

WE DESCENDED THE IVINDO: BAKA MIGRATION AND MOBILITY TO NORTHEASTERN GABON FROM THE 1960S TO TODAY

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ABSTRACT This article provides an account of the migratory history from the 1960s until today of the Baka groups now living along the River Ivindo in northeastern Gabon. Important sites and routes in the migratory processes of these Baka, their clan members, and ancestors are documented and causes for staying or leaving, past and present are detailed. The historical analysis shows there to be three principal factors in Baka migrations and mobilities: firstly, *toma*, following family or friends; secondly, the type and quality of the inter-ethnic relations; and, thirdly, the search for a better life defined by economic parity and freedom from violence. This long-term study evidences the extended periods of Baka staying in one location when they feel at-ease, suggesting that particular social values guide Baka migratory movements, and highlighting the significance of the ‘social environment’ in conceptualising (Baka) migration. Furthermore, Baka sedentism, at least in northeastern Gabon, is shown to be more widespread and self-generated than previously assumed.

Key Words: Baka; Migration; Mobility; *Toma*; Inter-ethnic relationships; Gabon.

INTRODUCTION

I. Context and Research Question

This article provides an historical account from the 1960s until today of movements of the Baka groups now living along the River Ivindo in northeastern Gabon. It documents important sites and routes in the migration of these Baka, their clan members, and ancestors. The dominant direction of the migratory movements of the ‘Ivindo Baka’, as I refer to them for ease of address, has been from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon. The main areas of departure for the migrations were the villages around Mintom, Alati, and Ntam in Cameroon, and Souanké in Congo, and there were predominantly people from five clans involved in the migratory waves: Ye Yanji, Ye Likemba, Ye Ndoum, Ye Njembe, and Ye Mombito. The Baka migrated to the Ivindo region in northeastern Gabon over the course of the last 70 years.

Ethnographic work with the Baka has always indicated the relevance of social factors in migration and mobility, overriding purely resource or environmentally determined approaches, which pay little attention to the ‘social environment’ or migration and mobility as a method for conflict resolution (Vallois & Marquer, 1976; Dhellemmes, 1986; Bahuchet, 1992; LeClerc, 2001; Joiris, 2003; Weig,

2013). In this investigation, the questions guiding the research and data analysis concern the details and factors for Baka staying or leaving, in the past and present. The study queries and verifies the importance of social factors in Baka movements in the long-term.

Migration and mobility commonly refer to physical and spatial displacement and are here understood as relational phenomena, referring to a positioning within a system and interaction of movement and fixity, of position and outcome (Adey, 2010: 18). As a migratory history is made up of what at the time of their occurrence are individual and group mobilities, migration is considered as one aspect of possible human mobilities (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Weig, 2013: 3). When recounting the most recent migratory history, I refer to mobility types commonly practiced today, underlining that even in migratory processes ‘mobility and immobility always go hand in hand’ (Beckmann, 2005: 82).

The relational conceptualisation is further inspired by the emic point of view, namely the Baka understanding of space, time and sociality as interrelated (LeClerc, 2001). Baka movements are often theorised as bound up with that of their neighbours (Bahuchet, 1992), in particular the Fang and the Bakwele, and the unit of analysis here is not limited to the Baka, but also concerns these inter-ethnic relationships. I have suggested elsewhere that conceptualising individual and group mobility in one framework is best achieved through the concept of *motility*, meaning the capacity or potential to be mobile (Weig, 2015a), and this article makes a further contribution to the reconsideration of the conceptualisation of Baka-neighbour interactions.

Considering the migration data leads me to argue, in the following, that three factors dominate Baka migration: firstly, *toma*, meaning to follow family or friends to or from different locations⁽¹⁾; secondly, the type and quality of the inter-ethnic relations; and, thirdly, the search for a better life defined by economic parity and freedom from violence. On a physical, bodily level, Baka migrations were (and still are) made up of *molongo* (walking in the forest for a longer period of time with a group of at least three), *mongengele* (walking far), and *mosesanu* (the place, paths and activities by which people connect villages); in Gabon, travel is frequently in dugout canoes along the River Ivindo.

The analysis further brings out that whether a Baka leaves or stays is influenced by certain social values which can be summarized as follows: first, the existential value of individual autonomy, known in many mobile hunter-gatherer populations with an egalitarian social system (Woodburn, 1982); second, *na dja bo djoko*, *na bana djoko*, or *bien garder*, which can best be translated as to take care of one another, to guard well, or to welcome and applies to family, clan members or other close emotional contacts; third, *être à l’aise*, defined by the Baka as ‘to be relaxed and feel at ease, to lead a good life’; fourth, *faire l’ambiance*, meaning to have a party; and fifth, the interplay of heart and *spirit* in Baka decision-making (see further Weig, 2013: 122–130). In my view, the data suggest that these five aspects amount to what may be called ‘Baka migration or mobility values’.

The stories around each village location offer information on the multiple motivational aspects for Baka migration. The article, therefore, focuses on the princi-

pal dynamics in a particular village in order to make for digestible reading, and constitutes a summary of more extensive information on this topic (Weig, 2013: 143–201). The unfolding of the migratory history of the Ivindo Baka is structured into three parts: firstly, I detail the military violence and interest in gold work in 1960s Cameroon and Congo which caused the initial migrations south; from Alati in Cameroon; from the villages between Alati and Ntam on the border of Cameroon and Congo; and from near Souanké in Congo. Secondly, I describe the movements of how Baka *toma*, followed, family within Congo and to Gabon. Initially they moved towards Garabizam in Congo, where the various groups stayed for different lengths of time in the villages of Lio II and Ebandak; before moving on to Koto, Gata, Eba, Kuambai and Été in Congo; or Dezou, Abam, Ndoumabango, Makokou, Adjab and Kabisa in Gabon. Thirdly, I depict the process of searching for a better life and (contemporary) settling in Gabon. Following this, I suggest an overall conceptualisation of primary and secondary factors in Ivindo Baka migration and conclude with an outlook.

II. Aerial Focus and Methodology

The choice of the Ivindo Region as the location of investigation became paramount following my pilot study in the area. From this study emerged the considerable number of Baka groups permanently living in the region and how they have been an active part of Ivindo social systems for the last approximately 70 years—although this fact is not necessarily known to the officials in Libreville, the capital of Gabon. Today, about 300 Baka live along the Ivindo River in the province of Ogooué-Ivindo in northeastern Gabon, and they are situated in four locations, namely the provincial capital Makokou, and the three riverside villages Ndoumabango, Kabisa, and Adjab. I worked in all four locations, but conducted participant observation-sensation and interviews in particular in Adjab and Kabisa. At the time of writing, the Baka rarely go on *molongo*, the Baka term for ‘walking’, ‘going into the forest’, or ‘a longer stay in the forest’. Previously it would be normal to be *a bele*, in the forest, for 1–2 years, an activity which the Baka were famed for. They now spend most of their time in their villages and dwellings, which range from mud-walled houses, some of which have up to four rooms; to *mongulu*, the ‘traditional’ dome-shaped huts covered with leaves; to simple tent-type structures made from wooden poles and large black plastic sheets; to shacks built with various materials.

The data on Baka migrations presented in this article is drawn from life history interviews conducted during my one-year fieldwork period from 2010 to 2011 and concerns over 350 Ivindo Baka, with an even gender-divide and an age range from new-born to about 70 years and includes information on deceased family members. The data comprises recorded semi-structured sessions of between 3–10 hours with individuals or groups of notable family members, as well as impromptu data gathering, for example, during trips in dugout canoes along the Ivindo. The overall story and migratory dynamics of individuals and family groups emerged and were verified through an increasing network of structured and informal interviews in different localities along the River Ivindo and other locations

such as the provincial capital Makokou, including with many non-Baka. As the Gabonese national archives have been closed for many years (Weig, 2013: 50), and the recognition of Baka as Gabonese citizens is not fully accomplished (Weig, 2013: 72), a verification of the information given through public records was rarely possible. Alternative methods of verification included asking the Baka to draw their migratory movements in the sand of the village square, which resulted in a very large ‘map’ and brought out inconsistencies in the interviews.

Writing up a migratory history can be done from different points of view. In my aim to give credit to the Baka and the way they told their story, the frailty of human memory and history as a constructed narrative, I chose a descriptive approach structured chronologically and geographically. This serves to underline the wave pattern of the movements, the processes of back and forth between the different villages. It further highlights, *toma*, following, as the essential aspect of these patterns, exemplified by the stories of two central families around PO. and NA. The storylines leading to Makokou, on the other hand, evidence Baka movements together with Fang in the established relationship structure of ‘villager’ and ‘pygmy hunter’. This article also evidences how the Ivindo Baka have ‘digested’ their own migratory history, and how previous movements are now succinctly summarised into migratory narratives in hindsight: Baka regional mobility becomes a migration to Gabon, when considered in the long-term. Whereas, as we get closer to the present time and migration and mobility are temporarily intertwined in the constant geographical back and forth, the stories get detailed and messy, evidencing the entangled processes underlying human mobility and migratory movements, and emphasizing not just points or arrival and departure, but the wayfaring in-between (Ingold, 2015).

Fig. 1 below gives an overview of the most prominent locations of Ivindo Baka migratory routes. The movements are shown in a reductionist form as simple black lines. The routes, illustrated according to actual facts, would look more like chaotic scribbles from a two-year old, indicating the back and forth between locations over time. When commencing a new migratory section, the reader is invited to refer back to the map to locate the migratory story geographically.⁽²⁾ The appendix contains maps of those villages where I was able to collect the relevant data during my field period. In the text, individual aspects of the migratory movement case studies are systematically numbered as [C1, 2, 3, ...]. These references are then aggregated and systematised in Part 5 ‘Conceptualising Baka Migration’, Table 2, as primary and secondary factors in Baka migrations.

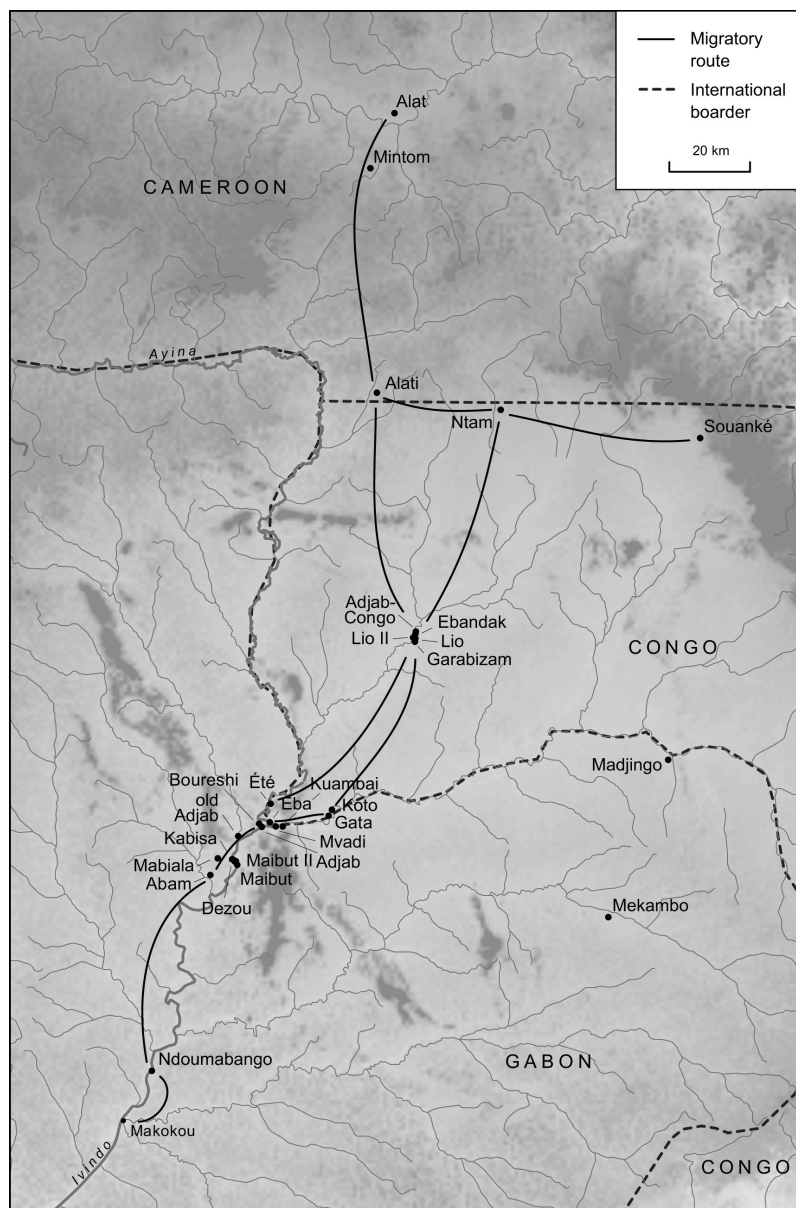


Fig. 1. Locations and routes of Baka migration and mobility within Cameroon, Congo and Gabon from 1960s to today.

MILITARY VIOLENCE, SORCERY, AND GOLD IN 1960S CAMEROON AND CONGO

I. Alati and Ntam

In all accounts of migration from the interlocutor generation aged 45 or older, reference was made to what they termed ‘civil war’ between Cameroon and Congo as a major cause of involuntary movement, suffering and family separation [C1]. History books make no reference to this war, but as one Baka elder explained:

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

The war the Baka tell of refers to the violent struggle and resulting armed conflict of the UPC, *Union of the Peoples of Cameroun*, involving regular attacks on forest village communities, and presenting the heads of these villagers on sticks by the roadside (DeLancey & DeLancey, 2000). BK., a male Baka elder of about 61, remembers the war between Cameroon and Congo starting in Alati and moving to Lélé, and how ‘we Baka thought this was *amansi*, the end of the world. When the army returned, Baka and Fang left together and fled towards Congo (BK. 13.5.2011)’. They went deep into the forest where they spent between one and three years. The noteworthy aspect of these movements is that the Baka continued on to various places in Congo and Gabon, whereas the Fang returned to their villages and took up their old lives. Baka and Fang had lived together in Alati, and the Baka described this co-habitation as a ‘good village atmosphere’ and ‘peaceful’, which lasted for a long time, or as is commonly expressed in Baka-French ‘c’a duré’, it lasted [C2]. These statements are a first example of the importance of Baka ‘migratory values’ and the good quality of inter-ethnic relations in Baka migrations.

At the time of the war, AM., now an influential male Baka elder of about 67, was a young boy, and lived in Ntam. Ntam lies about 35 km west from Alati, just south of the border between Cameroon and Congo, and was and is a big village with many Fang, Ndjem, Bakwele and Baka inhabitants. It was also described as a place with *bonne ambiance* [C3]. Following an alert, Baka and Ndjem all fled into the forest together. As AM. recounts: ‘Baka and Ndjem, we were together, because no one could resist. Who can bear to stay when there is war? Everyone fled’ (AM. 16.5.2011). Following the general flight into the forest, the Baka of this region, who lived in approximately 10 villages between Ntam and Alati, became separated. The majority including AM.’s family stayed [C4], but three families, eight men with their women and children originally from the village Meka, decided to flee south. The others later learned what had happened to those men who ended up ‘going far along down the Ivindo’. As AM. recalled:

Only after a year did we learn that those who fled settled in a village called Garabizam.⁽³⁾ This news had been announced by those who travelled along the Ivindo. So then, they [the Baka of Ntam and those others] started visiting each other until that generation died, and there remains only the current generation (AM. 16.5.2011) [C5].

AM. clearly critiqued those that left and how they fled without paying attention to the rest of the family. AM. contrasted this with how his parents had fled the immediate military violence, but did not abandon their village, repeatedly emphasising this as *resistance*. His account suggests a notion of rivalry between those who ‘resisted’, who suffered the horrors of war and held out, and the others who fled because they could not ‘*tenir sur place*’, stay in one place, as AM. termed it (AM. 16.5.2011). Nevertheless, all interviewees associated the men who left for Gabon with mythical powers on grounds of their endurance and the actual fact of the flight.

II. Alat and Mintom

The impact of the military violence could also be felt further north, in the area around Mintom in Cameroon, which lies roughly 70 km north of Alati, and specifically the villages of Alat and Akebale, which is the main living area of Ye Yanji.⁽⁴⁾ The Baka from Alat also fled due to the civil war, and again there was a Baka intra-group separation [C6]. Some remained in the forest to later return to Mintom, but PO., a Baka male, left with his family, and the children by his fourth wife YC. now live in Adjab (Gabon). As YC. remembered ‘we didn’t know whether the war would continue or not, so we decided to cut through the forest to come to Gabon. [The Baka god] *Komba* gave us the force to continue (YC. 23.4.2011)’. Many of the interviewees suggested a direct reasoning between the war in Cameroon and coming to Gabon, an example of which can be seen in YC.’s statement, and which was often summarised in the phrase ‘we descended the Ivindo’ [C7].⁽⁵⁾

In her account on Alati, YC. referred to *vampire*, which means sorcery and black magic, as another reason for migration [C8]. Baka explain *vampire* as ‘African magic’, a ‘nocturnal power where bad spells are launched and effected against the victim during the night’. Bonhomme who studied sorcery in Gabon highlights that:

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

The Ivindo Baka see the *vampire* as the main source for the deaths of particularly children. One Baka man explained that it can also have a mental impact

and influence your decision-making in that ‘it stops you from acting, or carrying out projects, even if you have the money’. On a regional or national level it has been shown to materialise as a ‘mystical political agency’ influencing national Gabonese politics (Cinnamon, 2012: 205).

III. South from Mintom

Before the war, there had been a separate Baka movement into Gabon for economic reasons and to undertake artisanal gold work in small sites dotted around the Congo Basin and North-Eastern Gabon (Weig, 2015a), a development which started in the last century (Lahm, 2002). The purpose for migration by a group of Njembe Baka from Meka in Congo, one of the villages between Alati and Ntam, was, as the Baka themselves stated, to escape poverty. They travelled to Gabon and worked at the gold camp in Ngutu [C9]. This may have been already in the late 1950s, but undoubtedly before 1970. MF., a female Baka elder of about 67 from the Njembe clan, succinctly summarised their motivation as: ‘My kinfolk left poverty to come to Gabon, because here there is richness’ (MF. 21.4.2011). Another Baka couple also emphasised the will to escape *souffrance*, condescending treatment [C10]:

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

Table 1. Migratory waves from Congo and Cameroon into Gabon as recounted by the Ivindo Baka in 2011

Waves	Direction of Movement	Reason for Movement	Dominant clans involved	Approximate Time Period
Wave 1	From Meka (Congo) to gold camp Ngutu (Gabon)	Economic Improvement	Njembe	Possibly late 1950s; before 1970
Wave 2	From Alati (Congo), into forest, to Garabizam (Congo), into forest, to Koto (Congo)	Fleeing War <i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	Njembe Mombito	1960s
Wave 3	From Mintom (Cameroon), into forest, to Garabizam (Congo), into forest, to Été (Congo)	Fleeing War <i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	Yanji	1960s –1970s
Wave 4	From Congo to Gabon; return to Congo*	<i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	-	1980s –1990s
Wave 5	From Congo to Gabon; return to Congo	<i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	-	2000s

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

Triggered by the brutality of civil war, sorcery, the desire for economic improvement, or the wish to follow the family (*toma*), different Baka groups from different villages have followed and moved on south in the direction of Gabon at different times.⁽⁶⁾ Table 1 below gives an overview of the migratory waves from Congo and Cameroon into Gabon documented in this article.

FOLLOWING THE FAMILY IN CONGO AND TO GABON

I. Garabizam

Following the flight from the war-torn areas as described above, the Baka spent approximately one year in the forest before they arrived in the Congolese town of Garabizam, which lies on the River Katagua, about half way between Ntam and the Gabonese-Congolese border. EM. recounted how the group of Alati Baka travelled to Gaza, which is how the Baka refer to Garabizam, and specifically to the village of Lio just north of Gaza, following the old routes [C11]:

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

The Bakwele lived in Lio and the Baka cleared and built a new living area, which was called Lio II. This documents the well-known practice of separate living areas of Baka and other ethnic groups as neighbours in a village (Weig, 2013: 78). BK. described how his parents summarised the decision as ‘we must stay, be patient here’, adding that ‘that’s what Baka do. We just stay’ [C12].

All interviewees addressed the fact that in the region of Garabizam the relations between Baka and Bakwele were fraught with difficulty. The Baka were not only cheated financially, but also suffered *brimade*, which translates as bullying [C13], but Baka usage of the term suggests that sometimes things went beyond mere taunts and threats, and a female Baka of about 50, was very clear on the fact that ‘we quit Gara because of *brimade*’, because ‘*Bkbel* [Bakwele] *wo we na bo Bakao*’, meaning that the Bakwele were beating the Baka too much.

II. Koto and Gata

EM. estimates that he and his family spent about one year in Lio II, until they, as a ‘second wave’, left and travelled through the forest to Koto. Koto is a small village, which lies on the north side of the River Djoua,⁽⁷⁾ which constitutes one part of the border between Congo and Gabon. The group that travelled were predominantly Mombito and Njembe, and ‘MO. decided to move to Gabon, because

he had heard that Baka were living a good life in Gabon' (EM. 28.7.2011) [C14]. Koto was a Baka-Bakwele village, but the Bakwele from the village of Mvadi, several kilometers downstream, came to insult and beat them there [C15]. Following the attack, the Baka fled Koto at night, and travelled far down the Ivindo into Gabon with friendly Bakwele to the villages of Maibut I and Maibut II [C16]. There the group disbanded, and the Baka too separated. Some went to live in a village called Abam, and some continued on to Makokou.

It was related to me that following this particular incident, the late Gabonese president Omar Bongo made a statement criticising the violence against the Baka Pygmies, inviting them to live in Gabon [C17]. One Baka woman summarised his criticism of the attacks against the Baka in her own words as: 'Leave the pygmies alone, there are none in Gabon, they are allowed to enter Gabon (GT. 26.4.2011)'.⁽⁸⁾

III. Abam

The village of Abam lies in Gabon in the forest near Maibut and the Ivindo tributary Sing. The decisive point for the Baka who arrived there from Koto was that it was on the opposite side of the River from the Bakwele villages Maibut I and Maibut II, which to the Baka meant living in safety [C18]. MJ. estimated that Abam had existed for about 5 years when he arrived there at age 18, which sets the time of arrival of the others in Abam around 1978.

Three factors influenced the departure from Abam. Firstly, there were many deaths [C19]. Secondly, the Bakwele village chief from Maibut encouraged them to move, saying they should leave the forest and live on the riverbank, as he wanted them closer [C20]. The incident, which finally caused the abandonment of Abam and the move to what had by now been established as the Baka village of Dezou, was a fight over a woman. Migration was caused, therefore, not by external violence, but by Baka intra-group fighting, by a love triangle [C21]. The latter can be understood as a minor point in the migratory history, but has a considerable impact on movements to and from the current Baka villages of Adjab and Kabisa.

IV. Dezou

Dezou was a Baka-only village known by the Bakwele as Maibut III. Chief BM. had given the Baka his younger sister's terrain on the Ivindo riverbank opposite Maibut II to set up their new village. The fact that singles out Dezou is that it is predominantly associated with death [C22].⁽⁹⁾ In all accounts of this village, which no longer exists and where, what was once the central village space, is now overgrown by tropical forest, people would simply tell of the loved ones, especially children, they had lost there. Most stories about Dezou included a description of a child dying after 2–3 days, following a serious case of diarrhoea, which would weaken the child so much that 'it would tire' and die. One Baka couple, for example, lost about 5 children in Dezou. From the accounts given, it became clear that apart from the obvious sadness and pain on losing a

child, it was the repeated suddenness of death, which was so shocking. These deaths were put down to sorcery, the *vampire*, one man relating how he had lost his second child, and his brother had lost his fifth child due to the jealousy of his nephew, who had ‘thrown the bad spells against the helpless children’ [C23].

The other reason was the ‘*vrai vampire*’, which is how my interlocutors referred to an outbreak of Ebola in the Maibut area in 1996 (Georges et al., 1999) [C24]. Some Baka knew this type of epidemic, as there had been a previous Ebola outbreak in 1994 in Mikouka (Lahm et al., 2007: 65), where 2–3 people were dying per day. Several Baka recalled how in the 1996 outbreak you couldn’t eat any meat or fish, and how, for about three months, you would find dead animals everywhere in the forest. MF.’s sister had lost three children in 1996 and put this down to the *vrai vampire*, giving an example of the combination of local (Baka) belief systems and a scientific explanation of the facts as an epidemic by specifying that ‘Ebola is transmitted by the *real vampire*’.

The other important detail about Dezou was MA., who became Baka chief in Dezou, because the Baka population had decided for him ‘given his excellent behaviour’. Many stories of movement to Dezou are based on the motivation of wanting to live with or near the “great” MA. as he was known, and even his own brother came to ‘follow his little biological brother’ [C25]. MA. died around 1990 aged about 65. Dezou and Été, a village I speak of later, existed at the same time, and there was regular travel between the two places. The majority of Dezou inhabitants moved to Été following the second major Ebola outbreak in 1996.

V. North and South from Lio II

Returning to the small villages northeast of Garabizam, the families of PO., NA. and other Ye Ndoum lived together in Lio II. NA. and PO. were ‘great friends’ and hunted together, as their respective sons explained about their late fathers [C26]. This emotional connection highlights an aspect, which has not only been neglected in the analysis of inter-ethnic relations, but also on Baka group level. In many cases of *molongo*, the people who set off together share a special proximity irrespective of and overriding clan membership. Simply spending time with people you like is significant in Baka migration decisions and plays into the developing field of the study of mobility, body, and sensorial experience (Ingold, 2000; Adey, 2010; Hill et al., 2011; Weig, 2015b, 2015c).

Some of the Baka living in Lio II who had fled the civil war violence were still thinking of returning to Alati, Mintom, or other places; and some did. For example, NA.’s younger brother returned to live in Assambé (Congo) with the parents of his wife, when they came to get them [C27]. However, the *brimade* described earlier by YS., caused the remaining Ndoum to quit Lio after about two years (*ntumbu*) to go to Gabon in search of a better life [C28]:

Well, as people who took the decision [of fleeing the war] like that, they first thought only of going into the forest, but then they changed plans. They worked in Garabizam for some time, before, one day, they crossed

the river and left for the forest, this time to move to Gabon (MJ. and GW. 9.8.2011).

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

VI. Gata, Eba and Kuumbai

Close to the site of Koto, but slightly further east along the Djoua, or Yesse as the Baka call this river, was the large Bakwele village of Gata, known as Gara in Baka. Gara was about the size of the village Adjab today, headed by Bakwele, and although connected by river to the next larger village Mvadi, it was so far that there was a ‘risk of having to sleep in the forest’ when travelling on foot between the two places.

The extended Ndoum family also lived and worked in the Bakwele village of Eba, where the Bakwele TM. lived with his father. The Baka described how this village had had a good ‘ambiance’ and how they would dance the Baka dance *bouma* together with the Bakwele [C29]. They remembered living there for a long time, until one day around 1980 the Mvadi sub-prefect came during the day to burn Eba as part of his *Regroupement activities* [C30].⁽¹⁰⁾ As YS. summed, ‘the authorities didn’t want the Baka to stay in the forest, because we were far. The prefect didn’t want us to stay in Congo (YS. 26.4.2011)’. She explained how burning down a (mud-walled) house cannot scare a ‘true Baka’, and they quickly built *mongulus* to have a roof over their head. One family left Eba and travelled to Dezou. Another Baka family left for Makokou and lived there for one year, then moved to Dezou, where the *vampire* killed the father’s wife [C31], after which they again returned to live in the village of Andok near Makokou. From Eba, the Bakwele TM. and his family and some of the other Baka moved further up the Ivindo away from Mvadi and proceeded to build the village of Été. This voyage was described as *mongengele*, meaning to walk far in Baka. These events are most likely to have taken place in the years around or after 1980, during which there had also been outbreaks of Ebola [C32].

Also during this period, MY. had moved to Kuumbai, the village after Gata and further west along the Djoua than the falls. When MY’s second husband, who was one of the ‘great eight’ men died, AO. came to *toma*, to get MY [C33]. and her family and brought them to Été. This was around 1982.

VII. From Ebandak to Été

The family of PO. had, in the meantime, moved first from Lio II to Ebandak, another Bakwele-Baka village slightly further north. One young Baka woman, who is about 20 today, was the last to be born in Lio, which suggests that these Baka movements should also be considered in the context of the general depopulation of the tropical forests in this region [C34].⁽¹¹⁾ Around the year 1970, PO.

and his family moved several kilometres further north from Ebandak to the Bakwele-Baka village Adjab(-Congo).⁽¹²⁾ At some point, PO. wanted to join his daughter from his first wife in Été [C35]. As his son JH. described: ‘My father wanted to follow her and her children to Été (JH. 19.5.2011)’. On the other hand, PJ., PO.’s oldest son by YC., suggested a different motivation. He told of how his father had wanted to come to Gabon for economic reasons, following his Bakwele friend TM., whom he had met in Cameroon [C36]. One could understand these statements by PO.’s two sons as contradictory, but I argue they must be read in conjunction in that both the social and the economic factors create motivation for migration.

The point I would like to draw attention to with this case is the dynamic of following, *toma* in Baka, *suivre* in French, which I variously indicated to be one of the principal aspects of Baka migratory dynamics. *Toma* can mean following a relative to another location, or being picked up by kinfolk to go to or return somewhere, or being the clan person or group who travels to bring someone else back to a certain place. As YS. described [C37]:

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

A further instance is the family of NG. and OA. who had taken the usual route from Gara to Été, but left Été by pirogue to Dezou to join family [C38]:

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

VIII. Été and Mvadi

The village of Été, like Gata and the other small villages, is officially on the national territory of Congo, but lies very close to the Gabonese-Congolese border. The two Gabonese Bakwele TM. and his father from Eba founded Été. Été was ‘a big village with everything and big proper houses’, with about 100 people living there. The Baka accounts tell of how they hunted and tended plantations and stayed in Été for approximately 20 years. The Baka living area was known as Quartier PO., and Été is even spoken of as the ‘village of PO.’, as the family of PO. stayed in Été the longest. In general, the atmosphere with the Bakwele seems to have been good, although some stories referenced discrimination, but overall the accounts of Été tell of many happy years [C39]. JH. spent what he himself termed ‘my entire life’ in Été, from the age of about 6 to age 30. Emic and etic descriptions document how life in Été was lived in relation to Mvadi [C40].⁽¹³⁾ The villages lie about 8 or 9 km apart, and Baka would go to Mvadi for provisioning, schooling (short spells), and, most importantly, *bricoler*, doing small jobs. As Djambess Florent (DF. in the following), a Bakwele village chief

from Mvadi remembers:

They led their lives in relation to Mvadi, where they came to stock up. They had their hunting and their plantations in Été, and did some *bricolage* for the Bakwele here. Someone would call a pygmy to work with him on a plantation or to hunt a gazelle for him (DF. 26.4.2011).

The Baka man AO. from Été, PO.'s son, and DF. have known each other since school times, and continue to share an intricate relationship of *ami*, French for friend, which describes a particular socio-economic relationship between a Baka and someone from another ethnic group (Joiris 2003) [C41]. This long-standing connection between the family of PO. and DF. formed part of the close connection between Été and Mvadi.

IX. Leaving Été

The story of why the family PO. finally left Été is, once again, one of military violence which caused involuntary migration and uprooting [C42]. The military had repeatedly threatened Baka living in Été, and there was one particular incident in 2001, which finally caused the Baka to leave Été:

We also left Été because of violence. One Baka man had been given cartridges and shoes, but he didn't bring back either cartridges or meat for the Bakwele who had provided them, and he didn't give back the shoes. When the Bakwele arrived to find he was not there, they hit his wife and child instead. There was no time for us for meeting and talking about what to do. We just left one-by-one, quietly to the forest, and without haste so as not to show the military we were leaving. Everybody was saving his or her own body. Everybody left Été at the same moment, the whole family. Nobody stayed behind. In the evening of the day of the incident we secretly returned to Été from the forest to get our belongings, but the military was still there. We took our things and ran. ... Half the stuff stayed behind, especially of those who were not fast enough. ... The military ... grabbed my uncle and tore his clothes off, left him naked. From my father, they took his machete, oil, and two radios (MF. 21.04.2011).

The interviewee also detailed how this was the continuation of a long history of abuse [C43], the impact of the incident on Baka reasoning, and why the Baka finally gave up Été:

The reason for us leaving was kabu, which means anger or being fed up, because we had been made to suffer too much. We considered the act of hitting a woman with child as incomprehensible. We were also fed up with the situation that Baka men would be out at work, ... and the women would be left behind. In what seemed to be perfectly coordinated timing, the military would arrive, and just take what they needed from the houses,

We didn't want to risk that situation anymore. After all this, we were just fed up, *kabu!* (MF. 21.04.2011).⁽¹⁴⁾

In the end, Baka and Été-Bakwele were forced to flee Été together. In this case, the Bakwele went to Mvadi, and the Baka, after some stops in between, have settled in the village Adjab. During an interview round with some of the men, they explained that they had had no particular plan, just the idea of leaving:

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

JH.'s statement can be read as another clear indication of the strongly sedentarised Baka lifestyle already in previous decades, and how current Baka sedentism is a continuation of this [C44]. They found it hard to leave Été for practical reasons, and often commented on the theft and loss of material goods by the military. More importantly Été was a place where they were happy and at ease, and they described having to uproot as a tragic case of involuntary migration, which supports the idea of dwellings as 'emotional moorings' which 'enables a mooring of meaning and subjective feeling towards 'wherever [people] happen to be' (Adey, 2010: 73). At the same time, it shows how emotional well-being forms a central aspect of Baka decision-making, and the counter-part of *kabu* is, of course, *bien garder*. My interviewee ended this sad story on a proud and defiant note:

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

X. From Congolese Été to Gabonese Adjab

After they fled from the village, the Été-Baka spent some time in the forest, then went to the gold camps Kuamecar and Mitoungashi. JH. explained how at first they were all thinking of going to Makokou (JH. 19.5.2011). The Commandant de Brigade from Mvadi had previously advocated for them to move onto Gabonese territory and the Baka finally accepted his repeated offer [C45]:

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

The Baka used DF.'s large canoe to first travel to an old camp, 'old Adjab' further south on the Ivindo, which, like Abam, was 'on the other side of the

river', the main advantage associated with this being increased safety [C46]. Although the Baka had begun to build houses, they had to leave 'old Adjab' again, because they were too close to the official WWF site at the mouth of the River Nouna. DF. expounded the risk of conflict between WWF wildlife protection policies and Baka (traditional) hunting practices [C47], and admitted to an ulterior motive in that the power of a local chief within Gabonese bureaucracy is linked to his number of inhabitants and voters (DF. 17.7.2011)⁽¹⁵⁾:

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

The majority of Été-Baka moved from Été via different forest locations and the spell at 'old-Adjab' to the 'safe place' of the village currently known as Adjab [C48], but several others also journeyed from Été to Makokou.

SEARCHING AND SETTLING FOR A GOOD LIFE: SECURITY IN GABON

I. Adjab

The Baka have now been in the village of Adjab for over ten years. Adjab is an abandoned Fang village, but the Bakwele have had plantations in the forest surrounding the location for many years.⁽¹⁶⁾ On arrival in Adjab in 2001, the Baka set up makeshift tents covered with large plastic sheets they had bought in Kuamecar following their flight from Été,⁽¹⁷⁾ and then began the process of clearing the land. Some people built bark houses. Clearing the village area took about one year, after which they began building houses, some of which you can still see today. They replaced the plastic with *pailles*, thatched straw roofs, or with corrugated iron. The Baka described this change in dwellings as the wish to improve their living conditions [C49]. From a Baka perspective, the most important characteristic about Adjab is that it is a Baka-only village, that they live in their own village without direct interference from others, and because of that they can say '*djoko* ... on est bien là à Adjab', Adjab is a good place.

It is interesting to consider how the previous circulation link between Mvadi and Été, has now become Mvadi to Adjab following the relocation of the majority of the Été inhabitants to Adjab [C50]. The distance between Mvadi and Adjab is about 3.5 km, so shorter than the 8–9 km between Mvadi and Été. Looking at this on the above map reminds of the argument that 'pygmies' live their forest mobility with reference to a single village, or close group of villages (Bahuchet 1985). At first glance, one might be tempted to say that this pattern has not changed, as the reference point of the Baka in Adjab is still Mvadi. Their life is with reference to Mvadi, their (daily) interactions are with the same people, and they seem to talk about Mvadi the same way as before. However, it is worth

remembering that the movement from Congo to Gabon is a cross-border one. The significance of the national boundaries is that it was possible to escape violence, moving from violence to security [C51]. Also, the original choice of location after Été and Kuamecar had been for old-Adjab, the village on the Nouna. Therefore, the continuing daily relationship and related mobility to Mvadi was not intended and cannot be interpreted as a linear development, it is rather an example of the iterative steps back and forth that make up migratory patterns [C52].

II. Boureshi

Boureshi lies about 1km north-northwest of Adjab, and AO. moved there from Été after his father had died in Été in 1996 [C53]. As AO. remembered:

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

Death is a long established factor for Baka mobility (Vallois & Marquer, 1976), and the above statement conveys the death of AO.'s son and father as a reason for migration but also *toma*, specifically the dynamic of 'push following', meaning that the others didn't want to leave AO. alone in Boureshi, and asked him to follow and join them [C54].

III. Kabisa and Mabiala

Kabisa was the reference name for an area of plantations across the Ivindo from Maibut II, and means 'village of hunger'. BK. and his wife JM. came to live there around 2005, and now Kabisa has become a small village where their sons and other family members have also built houses. BK. already worked as a hunter for Monsieur EC. in a relation of *ami* [C55], which is why he and his wife were asked to come to Kabisa:

The Bakwele Monsieur EC. came to get us, saying he needed us because elephants were destroying his plantations. Another man then came to pick us up [in Adjab], and we were asked to stay permanently, to stop coming and going, to build a house, a village even, in Kabisa (JM. 22.5.2011).

Kabisa is also the access point to the forest gold camp Mabiala. Baka and other ethnic groups work at Mabiala to make money through gold work [C56]. As there are only forest paths leading to Mabiala, all goods must be transported and carried there on foot. The Baka who live in Kabisa and visiting Baka work as porters along this route.

There is constant movement, *circulation*, between the villages of Adjab and Kabisa; in order to earn money through gold work or as a porter and to socialise

with other Baka, and so both economic and social factors motivate these activities [C57]. The movement between the two villages is not termed *mosesanu*, as there are no well-used paths connecting Adjab and Kabisa, but travel is by dug-out canoe. There is strong rivalry between Adjab and Kabisa, and many moves from one place to the other are undertaken to escape: family feuds [C58]; physical harm through (alcohol-related) violence [C59]; accusations of *vampire* [C60]; illness stemming from *vampire* [C61]; intra-group bullying [C62]; jealousy [C63]; the repercussions of adultery [C64]; and the pain of death [C65]. There is also migration and mobility to the communities of Adjab and Kabisa by Baka wanting a change from urban life in Makokou [C66]; by a woman who has become estranged from her husband [C67]; and by the young men from Makokou, who come to search for a good Baka wife in the villages [C68].

IV. Ndoumabango

Ndoumabango is about a one hour, 17 km trip away from Makokou by high-powered motorised boat along the Ivindo. The Baka often spoke of Makokou, when they meant either Ndoumabango or any of the locations within Makokou, referring to an approximately 15 km radius to a location as *ici*. This had also been the case with the small villages around Mvadi and Garabizam.

One man who spent many years in Ndoumabango is MO.. From Garabizam, MO. moved towards Gabon, because he had heard that the Baka were living a good life in Gabon [C69]. After periods near Mvadi, and in Dezou, MO. and his family ‘came out of the forest’ on the River Wa where they met the Bakwele SM. who was on a fishing trip, and MO. and SM. became *ami*. As YS. described, this friendship of MO. with SM. is the reason for their stay and her being in Ndoumabango now [C70].

After a *molongo* of about 2 years, TF. and his wife EK. had spent several years living first in Dezou and later in Ndoumabango. EK. described, and many others confirmed, that the *ambiance* between the Bakwele and the Baka in Ndoumabango was not good [C71]. This was also due to the village being a location of many deaths attributed to cases of *vampire*, which once again documents the correlation between *vampire* and a socially poisoned atmosphere [C72]. When EK.’s daughter lost her first child to the *vampire*, they ‘fled to Makokou, as there was no one left’, as EK. summarised.

V. Makokou

Makokou is the capital of the Gabonese province Ogooué-Ivindo, with about 12.000 inhabitants. It is unclear, when the Baka first came to Makokou, and several of the authorities in Libreville and in Makokou were even unaware of their current presence. In August 2011, the Baka were living in six different locations in Makokou, totalling around 60 individuals, who are there more or less permanently (see Table 2).

Many of those in Quartier Central, the central market area of Makokou, are

Table 2. Baka locations in Makokou in 2011

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

children and grandchildren related to one man, JO., a Mbongo who passed away in June 2011 at the age of about 82. JO. had come to the region along the Ivindo and around Makokou about 40 years ago, working as a hunter [C73]. After two years and many (typical) experiences of not being *bien garder*, of not getting paid for his kill, it was a Fang man who made JO. come to Makokou and live with him in the Quartier Central [C74]. The house the Baka still live in must be described as extremely derelict.

One Baka man, NG., a Mofandje born in Akebale near Alat north of Mintom in Cameroon, had travelled with his family from Alat via Garabizam and Été to join family in Dezou [C75]. He and his family left Dezou due to intra-population fighting to first live in Ndoumabango [C76], and then came to live in Elarmintang, which lies on the Western outskirts of Makokou. NG. hunted for a Fang man as his *ami*, and he and his family lived in a house in Elarmintang, which belongs to that Fang family [C77]. NG.’s family continues to do so since his death in 2001. A two-minute walk from this house live another Baka man and his family in a large stone house, which also belongs to a Fang family with whom the father is in relation of *ami*.

The reason I have portrayed the stories of these families is to draw together the migrations to Makokou, where it seems that only those Baka who were working and travelling with a Fang *ami* came as far south as Makokou. The other strong pull of Makokou is, of course, that it is a large town and MO.’s final move was to Makokou, because he ‘wanted a village life which meant cars’ (EM. 28.7.11) [C78]. Their first location in Makokou was Zongayong, where just as in Garabizam, they had to ask the chef du quartier for permission to stay. Makokou was and is perceived as a location of economic opportunity, and Baka men travelled and travel from, at the time Été, today Adjab or Kabisa to work there [C79]; some return to the villages to get married [C80]. Makokou and Ndoumabango are also locations where individual Baka from Minvoul in northern Gabon have come to visit [C81]; and in one case stayed.

Finally, one Baka woman AP. has come to Makokou from Alat, where she left, aged about seven, with her family due to the war [C82]. Today, she is about 45 years old. AP. separated from two husbands on grounds of violence [C83], the first in Été, the second in Makokou, and now lives with her children and third husband on the outskirts of Makokou in Mboula.

CONCEPTUALISING BAKA MIGRATION

As the analysis of Ivindo Baka life histories has shown, migration considerations can be of a social, political, emotional, ecological or other nature, evidencing the multi-causality underlying Baka migrations. During the interviews, environmental concerns were never related as definite reasons for migration, but rather given as aids to locate an event in time. The data emerging from the investigation can be classified as ‘primary factors’ and ‘secondary or contributing factors’, as summarised in Table 3. The analysis has drawn out that there are three primary factors which motivate, govern or override Baka migratory considerations. These are: firstly, *toma*, meaning to follow family or friends to or from different locations; secondly, the type and quality of the inter-ethnic relations; and, thirdly, the search for a better life defined by economic parity and freedom from violence.

Table 3. Primary and secondary factors for Baka migrations

Summary of Primary and Secondary Factors for Baka Migration	Case Numbers
PRIMARY FACTORS	
• toma (following family or friends to or from different locations; Baka also use the French term <i>suivre</i>)	C 1, 6, 10, 11, 16, 25, 26, 27, 33, 35, 37, 38, 54, 58, 75
• type and quality of the (inter-ethnic) relationships between Baka and their neighbours	C 2, 3, 13, 16, 20, 29, 39, 40, 41, 50, 55, 70, 71, 74, 77
• search for a good life (economic prosperity and freedom from violence)	C 1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 18, 28, 36, 46, 48, 49, 51, 57, 69
SECONDARY OR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS	
• civil war	C 1, 6, 7, 82
• paramilitary violence	C 1, 42
• brimade	C 13, 15, 28, 43
• regroupment	C 30
• Ebola	C 24, 32
• sorcery (vampire)	C 8, 23, 31, 60, 61, 72
• family and intra-group feuds, marital violence (incl. physical harm)	C 58, 59, 62, 63, 67, 76, 83
• kabu (anger or fed up with unnecessary suffering)	C 10, 16, 43
• death of a loved one, group or clan member	C 19, 22, 53, 65
• searching for a wife	C 68, 80
• wanting a change from urban to rural life, and vice versa	C 11, 34, 66, 78
• earning money (bricolage, working as porter, carving oars and paddles, hunting, gold work, tracking for NGO, healing)	C 9, 40, 47, 50, 56, 73, 79
• adultery, sexual adventure	C 21, 64
• invitation to enter Gabon (by the late President Omar Bongo and others)	C 17, 45, 51

Table 4. Baka migration and mobility values

1. individual autonomy	: existential value in an egalitarian social system
2. <i>na dja bo djoko, bien garder</i>	: to take care of one another, to guard well, to welcome; applies to family, clan members or other close emotional contacts
3. être à l'aise	: 'to be relaxed and feel at ease, to lead a good life'
4. <i>bonne ambiance</i>	: have a party
5. importance of heart and spirit in Baka decision-making	

Additionally, I advocate that the Baka have 5 what can be termed 'migration and mobility values', as summarised in Table 4. This notion draws on the concept of *motility*, defined as 'the capacity to move' (Weig 2015a). In *motility*, motivations, aspirations, desires or imaginaries in moving are considered, rather than just observable mobility, and as I detail further in the following.

I. *Toma* (following family or friends to or from different locations)

Toma signifies following a relative, either direct family or important clan members, to another location; or being picked up by someone from the direct family or clan to join or return to family members in another location; or being the clan person or group who travels to bring someone else back to a certain place. One female Baka elder described how she had 'followed my uncle, because he was the brother of my mother', emphasising the importance of kin relations in the dynamic of *toma*. The travels undertaken to pick up own children, or to take children of other family members from one place to another, are also considered as *toma*.⁽¹⁸⁾ Visiting must be distinguished from *toma*, as the former clearly implies the return to a different location, even if this is only after a period of two years (C5, 81)⁽¹⁹⁾; whereas following entails departing and relocating to another place, without the intention of return. The unit of reference in *toma* is the group, coinciding with Baka group as the reference unit for mobility activities in general (LeClerc, 2001). In Baka, my interlocutors would refer to themselves or the group that was travelling from one location to the next, and in French use either *je*, I, or on, an impersonal we, to describe who was following. Although it is mostly a particular individual, which is followed, the aim was nevertheless described as wanting to join or re-join with other family members, with the *group*.

Through the historical survey, migratory patterns of repeated separations and bringing together of family or clan units in endless movements of fission and fusion emerged. For example: How people travelled to live under MA.'s guidance in Dezou (C25); how NA.'s brother and his wife were picked up by her parents to live in their village (C27); how the families of BF. and AG. went to live with other family in Dezou following the village burnings (C30); how AO. had gone to pick up MY. from Kuumbai and take her to Été (C33); how YS. and her family moved from Gara to Été following the family already living there (C37); and last, but not least, how the PO. family followed PO.'s daughter and his friend TM. to Été (C35, 36). From these and all other examples, it can be argued that what the Baka call *toma*, or *suivre* in French, forms the baseline of

their movements.

Some separations are forever, but continuing *toma*, *molongo* and *circulation* counter this and ensure and maintain regular contact and information exchange. *Toma*, therefore, signifies not only a migratory factor, but also a migratory pattern. This pattern corresponds to previous descriptions of Baka migration and mobility defined by the aggregation and dispersal of family units (Vallois & Marquer, 1976; Bahuchet, 1992; LeClerc, 2001) to show that Baka migration is best explained not by seasonal economic factors, but rather by social relations and emotional attachment or animosity. Interestingly, *toma* is used to express following animals and humans in Baka. For the Mbendjele, Lewis has shown how the terminology of hunting and the metaphors of predation extend to outsiders, albeit with regard to hunting 'natural resources' or 'commodities' (Lewis & Köhler, 2002). In the case of the Baka, *toma* refers also to following a friend.

II. Type and Quality of the (Inter-Ethnic) Relationships between Baka and Their Neighbours

The historical study, secondly, brings out the importance of the interactions between Baka and their neighbours in the long-term, beyond socio-economic considerations, highlighting that the emphasis on social relations applies to Baka intra- and inter-group dynamics. For example, it is important to distinguish between the Bakwele who lived in Été and with whom the Baka 'had no problems and shared their meat with' (C39), and the military and other Bakwele who systematically sought out Baka to inflict violence and *brimade* (C42, 43). The continued experience of *brimade* in Garabizam caused some Baka to leave. On the other hand, in Gata and Eba, only the impact of external violence by third parties led to the dissolution of joint living arrangements between Baka and Bakwele. In the case of Eba, the co-habitation was then transferred and continued in Été for about 20 years. The activities around these villages show how external influences like persecution and Ebola were driving forces to make Baka move, or, on the contrary, how a good village atmosphere and relationship with their neighbours, the lack of violence, resulted in 'staying'.

In Makokou, as opposed to the area around Mvadi, there is no gold work, but there are many Fang, and the well-documented relationship structure of villager and 'pygmy hunter' between the Fang and the Baka can still be found (C74, 77).⁽²⁰⁾ It seems that originally only those Baka who were working and travelling with a Fang *ami* came as far south as Makokou. However, especially today, these relationships are not simply governed by socio-economic considerations, but also by emotional proximity, as many have named children after each other, a practice known as *homonymy* (Rupp, 2003: 46).⁽²¹⁾ The importance of emotional ties in inter-ethnic relationships has been emphasized (Rupp, 2003), and I suggest that this is not merely a recent development, but constitutes an essential aspect of Baka migratory history.⁽²²⁾ The close socio-economic relation of *ami* between a Baka and a Fang or a Bakwele creates *toma* outside Baka clan dynamics.

As the contrast between the short duration in Garabizam and the long stay in Été documents, time plays an important role in inter-ethnic relationships. From

the interviews emerged the concept of *ntumbu*, the time of approximately two years, a kind of try-out period, after which the Baka decide to leave, or stay. Moreover, it seems that the following temporal steps are between 3–10 years, then from 10 years onwards. I suggest this understanding of time is related to Baka notions of the person and the lexical equation of space and time (LeClerc, 2001). *Ntumbu* seems to fall in that same category, connecting actor, space, time, and adding the quality of relationship between Baka and ethnic neighbours, also manifest in Baka values of *bonne ambiance* and *bien garder*.

Moreover, the Baka I worked with and in part also their forefathers, spent long periods in and around one location, a fact that suggests that Baka themselves strive for a (part-) sedentarised lifestyle. In terms of migration, these are long periods of ‘relative immobility’, relative because there remains daily mobility within a 15 km radius, a spatial reference the Baka refer to as *ici*, here. Giving credit to the long-term perspective documented in this article, accentuated by Biesbrouck’s observation that hunter-gatherer mobility theories have been too focused on the annual cycle (Biesbrouck, 1999), makes evident the importance if not the supremacy of social factors in Baka migrations, applying to Baka intra- and inter-group dynamics.

III. Search for a Good Life

Many of the stories in the Ivindo ethno-historical account tell of how Baka are searching for, in their own words, ‘a better life’. To them, this is constituted by economic improvement and (physical) peace—underlined by their enthusiasm for gold work and the dynamic of Baka ‘leaving the forest’, meaning they are no longer focused solely on a forest lifestyle. With regard to economic improvement, the migration and mobility connected to the artisanal gold work enables Baka to participate in the cash economy and to slowly transform their social perception and identity in Gabon, to counteract poverty and being disrespected or discriminated against by their neighbours. Baka acknowledge violence as part of life and the study pinpointed military violence or *brimade* and the regroupment activities in Congo and Gabon as a major cause for enforced movement, as well as the outbreaks of Ebola. The example of the village of Abam and the back and forth between Adjab and Kabisa today, show that intra-group violence and the experience of violence against the person resulting from family feuds and adultery, also constitute reasons for (attempted) migration.

Another factor, which plays into the search for a good life is the freedom from sorcery, from the *vampire*. The *vampire* is practised in many parts of Central Africa, implicating Baka and surrounding ethnic groups. *Vampire* is a way of addressing social conflict, which can, and often does, result in migration, even though accusations of *vampire* can travel with the people. The emotional impact of suffering or being haunted by accusations of *vampire* is very strong and causes nightmares or even long-term mental health issues. In one case, a Baka man was accused of having killed his brother’s children through the *vampire*, of having ‘eaten somebody else’, to get at the material belongings of others. This had been the man’s parents’ reason to leave Meka and move to Alati, which foregrounds

‘individual autonomy, the ability to physically leave an area of conflict and move on as a method of conflict resolution. Often in such cases, environmental reasons are given, but they are mere false pretences as mobility is employed to avoid a social conflict (Widlok et al., 2012: 4). Those Baka in Gabon afflicted by continuing accusations bemoaned how they were ‘ill at ease’, but how the normal migration value of ‘individual autonomy’ to avoid family conflicts was now impossible to enact, because they have a more settled lifestyle.

Baka often spoke of *direct* movement to Gabon, of ‘descending the Ivindo’ during the interviews (C7, 52). However, travelling to Gabon in no case meant that the Baka actually took a boat, and went straight from Cameroon to Gabon via the Ivindo—travelling meant *molongo*. Moreover, the way to Gabon was not a clear, linear development, but a direction of movement that only emerged way-faring step by step; and always there were individuals or families who turned back (third and fourth waves; see Table 1). One way of reading and understanding how the migratory narrative on ‘*direct* to Gabon’ was constructed in hindsight, is to view ‘Gabon’ as a synonym for gold and the related income as a wish and way to achieve a certain wealth and independence. ‘Gabon’ for the Ivindo Baka, refers less to a national territory, than constitutes this signifier of wellbeing and a better life including the promise of freedom from discrimination, military or extreme inter-ethnic violence. Read this way, ‘moving to Gabon’ equals moving on in search of this better life and, at least for some Baka, economic migration.⁽²³⁾

Thinking in a different time frame, the *imaginary* of ‘Gabon’ (Salazar, 2010) has served to bring together and hold together Baka family units on their move from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon. It can be said, that Ivindo Baka have been following ‘Gabon’ rather than an elephant as was previously the case in Baka community-building rituals (LeClerc, 2001). ‘Gabon’ thus constitutes both an economic motivation for migration and mobility, and a socio-political one. Finally, one could argue that the signification of ‘Gabon’ is linked to the idea of Baka decision-making having a strong spiritual component, of being guided, of following ‘heart and spirit’, and this guidance taking over from ‘rational’ planning (Weig, 2013: 126). *Toma* may relate not only to animals, fellow Baka, and Baka neighbours, but also to ideas. This, in turn, would refer back to the Baka origin myth of walking in the forest and ‘following honey’ (Weig, 2013: 64), indicating that the honey has been replaced by ‘Gabon’; in both cases, the ‘sweet’ things in life.

IV. Migration and Mobility Values

The conceptualisation of these primary migration factors is further underlined by the ethno-historical account documenting how ‘individual autonomy’, the key value of Baka egalitarian society, continues to be practiced, even if it is becoming increasingly difficult given the levels of sedentism along the Ivindo. The counter-dynamic is Baka group focus and the fact that the quality of Baka relation with a place and their inter-ethnic relationship is absolutely decisive in whether the Baka like a place, and whether they stay or go. All interviewees would at

some point refer to this dynamic, without prompting, and the way it was said made clear its importance. The social values *bien garder*, *être à l'aise*, and *bonne ambiance*, which additionally guide and govern other aspects of Baka sociality, mirror these considerations. These values also influence and guide Baka decision-making with regard to migratory movements and daily mobilities, focusing on socio-political-emotional dynamics over and above environmental concerns. Taking this together with the importance of 'heart and spirit' in Baka decision-making, leads me to suggest that the interplay of these values, results in and constitutes for the Baka 'migration and mobility values'. This notion gives further support to the established relevance of social factors in Baka migration and mobility; and underlines the relational understanding of mobility outlined in the introduction, emphasizing the application not only on conceptual level but as an emic socio-spatial-temporal reality.

The notion of the 'migration and mobility values' conceptually draws on an idea governing the application of the concept of *motility*. *Motility* is defined as 'the capacity to move' and analyses constraints on (migratory) movements and the impact of such constraints as mobility or immobility, as moving or staying (Weig, 2015a).⁽²⁴⁾ Rather than just observing visible mobilities, *motility* analyses the before of movement by considering the choices and limitations which *precede* peoples' movements, and in which motivation, imagination or desires in moving play a vital role. *Motility* thereby addresses the lack of a temporal dimension in many existing mobility models and their critical limitation to questions of space and territoriality noted in archaeological, anthropological, sociological and geographical discussions (Kaufmann et al., 2004).

V. Staying and Leaving: Diversity in Intra-Group Responses

During the interviews, the notion of 'staying' was explained as remaining in one particular place or within a region and linked also to having houses, which can be interpreted to suggest that at least part of the Baka considered their dwellings as 'emotional moorings or anchorage' (Adey, 2010: 73) (C4, 44). For example, the emphasis on *tenir sur place*, staying, in Alati highlights the value given to a (more) permanent location, contrary to nomadic movement, and the value of returning to a location to which there are strong emotional ties. For example, AM. always spoke of the importance of tending and harvesting his family plantations, something which is generally associated with a more sedentary, farmer lifestyle. AM. also emphasised that Baka in Cameroon are still today more sedentarised than their Gabonese kinfolk: 'There are now still more Baka (villages) in Cameroon than in Gabon, because the majority stayed'.⁽²⁵⁾ This is to be contrasted with those Baka who left, and who seemed to be less bound to locality, more mobile, whose 'emotional anchorage' was predominantly with their small group, and Baka' notions of well-being associated with the freedom of the forest. AM.'s account evidences an intra-group diversity and rivalry amongst the Baka already 40 years ago (C3).

Moreover, the response patterns to 1960s violence in Cameroon show that, at first, all Baka groups and their neighbours reacted in a similar way: they fled

and hid in the forest to escape the brutalities, something which has been practiced by all inhabitants of this region since colonial times (Ndong-Akono Mbiaga, 1984). However, once the immediate threat was over, the difference in mind-set and living conditions resulted in the more sedentarised returning to their villages, whereas the more mobile moved on, but the response pattern does not follow a simple dividing line between Baka and non-Baka. In Alati, the Fang returned to their villages and took up their old lives, whereas the Baka of Alati continued on to various places in Congo and Gabon. In Ntam, both Baka and other ethnic groups returned to their villages, but the ‘mythical eight’ Baka continued. The differentiation between those who fled and those who stayed is not a distinction between Baka and their neighbours, but amongst the Baka themselves.

In view of these facts, it is possible to support the growing debate against the reductionist classification of forest dwelling groups into ‘pygmy’ hunter-gatherers and village farmers (Rupp, 2011). I advocate, firstly, allowing for more intra-group diversity in considerations of Baka identity, and secondly, adopting a multilateral conceptualisation of Baka-neighbour interactions, past and present (Weig, 2013: 233). The fact that forager mobility is best understood as a continuum (Kent, 1992: 636) further underlines this idea.

CONCLUSION

Taking this historical journey from the 1960s to today with the Ivindo Baka has documented how they and their forefathers were living in Cameroon or Congo before moving to Gabon. The migrations originated from three areas: Alat near Mintom in Cameroon; the villages between Alati and Ntam on the border of Cameroon and Congo; and the villages around Souanké in Congo. From there, the first movement was towards Garabizam in Congo. In Garabizam, the various groups stayed for different lengths of time in the villages of Lio II and Ebandak; before moving on to Koto, Gata, Eba, Kuambai and Été in Congo; or Dezou, Abam, Ndoumabango, Makokou, Adjab and Kabisa in Gabon. The accounts serve to make evident and underline the multi-causality in Baka migrations, as summarized and conceptualized in Chapter five. Moreover, I have shown that the phrase ‘we descended the Ivindo’ is not to be taken literally, but that the movements were undertaken in small (geographical) steps through the forest as a pattern and process of back and forth between old and new locations, involving long periods of sedentarisation.

The data analysis brought out three principal factors in Baka migrations: firstly, *toma*, meaning to follow family or friends to or from different locations; secondly, the type and quality of the (inter-ethnic) relations between Baka and their neighbours; and, thirdly, the search for a good life defined by economic parity and freedom from violence. Bakas’ emphasis on ‘staying’ and good social relations means that the decision to leave or stay often comes only after a time period of approximately two years, a notion referred to as *ntumbu*. Overall, the importance of *toma* and relations with neighbours as central factors in migratory processes document and confirm the quality of social relations as essential to Baka

migrations rather than environmental considerations.

The search for a good life can possibly also be understood as an ideational one in that searching for ‘Gabon’ became equated with the promise of a better life. In Kabisa and Adjab, there was constant talk of ‘suffering’ and mixed in with this ‘web of meaning’ which is Gabon, were several voices about what the Baka (of Adjab) should do next to improve their situation. One man argued that the Baka in Adjab are too limited by riverine travel, too far away from the benefits of a larger town, specifically Makokou. The idea advanced was to move to a location along the road between Maibut and Makokou to be better connected to urbanity. It will be interesting to see whether or not this idea will prevail and become reality. What is clear is that the Baka search for ‘Gabon’, for a better life of wellbeing, economic prosperity and parity, and freedom from discrimination and violence continues. If the Baka were to move in this way, it would amount to auto-generated migration and sedentarisation, and this development could then be considered as a further ‘wave’ in their migratory history of ‘descending the Ivindo’.

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NOTES

- (1) Visiting must be distinguished from following, as the former clearly implies the return to a different location, even if this is only after a period of two years; whereas following entails departing and relocating to another place, without the intention of return.
- (2) The individual villages between Alati and Ntam and those around Makokou are not indicated in detail as this information has been published elsewhere.
- (3) AM. here refers to Garabizam as Galzance, which was first translated to me as Galabiseng. The Ivindo Baka generally refer to Garabizam as Gaza.
- (4) The dominant clan in Adjab, where I spent the majority of my fieldwork period, is also Ye Yanji.
- (5) This expression has also led some writers to assume that the migratory dynamic for the Baka from Minvoul and that of the Baka around Mvadi and Makokou is similar (Paulin, 2010).
- (6) The term ‘wave’ was used by several Baka to describe the migratory movements from the area around Garabizam to the various sights in Gabon. I realised in hindsight that it cannot be excluded that I had used the term ‘wave’ myself at some point, and the Baka picked it up from me. As they were very clear in speaking about these waves, it seems appropriate to use this ‘emic’ expression to refer to the incremental movements along the Ivindo.
- (7) Not to be confused with the river Dja in Cameroon.

- (8) Again the closure of the historical archives in Libreville made it impossible to verify this statement, or president Omar Bongo's later speech on this in Mvadi around 1996. See also Knight 2003.
- (9) Dezou also stands out because it had the only ritual house built along the Ivindo. The fact that none have been set up since underlines the considerable social transformations Ivindo Baka are currently experiencing (Weig, 2015c).
- (10) The policy of *Regroupement*, regroupment in English, was designed to force those people living in the forest or in remote forest villages to leave these places and move to the larger villages, to *regroup* and settle there. This strategy was implemented in large regions of Central Africa (Robineau, 1971: 41), already during colonial times, and forest foragers such as the Baka were particularly hunted. An eyewitness account coming from a Kota man of North-Eastern Gabon told of the first villages being burnt during the 1950s (Samir Nziengui Kassa, personal communication). In the case described here, the aim was to force everyone to leave the small villages in the region, like Eba, making them move and *regroup* in Mvadi.
- (11) Interestingly, Michael Fay lists Ebandak as one of the villages he passed through during his Megatransect of Central Africa. In his report, he states how in 1991 there were about 150 people living there, but when he passed through again in 2000 things had changed dramatically: 'Like all the villages along this footpath this one was dying. People are leaving for the cities'. Fay quoted on www.nationalgeographic.com/congotrek/report_41_djoua.html
- (12) I specify the location of Adjab by adding the suffix '-Congo', as the village is not to be confused with Adjab in Gabon, where the Baka live today.
- (13) Mvadi is a Bakwele town in the Gabonese province Ogooué-Ivindo (the capital of which is Makokou). It was originally founded in 1908 as a German colonial post, and has approximately 1,000 inhabitants today. It lies at the mouth of the River Djoua where it flows into the Ivindo, on the border of Congo and Gabon. Mvadi is divided into three administrative parts, all of which are administered by a separate village chief. The village Adjab, where many Baka moved to from Été, also belongs to the area Mvadi III, and Djambess Florent is the official village chief in Adjab.
- (14) The French term for *kabu* is *cholère* and the Baka use these two terms interchangeably.
- (15) DF. also admitted having lost some Baka to Maibut because he did not live up to the ideals of the caring for the Baka.
- (16) Apparently Adjab was also burned during *Regroupement*, but this was never confirmed. Personally, I found it amusing that Adjab is the Fang word for the Moabi tree in the Baka origin myth, and that I was working in the 'primordially' named village. When I asked some of the women and men about this, they smiled, but said it had no particular meaning for them.
- (17) In the same way many of those Baka returning from the gold site Mikouka to Adjab in June 2011, carried their plastic sheets, with one square meter costing around CFA 3.000, with them, and built new tent structures with them. I came to think of these as 'shifting homes'.
- (18) From all accounts, it is a common Baka practice to leave children with other family, whilst the parents go off for a number of reasons such as *molongo* or gold work. This also happens in cases of separation or divorce. Following the patrilineal rules, the children become part and responsibility of the father's clan once he has completed the bride service or paid the bride price (Paulin, 2010), but I was told of many cases, where the children are 'left' with the mother. In some instances, the father never returns to pick up his children.
- (19) Case references are only included in this part of the text, if they are specifically relevant

- to the article, or if they do not appear in Table 2.
- (20) The Baka still work as hunters for the Fang, especially for ivory.
 - (21) Something which I only heard this once, but which must be mentioned regarding positive changes in the relationship symmetry between Fang and Baka, is that a Fang man gave his Baka *homonym* a piece of land.
 - (22) Moreover, I argue for the importance of emotional ties also being applicable to the Baka themselves, an essential aspect of the interrelations between the autonomous, individual family units in addition to clan structure rules (Hill et al., 2011), an idea also supported by Baka knowledge transmission following matrilineal transmission overriding agricultural cultivation activities (LeClerc, 2001).
 - (23) Certainly a topic, which would need further research, I can here only hypothesise about the increasing implications of sedentism on Baka (economic) migration. Possibly, once the proximate aim of having earned some money to alleviate poverty is fulfilled, the need to 'return home' takes over, if sufficient attachment to a place is given, due to emotional relations or the impact of sedentism. This would mean that some Baka could be classed simply as economic migrants between Cameroon, Congo and Gabon.
 - (24) The emphasis on constraint is particularly interesting, as it constitutes one suggested solution to the difficulties with OFT argued from within evolutionary biology in that Gray suggested 'to resolve the problems of OFT by rejecting functional explanations and reformulating organism—environment relations in terms of reciprocally constrained construction (Gray, 1987).
 - (25) This development must also be seen in light of aid projects for Baka emancipation, such as 'Projet Baka' (<http://baka.sitewala.net>), which help develop agriculturalist knowledge and skills, as well as schooling.

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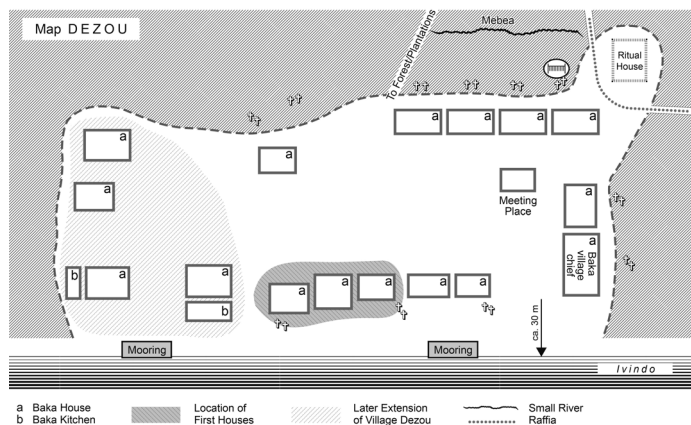
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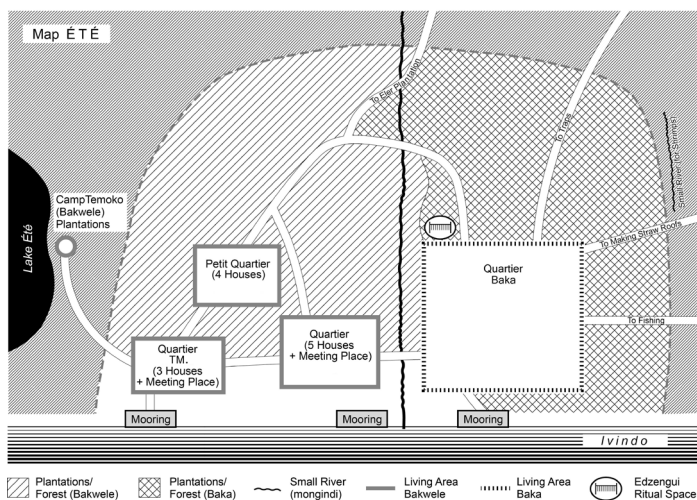
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APPENDIX

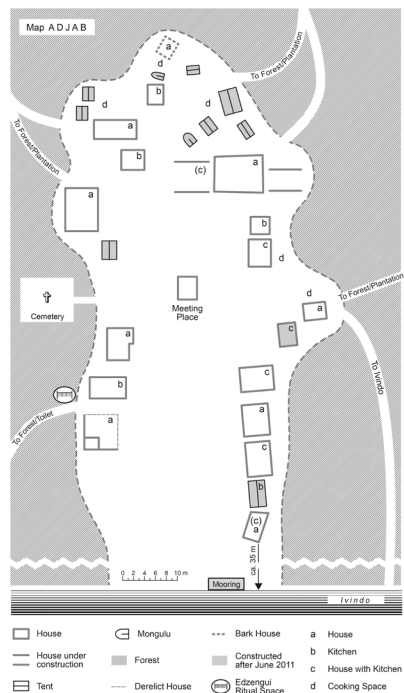
1. Village Map Dezou (drawing of former village based on research visit and Baka recollection)



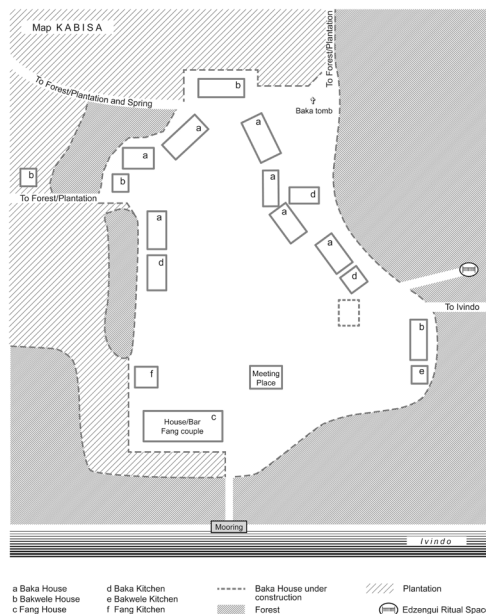
2. Reconstructed village map of Été (based on research visit to Été with the Baka, and their later drawings of village details)



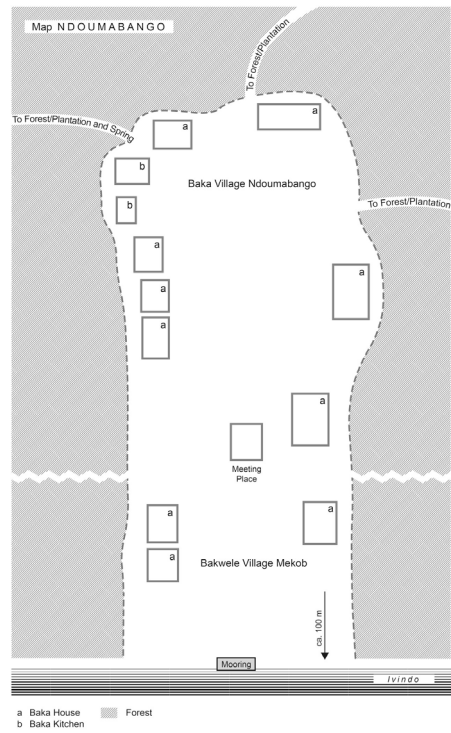
3. Village Map Adjab, as recorded between October 2010 and August 2011



4. Village Map Kabisa, as recorded between October 2010 and August 2011



5. Village Map Ndoumabango, as recorded in 2011



6. Plan of Houses in Mboula (Makokou)

