Baka and the Magic of the State: Between Autochthony and Citizenship

Alec Leonhardt

Abstract: While Baka "Pygmies" are regarded as among Africa's most indigenous peoples, their autochthony seems lacking in features that would give them standing for special consideration by the state. Somehow, indigenousness does not equal autochthony. Other mobile indigenous peoples such as traders and pastoralists have also been seen as less than autochthonous. These groups lack "roots in the soil," which makes them less subject to the authority of the state than farmers. Further, as an acephalous society, Baka political culture cannot be appropriately adjusted to interact with the hierarchical structure of the state and related institutions. For this reason the problematic autochthony of Baka is less an issue of rights within the existing structure of the state—of civil rights—than of human rights. Unfortunately, this human rights issue is not really on any policy agenda, not even that of the working group for the U.N. Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Résumé: Tandis que les Pygmées Baka sont considérés comme les populations parmi les plus indigènes d'Afrique, leur identité autochtone semble manquer certaines caractéristiques qui leur donneraient un statut particulier aux yeux de l'état. D'une certaine manière, il semble que l'identité indigène n'est pas équivalente à celle d'autochtone. D'autres populations nomades telles que les commerçants ou les prêcheurs ne sont pas considérés comme autochtones. Ces groupes manquent de "racines dans le sol," ce qui les rend moins sujets à l'autorité de l'état que les fermiers. De plus, en tant que société acéphale, la culture politique Baka ne peut pas être ajustée de manière satisfaisante à la structure hiérarchique de l'état et des institutions qui s'y rattachent. C'est pour cette raison que le statut autochtone problématique des Baka est moins une question de droits au sein de la structure existante de l'état—de droits civils—que de droits de l'homme. Malheureusement, cette question de droits de l'homme n'est sur aucun agenda politique, pas même sur celui de l'équipe travaillant à la première version de la déclaration des droits des indigènes de l'ONU.

African Studies Review, Volume 49, Number 2 (September 2006), pp. 69–94

Alec Leonhardt is a cultural anthropologist who has done his major research with Baka in southeastern Cameroon. He has also done research on African diaspora communities in Belarus, Louisiana, and Korea. He is currently teaching at Sogang University in Seoul.

Introduction

This article concerns the autochthony of Baka hunter gatherers of southeast Cameroon. In that region they are considered so quintessentially "of the place" as to occupy a space that overlaps the human and natural worlds. Most commonly known as Pygmies, they are regarded locally and internationally as one of the world's most indigenous peoples, but within the present discourse of autochthony they have received little attention. In this article I explore this apparent contradiction. On the one hand, contemporary discussions of autochthony posit autochthony as the basis for access to rights as citizens within a state. On the other hand, a lack of autochthony is the basis for minimizing civil rights, or outright exclusion from citizenship altogether. In a growing number of studies dealing with autochthony, it has been shown that there are many different foundations on which claims of autochthony have been made, and autochthony has been used to justify a variety of appeals to special rights. In all of these cases, however, the discourse takes place within the context of the state. Autochthony is a kind of "magic of the state": not magic that the state exercises upon citizens, but the reverse. Autochthony is not a coherent body of principles on which rights are based. It is a mystification of ancestry, a method used for the purpose of magically extracting wealth from the state.

The problem that this presents for the autochthony of Baka is that they have a relationship to the state and citizenship that is fundamentally different from that of urban citizens or even the most remote village farming citizens. What this means is that while Baka may be the most autochthonous of peoples, their autochthony is in effect purely symbolic. One could say that Baka are not autochthonous at all, that they are indigenous but not autochthonous. This is a reasonable position to take, given the character of the current debates about autochthony. That position, however, would empty autochthony of any empirical basis altogether, quickly leading to the conclusion that autochthony is an ungrounded, opportunistic fabrication. I am taking a different approach, accepting the autochthony discourses as legitimate at face value. According to this approach, it seems that Baka both are and are not autochthonous. Because the first position seems straightforward enough, I will focus on why they are not. I will call the autochthony that comes from being "the first Cameroonians" symbolic or honorary autochthony.

The autochthony that is currently the focus of contestation—that which entails special rights conferred by the state—is not merely symbolic or honorary; it is substantive, in that it has unambiguous exchange value. It may not be like currency, but one can potentially buy things with it. In Cameroon, for example, such autochthony can be used by a local group to acquire an officially recognized community forest tract from the government. I will call this substantive autochthony.

There are a number of reasons why Baka have symbolic autochthony and not substantive autochthony. Their relationship to the soil is different from that of farmers. Baka ideas about identity conflict with participation in citizenship. In practice, citizenship and Baka identity are mutually exclusive for many Baka. For these Baka their relationship is with the place, the environment, the forest rather than with the soil.

Since the arrival of the state in Bakaland, the relationship between government and the people has gone through numerous rapid changes, and Baka have responded with a variety of strategies of accommodation and avoidance.[1] Throughout, the general trend has been a diminution of older forms of Baka autonomy (albeit with some new ones arising). What is different now is that because of the intensification of forestry exploitation over the last thirty years, the Baka can no longer avoid engagement with the state. In the 1990s Cameroon's New Forest Law and the community forest program that it established set off the debates on autochthony in the region, which continue to this day. An outsider might assume that Baka, "The People of the Forest" (Aglund 1987), would be central protagonists in these contested claims of autochthony, but in fact they are quite marginal. The main purpose of this article is to explain why this is the case.

Baka Relations to the Soil and Autochthony

The metaphor of "the soil" is more connected to autochthony than to indigenousness. This is part of the reason that Baka are clearly indigenous but ambiguously autochthonous. "The soil" is an agricultural metaphor; farmers are "of the soil." Most Baka, however, see themselves definitively as hunters, and their farming neighbors see them in the same way. Rather than "of the soil," they are highly mobile and have minimal attachment to a specific settlement. The ways in which Baka and non-Baka construct Baka identity, then, are important to the position of the Baka in the discourse on autochthony.

Who Are Baka?

"Baka" is a name for a language and a people, recognized by Baka themselves and neighboring non-Baka. Although non-Baka Africans use the name Baka, they prefer the term "Pygmy" when speaking French. Not very long ago, commonly used terms were "BaMbenga" or "Babinga," which are African but non-Baka terms meaning "people of the spear." It is not unusual to hear Baka called "forest people" (*les gens de la brousse*). As recently as the early 1990s the archaic term *negrille* (negrillo) could be heard occasionally. Earlier European constructions included "dwarfs" and more fanciful associated notions such as elves. Hunter gatherer is an economic concept with political implications; Pygmy is a racial concept with evolutionist implications.

If the "Pygmy" is one's object of study, then one is concerned with groupings of genetic tendencies of some central African populations. Although the word "Pygmy" is in common vernacular use among Bantu (as well as Baka), it is a somewhat slippery word that can have some of the same connotations as the word "nigger." While "BaMbenga," "dwarfs," "Negrillos," and "Pygmies" are all terms of colonizing discourses, they each constitute their objects differently. "BaMbenga" is an object of direct experience, while "dwarf" is one of distant experience. Moreover the "dwarf" has some supernatural associations and an uncertain human status. "Negrillo" constitutes an object that is much less remote and imaginary, more definitely human, part of a taxonomy that moves it into association with the Negro. "Pygmy" (and also "black") places the emphasis on difference, or "other" (Baka sometimes refer to Bantus as "blacks" [*noirs*]).

These different conceptual frameworks give the peoples they designate differing roles in relation to one another. "BaMbenga" designates most directly a technology (the spear), implying an economy and by extension a culture. The "Pygmy" and its antecedents refer to a race. For this reason, although "Pygmy" remains the most currently used term, some researchers prefer the more awkward but descriptive "African rainforest hunter gatherers"—close in spirit to "BaMbenga," though not nearly as concise. Of these colonizing discourses, "Pygmy" is the most objectifying. Even their own name for themselves is not unproblematic. For some Baka, those who farm and do not know how to hunt are not really Baka. Baka farmers are apt to regard hunters as the "real" Baka. And there are farmers who consider themselves no longer Baka because they are exclusively engaged in farming.

How one chooses to construe Baka as a social object has a bearing on how one conceives their relationship to different issues, including autochthony and citizenship. Ultimately which conceptual scheme is most relevant depends on what issue one is concerned with.

Baka and Autochthony

If who Baka are—whether one regards them as Pygmies, hunter gatherers, BaMbenga, or just as Baka—is by no means a simple a matter, their status as autochthones is no easier to pin down. What's more, we find that as soon as we begin to talk about Baka autochthony, the issue is already inextricably entwined with the issue of citizenship.

Observers of the contemporary autochthony phenomenon in Africa consistently note the unstable nature of the concept and its consequent volatility. Ceuppens and Geschiere (2004) point out the common classical Greek origins and differing contemporary trajectories of the words *autochthonous* and *indigenous* and note the association of autochthony with ideas about Athenian governance. The political scientist K. C. Wheare (1960) used the concept of autochthony in regard to the originality of constitutional law in postcolonial states. Geschiere and Cueppens (2004) describe the arrival of the concept in colonial Francophone Africa in Senegal and Niger, where administrators asserted early on that among some indigenous peoples the ruled were autochthonous and the rulers were not, or that farmers were autochthonous and mobile traders were not.

Starting with the Athenians, the discourses of autochthony have taken place in the context of the state. One can say that a difference between autochthony and indigenousness is that autochthony presupposes a state and indigenousness does not. As Ceuppens and Geschiere (2004) also point out, indigenousness is part of a human rights discourse concerning the rights of groups that predate the state. Human rights claims in this context go as far as demands for sovereignty independent of the state. Stephen Jackson similarly observes in his work on the eastern Congo (this issue) that autochthony means both more and less than indigenousness. He also finds a tendency to value farming over cattle-keeping as a basis for claims of autochthony, along with a connection between autochthony and a supposedly greater gift for governance on the part of one population as opposed to another. Significantly, Jackson argues that the malleability of autochthony discourse allows it to elide the problem that the presumably superior autochthony of Twa in Congo would seem to present for Bantu autochthony.

Despite the volatile and variable nature of the autochthony discourse and its resistance to firm definitions, there are important recurring themes. In Senegal, highly mobile Dyula traders, in contradistinction to farmers, were apparently disqualified from claiming autochthony. In eastern Congo, cattle keepers and Twa (originally hunter gatherers) likewise seem to have a weaker autochthony status as compared to farmers. Another theme is the way that autochthony comes into play in terms of legitimacy in relation to the state. On the one hand, autochthony can be construed as less than indigenousness in the sense that when the state and the nation are subtracted from the equation, indigenousness remains. On the other hand, autochthony can be more than indigenousness in the sense that it does not merely legitimize one's presence, but also adds a special legitimacy.

Baka and the Soil

Definitions of autochthony, as we have seen, usually begin with the idea of connection to "the soil," not with connection to a particular place, or with the concept of individuals or territory that is "native." In the context of this agrarian connection, Baka cannot be considered, and do not think of themselves as, autochthonous. So while they are very much of the place, and are the acknowledged original inhabitants, most Baka and non-Baka alike do not really think of them as real citizens. Farmers' rootedness in the soil allows them a sense of ownership, collectively and individually. Farmers believe that their fields and the surrounding forests belong to them, whereas Baka have access to the hunting territory by virtue of their association with farmer "patrons." (Some farmers think of themselves as owning the Baka, but this is mainly wishful thinking). They see Baka as something like a natural resource of the forest environment and Baka, in turn, while thinking of the forest as "theirs," do not have a particularly strong sense of possessiveness. If Baka are people of the spear, farmers are people of the hoe. Baka refer to non-Baka as *villageois*, while non-Baka call Baka *les gens de la brousse*, even though nearly all Baka do some farming and most farmers do some trapping and collecting of other wild forest products.

The distinctions between Baka and non-Baka extend to personal and characterological differences, both imputed and self-assigned. Baka do not have a very strong ancestral connection to the land. They have little genealogical recollection beyond the living generations, and their attitude toward the graves of the dead contains as much avoidance as it does reverence because of the association with loss. Farmers' mastery of the natural environment consists of subduing it to make it humanly productive. Baka mastery of the environment consists of appropriating its naturally occurring resources. Because Baka are not "rooted" in this way, farmers consider Baka to be wanderers (vagabonds) in the pejorative sense—free and mobile to a fault. They observe that when Baka plant crops their effort is lackadaisical and they seem content to abandon their cultivated fields if they become more interested in hunting or gathering somewhere else. From the farmers' point of view Baka have an uncivilized, savage lack of respect for private property. And yet in many ways farmers also respect Baka for what they recognize as a mastery of the natural environment (along with the supernatural powers associated with that knowledge) that is different from, but in many ways just as impressive as, their own.

The categorical distinctions between Baka as people of the spear and farmers as people of the hoe persist even though, in practice, the difference between hunter gatherer and farmer is not absolute. In precolonial times, there was movement between farming and hunting and gathering for both Baka and non-Baka. In colonial and postcolonial times, social and financial pressures and the attractions of farming, including the move to farming exclusively, have grown increasingly powerful. There are significant numbers of Baka who are now farmers and do not engage in hunting and gathering any more than non-Baka farmers do. Many of these Baka farmers are part of local communities in which some individuals maintain the old way of life, and there are still some local groups that are primarily hunter gatherer. But many Baka farmers are part of more homogenous communities of Baka farmers. This division of Baka society into these new sectors has taken place at the same time that the relations between farmers and hunter gatherers have been disturbed by the colonial/postcolonial state. If in the past farmers were domineering in their relations with hunter gatherers, they could not in fact exercise very much control over them. In the colonial situation though, they became the gatekeepers to colonial power. Precolonial relations involved antagonism but also mutual benefit and complementarity. This equilibrium has now been disrupted, and if farmers are low in the new hierarchy, Baka are well below them, at the bottom. This is the background for the present context in which we see Baka making new distinctions among themselves about who is really Baka and who is not. These distinctions parallel those of belonging and exclusion in the autochthony debates, although without the jockeying for power.

A Baka Country Cousin and a Forest Cousin

My Baka assistant had attended school full time, completing *cours moyen deux* (the level prior to *lycée*, perhaps comparable to middle school in the United States). To have attended school full time and advanced to this level is an unusual achievement for anyone in the region, Baka or otherwise. It was possible because his village was within walking distance of Yokadouma, an administrative town with a secondary school, and most important, his father had insisted that he and his older brother advance their education as far as possible. His brother eventually became a schoolteacher, but my assistant could not continue his education after his father died and he could no longer pay the school fees. When I met him, he was a successful full-time subsistence farmer and coffee planter who did some trapping, but he had no hunting or forestry skills.

During one of our trips we met a cousin of his in Ngato (Ancien), a thriving community of hunters two or three days from the nearest road. This encounter provided a small-scale example of exclusion that is informative about Baka notions of belonging. As custom entitled him, my assistant asked the cousin to make a gift of his fire-starting kit. My assistant did not have such a kit because he had never needed one. As a village dweller, close to a town, he always had ready access to matches, and he had never expected to be alone in the forest in the rain. For his cousin, in contrast, the kit was a necessary item of everyday equipment. But what surprised my assistant was that his cousin slighted him unhesitatingly and refused the request. His answer was, "If I came to your village you would have nothing to offer me." My assistant recounted the experience to me with shock, indignation, and hurt. Both he and his cousin spoke the Baka language, shared certain aspects of physical appearance, and recognized their kinship. But from the cousin's point of view my assistant did not really count as Baka. He was unwilling to extend normal Baka courtesy to someone he did not consider part of his Baka social world, to an outsider.

The cousin's rebuff was likely not based solely on my assistant's farming occupation. My assistant was fit, healthy, well dressed, alert, well spoken, good natured, and well paid, and he had acquired a European patron (me). Certainly he would have stood out even in many Baka agricultural settlements where the residents are very poor. What the cousin was saying, in effect, was that my assistant's way of life had nothing to offer, no matter how successful it was. My assistant's way of life was too remote to be of any relevance. My assistant later had the occasion to redress his hurt feelings, which gives the episode an interesting additional dimension. While staying at another camp in the area, the skin of a bongo was cured, and when it was done, it was cut into pieces and shared. I did not receive a portion, being too much of a non-Baka, apparently. Just as the fire-starting kit would have been wasted on my assistant from his cousin's viewpoint, in this case a piece of bongo hide would have been wasted on me. But in this case my assistant was not excluded and was given a large piece. He quickly set to work and soon demonstrated that he could produce the kind of elaborate stitch appropriate for making a fire-starting pouch (even though what materialized was not the type of pouch that normally carries flint, steel, kapok, and tobacco leaves, but instead a fine pouch suited for the notebooks and camera with which I had burdened him!).

Perhaps as distressing as my assistant's encounter with his cousin, or even more so, was his experience of socializing with girls and young women in these camps. When we first arrived in the area we talked about the possibility of a much longer stay on a later trip and he was very enthusiastic. He was particularly pleased with the idea of marrying another wife there. Soon, though, he expressed dismay that young women he spoke to would not respond, unlike in the Baka communities of his own area. He spoke with intensity that it was incredible to him that, as he put it, they regarded him as so strange, as hardly human. Possibly what he was experiencing had more to do with the traditional shyness of young Baka women around strangers than a perception of him as especially alien. However, my assistant was sure that the young women projected a feeling of otherness onto him. It is beyond my ability to adequately analyze the circuit of projections between my assistant and those young women. However, I do not think it is too much of a leap to say that there were certainly some feelings of estrangement in play there.

These experiences of my assistant are high-contrast encounters. Very few non-Baka in the region progress as far as he did in school, and not many Baka are as adept in an urban environment or as lacking in forestry skills as my assistant. At the same time, not many Baka live in places so conducive to hunting and gathering or so remote from urbanization and ruralization as the residents of Ngato (Ancien) (and also Zoulabot [Ancien], discussed below) do. My assistant is a success story of Baka education, farming, and citizenship—the very things that made him an outsider among Baka at Ngato (Ancien). I am reminded of Turnbull's (1983) account of Mbuti contemptuously using the word "citizen" to express their disdain for those living in government-promoted roadside settlements.

My assistant had become a person of the soil, and of the state. At the same time, one could say that he was no longer as "autochthonous" as his cousin, that his autochthony was—in theory—no different from that of most other Cameroonian citizens. His cousin had little root in the soil or the state, but he had exemplary autochthony. However, that autochthony was symbolic rather than substantive.

Baka Autochthony and the Vicissitudes of Citizenship

My assistant's papers were all in order, except for one thing. He did not have to pay the head tax. He explained that planters had to show their tax receipt when they sell their cacao at the market. But, he continued, the Divisional officer had ordered that Baka be allowed to sell without showing the tax receipt in order to encourage their participation in cash crop production. This continues a "taming" policy first made official in the 1930s—to attract Baka participation in the colonial order. Not all Baka encounters with the official formalities of citizenship have been as agreeable.

The words *citizen, city, civil,* and *civilization* all come from the same root. The state presupposes the city, civil society presupposes the state. To be a citizen is to be a member of an urban society, or at least the hinterland of an urban society, and many Baka live beyond that rural fringe in Cameroon. States have more or less restrictive qualifications for citizenship; not all members of a given society necessarily have the right to be citizens. Anyone born in Cameroon is entitled to citizenship if the Cameroonian citizenship of at least one parent is established. Most Baka do not meet this qualification, though for Baka exceptions are made. A birth certificate is the basis for establishing all other official documents related to citizenship. Most Baka do not have birth certificates, and this means that anything requiring official documents will often be unattainable.

It is difficult to travel around Cameroon without official identification, and problematic Baka official status makes national identity cards difficult to obtain. Robert Moise (2003) describes the experience of a Baka man who worked for a foreign business and traveled frequently. Even with his good connections he was unable to get an ID card. Eventually he resorted to having his teeth filed to points. This archaic African custom is in Cameroon still practiced only by Baka, though it has become rare among young Baka, who regard it as an old-fashioned cultural stereotype with which they do not want to be associated. For this young man, however, pointed teeth served as a kind of Baka ID. Being marked as definitively Baka, he was thus placed beneath, or beyond, the normal requirements of the state. Some officials decry the absurdity of Baka being pressured to buy membership cards in the government political party when they are unable to obtain ID cards. Since a national identity card is necessary in order to vote, one can understand officials' outrage. There are many absurdities connected with Baka existence at the edge or outside of Cameroonian society. A missionary described one Baka community's solution to their problem of obtaining ID cards. For many Baka getting an ID photograph is a tremendous inconvenience and an expense. As a solution, a group near Ngato (Nouveau) obtained a large number of prints of a photograph of one Baka individual, and they all got ID cards with this same photo. One wonders if the civil servant issuing the cards did not notice, or was it that he was extending to these applicants the Baka exemption to the rules? According to Maryvonne Bretin (2005), Baka citizenship exists only on paper. It is also apparent that even where it exists on paper, it is often only in the form of an absurdity.

Baka Identity and Modernity

Baka have faced a great variety of local conditions regarding pressures, or inducements, to sedentarize, to practice agriculture and assimilate to the environing agricultural economy, and to establish roots in the soil and the state. The differences in local situations have led to notable differences in response by Baka, with different consequences for Baka identity and implications for their status as autochthones. In this section I trace the Baka situation in three localities; these cases are important for what they reveal in themselves, as well as what the differences among them suggest. One could say that they are each success stories of modernization, although their modernity takes very different forms.

Lomié and Sedentarization

Lomié is a major rural area in Bakaland where Baka are numerous enough and the general population sparse enough that Baka are a relatively large proportion of the population. It should be noted that in Bakaland rural areas exist not in contrast to urban areas, but to forest. A distinctive feature of the Lomié area is the presence of a Catholic mission to Baka begun in 1972. Missionaries are required to work within the framework of the government's Baka integration policy with its emphasis on sedentarization and agricultural production. Sedentarization entails the elimination of the residential mobility and seasonal relocation that is vital to a hunting and gathering orientation for Baka. The Bosquet mission at Lomié has worked hard to promote permanent roadside village settlement, self-sufficient subsistence, cash-crop farming, and full-time school attendance for all children. Although they have put a great deal of work into this, their effort would not have had the effect it has if there had been no appeal in it for Baka.

Robert Moise (2003) did extensive research in this area in the late 1990s, focusing on Baka interest in and response to modernity, especially in relation to the model village at the mission. One of the most interesting aspects of Moise's work is his discussion of the vibrant Baka youth culture which extends to regional dimensions, participating in regional popular culture with great originality.[2]

Moise observed a major distinction between Baka oriented to the forest and hunting and gathering activities and those oriented to the roadside village and rural activities. The former tend to be older people and the latter predominantly the young. Among the young there is also a division between the educated (primary, some secondary schooling) and the uneducated, who remain somewhat more oriented toward the forest. The rise of Western schooling among Baka has resulted in a decline in the reproduction of Baka technical knowledge. Among many youth in the mission settlements, knowledge of Baka hunting technology and methods, medicinal plant use, religious and healing practices are declining.

Among those who pursue forest activities, changes are also taking place at the mission settlements. Hunting with bows or spears has been pretty much replaced by hunting with guns, which requires considerably less skill. Since few Baka own guns, this makes them more dependent on Bantu gun owners and obliges them to give up a far greater portion of the game they bag. At the same time, hunting of any kind is being replaced by trapping, a more rural activity common to non-Baka farmers. In collecting wild plant food and other useful plants, many fewer men have the ability to collect honey, and women are familiar with a significantly smaller number of plants than their mothers had been. Extended stays in the forest have become shorter and fewer. The size of groups doing so has become smaller and trips by groups are decreasing while those by single individuals are increasing. More and more of forest activity is within a day's walk from the home village. This means that more and more forest activity is taking place in what are really ruralizing areas of the forest around villages. This overall pattern is one that is more and more closely coming to resemble that of Bantu farmers.

Moise also notes that Baka roadside settlement near the mission involves a greater population density and a greater proximity of unrelated groups. This seems to be associated with increased conflict, increased emphasis on private property, and problems for the Baka ethic of sharing.

Around Lomié, Baka distinguished between forest and village-oriented Baka with such observations as, "That traditional stuff—here, that's already finished. The real Pygmies are over there" [pointing deeper into the forest] (Moise 2003). Moise says that "forest-oriented Baka also perceived the distinction in orientation, for them, being a 'real Baka' was equivalent to being a 'real Pygmy.'"

Moise observes how the emergence of a quasi-urban Baka youth culture around Lomié expresses a strong contemporary assertion of Baka identity. Interestingly, this comes at a time when their way of life is coming to more and more closely resemble that of non-Baka farmers. For the more educated Baka around Lomié, as for my assistant, full-time school attendance does not mean a Western education in addition to a Baka education, but instead of a Baka education. Put simply, to forest-oriented Baka, village Baka are not real Baka. For village Baka, the situation is more ambiguous. The forest Baka are the real Baka, and to village Baka they themselves are also Baka, but less so.

Bigotsa and Assimilation

The kinds of changes taking place around Lomié are taking place all over Bakaland, though often in very different ways. The hamlet of Bigotsa is an interesting contrast. Lomié is a small isolated town and beyond the scattering of villages around it lies deep forest in all directions. Lomié is the last (and only) settlement of any significance on a road that dead-ends near the Congo frontier. By contrast, Bigotsa is bounded by major roads of the province, not far from both the largest town of the Eastern Province and the provincial capital. The dominant population is Maka, a Bantu farming people, and Baka are an important but small minority. This area is now in the margin between the forest and the savanna. What is left of the forest is so degraded that this community has not been able to subsist by hunting and gathering since the 1960s, according to the recollection of old people. They said that the last time a logging company logged the area was in the early 1960s, and since then there have not been enough trees for them to cut. On first arriving at Bigotsa, a young man told me, "Our grandparents were Pygmies." He and others in the village assert their Baka ancestry but say that they are not Pygmies, or Baka. They used the terms "Baka" and "Pygmy" somewhat interchangeably, but often with different emphasis, one more suggestive of ethnicity, the other of a way of life. As I interpret their discussion, they seemed to be saying that they were not Pygmies, and not very much Baka because they lived in the village, not in the forest, and they were farmers, not hunter gatherers. On the other hand, they regarded themselves as to some degree residually Baka since their transformation to Maka was not entirely complete. They considered themselves Baka by ancestry, but since they had converted to Catholicism and full-time farming, by their own estimate they did not practice a Baka way of life, and they barely spoke the Baka language; thus they were primarily Maka. Remarkably, they reported regular marriage between ex-Baka men and Maka women.

I had been interested in finding a community in this kind of environmental transition. A missionary to Baka had told me that in twenty years the northern edge of the forest had moved more than twenty kilometers farther south. I became curious about what was happening to Baka communities that were being overtaken by the encroaching savanna, but had not had the occasion to pursue the question until I heard about Bigotsa.

Bigotsa is a hamlet (quartier) of Bayong 1. Bayong is a village group (de-regrouped village) about thirty kilometers from Doume on the road to Nguelemendouka. Here, not just the area around the houses was cleared of trees, but there was hardly a tree to be seen to the horizon in any direction. The houses were mud-wattle in the usual village style of the area and very modest.

I had traveled to Bigotsa with my friend Lauren Suraci who introduced me to Nguelekamba Jean de Dieu. It was he who told me that their grandparents were Pygmies. He said that he spent a few months at a time working as a mechanic for the provincial tax department in Douala, and then a few months in Bigotsa. Also there was Nkoia Martin, a Maka man retired after teaching school for thirty years. Since then he continued teaching Baka or ex-Baka or ex-Baka-in-the-making or Baka-Maka or former Baka now Maka pupils like Jean. Saoponga Maurice, an older Bigotsa farmer, remembered when they had first "come out of the forest" to Bigotsa in 1961. We discussed a number of subjects dealing with Baka and Maka life ways and Bigotsa people's relative status as Pygmies, hunter gatherers, farmers, Baka, or Maka.

There was consensus on many points. Bigotsa people did not hunt, did very little gathering of wild plants (and this was only done by men), did not go into the forest except on day trips to tend traps. Maurice said that people preferred the village and did not like to go into the forest. Bigotsa people were all full-time farmers, planted coffee as well as subsistence crops, in which they were self-sufficient, and did not perform wage labor for other farmers. Maurice said he produces eleven or twelve sacks a year, which among Baka farmers is pretty good.[3] This situation shows none of the characteristics of client relations with farmers typical of Baka elsewhere.

Younger people barely understood the Baka language at all. Older people spoke Baka somewhat haltingly as if long out of practice. The primary language was Maka, though most also spoke French fairly well.

I asked about the dance for Njengi, the major Baka forest spirit. Maurice said they had not had a dance for Njengi since 1962 or 1963. He said that when they had dances it would be Ayanga, a Maka social dance. I asked about Komba, usually translated from Baka as "God."[4] After Maurice explained what the word meant, Jean said, "I want to respond to that. There is one thing. I told you to begin with that, ah, we lived in the forest, our grandparents. OK, when we came to the village, the villagers attracted us to forget most of our things." He said that most everyone in Bigotsa was Catholic, though there were a few Protestants.

I learned that they had occasional contacts with Baka living in a forest near Dimako. Jean said of them, "They have nothing. Rather they come trade for bananas with us here in the village. At times they go steal everything from other people's fields. They eat wild yams, they are savages, they are very savage."

Finally, I wanted to see if there was some way in which this picture of having totally assimilated to the ways of Maka was less complete than it was being portrayed. I asked if there were marriages between ex-Baka men and ordinary Maka women. All agreed that there were, and indeed some of the women of the community did look like they were more Maka than Baka. Jean spoke of the generation that had settled Bigotsa: "OK, with that way of life, they also found women, in the village. They married the Maka girls.... With those marriages they could no longer return to the forest. The Maka girls could not accept the life in the forest.... With those village girls they gave birth to our parents. And our parents, they also married with village girls and gave birth to us."

I came back to the question of the distinction or identity between Pygmy and Baka. All were quite definite: Baka are Pygmies. To be a Baka was to be a Pygmy, and by extension to not be a Pygmy was to not be a Baka. That this view is not quite compatible with their recognition that their Baka identity was not entirely effaced by their Maka identity seemed not to be a problem. Still, with my obtuse questioning, tension came through in Jean's remarks, as he seemed at pains to convey to me that he was not at all denying his Baka ancestry, even asserting that in a way they were still Baka, but that they were not Pygmies, and not primarily Baka. He ended on the subject of intermarriage with Maka women, by which he was in effect saying that that settles the matter.

After my meeting in Bigotsa I wanted to speak with Maka whose grandparents were not Pygmies. I expected that I would get a somewhat different perspective and so I was surprised to find that there was practically nothing I had been told that was not confirmed. I went to the village of Bayong 1, of which Bigotsa was a hamlet, Bayong having begun as a colonial regrouped village. I talked with the chief, Amougou Yanda Marc. Bayong 1 seemed to be a fairly conventional Maka community. Appearances suggested few Pygmy grandparents. Amougou's house was appropriately imposing for someone of his age and position, contrasting to the modest houses of Bigotsa. He told me that he had sold thirty-six sacks of coffee at the market that year (which months later he had yet to be paid for) and could have sold more but could not hire enough workers to do all the harvesting. Here is a slight difference from the account I got at Bigotsa. It would appear that some people in the area are available for wage labor at harvest time. However, by Amougou's account that availability is much less than the demand. This suggests that while the people of Bigotsa may not be entirely free of pressure to do wage labor, they have a considerable degree of freedom from it.

As I said, Amougou generally confirmed what I had heard in Bigotsa. He said that there were no Baka in the area that still lived in the bush. I asked him if it were true that they were no longer Pygmies.

> *Amougou:* In name only. They are no longer Pygmies. Only in name.
> *A.L:* Are they Maka like the people here?
> *Amougou:* They're Maka, yes, yes. In the beginning, their mothers, were daughters of the village, who married their fathers.
> *A.L.:* So at the beginning they married women from here?
> *Amougou:* I said, their mothers, when their fathers lived in the forest, they came and married the girls of Bayong.

In all of this, the assertion of marriage between Baka men and Maka women on both sides is absolutely remarkable. Further research could add qualifications to these self-reports. One might guess that the Maka women are not first-born, or in some other ways not of the highest status. However, this form of intermarriage has always been the one unbreachable barrier to Baka assimilation. If this boundary has been breached, then there are no real barriers to assimilation. There are other significant points worth noting, like the fact that the men of Bigotsa cannot easily be dragooned into field labor and that men rather than women collect wild plant food. But if none of the rest of this were true, the intermarriage would remain absolutely telling.

There remain many unanswered questions about the depth of ex-Baka assimilation to Maka society at Bayong. Clearly the people of quartier Bigotsa were not Maka in the same way as most Maka understand themselves. But if they were not altogether Maka, they saw themselves as only vestigially Baka, which corresponds to the views of their fully Maka neighbors. While much more remains to be learned about the transition from Baka to Maka at Bigotsa, others have previously commented on this general process.

In the early twentieth century the administrator M. Siret worked in the Department of Haut Nyong, where Bayong is located. One of his posts was at Doume, about thirty kilometers from Bayong. It is clear from his memoir that situations similar to the condition of Bayong in 1989 were probably already common fifty years before.

> Their life [Baka] which is no more than semi-nomadic, almost sedentarized, shows them the example of the villagers, keeping gardens: bananas "ndo", manioc "Mboma", maize, "Mbomo".... I was able to determine that in a camp, among the Djems to the south, that they were beginning to abandon their hemispherical huts and adopt the more spacious and healthy [rectangular] bark cabin.... Isolated, having lost nearly all contact with other baka families, associating only with the Makas, Bajoues, Djems or Dzimous, depending on locale, they begin to abandon their customs and many are the negrillos who understand and speak the language of the tribes of the region. Certainly, many among them live far from any regroupment, persevering in their isolation and their traditional life, but it is probable that their sedentarization will bring, with the abandonment of their beliefs and the mixing inherent to all prolonged contact with foreign peoples, the progressive disappearance of a people. (Siret 1946)

Cavalli-Sforza (1986:422) asserts that there is a general pattern of hunter gatherer assimilation in equatorial Africa. If one credits his observations, villages of this type are found in the vicinity of every large forest in equatorial Africa, where memories of Pygmy origins are disappearing, and over time complete absorption into surrounding farmer populations is taking place. While one may have reservations about some of Cavalli-Sforza's generalizations outside the field of genetics, this one is consistent with what I found at Bigotsa and Bayong and with Siret's description of the situation in the region in the early twentieth century.

The residents of quartier Bigotsa were not excluded from membership by the larger Baka community. They made that exclusion themselves. They did so not to deny their Baka ancestry, but simply in recognition that it had lost its relevance to them. Their self-exclusion from Baka identity was not for the sake of claiming a more elevated social status, but just an acceptance that the way of life of their ancestors was not theirs. According to their criteria of what made people Baka—economy, religion, language and otherwise—they were not Baka. In doing so they provided us with their self-evaluation of what it is to be Baka, and it seems likely that there are and have been a significant number of similar communities.

In Bigotsa sedentarization is permanent. There is no going back because the environmental resources to support rainforest hunter gatherers are gone. Around Lomié the situation is more complex. For some Baka, sedentary agriculture is just another option. Longtime observers have seen many Baka groups settle in roadside camps near their Bantu patrons' village, eventually build permanent village-style houses, cultivate more and more extensive fields, and develop their cash crop production. And then, perhaps suddenly and even with no apparent reason, they pick up and move, maybe not very far, maybe far enough to keep their patrons from coming around much, sometimes a considerable distance into the forest and even occasionally severing relations with the patrons and moving quite a long way. By the same token, such a group may reappear at one of its former residences at any time. This pattern has always been a possibility, but with growing numbers of educated Baka unable to function very well in the forest, these kinds of options are not so possible. Thus, for many Baka, permanence has always been another option to exercise or discard. At Lomié, unlike at Bigotsa, this remains the case at least for the forest-oriented Baka population.

Another important difference between Lomié and Bigotsa is that at Lomié, Baka are an important and thriving fraction of the general population, while around Bigotsa, Baka numbers are much fewer and declining. It seems that absorbing small numbers of Baka in Bigotsa does not represent as much of a challenge to Maka. Around Lomié, even if Baka wished for such complete assimilation it seems likely that their numbers would be greater than Nzime would easily contemplate absorbing. That would seem to be a major difference between the situation for the village Baka around Lomié and the hamlet of Bigotsa.

For Baka such as these, it would seem that substantive autochthony should have begun to accrue. They have roots, they are farmers, they market coffee, they pay taxes, their children go to school, they go to church. It would seem as though they are well on their way to being full citizens of the state.

Ngato, Zoulabot, and Nonassimilation

The development model for Baka—whether that of the state, the NGOs, or the missionaries—always assumes the idea of integration or assimilation into national society. Older documents frequently contain repetition of a common phrase: "Baka must come out of the forest." More recently this imperative is not emphasized as much, perhaps because this change can now be taken for granted. At this point, then, I would like to briefly consider the development alternative—of Baka who have not come out of the forest.

With the encouragement of colonial administrators, Baka of Ngato and Zoulabot came out of the forest in the 1940s. Ngato and Zoulabot were large, regrouped villages on an important trail in the German colonial period, and Ngato was a military post. That trail became less important under the French, and when some trails were made into motor roads in the 1950s, this one was not. Konabembe are the farming people of the area. In 1941 the official Konabembe population of Ngato was three hundred and the Konabembe population of Zoulabot was two hundred and fifty. In 1989 I found only three Konabembe in Ngato and three in Zoulabot. These villages now appear on maps (when they appear at all) as "Ngato (Ancien)" and "Zoulabot (Ancien)" because nearly all the Konabembe population has relocated to newer villages on the motor road, which are also called Ngato and Zoulabot (or Ngato [Nouveau] and Zoulabot [Nouveau]). Baka at the original Ngato and Zoulabot have not relocated, and although any Baka census is uncertain, I would estimate that in 1989 Baka in the area numbered several hundred. Hereafter I use the names Ngato and Zoulabot without the "Ancien" modifier, just as their current inhabitants do.

On first arriving at Ngato, my assistant was stunned at the size of the banana plantations we crossed. "I've never seen Baka who had such big plantations," he said. At Ngato and Zoulabot, Baka are completely self-sufficient in terms of food crops. They attribute this productivity to there being so few Konabembe left to bother them with labor demands. However, as they have become isolated, it is no longer practical to carry cacao to market, and those plantations have become overgrown. Elephant hunting has not gone out of style, though. The usual contemporary Baka elephant hunting method, an antique *fusil de traite* (a muzzle-loading flintlock musket loaded with a spear) is only a little less dangerous than the traditional hand-held spear method, so they are not the major contributors to the ivory trade. But elephant-hunting (though now illegal) does provide great feasts and a little money.

I asked Mewoua Ngallo Daniel, the lineage head at Zoulabot, how it is that he spoke such good French. He told me that when he was young the government had sent a schoolteacher to Zoulabot and there had been a "school under the trees." He had also learned enough math to handle money and deal with the ivory traders. My assistant asked Mewoua and others what people felt they were lacking at Zoulabot. In response they variously mentioned a school, a logging camp, a dispensary, and a market. Above all else they wanted a school, and they wanted a road: "The problem of the road bothers us a lot here."

But if Baka in this "isolated" area want the things they have seen when they have visited the road, why do they not relocate there? All but a tiny number of Konabembe have left their villages to relocate in villages along the road. Baka settlements have always been much less permanent than Konabembe villages, and Baka often moved over long distances year after year. Yet here they have populous, thriving communities, whereas nearly all the Konabembe are long gone. I asked Mewoua why they were still here, why they had not moved to the road like the Konabembe? He said, "It's good here. We have no reason to leave." I pointed out that if the road came, there would be many Konabembe and other people who would come with it; how would that be? Mewoua said, "We don't want them to come." Several people mentioned a violent clash that had taken place at Ngato a couple of nights before. One man said,

> I see that the road is not so good a place, because... the day before yesterday, when there was the fight between [a] brother and sister, if it was over there on the road, they would already be far away, you see.... Because at the road just once you do something like that, go, they take you-you-you [stuttering], they take you directly to the gendarme station.... What is important is to make sure we are always here. Here disputes are settled by families in the home, so it is better to stay here, eternally. We cannot leave, because there along the road is trouble.

At a couple of points while talking, the speaker was so overcome that he stuttered and struggled for words, so difficult was it for him to express his horror at the coercive power of the state. Behind this outlook is the prime Baka value of egalitarianism. No one is allowed to impose his or her will on another person, no one is allowed to have more power than anyone else. In his statement this man separates himself from those Baka who live along the road who have accepted the authority of the state and the existence of inequality among themselves.

But how completely outside the authority of the state are Baka at Zoulabot? While I was there Zoulabot was visited by a man who introduced himself as a municipal councilor who lived in the nearest village that could sometimes be reached by vehicle, two or three days away. He explained that as a member of the government political party, he was delegated by the Divisional Officer to represent the administration in this area. He said that once a year he was sent to visit these villages as a representative of the government. The reason for this, he said, was that an actual administration official, of even the lowest rank, could not be induced to go to a place that could not be reached by car.

We had awaited the councilor the previous day with Mewoua, who had brought his head tax bill to pay. However, the news came that there was a feast for the councilor at Ngato, and he would not be coming until the following day. The next day I went back to wait for the councilor with the Konabembe village chief (the other villagers being his wife and mother). Mewoua did not come, though, since he had earlier made an engagement with his brother to go hunting, which he did not feel he could break. When the councilor arrived, the chief threw himself into an angry fit at the outrage of Mewoua's absence. Once the chief again grew calm, we had a pleasant and informative conversation with the councilor. With no further business to conduct at Zoulabot, the councilor bade us goodbye, cutting quite a figure with his swagger, stick under his arm and followed by porters carrying tribute.

Some background will help make more sense of this (post)colonial vignette. Why of perhaps 250 or so Baka around Zoulabot was Mewoua the only one with a tax bill? That is because he is a well-known hunter, so in the Subdivision office he is one Baka at Zoulabot whose name they know, and since he is a hunter they know that he has money now and then. Why was the councilor received so grandly at Ngato and so unceremoniously at Zoulabot. One reason could be that Ngato is an even more notorious home to elephant hunters. That practice happens to be illegal, though, so if you ask in Ngato, nobody hunts elephants; they used to, but not anymore. Hence all the enthusiastic taxpayers, party throwers, and tribute payers at Ngato.

I think this gives us a picture of the presence of the state in this part of Bakaland. Evidently, if Mewoua misses his chance to speak with his representative from the government from one year to the next, it is not a big a deal and he can pay his tax some other time.

There are those in government who think that this state of affairs is deplorable, even outrageous. Outrageous that people like the councilor are selling party membership cards to people like Mewoua who "do not even have national identity cards!" It is the government's official position that people like Mewoua have been denied the benefits of development that are due to citizens of Cameroon.

Mewoua and others, though, do not seem dissatisfied with their current situation. On some level they would like that road, but on another level they do not want what the road would bring. Mewoua owns his own gun, and with his gun and a crossbow he is a successful hunter.[5] He has a large food crop plantation, speaks some French, and is competent with numbers and money transactions. Local musicians make instruments using aluminum sheet metal and nylon fishing line. A younger brother owns a cassette-radio boom box, and a trader comes through every so often with batteries, kerosene, soap, and other items. The cacao plantations have been abandoned since the nearest market no longer functions. But people in this area seem satisfied with what they have in terms of agricultural development and other features of modernity and are mostly content doing without the rest. The state impinges on their lives in some ways, but in the ways that are most important to them it is blessedly absent. Mewoua's early experience with "school under the trees" indicates that schooling and health care can be provided in ways that do not seem intrusive or overbearing.

An important point to be made here is that in research and policy circles not very much is being said about places like Ngato and Zoulabot. They come up only when the World Wildlife Fund insists that Baka from such communities need to be kept out of the newly created forest reserves. Otherwise, only Baka who are settled on roads or not too far from them receive any notice. Given the increased birth rates associated with sedentarism, they are probably a majority of Baka by now. Most published material about Baka has to do with their adherence to the government's program or with problems of Baka integration. Very little is written about Baka who are not interested in programs or integration and who are doing fine without them. In part this is understandable; missionaries and development workers are not there to help people who are doing fine without them. Moreover, there are many Baka communities found along roads that are impoverished, malnourished, disease-ridden and beset with alcoholism, prostitution, divorce, and family abandonment and are in desperate need of help. The problem, though, is that the overall picture does not really include Baka who are relatively independent of patrons, missionaries, the state or anyone else, and who are not in crisis. The result is a general picture of Baka who are dependent and assimilating, and this is taken as defining the Baka condition.

Baka Models of Modernity

Of the modernization success stories in this section, Ngato-Zoulabot is the only one that seems unambiguous or unironic. It shows that the opposition between modernity and tradition is not the same as the opposition between the road and the forest. The modernity of Baka along the road who are oriented to the village is one kind of modernity. My assistant thought that life around Ngato and Zoulabot was like that of his grandparents. But this is really what Fabian (1983) means by the "denial of co-evalness." Mewoua was just as much an example of Baka modernity as my assistant, but in a different way. The tragic irony of Bigotsa is that their successful adaptation results in an end to their history as Baka. Around Lomié Baka seem to have escaped this fate, and I think that the reasons are important. Around Lomié, Baka communities are not isolated; they are part of a thriving regional Baka community. That is what Bigotsa lacks. It appears as if their pronounced lack of authoritarianism and nonantagonistic ways may be connected with a lack of resistance to assimilation. With the critical mass of Baka around Lomié, even if some day there are no more forest-oriented Baka there, the Baka language and perhaps some other elements of Baka culture could still survive. The modernity of each of these communities seems to bring with it new elements of belonging and exclusion among Baka. My assistant's claim of reciprocity was shunned at Ngato; he was not a real Baka. Educated Baka women are beginning to shun uneducated suitors. At Bigotsa, they have excluded themselves from Baka identity, asserting in effect that they are not real Baka. Ngato-Zoulabot Baka would seem to have the most unambiguously Baka identity, and more significant than elephant hunting in this regard is their maintenance of Baka egalitarianism and political autonomy, such that the authority of the state continues to be viewed by them as alien and horrifying.

These few examples of Baka communities show how Baka in different circumstances have had various ways of dealing with pressures and inducements to modernization. In grappling with these challenges of modernization they have become more "of the soil" and more engaged with the state. In principle, this should increase their autochthony.

Conclusion

A Baka community's encounter with Cameroon's community forest program well illustrates the predicament that autochthony represents for Baka. In the late 1990s a Baka group in the Lomié area was aware of the community forest program and realized that under its terms they should meet the qualifications to be granted one.[6] Knowing that the process would involve a great many bureaucratic obstacles, they went to the Catholic mission for Baka, le Bosquet. They asked the nuns to help with the application process and the nuns agreed. Once they had begun the application, the news spread from the Subdivison office and reached some Nzime (Bantu) farmers who lived nearby. Those Nzime were outraged at the thought of Baka acquiring rights to land in this manner from the government. It was their view that only they were entitled to such benefits, and that Baka by virtue of being Baka were not. It was evident that the Baka were village dwellers, farmers, not given to lengthy absences from the village; they sent their children to school, and were by any formal measure citizens of equal standing with the Nzime farmers. While all of this was apparent, and perhaps because it was apparent, the Nzime felt that the Baka were lacking something important that would give them the proper standing to acquire land rights in this way. They went to the mission and told the nuns how angry and outraged they were. They told the nuns that if they persisted in helping the Baka establish their claim to a community forest, violent retribution would result (Robert Moise, personal communication, 2005). Such a threat made to other Africans might or might not have had serious ramifications. However, for Africans, making such a threat to, or even just in the presence of, European missionaries could potentially have extremely serious official repercussions. The Nzime were aware of this, which shows just how seriously they took the matter.

The outcome of the threat and the case are not clear, but whatever ensued, this episode points to the key issues of Baka autochthony. What those Baka lacked as far as the Nizime were concerned was autochthony. They may not have lacked symbolic autochthony, but they lacked substantive autochthony. And the Nzime were determined that Baka should not receive that level of recognition. Rights to community forest tracts have inspired a notable amount of conflict over autochthony within Bantu local groups. In this case, the issue was more heavily loaded because it suggested that a Baka group's claim of autochthony would have the same legitimacy as Bantu claims.

Why would that group of Nzime be so hostile to the Baka getting recognition and benefits from the government? A simple answer would be that excluding Baka would mean more state benefits available for them. But that would not explain the violent emotion involved. An effort to explicate that should bring us to a fuller understanding of what it is about Baka autochthony that is so arguable.

Colonization and postcolonization have been a great hardship on farmers, in many ways much more so than for many Baka. The subordination that farmers experienced has impelled their efforts to subordinate the Baka. In a very real sense the colonial/postcolonial state has been paid for by the exploitation of farmers. When at long last it appears that some benefits may be coming from the state to inhabitants of the especially marginalized and exploited Eastern Province, farmers' resentment at Baka claims on state resources is not really surprising. This is where indigenousness does not overlap with autochthony. Baka may be the most autochthonous of all to the northwest Congo basin, but they are not autochthonous to the state. From this angle it is understandable that Baka lack birth certificates, identity cards, diplomas, tax receipts, and they do not vote; they are not much part of that world, and in that world they do not really count. Autochthony claims in this context have more to do with manipulating the institutions of the state than with popular democracy and local empowerment.[7]

If roots are the flip side of globalization, Baka do not have a big stake here either.[8] When Baka develop roots, they may just disappear into the surrounding farming population. Similarly, with autochthony and citizenship, they fall in between, with limited claims in either domain. The reason is that autochthony and citizenship may be opposing poles on one field, but that field is the state, and many Baka remain substantially outside the state, either beyond it or below the bottom rung.

The Baka situation lies beyond the limits of current discussions of autochthony in terms of citizenship and access to state benefits. The issue for Baka is one of human rights more than civil rights, since what limits their substantive autochthony also calls their citizenship into question.

However, as the example of my assistant and his cousin shows, for many Baka, citizenship and being Baka can be mutually exclusive. From this perspective the educational and economic requirements of citizenship cannot be added to a Baka way of life; they can only replace it. Citizenship also presents a purely political problem for Baka. Citizenship imposes demands for institutional authority and group representation that are irreconcilable with their acephalous social organization.

One of the most defining features of band societies is their egalitarianism. Some missionaries who work with Baka bemoan the impossibility of developing leaders among them. By "leader," a missionary explained, she meant someone who can make authoritative decisions for the group. In that sense Baka indeed do not have leaders. They have what could be called opinion leaders—people who are influential and respected—but no one who can make decisions for the group. She told me, "We have to train villagers to be organizers in Baka communities. It would be ideal to have Baka facilitators. But they put aside anyone who would be a leader; they're egalitarian. An organizer is a leader."[9] She clarified the role of the organizer as she conceived it, saying that an organizer has to close discussion at certain points and push for a decision. Among Baka this would be impermissibly coercive. They have persuasive power, but not the legitimacy to act authoritatively for the group. She also told me, "We are in the process of overturning their entire vision."

In other words, if Baka are taken on their own terms, there cannot be any such thing as a legitimate leader (in an institutional sense), and by extension, any delegate, representative or other authority. As this missionary's remarks suggest—and other missionaries make even more explicit—what they are doing, along with government ministries and NGOs, will eventually result in the disappearance of Baka political culture. Some of those missionaries are convinced that this will finally result in the disappearance of Baka culture altogether.

To be autochthonous is to be indigenous, to have roots in the soil and to be a constituent of the state, a citizen, to recognize leaders, and to be represented. Therefore, to be acephalous or egalitarian means one cannot be autochthonous. This is the reason that even if Baka civil rights were infrequently denied, the Baka situation would present a fundamental issue of human rights.

Apart from the state's character as a monopolistic, totalizing institution, the state is reluctant to take on the challenge of dealing with a social entity that does not have a structure comparable to that of the state itself.[10] There is at present no context in which the full extent of the human rights issues raised by the world's most egalitarian societies, such as Baka, are even being discussed. The U.N. Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was debated over years to the point that it was at last acceptable to all the members of the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus, but even so, it is a very statist document. Nonetheless, the states with indigenous peoples' issues have kept it from being ratified because it does recognize the concept of "indigenous peoples," their rights of self-determination, and territorial rights. These would be reasons enough why Cameroon would not want Baka to have the rights granted by the U.N. draft declaration. However, the human rights, and how to recognize them, of an acephalous people, a people who have a nonrepresentational politics and do not accept institutional authority, is a human rights issue so basic that it is more fundamental than the issues that the U.N. draft declaration working group is dealing with.

Even though Baka are practically powerless in the face of the state, the state sometimes seems to view Baka as if they were a threat. In Cameroon, government officials concerned with Baka have regularly produced documents containing such statements as "They must be made to come in out of the forest," and "They must be made to feel a PROFOUND FEELING OF BELONGING to the national community"(Ministere des Affaires Sociales 1988: ii,2,5,6; emphasis in original). The latter statement was repeated four times in one six-page document. Such statements express by their frequency, insistence, and imperative voice their indignation at the continuing irrelevance of the state to many Baka. Baka must be brought under control, among other reasons, in order to redress the insult that their independence represents to the state. Baka symbolic autochthony derives from that independence and problematizes the autochthony that is the apparent monopoly of the state to confer. If Baka can be made to feel themselves Cameroonian first and Baka second, the problem disappears. For Baka, autochthony's highly segmentary character and foundation in the forms of the state have not served their interests, but rather have exacerbated inclinations to exclusion directed against them.

References

Agland, Phillip. 1987. *Baka: People of the Rainforest.* Dja River Films.

Bretin, Maryvonne. 2005. "Quelques Points d'Information sur le Statut des Baka." Cameroon: SNV (Service Neerlandais des Volontaires).

Cavalli-Sforza, Luigi Luca. 1986. "African Pygmies: An Evaluation of the State of Resarch." In Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, ed., *African Pygmies,* 361–426. New York: Academic Press.

Ceuppens, Bambi, and Peter Geschiere. 2004. "'Autochthonous' or 'Indigenous'?"

Dodd, Robert. 1979. "Social and Economic Changes among the Baka Hunters and Gatherers of SouthEast Cameroon, with Particular Reference to the Proposed Yokadouma/Lomie Road."

Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Gescheire, Peter. 2001. "Witchcraft and New Forms of Wealth." In P. Clough and J. P. Mitchell, eds., *Powers of Good and Evil.* New York: Berghan Books.

Jackson, Stephen. 2006. "Sons Of Which Soil? The Language and Politics of Autochthony in Eastern D.R. Congo." *African Studies Review* 49 (2): 95–123.

Ministère des Affaires Sociales. 1988. "Intégration Socio-Économique des Populations Baka et Bakola du Cameroun."

Moise, Robert. 2003. "Loved Ones and Strangers: Society, History and Identity in Equatorial Africa." Ph.D diss., New York University.

Siret, M. 1946. "Monographie de la région de Haut-Nyong." Yaounde: Archives IRCAM.

Turnbull, Colin. 1983. *The Mbuti Pygmies: Change and Adaptation.* New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

Wheare, K. C. 1960. "The Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth." London: Clarendon Press.

Notes

1. I use the term "Bakaland" following Robert Dodd (1979).
2. I rely a great deal on Robert Moise's work for this discussion of Baka in the Lomié area, and I owe Bob great thanks for his help. I should caution the reader that I am approaching the subject from a somewhat different angle from his.
3. This would have been worth about a thousand dollars in 1989.
4. Although "Komba" has been translated as "God," it might not be accurate to regard Baka spiritual beliefs as deistic.
5. Mewoua owns a muzzle loading flintlock musket (*fusil de traite*). This antique European arm is well suited to Baka elephant hunting. A short spear is loaded into the gun instead of a musket ball. With a spear alone, the hunter must go under the elephant and force the spear into the elephant's heart or abdomen with his hands. The spear-loaded musket allows the hunter to shoot the spear from a short distance, slightly reducing the risk involved. The other arms present in Bakaland include the shotgun (*fusil de chasse-calibre douze*). The shotgun is used with shells containing shot, balls, or slugs. With a slug it might be effective against a gorilla, but not an elephant. Bushmeat-hunting gangs commonly use military automatic weapons, particularly the AK-47 since it is less expensive than the M-16. The high-powered rifle (carabine) is the most advanced technology. It is the only weapon capable of killing an elephant at a distance. It is very expensive, and in Cameroon, where permits for gun ownership are generally difficult to acquire, it is the most restricted of arms. I have a report I can count as fairly reliable that a missionary obtained one and used it through auxiliaries to poach elephants and participate in the ivory trade. The musket-fired spear method of elephant hunting does not seem to be popular with anyone but Baka. Perhaps one has to already be accepting of the idea of getting pretty close to the elephant. In any case, it does not appear that this method of hunting has greatly increased the toll on elephants.

   The crossbow was brought to Africa in the fifteenth century by the Portuguese, making it one of the earliest "modernisms" in Africa. It is not known when it first appeared in Bakaland. By now it is no longer used by many Africans except for Baka. It is very useful for hunting quarry high in trees.
6. The community forest program came into effect as part of the New Forest Law in 1994, which was largely written by the World Bank. The Bank wanted to support the government's expansion of logging in Bakaland in order to increase revenues and keep the government paying off the Bank's loans. In order to have some window dressing to answer environmentalists' criticisms of this move, the Bank insisted that some environmental and other progressive measures be part of the law. The ostensible aim of the community forest program is to allow local groups to obtain long-term use rights of small forest tracts. The hope is that this will result in income for the local groups and thus motivate them to engage in sustainable forestry management. In the first six years, no community forests were granted, and since 2000 a couple of dozen have finally

been granted out of more than three times that many applications. Of these the majority have gone to local elites with political connections.

7. I am not referring to Taussig here, but to contemporary Cameroonian beliefs about the accumulation of wealth by witchcraft (see, e.g., Geschiere 2001).
8. I believe we are indebted to Peter Geschiere for this turn of phrase.
9. The term used in practice for people in this role is *animateur*. The missionary I am quoting is familiar with theories of social work and social organizing in English and referred specifically to the terms "facilitator," "organizer," and "leader."
10. In Namibia, some NGOs dealing with San people are trying to adjust their institutional processes to interact appropriately with the acephalous political culture of the San, while the Namibian government is very pointedly not doing so (Megan Biesele, personal communication, 2004).