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## The Aka and Baka : Food Sharing among Two Central Africa Hunter-Gatherer Groups

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## **The Aka and Baka: Food Sharing Among Two Central Africa Hunter-Gatherer Groups**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The study of hunter-gatherer economic relations has shifted focus in recent years to include not only how hunter-gatherers capture and utilize wild resources for food, but also how these captured resources are distributed beyond immediate producers. It has been frequently reported that food sharing can be observed among almost all hunter-gatherers and Leacock and Lee [1982] suggest that sharing is one of the core features denoting hunter-gatherer societies.

Today it is recognized (see Headland and Reid [1989]) that there are no 'pure' hunter-gatherers who depend solely on wild resources anywhere in the world. Rather, the economies of present-day hunter-gatherers are in fact affected by a wide range of external influences, not the least being the impact of commercial relations with adjacent non-foraging societies. Although some researchers have reported on the negative influence such exogenous relations impose on the economic integration of hunting communities, others [PETERSON 1991] see hunter-gatherer exchange relations with non-hunting neighbors as being much more complex and equivocal.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and compare the sharing systems of two Central African hunter-gatherer, "Pygmy" societies, the Aka and the Baka. These two groups share the same origin. However, their present economic and social situations show quite divergent patterns of development. Whereas the Aka seldom have direct contact with the commercial economy of their non-Pygmy neighbors, the Baka are strongly involved in a variety of economic exchanges with non-Pygmy peoples. Through a comparison of the social economies of each, the impact of commercial economic relations on these societies will be clarified.

The economic effects of contact with outside peoples on Aka and Baka systems of sharing can be roughly divided into two important aspects. The first is the way that things which were not formerly available to either society, such as cash and imported commodities, have become connected, or not, into their respective sharing systems. The other is the way that indigenous foods and artifacts that were formerly shared in each system have been incorporated into or remain distinct from externally directed economic activity.

In this paper, I will emphasize only this second overall aspect, especially in relation to foods and how such exchange affects local group residential patterning and demography. Although the flexibility of residential groups has been widely reported among hunter-gatherer societies generally and among Pygmies specifically (e.g. Turnbull [1968]), the relationship between changes in camp size and composition and food sharing has rarely been described quantitatively in any detail. In this paper, I show the flexibility of the 'traditional' food sharing system and its close relationship to change caused by the impact of commercial economy activity.

## THE AKA AND BAKA

The Aka and Baka are both members of the larger cultural grouping generally referred to as Pygmies. Both live in the tropical rainforests of central Africa and, until recently, each subsisted primarily as hunter-foragers. As already stated, both share a common origin, but, according to Bahuchet [1991], separated from each other about two hundred years ago. Because, following this fission, each contacted different agriculturalist societies, they now speak distinct languages—the Aka speaking Bantu of the C10 grouping [GUTHRIE 1967–1970; CLOAREC-HEISS and THOMAS 1978], while the Baka speak Oubanguian [BAHUCHET 1991].

At present, the Aka inhabit the northeastern Congo and southern Central African Republic and the Baka live in southeastern Cameroon and the northwest portion of the Congo, however the process of their fission has not been revealed yet. Today the Baka live west of the Sangha River and the Aka live to its east. Along the Sangha River, the Baka do come into contact with the Aka, probably because of the eastward migration of the Baka. However, the Aka and Baka neither make camp together nor reside near the same settlements at present.

### The Aka

Bahuchet and Thomas [1986] estimate that the Aka number between 15,000 and 30,000. I conducted field research among the Aka who live in the vicinity of Linganga-Makaou village, the uppermost village on the Motaba River of Dongou District, Likouala Region, Republic of Congo (2°55' N. Lat., 17°10' E. Long., (see Fig. 1), from October 1991 to November 1992 and from August to November 1995. Linganga-Makaou village was founded by Bantu-speaking Ikenga agriculturalists. There are approximately 220 Ikengas in the village. Besides carrying out shifting cultivation, the Ikenga hunt with guns in the adjacent forest and fish in the Motaba River [KITANISHI 1995].

During the periods of research, there were about ten residential groups of Aka, numbering some 350 people, around the village. The Aka of Linganga-Makaou generally spend from four to eight months each year in the forest, staying around or close to the village during the remaining months. Occasionally, however, the Aka remain in the forest, and away from Linganga-Makaou village, for periods exceeding a year.

The residential groups studied near the village consisted of from three to twenty families,<sup>1)</sup> numbering from 15 to 100 persons, respectively, with each group linked internally through kinship. The group I studied most intensively comprised about 80 persons in 1992 and 100 in 1995. While some Linganga-Makaou Aka groups remain intact even after moving into the forest, sometimes large residential units split into a few small groups which then live separately. The main Aka residential group I researched practiced this pattern of fissioning.

Aka life in their forest camps was quite different from that followed when in residence near the village [KITANISHI 1995]. In the forest, Aka mainly hunted and collected wild foods (see Table 1 for an inventory of wild food resources), especially wild yams, various fat-rich nuts, honey and meat, which together accounted for 80% of total forest camp energy intake. Agricultural products held a distinctly minor position during times of Aka forest residence.

In contrast, during near-village camp periods, the Aka provided their Ikenga agriculturalist neighbors with various forms of agricultural labor and received various agricultural products (especially cassava), cigarettes, palm wine and so on. The agriculturalists often lent the Aka men shotguns and shells to go gun hunting in order to fulfill the agriculturalists' meat demands. For Aka living in village camps, the main dietary items were agricultural foods and wild meat kept while hunting with loaned Ikenga firearms. And, while Aka frequently bartered several kinds of gathered food products, including the wild nut *Irvingia gabonensis*, varieties of edible wild leaves (*Gnetum* spp.), caterpillars and oil palm fruit, to the Ikenga for agricultural food, salt and cigarettes, food seldom entered into barter between Aka, whether from within or from another residential group.

Beside indigenous manufactures, some Aka also owned industrially made goods, like metal pots and plates, clothes and steel wires for traps. Such goods were received from Ikenga in trade for such Aka items as cakes made of *Irvingia* nuts, large amounts of caterpillars, or were presented to Aka as rewards for their agricultural work. Therefore, as Aka generally came into contact with the economy of the outside world through the intermediation of their agriculturalist neighbors [KITANISHI 1994], economic life in the near-village camps was based on the close barter and labor relations with Ikenga villagers.

The Aka in Linganga-Makaou seldom used cash in 1991–92. Further, because of the spread of guns among the agriculturalists, the Aka did not exchange meat with the Ikenga villagers. In addition, because of the long distance between the town and the hunting area when the Aka were in forest camps, the transport of

**Table 1.** Food in the forest camp of the Aka (percent of energy).

food	wild tubers	wild seeds	honey	wild mammals	other wild food	agricultural food
percent	16.9	17.3	14.9	26.4	2.3	22.2

Note: The data were collected in six periods, for 92 days in total, covering almost all the seasons of the year.

meat was difficult. Therefore, the animals hunted by the Aka was not brought to the town for sale or trade. Instead, the animals hunted by the Aka was consumed by themselves. Further, as the Aka did not own guns and ammunition to use in hunting when away from the agricultural village, large meat surpluses were not available.

The convenience of transportation to towns is the reason for the difference reported by Bahucet [1990] in meat trading between Aka living in the southern Central African Republic (C.A.R.) and the situation of Aka at Linganga-Makaou. In the C.A.R., he reports that one-half of the animals hunted by Aka was exchanged with the agriculturalists, who then sold it to commercial meat traders.

### **The Baka**

The Baka group included in this comparison was studied from October 1993 to January 1994. Overall, there are from 30,000 to 40,000 Baka [JOIRIS 1993] living in southeastern Cameroon and the northwestern Congo. I conducted field research in the vicinity of Lotong quarter in southeastern Cameroon (Mikel village, Moloundou subdivision, Boumba and Ngoko Division, East Province, 2°52' N. Lat., 15°46' E. Long., (Fig. 1)). Lotong was founded by Bantu A speaking Mbomam agriculturalists, of whom there are 20–25 in the quarter.

In the study area, there were several settlements<sup>2)</sup> of Baka with each one occupied by from 10 to 60 inhabitants. Three settlements were included in my research. However, because the total research period spanned only two months (the dry season), this analysis of Baka food sharing must be considered preliminary.

Unlike the previously described Aka, the Lotong Baka cultivated their own fields. The food crops produced by the Baka were of considerable importance, with plantain banana the most important in the study area. Although Baka occasionally received some cultivated foods from neighboring non-Baka farmers as a reward for Baka labor in the latter's fields, this amount was considerably less than that obtained from the Baka's own fields. Thus, economically the Baka were nearly independent of their Mbomam neighbors.

The majority of Baka settlements in the area are located adjacent to the main road used by large logging trucks. The Baka made cash sales of both cultivated plantain banana and wild meat to the passing drivers. This money was then used for the purchase locally of non-Baka produced alcohol, imported clothing, pots, plates, and machetes. Money was also socioeconomically important for the payment of bridewealth. However, no instances were observed of cash being used to buy food from other Baka.

## **FOOD SHARING**

### **Hunting And Prey Ownership**

Although there are clear differences in the present subsistence circumstances

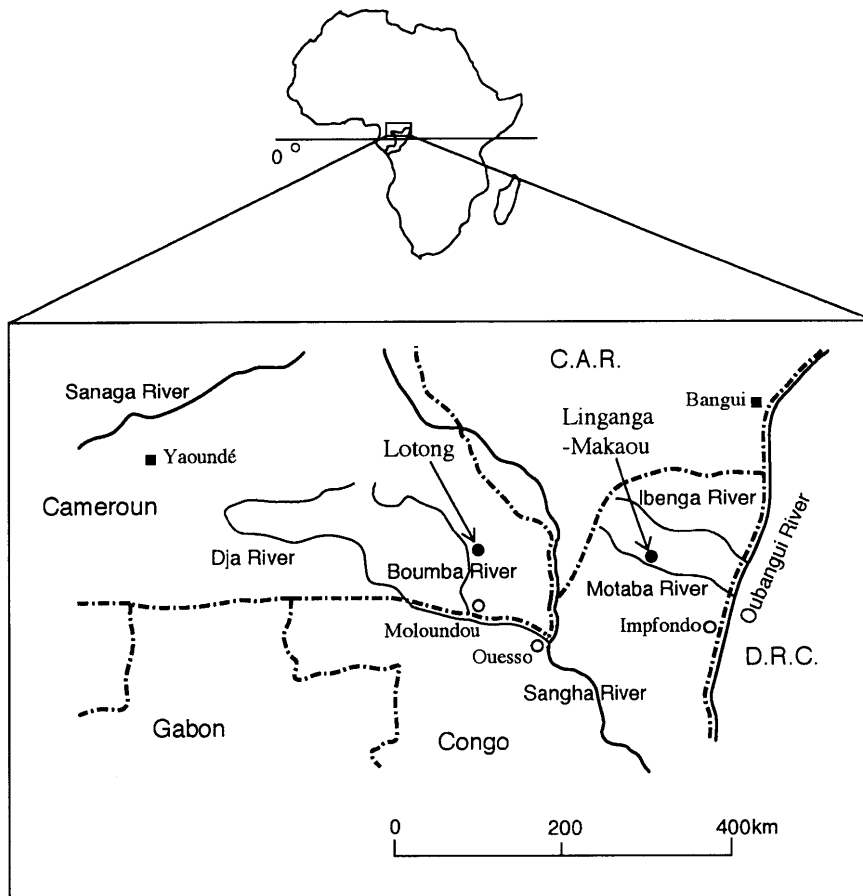


Fig. 1. Study area.

and activities of each group, the way the Baka share food is similar in almost all respects to that of the Aka. For the purpose of this paper, I shall therefore mainly concentrate on the Aka way. Further, I shall principally focus on Aka meat sharing, as meat was the most frequently shared food among both groups and because meat sharing has been more widely studied in relation to hunter-gatherer societies. Suffice it to say that the Aka and Baka share almost all wild foods, including gathered plants, in some manner, except for fruits that are sometimes eaten at the time that they are collected.

The major hunting method used by the Aka when in forest camp was a spring trap made with steel wires [KITANISHI 1995]. About three quarters of the meat obtained through hunting was yielded with this trap technology. In addition, Aka hunt game with spears and nets. But meat obtained in spear and net hunting contributes only about 10% of total meat captured using all methods. In contrast, the major hunting method employed by Aka when camped near Linganga-Makaou

village was with firearms (as mentioned earlier, guns and ammunition were frequently loaned by non-Aka agriculturalists with much of the production returned as payment for use). Although the Aka also set spring traps within one hour's walk from their village camps, animals were seldom trapped, probably because of the low density of game near Linganga-Makaou.

Before the widespread use of guns by the local agriculturalist population, they too mainly hunted with steel wire spring traps. Once firearms became common in the 1970's–1980's, however, trapping technology was passed along to the Aka. Prior to the Aka's access to steel wires, they probably utilized three major hunting methods—spear hunting, net hunting and trapping using twisted cords of raffia palm fiber. The Aka of other villages in northeastern Congo, where agriculturalists preferred fish to hunted meat, had much less access to spring trapping; therefore, their major hunting method into the 1990s was net hunting.

As a general rule, the owner of a captured animal is the person who owned the hunting tool which immobilized the prey [BAHUCHET 1990]. Thus, ownership of a trap-caught animal is the actual trap owner. Likewise, in spear and net hunting, the owner of an animal or animals caught by these means is, respectively, the owner of the spear that gave the first blow or person whose net an animal actually enters. The pattern of prey ownership remains consistent even in the gun hunting done by Aka at the behest of Ikenga farmers - in such cases it is the agriculturalist whose shotgun and shot brings down an animal that is the owner of that animal.

### **The Stages Of Food Sharing**

While the manner in which initial ownership of an animal as the property of a hunter is clear, the actual procedure of sharing is more multi-faceted. Sharing operates in three stages [BAHUCHET 1990, KITANISHI 1998]. First, some parts of meat are shared among the hunters according to the roles they performed during the hunt. I term this the first distribution. This first sharing stage is obligatory and follows strict rules. Because almost all spear and net hunting actions are collective endeavors, first distribution sharing of some parts of animals caught by these means occurs.

The animal species captured and the method used to kill the game determine the details of the first distribution. When a bushpig is caught in spear hunting, the owner of the spear with which the second blow was given receives the dorsal midriff and the owner of the 'third' spear receives the head of the animal. In the case of net hunting, in which duiker are typical game, the recipients of first distribution shares are the individual who actually seized the animal after it entered the net and the person who set the net. The 'seizer' receives the duiker's ribs, belly and intestines, while the 'setter' gets the head. On the other hand, because trapping is an individual pursuit, no first distribution sharing of meat takes place. Finally, in gun hunting, it is the agriculturalist owner of the gun, and animal, who performs the first stage sharing, giving the Aka hunter the head and internal organs of the animals and two cigarettes.

The owner and those who received meat in the first distribution stage then share the butchered meat further with those present in their home camp at their discretion. This second stage distribution is neither obligatory nor follows explicit rules. Receivers at this second stage of sharing may even include temporary visitors to the camp. Meat that is received during this second level of distribution is then sometimes cut into even smaller portions by its recipients and redistributed yet further<sup>3)</sup> within the camp.

The owner and the men with meat from the first or second distribution finally give their meat to their closest female relative, generally to wives in the case of married men and for unmarried men their mothers. The women then stew this meat, as well as any received by themselves in other first and second distributions, with several kinds of collected plants, such as wild yams, edible leaves and the fat of nuts. Women share the stew with those who are present at the camp. This is the third stage of meat sharing. Women also share stew containing only plant food. I call the sharing of cooked food that the women practice meal sharing, as distinct from men's meat sharing.

When the cooking of a meal is complete, the cook then gathers plates from all those with whom she plans to share the stew, places them around the pot, and proceeds to place a portion of stew on each. If there is an insufficient number of plates, she uses pot lids or large leaves. To share with another woman, the cook calls the children of the intended receiver and has them take the served portion to their hut. The receiver then shares the plate with her unmarried children. Adult men, on the other hand, usually eat their meals together in a single hut, called *mbanjo*,<sup>4)</sup> where men generally gather when in camp. Finally, the cook eats the remaining stew in the pot with her children. This three stage distributive procedure was observed to occur not only in Aka forest camps, but also in their village camps at Linganga-Makaou and in the sedentary Baka settlements.

### **Aka Sharing In The Forest Camp**

Because camp size affects the extent of food sharing, I have for analytical purposes divided the Aka forest camps which I studied into two primary types; these are designated as S (small) or L (large) camps. S-camp consisted of four to six families, or about 20 persons; L-camp was composed of 17 families, about 60 persons (see Table 2).

Forest camp hunting is dominated by trapping done by single hunters. As a result, only a very small proportion (3.5%) of the total amount of meat that entered the camp was allocated through a first distribution [KITANISHI 1996]. Rather, the majority of forest camp meat only became subject to sharing through the second distribution procedure outlined above. Indeed, first stage distribution, involving several individuals actually active in the same hunt, necessarily plays a minor role in the Aka forest camp situation as the preferred method for capturing game when Aka are residing in the forest is solitary trapping. Clearly, therefore, whether first distribution stage sharing in fact occurs relates directly to the hunting method that



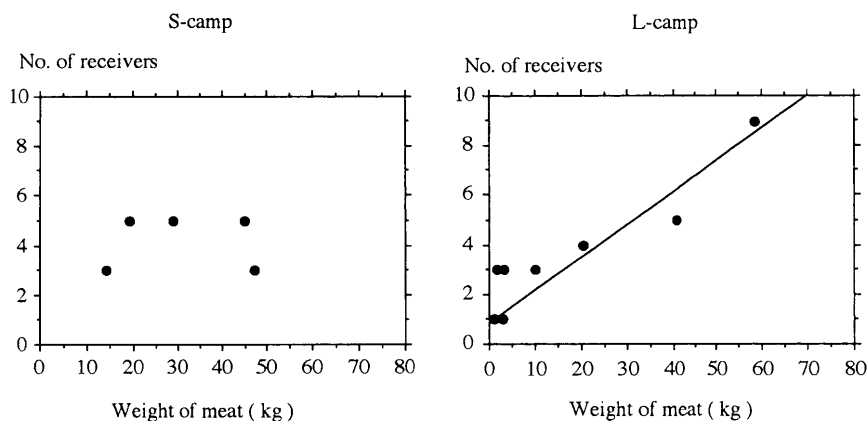
**Table 2.** Study periods and camp size in the forest camp of the Aka.

	S-camp		L-camp	
	1992.10 Feb.	29 Jun.	25 Aug.	10 Oct.
period from	1992.10 Feb.	29 Jun.	25 Aug.	10 Oct.
to	22 Feb.	9 Jul.	2 Sep.	24 Oct.
days	13	11	9	15
average camp size	20.6	15.8	59.1	59.5
No. of families	6	4	13-17	15-17

is employed.

It is second level distribution that forms the important distributive means in the forest camp. Figure 2 shows the relationship between the number of receivers and the weight of meat in both the 'L' and 'S' type camps that were studied. In L-camp, the number of receivers increased in proportion to the weight of meat. In the S-camp, however, the number of receivers and the weight of meat had no correlation. In both types of camps, if a hunted animal was larger, its owner intended sharing it with larger number of persons. But in S-camp, the number of sharing portions easily reached that of families in the camp. When an animal whose weight was more than about 20 kg was hunted, all families in S-camp usually received some share. In S-camp, simple presence in the camp was the only necessary condition required to receive some amount of shared meat. In the L-camp, however, an owner of meat, because of the camp's size, could not share with all families. Meat owners, therefore, made deliberate choices as to who would be the receivers of shares.

Analysis of L-camp spatial and social relational data indicate that both are relevant to a meat owner's sharing choices.<sup>5)</sup> The data show a correlation between kinship closeness and hut proximity. Generally, close kin constructed huts close to one another. In L-camp, huts were established in two relatively distinct groupings,

**Fig. 2.** The relationship between the number of receivers and weight of meat.

**Table 3.** The second distribution of meat within and between hut-groups in L-camp of the Aka.

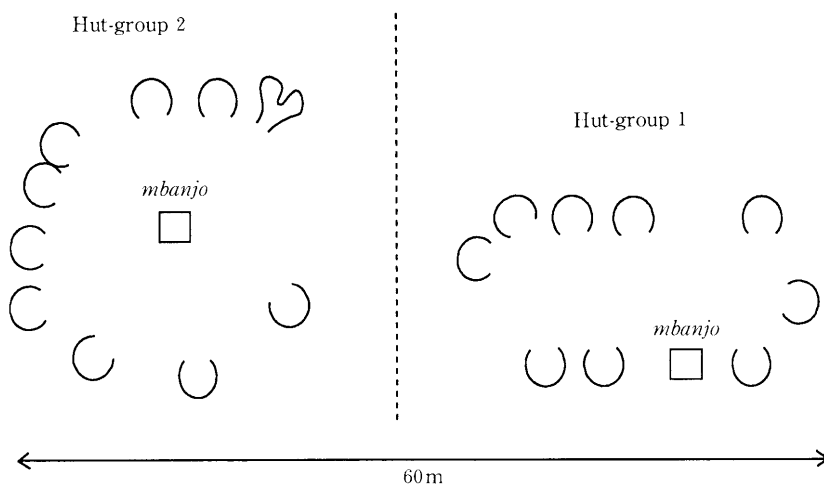
giver	receiver	
	Hut-group 1	Hut-group 2
Hut-group 1	0.75 (1.38)	2.40 (1.77)
Hut-group 2	58.25 (51.12)	43.99 (51.12)

Note: Figures show actual weight (kg) of meat. Figures in parentheses indicate the expected weight distributed assuming that each family received the same weight.

which are here referred to as Hut-Group 1 and Hut-Group 2 (see Fig. 3). Except for a few persons, the correlation noted above had strong validity.<sup>6)</sup>

L-camp sharing was analyzed with respect to the actual and expected weight of meat distributed (Table 3) within and between hut-groups. The expected weight of distributed meat, assuming that each family received the same weight, is not much different from the actual weight of shared portions. The actual weight shared between hut-groups is a little more than what was projected by the expected weight calculation. Meat owners distributed shares equally to members of both hut-groups. Meat owners tried to insure that shared meat was not concentrated in just one hut-group, but also went to the other group.

Meal sharing is also important in the forest camp. A large stew was shared with a large number of persons, while a small stew was generally eaten by the cook and her children, or shared with a few families. In the case of a large stew, however, it was not possible for the cook not to share a substantial portion beyond



*mbanjo*: the hut where men eat meal and chat together.

**Fig. 3.** The hut position of L-camp.

**Table 4.** Distributed portions of meals in the forest camp of the Aka.

	No. of distributed portions					total
	0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-	
S-camp (frequency)	3	25	33	2	0	63
(%)	4.8	39.7	52.4	3.2	0.0	100
L-camp (frequency)	35	78	60	22	7	202
(%)	17.3	38.6	29.7	10.9	3.5	100

her own family.

Table 4 shows the number and percentages of distributed portions in S- and L-camp. Because there were four to six adult women in S-camp, each meal was generally shared with all the women. In L-camp, such all-encompassing sharing was impossible because of the overall number of families. However, at the distributive stage of women's meal sharing, the distribution of cooked stew was generally limited to the sharer's own hut-grouping (see Table 5). Sharing beyond the immediate hut-group was observed only when a large number of portions was available. Therefore, the locations of huts were an important factor in determining who were included as meal sharing partners.

#### Aka Food Sharing In The Village Camp

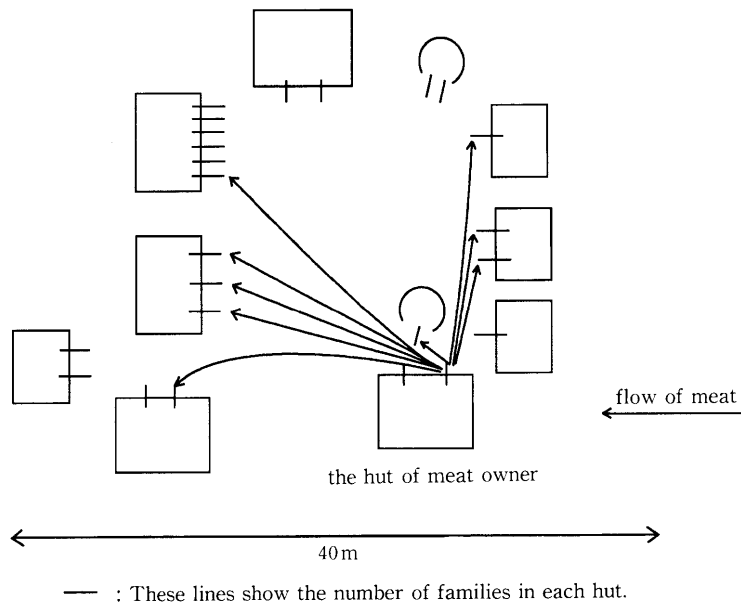
In the village camp observed, the majority of meat was hunted with the guns on loan from Ikenga agriculturalists. The Aka were thus given only a small share of animals (see above) by the agriculturalist owners of this game in the first distribution associated with gun hunting. In addition, Aka also occasionally received meat from farmers as a reward for various other kinds of help.

Because of the small amount of meat received at first distribution, the number of distributed portions available for village camp second stage distribution was also small. There were, however, exceptions as when an Aka hunter killed three bushpigs with a borrowed gun; then the resulting second distribution involved a considerable amount of meat.<sup>7)</sup> Figure 4 shows the hut position of the distributor and that of those who received shares on this occasion; in this case meat was shared extensively through the camp during the second distribution.

**Table 5.** Meal sharing within and between hut-groups in L-camp of the Aka.

giver	receiver	
	Hut-group 1	Hut-group 2
Hut-group 1	167 (83.1)	23 (106.9)
Hut-group 2	34 (155.4)	277 (155.4)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the expected frequency distributed assuming that each women received the same times.



**Fig. 4.** The hut position and second distribution of meat in village camp of the Aka.

During some occurrences of second distribution, a part of the meat available for sharing was given to members of other camps. In such cases, the distributors primarily gave shares to the parents or brothers of their spouses. Despite the small amounts of meat available for second distribution, members of the meat owner’s own camp did not overtly complain that sharing with the persons outside the camp occurred.

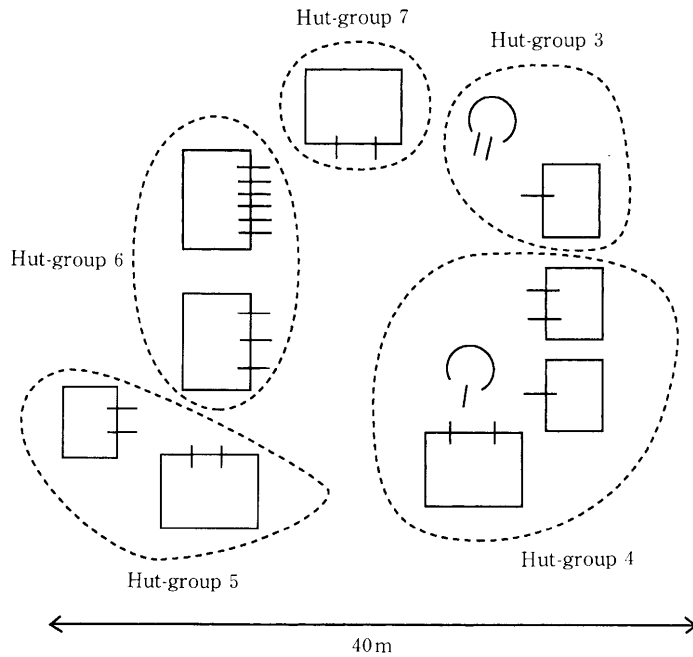
The camp size clearly affected meal sharing in the village camp situation. In smaller village camps, usually 20–30 persons, cooks generally were able to share meal with all co-resident families, except when only a very small amount of stew was prepared. This last condition was relatively infrequent.

I also collected data, spanning a 17 day period, on meal sharing in one large village camp. This site had a maximum population of about 100 persons and there were about 30 cooks. The number and percentage of distributed portions of cooked meals in this village camp are shown in Table 6.

Because a cook could not share the meal she prepared with all the families present on any given day, she chose the actual receivers. Through an analysis of

**Table 6.** Distributed portions of meals in the village camp of the Aka.

	No. of distributed portions					total
	0	1–3	4–6	7–9	10–	
frequency	4	52	70	10	2	138
%	2.9	37.7	50.7	7.3	1.5	100



**Fig. 5.** The hut-groups of meal sharing in village camp of the Aka.

the patterns of distribution followed by each cook, I identified five hut-groups within which clusters of cooks carried on meal sharing (Table 7; Fig. 5). As was found to be the case in the Aka forest camp, meal distribution within each of these hut-groups involved 5–8 cooks sending meal shares to each other, generally people sharing close kinship. In general, men of each hut-group also ate a shared meal together from a plate. Meal sharing beyond the hut-group to which a cook belonged was only observed when a large amount of stew was available for distribution. However, when a large stew was available, meal sharing almost always meant that shares crossed between hut-groups.

**Table 7.** Meal sharing within and between hut-groups in the village camp of the Aka.

	receiver				
	H-g3*	H-g4	H-g5	H-g6	H-g7
giver					
H-g3	30	8	0	5	1
H-g4	4	89	9	7	1
H-g5	0	7	18	18	2
H-g6	6	5	5	118	9
H-g7	2	4	2	5	24

\*: H-g is Hut-group.

When Aka from other village camps appeared in the large village camp that was studied, cooks only sometimes shared meals with them. However, meal shares were almost never sent, or taken, to other village camps. Thus, regarding inter-village camp meal sharing, presence within a hut-group at the time a cook undertakes meal distribution is a primary determinant in whether a non-resident receives a share.

### **Baka Food Sharing**

Although the period (2 months) during which I was able to observe Baka hunting was limited, the major hunting method during this time was the spring trap. Because of the high hunting pressure and low density of animals that prevailed in the vicinity of the road where the three study settlements were located, the area in which Lotang Baka hunters set traps was remote from their sedentary settlements. To patrol their traps, hunters departed for the forest in the early morning, returning to the settlements usually around sunset. Their trap sets were patrolled on average once or twice each week. Also on occasion, one or 2–5 families together stayed in the forest and intensively hunted for 3–10 days in the study period.

The rule of first distribution for trapped animals of the Baka is different from that of the Aka. Among the Baka, when someone other than the owner of a successful trap finds and brings a trapped animal to the trapper's settlement, the finder is given half of the animal by the trap owner. However, this circumstance was not observed during the study period.

In Baka sedentary settlements, the owner not only makes choices about whether to share his fresh meat with other Baka and with whom to do so (in the second distribution), but also whether to sell a part, or even all, of the meat to get cash. Generally, meat owners sold half of the meat captured to truck drivers, and shared the rest with the members of their settlement. On the occasions when meat owners made such sales, the other residents of his settlement accepted conversion of a part of the wild meat into a cash commodity.

Meal sharing also was carried on in the Baka settlements in a manner very similar to that practiced by the Aka, with a cook giving meal shares to neighboring women and to men gathered in the *mbanjo*. I collected data on meal sharing in three Baka settlements, one of which was small while the others were large (see Table 8). My data on the pattern and intensity of meal sharing in the three study settlements are presented in Table 9. In the small settlement, the cooks generally shared meal with all adult women because the number of portions from an average

**Table 8.** Size and research duration of meal sharing in the Baka settlements.

	Settlement 1	Settlement 2	Settlement 3
research duration	3 days	12 days	10 days
camp size	24	63	61
No. of families	8	16	20

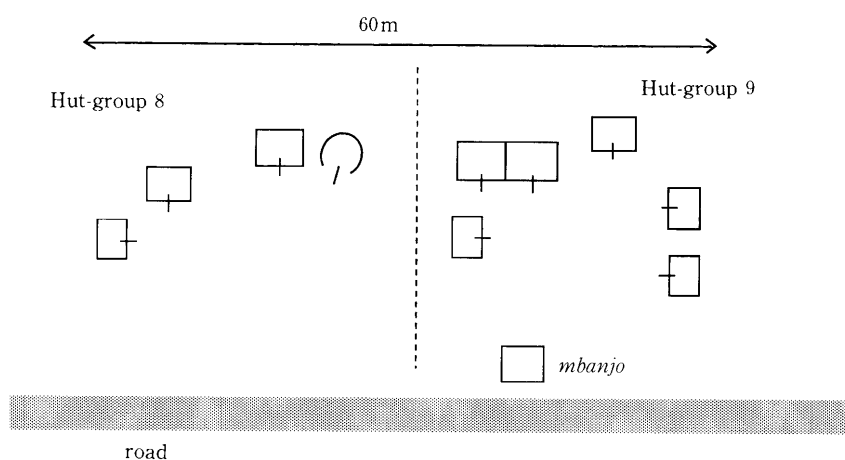
**Table 9.** Distributed portions of meals in the Baka settlements.

	No. of distributed portions					total
	0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-	
Settlement 1 (frequency)	1	1	6	7	3	18
(%)	5.6	5.6	33.3	38.9	16.7	100
Settlement 2 (frequency)	0	40	71	5	0	116
(%)	0	5.6	33.3	38.9	0	100
Settlement 3 (frequency)	0	14	50	41	1	106
(%)	0	13.2	47.2	38.7	0.9	100

stew was almost equivalent to the number of adult women. In the large settlements, however, cooks could not share meals with all the resident adult women.

Through the analysis of meal sharing, I found two major hut-group clusterings involved in meal sharing (see Figs. 6, 7; Table 10). The cook almost always distributed meal shares within her own hut-group. The actual frequency of between hut-group meal sharing is quite low, indeed nearly non-existent. Even when a large amount of stew was cooked, Baka cooks seldom distributed meal shares beyond their own hut-group. When the number of portions of stew exceeded that of adult women of the cook hut-group, the cook shared them with some children of her hut-group.

The non-Baka agriculturalists along the road also sold meat, both fresh and cooked (but particularly the last because it produced greater income), to passing drivers. Notably, however, the Baka never sold cooked meat to drivers, or to other Baka within the cook's own or from other Baka communities. This suggests that to the Baka meat, once it is processed through cooking, is not only physically and

**Fig. 6.** The hut position in the Settlement 2 of the Baka.

**Table 10.** Meal sharing within and between hut-groups in the settlements of the Baka.

Settlement 2			Settlement 3		
giver	receiver		giver	receiver	
	Hut-group 8	Hut-group 9		Hut-group 10	Hut-group 11
Hut-group 8	128 (60.0)	2 (70.0)	Hut-group 10	152 (59.7)	2 (99.6)
Hut-group 9	4 (91.3)	171 (78.2)	Hut-group 11	5 (80.9)	189 (113.3)

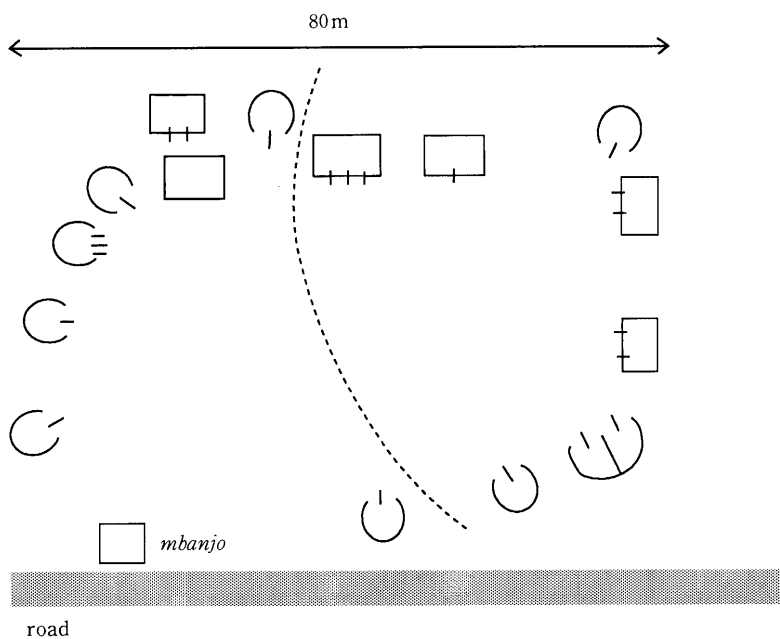
Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the expected frequency distributed assuming that each women received the same times.

nutritionally transformed, but also undergoes cultural transformation. By this I mean it is no longer something which may be shared and used in the settlement or pass by its sale outside the community, as it may when fresh, changing with its cooking into an exclusively Baka hut-group resource.

**DISCUSSION**

The food sharing systems of both the Aka and Baka exhibit at least three distributional stages. However, as will be reiterated below, a number of factors could mitigate the choices and actions of sharers at each of the discussed levels.

In both groups, the extent, and even occurrence, of first level distribution



**Fig. 7.** The hut position in the Settlement 3 of the Baka.



between the owner of a captured animal and others, followed explicit rules which were mainly determined by the hunting method that was employed. In the forest camp of the Aka and among the Baka, wire trap hunting was the principal mode of hunting used. Thus, first distribution sharing was not important because trap use rarely involved the participation of any other hunters. In other areas of the northeastern Congo where the major hunting method was netting (Ibenga area, Fig. 1), first distribution between the owner of a successful net and those who set it and subdued the prey, played an important socioeconomic role [TAKEUCHI 1995]. When setting nets, net owners often exchanged nets with each other and set others' nets, therefore, a first distribution to those who set nets was frequently made in Ibenga. In the first distribution carried out after netting, in which the majority of camp members participated, meat was generally shared throughout the camp.

In the Aka village camp, however, where hunting was done using shotguns on loan from Ikenga agriculturalists, the Aka hunters received only small first distribution portions from the agriculturalist owners of the animals taken. The rule of the first distribution, exclusive possession of guns by the agriculturalists, and the low density of animals around the village meant that the Aka were relatively meat dependent on the agriculturalist lenders. In addition, as the agriculturalists mediated between the Aka and the outside economy, it is supposed that this dependence relegated village camp Aka to a social stratum below that of their Ikenga neighbor-benefactors.

The pattern and extent of second level meat distribution varied among both Aka and Baka in relation to camp size and the relation to the outside of the camp. In the small Aka forest camp that I studied, which was a small, closed group, simple presence meant virtually generalized sharing because the amount of shareable meat and the number of portions into which the meat could be divided easily reached all families. However, in the large forest camps of the Aka, which consisted of multiple closely related hut-groups, second level meat distribution did extend beyond a distributor's own hut-group despite possible cost in the amount of meat retained by an owner-distributor. The fact that distribution at this level retained extensiveness appears to relate to a normative desire for resources not to be concentrate within specific groups. Finally, at the Aka village camp that was studied, which was open to other Aka village camps, distributors shared meat extensively in the camp and occasionally with members of other camps.

In the Baka settlement, which was considerably more open to external commercial interaction with truckers without non-Baka mediation, about half the meat hunted was sold in raw form to obtain cash. However, cooked meat was never sold by Baka. Rather, sales always occurred before meat owners conducted any second stage distribution. Although the Baka case was not sharing but exchange for cash, meat flowed to as wide a range as possible in any situation. The persons who lived close to distributors (the same settlement in the Baka case; among the Aka in the same hut-group in large forest camps and/or same village camp) accepted that they did not always receive meat at this second distributional stage.

Meal sharing (the third level of distribution in my schema) did not vary with the settlement situation of the residential group. Close kin, who almost always were also in close spatial (same hut-group) proximity to cook-sharers received meal portions. In general, other hut-groups or visitors from other camps not present in a cook's hut-group were not shared with.

Among the Aka, meal shares were occasionally given beyond a cook's hut-group. Likewise, if a visitor, including those who were non-Aka, stayed close to a cook, she or he generally received part of the meal. Thus, closeness in relation to sharing in meal distribution was determined by a complex of factors, including kinship, presence in the camp and proximity to a cook at the time a meal was being distributed.

For the Baka, the extent of meal sharing was more circumscribed than with the Aka. Meal portions were almost never observed to be shared beyond a cook's hut-group. Further, because the Baka were sedentarized, the composition of each residential grouping was less changeable; thus, meal sharing partners were fixed.

I have also indicated in this paper that two sharing types exist. The first is obligatory, rule-governed sharing based on the role played by a receiver in the hunt or his/her social proximity to a distributor through kinship. The other is sharing based on the autonomy of the person rather than on some social structural means, like kinship [ICHIKAWA 1983; INGOLD 1988; BAHUCHET 1990]. Obligatory, rule-governed sharing is most apparent in the way both the Aka and Baka conduct the first distribution of game. On the other hand, among both groups the second level of distribution involves personal discretion to a greater extent. The third level of distribution (meal) is partly rule-governed (generally within a hut-group), but partly not rule-governed (a cook can choose those who receive a meal among hut-group members). Because of the difference in the extent of personal discretion between second and third levels of distribution, the second level results in sharing with a wider extent and the third level in sharing with a narrower extent. The co-existence of these two kinds of sharing, especially among the Aka, assures the balance of socio-economic relationships with close persons and with those not so close.

At a broader level of analysis, the classic formulation of Murphy and Steward [1956/1968] on the impact of commercial economy on pre-capitalist societies bears relevance to the present discussion. Their basic thesis, in summary, is that once industrial commodities become available to them, then indigenous people's desire for these goods causes them to invest their effort into the production of local resources for exchange, ultimately leading to the disruption, if not demise, of the local system of economy. However, considerable recent works (see, for instance, Peterson & Matsuyama [1991]) strongly suggest that the consequences of hunters' involvement in outside/commercial economic activities are much more complex and diverse than Murphy and Steward's proposition allows. In my view, the Aka and Baka cases presented illustrate just such complexity.

Indisputably, contact with commercial economic relations has brought about some change in their respective systems of sharing. But this change has neither

meant the destruction of sharing, an extreme modification of their existing systems, nor the creation of new systems. Indeed, despite quite different settlement and demographic circumstances, both systems are remarkably intact. As indicated in the analysis of second level of distribution, their food sharing system could originally cope with the flow of meat to a wider range. Therefore, when a meat owner sold part of the meat, persons who lived close to the owner accepted that they did not always receive meat at the second level of distribution. The third stage of distribution, however, which is sharing with a narrower extent, is not connected with commercial economy among the Baka.

In the eastern part of Ituri Forest, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire), Mbuti net hunters intensively barter meat for agricultural food and industrially made goods with meat traders [ICHIKAWA 1991]. In the eastern part of Ituri Forest where meat trading was most prevalent, food sharing was generally limited to meat owners' close bilateral kinsmen, such as parents, offspring, siblings and parents-in-law. Although traditionally, Mbuti men ate meals communally at the central hearth, men ate apart from each other at their respective family hearths in the 1980s. Individual interests were sometimes affected, with owners sometimes exchanging meat for external trade goods even when such activity provoked social tensions within Ituri camps.

As the Baka material presented here shows, this commercial activity, which involved the exchange of considerable amounts of meat for cash, did not cause overtly evident tensions. However, such transactions never involved cooked meat products, essentially those that had already undergone second or third stage distribution, despite the fact that such exchange reduced the amount of meat available for second level distribution, as well as impinging on the meat available for women's meal sharing and men's communal eating.

There are also clear differences between the Baka and Mbuti as to the way each obtained agricultural foods. The Baka maintained their own fields. Agricultural food that was harvested there was their most important energy source. Only a small amount of agricultural food was exchanged for cash and almost all the production was shared through third level distributional action (that is through women's meal sharing). The Mbuti, on the other hand, obtained the agricultural products they consumed strictly in exchange for meat. Therefore, further meat exchange for industrially made goods brought about not only a decrease in the second level of distribution but also in the third one. Among the Baka, when the second level of distribution was diminished by meat trading, food sharing was partly complemented by the third level of distribution. Among the Mbuti, however, this could not happen. This might bring about such individualization in their sharing.

Ichikawa [1986] has described the traditional relationship between the Mbuti and their neighbor agriculturalists as a system of interdependency in which the Mbuti, as protein producers, exchanged meat for high energy products (starchy agricultural foods). Such specialization in subsistence activities is one of the

factors for the intensive dependence of Mbuti on meat trading. But the Aka (and probably the Baka before the 1950s) practice a more generalized subsistence regime: not only hunting (protein), but also conducting extensive gathering of high energy wild plant foods [KITANISHI 1995]. This generalized feature of both the Aka and Baka food systems provides the support needed for the degree of flexibility each exhibits in their food distribution system.

In this paper, I have not discussed how non-traditional resources, like cash or imported commodities, play direct roles in the two systems of sharing. In Aka society, cash has made a gradual penetration. A national park was established along the upper part of the Motaba River, and some of the Linganga Aka and Ikenga agriculturalist men from the study area were employed in various constructions between 1993 and 1995. This resulted in an inequality between Aka with respect to access to cash income. There were thus some conflicts about how to share cash involving Aka who participated in wage employment at the park and those who did not. However, the situation is still undergoing resolution and is, at present, beyond the purview of analysis at this time.

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### **Notes**

- 1) In this paper, a group consisting of a couple and their unmarried children or of a widow or widower and their unmarried children is called a 'family.' There is no word which means 'family' in the Aka language. But a family can be regarded as one of the economic units which play some role in the food sharing of the Aka (in detail, Kitanishi [1998]).
- 2) In this paper, the residence place of the Aka is called 'camp,' because of their frequent

movement, whereas that of the Baka is called 'settlement,' because of their sedentariness and durable huts. The process of sedentarization of the Baka commenced in the 1950's [ALTHABE 1965].

- 3) I could not always follow this redistribution. Therefore, it is excluded from the quantitative analysis in this paper.
- 4) Italics denote the Aka language.
- 5) The relationship between the choice of receiver and kinship is described in Kitanishi [1998].
- 6) The genealogy of Hut group 1 and Hut group 2 is shown in Kitanishi [1998].
- 7) Because the Aka obtained meat sporadically in the village camp, I could not collect data on the second distribution of meat to analyze it quantitatively.

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