

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **Aka Pygmies of the Western Congo Basin**

**T**he Aka Pygmies are foragers of the tropical forest regions of the southwestern Central African Republic (CAR) and northern People's Republic of the Congo (PRC) (see fig. 1). The Aka in this study are associated with the Bokoka section of Bangandu village (CAR). There are approximately 300 foraging Aka associated with Bokoka, and 769 farmers, primarily Ngandu peoples, in Bokoka.

### **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

The most distinctive characteristic of the tropical rain forest is its great species richness; no other major ecological community has as many varieties of plants and animals (e.g., it has over 3,000 plant species) (Lewin 1986). Yet, the rain forest is a relatively poor place for foraging humans to live because animals are sparsely scattered and a low percentage of plants are edible (Dunn 1968; Richards 1973).

Ecology of the tropical rain forest is characterized by many species of plants and animals per unit area, but by few individuals per species in the same unit area. Ecologists sometimes describe the tropical forest as "marginal" by comparison to temperate environments, but the Aka certainly do not perceive their environment this way. It is seen as a plentiful environment, rich in game and edible plants. Nutritional studies coincide with Aka perceptions; Aka are

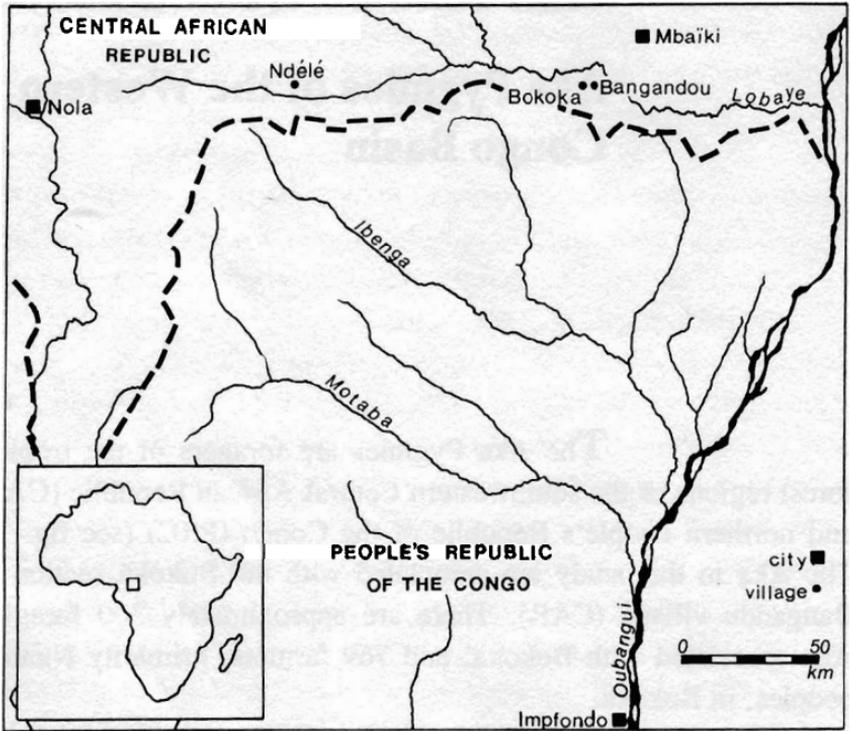


Fig. 1. General area occupied by Aka Pygmies and location of study populations

better off than most other peoples of sub-Saharan Africa (Pennetti, Sgaramella-Zonta, and Astolfi 1986; Cordes and Hewlett 1990). But it is most likely the great accumulation of hunting and gathering knowledge and skill of the Aka that enables them to have a relatively abundant life in the forest.

Unlike Turnbull's (1965b) homogeneous portrayal of the Ituri forest, the western Congo Basin forest of the CAR and PRC is quite heterogeneous. There are at least eleven distinct ecological zones within the tropical forest occupied by the Aka (Bahuchet and Guillaume 1982). There are several types of solid ground (terra firma), semideciduous forests that are categorized according to subsoil type (e.g., secondary sandstone, tertiary sandstone or alluvia, quartzite

sandstone, etc.), as well as a solid ground evergreen forest where *Gilbertiodendron* species are dominant. Most of the tropical forest is covered by the solid ground semideciduous forests, and within them one finds the primary species of hunted game: several species of duikers and red hogs occupy the ground level (along with the less frequently hunted gorilla and chimpanzee), while several species of monkeys (mangabeys, guenons, colobi), squirrels, and birds occupy the canopy. In the solid ground evergreen forest, one type of duiker (*Cephalophus leucogaster*) and the bongo antelope (*Boocercus euryceros*) are commonly hunted.

In the flat and riverine valleys that traverse the western Congo Basin there are swamp or marsh forests. The forest vegetation in the swamp varies according to the wetness and flooding of the land: In areas that are continuously flooded one encounters a low dense evergreen forest; on soils that are permanently damp, but only occasionally covered by water, a high canopied forest exists; and, in areas where flooding occurs periodically but where drainage is good so soils can eventually dry out, one finds a mixed forest. Wildlife of the swamp forests is also markedly different than that found in the solid ground forest. For instance, the largest mammals hunted by the Aka, the elephant and situtunga (*Tragelphus spekei*), are generally found in the swamp forest (Bahuchet and Guillaume 1982; Hewlett 1977).

Also, within the forest are pockets of naturally occurring open savannah as well as stretches of secondary forest (areas that have been abandoned by slash and burn farmers and that are characterized by a large number of vines and heliophilous trees, such as the Musanga umbrella tree). The fauna in these environments are distinct from those found in the swamp or solid ground forest. In the secondary forest Aka hunt for civet, numerous rats, and a few species of duiker (Bahuchet and Guillaume 1982; Hewlett 1977).

The climate of the Congo Basin is generally warm and humid. There are two seasons: a long rainy season and a dry season with much milder rains. On average, it rains 117 days per year for a total of 1,766 mm of rainfall (range is 1,407–2,381 mm) (Bahuchet

1985). August, September, and October are the wettest months, each averaging 230 mm of rainfall. The commencement of the seasons varies from year to year, but the rainy season generally begins in the first half of March and the dry season generally begins in November.

While there is marked variation in the seasons, there is little variation in the temperature throughout the year. The mean temperature during the year is 24.5 degrees C, but the difference between the high temperature of the warmest month (March) and the high temperature of the coldest month (July) is only 2 degrees C. The difference between the monthly average high temperature and monthly average low temperature also varies slightly during the year; the greatest difference in high and low temperature is 11.8 degrees C (February). The relative humidity is also comparatively constant, averaging 92.4 percent at 7:00 A.M. and 69.6 percent at midday (Deuss 1968; Bahuchet 1985).

## CULTURAL HISTORY

There is considerable debate over the prehistory of African Pygmies. Ethnohistoric (Schebesta 1933; Turnbull 1983), linguistic (Bahuchet 1985, 1987), and genetic (Cavalli-Sforza 1986) data suggest a long history of independent occupation of the forest by Pygmies until the Bantu expansion about 2,000 years ago (David 1980; Phillipson 1980). Recent ecological studies (Hart and Hart 1986; Bailey et al. 1989) question this interpretation and instead hypothesize that the Pygmies (or any other forest foraging population) could not have subsisted in the interior regions of the forest without entering into a symbiotic relationship with farmers to obtain carbohydrates. These researchers suggest the forest does not yield enough carbohydrates (specifically, wild yams) for people to live there independently. They hypothesize that Pygmies originally lived on the margins of the forest exploiting both forest and savannah habitats and did not move into the forest until forest farmers moved in with them. Archaeological evidence for their hypothesis does not exist

as archaeological data are extremely limited in the African tropical forest. In the CAR numerous surface collections along forest rivers have produced artifacts of great antiquity (e.g., Acheulean hand axes) (Bayle des Hermes 1973), but no stratified archaeological sites have been excavated in the forest interior (van Noten 1982).

The ethnohistoric accounts of Pygmies go back thousands of years. Pharaoh Phiopts II of the 6th Dynasty (about 2300 B.C.) mentions a Pygmy dancer brought back from an expedition to the forest, while Homer, Herodotus, and Aristotle are but a few others to mention Pygmies or small African people, often called Aka (see Tyson in Windle 1894 for early citations of Pygmies). Although these early reports are very vague concerning the location of the Pygmies, they are cited (Schebesta 1933; Turnbull 1983) as evidence to support the contention that Pygmies lived in the forest before the Bantu expansion.

Little is mentioned of Pygmies between the fourth century and 1850. Most references during this period refer only to their mythological existence. George Schweinfurth in 1870 was the first European to rediscover the Pygmies, and shortly thereafter Miani (Giglioli 1880) and Stanley (1891) confirmed the existence of forest Pygmies, Miani being influential in getting two Pygmies back to Italy.

The colonial period was a time of dramatic change for the Aka. The European and American demand for slaves, ivory, wild rubber, and duiker skins affected their forest life. To flee Dutch slave traders in the 1700s the Ngandu farmers, the horticulturalists with whom the Aka of Bokoka live in association today, moved northward from the Imfondo area of the PRC and settled on the southern banks of the Lobaye. This movement of peoples must have increased the population density of the region and the number of farmers desiring the meat and services of the Aka. Resulting changes in Aka social organization are difficult if not impossible to reconstruct for this early period. At the end of the nineteenth century ivory became the major export from the region, and the Aka were the principal producers. Villagers were responsible for providing the ivory to colo-

## *Intimate Fathers*

nial traders but it was usually the Aka, armed with spears and sometimes guns, who killed the elephants to acquire the ivory. This development increased the frequency and type of exchange between farmers and Aka, depleted the elephant population, and promoted the *tuma* (great elephant hunter) to greater social status. After 1908, the number of guns increased and the number of elephants decreased, and the European concessions in the region became interested in rubber. During a period of wild rubber exploitation (1910 to 1940), European agents employed "forced labor" regulations to get male farmers to go into the forest and drain trees of rubber. While the Aka were never employed to collect rubber, the farmers' demands on them for meat increased because male farmers could not do any of their own hunting. I have collected a number of accounts from this period in which villagers fled the forced labor situation to live in remote areas of the forest with Aka. The farmer's family would make a garden in a remote forest area where Aka hunted and gathered. By 1925 a market for duiker skins developed in France to make coats and chamois leather. The market peaked in the 1950s when 27,000 duiker skins per year were being exported from some forest areas (Dongier 1953). This encouraged Aka to use nets more often than the traditional spear hunting. Today, Aka and farmers in the CAR say that net hunting was traditionally a villager hunting technique, and that spear hunting was the primary hunting technique of the Aka. But a greater demand for meat by villagers during the forced labor period and the European market for duiker skins prompted the Aka to adopt net hunting. The decision to net hunt affected Aka social organization: The social status of *tuma* decreased while that of the *nganga* (traditional healer who also directs hunting rituals and practices divination on the net hunt) increased, and the sharing of meat became less egalitarian (duiker meat is not divided among all members of the camp as is elephant or red hog meat). In the 1930s the French attempted a "taming policy" to integrate the Aka into the colonial system by encouraging them to move onto the roads and begin farming, but few Aka

complied, and the policy's influence seems limited to a few areas in the PRC (Bahuchet and Guillaume 1982; Bahuchet 1985).

Today the Aka continue to be affected by the world economy. In Bokoka, for instance, the Aka move into the village for part of the dry season, at the expense of missing the best net hunting of the year, to help the farmers with their coffee plantations. The coffee, destined for the European market, is the primary means by which villagers acquire money. Some Aka help villagers hunt elephant for ivory, while other Aka work for lumber companies in the region.

The history of the area has also contributed to linguistic diversity. There are approximately fifteen ethnic groups who speak fifteen languages and live in association with the approximately 30,000 Aka in the CAR and the PRC. The Aka language is a distinct Bantu language and is classified in the C-10 Bantu language group, belonging to the Benue-Congo group of the Niger Congo, a subdivision of the Congo-Kordofanian phylum (Greenberg 1963). Unlike the Mbuti Pygmies in the Ituri who speak the same language as their village neighbors (Turnbull 1965b), the Aka speak their own language (*diaka*), as well as the language of their neighbors.

## DEMOGRAPHY

To demonstrate both variation and continuity of demographic features within Aka society two locations will be compared: Bokoka, where the father-infant study was conducted, and Ndélé, about 125 km west of Bokoka. The demographic data are based upon a population of 283 Aka from Bokoka and 274 Aka from Ndélé. One regional variation that should be kept in mind when interpreting the demographic data is the difference in population density: the population density in Bokoka is about twice the population density of Ndélé (0.33 persons/km<sup>2</sup> in Bokoka and 0.17 persons/km<sup>2</sup> in Ndélé) (Cavalli-Sforza 1986). Besides demonstrating the demographic variability within Aka culture, comparisons with !Kung San and Yanomamö demographic data are also made.

Table 1 describes the sex-age structure of the Aka from Bokoka and Ndélé and compares the Aka structure with that of the !Kung San and Yanomamö. Aka data from the two locations are remarkably similar, and the Aka population structure is much closer to that of the Yanomamö than that of the !Kung San.

Fertility is high and infertility infrequent. The total fertility rate (TFR) or mean number of live births for postmenopausal women is approximately 5.5. Neuwelt-Truntzer (1981) estimated 5.1 live births for Aka women from Zomia; Cavalli-Sforza (1986) found an average of 5.0 live births for women from various areas in the Central African Republic, while Aka women associated with Bokoka averaged 6.2 live births and Aka women in Ndélé averaged 5.6 live births. The completed fertility of Aka females lies between the 4.7 live births found with !Kung San females (Howell 1979) and the 7.9 live births found with Yanomamö women (Early and Peters 1990).

Female infertility is rare among the Aka; only one woman was reported infertile. All women get married, generally by sixteen to seventeen years of age. Men first marry two to four years later than women.

Male reproductive histories were also recorded. As expected, Bokoka and Ndélé men over forty-five years of age averaged almost the same number of live births as postmenopausal Aka women from the area. But unlike the Aka women, the men had greater reproductive variability (e.g., Bokoka male variance = 8.64 while female variance = 5.20). Some Aka men had no children while others had fourteen, whereas all Aka women had at least two children, but none had more than eleven. This pattern of greater male variability is consistent with that found among the !Kung San (Howell 1979) and Yanomamö (Chagnon 1979).

The birth interval of Aka women from Bokoka averaged 3.5 years while women from Ndele averaged 3.7 years. This is somewhat lower than the 4.2 years calculated by Neuwelt-Truntzer (1981) for the Aka from Zomia and the 4-year interval found among the !Kung San (Howell 1979) but is substantially higher than the 2.9-year interval estimated for the Yanomamö (Melancon 1981).

Infant mortality is also high. Retrospective life histories of women indicate an infant (up to twelve months) mortality rate of 20 percent, which is slightly below the 22 percent infant mortality rate estimated by Neuwelt-Truntzer (1981) for the Aka of Zomia. Aka infant mortality is essentially indistinguishable from the infant mortality rates of the !Kung (20.2 percent [Howell 1979]) and the Yanomamö (21.8 percent [Early and Peters 1990]).

A causes of death study (Hewlett, van de Koppel, and van de Koppel 1986) identified the major cause of Aka death at all ages— infectious and parasitic diseases. Accidental and violent deaths were relatively infrequent especially in comparison with the Yanomamö and !Kung San. The causes of death study also indicated that males at every age were at greater risk of death than were females. Young adult males (eighteen to twenty-five years) were at especially high risk relative to female risk of death at the same age. This pattern is consistent with that found among the Yanomamö (Melancon 1981) and !Kung San (Howell 1979).

Table 2 examines the polygyny and divorce rates for Ndélé and Bokoka Aka. Again, they are very similar, about 17 percent of Aka men have more than one wife, and about one of four marriages

TABLE 1. Sex and Age Distribution, in Percentage

	Ndélé Aka	Bokoka Aka	!Kung <sup>a</sup>	Yanomamö <sup>b</sup>
Age in Years				
0-14	42.0	44.5	28.9	45.4
15-29	22.6	23.7	24.6	30.1
30-44	20.0	17.3	24.9	16.3
45-59	9.8	8.5	13.4	7.2
> 60	5.5	6.0	8.2	1.0
Sex ratio (m/f)				
Less than 15 years old	1.2	1.2	0.8	1.3
Greater than 15 years old	0.9	0.7	0.9	1.0

<sup>a</sup>Howell 1979

<sup>b</sup>Chagnon 1968

TABLE 2. Aka Polygyny and Divorce Rates

	Percentage of Males Having			Divorce Rate		
	1 wife	2 wives	3 wives	No. of Marriages <sup>a</sup>	No. of Divorces	Rate (in %)
Ndélé Aka	82.6	13.8	3.6	206	53	25.7
Bokoka Aka	82.1	16.1	1.8	195	56	28.7

<sup>a</sup>number of male and female marriages

ends in divorce. Most of the divorces come at an early age before children are born. Most of the early divorces are initiated by women, whereas most divorces after age thirty-five (when women have completed fertility) are initiated by men.

Overall, the age-sex structure, fertility, and mortality patterns are consistent with those in other hunter-gatherer and horticultural populations. Both fertility and mortality are high and the population is relatively young. The causes of death study indicates the Aka are more peaceful than many other hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists (Hewlett 1990).

## SOCIAL UNITS

There are at least five significant social units: the family, the camp, the clan, the band, and the regional community. The family (husband, wife and children) is the most significant as this is the unit of production and reproduction: The family works as an economic unit on the net hunt, and in a variety of other subsistence activities (e.g., collecting caterpillars and mushrooms), and the conjugal family is where most cultural skills are transmitted and acquired (Hewlett and Cavalli-Sforza 1986). The camp (*lango*) consists of one to fifteen nuclear families but averages around twenty to thirty-five individuals. Table 3 compares the average size of forest and village camps in Ndélé and Bokoka. The data indicate there is no appreciable difference in the size of camps in the village and forest. There is no clear pattern of Aka concentration and dispersal as is found

among many other foraging populations (Lee and DeVore 1968). There is a tendency for Bokoka forest camps to get larger during the dry season, as this is the best time for cooperative net hunting. Bahuchet (1985) points out that before 1900 Aka camps were concentrated during the dry season for net hunting and dispersed the rest of the year. While this tendency was found in Bokoka, it is quite variable from year to year. In Bokoka in 1980, for instance, there was a large measles epidemic, and most village camps during the dry season were large, but in 1984 village camps were small. In Ndélé, during the 1973 wet season, the Aka made large camps (greater than forty individuals) in the village, but in 1976 and 1980 the village camps were small (about twenty-five individuals). One pattern is clear: When Aka take up farming deep in the forest, the size of the camp grows appreciably. One Aka camp near Ndélé that had taken up farming numbered ninety-five, while another camp near Bokoka numbered sixty-seven.

The camp generally consists of three to four adult males from the same patriclan (usually brothers or first cousins), their wives and children, an elderly mother of some of the adult males, an older divorced sister of the patriclan and her children, a daughter of one of the adult males and her spouse who is performing bride service, and one or two visiting families. In Ndélé, 56 percent of the adult males in the camp belonged to the same patriclan, 19 percent of the males were in camp to do bride service, and 25 percent of the adult males were visiting. In Bokoka, the figures were 47 percent, 19 percent, and 33 percent, respectively.

TABLE 3. Camp Size in the Forest and Village

	No. of Camps	Mean	SD
Forest			
Ndélé	6	22.3	3.6
Bokoka	6	34.0	5.4
Village			
Ndélé	7	22.5	8.4
Bokoka	9	23.3	11.3

## *Intimate Fathers*

While the core of the camp usually consists of adult males belonging to the same patriclan (*dikanda*)—that is, individuals tracing their ancestry patrilineally to a mythical plant or animal, clan identity is weak. Few Aka know the mythology associated with their clan and Aka rarely invoke clan obligations if family members do not help out in subsistence activities. Aka adults can seldom remember patrilineal links back more than two generations and matrilineal relatives are visited frequently. An Aka male's clan name is the same as his Ngandu trading partner. Aka members of the Bodikala clan, for instance, usually trade with Ngandu farmers of the Bodikala clan. Consequently, Aka and Ngandu children grow up with their future trading partners. Table 4 lists the mean clan size from Ndélé and Bokoka. Tables 3 and 4 indicate that the mean clan size is not significantly different from the mean camp size.

The band is a more elusive entity as the Aka do not have a native term for it. Essentially it is a group of 50–150 individuals who hunt and gather in the same vicinity. Its core usually consists of two to four clans. There is general stability in the band over time. I have been returning to some areas for over fifteen years now and can generally take a trail to a particular territory and find many of the same individuals hunting and gathering together. Changes do of course occur. One camp or clan, for instance, may move to a new area because hunting is not good or the *konza* (village patron) is not treating them well or is running out of manioc. In Bokoka there were three bands, consisting of 65, 150, and 52 individuals, respectively, while in Ndélé the three bands consisted of 95, 125, and 50 individuals. Each band usually has one trail from the village to the forest camps.

The final social unit is the regional community or what in other

TABLE 4. Mean Clan Size in Ndélé and Bokoka

	No. of Clans	Mean	SD
Ndélé	6	19.5	5.6
Bokoka	7	22.7	6.2

publications is called the "exploration range" (Hewlett, van de Koppel, and Cavalli-Sforza 1982). This is the limited geographical area an individual explores during his or her lifetime. The "exploration range" is where subsistence activities take place, a spouse is encountered, and other aspects of geographical as well as social knowledge are acquired and transmitted. Aka tend to travel in a 50 km radius area from their place of birth (Hewlett, van de Koppel, and Cavalli-Sforza 1986) and get to know about 700 Aka in this area. In Ndélé, Aka males have a greater exploration range than females, and the Ndélé Aka also have a greater exploration range than Bokoka Aka. Population density is an important factor in how far one travels. Population density in Bokoka is twice that of Ndélé so Bokoka Aka do not have to travel as far to meet the same number of people. Male exploration range is also related to the distance traveled to find a spouse and helps to explain why Ndélé males travel farther than Ndélé women. The exploration range for Aka seems to approximate the dialectical tribe described by Birdsell (1973), in that it tends to include an area where one meets and gets to know about 500–700 individuals. The Aka have no term for the community of individuals one gets to know during his or her lifetime.

## **SUBSISTENCE AND SETTLEMENT**

The Aka know hundreds of forest plants and animals but subsist primarily on sixty-three plant species, twenty insect species, honey from eight species of bees, and twenty-eight species of game. The Aka collect roots from six species of plants, leaves from eleven species, nuts from seventeen species, and fruits from seventeen species. They collect twelve species of mushrooms, four types of termites, crickets, three types of grubs, and twelve species of caterpillars. The Aka hunt seven species of large game with the spear (primarily hog and elephant), six species of duiker with the net (primarily the blue duiker), eight species of monkeys with the cross-bow, and seven species of rat, mongoose, and porcupine with a

variety of small snare and net traps (see Bahuchet 1975, 1985, and Hewlett 1977 for details of plants and animals and associated hunting and collecting techniques).

The Aka clearly identify forest zones that are rich in particular plant or animal species. The best zone for caterpillar collecting, for instance, is about twelve km south of Bokoka. Specific zones of honey collection, roots, and *payo* nuts (*Irvingia* spp.) are identified within the hunting-gathering territory. Specific locations of the best duiker, pig, and elephant and bongo hunting are also well-known.

Over the course of a year the Aka spend about 56 percent of their time hunting, 27 percent of their time gathering, and 17 percent of their time in village work for the Ngandu (Bahuchet 1988). The relative importance of hunting and gathering activities fluctuates from season to season. It is estimated, for example, that the Aka spend up to 90 percent of their time net hunting in the drier season (January to May), while during part of the rainy season (August to September) 60 percent of their time is spent collecting food, especially caterpillars (Bahuchet 1988). Much of the vegetable food in the Aka diet is obtained by trading meat to farmers for manioc and other cultigens. Although the Aka net hunt in the forest the majority of the year and spend little or no time cultivating plant foods, they are transitional foragers in the sense that a large proportion of their diet comes from these domesticated village products. Seldom does a day go by without some of this food being eaten. While residing part of the year near the Ngandu village, Aka provide labor to their village *konza* (patron) for which they receive access to the farmer's fields. The Aka come to the village three or four months a year to assist in the clearing of the fields. A "typical" Aka meal in the dry season in a forest camp would consist of manioc, meat from a blue duiker cooked in a *payo* gravy, and shredded *koko* leaves (*Gnetum* spp.).

As with the Mbuti Pygmies of Zaire (Hart 1977; Turnbull 1965b), most camp members—male and female, young and old—participate in the net hunt (see pls. 2–4). From the time Aka leave the village and return to the forest (February-March) until caterpillar

season (July-August), they often net hunt six days a week, four to nine hours per day. Net hunts decrease in frequency during the caterpillar season and the major rainy season (August-October); individual and small group foraging techniques (e.g., spears, crossbows, traps) are utilized more frequently during these seasons (see Bahuchet 1985 and Hewlett 1977 for descriptions of various hunting techniques). There are a few technical features about the net hunt that distinguish it from most other hunting techniques: There is no stalking of game; once the nets are set the object of the "beaters" is to make as much noise as possible in order to wake up the nocturnal duikers, the primary targets of the net hunt. It is also one of the few hunting techniques where ears are just as important as eyes and where women and children can contribute to the success of the hunt. There are at least six types of net hunt. Usually the nets are arranged in a semicircle and the men flush out the game and the women trap and kill it (this is the most common type of net hunt and called *banda*). In other instances the women are the beaters and the men the trappers (this type of net hunt is called *mbembo*).

Although both men and women collect leaves, fruits, nuts, mushrooms, and termites, women do the majority of the collecting. They may do this as a conjugal unit or individually. Men do the majority of the honey collecting, especially if it involves climbing a tree large in diameter. Both men and women net hunt, usually together, but sometimes individually, and men and women both use small traps to hunt, often together, but again, sometimes individually. Only men use the spear and crossbow to hunt.

Seasonal camp movements vary according to a variety of social and ecological factors. Most Aka associated with Bokoka move into the village from late November until mid-February, whereas Aka associated with Ndélé are in the village from August until October. Bokoka farmers are wealthier than the Ndélé farmers because the roads to Bokoka are better; they are also closer to urban areas (e.g., Bangui, the capital; and Mbaiki) and consequently have larger coffee plantations. The Aka in Bokoka move into the village during the early part of the dry season (December-January), when net hunting

is best, to help villagers harvest their coffee. Aka are willing to do this because it is a time of plenty in the village; most of the yearly cash income for clothes, drink, and other commodities comes to the farmers during this period, and Aka reap some of those benefits. In Ndélé, on the other hand, coffee plantations are small and there is no caterpillar season (there is more swamp forest, which has fewer caterpillar trees), and consequently Aka move into the village during the height of the rainy season (August-October) rather than the dry season because net hunting is poorest at this time (the nets tear easily if wet).

There are some similarities in the seasonal movements of Ndélé and Bokoka Aka. Both Bokoka and Ndélé Aka are in the forest from March through June and July. Net hunting is good at this time and the trees start to flower, which means plenty of fruits, nuts (especially *payo*), and honey. Termites are also likely to swarm at this time. Aka are also less likely to obtain much from farmers at this time: May and June are the leanest times for villagers as they usually plant in April and hope to have their first crop by July.

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Aka are patrilineal, having shallow patrilines (*dikanda*), and are generally virilocal except for a few years after marriage when the male provides bride service in the camp of his wife's family. Female lines are also recognized by the term *mobila*. This term refers to the lines of mother, mother's mother, father's mother, and father's mother's mother. Aka kinship terms are classificatory and basically generational; for instance, *tao* refers not only to the natural father but to the father's older brother and the husband of the mother's sister; and *ngue* (mother) refers to mother and mother's sister. All grandparents are called *koko*; all grandchildren are called *ndala*; all offspring are called *mona*; and all brothers and sisters are called *kadi*. *Mokio* refers to your spouse's mother's and father's family members, and *mokope* refers to all spouses of patrilin members.

Aka prefer to marry far away, and clan exogamy is practiced. Although Aka do not practice sister exchange as do the Efe Pygmies of Zaire, there is a tendency for males in one area to marry females from a particular location. In Ndélé, for instance, many of the men obtained wives from the Kaka region in the PRC. A man acquires a bride through service to his wife's family, often until the first infant of the married couple walks well. Men conducting bride service in the same camp usually become close friends for life. Bride service takes place regardless of the age of the woman, but as a woman gets older the length of bride service diminishes.

There are few Aka status positions. There is no chief in the sense of a person commanding ultimate authority, yet there is the *kombeti*, who is generally more influential in subsistence and camp movement discussions. He is often a liaison between Aka and Ngandu. The farmers show deference to the Aka *kombeti* (e.g., saying hello to him first, giving him more cigarettes) yet the Aka themselves do not show any such behavior toward him (intergenerational inequality is minimal). The *nganga* is the traditional healer and provides a wide range of services to the community—such as divination on hunts, curing of witchcraft, and herbal healing. The *tuma* is the great hunter who has often killed several elephants on his own. He leads spear hunts and important hunting and seasonal rituals and organizes the training of young boys in the men's secret society. The status positions are usually held by males.

The Aka are fiercely egalitarian and independent. No individual has the right to coerce or order another individual to perform an activity against his/her will. Even when parents give instructions to their children to collect water or firewood, there are no sanctions if they do not do so. Aka have a number of informal noninstitutional methods for maintaining their egalitarianism. First, they practice prestige avoidance; one does not draw attention to his or her activities. There are certainly exceptional hunters, dancers and drummers, but individuals do not brag to others about their abilities. Second, they practice the rough joking described by Lee (1986) among the !Kung San. For instance, if a man boasts about the

amount of honey he collected, others will joke about the size and shape of his genitals. And third, they practice demand sharing. This simply means that whatever one has will be given up if requested. This is one reason Aka have been slow to take up farming. An Aka who spends three to four months farming must give everything away at harvest time when all the relatives come to visit and request food.

Sharing, cooperation, and autonomy are but a few other of the Aka core values. The community cooperates daily in the net hunt, food hunted is shared with members of the camp, and decision-making is the reserved prerogative of the individual; if one is not content with living conditions, for instance, one moves to another camp. As a result, camp composition changes daily.

### BELIEF SYSTEMS

Aka belief systems are best characterized by their regional and individual variation rather than by a standardized religious pattern. Unlike kinship terms, marriage rules, and social organization, where there is generally agreement between informants, there is consistent disagreement about the supernatural world. I would talk with a few informants about belief systems and begin to sketch out a general pattern, when the next informant would ridicule and clearly disagree with the earlier informants' statements. Although more research is needed in this area, a few general patterns eventually emerge.

The very individualistic nature of Aka beliefs is clearly demonstrated by some activities associated with adolescence. Aka circumcise boys at adolescence, and both boys and girls point their top four incisors (and possibly their bottom four) at this time (Walker and Hewlett 1989). The timing of these activities, however, is determined by the individual boy or girl. Whenever boys or girls feel like having their teeth pointed, a *tuma* is called in to point them. Adolescents decide if they want to have their teeth pointed with other male or female friends. The activities are very casual and individualized and contain a minimum amount of ritual. Aka male

and female initiations are considerably different from the male (*nkumbi*) and female (*elima*) adolescent initiations described by Turnbull (1965b) among the Mbuti Pygmies.

But similar to Turnbull's (1961) portrayal of the Mbuti, the Aka view the village (*mboka*) as a dangerous place, whereas the forest (*ndima*) is perceived as comforting and protecting. Aka express their fears about bad spirits and aggressive farmers in the village, and their demeanor in the village clearly communicates this fear. In the forest, Aka sing, dance, play, and are very active and conversant. In the village, their demeanor changes dramatically—they walk slowly, say little, seldom smile, and try to avoid eye contact with others. While camping in the plantations outside the village (*ngondu*), the Aka are more relaxed, but they still behave cautiously for a villager could overhear their conversations or enter the camp at any time.

Some Aka religious beliefs are similar to those of the Ngandu. Aka, like Ngandu, believe in ancestor spirits (*edio*). Aka generally recognize two types—personalized spirits (spirits that have names and belong to particular families) and nameless generalized spirits. An example of the first type of *edio* was provided by an Aka woman. She reported that the spirit of her dead husband knocked her new husband to the ground because the new husband married her too soon after her former husband's death. The degree and type of influence of *edio* in the daily life of Aka varies from one individual to the next. A few informants said all *edio* were bad, while others indicated they could help out on the hunt. Some Aka feel that they need to practice magic daily to protect themselves from *edio*, while others feel that *edio* have minimal influence in their life. Many Aka reported that *edio* could cause illnesses by sitting next to people and eating their food, so that they would eventually grow thin and die. Only an *nganga*, the traditional healer, had the ability to talk to *edio* to get them to leave.

Most Aka camps have an *nganga*. Ngangas can cure all forms of illness (e.g., malaria, worms, bad luck, attack by witchcraft), see into the future to help one make decisions about travel, marriage,

## *Intimate Fathers*

or friendships, and can see game animals deep in the forest while on the net hunt. There is tremendous intracultural variation in the abilities of the *ngangas*. Some are especially powerful and spend their time traveling from camp to camp to provide their services. The majority of *ngangas* are part-time practitioners and only have a few areas of specialization. *Ngangas* acquire their knowledge through training and initiation. During initiation, the insides of their eyelids are cut and medicine is placed in the cuts to help the *ngangas* see those things most others cannot. The number and importance of Aka *ngangas* are increasing as the number of Ngandu and other villager *ngangas* declines. Villager *ngangas* are increasingly difficult to find and can be very expensive so more villagers turn to Aka *ngangas*. Aka *ngangas* living near the village get a brisk business from villagers, who generally believe that Aka have supernatural abilities. Villagers are usually charged for their treatment (e.g., a chicken, a piece of cloth, salt, tobacco, etc.), while generally there is no charge for treating other Aka.

Also like Ngandu farmers, the Aka believe in witches (*limba*) and witchcraft (*gundu*). Aka from Ndélé attributed 15 percent of their parents' and children's deaths to witchcraft, while Bokoka Aka attributed only 7 percent of their deaths to witchcraft (Hewlett, van de Koppel, and van de Koppel 1986). The witches or sorcerers (the Aka make no distinction) practice secretly and are unknown to the general population, although *ngangas* are highly suspect. The witches send poison darts (*ndoki*) into the body of their victim, and the person eventually dies from the poison unless the *nganga* can extract the dart, usually by sucking it out.

Aka who believe in *bembe*, the creator of all living things, believe also that *bembe* retired soon after creation. The most consistently mentioned divinity or spirit is that of *dzengi*, a forest spirit. In the Bokoka region, *dzengi* is strongly associated with elephant hunting. One needs to dance and sing to *dzengi* to insure a successful elephant hunt. If an elephant is killed, a grand dance to *dzengi* is performed in which a large raffia mask symbolizing *dzengi* is

utilized. The *dzengi* dance is organized and directed by the *tuma*, the great hunter.

All Aka adolescent boys are taken on an elephant hunt by a *tuma* to learn how to hunt elephant as well as to learn about the secret lore of *dzengi*. While women are kept peripheral to powers and secrets of *dzengi*, most women I spoke to about *dzengi* were not mystified or fearful of *dzengi* or the men's secrets, and in fact, sometimes laughed and said it was just a way the men tried to keep knowledge and power from them.

In Ndélé, *dzengi* was not specifically linked to the elephant hunt (although there would certainly be a dance to *dzengi* if an elephant was killed). In this region, one can dance to *dzengi* anytime the *tuma* agrees. As in Bokoka, the large raffia mask is used to symbolize *dzengi*. The *tuma* is bilingual and can communicate with the mask while it dances and translate *dzengi* messages to the others. The mask stops dancing when the singing and activity are poor or are not done with enough enthusiasm. The forest spirit likes singing, vigorous dancing, and play and will disappear if these behaviors are not exhibited. The *tuma* in Ndélé is also responsible for taking adolescent boys out on an elephant hunt to train them in the secret powers of *dzengi*.

Many Aka rituals are linked to hunting and gathering, and Aka engage in a number of individual and group hunting rituals to insure a successful hunt. To assist hunting efficiency the net can be ritually washed of bad spirits (*kose*) or a variety of medicines (*bouanga*) can be placed on them to increase good luck. The number and types of rituals increase as hunting success decreases (Moise 1987).

To this point, general features of Aka culture and environment have been described. They all have some effect on the nature of father-infant interaction. Precisely how these various aspects of Aka culture and environment are related to the father-infant relationship will be discussed in the following chapters. The next two topics of Aka culture—Aka infancy and husband-wife relations—are more central to father-infant relations. It is essential to have an under-

standing of Aka infancy and childhood and of gender relations to discuss the father-infant relationship.

## AKA INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD

### Infancy

There are various aspects of Aka infancy that contribute to and reflect the intimate nature of the father's role. The previous sections of this chapter provided some data on the physical and social setting of Aka infancy. In general, Aka infants live in small camps of twenty-five to thirty-five individuals. Half of the camp is under fifteen years of age and most adult women have a child under four years of age. Many of the other infants and children in camp are biologically related through the infant's father. The infant travels on the net hunt with the rest of the camp and sleeps in the same bed as its mother, father, and possibly older brothers and sisters. If a five-to-nine-year-old brother or sister has a grandparent (usually a grandmother) in camp, the child will sleep with the grandparent. After ten to eleven years of age girls often make their own house next to their parents, while boys will get together and make a lean-to in camp and all of them (two to four boys) will sleep together.

Aka infancy is indulgent: Infants are held almost constantly, they have skin-to-skin contact most of the day as Aka seldom wear shirts or blouses, and they are nursed on demand and attended to immediately if they fuss or cry. Aka parents interact with and stimulate their infants throughout the day. They talk to, play with, show affection to, and transmit subsistence skills to their infants during the day. I was rather surprised to find parents teaching their eight-to-twelve-month-old infants how to use small pointed digging sticks, throw small spears, use miniature axes with sharp metal blades, and carry small baskets. Most of this direct teaching takes place while resting on the net hunt. Unlike their village neighbors, Aka infants

are carried in a sling on the side rather than on the back, which allows for more face-to-face interaction with the caregiver.

The Aka identify two stages within infancy—*molope*, from the time of birth until the infant can crawl, and *dibinda*, from the time of crawling and eating of solid foods until the child walks, at which time the infant is called *mona*. The term *mona* can be used up to seven to eight years of age. Unlike the !Kung hunter-gatherers (Konner 1976) Aka do not believe that infants have to be directly trained to walk or crawl. Like the !Kung, though, Aka infants receive plenty of vestibular stimulation as they are carried vertically most of the day. Infants will sleep for hours in the sling as parents set up nets and chase after game. The increased vestibular stimulation may contribute to the Aka infants' precocious motor and cognitive development described by Neuwelt-Truntzer (1981). Aka infants are smaller than American infants, but this does not appear to be a result of malnutrition. A study of infant health and nutrition (Cordes and Hewlett 1990) and Neuwelt-Truntzer's developmental tests indicate that Aka infants are healthy, especially by comparison to infants in other parts of the Third World, and that their motor and cognitive development is normal for their age.

While Aka are very indulgent and intimate with their infants, they are not a child-focused society. Some have suggested that many American parents are child-focused, in that parents will give undivided attention to the child (quality time) and dramatically change their behavior or activities to attend to the desires of their children. American parents allow their children to interrupt their conversations with other adults; they ask their children what they want to eat and try to accommodate other desires of the children. Aka society is adult-centered in that parents seldom stop their activities to pay undivided attention to their children. If an infant fusses or urinates on a parent who is talking to others or playing the drums, the parent continues his activity while gently rocking the infant or wiping the urine off with a nearby leaf. There are times when the infant's desires are not considered and the infant is actually placed in danger by the parents. For instance, on the net hunt, if a woman

chases a game animal into the net, she will place the infant on the ground to run after the game and kill it. The infant is left there crying until the mother or someone else comes back.

While mother is the primary and father the secondary caregiver, numerous others help out with infant care. While in the camp setting, Aka one-to-four-month-old infants are held by their mothers less than 40 percent of the time, are transferred to other caregivers an average of 7.3 times per hour, and have seven different caregivers on average that hold the infant during the day. The multiple caregiving decreases as the group moves out of camp to travel or go net hunting. Outside of camp, the mother holds the infant almost 90 percent of the time and the infant is transferred only two times per hour on average (Hewlett 1989a).

Unlike their farming neighbors and many other farming communities (Weisner and Gallimore 1977), older Aka infants are not placed under the care of an older, usually female, sibling on a regular basis. Older siblings may help periodically, but often it is because they want to care for the infant, not because they are given the infant to care for by the mother or are given the responsibility. Generally, it is difficult for parents to get their older children to do much for them at all. Older children (seven to eleven year olds) are asked to collect water or firewood but often simply ignore their parents' requests. The parents may yell at their children, but more often than not, they just go and get what they need by themselves. Children are independent and autonomous at an early age. The training for autonomy begins in infancy. Infants are allowed to crawl or walk to wherever they want in camp and allowed to use knives, machetes, digging sticks, and clay pots around camp. Only if an infant begins to crawl into a fire or hits another child do parents or others interfere with the infant's activity. It was not unusual, for instance, to see an eight month old with a six-inch knife chopping the branch frame of its family's house. By three or four years of age children can cook themselves a meal on the fire, and by ten years of age Aka children know enough subsistence skills to live in the forest alone if need be (Hewlett and Cavalli-Sforza 1986). Respect

for an individual's autonomy is a core value among the Aka, and it is demonstrated and encouraged in their patterns of infant care.

The great respect for autonomy is consistent with another Aka value—intergenerational equality. This is a positive description of what villagers would call a lack of respect for elders. On one occasion a group of three young children (one to four year olds) was left in camp with an elderly man and an adult woman. During the day the kids started to tease and throw sticks at the elderly man. He tried to get them to stop but they continued to come back. The adult woman was not within view of the children. Eventually the old man just got up and walked into the forest and stayed there for three days. The Aka never got after the children for doing this. One villager in camp at the time chastised the Aka adults for not being more strict with their children and teaching them to respect their elders. Unlike their village neighbors, Aka infants and children are not socialized to be respectful, deferent, and obedient to elders. As mentioned, Aka infants can interfere with adult activities and not get punished.

Besides being indulgent and intimate, Aka infancy also lacks negation and violence, which are relatively common in American infancy. Seldom does one hear a parent tell an infant not to touch this or that or not to do something. As already mentioned if an infant hits another child a parent will get up and move the infant to another area; the infant is not told *no no!* Violence or corporal punishment for an infant that misbehaves seldom occurs. In fact, if one parent hits an infant, this is reason enough for the other parent to ask for a divorce.

While fathers are very active in infant care, they do not participate in the birth of their infants. Usually only women and young children attend births. One father I met attended and helped in the delivery of his infant but only because his wife gave birth while they were walking together in the forest. He was not teased or stigmatized for his participation. Both mother and father observe food taboos during the pregnancy and until the infant can walk well. There is also a postpartum sex taboo until the child can walk very

well. If one eats a taboo food or has marital or extramarital sex during the first year or two, the infant and/or the parents can get sick and possibly die. *Ekila*, an illness in which the infant goes into convulsions, is caused by the parents eating a taboo food and is the second leading cause of death among infants (Hewlett, van de Koppel, and van de Koppel 1986). Most Aka know about the postpartum sex taboo, but limited interview data and impressions indicate it is not observed. Even if one does break the rule there are indigenous medications to remedy the transgression.

In summary, Aka infancy has the following characteristics: constant holding and skin-to-skin contact, high father involvement, multiple caregiving, indulgent care, lack of negation, early training for autonomy and subsistence skills, parents as primary transmitters of culture, and precocious motor and cognitive development.

## **Childhood**

Since infancy is to the topic of this study, only a limited description of childhood will be provided.

Weaning usually begins at age three or four when the mother becomes pregnant again. This relatively short developmental stage is called *djosi*. Once the newborn arrives, changes occur in the child's daily activities. The child, now called *mona*, is not able to walk fast enough to keep up with the net hunt and it is difficult for parents to transport two children on the hunt (i.e., the newborn and young child), so the four to five year old frequently stays behind in camp with one or two other children and an adult. The other children may be the same age or may be older children who did not want to go on the hunt. The children play, explore and practice subsistence skills and seldom venture more than fifty meters from camp. There is no special children's play area as described by Turnbull (1965b) for the Mbuti. The adult that stays behind does not watch them closely or instruct them in any skills but is always within earshot if help is necessary. In camp, before and after the

hunt, most of the child's interaction and activities occur in and around the nuclear family hut.

When children can keep up with the net hunt (about age seven or eight), they join their parents on the hunt. Boys at this developmental stage are called *mona bokala* and girls are called *mona ngondo*. A boy tends to stay close to his father and a girl close to her mother, but the child makes the decision whom to follow and will usually follow the parent of the opposite sex for at least part of the day. Mothers and fathers are likely to ask for (but may not receive) the assistance of their son or daughter. The assisting son or daughter will receive more specific knowledge of subsistence techniques from the parent. Instruction is still primarily by observation and imitation, but verbal instructions are also given. At times during the net hunt, groups of children get together and play, but eventually they break up and return to the location of their parent's net. In camp the majority of the child's time is spent within a multiage play group, but always in the company of adults; the child's activity is no longer centered around the parental hut. If children have living grandparents in camp, they often sleep and eat with them.

By age eleven or twelve, same-sex and similar-age groups are quite distinct. At this developmental stage boys are called *bokala* and girls *ngondo*. Younger children have a tendency to play in same-sex, multiage groups, but by adolescence the few same-sex peers seem to be inseparable. While their activities are not totally independent of their parents (they often sleep and eat with their parents and stay near them on the net hunt), adolescents spend most of their time with same-sex peers. Girls of this age collect water, nuts, or fruit together, while boys take trips to the village or go on small game hunts together. The size of the same-sex group depends on the size, age, and sex distribution of the camp, but it often consists of three to four same-sex twelve to eighteen year olds. This is also a time of travel to visit relatives and explore territories other than the one they grew up in, so adolescents may be absent from the camp for long periods.

## GENDER RELATIONS

Aka male-female relations are extremely egalitarian by cross-cultural standards. There is little agreement on how to determine gender equality/inequality (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988), but in all domains that are consistently mentioned in the literature, the Aka fall on the egalitarian side. Four domains of male-female relations will be considered here: economic, autonomy, power and prestige, and health and nutrition. Since this study concerns parenting, an emphasis will be placed upon the husband-wife relationship.

Women and men have considerable equality in the economic domain. While systematic studies on the caloric contributions of males versus females have not been conducted, it is clear that both males and females are regular contributors to the diet. What is especially remarkable about the Aka is the amount of time husband and wife spend in cooperative subsistence activity. Husband and wife are together on a regular basis to net hunt, collect caterpillars, termites, honey, fruit, and sometimes fish. On net hunting days husband and wife are within view of each other 47 percent of the time (Hewlett 1989b). They are not only in association with each other but actively cooperating in subsistence activity. On days when there is no net hunt, it is not unusual to see a husband and wife going out together to collect plants or honey (see pl. 5). Wives are less likely to participate in crossbow hunting for monkeys and trapline hunting for medium size game and never participate in spear hunts for wild pig and elephants. Aka husbands and wives are together often and cooperate in a wide variety of subsistence tasks throughout the year; they clearly care for one another, but it is also clear that Aka men and women like to be with members of the same sex at least as much as being with their spouses. Men enjoy hunting game together, and women enjoy collecting nuts and fruit away from the men.

Although not based upon systematic measures, men contribute slightly more to the diet while in the forest camps because in addition to the net hunting, men hunt for monkeys, pigs, and elephants,

and collect most of the honey. In the village camps females are the primary providers, contributing at least 70 percent of the calories. While in the village, Aka women work in the fields of Ngandu women and receive manioc, corn, and palm oil in exchange for their labor. Similar to village men, Aka men do very little in the village camps. They may cut down palm nut regimes or clear coffee fields for villagers. Men spend about 10 percent of their day in productive labor in the village, in comparison to 60 percent in the forest (see chap. 4 for more details). When the camp is close to the village the Aka are more likely to follow the village pattern of separate gender subsistence activities. Approximately three to four months of the year are spent in the village.

Women not only contribute substantially to the diet but have considerable control over the distribution and exchange of food. Both women and men butcher and distribute game captured on the net hunt, and if it has been a reasonably good hunt women will prepare pots of food for other camp households. Sharing among the Aka is essentially a two-tier process. First, game is divided by the owners of the net (husband and wife) according to who jumped on the animal, who killed the the animal, and who helped set up the net. Once this division has taken place the game is taken back to camp and cooked. It is then distributed again by the woman that prepares the food. Women also distribute gathered food—mushrooms, fruit, nuts, tubers. A woman may distribute gathered food out in the forest, when she returns to camp or after she has prepared the food. Animals captured with other hunting techniques—monkeys, pigs, elephants, or gorillas—are divided by the individual who killed the animal. Patterns of sharing vary with the species of game (Bahuchet 1985). Besides having a central role in the distribution of food, women are primarily responsible for exchange with villagers. Villagers provide manioc, corn, salt, and other village goods in exchange for the Aka meat, *koko*, and other forest products. While deep in the forest, Aka and Ngandu women meet at a predetermined place halfway between the village and forest camp in order to exchange items. Since the baskets are heavy for these trading expeditions, the

women in camp may be gone for two or three days. But when Aka-Ngandu exchange occurs in the camp, it is usually the Aka women who exchange goods, regardless of the villager's gender.

The political power and social prestige of Aka women are pronounced but are not as structurally salient as those of Aka men. Aka men hold all the named positions of status—*kombeti*, *tuma*, and *nganga*—but as mentioned already, these men hold no absolute power. They influence people through their hospitality, persuasiveness, humor, and knowledge, not by their position. Aka women challenge men's authority on a regular basis and are influential actors in all kinds of decision making. Women participate in decisions about camp movement, extramarital affairs, bad luck on the hunt, and sorcery accusations. There is something of a matriarchy in many camps as the mother of the men who form the core of the camp is often the eldest patriclan member. Since men marry younger women, Aka women usually outlive their husbands by many years. These grandmothers eventually move back to the camp of their patriclan. Women in this position are vivacious characters and become respected patriclan spokespersons. The men in the named status positions are usually their sons. In terms of prestige, women's lines, *mobila*, are recognized and origin myths have men and women originating from a female fruit. Women have their own dances and songs in which they ridicule men. Kisliuk (1990) reports the lyrics for one *dingboku* (woman's dance) song: "the penis is not a competitor, it has died already! the vagina wins!" McCreedy (1990) describes the importance of women in Aka ritual life, especially the net hunt *bobanda* ritual. While there are many rituals and dances that clearly demonstrate the power and prestige of women, most rituals and dances involve both men and women in their separate but respected and complementary roles.

Autonomy within the context of group interdependence is a vital feature of Aka gender relations. Husbands and wives cooperate in a wide range of activities, but there is respect for each other's feelings and peculiarities. Husbands cannot force their wives to come on the hunt, and wives cannot force their husbands to look

for honey. Spouses can and do ridicule each other with rather crude joking (e.g., uncomplimentary remarks about the size and shape of the partner's genitals), but for the most part the partner does not pay much attention to the ridicule. If the couple does not get along, divorce is a matter of one partner simply moving out of the house. While men and women have clearly defined subsistence and social roles, one is not ridiculed for trying a role usually assigned to the other gender. Women carry the nets, spears, and crossbows of the men, and men carry the baskets and digging sticks of the women. This sex role flexibility is seen in the different types of net hunt. On most net hunts, men go to the center of the nets and chase the game into the nets while women stand nearby to jump on and kill the captured game. But for social or environmental reasons (getting tired of doing one type of net hunt or trying to capture especially large game), the roles are sometimes reversed, and women go to the center of the nets while men stay next to the nets.

Physical violence in general is infrequent and violence against women is especially rare. The lack of violence enhances female autonomy and encourages husband-wife cooperation and trust. It is rather remarkable that after working on and off for fifteen years with the Aka I have yet to witness a violent act against a woman. I have asked colleagues who have spent considerable time with Aka, and they are also unable to report a case of violence against a woman. Husband-wife conflicts do of course occur but they are usually resolved through talking, rough joking, leaving camp for a while, or mediated assistance from other camp members. I have witnessed female violence against men. Women have cut their husbands' faces with knives and have hit their husbands with logs from the fire for sleeping with other women. Women, however, are more likely to show their anger and displeasure with their husbands by tearing down the family house. Aka women make the houses, and Aka men are not very good at it (they usually make lean-tos). Female autonomy and the lack of violence against women are also demonstrated by the frequent travel of women, alone or in small groups, throughout the forest.

## *Intimate Fathers*

Recent studies of Aka health and nutrition (Cordes and Hewlett 1990; Walker and Hewlett 1990) provide objective indicators of both gender equality and inequality. Aka females under five appear to have slightly better health and nutrition than Aka males of the same age, while Aka males are more likely to have better health and nutrition in adulthood. Aka females under five have significantly higher hemoglobins than Aka males of the same age. The young females also have slightly larger arm circumferences and skin folds than the young boys. The differences disappear by age ten, and by adulthood the pattern partially reverses itself, the adult males having significantly higher hemoglobins than adult females. Adult females do continue to have larger skin folds and arm circumferences than the males. Adult males also have better dental health than adult females; the adult males had fewer dental caries and missing teeth than the adult females. The nutritional demands of lactation may explain the prevalence of high tooth loss, but the higher caries rate is related to a diet higher in carbohydrates and lower in protein and fats than that of adult men. A male diet higher in protein is also suggested by the hemoglobin data. Finally, Aka mortality data indicate that, unlike the Ache, Batek, and Inuit hunter-gatherers where statistically more males survive to adulthood than females, there is no preferential treatment of boys over girls. While there are differences in the health of Aka adult men and women, there are numerous similarities: both men and women have similar blood pressure throughout the lifespan, they have essentially the same prevalence of splenomegaly and hepatomegaly, and they have similar height-to-weight ratios.

It is essential to understand Aka gender relations, particularly husband-wife relations, if one is to understand the Aka father-infant relationship. Husband and wife are together often, know each other exceptionally well, and cooperate on a regular basis in a diversity of tasks. Men and women have distinct tasks, but there are few underlying beliefs that one sex is naturally inclined to perform certain tasks. The capabilities of men and women are very similar, and therefore tasks can be reversed easily. Male and female experiences

and socialization are different, but men and women know the tasks of the opposite sex. Women are also valued and respected members of the group. Aka men, however, are similar to men cross-culturally in that men predominate in the named status positions, only men hunt large game, and polygyny is relatively common. In summary, Aka male-female relations have commonalities with male-female relations cross-culturally, but the Aka are probably as egalitarian as human societies get.

### **THE VILLAGE WORLD—THE AKA SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

It is impossible to provide a holistic view of Aka life without describing the Ngandu farmers with whom the Aka have a semisymbiotic trading relationship. Aka throughout the CAR and PRC have trading relationships with at least fifteen ethnically and linguistically distinct farming-hunting-fishing populations. The Ngandu speak a Bantu language totally different from the Bantu of the Aka and moved into the area only 120 years ago.

Turnbull's characterization of distinct forest and village worlds (1965a, 1965b) does not apply to the Ngandu and Aka. Ngandu men and women go into the forest on a regular basis and the Aka depend heavily on Ngandu for manioc and other village goods. But Turnbull's ethnographies do capture the distinctive ambiance of the village and forest worlds. In this brief section I will not try to duplicate Turnbull's exceptional work but will simply identify some contrasting features of Aka and Ngandu cultures.

The Ngandu farm manioc, plantain, yams, taro, maize, cucumbers, squash, okra, papaya, mango, pineapple, palm oil, and rice. The domesticated crops provide the majority of calories to their diet during the year. They also keep chickens, muskovy ducks, goats, sheep, and dogs. Men hunt occasionally with crossbows, steel-wire snares, and guns for monkeys, a variety of small duikers, wild pigs, bongos and other mammals. All Ngandu grow at least some coffee as a cash crop. Ngandu men occasionally hunt, but they receive the

## *Intimate Fathers*

majority of their meat through trade with the Aka. The Aka provide the Ngandu with game meat, honey, *koko*, and other forest products, and the Ngandu provide the Aka with manioc and other village products. There are a government-supported school, dispensary, and police station in the village.

Ngandu women are the primary contributors to the diet but have substantially lower status than Aka women. Violence against women and children exists, and women seldom participate in political decision making. Men spend little time in subsistence activities and spend their time politicking, talking, and drinking palm wine with other men. Polygyny is about 45 percent, and fertility is slightly lower due to a greater prevalence of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) and consequent female infertility. Ngandu often remark about the exceptional fertility of Aka women, but only occasionally does an Ngandu man marry an Aka woman. Ngandu women never marry Aka men. Child mortality may be slightly lower among the Ngandu because the government nurse periodically provides childhood immunizations, antimalarial drugs, aspirin, and oral rehydration mix.

The kinship and marriage patterns are quite distinct. The Ngandu males live in the same house and village most of their adult life and have strong localized patrilines. The patriline is a social support network and is a major force in determining who helps whom in village disputes and in organizing ritual activities, especially funerals. The Ngandu do share food with clan and family members and hospitality is an important cultural value, but it is relatively infrequent in comparison with the daily sharing among the Aka. Ngandu males provide bride wealth rather than bride service to obtain a spouse, which means there is no temporary matrilocality among the Ngandu. If there is a divorce, the children belong to the patriline and will usually stay with the father's family. Among the Aka, children decide with their parents whom they will live with. Ngandu and Aka infants always stay with mother.

Ngandu draw attention to themselves whenever possible. If they have killed a monkey with a gun, have a new machete, or a new

blouse, they visit people to show off the item. This contrasts with the Aka pattern of prestige avoidance. Ngandu are also accumulators and material wealth increases both an individual's and clan's prestige. Aka seldom asked me for clothes or other material items while Ngandu were persistent and assertive in their demands for items.

There is greater standardization in Ngandu religious life. Beliefs in sorcery predominate Ngandu life, and it is not uncommon for an individual to be in the custody of the mayor or the police for practicing sorcery. Most illness and death are attributed to sorcery. Ancestor spirits are also important and can assist or cause harm to family members. Most Ngandu have had some exposure to Western religions. There are a Catholic and a Baha'i church in the village and Protestant missionaries make regular visits. A number of missionaries have tried to work with the Aka but none have succeeded in maintaining contact because the Aka move camp so often.

The Ngandu generally see themselves as the owners of the Aka. The Ngandu and their trading partners have the same clan name. Aka are expected to provide occasional gifts of meat, honey, or caterpillars to their *konza* (patron). When an Aka baby is born the Ngandu trading partner of the family is delighted because the baby represents another worker. Some Ngandu are relatively egalitarian in their relationship with Aka, while others are extremely exploitive. I have witnessed four instances of villagers beating an Aka because the person disobeyed, stole from, or cheated the villager.

Health and disease patterns are somewhat different. Ngandu have more bronchitis and respiratory problems, a higher prevalence of STDs, higher blood pressure, and a higher prevalence of goiter. The Aka have lower hemoglobins and a higher prevalence of yaws, splenomegaly, hepatomegaly, and tropical ulcers.

Socialization practices are extremely different in the two populations. Ngandu fathers provide a minimal amount of direct care to infants and children; mothers and older female siblings are the primary caregivers. There is no multiple care as described for the Aka; Ngandu infant care may be called "polymatric" in that the mother

## *Intimate Fathers*

usually gets assistance from an older female sibling or one or two other female relatives. Children are socialized to be obedient and respectful and can receive corporal punishment if they do not heed their parents' requests. I asked Aka parents what things they liked most and least about Ngandu child-rearing patterns. Aka parents did not like how often the Ngandu beat their children, but they did like how the Ngandu children listened to their parents!

Ngandu children have same-sex, similar age playmates early on because the village is much larger than the Aka camp. Cultural transmission is more horizontal (friends and peers-to-child) than vertical (parent-to-child) due to the different physical settings. Older children, especially girls, are expected to make regular contributions to subsistence and domestic activities (e.g., getting firewood or water and helping in the fields), whereas Aka children are not expected to contribute to subsistence until early adulthood, usually when they get married. Ngandu children learn to be deferent to elders, teachers, and village chiefs, whereas Aka children do not learn or practice deference toward Aka elders, the *kombeti*, or the *tuma*.

Village life and forest life are very different. In the forest the Aka are lively and playful during the day; dancing and singing occur most evenings. Autonomy, cooperation, and play characterize forest life. Village life is lively and social and long visits with neighbors occur throughout the day, but village life is more cautious and restrained. It is important to be sensitive to the needs of others and demonstrate deference and respect to many people—older brothers, parents, government officials, older male clan members, and the elderly.

This overview provides the backdrop for understanding the nature of the Aka father-infant relationship. The next three chapters link the various cultural components described in this chapter to various facets of the father-infant relationship. The following chapter outlines the methods used in the father-infant study.