# IN SEARCH OF HOMELAND: BANTU EXPANSION AS PRE-MODERN AFRICAN DIASPORA

By

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## A DISSERTATION

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#### ABSTRACT

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The expansion of Bantu speaking people is one of the longest periods of premodern human migration. Despite a century of research on their expansion into Central Africa, little is known about how Bantu speaking groups successfully traversed the varied landscapes of the Congo River Basin especially amid the cultural and environmental shifts that characterize the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. This study addresses the fundamental question of how and why was Bantu Expansion into Central Africa during the Early Iron Age successful? To answer this research question, I examined published and unpublished archaeological accounts of sites located across Central Africa from western Cameroon to southwestern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I then categorized the presences and absences of the archaeological material from each site to map when and where artifacts emerged during the Early Iron Age, ca 1000 B.C. to 200 A.D. Then I developed a framework for examining premodern African Diasporas which prioritizes massive, long term dispersal and the interregional connections such dispersals produce. Through analyzing an interregional network of shared cultural knowledge throughout the Equatorial Forest between 1000 B.C. and 200 A.D. I illustrate that Early Iron Age Bantu speakers were actively constructing connections to their homeland via the trade, technological, settlement, and aesthetic choices. The similarities and dissimilarities reveal an intentional pattern of interregional connection, previously thought to be discontinuous and disjointed. This research ultimately reveals that the patterning of behaviors strengthened their common local and regional identities and thus gave way for continuous reconnection and cultivation of the Bantu homeland.

Chapter One introduces the Bantu Phenomenon, the major models that illustrate cultural change, and the research questions that shape this dissertation. Chapter Two situates the research within major theories of cultural change in pre-historic Africa and outlines the pre-modern African Diaspora framework to explore mechanisms of interregional change given the duration and magnitude of the expansion of Bantu speakers during the period. Chapter Three explains the use of the existing published record of archaeological materials as the primary source of information for the dissertation. Chapter Four then discusses the development of the Early Iron Age package in the Bamenda Grasslands and the Northern Plateau of south western Cameroon. Chapter Five reports on the archaeological materials recovered from the Forest interior and Lower Congo serving as illustrations of the dispersion of the Early Iron Age package throughout the Congo River Basin. Chapter 6 presents the analysis of when and where behaviors arrived across these sites and the inter and intraregional patterns that emerge between the cases. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation with a re-construction of Bantu expansion as a premodern African Diaspora. This re-construction reveals the connections between the Northern Plateau, namely Obobogo and the rest of the basin as indicators for the establishment of the Bantu Diaspora that would persist for the next two millennia. Lastly, I suggest that future research would benefit from paying attention to both the continuities and discontinuities of assemblages at the regional level and how those connections change across space and time. This research contributes to the scholarly engagement with the origins of the Bantu Phenomenon and how it endured across the variety of environmental, cultural, and technological conditions of the Central African Early Iron Age.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather James William Starnes and my mother Darlene Elaine Starnes. Love Always, Blair Rose

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#### PREFACE

In 2002, my mother Darlene Elaine Starnes and I arrived at Michigan State University for the freshman orientation program. She encouraged me to explore the world and learn new things but never forget my hometown New Jersey roots. I would eventually travel to the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa always considering how my family, community, and background prepared me for these new experiences. Through wondering about how my past continuously effected my present, I began to consider how the past may likewise still influence modern times. Whether I explored historic coffee plantations in Cuba or rock art paintings in the Drakensburg Mountains of Lesotho, I continuously wondered about how these cultures that existed hundreds and maybe thousands of years ago impact our day to day lives.

This wonder led me to pursue a dual major in African American and African Studies (AAAS) and Anthropology at MSU. The former program provided a clear perspective and framework for understanding a group of people from their particular social, historical, and racial vantage point and the latter offered archaeology, a science that examines the past and a focus on culture, or the ways human groups behave and act as a group. As such, my project began by exploring the African presence in the Americas to understand the ways culture changes within the modern African Diaspora. However, those projects would eventually evolve to consider how and when patterns of cultural change identified within the African Diaspora first began to emerge. I wondered if they were strictly products of modernity bought on by the conditions of trans-oceanic trade of enslave people and its aftermaths or where these patterns of cultural

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change products of some shared *Africaness* that existed from the beginning of time? Or were there other possibilities scholar simple had yet to consider?

As my questions evolved, I moved my research focus to central Africa, and specifically the Kongo Kingdom to better understand mechanisms of culture change that may have been present prior to 15<sup>th</sup> century. Given the Kongo's extensive historic and cultural literature, I assumed their archaeological research would be just as robust. However, when I contacted Pierre de Maret in 2012, little did I know that they were beginning on one of the few archaeological projects on the historic period in Central Africa. It was only after learning KiKongo and working on the KongoKingdom field project with the University of Ghent that I realized that, perhaps, the questions of the impact of the ancient world, may indeed need to start with the ancient world.

It was at this point that I began the specific study presented here: understanding Bantu Expansion as premodern African Diaspora. I attempted an equally AAAS and archaeology project to identify what the African Diaspora would look like in the premodern era and why it is important to examine the Bantu Phenomenon as such. This project thus sought to traverse disciplinary boundaries to identify potential pathways for interdisciplinary work between AAAS/Black Studies and archaeology. This project thus represents a starting point in the reexamination of Bantu Expansion and the conceptual ground work for framing the Bantu Diaspora. My hope is that it reinvigorates interest in the distant past and how it continues to shape today.

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**



*Figure 1: Map of present-day distribution of Bantu languages* Letters refer to their grouping in 15 language zones based on their similarities (de Maret 2013:628).

#### I. The Bantu Phenomenon

The Bantu phenomenon, the presence of a closely connected linguistic, cultural, and genetic system across western, southern, eastern, and central Africa south of the Sahara Desert, has preoccupied historical understandings about the nature of cultural change in Africa for over 500 years (See Figure 1 for contemporary depiction of the Bantu language family of sub-Saharan Africa). One of the earliest modern historical accounts occurred in 1498 aboard Vasco di Gama's ship, when the chronicler noticed that Martim Afonso, a general familiar with the languages spoken along Africa's Atlantic coast could effectively communicate with several language communities on the Indian Ocean coastlines as well (Damião 1566:100). This initial interest in the commonality of the languages that spanned a continent continued well into the 19th century when the term Bantu was first coined by Wilhelm Bleek (de Maret 2013:627). The Bantu Phenomenon was also a point of interest during the early phases of the development of Black or African American Studies as noted in the 1940s when W.E.B. Du Bois stated, "Finally there are the Bantu, who are congeries of peoples, belonging predominantly to Central and South Africa and occupying the southern two-thirds of black Africa. The Bantu are defined on purely linguistic criteria" (Du Bois 2007:60). Since Du Bois's observations in the mid-20th century the Bantu phenomenon has grown to encompass 300 million speakers and 500 distinct languages spread throughout the globe. What first appeared to be a distinctively linguistic phenomenon soon morphed into a cultural, ethnic, and even racial category (de Maret 2013:627). This shift towards understanding the origins of cultural aspects of the Bantu phenomenon is the focus of this dissertation. Through examining the Bantu phenomenon as the result of adaptations to the emergence of the Bantu Diaspora, I have identified key mechanisms for the geographic spread and maintenance of Bantu culture.

## II. Understanding the Bantu Phenomenon

#### *Linguistic models*:

Since the Bantu Phenomenon was first observed as a linguistic system the prevailing frameworks for understanding are based on linguistic models of cultural change and connection. One of the earliest attempts at categorizing the languages was from Henry Johnston in 1919 who stated, "...it might be said that the whole of this southern third of Africa contained bus one indigenous speech family, the Bantu..." (Johnson 1919:15). This encouraged the perception that the Bantu "speech family" emerged from a single mother tongue (Vansina 1979). Later by the beginning of the 21st century Jan Vansina had identified several distinctive characteristics among the various Bantu speaking communities such as when the encountered non-Bantu speakers, the agricultural and technological skills each group possessed and the extent of exchange and intermarriage with Bantu and non-Bantu speakers, particularly in Angola, just south of the Congo River Basin (Vansina 2004). Vansina's work illustrates the shifts towards a complicated linguistic system, that did not move across space and time at a unified pace. The definitive recognition of Bantu speakers as complex heterogenous cultural groups reignited the debates about their origins, their contemporary experiences and the cultural, social, and political processes, events, and circumstances that occurred in between. This has influenced the current interdisciplinary strategies that have sought to combine environmental, economic, archaeological, and cultural frameworks with linguistic models to produce a more nuanced understanding the phenomenon (Bostoen 2015).



*Figure 2: Map of Central African Rainforest* Stars represent research sites. (Butler 2013).

#### Environmental models:

Central Africa is defined by the geographic zones associated with the Congo River Basin and the Equatorial Forest stretching eastward from and along the Atlantic Coast (Lanfranchi and Clist 1991, see Figure 2). These contemporary countries include: northern Angola, southern Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, western Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), São Tomé and Principe, and the southern border of Central African Republic (de Maret 2013). The defining geological feature is the Congo River Basin, a large depression that averages about 400 meters above sea-level, that begins at the East African rift Valley and extends to the Atlantic Ocean (See Figure 2) (Eggert 1993:291). The Congo River Basin is made up primarily of the Congo Rain Forest, or the Equatorial Forest, which makes up 8% of the continents surface area as it stretches from the coast of present-day Liberia to coastal Angola (Eggert 1993:291).

The Equatorial Forest developed over the last 40,000 years with significant climatic

events every five to ten thousand years (Clist 1989:62). The climatic events have created significant variation in the density, structure, and extent of the forest, particularly around 2000 years ago which produced both forest environments- dense primary and secondary forests that are humid and have an above average rainfall and savannas- non-forest, open areas that are arid more than two months out of the year (Gond 2013:2; Maley and Brenac 1998:145). As a result, the region is made up both savanna and forest environments which continuously shift- creating new open, less dense areas as access to and support of new plant and tree species. Both the forest and savannas vary in density, duration, and humidity levels to create distinctive zones, particularly along the edges of the Equatorial Forest or the outer hilltops of the Congo River Basin. Given the vast arrange of climates, geographies, and environments of the region, several models of cultural change have focused on the effects of the environment on human behavior across time, forest pathways models and scarcity frameworks.

The forest opening models argue that the fluctuating forest and savanna boundaries created access points for migration into and through the dense rain forest (Bostoen et al 2015:357). Therefore, the peopling of the region is attributed to the shifts in the forest which required adaptation to new environments and allowed access from groups the north and west. These new dryer savanna conditions likely caused the slow but steady introduction of macro-lithics, a few axes, and early crop cultivation of pearl millet as early as 2400-2200B.P (Neumann et al 2012:54; Lavachery 2001:244; Lupo 2014:59). The dry climate removed some forests, particularly along optimal travel routes like the SRI which aided in the southern expansion of Bantu speaking peoples. Likewise, the shifts in the climate introduced new crops such as wild palm that were added to the forest-based hunter-gatherer diet as the forest started to decline (Lavachery 2001). The forest openings are then understood to produce the environmental

conditions that support movement through an otherwise less hospitable region. This theory suggest that Bantu speakers were ultimately passive in their expansion into the forest as they were mostly prompted by the shifts in the environment.

Scarcity frameworks begin with the assumption that Central African Rainforest was generally inhospitable and as resources became scarce, communities had to move further south (Lupo 2014:59-62). Like the forest opening framework, this framework suggests that climate changes caused unavoidable shifts in the available resources as well as access to them and Bantu speakers would have to develop new settlement and subsistence patterns in other parts of the region. However archaeological data throughout the region suggests access to an abundance of resources and trade networks, thus reducing the probability that communities would move when resources became scarce.

#### Economic models:

The shifts in the climate and environments lead to shifts in their ability to adapt to new surroundings and access to resources. These circumstances increased the need for trade and exchange both inside and outside of the Congo River Basin. Trade and exchange become the major sources of innovation and thus cultural change for Bantu speakers. This trade could be for subsistence goods such as fish, ideas such as metallurgy and agriculture, and knowledge such as new subsistence strategies from the autochthonous populations. Further, along the lines of the scarcity framework, Bantu speakers who lived in open savannas relied on the forest products such as meat and may have secured those goods from the people who lived in the forest. Further, there is evidence of intermarriage which may have shifted social and political relationships between migrants and indigenous people (Lupo 2014). These exchanges produced an

interrelationship between these groups which supported the continuous migration of Bantu speakers into the forest (Lupo 2014:610).

#### Archaeological contributions:

Given the linguistic, genetic, historic, and even environmental antiquity of the Bantu Phenomenon, archaeology has been particularly suited to offer materially based evidence for various aspects of the emergence, dispersion, and continuity of Bantu cultural practices. Archaeological research suggests that Bantu populations entered the Congo Basin from the Nigerian/Cameroon boarder in a series of continuous migrations down along the coast and into the equatorial rainforest over a period of 2000 years (Blench 2006; Needham 1984). The distribution and pace of changes in microlithic foraging technology suggests that the migrations occurred during climatic events that caused the rainforest to recede and savannahs to expand allowing for better access to resources (Blench 2006:127; Bostoen et al 2015:358). Archaeological evidence also suggests that Bantu people exhibited a mixture of subsistence strategies such as cultivation, hunting and gathering, as well as various forms of trade (Blench 2006; Lupo 2014; Bostoen 2015). This has allowed for advanced theories on changes in food production strategies in the region. For example, although there is evidence of proto food cultivation during the Later Stone Age, food production sees a distinct increase during the Early Iron Age (Neumann 2012; Oslisly 2013). Also, aborio-culture remains a stable feature of both pre-agricultural and agricultural groups during Iron Age site in the region (Neumann et al 2012). The archaeological, archaeo-botanical and linguistic data show the distribution of the most common features of early food producers; pits containing ceramics, charred plant material and increasingly, metal objects parallel the linguistic maps of the Bantu phenomenon (Neumann et al. 2012). These overlapping conclusions indicate that the expansion of Bantu speaking people

correspond with the emergence of Early Iron Age culture in the Basin and thus support the assumption that the earliest villagers were most likely Bantu speakers (Neumann 2012; Oslisly 2013; Lavachery 1998). However, presently there is no strictly archaeological basis for identifying these sites as Bantu (Egger 1993:223). For the purpose of this dissertation and to remain consistent with present terminology, the parallels in the environmental, linguistic, genetic, and archaeological data are sufficient to view Early Iron Age sites as Bantu and thus illustrations of Bantu culture.

These models ultimately contribute to the shift of understanding the Bantu Phenomenon in purely linguistic terms to one that includes enduring Bantu cultural productions, stability, and change. Here a broad definition of culture is most appropriate because there are significant gaps in our understanding of the nature of Early Iron Age behaviors, identities and activities. Here I adopt the broad definition proposed by Stuart Hall, a definition that merely requires a shared history and ancestry... " which provide us with 'one people' with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of references and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history," (Hall 1990:223). Drawing on the expansive similarities and differences that develop among African Diaspora populations, Hall used this broad definition to establish a baseline of characteristics that unify an experience, which I believe is appropriate here. Nevertheless, these models set the stage for the prevailing ideas about Bantu expansion, for example that it was a colonizing efforts on the part of Bantu speakers, or it required power over the autochthons populations, or on the other hand, Bantu speakers were at the whim of nature and history and responding to changes as best they could.

III. The problem, research question, and research design

Given the last 100 years of systematic work on linguistic, environmental, historic,

cultural, and genetic aspects of the Bantu Phenomenon, some characteristics are now considered factual. The movement of Bantu populations is one of the most significant archaeological events in Central Africa due to the sheer magnitude of migrants, rapidity of cultural change, and lasting impacts on human behavior in the region (Bostoen et al 2015:355). The existing literature on Bantu expansion, interaction, and exchange rightly suggests that the expansion of Bantu speaking groups required the development of a variety of adaptive strategies including sustaining interactions across multiple regions as they are more familiar with these new environments (Mercader and Brooks 2001). Genetic evidence has most recently concluded that this expansion of Bantu speakers into sub-Saharan Africa was the result of population movements, rather than the result of an interregional trade language shared across various populations (Rowold et al 2016; Li et al 2014:5-8). Lastly, this population movement occurred during the same period in which villages, metallurgy, and early food production techniques were appearing across the regions (Bostoen 2015; Neumann et al. 2012).

Nonetheless, the issue of how these changes led to the development and endurance of the Bantu Phenomenon has yet to be fully addressed. The above models provide context for why people would move but not why such movement would cause such monumental changes. For example, with the scarcity frame work, if resources are scarce and the forest it inhospitable, why then would communities move south, further into the forest, rather than west and north? Or with the environmental factors, the Equatorial Forest is continuously influx, with pluvial and interpluvial periods consistently changing the nature of the forest (Eggert 1993:293). If that is the case, then why haven't there been numerous culture phenomena throughout central African prehistory? These questions seek to illustrate that while these models help to understand the context, they are insufficient for understanding the Bantu phenomenon.

Therefore, I developed the following research question to address the gaps in our understanding about the social and cultural change brought on by the movement of Bantu speakers into Central Africa: *How and why was Bantu Expansion into Central Africa during the Early Iron Age successful?* The 'success' of the Bantu expansion, or the ability of Bantu speaking groups to spread people, material objects, and immaterial cultural behaviors throughout sub-Saharan Africa, is well documented in anthropological, historical, and biological sciences (de Luna 2014). However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, scholarship on pre-historic African cultural change tends to focus on the external stimuli such as the environment or an external community. Further, such scholarship prioritizes the conservative nature of culture and leave little room for understanding the significant cultural and technological advances that make up the Early Iron Age package.

Following Colin Palmer's claim that Bantu Expansion represents the second major dispersion of African people, I identified key elements of the archaeology of premodern African Diasporas to assess the observable elements of the Bantu Diaspora for indications of its success (Palmer 2000). First, I examined four key regions of the Congo River Basin for evidence of connections between the Bantu homeland and the diaspora frontiers: The Bamenda Grasslands, The Northern Plateau, the Forest Interior, and Lower Congo. Next, I examined these regions for archaeological evidence of Early Iron Age trade, subsistence, settlement and technological change to assess the extent of intra-African dispersion and the construction of relationships with each other and a homeland. This process can be summarized in the following way; first identify the material record, analyze it for regional patterns of dispersion and connection, describe how such patterns aided in the success of the phenomenon. I identified patterns of similarity within the Early Iron Age package but also regional distinctions that appear to be more intentional than

previous literature acknowledge. I conclude that dissimilarity of specific artifact classes, for example ceramic form and shape, does not inherently mean a lack of interaction between groups. Further, I found that an examination of the patterns of both similarity and dissimilarity across artifact classes can reveal new insights into the construction of "homeland" by various diasporal frontiers. I ultimately argue that the success of the Bantu Phenomenon is due to the construction and maintenance of the Bantu Diaspora, a premodern African Diaspora. The significance in this research relies in the ability of this premodern African Diaspora framework to offer new insights into the interregional connections that affected Bantu speakers.

## IV. Dissertation outline

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1, the Introduction defines the Bantu Phenomenon and research problem, question, and design. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on cultural change in African prehistory and African Diaspora studies to construct a framework for premodern African Diasporas. Chapter 3 details my methods for understanding this phenomenon particularly the focus on the collection and analysis of the archaeological literature on the Central African Early Iron Age period. This chapter also constructs the basic tenants of archaeology of premodern African diasporas and possible forms of evidence to look for in the material record. Chapter 4 examines Case 1 The Bamenda Grasslands and Case 2 the Northern Plateau, both located in south western Cameroon along the Nigeria/Cameroonian boarder, the linguistic homeland of Bantu speakers. Chapter 5 presents case 4: The Forest Interior and Case 5: Lower Congo as these regions are in other parts of the forest and thus represent different strategies, connections, and developments of Early Iron Age culture. Chapter 6 offers an analysis of the four cases and a discussion of the findings in relation to the framework presented in Chapter 2. Lastly, Chapter 7 presents the Bantu Expansion as a premodern African Diaspora

based on the research. The dissertation ends with suggestions for future research that can contribute to a better understanding of the Bantu Phenomenon as well as suggestions for identifying other premodern African Diasporas.

#### **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### I. Introduction

While the how question has yet to be addressed within Central African Bantu Expansion specifically, the whys of cultural change in premodern or prehistoric Africa have been thoroughly examined across bodies of literatures. What was unique about the types of interactions, cultural processes, and effects on culture history for people on the frontier? What contribution can a frontier analysis make in the era of globalization, global authority of nation states, and near permanence of constant movement and interaction of people around the world? These questions provided the answer for the field: use the fields emphasis on politics, culture, and interaction to analyze these contemporary, ever changing frontier context (Helms and Loveland 1976). Helms and Loveland (1976), argues that through an analysis of regional and local context we can better understand the construction of global frontiers. The authors suggest that the Caribbean and Central America are a social, political, and cultural frontier. They explain that the multi ethnic power dynamics of this region can be understood as a framework for construction global frontier processes.

#### II. Frontier-metropole hypotheses

Frontier studies most popularly begins with the work of Fredrick Jackson Turner, a significant American historian from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Turner's (1894) essay is understood to be the earliest proposition for a basic framework for identifying and analyzing the social processes occurring and arising from a frontier. For Turner, the frontier is characterized as the boundary between savage and civilized, a world unhinged and free, a place of settlement (Turner 1894). The nineteenth century nostalgia of the U.S. American West becomes the impetus and definition

of frontier studies. Turner did not incorporate nuanced notions of power, colonialism, nor Native American agency when understanding the dynamics of frontier life in the US. Over the last century, scholars have emphasized the ethnocentric and narrow use of the Native American and European settler interaction as the basis for understanding frontier spaces worldwide. Nevertheless, Turner's work, despite over a century of critique, still structures scholarship on cultural change within a frontier context.

The defined boundaries of nation states create a different dynamic as groups who live on the borders are typically very clear about political authority in various jurisdictions. Ochonu (2015) examines role of violence in the economic and religious cultural changes in the lower Benue hinterlands of Nigeria (Ochonu 2015:204). In agreement with Parker and Rodseth (2006), Ochonu demonstrates the varying scales of power and influence from multiple sources within the frontier formation processes. Nineteenth century India provides another example of political impetus for the formation and continuation of a frontier context. Although British governance and punishment was largely structured by the British imperialist in India, the frontiersmen established a strict frontier boundary empowered by the Frontier Crimes Regulation (Hopkins 2015:371-378). This structuring and legitimizing of frontier politics on the British frontier demonstrate that use of administration and authority to organize and strengthen social life. In an urban frontier settlement of the Ottoman Empire, Mastan (2014) demonstrates how "identification agents", or outsiders, established unity among outsiders based on their social roles formed in the imperial center (Mastan 2014:16). Mastan, following in the long history of frontier studies, argues that by encountering indigenous groups, the outsiders created new cultural and social behaviors. Further, the frontier context established different patterns of behavior that made cultural productions diverge from those that occurred in central spaces (Mastan 2014:16).

Lastly, Igor Kopytoff's edited volume, The African Frontier (1987), is the most widely recognized source for understanding the nature of cultural interaction and emergence of complex societies outside of European interaction mechanisms. The frontier in Africa was unique because as Kopytoff purports, because ethnically ambiguous marginal societies on the outskirts of large established polities, or frontiers in Western literature, were the model of cultural change on the continent (Kopytoff 1989:5). Deveneaux's (1978) detailed overview of the history of frontier studies in Africa, demonstrates that the construction of an African frontier cannot be structured around the western philosophical traditions of Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx. Through a biographical sketch of a nineteenth century East African leader, Bennett (1971) examines the expansion and contraction of regional politics in East Africa. This volume demonstrates how local politics shaped Afro-Arab regional dynamics. Hess (1978) contributes another perspective on African-Arab-European interactions, through his analysis of the spheres of influence around the Mediterranean Sea. De Kiewiet (1942) assesses regional processes in the frontier zones of colonial South Africa, arguing that geographic segregation resulted in cultural and political frontiers of British, African, and Boer communities. These three texts demonstrate how analysis of local and regional context can help evaluate the entanglement of global relationships and the cultural and political boundaries that continue to shape social and political interaction today (Hess 1978:3-4).

#### III. Intra-frontier hypotheses

Social scientist inspired by the Boasian culture historic critique began to develop an interest into the cultural processes of non-western people. Analysis of the frontier is no longer framed by the political context alone; rather the social and cultural process that occur provide the most substantive insight into cultural change over time in the frontier setting. Bohannan and

Plog's (1987) chapter attempts to move the concept of frontier beyond even a geographic boundary to describe "any kind of interaction across cultural boundaries" (Bohannan and Plog 1987:9). This posture seeks to understand the types of cultural processes that occurred within multi ethnic spaces, regardless if these processes occur within a bounded geographic zone. The frontier began to be seen as more complex than simply a site of cultural domination of one group over the other. Further, the rate of acculturation was also more complex and often the process itself took on ethnic distinctions.

Barth (1969) uses ethnographic evidence from Africa, Asia, and Europe to compare dynamics on the frontier and those in cross cultural contact zones. Specifically, Barth proclaims that contrary to his social science contemporaries, ethnic boundaries are often strengthened in events of multi-ethnic contact. He states, "ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built" (Barth 1969:10). Stein (1980) complicates this narrative by emphasizing that social and political power is not always established by authoritarian rule by the larger, core metropolis over the periphery frontier context. In conjunction with Feierman cited below, this text demonstrates that the borderlands too control resources and socio-religious power which can be levied against the core authority. Feierman (1974) also demonstrates that the frontier was a source of power and initiated processes of cultural change. He examines the Shambaa, a regional political economic frontier in eighteenth and nineteenth century Tanzania. He demonstrates that market activity was multi directional and that the activities and needs of the frontier directly affected the needs and cultural developments in the more powerful surrounding cities (Feierman 1974:129-131). This text helps demonstrate that frontiers do not exist at the whim of the powerful centers. Rather, center political economics rely heavily on the social, cultural, and trade relationships developed in the hinterlands. The regional perspective also demonstrated that the frontier existed beyond the sites of rural isolation. The identification of urban frontiers, whose authority can lie outside of the core political areas as well as the frontier zone itself, highlights the significance of socio-political context among its neighbors and hos it shapes life on the frontier (Vlassenroot 2013:3171).

In Africa specifically, the social, political, and cultural formation on the frontier also affected interactions with the areas surrounding the frontier, not just homelands. Ogundiran (2014) demonstrates the significance of frontier-frontier interaction through an historic archaeological approach to the Osogbo of nineteenth century southwest Nigeria (Ogundiran 2014:6-7). The Osogbo frontier existed as a part of a regional network of frontiers. Political authority on the Osogbo frontier developed through interplay with the surrounding frontier networks, rather than an internal conservative dynamic founded on homeland behaviors as theorized by Kopytoff (Ogundiran 21:2014). In making the local global, Ogundiran (2009) investigates "interstitial frontiers" in the Oyo Empire of Nigeria, or non-metropole frontiers as a method to understand indigenous mechanisms of cultural production an authority in the region and uses these local realities to better understand the Atlantic trade (2009:356). Usman (2011) performs a similar task through in investigation of the peopling of the frontiers of northern Yorubaland in north central Nigeria. Usman's focus on population change invokes ethnogenesis, particularly during the time of mass movement of people during the Atlantic era. Peacock (2009) offers a collection of essays about the variety of frontiers surrounding the Ottoman Empire that expanded from central to eastern Europe and Iraq to Sudan between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. This comparative approach to the multiple ways in which a specific Empire utilized frontier spaces demonstrates mechanisms for social interaction at a large scale.

#### IV. Environmental hypotheses

The frontier zone offers a unique perspective on how human behavior shifts and adapts in relationship to the environment because of the inherent nature of culture change on the frontier. Frontiers are often defined by isolation that emerges from natural conditions such as water, forests, and terrains which often create forced boundaries between societies. Osei-Tutu (2006) examines the shifting cultural influences between two societies with contrasting landscapes one along the Akuapen ridge and those in the Shai hills of Ghana. Osei-Tutu uses the ceramic assemblages to demonstrate that cultural exchanges occurred between these societies, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however there was no evidence for sociopolitical influences (Osei-TuTu 2006:103). The landscape here, the ridge, acted as a physical boundary that constructed complementary needs for the two groups. Similarly, Rodseth's article addresses how the Himalayas in the formation of Hindu and Buddhist ethnic enclaves at the beginning of the first millennium (2006:90). The Hindu and the Buddhist both represent a homeland, core spaces, therefore this work illuminates a core to core model of interaction. However, the Himalayas create a natural boundary between these two societies because of the difficult terrain and isolation from the homeland networks. The author argues that the Himalayan borderland between Hindu military quest and Buddhist missionary expansions created a hilltop and valley systems that shifted through time and directly impacted ethnogenesis in the region.

#### V. Frontier cultural and identity construction frameworks

Frontier studies is also used to explain of identity formation processes. Parker and Rodseth (2006) identify three elements that impact identity construction on the frontier: one or more parties emerging from a "core", a core-frontier dialectic, and social interaction between the

products of this core-frontier dialectic and a new, unrelated group (Parker and Rodseth 2006:4). Further, Whitten demonstrates that African descendants in the Americas should be understood as frontiersmen because of their marginality to mainstream politics and economics. Whitten's argument for frontier identities also challenged the tenants of the frontier in that the construction of a frontier zone or frontier interaction need not be based on geographic isolation but power dynamics within cross cultural settings (Whitten 1974).

While the dominance of one political authority over another is readily apparent on modern frontiers, cultural change and the resultant identity (re)formation processes develop unique expressions of power on the frontier. For instance, the Ekie case in the Goba region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrates a continuous reconfiguration of political authority but consistent cultural ideological expressions of power at the regional level (Lancaster 1987: 106-107). Packard's chapter adds the element of multiple origins and narratives of first-comer and late-comer, where outside and inside memberships continuously change through time (Packard 1987: 150). Cultural identity formation processes therefore are continuously restructured as newcomers become indigenous. Such origin dynamics re-situate political authority as each new group claims power over previous groups and thus creates a socio-political climate that (re)connects authority among them (Packard 1987:130). These cases demonstrate both stable and fluctuating circumstances that structure identity formation processes on the frontier.

Lastly, the multi-ethnic context is inherent to the frontier but ebbs and flows as cultural change is determined by one group's social authority, cultural or political, over another. Isaacman and Isaacman (1975) investigate how European traders and farmers in Mozambique became subsumed into indigenous cultures over a period of 200 years. The authors use Philip

Curtin's concept of *transfrontiersmen* to demonstrate that within this setting, cultural change flowed in many directions, not just toward European, nor towards those with most political or military power. Finally, Smith (2006) takes an even more direct approach in his study of intermarriage and politics, which uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus to demonstrate how intermarriage reconstituted ethnic identities to construct political power between Nubia and Egypt (Smith 2006: 230-231).

#### VI. Summary of literature review

This chapter presented the prevailing theories on cultural change in premodern Africa. The initial theories suggested that the cultural similarities of Africa could be attributed to the power dynamics of centers over frontiers and the resultant conservative reconstructions of home culture in new spaces. Intra-frontier theories were also used to understand the interaction that occurred between the peripheries. Cultural change was also attributed to environmental factors where culture change emerged as premodern people attempted to respond to shifting environments. In both cases, cultural change is the result of external forces, be them political or natural, and how communities respond to them. However, this project employs the African Diaspora framework to assess the internal mechanisms of change that may be present in the Central African Early Iron Age. The following chapter illustrates how this framework incorporates the range of climatic, technological, and cultural traits to formulate a cohesive narrative of cultural change.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODS**

## I. Introduction

The goal of this dissertation is to understand how Bantu speaking people moved through Central Africa in such a short period; radically changing food economies, technologies, and cultural productions for themselves and those they encountered. I sought to understand these processes through answering the following question: *How and why was Bantu expansion into Central Africa during the Early Iron Age successful?* This research prioritized archaeological data to identify patterns in how Bantu speakers maintained cultural behaviors or established new ones given the variation in the equatorial forest during the Early Iron Age. In order to evaluate a broad set of archaeological sites within the research period, I relied on published and unpublished literature from Central African archaeology as the basis of information from which to identify these patterns. Ultimately, this chapter explains where, how, and why I collected the data to answer my research question. I also discuss my analytical approach and why I prioritized certain aspects of the data and presents the justification for my analytical framework.

# II. Data collection

The published literature on the central African material culture related to this project is for the majority split between 4 museum spaces: The National Museum of Yaoundé (Cameroon), the National Museum of Congo (DRC), The University of Tübingen (Germany), and the Royal Museum of Central Africa (RMCA) (Belgium). These institutions hold archaeological and cultural material dating at least to the 1980s and potentially would each serve as a compelling resource for understanding the interest of this project. However, the former three institutions typically have the materials from very specific sites and excavations. Further, as I examined during my pre-research at the National Museum of Congo in 2015 and the Bibliotheque Nationale de la Republique Democratique du Congo in 2011, these institutions were in the process of cataloguing and organizing their collections. The Bibliotheque Nationale had very minimal resources pertaining to pre-colonial history and culture in the region. At the National Museum of Congo, the archaeological materials, neither accessioned or properly catalogued and were not in a state for systematic research. Although the wealth of materials at the Museum of Congo cannot be understated, necessity to process, organize the materials to get to a point of research was beyond the scope of a dissertation project.

Ultimately, I chose the RMCA for my data collection as this museum holds most of the Central African archaeology and archival material. The RCMA is the largest museum of Africa and certainly Central Africa in the world. It is a major funder and supporter of the Central African archaeology projects, since the 1950s but certainly from the 1980s through the present. The museum maintains a consortium of archaeologists, curators, and archivist working on the region expanding and maintaining collections ranging from upper paleolithic to historic and contemporary times. Their collections, often on loan from Central African institutions, contain archaeological materials, photographs, field records, and videos. As a library-based dissertation project exploring patterns in material culture across multiple sites and regions, this project relied heavily on published literature found in the archives and collections at the RMCA.

Data collection at the at Cultural Anthropology and History division of the RMCA occurred from June 6 through July 21, 2017. I identified the published and unpublished sources considered data for the project from June 1st through August 1, 2017. I spent a total of 6 weeks in the Royal Museum of Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren, Belgium and the remaining weeks using the library resources for Michigan State University (MSU). As a library-based dissertation

project exploring patterns in material culture across multiple sites and regions, this project relied heavily on published literature found in the archives and collections at the RMCA. My first few weeks at the RMCA library consisted of photographing and digitizing relevant monographs, edited volumes, photo slides, and reports from their archives. I then digitized relevant Ph.D. dissertation and master's thesis chapters from these sites. With the help of Nadine Devleeschouwer, the archaeology reference librarian, I ultimately collected over 4GB of articles, reports, and dissertations. Upon my return to East Lansing, Michigan I continued my search of the digital databases such as included J-Stor, Google Scholar, and African Archaeolog.net using the MSU Library system from July 21 through August 1<sup>st</sup> 2017. I searched generic search terms such as "Bantu migration," "Central African archaeology," "Cameroon Archaeology," "African prehistory," "Early Iron Age" as well as specific terms such as "Shum Laka;" "de Maret;" "plant cultivation in Gabon" among many others.

I explicitly sought out materials that discussed archaeological data for the following archaeological regions; The Bamenda Grassfields, The Northern Plateau, The Forest Interior, and Lower Congo dating from 1000 B.C. to 200 A.D or the Early Iron Age. Each of the sites I identified for the project had publications on their initial archaeological findings, subsequent analysis, and additional insights spanning over at least twenty years. Lastly, these sites had subsequent fieldwork during separate periods of the historiography of central African archaeology, therefore they represent different modes of collecting and analyzing material overtime. These similarities and differences allowed me to minimize differences in fieldwork strategies to determine the composition of the artifact assemblages. I did not include articles that were explicitly theoretical or prioritized linguistic, human genetic, or ethnographic data over descriptions of archaeological materials. I also prioritized original publications of new

archaeological data for each of the site over publications that reiterated pervious findings. I included regional syntheses only when they included original archaeological data from the relevant locations.

Lastly, I included materials in any language, relying on my beginner French language training and google translate as needed. I also, necessarily, only included complete sources available through these methods during the period of research. These basic criteria; published sources that provide explicit accounts of archaeological material collected from these sites, significantly limited the number of sources I identified as data for this research. This exclusivity allowed me to focus specifically on the archaeological materials of the region rather than the theoretical linkages proposed between fields. This process revealed 46 sources that I consider as data (see APPENDICES A-D for a full table of sources).


Figure 3: Map of research areas

1) The Bamenda Grasslands; 2) The Northern Plateau; 3) The Forest Interior; 4) The Lower Congo

# III. Description of research materials

I conducted a meta-analysis of the grey literature on Bantu expansion in Central Africa to develop a timeline of when material based cultural behaviors emerged in the region (see Appendix A for a full list of these materials). This grey literature included dissertations, published field accounts and radio carbon date updates, bibliographies, and articles. The sources I used contained four main attributes; 1) has Central Africa or its borders as the geographic focus; 2) reports directly on archaeological fieldwork conducted on the phenomenon of Bantu expansion, either as primary or secondary data; 3) contains site specific information; 4) is accessible during the period of dissertation research (June-August 2017). The following is a breakdown of the sources I obtained for the research. The materials are broken down by the region as those were the primary categories for connecting the sites to Early Iron Age Bantu expansion (See Figure 3):

#### The Bamenda Grasslands:

The Bamenda Grasslands materials overwhelmingly focused on the Shum Laka cave site located southwest of present-day Bamenda, Cameroon. These sources span from 1987 through 2002 and represent the artifacts and analysis of the Early Iron Age/Stone to Metal Age timeperiod. I identified seventeen total resources: ten English sources and seven French sources. The French sources are comprised of one Ph.D. dissertation, one M.A. Thesis, and five articles from journals specializing in anthropology and environmental studies. The English sources are mostly book chapters and articles from 1992 through 2002 and represents expansions of the work presented in the dissertations as well as work relating to specific artifact classes such as the burials, lithic, and ceramic materials.

#### The Northern Plateau:

The Obobogo materials include descriptions of Obobogo, as well as the contemporaneous Nkang, Ndidan, and the Okolo sites along the hilltop ridges of in central Cameroon. I identified eight sources: four English and four French sources. Three of these sources are Ph.D. dissertations and one is a master's thesis. Since the dissertations are field based, they offer the most concrete articulations of artifact assemblages in the region. They often reference other sites

which help to demonstrate relationships among this group of sites. The articles represent the first introduction of the site and then 20 years of analysis of the sites.

#### The Forest Interior:

The Forest Interior represents the location where the Congo and Ubangi Rivers split within the rainforest. I reviewed eight sources from this region; four in English, two in French, and two in German. As a series of sites inside the Equatorial Forest, the Imbonga archaeological project represents a diversion from the work done on the coast and southern stretches of the forest. The materials include three book chapters and five articles published between 1984 to 2014. These materials describe early 1980s fieldwork in the Mbandaka regions along the northeast border corner of present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo. Of note, in late 2016 Eggert and Dirk published the Campo: archaeological research at the mouth of the Ntem River (south Cameroon), the first monograph analyzing the work at the sites in and around Imbonga. This volume is a much-needed contribution for the field but was not available during my research. As such I did not included it in this dissertation project.

#### The Lower Congo:

There is a total of fourteen sources for the Lower Congo group. Six of the sources are in English and eight are in French. There are five reports, six articles and three master's theses. These sources date between 1959 and 2016. The Ngovo group consist of sites in Lower Congo, the western region of DRC just north of Angola. These sites are located south of the Equatorial Forest and illustrate significant changes in the ceramic, lithic, and burial traditions of the central African Early Iron Age. Although this site represents the later period of the Early Iron Age, it also represents the earliest pottery classifications of the time-period for the region. As such, these materials illustrate the earliest methods of data collection and analysis of archaeological material

for the region.

This list of sources represents the available descriptions of the Central African Early Iron Age material culture. As with all social science and humanities work where there are frequently interviews are left undone, events left un attended, and units left unexcavated. As such, this systematic collection of the resources may have excluded valuable materials that fit within my research parameters. Nonetheless, the ones I have included have been referenced over the last thirty years as foundational text for understanding the material culture of the region (Eggert 1993: de Maret 2013; Vansina 1990). Therefore, the present analysis of the local, regional, and interregional changes of the Early Iron Age reflects nearly one third of the archaeological publications for the region and therefore adequately represents the material record to meet the goals of this research project.

#### IV. Data extraction and analysis

Once I identified all of the Early Iron Age materials from these sites and listed them based on publication, site, and region, I then moved to the analysis phase of research: understanding the spatial and geographic distribution of these materials as part of the Bantu Diaspora. The assumption, as stated above, is that Bantu populations sustained cultural behaviors which aided in their rapid expansion through the region through maximizing geographic and indigenous interactions (González- Rubial 2014; Rodseth 2006). To answer my research question, I developed a sequence of when Bantu settlements emerged and determined the extent to which these sites were similar to sites located within the homeland region. I then assess whether these variations were due to environmental conditions, interaction with other groups, or connections with the homeland. After organizing my sources based on site designations, I created excel spreadsheets to categorize the following categories for each excavation period for

each site: primary funding and support organizations, primary archaeologists, governing bodies associated with each excavation mentioned within each piece of literature. I then identified the specific excavation time periods, strategies, and context of material excavated from each field session. I then noted the listed excavation techniques and the laboratory and analytical methods employed. These first steps helped me to control for the variation of field techniques across the various site location and excavation seasons.

Next, I identified the different artifacts mentioned with their various relevant published attributes. For example, if there was a description of a burial, I noted the associated radio carbon dates, burial materials, location vis a vie the site and other artifacts, as well as its size when such descriptions were available. I made notations for the published levels, whether in stratigraphic or survey context. I included notations for each kind of artifact mentioned (e.g. polished stone, hearth, ceramic fragments, microlitihics, specific floral remains such as Musa residue, specific animal remains as well as evidence for the use and or production of iron. These spreadsheets allowed me to create a baseline to identify which sites had similar attributes at similar times. This also allowed me to identify the main artifacts present at sites during this period and when they appeared or disappeared at each of the sites. My systematic identification of where, when, how, and what artifacts were found within these sites revealed the following factors that shape Early Iron Age sites and activities at the local and regional level: the site location, use periods, immediate environment, floral cultivation, pottery production, lithic production, faunal use, and metal use. Once this baseline of when what appeared where was complete, I began asking questions of how they may have arrived there. The how question would indicate whether such items were traded or locally produced to allow to analyze these sites as a premodern African Diaspora.

In order to conduct such an analysis, I first examined existing frameworks for global, modern, and premodern Diasporas for possible indicators that would be relevant to the Central African Early Iron Age context. William Safran, Robin Cohen, and Ruth Simms Hamilton are representative of the variety of criteria that constitute a diaspora at these levels. These authors share an emphasis on the dispersion (whether forced or voluntary) from a center; retention of collective memory; conflict in the new area; and continued connection to the homeland/center. William Safran's work on the premodern Jewish Diaspora, serves as the prototypical diaspora for much of the field, provides additional criteria for distinguishing diasporas from other forms of movement such as migration (Safran 2005). To summarize Safran's criteria also include a desire to maintain cultural distinction from the host community, collective commitment to the restoration of the homeland and maintenance of cultural heritage and symbols of the homeland (Safran 2004:37). Robin Cohen adds categorization of diasporas, such as victim, trade, labor, and imperial diasporas, as ways to understand that different classifications will produce varying degrees of diaspora consciousness and identity (Cohen 2008:14). Cohen also proposes some additional common features such as: migration to two or more foreign regions, idealization of the collective homeland and collective commitment to it, frequent development of return movement, and a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over time (2008:17). The addition of specialforeign regions- and time- sustained over time- make Cohen's criteria especially appropriate for this present project. Ruth Simms Hamilton's focus on the criteria that emerged within the modern African Diaspora emphasizes the geo-social mobility of dispersed people meaning that they may move continuously through time, the importance of homeland connections, and the social inequality experienced within the new settings (Hamilton 2008).

This brief overview of diaspora frameworks presents a few common themes that may be

present in the Central African Early Iron Age as well as some elements that were most likely not present: the forced dispersal, the migration to two or more places over time, the construction of a homeland and maintenance of its connections; and experience of social inequality in the host land. On the latter point, given the endurance of Bantu speaking people and the linguistic and archaeological evidence on their interaction with autochthon people, it is unlikely that they were persecuted in their new communities. However, when one considers the climatic changes that were occurring, it is not implausible that the people of the Nigeria-Cameroon boarders were experiencing some pressure to leave and migrate into other regions. It is also clear that this group migrated to several different regions over a range of time and continued to move up until the present day.

This dissertation, however, is particularly concerned with the criteria of an intentional construction of a homeland and connection to it. Through combining frameworks for what constitutes a diaspora and what is known about the Central African Early Iron Age as stated above, I have identified the following observable characteristics that may be present in the archaeological record and which when considered together could indicated a premodern diaspora:

1) Required dispersion

2) Intentional connections to the homeland

3) Constitute a clear cultural, ethnic, or racial group

4) Inter and intra-regional dispersion beginning in Africa

5) Adaptations to new surroundings

These patterns are observable in the archaeological record and incorporate what is known about the Early Iron Age on the continent. For example, a shift in the floral and faunal materials can indicate a need for dispersion as well as intentional connections to the homeland. Observance of cultural traits at more than one location can be evidence of migration into more than one foreign location and when they may have arrived. Lastly, the unique ability to examine how these processes through time allow archaeologists a glimpse into how homeland relationships and connections may have adapted through time. Table 1. provides an example of the potential of this analytical framework.

Archaeology of Premodern African Diaspora						
Intraregional Location	Evidence of	Evidence of	Consitutes	Constitutes		
	Dispersion	Connections	Homeland	Diaspora frontier		
The Bamenda Grasslands						
The Northern Plateau						
The Forest Interior						
Lower Congo						

**Table 1: Premodern African Diaspora Framework Spreadsheet** 

#### V. Research challenges and limitations

Due to the nature of archaeological research in Central Africa, sampling issues were unavoidable within this research of which little remedy could be achieved. First, during the 1980s and 1990s archaeological research in Central Africa was primarily motivated by government or private construction projects which tended to focus on urban areas outside of the rainforest. This resulted in an overrepresentation of salvage projects or projects that develop out of the need for contemporary construction projects, along the forest borders or forest-savanna mosaic regions, or on hilltops in contemporarily populated areas. Therefore, the sites that are excavated and published tend to follow construction trends and thus concentrate around major cities leaving a large swath of the interior forest yet to be excavated and or published. As such, my data follows these trends, articulating a better understanding of the edge of the forest and leaving out most interior parts.

Further, since the projects tended to follow external construction and development projects, there was little support for continued analysis of certain sites and thus very few attempts to construct interpretations on the nature of cultural change across the region. Even when projects had the luxury of long-term field research lasting between 5 and 10 years, the analysis tended to identify a set of behaviors that existed within the space without attention to how or why those behaviors changed over time. This analytical limitation is precisely why such cultural histories are rare for Central African prehistory. By combining several projects across various regions, this dissertation attempts to lessen the impact of these limitations to produce an analysis of savanna, forest-savanna, and forest settlements and how they changed over time.

#### VI. Summary of research methods

This research sought to apply a premodern African Diaspora framework to understand the dispersion and connections that occurred during the earliest phases of the Bantu Diaspora into Central Africa during the Early Iron Age. To achieve this goal, I identified archaeological sites that exhibited the Early Iron Age package that is typically attributed to Bantu speakers. I then analyzed published and unpublished literature for descriptions of the material evidence of dispersion, such as the geo-temporal development of the sites, and evidence of connections- intra and interregional trade or intentional local or regional distinction. I collected the majority of my source material from the Royal Central African Museum in Tervuren Belgium and Michigan State University. I ultimately identified the Bamenda Grasslands, the Northern Plateau, the Forest Interior, and the Lower Congo regions and I cataloged the presence and absence of

different pottery types, EIA lithics, metallurgy, floral and faunal remains, as well as the site's location, local environment, and use period. These data points allowed me to identify when and where specific behaviors and activities emerged within the region. These designations allowed me to establish patterns of dispersal and concentration at the local level, indicating patterns that occurred within the homeland as well as those at the interregional level. The patterns that emerged within and between these spaces ultimately demonstrate connections that lasted through time and space thus producing the framework for identifying the premodern diaspora of Bantu speakers.

# CHAPTER 4: CASE 1: THE BAMENDA GRASSLANDS AND CASE 2: THE NORTHERN PLATEAU

## I. Introduction

This chapter presents case studies 1: The Bamenda Grasslands and 2: The Northern Plateau as they illustrate the earliest cultivation of Early Iron Age in the Congo River Basin. Case 1 focuses on the archaeological work conducted at Shum Laka, considered the linguistic homeland of Bantu speaking people. Case 2 examines the Northern Plateau and the fully developed Early Iron Age package.



Figure 4: Map of the Bamenda Grasslands

Star represents Shum Laka Cave site (Moyerson et al 1996:41).

#### II. Case 1: The Bamenda Grasslands

The Bamenda Grassland region is a mosaic of highlands and lowlands with both woodlands and savanna environments (See Figure 4) (Maley and Brenac 1998:145). These Grasslands are fed by the Gulf of Guinea which has supported the forests area since the Pleistocene era (Lavachery 2001:240). This location was unusually lush for this part of Africa (Lavachery 2001:214). While currently, the rock shelter is nestled in a savanna, the majority of the artifacts found resemble a forest environment during occupation leaving de Maret to determine that "not a single savanna element was found" in the preliminary report of the first large scale excavations of the site (de Maret et al 1993; de Maret 1995:14). Around 6000 B.P. there was a shift in the forest densities which eventually gave rise to the Bamenda grasslands. This environmental split gave rise to a cultural split that would leave the Bamenda region relatively isolated along its northern and western borders (Lavachery 2001: 241). There was also a roughly 2000 year gap between the Late Stone Age and the beginning of the Early Iron Age periods for the site observed in the stratigraphy of the rock shelter; 2 layers consisting of ochre ash with phases dating before 6000 B.P; and three layers of grey ash occurring since 4000B.P. representing the second wave of Bantu migration and the focus of this study (Lavachery 2001:219; de Maret 1996: 265).

The Shum Laka archaeology site is located in middle of the Bamenda Grassfields that would come to divide the western and eastern branches of Bantu culture. Initially, these branches shared lithic and ceramic traditions going back to the beginning of the Holocene, but the climatic shift produced a barrier which would split these cultural groups for the next 1000 years (Lavachery 2001:240). The site is located within a rock shelter situated behind a waterfall on a volcano 14km southwest of the city of Bamenda (Lavachery and Cornelissen 2000:153). When

occupied during its prehistoric times, Shum Laka was roughly 1,200 to 3200 meters squared and used for a variety of purposes discussed more below (de Maret, Clist, and Van Neer 1987; de Maret et al 1993; Lavachery and Cornelissen 2000:153).

### History of archaeology in the region:

The Grasslands had long been understood as the linguistic homeland of Bantu speakers and intermittent archaeological surveys were conducted as early as 1925 (de Maret et al 1987:560). The systematic survey of the Bamenda Grasslands began in 1977 at the behest of the continental shift towards studying Bantu origins and expansion. Abeke, Mbi Crater, Matupi, and Njinikejem were also surveyed during these early prospections and contributed to the culture history of the region despite not having substantive fieldwork in the following years. Abeke contained a clear occupation period while Njinikejem contained what looked like the only openair refuse pit in the Grasslands, possibly indicating a nearby settlement (Asombang 1988). Nonetheless, the thickness and density of Shum Laka's collections were a stark indication of logterm occupation and thus could potentially questions about transitions and cultural shifts linked to Bantu origins and expansion in the region (de Maret 1987).

In the winter of 1980 the Pierre de Maret conducted the first prospection targeted around Shum Laka specifically and observed, "Plusieurs sites mégalithiques et dix abris sous roche…" (translation: Several megalithic sites and ten rock shelters…) in the region (de Maret et al 1987: 560). Archaeologists quickly began working at Shum Laka and in 1982, Cameroonian archaeologist Raymond Asombang excavated 48 square meters within the shelter to reveal lithic traditions extending 10,000 years (Asombang and de Maret 1992). The next wave of extensive work occurred in the early 1990s under the Wide Bantu Homeland Project. These series consisted of several excavation periods from 1991 through 1994 which would ultimately uncover

over 80 square meters of occupation and almost half a million artifacts e (Lavachery 2001: 215). This work was primarily funded by collaborations between the University of Yaoundé, the Royal Museum of Central Africa, the University of Brussels, the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research, and the L.S.B. Leakey Foundation producing at least two generations of dissertations, master's thesis, articles, reports, and book chapters. At the end of the 1994 field season these excavations ultimately recovered one of the most complete records of human activity in the region.



Figure 5: Map of the Shum Laka cave site, present-day

Shum Laka archaeological site:

This section discusses the Shum Laka artifacts that are dated between 1500 B.C. and 200 A.D. or the Early Iron Age (See Figure 5). This section highlights when these artifacts first

appear and how and when they are replaced over time. My goal here is to illustrate how and when new behaviors where introduced and which ones endured the social and environmental changes of the Early Iron Age.

Lithics- Hundreds of thousands of lithic artifacts were recovered from the site within the grey ash layer associated with the EIA and they far outnumber any other artifact class in the cave. (Lavachery and Cornelissen 2000: 154). These materials were locally available from the volcanic and non-volcanic mountain ranges though no formal testing has been completed (de Maret 1995:2). A few interesting features to note are the appearance of macrolithic basalt tools at the bottom of the layer with a steady decline through time; a sharp decline in the number of hammer stones that indicate on-site flaking, and a decline in the basalt industry that dominate the LSA period, and a clearly delineated activity area with accumulation building up in a semi-circle along the cave walls (Lavachery 2001:233-4; Lavachery and Cornelissen 2000:159). Ceramics and Metal- By contrast the quantity of ceramic artifacts was quite small, numbering just over 1200 fragments, one-third of which could be refitted (Lavachery 2000:160). The pottery can be divided into three phases "between 2500-2000 B.C.,400 B.C.-A.D. 1200 and A.D. 1500-modern," based on radio carbon dates from the gray ash layer which can indicate either different occupation periods or the intensive erosion of the cave (Lavachery and Cornelissen 2000:160). They consisted of pot fragments that were low fired, rouletted, stamped, incised motifs (Asombang 1992). The nearby site of Njinikejem also located in the Grassfields, there is a refuse pit that contains pottery that typologically connect to ceramics dates to the earliest gray ash layer at Shum Laka and given its lack of roulette impressions predates 2500B.P. Thus, possibly corresponding to a sustained aesthetic, technological, and raw material practice that lasted through the early dispersals just north and east of the Grasslands near present-day

Yaoundé (Bostoen et al 2015:362). Metal objects are curiously absent given the long history of metal production in neighboring Nigerian communities such as the Nok which further illustrates the increasing isolation of the Bamenda Bantu speakers. The earliest metal objects date to around 400 B.C. and consist of one iron bracelet and an iron finger ring, dating around 400 B.C. (Asombang 1988; Lavachery 1996:270; Lavachery 2001:242). It would be another 300 years before concrete evidence of a full-scale metallurgic tradition would enter the cave as evidenced the carved incised and grooved pottery motifs observed in the upper ash layer (Lavachery 1996:270).

Faunal and Floral remains- There is a significant increase in the sheer volume of animal remains, even when erosion and post-depositional perturbances are accounted for. The kind of animals, mostly from the forest stayed mostly the same throughout the ash layer and included mollusks, reptiles, bats, rodents, giant forest hogs (*Hylochoerus menertzhageni*), civets (*Viverra civetta*), monkeys, apes, and bushbucks (de Maret et al 1993: 2; Lavachery 2001:231). There is also a marked increase in the presence of *Achatina shells* beginning in the Lower Horizon with a tripling in the Middle Horizon (Lavachery 2001:22). Plant remains on the other hand were a mixture of forest trees and savanna grasses and shrubs (Lavachery 2001:221). Most notable there was a sharp increase in the use of wild banana (*Ensete giletii*) and *Canarium Schweinfurthii* an edible tree both of which are savanna plants. There is also evidence that the latter plant was possibly protected and sometimes even planted based on its frequency increase during the Middle Horizon of the grey ash layer (Lavachery 2001:237). Lastly, wild palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), most likely the first plant to be cultivated by humans does not appear until the end of the middle horizon, well into the first millennium AD.

Human Remains- There were two funerary phases observed in the rock shelter. The first dating to roughly 5000 B.C and includes a 30-year-old anatomically male person in a contracted position and a "bundle of only long bones, belonging to a single individual" and a double burial of a 4-year-old child and a 15-year-old sub-adult with a nutcracker grave good (de Maret 1996a:275). The second funerary period begins around 1400-1000 B.C. and corresponds to the earliest gray ash layer of the rock shelter (Lavachery and Cornelissen 2000:161). There were fourteen burials recovered from the 1991-1994 excavation of 82 m<sup>2</sup> leaving archaeologists to estimate a possibility of 200 inhumations from this period (Lavachery 2001:243). One of the young individuals had an arrow still lodge in their hip during excavations and others had cranial and other bone fractures. These burials intentional and occurred in discrete tombs of mostly sub-adults with some grave goods included (de Maret 1996). Most of them included multiple individuals and at least two tombs contained additional human remains such as charred and ochre covered bones indicating potential secondary burials during inhumation activities (de Maret 1996:277).

Miscellaneous features- There is evidence of one hearth from roughly 2000 B.C. and shell beads that appear to be even older (de Maret et al 1995:2). To date, there is no evidence of additional shelters or structures relating to the Early Iron Age observed in the cave.

#### III. Case 1 Summary

The isolation brought on by the shifting of the forests, from roughly 1500 to 400 B.C at Shum Laka caused a 500-year period of stagnation in terms of the development of Early Iron Age culture. This is evident in the gradual shift in lithics, taking almost a millennium to develop a macrolithic toolkit and the lack of substantial evidence of nearby village sites. By the beginning of the Early Iron Age then, the people of the Grasslands had developed a markedly

distinct lithic technology, regional macrolithic technology which may have resulted from the need to cut the new trees of the emerging forest-savanna environment (Lavachery 2001:243). Further, the abundance of secondary processing materials as well as a wider range of larger game indicate a possible significant increase in the EIA population by the middle of the first millennium B.C. (Lavachery 2001:231). It is clear that at least some occupants had either exposure to or ancient experience with metallurgy and or arboricultural techniques as early as 1000 B.C as noted earlier the few metal artifacts and possible cultivation of savanna trees. Lastly, the increasing isolation of the Grasslands during the initial 500-year period of the Early Iron Age lead to the possibility of an increasingly inward awareness of the behaviors, beliefs, and practices of the group. These massive changes start to taper off by 400 B.C. leading to a period of stability and increasing complexity that last for the next 1000 years. Minimally, this is indicative of the establishment of normative cultural practices that endured the complex changes brought on by dispersal, agriculture, and metallurgy of the end of the first millennium B.C.

Shum Laka EIA Attributes					
Attribute	Context	Description	Timeframe		
Lithics	gray ash layer	macrolithic basalt tools, hammer stones	1500 B.C. to 200 A.D.		
Ceramic	gray ash layer	low fired, rouletted, stamped, incised motifs	2000 or 400 B.C. to 80 A.D.		
Metal objects	middle horizon, gray ash layer	an iron bracelet and an iron finger ring	540 A.D. to 880 A.D.		
Floral remains	lower horizon, gray ash layer	wild banana ( <i>Ensete g.</i> ), wild tree ( <i>Canarium Schweinfurthii</i> )	2000 or 400 B.C. to 80 A.D.		
Faunal remains	lower horizon, gray ash layer	mollusks, reptiles, bats, rodents, giant forest hogs ( <i>Hylochoerus</i> <i>menertzhageni</i> ), civets ( <i>Viverra</i> <i>civetta</i> ), monkeys, apes, bushbucks, <i>Achatina</i> shells	2000 or 400 B.C. to 80 A.D.		

 Table 2: Shum Laka Early Iron Age Attributes



*Figure 6: Map of archaeological sites of the Northern Plateau* Stars represent locations under study (Mbida Mindzie et al 2001).

#### IV. Case 2: The Northern Plateau

The Northern Plateau contains the earliest evidence of permanent settlement, food production, metal, and the end of the dominance of microlithic, as well as the continuous exploitation of both forest and savanna environments (See Figure 6). the sites that make up Case 2 are nestled within the plateaus that slope in a western direction from the mountainous region of the Bamenda Grasslands and are located on the extreme north east corner of the Equatorial Forest. This slope created hilltops and valleys that became open air settlements, not cave or rock shelter settlements, during the time period (Atangana 1988:25-26). During EIA occupation, plant and faunal remains indicate that these sites were in a forest-savanna matrix similar to Shum Laka (de Maret 1980:12; Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:157: Gond et al 2013:3). The sites under discussion here collectively are Obobogo, Nkang, Okolo, Nkmetou, and Ndindan, a group of sites that run north west from Obobogo for about 60 kilometers going up the Nyong-Sanaga ridge. These sites are contemporaneous, within close proximity, and have similar in structures and assemblages which offer an expanded level analysis of cultural activities for the time period. Further, pottery from across the regions had similarities that suggested affinities recognized as the Obobogo Group tradition.

Given the site's proximity to the capital city, these sites have offered continuous opportunities for excavations from between 1980 and 1985. The first excavations of Cameroon prehistory were done by colonial administrators in the 1930s with the vast majority of work done in the Sahelian environment of northern Cameroon., Obobogo specifically was first identified by J.B. Jauzé in 1944 where he found potsherds, polished stones and axes (cited by Mbida Mindzie 1996:31). Southern Cameroon so little activity because of the contemporary belief that the Equatorial Forest was generally inhospitable in ancient times. Under the urging of the 1977 Ie

Colloque international sur l'expansion Bantu (International Symposium on Bantu Expansion) 1980 Pierre de Maret and J.M. Asombang began prospections and surveys to prepare for excavation to specifically explore the Neolithic elements of the site (de Maret 1980:12). These initial excavations offered archaeologists the first glimpse of a large refuse pit which inferred a permanent settlement. The first excavations were conducted in the summer of 1981 by a group of students; Mr. Raymond Asombang from London University, Miss C. Atangana from the University of Paris I, Mr. C. Digara from the University of Paris, Mr. M. Elouga from University of Yaounde, and Mr. Christophe Mbida Mindzié from the University of Brussels under the direction of archaeologists Pierre de Maret of the Royal Museum of Central African, Tevuren, Belgium and J.M. Essomba, Minister of Culture from Cameroon (de Maret 1982:11). Subsequent excavations took place in 1983 which also revealed the archaeology sites of Nkang and Ndindan as well forming a north-western line of sites along the Nyong-Sanaga ridge. I have chosen to focus on this cluster of sites as they reveal a continuous stratigraphy that relates to the Early Iron Age and illustrate the range of activities in the region. These data were collected from reports, articles, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations completed between 1982 to 2001 (See Table 1 for complete list of sources).

#### Obobogo archaeology site:

The first archaeology site is Obobogo which is located in a southern suburb of presentday Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. Its proximity to Shum Laka and the temporal, spatial, and cultural connections between the two suggests that Obobogo was the first space of largescale dispersion and settlement outside of the Bamenda Grasslands around 400 B.C (Essomba 1989:53). Thus, the culture history of Obobogo represents the best indication of the development of homeland connections for Bantu speaking people. Obobogo is an open-air site defined by 8

refuse pits that were exposed as a result of construction. The work was carried out in two trenches, the first, Trench A, corresponded to Ceramic Stone Age Tradition which included grinders, decorated pots, and millstones (Essomba 1989:37). Bellow Trench A was a Late Stone Age occupation which produced quartz microlithic that were like most of the region dated to roughly 5000 B.P. (Essomba 1989:37; de Maret 1982:11). Initial radiocarbon dates from the 1980 excavation suggested that these pits dated to the beginning of the first millennium B.C. (de Maret 1982). However, subsequent research in and around the area as well as the ceramic typology developed by Phillip Claes suggest a much later date, more than likely to the second half of the first millennium (Claes 1985:145). The Early Iron Age at Obobogo extends from 1100 B.C. until the end of the first millennium B.C. and this Trench B assemblage is presented below (Essomba 1989:37).

Features- Eight pits were excavated in 1980 and they included ceramics, lithics, floral, and iron materials mentioned above

Lithics- The lithics recovered from roughly 40-50 centimeters below surface of Trench B consisted of polished stones, adze, polish axes, groove stones and grindstones which dated to around 1000 B.C.

Ceramics- The ceramics included richly decorated potsherds and consisted of a variety of forms and styles (Claes 1985: 131). The pottery fragments show variation between pits as well as similarity in form and decorative style (Claes 1985:125). Generally, the shapes are spheroidal or oval, and a concave neck (Claes 1985:126). The bottoms are flat and they are usually decorated with lines, circles, and other waves and polycentric designs (Claes 1985:127). Fauna- There were no osteological remains reported at this site (Claes 1985:137).

Flora- There was an 'abundance' of, edible palm tree nuts such as *Elaeis guineensis* (oil palm) and *Canarium Schweinfurthii* (fruit bearing tree) (de Maret 1982:12).

Metallurgy - There was undated slag found in Pit 7 and dated to the second century B.C. (Essomba 1989:38).

#### Ndindan and Oliga archaeological sites:

As stated earlier, the Ndindan archaeology site was found during 1983 regional prospections following field work at Obobogo. Ndindan is located roughly 15 kilometers west from Yaoundé and about 10 kilometers northwest from the Obobogo archaeology site. This site was excavated by C. Mbida Mindzie as part of the regional field work on Early Iron Age villages. Based on radiocarbon dating this hilltop village, was occupied between mid-7th century B.C. to the end of the first millennium A.D (Mbida Mindzie 1996:630). In 1988, aided by additional construction in the area, J.M. Essomba and J. Monteillet discovered the site of Oliga at the base of Ndindan hilltop just over a kilometer away (Essomba 1989:44; Mbida Mindzie 1996:36). Radiocarbon dates from Oliga span the last millennium B.C. into the third century AD, though most of them overlap with the occupation dates from Ndindan (Essomba 1989:44-45; Mbida Mindzie 1996:629).

Features: Nindan consisted of 7 shafts that contained stone tools, ceramic fragments, and iron slag (Essomba 1989:39). The only feature excavated at Oliga was an iron furnace. Lithics- Lithics from Ndindan were primarily made up of local sources such as quartz and silica and consisted of millstones, wheels, and strikers typical of the first millennium B.C. of the region (Mbida Mindzie 1996:638).

Ceramics- Ceramics consisted of flat bottom vessels with beveled edges (Essomba 1989:39).

Fauna- There were no bones or indication of faunal remains found in the pit (Mbida Mindzie 1996:629).

Flora: *Canarium schweinfurthii* and *Elaeis guineensis* endocarps were present in all the pits and the rest of the materials await further study (Mbida Mindzie 1996:629). *Pennisetum sp.* was also embedded in two ceramic sherds found at the site (Kahlheber et al 2014:498).
Metallurgy - Iron slag was found in one of the pits at Ndindan and dated to 400 B.C. to 400 A.D. (Mbida Mindzie 1996:638, 641). The Oliga fieldwork revealed an iron furnace at the eastern

base of the Ndindan hilltop site that structurally resembled the construction of 6th century B.C.

Nok furnaces from Nigeria (Essomba 1989:44; Mbida Mindzie 1996:493,629).

#### Nkang archaeological site:

The Nkang archaeology site is an open-air site located 70 kilometers northwest of present-day Yaoundé (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000: 151). As noted earlier the site was first recorded in 1983 during field work related to Obobogo during local road construction which exposed the 14 refuse pits found in situ inside an embankment (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:153). The 1983 field work consisted of excavating fully excavating and analyzing 3 of the 14 pits ranging from 3 to 15m2 and charcoal dates the site to between 500 and 150 B.C (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:152). No Late Stone Age materials were recovered leaving archaeologist to determine that the Early Iron Age lasted from roughly 2580-2170 B.P. (Mbida Mindzie et al 2001:1) Features- This site contained 14 shafts that contained pottery and lithics, eleven of those were excavated and analyzed (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:1). Mbida et al describe the pits as "either bottle-like, ovoid or cylindrical in shape, and their volumes ranged from 3 to 15 m2 (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:152). The pits were filled with "local soil, broken ceramics and stone tools, iron slags, charcoal and faunal remains (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:153).

Lithics- Lithic materials were similar to Obobogo and consisted of grinders, grinding stones, hammerstones, and polished axes (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:153).

Ceramics- Ceramics at Nkang had a collar neck and were oval shaped and appeared to be decorated with nut shells and contained had impressions on both the inside and outside (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:153).

Faunal- Animal remains included fish such as *Lates niloticus* (perch), some goats, sheep, and shells such as mollusks and *Achatina* shells (land snails) (Mbida Mindzie 1996:650-651, 653; Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:159). The *Achatina* shells had punctured holes in the center (Mbida 1996:200).

Flora- In addition to the typical *Elaeis guineensis* and *Canarium Schweinfurthi*, found at Obobogo and Shum Laka, Nkang also contained evidence of *Musa* (wild banana) found in Pit 9 180-300cm deep and dated to between 770-380 B.C. (Mbida Mindzie et al 2001:5). The phytoliths were found both on charred residues found on pottery as well as within the sediments of the pit (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:154).

Metallurgy- Slag and tuyere fragments were recovered from two pits which date to the EIA. (Mbida Mindzie 1996:648).

#### V. Case 2 Summary

Similar to Shum Laka, this region had Late Stone Age materials that dated between 5000-4000 years B.P. with a Ceramic Stone Age appearing at the end. In terms of Early Iron Age materials, the lithics seemed to be axes, adzes, grinding stones and other tools that were typically used for chopping trees, grinding grains, and other activities typically associated with village life.

The region is defined by the Obobogo Group ceramic tradition, which is found across Obobogo, Nkang, Ndindan, and Oliga (Claes 1985, 1992). These ceramics are characterized by

their collared neck and oval shape (Claes 1985; Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:153). The pottery at Nkang is slightly distinct in that it is slightly thicker than what is found in other parts of the region (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:153). This is most likely because Nkang is considered the northern limit of the Obobogo tradition (Claes, 1985; de Maret, 1991; Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:153). The ceramics from Nkang also represented a shared understanding of pottery production although some variation was present (Mbida Mindzie 1996: 475). Although the pottery tradition is similar, there is no indication of a pottery trade between the sites but was most likely produced at the household or village level across the sites (Mbida Mindzie 1996:645).

Due to the acidity of the soil in this region faunal remains-specifically bones are scarce. The majority of the faunal information then comes from Nkang. Some interesting elements are the perch and the *Achatina* shells. The perch is not local to the area and was more than likely obtained through trading (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:159). Nkang also has sheep and goat bones that indicate a modest breeding tradition, based on the low quantity of bones found (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:159). The *Achatina* shells are interesting because they 1) come from the Atlantic Ocean; 2) had holes punctured into them; and 3) have often been linked to trade currencies in the region. Mbida Mindzie determined that the shells were most likely traded through local micro regional trades from the coast into the region and then used as currency in a northern direction along the rivers (Mbida Mindzie 1996:653). The circular holes in the middle of the shells may also be attributed to adornment but further analysis is needed (de Maret, 1985b: 166; Mbida Mindzie 1996:650).

The floral evidence at these sites was well preserved and provide substantive information on the dietary, technological and trade practices of this region. Each of the sites *contained Elaeis* 

guineensis and Canarium Schweinfurthii indicative of adaptation to both forest-savanna mosaic environments. One idea is that the trees found at Nkang were used for construction and for fuel for metal production (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:157). Nkang however had evidence of Musa sp., which was domesticated in Indonesia and no wild species have yet been observed in prehistoric Africa (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:157; Mbida Mindzie et al 2001:2). Therefore, evidence of EIA cultivation in this region can only be the result of a long-distance trade network stretching to East Africa (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:157). As Mbida Mindzie et al explains, "... Musa is of Asian origin, and this study provides the first concrete evidence of contacts across the Indian Ocean a millennium earlier than currently accepted" (Mbida Mindzie et al 2001:1). Further, this plant is an ideal crop for rainforest agricultural practices and are thought to indicate an increase in the population capacity of these villages (Vansina 1990; Mbida Mindzie et al 2001:5). Lastly, this plant is significant as it is the first archaeologically identified crop in Central Africa and it appears in the first millennium B.C. (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:157).

While iron or slag fragments were found at all the sites, the most significant find is the furnace at Oliga as it represents an intimate knowledge of production rather than the acquisition of items through trade. This feature then illustrates that these interconnected villages began using iron technology just as they began to disperse into the forest. The peculiar shafts found at Obobogo, Nkang, and Ndindan are also found throughout the Congo River Basin. While the uses appear to vary from site to site, they are generally interpreted as either animal traps, some sort of grain storage system, clay extraction reserves, and most recently grave sites (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:152; Meister and Eggert 2008:199).

The general activities of this region consisted mostly of local production of crops, iron, and pottery with access to a vast trade networks to the north, south, and east. These villages most

likely were mainly hunters and used traps and snares as well as a regional trade economy. There is also a shift in lithic technology towards more agriculturally focused activities such as crop cultivation and production and animal husbandry (Mbida Mindzie et al 2000:160). This cluster of late first millennium B.C. hilltop settlements is currently the earliest known settlement outside of the Bamenda Grasslands. Obobogo was the largest space of all of the sites and could have been the regional market location based on its variety and volume of materials while Oliga could have been the iron production site within Ndindan village or its closest neighbor (Mbida Mindzie 1996).

The settlement of Obobogo and surrounding villages is the earliest complete record of Early Iron Age activities- villages, iron production, agriculture, effective use of savanna-forest environments- but also the development of extensive trade networks spanning from the northern Sahelian areas, down to the southern Atlantic coast and into the East African- Indian trade economies. These changes then began appearing in successive ways both in and around the forest-savanna regions. The next case study looks at such changes in an interior part of the forest to illustrate where and when these practices begin their eastward development.

The Northern Plateau EIA Attributes						
Attribute	Context	Description	Timeframe			
Lithics	Obobogo	polished stones, adze, polish axes, groove stones and grindstones	1100 B.C 100 B.C.			
	Ndindan	millstones, wheels, and strikers	750 B.C 1000 A.D.			
	Nkang	grinders, grinding stones, hammerstones, and polished axes	500 B.C 150 B.C.			
Ceramics	Obobogo	spheroidal or oval shapes, a concave neck; flat bottoms, decorated with lines, circles, and other waves and polycentric designs	1100 B.C 100 B.C.			
	Ndindan	flat bottom vessels with beveled edges	750 B.C 1000 A.D.			
	Nkang	collar neck with oval shaped; decorated with nut shells and impressions on the inside and outside	500 B.C 150 B.C.			
Metal	Obobogo	slag	200 B.C.			
	Ndindan	iron slag	400 B.C. to 400 A.D.			
	Oliga	iron furnance	1000 B.C 300 A.D.			
	Nkang	Slag and tuyere	500 - 150 B.C			
Floral Remains	Obobogo	wild palm ( <i>Elaeis guineensis</i> ), wild tree ( <i>Canarium Schweinfurthii</i> )	1100 B.C 100 B.C.			
	Ndindan	wild palm and wild tree endocarps	750 B.C 1000 A.D.			
	Nkang	wild palm, wild tree, and wild banana ( <i>Musa</i> )	770 B.C 380 B.C.			
Faunal remains	Obobogo	none found				
	Ndindan	none found				
	Nkang	perch ( <i>Lates niloticus</i> ), goats, sheep, mollusks and land snails ( <i>Achatina</i> )	500 - 150 B.C			

# Table 3: The Northern Plateau Early Iron Age Attributes

#### VI. Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the data associated with the initial phase of the Early Iron Age in the Bamenda Grasslands and the Northern Plateau regions of the Congo River Basin. The Bamenda Grasslands have been the well-established as the linguistic homeland of the Bantu speakers (Asombang and de Maret 1992:13; Li et al 2014:2; Lavachery et al 2000:154; Vansina 1984:132-135). However, the archaeological signatures present an alternative view. There is little evidence of a complete Early Iron Age package and their period of isolation during the formative years of the emergence of the Early Iron Age suggest that they were most likely not the origin of such behaviors. This may be why scholars like Lavachery insist on describing this period as the "Stone to Metal Age" because it does not ultimately represent the behaviors that would emerge alongside early Bantu speakers (Lavachery 1996). This case document the some of the activities that were present during the beginning of the Early Iron Age. Case 2: The Northern Plateau provides the evidence for the initial settlements outside of the Bamenda Grasslands and evidence of local, regional, and interregional trade from the Atlantic Ocean to the west and Sahara to the north. These village settlements demonstrate that these occupants had iron technology, began cultivating wild bananas, and pearl millet, and they became accustomed to their forest-savanna mosaic environment: a shift from the isolationism of Shum Laka. The Northern Plateau also exhibits the Early Iron Age characteristics that who would eventually inhabit central, southern, and eastern regions of the African continent. This cultural complex was not just a random, disjointed assortment of practices; rather they had established subsistence, technological, and trade networks that indicated a group awareness. The next chapter will illustrate when, how, and where these features appeared across the Congo River Basin.

# CHAPTER 5: CASE 3: THE FOREST INTERIOR AND CASE 4: THE LOWER CONGO

# I. Introduction

This chapter presents case studies 3: The Forest Interior and 4: The Lower Congo as they illustrate Early Iron Age activities a significant distance from the Cameroon sites of the last chapter. Case 3 focuses on the archaeological work conducted within the forest in and around the Congo and Ubangi River split. Case 4 examines the occurrence of these activities along the southern extremities of the forest in the Lower Congo region. Together, these cases illustrate the evidence of the development of these practices and for trade across the region.



Figure 12: Map of archaeological sites of the Forest Interior
1) Imbonga Horizon; 2) Batalimo-Maluba Horizon; 3) Pikunda-Munda Horizon.

#### II. Case 3: The Forest Interior

Current theories on Bantu expansion suggests that there were two pathways, one in an eastern direction further into the forest and one in a southern direction along the coast. Case 3 presents evidence for the former. This case focuses on the area north and south of the Congo River bend in northern Democratic Republic of the Congo (See Figure 7). Due to its location around the Congo River, this location contains to numerous rivers and tributaries that connect the Congo River to into Central African Republic to the north and the Republic of Congo to the west (Eggert 1993: 295). Despite the climatic changes that occurred around 1500 B.C., the numerous rivers and annual rainforest have fueled the growth of the evergreen rainforest that is known today (Eggert 1993:294). This part of the inner basin did not experience a forest retreat as seen at Obobogo and Shum Laka but maintained a mature, secondary forest mosaic throughout the time period under consideration here (Kahlheber et al 2014: 501). It is for these reasons that for at least 100 years, colonial administrators, historians, researchers, and archaeologists viewed Equatorial Forest as a whole as in hospitable and impenetrable (Eggert 1993:290). These perceptions of a static unchanging forest were disrupted during the mid-1980s as environmental specialists began to understand the relative fluctuations in the forest density and extension and archaeologists began to understand the extensive and ever adapting tool kit of Central African people (Mercader and Brooks 2001:197-198). Within that spirit of renewed possibility of human activity deep within the forest, Eggert and a team of archaeologist from Germany began investigating such activities to understand who these early occupants were, how they survived within the forest, and how they interacted with the regions around them. Do date, this work remains the most extensive archaeological research conducted within the forest and presents the best indications of Early Iron Age occupation.

The initial archaeological survey of the region was led by Manfred Eggert and took place in 1977. This archaeology team returned in 1983 as the Rivers Reconnaissance Project and mapped the riverways between the Congo River and the Ubangi river which headed north into Central African Republic. Funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft of Germany, this project, "surveyed several hundred villages and other places of potential archaeological interest" across an overall distance of 5000 kilometers (Eggert:1987:129; Eggert 1993:295). This project was focused on developing local chronologies that would serve as a backbone for future research (Eggert 1993:295). The results included an enormous among of ceramic materials which at sometimes were the only materials recovered from the surveys and excavations. This led to the identification of three ceramic horizons that make up the cultural history of the region- the Imbonga, Batalimo-Maluba, and the Pikunda/Munda horizon. As such, Case 3 focuses on the Early Iron Age assemblages that correspond with these ceramic traditions.

#### Imbonga Horizon:

The Imbonga type site was first surveyed in 1977 with subsequent excavations in 1983 along the Momboyo river bank (Eggert 1987:130). This ceramic horizon dates between 400 and 200 B.C (Eggert 1993:306). The pottery was found across 54 separate sites along the Momboyo River and its connecting waterways, 23 of which were fully excavated across a 10-year period (Kahlheber et al 2014:483).

Features- Circular pits containing Imbonga pottery were observed throughout the riverbank surveys. These pits were up to 1 meter across and 1.7 meters deep any "densely packed" with pottery fragments as well as in tact pots (Eggert 1987: 131). It appears that the broken pots were most likely broken in situ as they could be put back together in the laboratory with relative ease (Kahlheber et al 2014: 483)

Lithics- One curiosity of the Imbonga type site and subsequent findings connected to the horizon is that there are no lithics observed over the course of 4 seasons of fieldwork (Egger 1987:131). Ceramics- Imbonga pottery is known for its flat base, regardless of vessel shape or use, and grooved, impressed, incised, or adorned pots, bowls, and bottle and beaker like forms (Eggert 1987:130). The pottery dates to the second half of the first millennium (Eggert 1993:306). Fauna- No faunal remains were described.

Flora- Soil sieving revealed endocarps of *Elaeis guineensis* and fruits from the *Canarium Schweinfurthii* (Eggert 1987;132; Eggert 1993:323)

#### Boso-Njafo:

Boso-Njafo was first excavated in 1985 as part of the River Reconnaissance Project. This site is located on the Lulonga River roughly 124 kilometers from Imbonga (Eggert 1984:248). Features- 12 circular pits filled with pottery fragments were found in area of roughly 300m2 and three of these pits were analyzed (Wotzka 1995:382). These pits contained multiple intruding pits that indicated continuous reuse after the middle third century calibrated B.C. (Eggert 2014:484).

Lithics- No lithics were reported from this site.

Ceramics- Ceramic analysis connects this site to the Imbonga horizon (Kahlheber et al 2014). Fauna- No fauna remains were reported from this site.

Floral- Over a dozen species of plants were identified from two pits at the site. The most "common and abundant plant" species is *Elaeis guineensis* but no *Canarium* s. was reported (Kahlheber et al 2014:493). There was also *Pennisetum glaucum* (pearl millet) materials found in in one of the pits as far as 80-100 centimeters deep, as well as Raphia palm and *Aframomum* sp.

(a member of the ginger family). (Kahlheber et al 2014: 486, 494, 500). See Kahlheber et al 2014 pages 487-492 for a complete list of plant materials found in the pit. Metallurgy- No iron materials were reported from this site.

#### Batalimo-Maluba Horizon:

Located on the northern side of the Lobaye River, a tributary of the Ubangi River in present day Central African Republic, the Batalimo archaeology site was excavated in 1968 by R. de Bayle des Hermens (Eggert 1987:135). In 1985, the River Reconnaissance Project found similar materials at Maluba, a separate archaeology site located on the Lua river, an eastern tributary of the Ubangi located less than 50 kilometers from Batalimo (Eggert 1993:306). The ceramics recovered from this site also contained flat bottoms, were highly decorated and had similar neck and rim shapes as the Batalimo tradition but were dated to the last half of the first millennium B.C., predating the Batalimo tradition by a few hundred years (Eggert 1993:308). Thus, the two traditions form the Batalimo-Maluba Horizon dating from roughly 400 BC to 562 A.D. (Eggert 1993:311). The discussion below describes the assemblage from the Maluba site with mention of the lithics and ceramics recovered from Batalimo.

Features: Maluba had an interesting feature that consisted of three intersecting pits varying from between 40 to 100 centimeters in diameter (Eggert 1987:137). The pits contained various quantities of Batalimo pottery, but Pit 3 also contained human remains. The burial consisted of a secondary burial of a human skull and fragmented long bones. The bones were organized with the skull and two long bones, "an ulna and possibly a radius" in the middle of the 5 other long bones arranged in a semi-circular pointed towards the skull (Eggert 1987:139). Pit 3 appeared to be younger than Pit 2 but its relationship to Pit 1 is yet to be determined. Only Pits 1 and 2 could
be dated and they range from around 140 B.C. to roughly 70 B.C. with a controversial fourth date of 3rd century B.C. for Pit 1 (Eggert 1987:141).

Lithics- Hermens discovered several hundred ceramic fragments as well as stone tools; polished stone axes, scrappers, flakes, and unmodified waste which dated to the middle of the first century A.D, (Eggert 1993:311). There were no lithics reported from Maluba (Eggert 1993:326). Ceramics- The pottery in this horizon can be divided into two categories; the first group consists of flat-based and richly decorated vessels while the second group consists of undecorated bowls with a slightly constricted opening and an accentuated foot (Eggert 1987:134 citing Aumassip 1975). These ceramics, with characteristically intricate designs and flat bottoms, were also well polished and highly refined for typical EIA wares (Eggert 1987:136). The pottery specifically from the Maluba excavations were specifically "well-structured globular pots and wide mouthed bowls" (Eggert 1933:308).

Faunal- No faunal remains were reported (Eggert 1993:325).

Floral- Endocarps of *Elaeis guineensis* were recovered from unspecified context at Maluba (Eggert 1993:324).

Metallurgy- No iron objects were reported (Eggert 1993:326).

#### Pikunda-Munda Horizon:

In 1987 the River Reconnaissance project conducted a 6-month field season on the Sangha-Ngoko rivers a northern tributary of the Congo River (Eggert 1992: 10). A few sites were found of which two have been adequately tested and are thus included in this present study: Pikunda and Maluba.

## <u>Pikunda</u>

Features- The field team partially excavated a shaft that was 3 meters deep which contained two pottery phases and a small iron tool (Eggert 1993:326).

Lithics- No lithics were reported.

Ceramics- These ceramics consisted of horizontal bands and wavy lines as well as comb-

stamped decorations, round bases, bottle- like (Eggert 1993:314).

Faunal- No faunal remains were reported (Eggert 1993:325).

Floral- No floral remains were reported.

Metallurgy- One small unidentified iron tool with an apparent spatula like blade at one end was found in the lower half of a shaft (Eggert 1993:326).

## <u>Munda</u>

Located on the Likwala-aux Herbes river less than 50 kilometers north of Pikunda, the Munda site also defines the ceramic horizon for this region (Eggert 1992:16; Eggert 1993:305). Similar to the style and form of the Pikunda pottery, the Munda pottery dates between 353 B.C. and 435 A.D. (Eggert 1992: 16).

Features- This site contained two shafts and a "shallow bowl-like" pit (Eggert 1993:311). One of the shafts was packed with pottery and displayed evidence of intense heat and contained a "considerable portion of slag" (Eggert 1993:326).

Lithics- None reported from the Munda site.

Ceramics- Consisted of "wide-mouthed bowls with approximately parallel sides and a flared rim" and included globular pots, bottle-like vessels and round bases (Eggert 1993:311). The designs were grooved and incised horizontal lines (Eggert 1993:311).

Faunal- None reported from the site (Eggert 1993:325).

Floral- Endocarps of *Elaeis guineensis* were recovered from unspecified context (Eggert 1993:324).

Metallurgy- The shafts showed evidence of "intense heat" and the fill contained "a very considerable proportion of iron slag" (Eggert 1993:326).

## III. Case 3 Summary

In general, Early Iron Age interior forest settlements begin in the second half of the first millennium B.C. and continue until 400 A.D. Pottery entered the region as early as 400 B.C. and iron production soon followed as early as the second century at Munda. Individually, these sites represent different environments of EIA development- Imbonga situated south of the Congo River is deep within the forest; while Batalimo-Maluba represents the cross currents between the savanna regions to the north and the forest regions south of the Congo River and Pikunda-Munda represents the Sangha River Interval region, a diverse ecosystem of savannas and secondary forests that may have been a throughway for early dispersal from Cameroon and into Central African Republic and DRC(White: 1979:30; Bostoen et al 2015:355).

Like Case 2, the features in this region tended to be large pits and shafts that were nearly full of ceramics. Though further study is needed to understand all of the pits, they tended to be interpreted as refuse pits, with the exception of potential furnace at Munda and the secondary burial at Maluba. The only lithics that are reported from the area belong to the Batalimo archaeology site, which Eggert suggests may have been a lithic workshop given its abundance of unmodified waste (Eggert 1993). Further, the poor preservation conditions of the forest prevented the archaeological recovery of faunal and osteological remains.

Hans-Peter Wotzka conducted a ceramic analysis and concluded that there is a potential ancestral link, or Co-Tradition, emerged between the development of Imbonga and Obobogo and

then later Imbonga and Batalimo (Clist 1989:80; Wotzka 1995:286). Imbonga ceramic design motifs such as the "so-called impression piovante" seem to connect to Saharan and Sahelian regions farther north, while other such as flat bottoms connect to Obobogo (Eggert 1984:282-5; Claes 1985:127). Nonetheless, at present no known precursor to this tradition has been identified and dated as such. Batalimo-Maluba and the Pikunda-Munda emerge along the Sangah River Interval (SRI) a region that is closer to potential Cameroonian and Saharan access points, which may indicate a continuous flow of occupants into the region as that area is younger but also closer to the homeland area.

Another issue is the lack of "foreign" ceramics among all of the pits except Pikunda which has been interpreted as the result of little to no interaction (Eggert 1987:144; Eggert 1993:322; Wotzka 1995:287). This is based on the fact that none of the ceramic traditions were observed within the same context: meaning no Imbonga pottery was found on the Ubangi and vice versa. This suggests that either these groups maintained strict ceramic production boundaries over time despite their contemporaneity, locality, and evidence of trade into both local and non-local savanna environments (Kahlheber et al 2014:503).

Palynological data indicates that the forest was at least a secondary forest if not a primary forest during the EIA and thus the occupants did not live in a forest-savanna matrix like those at Shum Laka or the Nyong-Sanaga. However, floral remains give us some indication that the forest dwellers most likely had access to a forest-savanna mosaics. Imbonga, Boso-Njafo, and Munda all contained evidence of *Elaeis guineensis* which typically needs a sunny environment than the forest can provide. Also, the evidence of *Pennisetum glaucum* (pearl millet) materials indicates interaction with a savanna environment because of its hydrophobic properties which make the basin is a terrible climate for it (Kahlheber et al 2014:494). According to Kahlheber et

al (2014) it appears to be domesticated and most likely came from the Sahel region to the north or minimally from Cameroon. It is typically a forest/savanna border crop when it is wild (Kahlheber et al 2014: 497). It could have been traded into the region or the occupants could have developed the necessary technology to grown it such as elaborate drainage system, though more work is needed to know for sure (Kahlheber et al 2014: 493, 502). According to Kahlheber et al (2014) pearl millet is not even cultivated in the interior today as a result of the rainfall (Kahlheber et al 2014:498). Further, it is significant because it now adds grains to what has typically been considered the Equatorial diet, namely yams (Khalheber et al 2014:504). There are only three other archaeological sites that have pearl millet which are all located in southern Cameroon and were also discovered by German research teams (2014:498). Lastly, the swampy river environment also provided several different trees and grasses for use in the forest such as Raphia palm (a member of the palm family) and Aframomum sp. (a member of the ginger family). Even given the fact that the forest borders have fluctuated through times, these plants are not typical of this environment and most likely indicate that the occupants maintained at least some level of interaction with savanna dwellers over the time period (Kahlheber et al 2014:503).

In terms of general technology of the region, the curious absence of lithics and the two instances of iron use make it difficult to assess the nature of stone to metal transition. With the lack of stone at Imbonga and the use of stone at the younger site of Batalimo and iron at the seemingly intermediate sites of the Pikunda- Munda transition, I agree with Eggert's assessment that these transitions were not linear or uniform when it comes to the forest. Further, the river systems made these regions more accessible, rather than isolated as was thought to be the case and the archaeological evidence suggests that such travel was normative during the period (Eggert 1993; Kahlheber et al 2014:496).

Forest Interior: Imbonga Horizon Early Iron Age Attributes					
Attribute	Context	Description	Duration		
Lithics	Imbonga sites	none			
	Boso-Njafo	none			
Ceramic	Imbonga sites	flat base, grooved, impressed, incised, or adorned pots, bowls, and bottle and beaker like forms	<500 B.C.		
	Boso-Njafo	flat base, grooved, impressed, incised, or adorned pots, bowls, and bottle and beaker like forms	<500-350 B.C.		
Metal Objects	Imbonga sites	none			
	Boso-Njafo	none			
Floral Remains	Imbonga sites	wild palm ( <i>Elaeis guineensis</i> ) endocarps and wild fruit tree ( <i>Canarium Schweinfurthii</i> )	<500 B.C.		
	Boso-Njafo	wild palm; pearl millet ( <i>Pennisetum glaucum</i> ); raphia palm; ginger ( <i>Aframomum sp.</i> )	<350 B.C.		
Faunal remains	Imbonga sites	none			
	Boso-Njafo	none			

Table 4: Imbonga Early Iron Age Attributes

Forest Interior: Batalimo-Maluba Horizon Early Iron Age Attributes					
Attribute	Context	Description	Timeframe		
Lithics	Malabu	none			
	Batalimo	polished stone axes, scrappers, flakes, and unmodified waste	<150 B.C.		
Ceramic	Maluba	flat bottomed, highly decorated, distinct neck and rim shapes, well structured globular pots and wide mouthed bowls	400 B.C 562 A.D.		
	Batalimo	Consistent with Maluba ceramics	<150 B.C.		
Metal Objects	Maluba	none			
Floral Remains	Maluba	wild palm (Elaeis guineensis) endocarps	400 B.C 562 A.D.		
Faunal remains	Maluba	none			

 Table 5: Batalimo-Maluba Early Age Attributes

Forest Interior: Pikunda-Munda Horizon Early Iron Age Attributes					
Attribute	Context	Description	Timeframe		
Lithics	Pikunda	none			
	Maluba	none			
Ceramic	Pikunda	horizontal bands, wavy lines, comb-stamped decorations, round bases with bottle- like forms	110 B.C 120 A.D.		
	Munda	wide-mouthed bowls, parallel sides, flared rim; globular pots, bottle-like vessels, round bases; grooved, incised horizontal lines	353 B.C 435 A.D.		
Metal Objects	Pinkunda	unidentified iron tool	110 B.C 120 A.D.		
	Munda	shaft, iron slag	353 B.C 435 A.D.		
Floral Remains	Pikunda	none			
	Munda	wild palm <i>(Elaeis guineensis)</i> endocarp	353 B.C 435 A.D.		
Faunal remains	Pikunda	none			
	Munda	none			

Table 6: Pikunda-Munda Early Iron Age Attributes



Figure 8: Map of archaeological sites of Lower Congo

Circled sites are discussed below (de Maret 1986:105).

#### IV. Case 4: The Lower Congo

The Lower Congo region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo make up the southwestern range of the Equatorial Forest. This area stretches from the mouth of the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to its present-day capital of Kinshasa (See Figure 8) (de Maret 1975:133; de Maret 1986:105). Therefore, a discussion of the cultural practices of this area offer a glimpse into how a similar forest/savanna environment affected the spread of Early Iron Age culture nearly a millennium after it developed in the Bamenda Grasslands. Although this region is relatively young in terms of EIA occupation, it has the longest history of systematic archaeology and thus provides information for a greater range of sites and activities then other parts of the Equatorial Forest.

The first archaeological investigations of the Lower Congo began as early as the nineteenth century with a study by Stainier titled L'age de la pierre au Congo (Stainier 1899). Subsequently, periodic, though extensive excavations occurred from the 1930s and 1960s with some project focused on establishing stone age chronologies and others focused on historic sites such as those related to the Kongo Kingdom (de Maret 1984:40-42). With regard to the Early Iron Age archaeology in Lower Congo, the first excavations were carried out by M. Bequaert in 1939 in Mbanza Ngungu/Thysville, where he identified seven pottery groups for the area and R. F. van Morsel who excavated the Malebo Pool around Kinshasa in 1949 (Bequaert 1962:337; de Maret 1984:42). Later, G. Mortelmans excavated Ngovo, Dimba, and Ntadi Ntadi caves in 1957 and 1959 to establish 6 ceramic sequences for the area (de Maret 1986:106). Mortleman's Group VI is relevant here as this group was dated to the EIA whereas the other six groups relate to much more recent times into the Later Iron and Historic Ages (de Maret 1986:125, 127). The next phase of work began in 1972 and through 1984 under the direction of Pierre de Maret and

include surveys and excavations of Ngovo, Dimba, Ntadi-Ntadi, and Sakuzi rock shelters and open-air sites as well as several others (de Maret 1986). The four mentioned sites are included as they are had systematic excavations and are dated to the period in question.

#### Ngovo archaeology site

Ngovo is a rock shelter located south-east of present day Mbanza-Ngungu (de Maret 1986:106). Mortelmans' excavations revealed slag, lithics, and identified 6 groups of pottery which have undergone much revision since then (Mortelmans 1962: 419-420). De Maret excavated two 1x2 meter test pits to reveal a few Late Stone Age artifacts and a thick grey ash layer roughly 200 meters squared dating to  $195 \pm 45$  B.C. calibrated in his initial test excavations (de Maret 1986:109).

Features- There were no features reported from Ngovo.

Lithics- There was one polished stone axe found in Test Pit A and a few shards of cut stone that was associated with materials that dated to  $195 \pm 45$  B.C. and no lithic materials found in Test Pit B (de Maret 1977:5; de Maret 1986:109).

Ceramics- There was an average of 805 ceramic fragments per cubic meter at Ngovo for a total of 30 vessels (de Maret 1986:109, 121). The materials are attributed to Mortelmans Group VI pottery, which is described as reddish brown, oval shaped beakers with a short, flared collar often having multilinear motifs, with dotted bands across the top (Mortlemans 1962:416). These ceramics also have flat-bases, or slightly convex with oval bellies (de Maret 1977:6) Faunal- The 1972 excavations revealed some *Potamocherusporcus* (bush-pig) metatarsals (long bones in the foots), and some long bones, teeth, jaw bones, vertebra, and rib of *a Cephalophus sylvicultor* (medium sized antelope) (de Maret 1975:113). This season also yielded an *Achatina* 

sp. shell, rodent, other mollusks and avian bones were also recovered from the cave (de Maret 1975: 109). There were no faunal remains noted from 1973 excavations (de Maret 1975: 109). Floral- Plants were in a "grand nombre" at this site (de Maret 1977:6). Charcoal analysis revealed *Canarium Schweinfurthii* among several other forest or forest/savanna tree species (de Maret 1986:113).

Metallurgy- There were no iron objects found in Ngovo cave (de Maret 1986: 109) Dimba archaeology site

Located just 6 kilometers north of Ngovo and 3 km from Mbanza-Ngungu, Dimba cave is an "exceptionally large cavern" nearly 1600 meters long, 30 meters wide, and 20 meters high at the base of a valley (de Maret 1986: 114). In 1972 and 1973 excavations consisted of seven 3x3 meter units to reveal a blackish layer roughly 20 centimeters deep and a Late Stone Age occupation 300-350 centimeters deep (de Maret 1986: 114). Late Stone Age layer contained a polished axe (de Maret 1980: 452).

Feature- No features have been reported.

Lithics- Early Iron Age lithics consisted of an oblong a polished stone axe of green dolerite weighing 305 grams dating, a punctured mother of pear among other cut stones that dated to 390 B.C. and 70 A.D. (de Maret 1977:5; de Maret 1986:114).

Ceramics- Like Ngovo, the ceramics from the test units were mostly Mortlemans' Group VI pottery however the surface contained several unspecified varieties of ceramics and showed significant disturbance (de Maret 1986:114).

Flora: No floral remains have been reported.

Fauna: Achatina sp. shells were recovered from (Lavachery 1990:105).

Metallurgy: No iron materials were reported from this site

#### Ntadi Ntadi archaeology site

Ntadi Ntadi rock shelter site is about 60 kilometers south east from Ngovo and Dimba caves (de Maret 1986:116). The Early Iron Age dates from 205 B.C. to 60 B.C. (de Maret 1986:116).

Features: This cave also has painting and engravings which have yet to be analyzed (de Maret 1986:116). No ground features were identified.

Lithics- Lithics included mother of pearls, flakes, and a fragment of a grinder, no polished axes were found (de Maret 1977:6; de Maret 1986:116).

Ceramics- There were four decorated rim sherds and six small rim sherds found at this site and all but two of them were considered Group VI pottery (de Maret 1977:6; de Maret 1986:116). Fauna: Numerous Achatina sp. fragments were recovered from this site (de Maret 1986:116). Flora: No flora remains were reported from this site.

Metallurgy: No iron materials were reported from this site.

### Sakuzi archaeology site:

Lastly Sakuzi is an open-air site located roughly 80 kilometers north west from Ngovo 3 kilometers south of the Congo River (de Maret 1986:105, 126). This site was first surveyed in 1984 by Pierre de Maret in an attempt to better understand a separate pottery group named Kay Ladio (de Maret 1986:119, 125). Charcoal sampled from the site give an occupation range of 160  $\pm$  55 B.C but an abundance of surface artefacts suggests "long use of the site" (de Maret 1986; 118;).

Features- de Maret reported 49 archaeological features including pits, hearths, and iron smelting furnaces" of which, 19 were excavated (de Maret 1986:121). Only feature 37 was excavated. It was 85-90 centimeter in diameter and 100 cm deep and contained "earth reddened by fire- at a

depth of 20 centimeters- a cutting edge fragment of a polished schist tool... and the only feature to contain fragments of Group VI pottery" (de Maret 1986:121).

Lithics- A few fragments of worked chalcedony, quartz and quartzite as well as fragment of a polished stone tool were recovered from feature 37 (de Maret 1986:128).

Ceramics- Surface finds included Group VI as well as Kay Ladio traditions, a separate group based a few kilometers away which dates to the first century A.D. (de Maret 1986:125).

Ceramics excavated from feature 37 were consistent with the tempering material, surface-finish, and decoration of Group VI pottery (de Maret 1986:121).

Faunal- No faunal remains were reported from the site.

Floral- Charcoal samples were recovered as well as calcined fragments of *Elaeis* sp. (palm-nuts) (de Maret 1986:121).

Metallurgy- This cave consisted of iron smelting furnaces that dated to 160 + 55 B.C. (de Maret 1986 :121).

### V. Case 4 Summary

This case illustrates the development of iron, extensive use of forest-savanna mosaic plants, and regional ceramic tradition in Lower Congo at the end of the first millennium B.C. These caves and rock shelters were used for hunting, smithing, and refuse. In terms of the few faunal remains, the bush pig and antelope are known to inhabit equatorial forest and closed environments while the shell and rodents were determined to be food remains, all grow in forest or savannas. The flora remains, specifically the *Elaeis* sp. and *Canarium* sp. are consistent with the time period and likewise indicate the use of both forest and savanna environments. The presence of the *Achatina* sp. shells, the ubiquitous ceramic tradition within the relatively short time frame and the presence of both Kay Ladio and Group VI pottery within one site provide

support for a local trade network. Lastly, the presence of an iron furnace dating to the second century B.C. indicates that full use of this skill was present in the area at this early date.

The Lower Congo Early Iron Age Attributes					
Attribute	Context	Description	Timeframe		
Lithics	Ngovo	polished stone axe	250 B.C 150 B.C.		
	Dimba	polished green dolerite axe, mother of pearl items, among other cut stones	390 B.C 70 A.D.		
	Ntadi Ntadi	mother of pearl items, flakes, and a grinder fragment	205 B.C 60 B.C.		
	Sakuzi	worked chalcedony, quartz and quartzite, polished stone tool	210 B.C 110 B.C.		
Ceramic	Ngovo	reddish brown, oval shaped beakers with a short, flared collar, multilinear motifs, with dotted bands across the top; flat-bases, or slightly convex with oval bellies	250-150 B.C.		
	Dimba	Consistent with Ngovo ceramics			
	Ntadi Ntadi	Group VI ceramics			
-	Sakuzi	Group VI and Kay Ladio ceramics	210 B.C 110 B.C.		
Metal	Sakuzi	iron smelting furnaces	210 B.C 110 B.C.		
Floral Remains	Ngovo	wild fruit tree ( <i>Canarium</i> <i>Schweinfurthii</i> ) among several other forest or forest/savanna tree species	250-150 B.C.		
	Dimba	none			
	Sakuzi	wild palm nuts ( <i>Elaeis</i> sp.)			
Faunal remains	Ngovo	bush pig ( <i>Potamocherusporcus</i> ), antelope ( <i>Cephalophus sylvicultor</i> ); land snails ( <i>Achatina sp.</i> ) rodent, other mollusks and avian bones	250-150 B.C.		
	Dimba	land snails (Achatina sp.)			
	Ntadi Ntadi	land snails (Achatina sp.)			
	Sakuzi	none			

Table 7: Lower Congo Early Iron Age Attributes

## VI. Chapter Summary

These cases document the introduction of Early Iron Age activities across the Equatorial Forest over the span of 1000 years. Case 3 illustrates that the there was some level of ceramic connections between the occupants from Case 3 and 3 but clear formal and stylistic differences were apparent. Nonetheless, the occupants in the interior were equally well adapted to local and long-distance trade, particularly within the water networks of the Congo River. These networks may have provided grains to the forest villages as well as influenced the design motifs of the local pottery traditions. The contemporaneity, use of trade, and regional extension of the ceramic horizons generally support the mechanisms of interaction despite the clearly distinct ceramic horizons. Lastly, Case 4's focus on the Lower Congo illustrates how and where these practices reached the southern border of the forest towards the end of the first millennium B.C. The evidence of fully functioning iron production, the regional ceramic distribution indicates, and the extensive use of forest and savanna plants and trees suggests local interaction and regional trade as well. Together these cases provide the archaeological support for the formation of interregional development of Early Iron Age technologies and practices over a 1000-year period. The following chapter will provide a discussion of this assessment and the research conclusions.

## **CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### I. Data analysis

Case 1: The Bamenda Grasslands represent the earliest settlement of Bantu speakers in the Congo River Basin. They were initially connected to and interacting with Nigerian and Sahelian cultural practices as far back as 1500 B.C. This is illustrated by the fact that much of the similarities in the ceramic and lithic remains retrieved from Shum Laka that date to this period are attributed to practices developing from western or northern directions. Whether this period is called the Ceramic Stone Age, Neolithic, or Stone to Metal Age there was a period when pottery and ground tools were the predominate remains across the region (de Maret and Nsuka 1977). Then around 1000 B.C. a period of isolation developed, presumably as the rainforest thickened around that time (Lupo 2014:70; Blench 2006:124 and 126; Bostoen et al 2015:355). This period of isolation may have been a motivating factor in the development of cultivating *Elaies*, and Canariaum trees, as well as the shift towards open air settlements (Sowunmi 1999:202-203). At the end of the end of the forest thickening around 1000 B.C., this population began settling in the spotty savanna area near the Sangha valley (Maley and Brenac 1998; Bostoen 2015). These shifts from the highlands to the west of the Sangha river make up our only understanding of how these activities may have changed after settlement dues to the seeming extension of cultural practices (Klieman 2003).

Case 2: The Northern Plateau then illustrates the first attempts of settlement with newly developed skills for forest-savanna environment. Here we witness the local production of ceramics, either at the village or household level as well as interregional trade with shells from the Atlantic coast and lake fish from further north. We also begin to see specialized zones of

activity, for example the furnace at Oliga suggesting the development of a small community focused on iron production alone. This is typical since iron production require intensive labor from a variety of people and resources. This is the beginning of a pattern of site specialization I have noticed across the region such as ceramic production at Imbonga in the interior and iron production at Sakuzi in Lower Congo. Even with the necessary disclaimers on the sample size of the sites, the fact that some sites appeared to be workshops for a specific technology is clear across the region.

These sites also necessarily varied in the ways they adapted to their local environments. As mentioned above, one example is the way sites did not follow the LSA nor CSA tradition of relying on pottery and stone and opted for one or the other with the frequent addition of metallurgy. Such was the case at Imbonga and Pikunda where no lithics were reported as far back as the third century B.C. although the latter had already began using metal. Another example is the way they began systematically using *Elaeis guineensis* (oil palm) and fruits from the *Canarium Schweinfurthii* across all of the sites with floral data. These plants have a variety of uses including for example the palm oil was used to cook as a slow burning fuel and the fruits were eater (Khalheber et al 2014:497). Further, the are specifically cultivated in a savanna climate, thus, in cases where they appear in the interior at Imbonga, they suggest something more intentional (Sowunmi 1999:201,208). Lastly, they adapted mechanisms to interact beyond their surrounding areas for instance developing a river-based transportation system which provided access to resources not found in the forest such as grains and oil palm.

Although the environment seems to be a strong indicator for what practices will develop across the sites, the occupants often sought ways to maintain stability despite the environmental barriers. This was achieved mostly through trade or diversifying settlement activities within a

region. For example, in Case 4: Lower Congo the hilltop sites such as Ngovo and Dimba may have been designated for specific activities related to polished stones, ceramic fragments, and plants such as ritual spaces, while the riverine settlements such as Sakuzi may have served a different function given its location near the river and the abundance of features found at the site, such as a markets. Further, the ubiquitous pits and shafts that are found throughout the region suggest some sort of shared understanding- whether they are interpreted as storages or grave sites, the similarities between their shapes, sizes, and contents point to a conservatism towards such practices (Meister 2010:247).

In terms of variation among the sites, the forest interior sites appear to be the most different from the activities found in the Bamenda Grasslands. Here, the forest environment required different activities such as the abrupt development of metallurgy at Pikunda-Munda and the reliance on lithics at later sites such as Batalimo. As such, the connections between the sites illustrate their variability because social, political, and cultural formation on the frontier also affected interactions with the areas surrounding the frontier, not just homelands. Ogundiran (2014) demonstrates the significance of frontier-frontier interaction through an historic archaeological approach to the Osogbo of nineteenth century southwest Nigeria (Ogundiran 2014:6-7). The Osogbo frontier existed as a part of a regional network of frontiers. Political authority on the Osogbo frontier developed through interplay with the surrounding frontier networks, rather than an internal conservative dynamic founded on homeland behaviors as theorized by Kopytoff (Ogundiran 2014:21).

Ultimately, the data suggested more intra-regional variation than between the specific sites and the homeland. For example, none of the sites had the exact make-up of lithic, ceramic, floral, faunal assemblages at any point in time (See Table 8). For example, even sites that seem

to be parallel in terms of their development sequence such as Ngovo and Dimba, the later had evidence of multiple ceramic traditions and thus served different purposes through time. The lack of pottery overlap may be a distinctive identity marker as is usually the case, but it doesn't have to mean they didn't interact or weren't from similar origins or didn't see themselves as united in other ways. As the archaeological work done in the region has focused on identifying these groups rather than understanding how these places have changed over time, what I wished to do here was illustrate how these beginning practices provided mechanisms for interregional interaction that would thus sustain a development of Bantu identity across the region for the next millennium.

The documentation of the evidence of inter-regional interaction was the most significant find of this project. The prevailing literature has maintained a hardline of isolationism across this time period and region that is not supported by the data (Eggert 1993:323). Every site showed some indication of the use of non-local resources be them plants, animals, trees, or iron ore, even sites deep within the forest such as Boso Njafo illustrated the acquisition of a grain typically grown further west (Khalheber 2014:493). The distinctive 1000-year gap between Late Stone Age and Early Iron Age settlements across the region as an indication of new arrivals due to migration or dispersion. As noted earlier in the discussion, there is little evidence of the development of these technologies which most likely indicated that they were transferred as complete practices or technologies through population change.

Archaeologists in the region suggested that the lack of ceramic overlap was indicative of isolation rather than connections among these contemporary, mobile groups (de Maret 1986:130; Clist 1989:80; Eggert 1993:322). There is, however, concession around the idea of an ancestral group- perhaps from Obobogo or Gabon that share the "simplest decorative system from which

the others could have developed," and thus given support to the theory of human migration such as common traits of the flat bottoms and grooved lines despite the distance and time between these spaces (Clist 1989:80). If this was a simple migration from one site to the next, why do the sites connect to Obobogo rather than each other. For me, this illustrates an intentional differentiation rather than isolation.

## II. Summary of analysis

This research attempted to answer the question on the success of the development of Bantu culture across the region. This question essentially asked whether the behaviors associated with Bantu speaking people- settlements, metallurgy, and forest-savanna adaptations, developed organically and independently across the region or if they are the result of migration. If they were the result of organic independent development, perhaps due to the climatic shifts that altered the forest around 1500 B.C., there should be a continuity between LSA groups, evidence of trial and area of complex technologies such as metallurgy or refined ceramic. However, what we are faced with is evidence of fully developed activities such as grain storage and furnace construction early on during these occupation periods- suggesting that the occupants had previous experience or knowledge with such activities before settling the region. The question then becomes, where did they get this information and how was it spread? Those answers are revealed through an analysis of how and when these activities emerged and the mechanism through which they might have spread. Here, I have demonstrated that the south-easterly nature of the development of these activities and the evidence or local and interregional trade support my theory that connections to Bantu cultural practices, whether directly or indirectly through trade were a strong part of the success of the development of the Central African Early Iron Age. Thus, the success of these adaptations does not solely rely on people's ability to rapidly adapt to

change. Rather, the success in the case of Bantu settlement of Central Africa comes from their process of dispersal from the Bamenda Grasslands and settlement of the region during the Early Iron Age.

This dissertation sought to explore the nature of success of dispersion among Bantu speakers in the Central African Early Iron Age. In the process, I revealed shared cultural traits that indicated an interregional network of shared cultural knowledge throughout the Equatorial Forest between 1000 B.C. and 200 A.D. Through analyzing this network of relationships as a premodern African Diaspora, I have come to understand this process as a cultivation of homeland. As such, the shared cultural traits strengthened their common Bantu speaking identities and thus gave way for continuous reconnection and cultivation of the behaviors and patterns that allowed them to adapt across a range of environments over time, thus allowing for successful transference of Bantu cultural traits over the next 2 millennia.



**Table 8: Timeframe of Early Iron Age Behaviors in Central Africa.** This graph illustrates when certain attributes entered the regions under consideration.

## III. Discussion

This discussion integrates the above analysis of when and where which artifacts emerge across a region with the premodern African Diaspora framework, I developed in Chapter 3: Methods. The most significant finding is the need to examine the Northern Plateau as the archaeological homeland of the EIA package and most likely Bantu cultural traditions. At the end of the Late Stone Age, the symbiosis of indigenous, western, and northern populations began to cultivate culturally distinctive patterns within the Northern Plateau. These people began to shift and adapt to the increasingly mixed environments of the region. Further, these adaptations became increasingly more complex, meaning specific activities that require more people, skill, or delegation to achieve. This is evident in the shift in lithic materials and production techniques, more systematic, functional, and consistent ceramic decorations, and the string of villages that appear to be interconnected. This section will discuss how these features together construct a cohesive cultural practice that formed during this earliest phase of the EIA. As such, I hope to illustrate how these features are the dominant practices that will be replicated in the dispersal of Bantu speakers over the next 500 years. Further, this time period witnessed a shift in a preference for rock shelter and cave spaces to an inclination towards open air sites and the ability to live and thrive. It is within this context that the Northern Plateau, not the Bamenda Grasslands should be understood as the "diffusion center" of a shared identity for almost 500 years.

The Northern Plateau was a more or less a cosmopolitan center, with extensive trade networks, early crop cultivation, and iron specialization within the local region. Further, the connections between the Northern Plateau and the Forest Interior suggests a continuous connection based on the shared ceramic elements, the presence of similar complex floral remains such as pearl millet, and complex local pottery traditions. These coupled with the extensive waterway that makeup the Forest Interior provide substantial evidence for inter and intraregional trade.

At the other end of the forest, while Lower Congo is considerably younger than the other regions, it has a well-developed settlement system and metallurgy tradition by the end of the first millennium B.C. This suggests that in contrast to the northern regions, the EIA package most likely arrived in tack. Lastly, while the Bamenda Grasslands may be the linguistic homeland, the archaeological assemblage ultimately does not support that idea. The long period of isolation from other regions coupled with the long period of disuse of the cave site suggests that the Early Iron Age materials were brought in from another region, perhaps Obobogo.

Evidence of Premodern African Diaspora					
Intraregional Location	Evidence of Dispersion	Evidence of Connections	Evidence of a Homeland	Evidence of a Diasporal frontier	
Case 1: The Bamenda Grasslands	Continuous connection with western groups in Nigeria during the early phases of the EIA.	Period of isolation and then introduction of new lithic techniques and floral remains.		Activities from 400 B.C. onward may be the result of migration from another area.	
Case 2: The Northern Plateau	Circular movement within the region, similar ceramic and floral, and possibly metal working activities.	Complete Early Iron Age package and long-distance trade with the Sahel and East Africa.	Contains inter- and intraregional trade networks, use of goods from multiple regions, ceramic techniques are shared throughout the Congo River Basin.		
Case 3: The Forest Interior	The region contains elements of the complete EIA package.	Shares elements of the ceramic tradition, use of pearl millet, ceramic pit structures with Case 2, contains savana goods, evidence of specialization.		Activities emerge later than Case 2, no forest interior site contains the complete EIA package.	
Case 4: Lower Congo	EIA package emerges almost 80 years after Case 2	Inter- and intra- regional, fully developed iron technology during the earliest phases of occupation.		Activities emerge the latest here but are fully developed upon arrival.	

 Table 9: Premodern African Diaspora Framework: Bantu Homeland Diasporal Frontiers

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

## I. Conclusions

This research has produced evidence to support two key features premodern African Diasporas: an interregional trade network that facilitated the movement of goods, technologies, and people during the Central African Early Iron Age; and the connections and relationships that emerged between these groups and their homeland. This research demonstrated that the integration of frontier and African Diaspora studies into understanding premodern Africa provides essential theoretical and methodological tools. Environmental frontiers, defined by the boundaries that emerge from natural conditions such as water, forests, and terrains which often create forced boundaries between societies were key variables for when and where specific EIA activities developed. The application of African Diaspora's frame work offers a model for understanding the processes and conditions that emerge in the processes of dispersal from a homeland. Used together, I have constructed an archaeologically based culture history of Bantu expansion into Central Africa.

This project sought to construct a cultural history of the Central African Early Iron Age (EIA) roughly 1000 B.C. to 200 A.D. I identified 4 key regions that can provide insights into the movement across the regions, and how these communities responded to the environment, the patterns in which activities arrived in specific places and times and their abilities to trade both locally and across the region. This required obtaining a clear understanding of the state of literature on archaeology of the region. This body of work has, for the last 30 years, focused on understand how and when people developed EIA technologies such as iron production, settled villages, and inter-regional trade. Prevailing cultural histories connect these activities to Bantu

speaking people who emerged along the Niger-Cameroon border around 4000-3000 years B.P. Acquiring this assumption, I sought to understand how Bantu speaking people so successfully moved from one end of the Equatorial forest to the other in the span of a few hundred years and the practices they may have brought with them. I first applied a frontier perspective to understand how people would move through the multiple environments of the forests, sometimes dense primary forest, sometimes major rivers such as the Congo River, and sometimes mosaic environments that have all three.

The relationships that develop between diaspora communities become a pillar of the cultural identities that endure for centuries following the departure from a homeland. These relationships, borne of various power dynamics and social, political, and religious connections, can be expressed as conscious or unconscious currents embedded within the behaviors of a community. This process is powerful within a diaspora because it structures the ways the homeland becomes remembered and shared between these communities.

The project revealed that both the inter and intraregional variation provide insight into the construction of a diasporal identity, even in the premodern era. The integration of the frontier framework with African Diaspora studies allowed for additional comparison of the nature of regional and local connections. For example, on in the Forest Interior region, the ceramic and lithic traditions are not similar and suggests very little interaction. However, when compared to the Northern Plateau, these differences indicate a different relationship.

II. Bantu Expansion as Premodern African Diaspora: a culture history revised

When Bantu expansion is viewed as a premodern African diaspora the following picture emerges: an adverse climatic shift creates new behaviors, necessities, and interactions along the Northern Plateau. The existing village is cosmopolitan, with long distance trade routes from

across the region. The villages respond to the shift by establishing specialized activities such as metallurgy, cultivating crops, and incorporating both forest and savanna goods into their subsistence practices. After about 200 years, these groups began to spread via water or forest openings into other regions of the Congo River Basin. After another century new traditions emerge but trade and exchange routes are maintained alongside aesthetic similarities as illustrated by the pottery remains in the Forest Interior. Other groups travel back west and return to the Bamenda Grasslands and establish settlements and introduce new lithic technologies to the area. After another generation or two, these populations reach the southern limit of the Congo River Basin and establish village sites with fully functional metallurgy, extensive hilltop and rock shelter settlements, and extensive trade networks into the forest. This 500-700-year period of movement, interaction, and connection set the basis for the Bantu Diaspora and the cultural traits that would eventually make it into southern and eastern Africa.

### III. Suggestions for future research

This research established a framework for identifying cultural change in pre-modern Africa. In this process I identified two general areas that are in need of future research: first, more archaeological field work focused on identifying Early Iron Age sites and understanding how these sites change over time and second, examining African pre-history for other moments of dispersion that can be better understood through African Diaspora Studies.

Archaeology in the Congo River Basin remains pretty sparse relative to the geographic size and the extent of human occupation. Several of the underlying reasons were articulated in Chapter 2: Methods but suffice it to say here that the training and support of students interested in Central African in both field and laboratory archaeology would begin to fill in much needed gaps in this survey. For example, there are several pits from each region that still need to be

analyzed and processed. Also, some of these sites consist of a few test excavations and require more field work. There is also research needed on the sources used for the lithic, ceramic, plant, and metal remains and identifying where they came from in relationship to the sites. We can also begin sourcing ceramics through a project such as using Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA) to identify if the pottery materials were locally sourced or not (Usman 2012:131). There were also several post holes spread across some of the village sites which require additional analysis to reveal population density as well as the general uses or paleoecology of the sites. These kinds of inquiries can provide a better understanding of the possible transportation routes between the regions and potentially how each region functioned in relationship to the whole.

Given the general focus of this project, there are other regions in the Congo River Basin that need to be evaluated for how they fit into the construction of Bantu culture such as southern Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe islands, eastern Gabon and south-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. These regions each offer their own environmental boundaries, coastal frontiers for the former and forest interior zones for the latter two which may reveal different patterns of change and continuity than what I have illustrated here.

Further, Shum Laka's distinctively long and successive occupations periods foreshadow how Bantu speakers adapted to the environmental and social changes of the Early Iron Age. This then provides a snapshot of how other frontier communities responded to similar changes. I contend that articulating the features that make up the Northern Plateaus can be compared to other sites in the found in throughout the Congo River Basin. In this respect, it allows us to see how the homeland changes and adaptations within contemporary contexts and environments on the one hand and establish a possible framework for non-Bantu settlements on the other.

Lastly, focused research into the ways African descendants have moved across the globe in prehistory need more attention. Questions about East African people in the Indian subcontinent are as relevant to pre-historic studies as they are to modern conceptualizations of the African Diaspora. If we wish to disrupt the image of a static isolated prehistoric world, then inquiries into Africa's presence and interaction across both the continent and the world need our immediate attention. Such studies will bring us closer to identifying the essential qualities of what it means *to be* in diaspora. I believe that this current project has created a space for such future work.

APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A: THE BAMENDA GRASSLANDS TABLE OF DATA SOURCES

Author	Publication Year	Title	Site detailed	Kind
de Maret, Pierre, Bernard Clist, and Wim Van Neer	1987	Résultats des premières fouilles dans les abris-sous- roche de Shum Laka et Abeke au Nord-Ouest du Cameroun	Shum Laka- Abeke	Article
Asombang and de Maret	1992	Re-Investigating Shum Laka	Shum Laka	Article
Collette	1992	L'Abri Sous Roche de Shum Laka 2 (Cameroun): Etude Archéologique	Shum Laka	Masters Thesis
de Maret, Pierre, Raymond Asombang, Els Cornelissen, Phillip Lavachery, J. Moyersons, and Wim Van Neer	1993	Preliminary Results of the 1991-1992 Field Season at Shum Lake, Northwestern Province, Cameroon	Shum Laka	Article
de Maret, Pierre, Raymond Asombang, Els Cornelissen, Phillip Lavachery, and J. Moyersons	1995	Continuing Research at Shum Laka Rock Shelter, Cameroon (1993-1994 field season)	Shum Laka	Article

 Table 10: The Bamenda Grasslands table of data sources.
 See bibliography for full citations.

Table 10 (cont'd).

Cornelissen, Els,	1995	Fouilles Archéologiques à	Shum Laka	Article	French
Jan Moeyersons,		Shum Laka (Cameroun)			
and Pierre de					
Maret					
Lavachery,	1996	Shum Laka Rock Shelter	Shum Laka	Book	English
Philippe		late Holocene Deposits:		Chapter	
		from Stone to Metal			
		(North western Cameroon)			
de Maret, Pierre	1996	Shum Laka (Cameroon):	Shum Laka	Book	English
		Human Burials and		Chapter	
		General Perspectives			
Lavachery,	1996	30 000 ans d'occupation, 6	Shum Laka	Article	French
Philippe, Els		mois de fouilles: Shum			
Cornelissen, Jan		Laka, un site exceptionnel			
Moyersons, and		en Afrique centrale.			
Pierre de Maret					
Lavachery,	1998	De la pierre au métal.	Shum Laka	Dissertation	French
Philippe		Archéologie des dépôts			
		holocènes de l'abri sous			
		roche de Shum Laka			
		(Cameroun)			
Lavachery,	2000	Natural and Cultural	Shum Laka	Article	English
Philippe and Els		Spatial Patterning in the			
Cornelissen		Late Holocene Deposits of			
		Shum Laka Rock Shelter,			
		Cameroon			
Lavachery	2001	The Holocene	Shum Laka	Article	English
		archaeological sequence of			
		Shum Laka rock shelter			
		(Grassfields, western			
		Cameroon)			

# APPENDIX B: THE NORTHERN PLATEAU TABLE OF DATA SOURCES

Author	Publication Vear	Title	Site detailed	Kind	Language
de Maret, Pierre	1980	Preliminary Report on 1980 Fieldwork in the Grassfields and Yaoundé, Cameroun	Obobogo	Report	French
de Maret, Pierre	1982	Belgian Archaeological Project in Cameroon (July-August 1981 fieldwork)	Obobogo	Report	English
Claes, Phillipe	1985	Contribution à l'étude de céramiques anciennes des environs de Yaoundé	Obobogo	Masters Thesis	French
Atangana, Christine	1988	Archeologie Du Cameroun Meridional: Etude due Site D'Okolo	Obobogo Group:Okolo	Dissertation	French
Essomba, Joseph- Marie	1989	Dix Ans de Recherches au Cameroun Méridional	Obobogo Group: Ndidan	Article	French
Mbida Mindzie	1996	L'émergence des communautés villageoises au Cameroun méridional. Etude archéologique des sites de Nkang et de Ndindan	Obogogo Group: Nkang	Dissertation	French
Mbida Mindzie et al	2000	Evidence for banana cultivation and animal husbandry during the first millennium BC in the forest of southern Cameroon	Obobogo	Article	English
Mbida Mindzie et al	2001	First archaeological evidence of banana cultivation in Central Africa during the third millennium before present	Obobogo	Article	English

 Table 11: The Northern Plateau table of data sources. See bibliography for full citations.

# APPENDIX C: FOREST INTERIOR TABLE OF DATA SOURCES

Author	Publication	Title	Site	Kind	Language
Eggert, Manfred	1987	Imbonga and Batalimo: Ceramic Evidence for Early Settlement of the Equatorial Rain Forest	Imbonga Group: Batalimo	Article	English
Eggert, Manfred	1992	The Central African Rain Forest: Historical Speculations and Archaeological Facts	Imbonga	Article	English
Eggert, Manfred	1993	Central Africa and the Archaeology of the Equatorial Rainforest: Reflections on Some Major Topics	Imbonga	Book Chapter	English
Wotzka, Hans Peter	1995	Studien zur Archäologie des zentralafrikanischen Zaïre-Beckens und ihre Stellung im Kontext der Bantu-expansion	Imbonga	Book Chapter	German
Kahlheber et al.	2014	Pearl Millet and Other Plant Remains from the Early Iron Age Site of Boso-Njafo (Inner Congo Basin, Democratic Republic of the Congo).	Imbonga	Article	English

Table 12: The Forest Interior table of data sources. See bibliography for full citations.
## APPENDIX D: THE LOWER CONGO TABLE OF DATA SOURCES

Author	Publication Year	Title	Site detailed	Kind	Language
Bequaert, M.	1962	Fouilles à Thysville du Musée Royal du Congo Belge en 1938, Actes du 4ème Congrès Panafricain de Préhistoire et de l'Etude du Quaternaire	Ngovo: Thysville	Report	French
Morelmans, Georges	1962	Archéologie des grottes Dimba et Ngovo (Région de Thysville, Bas-Congo)	Ngovo	Report	French
de Maret, Pierre	1975	A Carbon 14 date From Zaïre	Ngovo	Report	English
de Maret, Pierre and F. Nsuka	1977	History of Bantu metallurgy: some linguistic aspects	Ngovo	Article	English
de Maret, Pierre	1977	La datation des haches polies du Bas-Zaïre	Ngovo	Report	French
de Maret, Pierre	1984	L'archéologie en zone Bantu jusqu'en 1984	Ngovo	Report	French
de Maret, Pierre	1986	The Ngovo Group: an Industry with Polished Stone Tools and Pottery in Lower Zaïre	Ngovo	Article	English
de Maret, Pierre	1990	Le "Néolithique" et l'âge du fer ancient dans le sud-ouest de l'Afrique Centrale	Ngovo	Article	French
Heimlich, Geoffroy	2010	Lower Congo Rock Art Revisited	Ngovo	Article	English

Table 13: Lower Congo table of data sources. See bibliography for full citations.

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