

Marksmen and the Bush: The Affective Micro-Politics of Landscape, Sex and Technology in Precolonial South-Central Africa

KATHRYN M. DE LUNA

Department of History, Georgetown University

This essay explores what we can know about the micro-politics of knowledge production using the history of bushcraft as a case study. In many societies in central, eastern and southern Africa, practitioners of technologies undertaken away from the village, in the bush, enjoy a special status. Among the Botatwe-speaking societies of south-central Africa, the status accorded hunters, smelters and other technicians of the bush was crafted in the centuries around the turn of the first millennium by combining old ideas about the blustery character of fame and spirits, and the talk that engendered both with the observation that technicians working in the bush shared a kinesthetic experience of piercing, poking and prodding into action during the generative activities of working smelts and taking down game. Yet the micro-politics of bushcraft knowledge also involved the bodies and feelings of spearmen and metallurgists' wives, lovers, mothers, sisters, and sometimes those of the entire neighbourhood. The invention of a new landscape category, isokwe, and the novel status of these seasonal technicians marks the development of a new kind of virile masculinity available to some men; it was a status with deeply sensuous, material and social meanings for women as well.

Keywords

Bantu, Botatwe, bushcraft, environment, fame, hunting, precolonial Africa, sexuality, technology

What can we know about the micro-politics of the production of expert knowledge in the early African past?¹ To answer this question, we first need to consider how scholars of recent centuries have studied the micro-politics of knowledge. Historians, anthropologists and others interested in how expert knowledge was crafted in Africa over the last few centuries have carefully exposed the negotiations hidden behind the exclusivity of expertise and the universality of 'scientific' and other forms of specialist knowledge. They have taught us that a wide range of participants played a role in amassing the information 'discovered' by experts. We now know decidedly more

1 I learned a great deal from colleagues' comments and questions when parts of this work were presented at the 'Object Emotions, Revisited' workshop, Yale University, 20–21 February 2015 and the 'Africa at 1000' workshop at Rice University, 27 March 2015. Susan Matt and David Schoenbrun kindly allowed me to read unpublished papers that shaped many of the arguments advanced here. The essay benefited from readings by Emily Callaci, Andreana Prichard, David Schoenbrun, Andrew Bank and two anonymous readers. All errors are, of course, my own.

about the vagaries of fieldwork, the uncertainties of mobility, the influence of social position, and even the personal skills that shaped anthropologists' interviews, health experts' educational agenda, historians' archives, veterinarians' disease interventions, and naturalists' taxonomies, to reference a few of the subjects in this volume. In south-central Africa, for example, we are now more aware of the befuddling fugue state of explorers out of their minds on the ground but militant in their (publishable) certitude upon their return, the collective wisdom of interlocutors on whom the Manchester school of anthropology was founded, and the inconsistencies between colonial fears of labour, population, and ecological collapse and the experience of *citimene* farmers in the early twentieth century.² Of course, we know best the collaborations, translations and censures that bridge the gap between our own fieldwork and publications.

Studies of the micro-politics of knowledge in recent centuries have also taught us about the value of specialised knowledge to those who participated in its creation or were caught up in its application without enjoying the designation of 'expert'. We have learned more about why people like Zacharia Mawere or Socwatsha kaPhaphu chose to work with Godfrey Wilson and James Stuart. Money and status figured, but their labour also produced knowledge that did other local political work of which European experts were often unaware.

In short, research on the micro-politics of knowledge production has illuminated the contingencies of interactions between people, between species, and within life-in-the-local that is sanitised through expertise to produce regimes of knowledge extrapolated as universal in scope.³ Can we illuminate for more distant pasts the personal experiences of experts and their collaborators, their social interactions and ambitions, and even the capricious and serendipitous influence of material life on the production of knowledge?

Africans living centuries and millennia ago also acquired and invented knowledge about the world in which they lived. They debated which knowledge, which skill sets, and which individuals could and should be identified as experts. They worried over who – witches? spouses? spirits? underlings? superiors? – collaborated in the new knowledge, practices and efforts of skilled adepts. Knowledge production was thus grounded in the micro-politics of experts' relationships with other experts, with members of their households, with ancestral spirits, with their apprentices, and others. But the sources we use to access stories of such early pasts necessarily illuminate the micro-politics of knowledge production on aggregated scales and not at the individual level often described in other articles in this issue.

This essay elaborates on a long-term history of bushcraft in south-central Africa, expanding on links between bushcraft, virility, sexuality and technologies in order to explore what we can know about the micro-politics shaping the production of

2 In order of reference: J. Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); L. Schumacher, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); H. Moore and M. Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890–1990* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1993).

3 See also H. Raffles, 'Intimate Knowledge', *International Social Science Journal*, 54, 3, September 2002, 325–35.

knowledge and expertise in early African societies.⁴ We begin with the problem of defining expertise: why did knowledge of some kinds of technologies – and not others – come to be understood as paths to fame, notoriety, celebrity and even political authority in parts of central, eastern, and southern Africa between the eighth and thirteenth centuries?

By the end of the second millennium, Europeans travelling through the area heard story after story where hunters and metalworkers founded kingdoms as distant as the Shambaa and Kanyok. Of course, the status accorded to those hunters and metallurgists with particular skills and knowledge did not automatically lead to their place in the production of ideas about sovereignty across the southern savannas; many acephalous societies maintained a very different relationship between technical knowledge, skill and power.⁵ An easy answer to this question about the relationship between technological expertise and fame is the instrumental answer: such folk produced meat and metal. They were essential to the subsistence economy. Yet there were other skills in gardening, home building, bone setting, or collecting and processing medicinal plants, to give a few examples, that were as essential to the wellbeing of communities but certainly less celebrated.

How did communities decide that the successful application of particular kinds of knowledge merited special status? Whose labour, knowledge and bodies were implicated in the production of the status enjoyed by hunters and metallurgists across south-central Africa and how did this constellation of knowing bodies, status and feeling change over time? What was at stake for those who didn't undertake such activities but nevertheless contributed to their ritual protection and participated in their celebration? The answers to these questions reveal a complicated history of the micro-politics of knowledge, technologies, sex and reputations in precolonial south-central Africa.

For early African pasts, we lack the detailed documentary records of personal interactions between experts and their collaborators available to scholars of more recent centuries. Yet changes in the lexicons and material cultures of skill, expertise and fame are particularly well suited for revealing the micro-politics of knowledge in the deep past. Skill and knowledge call into our historical narratives the gifted, knowing bodies of individuals so endowed as well as the social character of their efforts in learning and practising. Reputation, fame and notoriety shade into one another, illuminating how wider social groups participated in the politics of knowledge by accepting domains of expertise and recognising individuals as adepts, skilled practitioners and professionals. By historicising how expertise was recognised, contested,

4 K. de Luna, *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming 2016).

5 Compare oral traditions of savanna kingdoms to the social status of hunters among the Lele or Botatwe societies: L. de Heusche, *Le roi ivre ou l'origine de l'État* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); K. de Luna, 'Hunting Reputations: Talent, Individuals, and Community in Precolonial South Central Africa', *Journal of African History*, 53, 3, November 2012, 279–99; M. Douglas, 'The Lele of Kasai' in D. Forde (ed), *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1954), 1–26; S. Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974); T.Q. Reece, *The Rainbow and the Kings: A History of the Luba Empire to 1891* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); J.C. Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire: An Institutional and Ideological History to 1895* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

asserted and protected in the deep past, we trace out the social worlds of experts, asking who was involved in negotiating expertise and at what scales of social and political interaction. In the absence of specialist guilds, professionalisation, and other institutions of training and recognising expertise, much of the politicking surrounding Botatwe bushcraft was undertaken at the micro-level. For example, skilled practitioners negotiated for empowering sex with sisters and mothers or for protection from individual ancestor spirits. Such micro-negotiations are visible to us through changes in the material culture, landscapes and lexicons associated with expert forms of knowledge. We access change through the methodologies of historical linguistics, archaeology, and comparative ethnography.

On Methods and Sources

The communities whose history tied together sex, technology and celebrity between the mid-eighth and mid-thirteenth centuries were oral societies. We learn of their lives through the objects they left near deserted homesteads and the linguistic legacy they passed down to children, who learned to speak to the discerning ears of parents, siblings, neighbours and agemates. The story told here rests primarily on the histories of words: their invention and changing meanings. The histories of these words exhibit curious semantic fields that either collapse or in unexpected ways shore up the distinctions between affective and material life, subjectivity and sociality, people and their things, and the singularity of some kinds of technological expertise and the banalities of others. Words histories capture complexities like the sometimes taboo and sometimes everyday activities of the home, especially the sex lives of spouses and kin. From the traces they left behind, we can deduce that the speakers of proto-languages in the deep past insisted on the complicated articulation of the sensuous, the material and the affective across time in ancient south-central Africa, especially in speaking about technologies like hunting and iron working.⁶ These connections would not be discernable by thinking only about skilled technicians and their actions. Rather, it was in thinking about the sensuous qualities of objects, like technicians' tools, products, landscapes and the kinesthetic and social qualities of bodies implicated in generative technologies that speakers of Botatwe languages in south-central Africa were able to reimagine the sources of technicians' fame (see Fig. 1). This history of technology and celebrity was part of the wider savanna culture from which some societies invented novel political institutions (like royalty) and founded the famous precolonial savanna kingdoms. Yet the politics of reputation in bushcraft unfolded in far more localised, intimate domains among Botatwe societies living around the middle Kafue River between the mid-eighth and mid-thirteenth centuries.

6 I first began thinking of the relationship between affect and technology as I worked with the semantic domains of hunting vocabulary evidence, but the historiographical value of pursuing this line of inquiry was made clear when I read Susan Matt's observation that few scholars had considered the relationship between emotions and technology. Susan Matt, 'Technology and the Emotions, Roundtable: *Wither the History of the Emotions?* Presented at the meeting of the American Historical Association, San Diego CA, January 2010. See also Susan Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out', *Emotion Review*, 3, 1, 2011, esp. 122–3. Matt is interested in the ways in which technology facilitated expressing emotion or invoking emotion in the modern period.

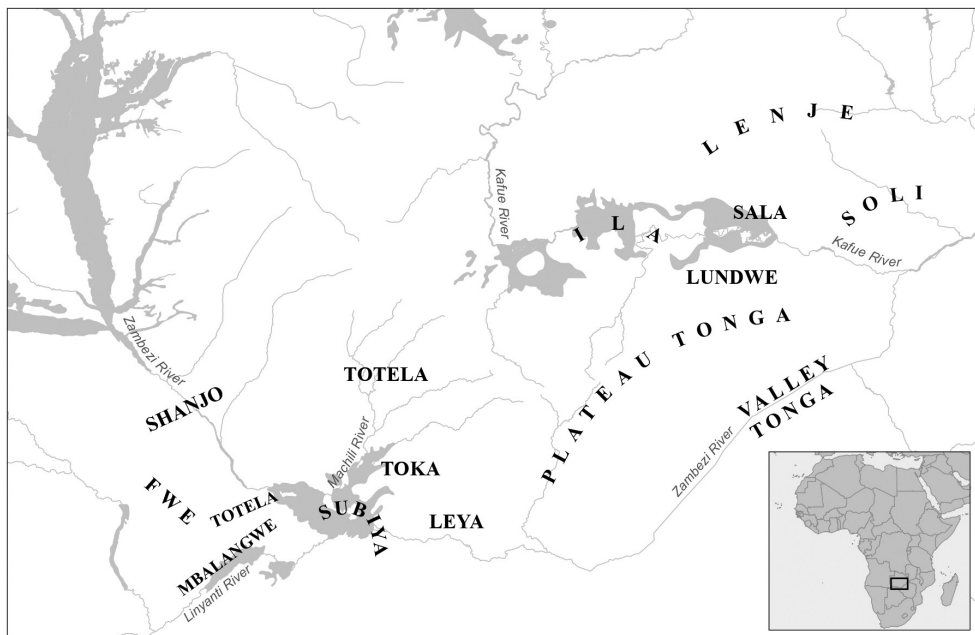


Figure 1: Location of Botatwe languages, c. 1900. Map devised by Kathryn M. de Luna, using information from her article 'Classifying Botatwe: M.60 and K.40 Languages and the Settlement Chronology of South Central Africa', *Africana Linguistica*, 16, 2010, 65–96

Understanding the evidence that undergirds this study requires a cursory knowledge of comparative historical linguistics, which may be less familiar to readers of this journal than the methods of archaeologists.⁷ Briefly, comparative historical linguistics uses a word's phonological shape and distribution in extant languages to determine its place in particular branches of a language family tree (see Fig. 2). A word's phonological shape and distribution also tell us which of three historical processes is responsible for its presence in that branch: inheritance, internal innovation, or borrowing from other languages. A historical linguist determines when a word was produced and by what process, and then uses that information to tell a story with broad geographical and chronological scope.

⁷ The methodologies of comparative historical linguistics are often not as familiar to historians of southern Africa as they are to scholars working in eastern and central Africa. To be sure, the study of 'Bantu' languages is embedded in a particular politics in southern Africa and for this and other technical reasons there has been little of this kind of precolonial history undertaken among the language groups there. For introductions to the application of the historical linguistic method in Africa by historians, compare de Luna, *Collecting Food*, ch 1; C. Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); D. Nurse, 'The Contribution of Linguistics to the Study of History in Africa', *Journal of African History*, 38, 3, 1997, 359–91; D. Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1998), 3–61, 265–9; J. Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 3–33; Vansina, *How Societies Are Born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 1–14, 273–83. For introductions to the method as applied by linguists to languages in Africa and other world regions, see T. Crowley, *Introduction to Historical Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); G.J. Dimmendaal, *Historical Linguistics and the Comparative Study of African Languages* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011).

- Botatwe (diverged c. 500 CE)**
- I. Greater eastern Botatwe (diverged c. 750 CE)
 - a. Central Eastern Botatwe (diverged c. 950 CE)
 - i. Kafue (diverged c. 1250 CE)
 - 1. Ila
 - 2. Tonga
 - 3. Sala
 - 4. Lenje
 - ii. Falls (diverged c. 1700 CE)
 - 1. Toka
 - 2. Leya
 - iii. Lundwe
 - b. Soli
 - II. Western Botatwe (diverged c. 1200 CE)
 - a. Zambezi Hook (diverged c. 1400 CE)
 - i. Shanjo
 - ii. Fwe
 - b. Machili (diverged c. 1425 CE)
 - i. Mbalangwe
 - ii. Subiya
 - iii. Totela

Figure 2: Outline classification of Botatwe languages. Approximate dates of divergence of proto-languages are in parentheses, and extant languages are underlined. For linguistic evidence supporting this classification see de Luna, 'Classifying Botatwe: M.60 and K.40 Languages and the Settlement Chronology of South Central Africa', *Africana Linguistica*, 16, 2010, 65–96. For details on dating the divergence of proto-languages, see de Luna, 'Surveying the Boundaries'.

The Botatwe words reconstructed in this essay were collected not only from published dictionaries and ethnographies but also from years of fieldwork, through word solicitation and participant observation. Data from Botatwe languages was compared with vocabularies of other Bantu languages through the published record and databases of Bantu lexicons to determine the antiquity of words and their meanings. Speakers used the morphology of their languages to derive new words from common roots. This process extended the range of meanings that speakers tied to the roots they used to develop multiple words. The layers of meaning attached to word roots over time all contain historical information that illuminate the social contexts of debates about knowledge. But, through their meanings, words also connect to other words developed from completely different roots (synonyms and antonyms are good examples, and this essay will consider some synonyms). Finally, words connect to other words when they are used together in relation to a particular activity, object or idea.

For each word in these complex networks, these lexicons, we can trace out the historical information embedded in morphology, the semantic ranges of roots, and changing meanings in order to produce a far more complex body of historical

information about past practices. The reconstruction of what words meant is not a projection into the deep past of meanings gleaned from more recent dictionaries and ethnographies. Triangulation between the linguistic, archaeological, and comparative ethnographic records is particularly important in identifying connections between words, objects, and activities. This enables us to build up a detailed, composite historical picture of the social lives of Africans who lived centuries and millennia ago.⁸

The actors of stories developed from the histories of words and lexicons are speakers of the modern or ancestral languages (proto-languages) in which particular words can be reconstructed. Those speakers belonged to generations that shared a way of communicating. They constitute a speech community. We can't capture through linguistic evidence individual conversations about hunting or accusations of sexual misconduct, which are among the more familiar scales of interaction of interest to historians and anthropologists. Yet, the histories of words reflect the aggregated outcome of such personal interactions. They have already undergone a generalisation from the particular that historians and anthropologists rely on, arguing as they do about the relevance of micro-data like letters, conversations, and personal histories. Even if it is not possible to tell the specific life stories of individuals who lived long ago, this unique scale of historical evidence does not preclude thinking about interactions between sets of individuals.⁹

Changing Subsistence Technologies: Cultivating Distinction from the Mundane

From the middle of the eighth century through to the middle of the thirteenth, proto-Central Eastern Botatwe-speaking communities and their linguistic descendants, speakers of proto-Kafue, participated in a regional transformation in the technologies of spear hunting, rapid current fishing and metallurgy. These innovations connected speakers of Botatwe languages to speakers of Bantu languages in a wide arc of the southern savannas: from modern-day north-east Angola, through the Democratic Republic of the Congo, north-eastern Zambia, southern Tanzania, Malawi and further, to languages spoken around the Zambezi River downstream of the Victoria Falls.¹⁰

As part of this transformation, Botatwe speakers invented a new category of landscape, 'the bush', which allowed them to cultivate a distinction between work undertaken in the village and fields and work undertaken beyond. The technological

8 Comparative ethnography analyses the cultures of societies thought to share a history, perhaps because they inhabit the same region or derive from a common ancestral community. With historical methodologies like comparative historical linguistics or archaeology, scholars can test whether such similarities were produced by inheritance, by independent parallel invention, or by contact and borrowing. Thus, comparative ethnography does not project practices of recent centuries into the deep past (a largely suspect approach), nor is it the same as archaeologists' ethnographic analogies. See K. de Luna, J. Fleisher, and S.K. McIntosh, 'Thinking across the African Past: Interdisciplinarity and Early History', *African Archaeological Review*, 29, 2 and 3, September 2012, 75–94. See also Schoenbrun, *Good Place*, 265–9.

9 A point elaborated in de Luna, 'Hunting Reputations'.

10 The next four paragraphs summarise arguments and evidence described in greatest detail in the following publications and citations therein: de Luna, *Collecting Food*; K. de Luna, 'Surveying the Boundaries of History and Archaeology: Early Botatwe Settlement in South Central Africa and the "Sibling Disciplines" Debate', *African Archaeological Review*, 29, 2 and 3, September 2012, 209–51; de Luna 'Hunting Reputations'.

revolution in spearcraft was, paradoxically, sustained by a shift in the subsistence economy dating back to the sixth century: a commitment to cereal agriculture, some cattle keeping, and a greater degree of sedentism. Celebrated spearmen, rapid-current fishers and famous smelters, who seasonally practised their crafts in the bush, sought to distinguish their activities from forms of related labour such as trapping, smithing and basket fishing, which were undertaken in the village and were more closely associated with farming, activities in which such technicians were also involved during most of the year.

Bushcraft, then, emerged out of and was not prior to the creation of a cereal-based savanna agricultural system. The invention of a distinction between the labours of agriculture and the work of the bush was transformative. It created a novel path to singularity, fame, friendship, and ancestorhood based on knowledge of the bush, a politics of talent and technology that recast local understandings of the landscape and resisted the centralisation of political and ritual authority around the agricultural economy. The invention of a new kind of technical knowledge – of bushcraft – depended on the development of new tools and techniques, cultivating a taste for specific products of hunters' and metallurgists' labours, and the invention of a novel landscape. Command of these tools, techniques, products and spaces became cause for celebration, fame, and even a degree of notoriety. But this politics of reputation in bushcraft also depended on the bodily comportment, feelings, tastes, and labour of those who celebrated hunters and metallurgists and, in so doing, produced and colluded with technicians' influence. The details of these developments are laid out elsewhere, but a quick summary shows broadly how negotiations over the fame of experts changed through time and was produced in a broader public than those who enjoyed the privileges of fame and endured its demands.

From the mid-eighth to the mid-thirteenth century, Botatwe speakers grew the vocabulary used to describe new point shapes, arrangements of barbs, midribs, tangs, and ferrules as well as new poisons and spear shafts. These developments in spear technology are also attested in the archaeological record of the middle Kafue and Batoka Plateau regions of this period.¹¹ Ironworking flourished, with new forms of points, ferrules, and end spikes. The regional faunal record shifts toward higher mortality rates of gregarious antelope species, hippos and elephants, all of them hunted by groups armed with spears. Moreover, fully grown adults of these fauna dominate mortality curves; archaeologists see this as indicating the emergence of skilful communal hunting practices, a form of hunting we return to at the end of the essay.¹²

As part of the innovation in spearcraft, Central Eastern Botatwe speakers reconceptualised the social meaning of skill in the kinds of hunting and fishing undertaken with spears. From an older word for a kind of long blade, the inhabitants of the southern savannas, from north-east Angola to the middle Kafue, developed a new noun

11 In addition to the citations in note 3, see R. Derricourt, *Man on the Kafue: The Archaeology and History of the Itzhiitezhi Area of Zambia* (New York: Lilian Berber, 1985), 208–15; B. Fagan, *Iron Age Cultures in Zambia*, vol 1 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), 70–82; B. Fagan, D. Phillipson and S. Daniels, *Iron Age Cultures in Zambia*, vol 2 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969).

12 Fagan, *Iron Age Cultures*, vol 1, 78. An aggregate table detailing the changing faunal records of the middle Kafue and Batoka Plateau sites may be found in de Luna, 'Surveying', 235–7.

*-pàdɔ, to name a ‘celebrated, skilled hunter/spearman’.¹³ Skill in hunting with spears was nothing new, but the category of person who might be celebrated for it was a novel contribution to the social landscape. The honorific ultimately derived from an ancient Bantu verb *-pá, ‘to give’, with the extensive verbal affix.¹⁴ The morphology of the term described the actions of such a famously skilled person: ‘giving’ his weapon toward his quarry or the generous distribution of the fruits of his labours to his community of supporters.

To describe what was new about the kind of work undertaken by a skilled hunter (*mwaalu*), Central Eastern Botatwe speakers invented a new verb, *-wèz-, to talk about hunting or fishing with spears, possibly throwing spears.¹⁵ In Ila, the best-documented Botatwe language, *kuweza* also refers to the hunt for economic success and its use to launch and manage one’s social position, precisely the process that could produce a status like *-pàdɔ.¹⁶ Indeed, the most likely source root is *-gèd-, a widespread Bantu verb with a broad range of meanings. As a verb, the root commonly glosses as ‘to try’, ‘to think’ or ‘to measure’, but in noun form it commonly means ‘wisdom’ or even ‘guile’ in central African Bantu languages.¹⁷ When Central Eastern Botatwe speakers developed the verb *-wèz- in the last quarter of the first millennium to talk about a new form of hunting and fishing with spears, they sought to describe the social implications of command of technological knowledge.

We can easily imagine explanations for this technological innovation in spear-craft: protecting herds and crops and supplying food in lean times. Yet the words invented to describe the new tools, landscapes and actions of spearmen point to different justifications. We need not, and perhaps should not, apply those utilitarian reasons so obvious to us as rationales for technological innovation. The vocabulary that was invented to talk about a far older technology was merely clothed in a few novel objects and new assertions of expertise. Speakers developed words as they debated the new social and economic meanings attached to activities that, as matters of subsistence, had a long history already. How, then, did skilled hunters argue that what they were doing deserved the attention and support of other participants and celebrants whose efforts sustained their fame? Spearmen were ‘marksmen’ in two senses

13 Christopher Ehret reconstructs the root for the instrument as *-palɔ, ‘long, stabbing blade’ to proto-Bantu; the distribution he lists for the blade includes eastern Bantu languages and Bobangi. The blade probably predates the application of the root to its wielder in class 1/2, but the Bobangi attestation follows known paths of contact in central Africa from the 8th century and is more likely a result of that contact than the proto-Bantu status of the reconstruction for the tool proposed by Ehret. C. Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. to A.D. 400* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 113. For a more detailed history of this root, see de Luna, ‘Hunting Reputations’.

14 Y. Bastin and T. Schadeberg (eds), ‘Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3’ (Tervuren, Belgium: Musée Royale de l’Afrique Centrale, 2005), <http://www.metafro.be/blr> accessed July 2015, ID main 2344; M. Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu: An Introduction to the Comparative Linguistics and Prehistory of the Bantu Languages*, 4 vols (Farnborough, 1967–1971), Comparative Series (hereafter ‘CS’) 1404.

15 The analysis of *-wèz- draws heavily on de Luna, *Collecting Food*, ch 3. This is a correction of the reconstruction published as *-weja in de Luna, ‘Hunting Reputations’.

16 As Fielder notes, ‘the Ila themselves describe a man’s economic struggle, his seeking for wealth and power, as his *buwezhi*, his hunting (*kuweza* – to hunt, pursue).’ R.J. Fielder, ‘Economic Spheres in Pre-Colonial Ila Society’, *African Social Research*, 28, December 1979, 624.

17 Bastin and Schadeberg, ‘Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3’, ID 1345; Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu*, CS, 797.

of the word. They ‘marked’ prey. But they also ‘marked’ as available for new social meanings some kinds of knowledge and labour that had once been quite banal.¹⁸

Developments in vocabularies of fame and technology thus reveal the conceptual leaps speakers made as they gave new meanings to once-banal actions and concepts and convinced others to accept them. Those new meanings entered the linguistic record as innovations in vocabulary; word histories reflect the accepted aggregated range of meanings deployed in individual uses of words. Hunters and metallurgists were not alone responsible for creating bushcraft. Working out the social meanings of changing technological knowledge was an intimate process that connected the embodied experiences of technicians to the feelings of their celebrants and the sexual lives of collaborators. To describe the micro-scale of such negotiations using word histories requires imagining what kinds of bodily experiences inspired individual hunters, smelters and their collaborators to make the conceptual leaps reflected in the changing meaning of words.

Bellows Work and Bluster: Reworking the Ancient Aerial Character of Fame

The celebrity of **pàdǝ* was an outcome of struggles to redefine the social and economic value of spearcraft.¹⁹ Rather than naturalise fame by assuming a universal ambition for its trappings, we might well ask what such celebrity was like in the closing centuries of the first millennium: how it worked, how it was recognised, and what it felt like to both the celebrated and the celebrants. Central Eastern Botatwe speakers inherited a very old metaphor for speaking about fame: the wind. They spoke of fame, **mpǝwo*, with an inherited word that ultimately derived from an older Bantu word, **-pǝǝp-* meaning ‘blow, wind, breath from lungs’. Significantly, this single root for fame encapsulates a nested set of ideas that shaped how Central Eastern Botatwe communities thought fame worked. From the broadest, oldest meaning of ‘wind, breath and lung’, many Bantu languages, including some eastern Botatwe languages, developed meanings like ‘spirit’, ‘news’, ‘opinion’, ‘talk’, or a ‘thing well known’. These meanings connected the discursive mechanisms by which fame was literally called into being with the social circuits of the living and the dead through which it was conducted.

If proto-Central Eastern Botatwe speakers reconfigured the relationship between fame and the politics of knowledge in the last centuries of the first millennium, as subsistence technology changed, we would also expect them to have invented new ways to speak about fame. Moreover, we might expect such a new vocabulary to mirror

18 I am indebted to David Schoenbrun and his Fall 2014 HIST 465 class for sharing concepts and ideas around the problem of meaning in the material and linguistic record used to write early African history. The logic of this and the following paragraph borrows heavily from D. Schoenbrun, ‘Pythons Worked: Constellating Communities of Practice with Conceptual Metaphor in Northern Lake Victoria, ca. 800 to 1200 CE’ in Andrew P. Roddick and Ann B. Stahl (eds), *Knowledge in Motion: Making Communities and Constellations of Practice across Time and Place* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016 forthcoming).

19 The following three paragraphs draw heavily on de Luna, *Collecting Food*, ch 3. See also Bastin and Schadeberg, ‘Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3’, ID 2660 and IDs 2661, 2662, 4823, 2690, 2691, 2693, 4797, 4381, 2469; E. Colson, *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century* (Lusaka, Zambia: Bookworld, 2006), 50; D. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Ila Usage, 1860–1960* (Hamburg: Lit, 2000), 206, 436, 492, 381; Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute, *Chitonga–English Dictionary* (Monze, Zambia: Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute, 2011), 1118.

the ties between technology and fame exhibited in the innovation **-pàdǎ*. Following these expectations, the innovation **-vǎbi*, ‘famous, rich person’, shows that new conceptualisations of fame depended on developments in technological knowledge. At the same time that the status of **-pàdǎ* was invented, Central Eastern Botatwe speakers similarly invented the status of **-vǎbi* from knowledge about metallurgy, an innovation that mirrors the increasing cultural value of metals across the savannas in the last quarter of the first millennium.²⁰ This new word for famous, rich person derived from an object used in metallurgy: either an older eastern Bantu root, **-gùbà* (smithy, bellows) or an ancient eastern Bantu areal form, *°-vuba* (bellows).²¹ The development of new forms of fame from the tool used to blast air through a smithy or smelting furnace clearly built on older ideas about the blustery, aerial character of fame encapsulated in the term **mpǎwo*, even as the knowledge and materials through which one could build up great fame and wealth shifted at the end of the first millennium.

The links between **mpǎwo* and **-vǎbi* thus seem clear, but **-pàdǎ*’s relationship to them deserves closer scrutiny. While it shares the semantic field of fame and celebrity based on knowledge of bushcraft, **-pàdǎ* might not conjure up a sense of breathiness or windiness as easily as blustery bellows work. Yet the windiness of hunting with spears becomes clear when we think about the qualities of the moving body and tools of the celebrated hunter, **-pàdǎ*.

The hunter, who is also a farmer most of the year, works in the dry season, which includes the windy season in south-central Africa. He and his wife and or lover initiate his task by abstaining from sex the night before hunting. In the morning, he makes an offering to the ancestor spirit from whom he inherited his craft at a shrine, a forked branch near his homestead or in the bush, which also functions as his spear-rest and trophy rack. He asks his ancestor, whom he cannot see but whose affects are as visible as the wind for which spirits and fame are also named, to be the source of ‘guided mobility’ in the ‘transient workspace’ of the bush.²² The hunter runs with his dogs, heaving in air to chase down quarry, stilling himself perhaps by controlling his breath as he stalks the animal. His knowledge of the wind’s changing direction is of upmost importance; for, just as the vibrating air of the speech of his admirers carries the hunter’s reputation like the wind, so the wind might carry his scent to his quarry in warning, undermining the hunter’s efforts and threatening his reputation for skill and success.²³ His spear moves through the air, shaped by the wind and directing new

20 C. Kriger, *Pride of Men: Ironworking in 19th Century West Central Africa* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), ch 1 and 2, passim. The cultural value of iron was obvious in south-central Africa as early as the 8th-century burials at Chundu, where Early Iron Age vessels contain hoards of iron and copper objects including axes, hoes and bangles (both iron and copper), and lumps of iron bloom alongside cowries. J.O. Vogel, ‘An Early Iron Age Burial from Chundu Farm, Zambia’, *Zambia Museums Journal*, 6, 1982, 118–25.

21 There is some disagreement about the antiquity of the underlying root, but we can be sure of the antiquity of the semantic innovation. Bastin and Schadeberg, ‘Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3’, ID 1526; C. Ehret, ‘Establishment of Iron-Working in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa: Linguistic Inferences on Technological History’, *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika*, 16/17, 2000, 125–76; J. Vansina, ‘Linguistic Evidence for the Introduction of Ironworking into Bantu-Speaking Africa’, *History in Africa*, 33, 2006, 321–61.

22 C. Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces: Technologies of Everyday Innovation in Zimbabwe* (Cambridge MA: MIT, 2014). Mavhunga builds on Tim Ingold’s influential concept ‘wayfaring’, which stresses the entwined relationship of mobility and knowing. Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), ch 3.

23 On the danger of animals catching the scent of a hunter on the wind, see A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond: The Making of Men and Chikunda Identities in the Unstable World of South-Central Africa, 1750–1920* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2004), 108.

air currents, eventually wounding the animal. When the wounded animal is found, cutting its throat redirects the felled animal's breath and changes its sonorous quality to the heaving tones and vibrations of wet membranes, muscle, and skin in the long minutes it takes for the animal's breath to cease, ensuring that the hunter will be greeted with the singing and breathless excitement of the village when he returns. The hunter's return includes laying his spear to rest in the forked branch of his ancestor shrine, accompanied by a gesture or word of thanks directed at the protective spirit whose influence mitigated the possible dangers of those unruly forces stirred to action in the bush during the chase. The hunter's success circulates on the lips of those living in the homestead and those residing beyond its fence, simultaneously creating and sustaining his reputation, just as his hunts will be commemorated by future generations' talk in the stories and petitions that will secure the hunter's place in his family's community of efficacious ancestral spirits. There is, then, some breathiness to the experiences of the celebrated hunter, to the creation of his fame, and to the objects he works in and on in life and in death.

Inventing the Bush: New Landscapes of Fame, 750–1250

The sensuous qualities of wind and breath are captured in the etymologies, meanings and actions of **-pàdō*, **mpōwo* and **-vōbi*, however distinct their technological or material basis. The anthropologist Webb Keane might observe that resemblance ('iconicity') offers us a way to think about how various objects, actors and the actions taken on those objects can lead us back to the same underlying concern with fame. For Central Eastern Botatwe speakers in the late first millennium, the work of hunters, metallurgists, fame and wind all resembled one another. But Keane's approach to objects offers the historian something more. The sensuous qualities of objects – for us, their breathy windiness – 'must be embodied in something in particular' like a spear, a bellows, an animal's last gasp, the furnace's blustery blue flame, and so forth. But as soon as the sensuous windiness of the core object in play – our spear, our bellows – is embodied, it is 'actually, and often contingently (rather than by logical necessity), bound up with other qualities,' Keane suggests: 'redness in an apple comes along with a spherical shape, light weight, sweet flavor, a tendency to rot, and so forth.' As Keane warns, 'there is no way entirely to eliminate that factor of co-presence, or what we might call *bundling*. This points us to one of the obvious but important effects of materiality: redness cannot be manifest without some embodiment that inescapably binds it to some other qualities as well, which can become contingent but real factors in its social life,' thereby inviting new possibilities. Such new possibilities are guided by what Keane calls 'semiotic ideology': 'agentive subjects and acted-upon objects.'²⁴

For Keane, much to the historian's relief, this 'openness of things' is historical: 'To realize some of the potential of things, and not others, is the stuff of historical

²⁴ Webb Keane, 'Signs Are Not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things' in D. Miller (ed), *Materiality* (Durham: Duke, 2005), 182–201. Keane applies Peirce's theory of semiotics to a reading of the material world.

struggles and contingencies.²⁵ What new possibilities did marksmen and metallurgists open up through their work with bellows and spears, those new material objects (or new iterations of older ones) wielded in crafting fame in the last centuries of the first millennium in south-central Africa? To answer this question, we need to seek further overlaps in the material qualities of spears and bellows and in the embodied experience of hunting and metallurgy as understood by the celebrated practitioners and those connected to them. Here we can turn to one more link crafted between the technologies of **-pàdǎ* and **-vǒbi* in the closing centuries of the first millennium, a link that neither directly includes nor excludes **mpɔwo*. This link is both spatial and conceptual; it lies at the man-made intersection between the geographies of spear-craft, smelting and spirits' influence: the bush.

Between the seventh and eleventh centuries across central and southern Africa, the well-established technology of iron smelting, which dates to at least the first century in this area, underwent a dramatic change: the location of smelting shifted from within the village boundary to unidentifiable sites outside, ones that were probably in the bush, according to the ethnographic and archaeological record.²⁶ Central Eastern Botatwe speakers who achieved the status of **-vǒbi* or the fame of **-pàdǎ* invented new paths to renown and influence on the basis of their ability to travel through and make productive landscapes that lay beyond the day to day bustle of the village. The reputations of **-vǒbi* and **-pàdǎ* depended on a widely accepted contrast between the village and the bush. That contrast was established (or perhaps re-established) in the late first millennium as the bush was christened with a new name: **-sókwe*.

In the last quarter of the first millennium, Central Eastern Botatwe speakers – probably mostly or only men – who undertook forms of hunting and metallurgy associated with fame and wealth did so under the cover of the bush.²⁷ To identify the micro-politics of knowledge underpinning new claims of talent and paths to fame, we need to understand the historical development of the idea of the bush. For those Botatwe communities about which we have a rich ethnographic literature, the bush is a key concept for understanding the social, economic and ritual dimensions of the landscape because it is firmly associated with metaphysical forces implicated in acts of transformation such as hunting, initiation and smelting (and also investiture, in other eastern, central, and southern African societies). Entry into and activities undertaken within this space require careful planning and ritual management to be

25 Ibid.

26 This pattern was observed by: M. Bisson, 'The Prehistoric Coppermines of Zambia' (Unpublished PhD diss, University of California, 1976); Fagan, *Iron Age*, 88–91; Fagan et al, *Iron Age*, 43; R.R. Inskeep, 'Some Iron Age Sites in Northern Rhodesia', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 17, 1962, 152–3, 155–6; Inskeep, 'An Iron-Smelting Furnace in Southern Zambia', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 33, 1978, 113–7; D. Killick, 'Technology in Its Social Setting: Bloomery Iron-Smelting at Kasungu, Malawi, 1860–1940' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Yale University, 1990), 76–7; J. Robertson, 'South African Early Iron Age in Zambia' in P. Peregrine and M. Ember (eds), *Encyclopedia of Prehistory*, vol 1 (New York: Springer, 2001), 262; J. Vogel, *Kumadzulo: An Early Iron Age Village Site in Southern Zambia* (Lusaka and London: Oxford University Press for the National Museums of Zambia, 1971), 39–40; Vogel, *Kamangoza: An Introduction to the Iron Age Cultures of the Victoria Falls Region* (Nairobi and London: Oxford University Press for the National Museums of Zambia, 1971), 39; Vogel, *Simbusenga: The Archaeology of the Intermediate Period in Southern Zambia* (London: Oxford University Press for the National Museums of Zambia, 1975), 66.

27 The following six paragraphs draw heavily on de Luna, *Collecting Food*, ch 3.

successful, but the landscape itself contributes to that success because it contains such strong, potentially generative powers.

Elizabeth Colson's description of Tonga ideas about the bush has much in common with ideas shared by most Botatwe societies, so it is worth quoting at length. For Tonga speakers living on the Batoka Plateau in the twentieth century, the bush was 'a metaphor for the great nonhuman sources of power pervasive of the wild', a space that 'carried connotations of wilderness and of absence of human control', and was 'the embodiment of power antithetical to human power'.²⁸ Colson explains that the bush

is still an ambivalent metaphor, for while it harbours much good, it also stands for matters out of human control, danger, and evil. It also stands for illicit activities. Children born of an affair are called "children of the bush". And ... the bodies of children born with certain physical anomalies and adults who were rejected by society [lepers, suicides, strangers] were once disposed of by throwing them away in the bush.

Thus, 'ghosts and the spirits of the unmourned adult dead who died away from home are associated with the bush.' While the bush is 'unpredictable and contains malevolent forces', it is also a place 'to which [Tonga] turned for extra empowerment' through medicine. Colson teaches us: '[m]edicines and charms, whether for protection or witchcraft, are primarily associated with the bush' and 'the use of such charms opens [users] to accusations of witchcraft, for they mobilize power stemming from outside the village'. Pithily, Botatwe speakers understand the bush as a place imbued with 'unrestricted power' (in the words of Eugenia Herbert), a power of great social potential and possible danger, one we need to take seriously to understand ancient African landscapes as historically contingent settings in which the micro-politics of knowledge played out.²⁹

Across Bantu-speaking Africa and even beyond, anthropologists have observed the link between ambivalent or even dangerous power and the bush, especially in rituals associated with activities that are undertaken there.³⁰ To be sure, scholars often read the danger and unrestricted power of the bush and activities like hunting and smelting into the deep past on the basis of their 'inherent' risks..³¹ But this approach

28 Quotes in this paragraph are taken from Colson, *Tonga Religious Life*, 107, 92, 104, 92, 107 and 93. These observations accord with my own fieldwork experiences studying wild resource use among Botatwe communities as well as observations throughout B. Reynolds, *The Material Culture of the Peoples of the Gwembe Valley* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968); P. Reynolds and C.C. Cousins, Lwano Lwanyika: *Tonga Book of the Earth* (London: Panos, 1989); T. Scudder, *The Ecology of the Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962); E.W. Smith and A.M. Dale, *The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1920).

29 E. Herbert, *Iron, Gender, and Power: Rituals of Transformation in African Societies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 172.

30 Eugenia Herbert's crosscultural study demonstrates the geographical range of these associations in Africa, while Victor Turner's work on the Lunda Ndembu is perhaps the most famous ethnography of 'the bush'. Herbert, *Iron, Gender, and Power*; V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

31 On hunting, consider the introduction to S. Kent (ed), *Farmers as Hunters: The Implications of Sedentism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1989. For similar arguments in the European context, see M. Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

naturalises cultural ideas about fear, risk and danger. Rather, the bush is a spatial concept whose development can be historicised.

The widespread distribution of the village/bush dichotomy across Bantu speaking regions of Africa (and beyond) speaks to its antiquity, yet the words used to name the bush changed over time, demonstrating the ways in which the space was refashioned by its users. Botatwe speakers probably already had a concept we might gloss as ‘the bush’ when they invented a new name for it in the centuries around the turn of the first millennium, during a time when new meanings and tools were grafted onto far older technologies.³² Even in the face of a broad, longstanding consensus about the utility of the idea of ‘the bush’, it worked as a boundary object, with slightly different meanings for various members of the speech community describing it with the same name.³³ Although many villagers travelled through the bush, harvested its wild fruits and sought out ingredients for relishes and medical treatments, speakers also recognised and debated what was novel about some people’s experiences of and in the bush – novelties that were dependent on changing technologies. Speakers used a new name, **-sókwe*, that could better describe the social significance of the kinds of experiences of that space enjoyed by only a few members of the community.

In modern Botatwe languages, *isokwe* is the quintessential ‘bush’; it is an open space with the scrub vegetation that indicates that it is neither settled nor cultivated.³⁴ This innovation of the word elaborated on an older, more widespread verb **-còk-* (to incite), which itself derives from an ancient Bantu term that glosses as ‘to poke in, put in, prick with a point, hide, ram in’.³⁵ Contemporary attestations in the best documented Botatwe languages reveal a complicated network of meanings tying together ideas about ‘provoking’, ‘inciting’ and ‘stabbing’ with ‘being first’, ‘establishing’ or ‘originating’. This semantic range suggests that speakers imagined acts of creation in the bush to require provocation by poking or spearing. Modern attestations make explicit the link to hunting: as a transitive verb, *kusoka* means ‘to examine trap(s)’ and ‘to start a quarrel’, while *kusokoma* means ‘to poke, as with a spear in a burrow, or in an animal’s chest to kill it’.³⁶

When Central Eastern Botatwe, Kafue and neighbouring communities named the open bush around them with the passive tense of the verb **-còk-*, they imagined this landscape to be a place of potential creation, that was literally ‘the poked, the prodded, the hidden, the entered’. It was a setting for and ingredient in acts of origination incited by the plunging action of spears thrust into quarry stalked, netted, or

32 It is difficult to determine whether this word was innovated in proto-Central Eastern Botatwe or proto-Kafue. The lenition (softening) of the initial consonant in Lundwe is unexpected, which might suggest a proto-Kafue origin, but the very short duration of the proto-Central Eastern Botatwe speech community reminds us that the history of the two linguistic periods bleed into one another in a matter of a few short generations.

33 I appreciate the mention of boundary objects in the guest editors’ original call for papers for this volume. Susan Star and James Griesemer, ‘Institutional Ecology, “Translations” and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39’, *Social Studies of Science*, 19, 3, 1989, 387–420.

34 Fowler, *Dictionary of Ila*, 242; Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute, *Chitonga-English Dictionary*, 970, see also 861 for *cisokwe*. Consider the related term *cisoko*: ‘a bush, a hiding-place, refuge; the usual way; the origin or nature of a thing’ in Fowler, *Dictionary of Ila*, 129.

35 Bastin and Schadeberg, ‘Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3’, ID 644-5 and Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu*, CS 371.

36 Fowler, *Dictionary of Ila*, 652-3. The word *Kusokoma* seems to include the positional (stative) suffix **-am-*, but with an assimilation to the first vowel of the root.

trapped in the bush, the pricking of furnaces with bellows' points or the rhythmic push of air goading the flames of the smelt. The old aerial qualities of spearcraft and metallurgy were still present but the gustiness of the activities was bundled with their pricking, piercing, poking, and inciting qualities. It was this latter cluster of kinesthetic experiences for the subjects and material experiences for the objects of bushcraft that were put forward as the quintessential encounter with the bush. *-*Sókwe* was a place of great potential power that could be incited and activated by those spearmen and smelters capable of prodding such generative forces towards acts of creation and social significance. *-*Sókwe* was the space where the geographies of the spirit world and excitable life forces met and overlapped in a way that could support the unique status sought by skilled hunters and smelters, thrusters of spears and blustery inciters of flames.

If Central Eastern Botatwe communities probably inherited some category of landscape that scholars might gloss as 'the bush', why did they invent *-*sókwe*, with its emphasis on inciting acts of creation through prodding, poking, and spearing? The actions of technicians summoned the uncertain and potentially dangerous power of the bush even as the men drew upon that power to protect and ensure the success of their labours. We might imagine that the invention of *isokwe* was a mechanism of control, an idea that fits well with evidence that various Bantu communities associate hunters' success with antisocial behaviours like witchcraft.³⁷ Perhaps ambitious spearmen and metallurgists carefully describing the dangers of the transformative power saturating *-*sókwe* sought to guard access to the wealth and social influence available to those who could work productively in the bush. Yet we could equally imagine the efforts of villagers who sought to limit the wealth and social influence of ambitious, skilled spearmen and smelters through talk about the dangers and anti-social powers of the bush and those who hide their wealth-generating labours in its shadows.

Both these explanations for the invention of *-*sókwe* hold merit. But while they conform to our assumed contest for control over paths to social mobility, power and influence, they do little to address the extreme uncertainty, fear, triumph and celebrations that were shared across the community upon the completion of a successful smelt or hunt and in anticipation of sharing in the fruits of such labours. An instrumental reading thus ignores the community's desire for hunters' fame and wealth in favour of hunters' personal ambitions, and the affective outcomes of bushcraft in favour of its material outcomes, though all such distinctions were probably blurred.³⁸

The difficulty with identifying why the bush was renamed is, of course, a problem rooted in the scale of the evidence, which tends to reify the undifferentiated social world of non-technicians. Without direct evidence, it is easy to revert to the familiar social faultlines along which power struggles might take place, invoking conflicts

³⁷ Turner, *Forest*.

³⁸ For a more complete exploration of the relationship between the affective and the material, see K. de Luna, 'Affect and Society in Precolonial Africa', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 46, 1, 2013, 123–50.

between upstart marksmen and established authorities such as the leaders of lineages, or appealing to the precarious balance between the power of Big Men and their wary dependants bent on maintaining some degree of autonomy. Indeed, to ignore the potential for conflict recreates an uncomfortably idyllic 'Merrie Africa'. The linguistic evidence does not directly attest to such conflicts, though we need not assume that the new politics of fame went unchallenged. The ethnographic record, however, does describe the social context in which hunters and smelters undertook their efforts in the bush, providing a more complex picture of those who did not directly participate in the hunt or smelt but whose actions, nevertheless, were central to its success. This part of the story takes us into the sex lives of hunters, smelters and their intimate kith and kin, and suggests that changes in bushcraft, technological expertise and fame were tied to the invention of new ideas about virility.

Sex, Technology and Generation

When hunters, metallurgists and their friends, neighbours, elders and dependants spoke about bushcraft in south-central Africa in recent centuries, they were also often indirectly speaking about sex.³⁹ Scholarship on hunting and metallurgy has long observed that the powers associated with human reproduction were understood to be either symbolically or actually implicated in the success of such technologies of the bush.⁴⁰ Several common ideas emerge from this vast literature. In the proper context, sexual intercourse both creates and safeguards life. Not only is sex the beginning of human reproduction, it is also integral to fortifying pregnancy. Moreover, in ritual and sometimes in everyday contexts, sex between certain people, such as between owners of the land and their spouses or between husbands and wives, is thought to initiate and fortify other fertilities – of the land, of herds – on which human life depends.

But there is a second widespread pattern in the ethnography concerning the generative power of sex. Sex can endanger people and their many, varied efforts at productivity because it is homologous with the generative activities people seek to protect.⁴¹ Sex before activities like hunting, smelting or brewing might drain participants of the life forces they need to ensure success. In the Botatwe area, husbands and wives avoid sex the night before tasks like planting, threshing, hunting, journeying, beer making and smelting.⁴²

Sexual intercourse between spouses, then, is either proscribed or taboo in relation to certain activities adult men and women undertake within a broader economy.

39 The bush is a fairly widespread metaphor for sex. So, incidentally, are other activities of food production and preparation. Compare, for example, Colson, *Tonga Religious Life*, ch 5 with T.O. Beidelman, *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1993), chs 3 and 4.

40 This is a vast literature. The definitive work remains Herbert, *Iron, Gender, and Power*. For south-central Africa, see many of the citations above and especially S. Marks, *Large Mammals and a Brave People: Subsistence Hunters in Zambia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976); A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond*; Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces*.

41 Herbert makes the observation about these activities and also those 'antithetical to' others in *Iron, Gender, and Power*, passim.

42 Colson, *Tonga Religious Life*, passim; Smith and Dale, *Ila-Speaking Peoples*, vol 1, 261–3; vol 2, 44. Of course, such practices are not unique to Botatwe societies.

Thus, the sex lives of men and women are monitored carefully.⁴³ For example, Botatwe societies, like many others in Bantu-speaking Africa and beyond, have rituals for removing the dangers of inappropriate sexual conduct like adultery, and disassembling the sex lives of widows from their deceased husbands. They also have institutions for bringing love affairs into proper social alignment with lovers' spouses and children, and with the generative activities of the lovers themselves, who often must follow the same sex taboos as spouses.

A third common idea about sex in the ethnographic record is that sexual intercourse that falls outside the social institutions of marriage and love affairs and the domestic spaces associated with them is normally taboo. Incest, brief adulterous liaisons and witches' sexuality are all associated with the bush, not the home. Such sex, however, is also potentially empowering. Among Tonga communities, a hunter's sister or mother might have sex with him the night before a hunt to protect and empower him, much like offerings and medicines.⁴⁴ These broad patterns suggest a widespread but varied set of beliefs about how the sex lives of those undertaking generative activities such as hunting, smelting, brewing and threshing, and also the sex lives of people who belonged to those technicians' households and lineages, affect the success of generative endeavours.

We await a deep history of sexuality in Bantu-speaking regions of Africa.⁴⁵ In its absence, it is difficult to historicise the relationship between marksmen and metallurgists and their wives and lovers, their sisters and mothers. As similar as the activities may seem in the ethnographic record of a large expanse of the continent, differences across cultures suggest a complex history of common practices and multiple instances of local innovation and expansive borrowing.

It is possible that sex, hunting, and metallurgy had long been associated with each other and with the bush before the centuries around the turn of the first millennium, when hunting, smelting and the bush all took on new meanings and new names in the Botatwe area. In the face of changing ideas about the value of some kinds of technological knowledge, it seems likely that the older ideas about how generation and regeneration worked were then used by speakers to reconfigure (or perhaps simply connect for the first time) the sex lives of wives, lovers, sisters and mothers to the bushcraft undertaken by kinsmen and lovers. The evidence of this connection is spotty and difficult to date. By focusing on a single technology, spear-craft, we can triangulate among three streams of evidence – ethnographic, linguistic, and archaeological – in an attempt to discern the antiquity of ethnographic evidence associating women's sexuality and spearmen's endeavours.

43 On the careful monitoring of the sex lives of community members in south-central Africa, see also M. Vaughan, "'Divine Kings': Sex, Death and Anthropology in Inter-War East/Central Africa", *Journal of African History*, 49, 2008, 383–401.

44 Colson, *Tonga Religious Life*, 100, 102. Marc Epprecht discusses hunters' sex with other men as a form of empowerment in *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 38.

45 But see C. Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010), ch 7. As in parts of this essay, Saidi relies on a comparative ethnographic approach to historicising particular practices like labia stretching, but there is no way to assess the antiquity of such practices without archaeological evidence or reconstructed words.

In the ethnographic record of the best-documented Botatwe societies, the practices of gifting between men and their wives, lovers and betrothed are often connected to the products and tools of spearcraft. In Tonga and Ila societies, spears are part of marriage exchanges, either as bridewealth or as part of the ceremony that announces the consummation of the marriage.⁴⁶ Similarly, husbands and lovers were expected to give their wives, lovers and betrothed antelope skins, especially *lechwe* hides, to wear around their hips as aprons, marking their status as adult women who were allowed to be or were already sexually active.⁴⁷

Evidence from the linguistic record shows that the special status accorded to spearmen first developed in the closing centuries of the first millennium as changing technologies sustained new forms of wealth and celebrity. Unsurprisingly, the word developed for the location in which these new technologies were practised, **-sókwe*, 'the poked, prodded place', was also used to develop words about virility in both Botatwe languages and those far beyond. For example, in Ila, the root in another noun class refers to male pubic hair, a source of a man's virility requiring protection.⁴⁸ An obvious example from the growing literature on sexuality in southern Africa is the Zulu word *isoka*, a term for a playboy that originated as a word for a circumcised man, an unmarried man, or young man 'who had begun to court as a first step toward marriage'.⁴⁹ The distribution of words connecting the root **-còk-* to ideas about virility might indicate great antiquity, though more research is needed on this root.

The landscape named with the novel word **-sókwe* was also a changing place in the archaeological record, as discussed above. Taken together, the archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic evidence suggests that **-sókwe* simultaneously conjured up the thrusting action of spears and bellows and the virility associated with those who could provoke its generative powers to bear fruit in activities (such as hunting) that were understood through the lens of human reproduction.⁵⁰ The invention of bushcraft, then, was both an assertion of a technological feat and a social achievement by marksmen who claimed a new kind of virile masculinity. But the opportunity to be the kind of man who could provoke the bush depended on intimate negotiations within and between households because it demanded particular forms of sexual comportment from marksmen and the women closest to them.

Triangulating between these three forms of evidence suggests that spearmen were involved in an economy of gifting that was connected to a moral economy of

46 Colson, *Tonga Religious Life*, 83; Smith and Dale, *Ila-Speaking Peoples*, vol 2, 56–7.

47 E. Colson, *Social Organization of the Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 20, 110–11; Smith and Dale, *Ila-Speaking Peoples*, vol 1, 96, 155.

48 Fowler, *Dictionary of Ila*, 129–30.

49 Mark Hunter, *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 26, 37, 49, 50–5. In 19th-century South Africa, when Zulu speakers talked about *isoka*, they were referring to young men who were accepted lovers, often quite popular with young women. These young dandies had sex with multiple partners, inventing a new youthful masculinity even as they aspired to the social influence that came with polygamy later in the lifecycle. Zulu *isoka* is the socially successful performance of provocation and inciting in the domain of sex. See Mark Hunter, 'Cultural Politics and Masculinities: Multiple-Partners in Historical Perspective in KwaZulu-Natal', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 7, 4, July–August 2005, 389–403.

50 As Eugenia Herbert observed over twenty years ago: Herbert, *Iron, Gender, Power*.

sex; they owned the tools and supplied the products that facilitated marriages and demonstrated proper care of wives, lovers and betrothed. Many scholars argue that cosmologies linking women's sexual lives to technologies usually practised by men were mechanisms by which men sought to control women's sexuality.⁵¹ That may be so, but it is only half the story because women's sexual conduct held the power of life and death over technicians who were husbands and lovers. Future historical research on sexuality in early African societies may well reveal that women also controlled men through such cosmologies; they could kill men through well-timed infidelity and withhold key sources of empowerment, ultimately shaping men's material and social success.

By the early centuries of the second millennium, during the era of the proto-Kafue speech community, the association between spearcraft, expertise, fame and sex intensified and yet it also became less exclusive by becoming more public, at least some of the time. Names for antelope species that were hunted with spears were given feminine prefixes, perhaps indicating their value as the source of gifts men gave to women with whom they had or sought sexual relationships. In the same period, proto-Kafue speakers developed a new word for the communal game drives, **chila*, that targeted those antelope.⁵² In recent centuries, *chila* hunts generated thousands of *lechwe* skins. In the archaeological record, the centuries around the turn of the millennium – the centuries when speakers developed the novel tools, techniques and status of spearmen – exhibit remarkable collections of wild game bones with mortality curves that indicate skilful communal hunting practices.

The invention of a new name for communal hunting suggests that skilled hunters' special access to the status, bridewealth and gifts necessary for wives and lovers was not without some challenge. Communal hunts allowed other young men to observe and try to emulate the techniques of **-pàdǎ* when large hunts drew in bigger audiences who witnessed and so affirmed the achievements of **-pàdǎ*. These were arenas of participation and spectatorship involving not only hunters and the women closest to them but neighbours, husbands and maternal uncles keeping a watchful eye on which young nieces accepted gifts from whom and which dependants among their household or lineage members were given the choicest cuts from the hunter's carcass. The invention of **chila* may well have been the outcome of broader contests between technicians with a reputation for skill in bushcraft and those who sought to control or emulate the material and social benefits of their knowledge. Yet **chila* was a rare occasion. And the intimate ties of sex were still part of bushcraft not only during **chila* but each time technicians prepared to puncture *isokwe* and use their spears and bellows to incite its resident powers to bear fruit.

51 Herbert, *Iron, Gender, and Power*, 5, 36. Consider also arguments in T.O. Beidelman, *The Cool Knife: Imagery of Gender, Sexuality, and Moral Education in Kaguru Initiation Ritual* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1997), 19–20, which inspired arguments in A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond*, 89–90. Saidi, in *Women's Authority*, suggests that men borrowed sex taboos from women, for the comparative ethnographic record also associates sex taboos with clay collection for potting, and potting is an older technology than smelting. There is a desperate need for a historical linguistic approach to such taboos to better seriate and date them.

52 For more on the history of **chila*, see de Luna, *Collecting Food*, ch 4.

Toward an Affective Micro-Politics of Landscape, Sex and Technology

The lasting outcome of intimate negotiations sustaining the new ideas about the bush in the centuries around the turn of the millennium was a transformation in local ideas about what kinds of actors technicians of the bush were thought to be and what kinds of knowledge, power and status were attributed to them. This shift is best illustrated if we return to the question why Central Eastern Botatwe speakers invented the name **-sókwe*, with its emphasis on inciting acts of creation through prodding, poking and spearing, especially if, as is likely, speakers already had a category for landscape that scholars might gloss as ‘the bush’.

To answer this question, we return to consider what kinds of entities can be ‘acting subjects’ and what can be ‘acted-upon objects’. Here, comparison with another attestation of the old Bantu root **-còk-* sharpens the point. Bashu communities in eastern Zaire also use **-còk-* to talk about ‘the bush’ but they developed an agentive noun *isoki* from that verb. For Bashu, the bush itself is the inciter, the piercer, the provoker in acts of creation.⁵³ For Central Eastern Botatwe speakers in south-central Africa in the last centuries of the first millennium, *isokwe* was the object acted upon by the piercer, the inciter, the provoker: the hunter or the smelter capable of entering the bush. It is difficult to know whether the Bashu attestation suggests that *isoki* is a far more ancient form transformed by marksmen in south-central Africa at the close of the millennium or whether it was an independent, convergent innovation. Regardless, the comparison shows that what was unique to south-central Africans was a different set of ideas about what entities were subjects and what entities were objects. For south-central Africans the bush was an *object* of human’s actions, a place marked by a firm boundary laid out between the bush and the village, a boundary that needed to be pierced, but piercable only by certain kinds of subjects. The shift in who acted and what was acted upon supported a new kind of authority and agency rooted in novel performances of skill and expertise, a celebrity available to men.

Naming the bush **-sókwe* was an assertion that there now existed a new kind of man who could open novel paths to wealth, fame and, ultimately, ancestorhood. Eugenia Herbert has eloquently written about how sex explained and intersected with the transformative power involved in activities like smelting, hunting and chiefly investiture.⁵⁴ Her study emphasises the gynaecological attributes of furnaces and the parallels between bearing children and hunting game and smelting. She argues that men appropriated the power of female procreativity and sought to replicate it in transformative technologies. But the way *isokwe* was created, its morphology and derivation, insists on the vital contribution of virility to such endeavours in addition to the contribution of female procreativity. The invention of the bush as **-sókwe* depended on the idea that, as Herbert observes, the drama of human fertility explained how some kinds of powers worked. But the sensuous, affective qualities of

53 R. Packard, *Chiefship and Cosmology: An Historical Study of Political Competition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 3–4, 26–8.

54 Herbert, *Iron, Gender, and Power*.

technology mattered because the kinesthetic resemblances between being the agent of poking and prodding as an act of origination in the use of new iron-tipped spears and bellows and in sex were experiences available to men. These parallel experiences are at the heart of the innovation *-sókwe and reveal a new mindset in which technicians – and not some other agent – were the pokers, prodders and inciters, and the bush was the passive, pierced object.

Thinkers (who were also actors and speakers) had to explain what they did with new iterations of older objects, why it was important, and how it all worked. They used older ideas and crafted new ones to compel others to understand and agree. Compelling arguments linked the concrete, material world of spearpoints, bellows, sex, wind and poking holes in things to more abstract, existential problems like attracting the protection of spirits and becoming famous, if only to secure for oneself the gusty, blustery agency of ancestorhood upon one's death.

Celebrated spearmen and smelters created a new way of acting in and on the world, inciting and prodding creative acts in the seclusion of the pierced landscape of the bush. Their way of being – their fame, wealth, and virility – built on the older 'windiness' of celebrity even as it insisted on new material conditions and settings that guarded access to fame. What was special about spearmen and metalworkers had nothing to do with the inherent ritual dangers of their crafts, as anthropologists undertaking symbolic analyses have long insisted. Rather, these technicians saw that some of their bundle of 'windy' objects and actions also shared an overlapping 'piercedness, proddedness, incitedness.' They observed how the openness of their material world produced opportunities for new convergences with older explanatory paradigms, like the drama of human fertility.

With such convergences, technicians invented new landscapes for their work and new ways of acting as successful men in a changing world – or a world that they argued to be changed. Because spearcraft and metallurgy were generative activities, practitioners and their audiences of kin, friends, dependants, peers, betters and apprentices made sense of these technologies by thinking with much older ideas about the quintessential generative act: sex. They drew on the powers associated with sex to protect their efforts, but this required intimate negotiations with wives, lovers, sisters and mothers. Of course, using the idea of sex in the context of novel generative technologies necessarily shaped how sex itself could be explained as a generative act. What men and women did to demonstrate successful living, including mastering the art of generation, was also in flux. Perhaps it is no surprise that historians still hear about hunters' status as desired lovers, for hunters' claims to virility have a long, productive history in south-central Africa.⁵⁵ Intimate relationships between husbands and wives, blood kin and spirits lie at the centre of changing ideas about the landscape, masculinity and fame that undergirded the existential work of producing future ancestors.

55 A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond*, 94–5.

The Micro-Politics of Knowledge Production in African Histories, Early and Late

This essay opened with a question: What can we know about the micro-politics of the production of expert knowledge in the early African past? The history of Botatwe speakers' knowledge about the bush and its technologies demonstrates that for very early periods we can reconstruct the kinds of politics that we know to have unfolded at the micro-level because they were located in experiences like sex, thrusting spears, or feeling the wind that were necessarily tied to the bodies of individual people. Word histories do not reveal particular *instances of* individuals' interactions shaping the production of expert knowledge, which is the far more familiar scale of micro-politics analysed by many of the essays in this volume. But word histories do reveal the *kinds of* instances of individuals' interactions that shaped the production of expert knowledge.

The different forms of evidence that scholars use to detect the micro-politics of knowledge reveal a range of social scales and illuminate the crucial difference between 'instances of' and 'kinds of'. Significantly, with linguistic evidence, this scaling up from 'instances of' to 'kinds of' is a process directed entirely by the community accepting the changing meanings and uses of words employed in the speech of individuals. In the case of richly textured information about more recent periods – interactions between Godfrey Wilson and Zacharia Mawere or James Stuart and Socwatsha kaPhaphu, to take two examples from this volume – the intellectual, social and political work of scaling up 'instances of' micro-politics into 'kinds of' micro-politics is undertaken by the academic author, who demonstrates the significance of particular 'instances of' micro-politics to our greater, collective understanding of 'kinds of' micro-politics. Each of these processes of scaling up to a 'kind of' micro-politics foregrounds unique audiences and distinct politics of knowledge. And, by positioning the academic author at different removes from the process of scaling up, they perhaps demand different arguments for the justification of the research into the micro-politics of knowledge production.

Why, indeed, should we seek to know about the kinds of micro-politics of knowledge production in the deep past? Perhaps such studies will illuminate new boundary objects. Or they may reveal older meanings associated with boundary objects like sexuality, the bush, hunting, animal species, or 'Zuluness', all of which are already recognised by scholars of recent periods as implicated in the production of expert knowledge. Will studies of earlier forms of negotiation around expertise change how we understand Africans' motivations and labours as guides, trackers and porters in more familiar histories of twentieth-century anthropology or ornithology? Can studies of the micro-politics of technological innovation in precolonial metallurgy shed new light on the forms of masculinity developed by African car mechanics working in twentieth- and twenty-first-century repair shops or by urban youths asserting the

status of *isoka* in twenty-first-century South Africa?⁵⁶ These are questions that are best answered by scholars who can claim particular expertise but are ready to collaborate across their domains of individual mastery. They are questions for, about, and of a micro-politics of knowledge production.

⁵⁶ Research on the politics of the production of anthropological knowledge is vast. Consider contributions to this volume as well as citations in notes 1 and 2 above. On ornithology, see Nancy Jacobs, *Birders of Africa: History of a Network* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016 forthcoming). For masculinity, technology, and car repair workshops, see Joshua Grace, 'Heroes of the Road: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Mobility in Twentieth-Century Tanzania', *Africa*, 83, 3, 2013, 403–25; Grace, 'Modernization *Bubu*: Cars, Roads, and the Politics of Development in Tanzania, 1870s to 1980s' (Unpublished PhD diss, Michigan State University, 2013). There is, of course, a far larger literature on metal working and masculinity as well as motoring and masculinity in the 20th century. On *isoka* and the politics of sexuality in modern South Africa, see especially Hunter, 'Cultural Politics'.