

HISTORY AND ECOLOGY OF PERI-VILLAGE FORESTS IN BOSSOU, GUINEA

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In the landscape of “la guinée forestier,” in the Republic of Guinea, West Africa, small forest patches often surround villages. Fairhead and Leach [1996] raised interesting questions concerning the history and ecology of these forest patches with respect to the dynamics of the forest-savanna ecotone in the Kissidougou area. The continuity and applicability of these ideas in southern, more-forested areas in Guinea have not been tested. A population of wild chimpanzees inhabits the area around Bossou Village. The chimpanzees are traditionally conserved by the local people, who believe that chimpanzees are reincarnations of their ancestors. The main habitat of the chimpanzees consists of dense forest patches, which are preserved as sacred sites, and various stages of regenerating fallow bush containing many oil palm trees. The appearance of Gban Hill, the core area of the chimpanzee habitat, seems quite natural today, but detailed descriptions of the tree composition and forest cover on the hill revealed various “designs” by the local people. In particular, the existence of a doughnut-shaped forest on the hill strongly suggests functional similarity to that in the Kissidougou area. The origin and function of the sacred groves at Bossou are likely related to past tribal warfare, and therefore are firmly embedded in the political and environmental history of the village.

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