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Écologie politique de la coexistence entre humains et chimpanzés dans la réserve naturelle de Mabi-Yaya en contexte d'après-guerre, Côte d'Ivoire

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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A translated version, in French, is available online in the "Attachments" section.

Une version, traduite en français, est disponible en ligne en annexe.

1 Introduction

- 1 Chimpanzees in Côte d'Ivoire are known to have suffered a 90% population decline between 1990 and 2007 (Campbell *et al.*, 2008). This extreme population reduction took place amidst very high human population growth rates since the 1970s related to Côte d'Ivoire's plantation economy, which led to chimpanzee habitat loss unparalleled in West Africa and to higher hunting pressure. In addition, Côte d'Ivoire's wars between 2002 and 2011 strongly accentuated these tendencies (Campbell *et al.*, 2008; Bitty *et al.*, 2015; Kühl *et al.*, 2017; Leblan & Soiret, 2021). These multiple factors have led to the elimination of chimpanzees from unprotected areas (Kühl *et al.*, 2017), except for rare cases of non-viable populations living in commercial agriculture settings (e.g., Soiret *et*

al., 2019). Chimpanzees are also reported as extirpated from at least 15 protected areas in the country since the late 1980s, either through habitat loss following commercial agricultural encroachment and/or hunting (Kühl *et al.*, 2017). Côte d'Ivoire's monoculture export policy, coupled with political and civil unrest, has thus induced very high tensions with conservation agendas, outside of protected areas as well as within them. Contrary to neighboring countries, this situation has made human-chimpanzee coexistence in shared landscapes nearly impossible, except, paradoxically and unsustainably, within protected areas (Leblan & Soiret, 2021).

- 2 The Mabi-Yaya Nature Reserve (MYNR) located in the southeast of the country is emblematic in this regard. Three reasons motivated us to undertake a chimpanzee survey within this reserve. First, no certain information about chimpanzee presence in MYNR had been published since a survey conducted between 2010 and 2013 (Bitty *et al.*, 2015). While Kühl *et al.* reported in 2017 chimpanzee presence in the Mabi compartment of the reserve, the last IUCN action plan for the conservation of western chimpanzees actually reported chimpanzees as extirpated from this protected area (IUCN 2020). Clear information was thus warranted. Secondly, MYNR recently came to the fore of the Ivorian conservation agenda: it was gazetted in 2019 by merging two classified forests and upgrading them to nature reserve status. Thirdly, an international conservation and development NGO concluded that as much as 94% of the neighboring villagers supported this reserve creation (Nitidae, 2019). Yet, protected areas commonly oppose a variety of stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire (Ibo, 2013; Kra, 2019), as in neighboring countries (e.g. Leblan, 2016 for Guinean examples involving chimpanzees). Therefore, such a spectacular ratio had to be questioned, and its (chimpanzee) conservation implications determined. This was especially the case since the national political turmoil that highly exacerbated the causes of chimpanzee decline in the 2000s, as we will see, has not come to a complete halt.
- 3 After describing the study site and our fieldwork methods inside and outside the reserve, the results and discussion section looks at the number of past and present chimpanzee cues in relation to the evolution of human activities within MYNR and then examines the reasons for MYNR's local popularity and for the possibly related absence of large-scale deforestation within it. We conclude with considerations about remaining chimpanzee presence in postwar Ivorian protected areas and the social challenges of managing MYNR in a political situation still prone to high-level conflicts among neighboring communities.

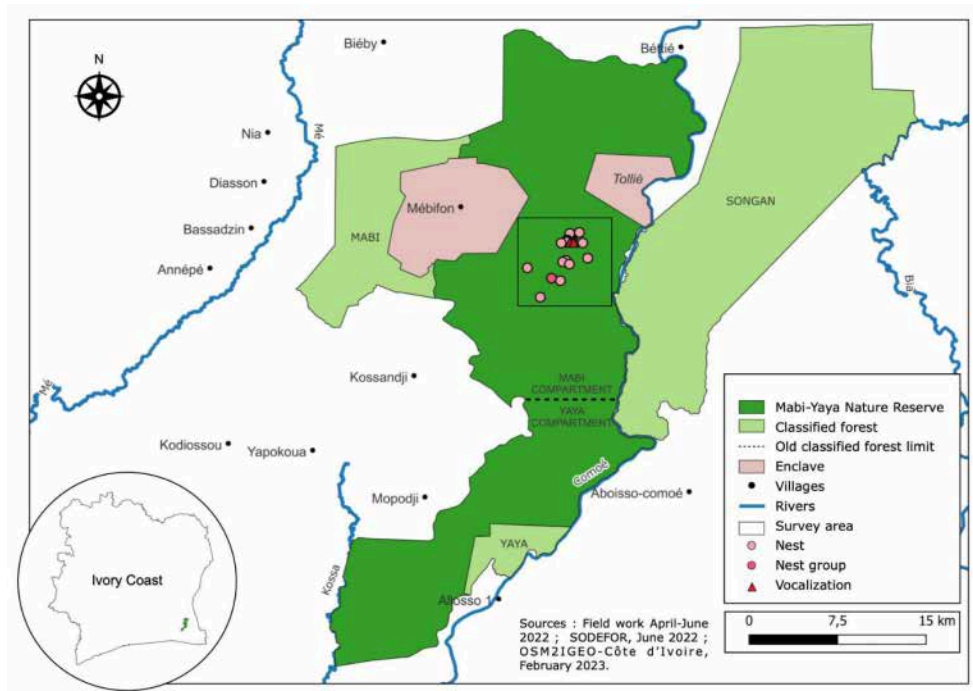
2 Study site

- 4 Contrary to many Ivorian protected areas, MYNR has retained much of its high canopy forest cover during and since the 2002-2011 period of wars and civil unrest (UNEP, 2015). In 2015, it accounted for 88,8% of the reserve's surface (61283 ha) and still reached 83,4% in 2020, thus providing a large amount of theoretically adequate chimpanzee habitat that corresponds to Marchesi *et al.*'s (1995) "wet primary forest". The rest of the reserve is mainly covered by a mix of cocoa and rubber tree plantations as well as patches of degraded forest. For the most part, these other vegetation types are located on the reserve's margins and are more developed in the Mabi than the Yaya compartment (Ouedraogo *et al.*, 2023). The category "degraded forest" consists of a mix of forest destruction between 2015 and 2020 and forest regeneration after plantation

abandonments during that period (*id.*). In 2015, there were an estimated 300 farms in the Yaya compartment (UNEP, 2015; no data for the Mabi side). Some of the plantations were then operated from temporary camps located within the reserve, which had no permanent settlements (Bitty *et al.*, 2015). Outside of the reserve, cocoa and rubber tree plantations and “degraded forest” are the dominant land cover categories. While this pattern has undoubtedly spread since the 1990s, it is qualitatively similar to the one that preceded the 2000s wars: Mabi and Yaya classified forests were then dominated by partly logged old-growth forest (which was consistent with their classified forest status) with illegal plantations on their inner peripheries and a thriving plantation economy outside (McGraw, 1998). This perennial commercial agriculture dominates the economy of the 15 peripheral localities, all located a few kilometers away from the reserve. These localities include villages of a few thousand inhabitants and towns, five of which comprise between 12 000 and 38 000 inhabitants according to the 2014 national census. The local residents are Attié landlords who claim an autochthonous status and “strangers” or allochthonous persons originating from other regions of Côte d’Ivoire (e.g. Koulango) or neighboring countries (mainly Burkina Faso and secondarily Togo).

- 5 In 2019, the adjacent Mabi and Yaya classified forests were upgraded and fused into a single unit, the Mabi-Yaya Nature Reserve (fig. 1). The idea of assigning a higher conservation status to Mabi and Yaya had already been expressed in the late 1990s, at least within the scientific community (McGraw, 1998). This suggests that the political-military crises of the 2000s and the consequences of the 2011 post-electoral crisis simply postponed its implementation. This status change was legally made possible by the 2019 forest code which states that “some well-preserved classified forests may be classified as national parks or reserves according to terms to be specified by a Council of Ministers’ decree” (law no. 2019-675, art. 30). For such upgrading to occur, the forest cover of a classified forest must be at least 80% conserved (decree no. 2019-895). This policy aims at providing the country’s most significant dense forest tracts, all located within protected areas, with more combative protection against encroachment attempts. The parts of Mabi and Yaya which were over 75% degraded remained classified forests (decree no. 2021-437). As these are adjacent to the nature reserve (fig. 1), public authorities may have conceived them as partial buffer zones with the agricultural environment, as seen elsewhere in Côte d’Ivoire (Dosso, 1992; Ibo, 2005), although this remains uncertain at the moment. In addition, MYNR is characterized by a couple of enclaves: Mébifon which is a village (3352 inhabitants according to the 2014 national census) locked between the remaining Mabi classified forest and the MYNR and Tollié, located between the reserve and the Comoé River, which consists of a set of fields with rights of ways running through the reserve to the towns of Biéby and Bettié.

Figure 1



Mabi-Yaya Nature Reserve and location of chimpanzee traces within the survey area

3 Methods

- 6 Before undertaking our survey, past evidence concerning chimpanzee presence and local support for the reserve was searched in published and unpublished sources (i.e. local results of a 2019-2021 nationwide faunal census transmitted by the 'Office Ivoirien des Parcs et Réserves' [OIPR], the national parks and nature reserves administration), as well as through oral information obtained through interviews with the reserve's neighboring residents and local OIPR staff. These data were analyzed through what social scientists refer to as "the historical explanation", i.e. by seeking to grasp the local actors' perceptions and motivations through a detailed knowledge of the context that leads them to act in this or that way. Survey activities were focused on the Mabi compartment where the local OIPR agents and some inhabitants of Mébifon village reported hearing chimpanzee vocalizations at least during the two preceding years, contrary to the Yaya compartment. The surveying team was composed of one local assistant plus the first author in addition to the second author at the beginning of fieldwork. Fieldwork consisted of alternating stays between MYNR and Mébifon, each 4-5 days long, in April-May 2022. 20 days were thus spent surveying chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes verus*) 8 hours a day. Reconnaissance walks and base camp locations (N = 3) within MYNR were chosen in order to cover the largest possible area (approximately 30 km²), investigating evidence of chimpanzee presence, especially beds and vocalizations. The survey area on fig. 1 connects the most distant survey locations in each cardinal direction. Surveys were conducted without any prior knowledge about nest locations by the local assistant. In the absence of local data on the aging speed of beds, we used Tutin & Fernandez's (1984) four age classes established in Gabon also referred to by Marchesi *et al.* (1995) in Côte d'Ivoire: 1) fresh: leaves still totally green; 2) recent:

leaves drying, changing colour; 3) old: dead leaves, nest still entire; and 4) very old: no more leaves but nest still identifiable by broken branches. Groups of beds were considered as such when beds are at most 20 m of each other (Marchesi *et al.*, 1995). *Ad libitum* sampling aimed at dense forest located towards the center of the reserve was privileged. In addition, we recorded all evidence of human presence within the reserve (cartridges and gunshots, traps, farms, etc.). All evidence was geo-referenced with a GPS unit (Garmin etrex 10).

- 7 Outside of the reserve, participant observation for a total of 20 days at Mébifon allowed to gather information about various local stakeholder relationships to the protected area. Residing in the village helps reducing apprehensions regarding the investigators' status, who can easily be assimilated to the forest administration when illegal actions are concerned. However, we were invited to reside in the autochthons' quarter which probably complexified our exchanges with some members of the various Mébifon allochthonous communities. Nevertheless, observations and discussions took place with cultivators and hunters in all Mébifon quarters, after explaining our intentions to each community leader who then publicly announced them through "town criers". This also facilitated the recruitment of well-respected interpreters in each quarter. These observations and conversations aimed at grasping the logics of protest as well as compromise with the reserve in order to better understand the reasons for the reported local support. For this, we paid attention to practices and discourses concerning 1) the residents' relationships to the reserve and 2) the allocation of land rights within and outside the reserve and their perceived (il)legitimacy among auto- and allochthonous communities during wartime and the postwar period. All statements and observations have been anonymized in order not to fuel the strong ongoing conflicts.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Prior evidence of chimpanzee presence within Mabi-Yaya Nature Reserve

- 8 The first published report of chimpanzee presence dates back to a 1988 survey reporting 0.3 ind./km² (\approx 180 ind.) in the Mabi compartment of the reserve and 0.4 ind./km² (\approx 120 ind.) in the Yaya compartment (Hoppe-Dominik, 1991 in Kormos *et al.*, 2003). The last published report of chimpanzee presence prior to the present study dates back to a survey conducted between 2010 and 2013, reporting chimpanzee presence in both compartments as well (Bitty *et al.*, 2015). This second survey targeted any primate taxa within 23 Ivorian protected areas, presumably leading the authors to summarize their results as much as possible. Therefore, the type and number of presence cues (chimpanzee and/or bed observations, vocalizations) were not specified. In addition, beds which would have been recorded during a countrywide survey in the Mabi compartment in 2007 (Campbell, 2008) are also mentioned by Kühl *et al.* (2017). However, these survey results make no such mention, the closest evidence coming from the Bossématié classified forest about 40 km to the North.
- 9 The latest preliminary cues come from unpublished sources transmitted by the OIPR. 35 line transects, each 1.5 km long, executed within MYNR during a 2019-2021 countrywide faunal census yielded only one chimpanzee vocalization in January 2020,

in the Mabi compartment. We initially considered this unique cue with caution because of the reported under-training of some of the forest administration staff who conducted the national survey (DNEF, 2021). In addition, at the national level, 60% (N = 68) of accurately located chimpanzee cues by this survey consist of vocalizations versus beds (*id.*). The opposite would have been expected as chimpanzees are frequently hunted in Côte d'Ivoire (Campbell *et al.*, 2008), a situation conducive to lower vocal behavior frequency (e.g. Hicks *et al.*, 2013 for a Congolese example). This suggests that bed search was not an overall priority of the survey teams, who then probably underreported them, in MYNR as elsewhere. Independently of this national survey however, the MYNR OIPR staff reported in 2022 hearing chimpanzees while patrolling the reserve over the two previous years in the Mabi compartment and receiving at least one local complaint about chimpanzee cocoa feeding from the same area. OIPR staff reported an absence of chimpanzee evidence in the Yaya compartment, although we have no data to control for the similarity of patrol frequency and quality between the two compartments.

4.2 Contemporary human-chimpanzee coexistence within Mabi-Yaya Nature Reserve

- 10 A total of 29 chimpanzee beds were georeferenced, comprising 17 single beds and two groups of 5 and 7 beds respectively. According to decay state, one bed was considered fresh, 11 as recent, 9 as old and 7 as rotting (Tutin & Fernandez, 1984) while one was not datable. In addition, a couple of vocal behavior sessions were heard on May 11th at 7 pm and on May 17th at 6:30 pm, involving one and two individuals respectively. As seen on the map (fig. 1), the north of the study zone has a higher concentration of beds than any other surveyed area. However, the *ad libitum* sampling scheme led to a higher sampling effort of this area, due to initial nest findings in this part of the reserve which first guided our attention.
- 11 Although we currently lack nest decay and nest production rates that would be calculated during a longer survey, the detection of only one fresh nest during a 20 days survey of an approximately 30 km² area within MYNR suggests an extremely low chimpanzee population number, especially when compared to the late 1980s survey reporting for the whole Mabi compartment an estimated 0.3 ind./km² (\approx 180 ind.) (Hoppe-Dominik, 1991 in Kormos *et al.*, 2003). Hunting is undoubtedly the main factor of chimpanzee's steep decline within MYNR. During our survey, we encountered a total of 29 cartridges, heard 6 gunshots and encountered 134 traps and snares. It is hard to say if such numbers reflect a situation similar to the late 1990s when hunting pressure within the Mabi compartment was already described as heavy (McGraw *et al.*, 1998). In any case, this interpretation is supported by Taï National Park's steep chimpanzee decline in a similar type of forest and during the same 2002-2011 episode of high political instability in Côte d'Ivoire, continuing at least until 2013, which is also associated with a high rise of poaching levels (Leblan & Soiret, 2021). These observations are compatible with the notion established by Bitty *et al.* (2015) that hunting pressure on Ivorian protected areas is overall higher when tall canopy forest, not completely converted to plantations, is present. In addition, while plantations within MYNR are predominantly located on its periphery since the late 1990s, we encountered in our 30 km² survey area a total of 21 active farms (near exclusively cocoa

farms), 34 abandoned cocoa farms and 23 places where some forest clearing had been initiated. All active farms consisted of temporary camps, as noted a decade earlier as well (see Kouassi and Ongolo 2019 for a permanently settled Ivorian national park now devoid of chimpanzees). Basing ourselves on the only available comparative data, this corresponds to a lower rate of active farm presence in this section of the Mabi compartment ($0.7/\text{km}^2$) than the one characterizing the Yaya compartment as a whole in 2015 ($1.3/\text{km}^2$) (UNEP, 2015). Nonetheless, given the discrepancy between these data sets, we cannot rule out that plantations have gained ground in some of the central parts of the reserve.

- 12 Overall, the number and nature of chimpanzee and hunting traces within MYNR suggest that the chimpanzee population is non-viable, even in the short term. Ideally, another 30 km² survey area in the Mabi compartment and a survey of the Yaya compartment would now be undertaken.

4.3 Is Mabi-Yaya Nature reserve really so popular?

- 13 A public consultation carried out by the NGO Nitidae, which aims to develop sustainable agriculture practices on the MYNR periphery, concluded that a majority of the reserve's neighbors supported its creation in 2019 (Nitidae, 2019). In 10 villages out of twelve, this support is almost unanimous, ranging from 83 to 100% of the people surveyed (number unknown), with strong rejection expressed in the two remaining (and adjacent) villages (6% and 31%). It even appears that « the inhabitants of Yakassé-Attobrou », a neighboring town, publicly requested the creation of the reserve to the President of the Republic during his 2019 official visit to their locality (*id.*). However, in stark contrast, members of a 1997 primatological survey within several classified forests of Eastern Côte d'Ivoire, including Mabi and Yaya, stated that “[...] hunters and farmers we encountered were surprised by our concern with the forest and its [animal] inhabitants” (McGraw *et al.*, 1998). How can this discrepancy between residents' declarations twenty years apart be understood?
- 14 The near unanimous local support for MYNR reported by Nitidae is especially surprising given that forest product gathering rights granted to local residents inside the classified forests were abolished and that access to the protected area became strictly forbidden with its upgrading to nature reserve status (law n° 2002-102 art. 10-11). We do not discuss the existence of a high level of support, although it comes down to 81% when including the two villages where rejection is the main opinion, instead of the 94% claimed by Nitidae. The exclusion of these two villages from the NGO's data set was in all likelihood driven by the aim to garner support for its specific policy agenda, a common NGO strategy to acquire greater legitimacy and rhetorical weight (see Fairhead & Leach, 1998 for examples dealing with forestry statistics). In any case, the possible motivations for the local residents' support have not been discussed and require investigation. Our thesis is that local support for MYNR is more related to the national and local politics of land-use rights and ethnicity that gained much prominence during the past twenty years than to biodiversity decline and to any agreement with local conservation policies.
- 15 The permanent expansion of cocoa pioneer fronts since the 1930s, of which Côte d'Ivoire has been the world's leading exporter for decades, is based on a smallholder's agriculture which has been encouraged by a continuous State-sponsored immigration

policy. This has allowed to attract workforce into the forest region of Côte d'Ivoire from the North of the country and from neighboring countries (Dozon, 1989; Ruf & Schroth, 2004). An allochthonous person is then a newcomer who is thus in principle dependent on a given locality's autochthons for access to the land (Chauveau, 2000). However, State representatives have long exerted pressure on autochthonous political leaders and land owners of the forest region to welcome allochthonous farmers on their land: an economic policy that greatly contributed to harden ethnic identities and trigger land rights conflicts on this basis (Marshall-Fratani, 2006). During the 2000s episodes of civil unrest and military confrontations, political power from national down to local level shifted twice between 'autochthonist' versus 'allochthonist' parties and their supporters, in 2000-2002 and 2011, alternately opening and closing land-use rights to alleged opponents (Babo & Droz, 2008). Although the war-like situation ended in 2011, these identity and land rights issues dominate Ivorian politics up to this day (Ibo, 2016).

- 16 At Mébifon, allochthonous persons are particularly blamed for creating farms within MYNR: "when they arrive here, they take the land and the forest and also inform their relatives and friends so they can join them" said for instance an autochthon during a conversation about the presence of farms within the reserve. In addition, "strangers" at Mébifon are not blamed simply for cultivating within MYNR reserve but for doing it without having paid the expected tribute to the autochthons who actually consider themselves the legitimate owners of the land now enclosed by the protected area: "the reserve is a benefit for us because it allows us to protect our resources which some want to take advantage of" according to another autochthon. We also learned at Mébifon that a local "volunteer force" responsible for curbing the installation of allochthonous persons and the appropriation of land within and outside the reserve existed during the 2002-2011 crises.
- 17 These allochthonous persons would correspond to the farmers reported on by Bitty *et al.* (2015) who started working inside the reserve during the decade of political unrest. In addition, some of them could be farmers evacuated by the army from Mont Péko National Park in Western Côte d'Ivoire in 2016, as seems to be the case inside the nearby Bossématié classified forest (Kobliko, 2016). Such "green nomadism" (Kra, 2019) of ex-Mont Péko farmers has been observed in three other protected areas located in the Western part of the country (*id.*). The autochthons' discourse based on an "us/them" opposition concerning access to the reserve and its "resources" can be understood, from an autochthons' point of view, as the failure of a model of informal land rights transfer which is documented in Côte d'Ivoire since the 1970s: although farming is strictly banned by the law within protected areas, autochthons have often allocated land within them to "strangers" in order to recover a fraction of the income from their ancestral lands from which the legislation has excluded them. This strategy also allows them not to be personally confronted with park authorities when returning land enclosed by protected areas to agriculture (Léonard & Ibo, 1994; Ibo, 2016). Within this context, the autochthons' efforts to protect the reserve against "strangers" in a war situation motivated by land rights conflicts makes MYNR function as a buffer against "outsiders" who have partly taken what, in the autochthons' understanding, is their land and no one else's. This, in turn, has created conditions for supporting the protected area's upgrading. Given the Ivorian political context, it appears that autochthons will not accept that "outsiders" enrich themselves at their expense, i.e. by cultivating land they consider having been deprived of by the State. While our participant observation period was limited to 20 days and longer durations are often

needed for deeper understanding and building confidence with interlocutors, there were no obvious reasons for the autochthons not to communicate about these issues. Indeed, they did not contravene with the park regulations but actually pushed for their application, even though their motivations were remote from any conservation concerns. Hence, the Nitidae survey about local attitudes towards the reserve has likely either targeted autochthons only or produced politically correct answers by various members of the local political chessboard.

- 18 This scenario gains confirmation from a European Union funded expert report on the application of rural land-use rights in Côte d'Ivoire. Published two years before the upgrading, it states that “very often, people living near classified forests or inside them [as in the case of the Mébifon enclave] find their occupation regrettable as they consider themselves, in some way, their ‘natural custodians’. In their understanding, the forest has never ceased to be part of their heritage, as property customarily inherited from their ancestors and believed to be protected so that it goes to their children, even though it belongs to the State. [...] This is how the Mébifon autochthons (classified forest of Mabi) offer to join in any action tending to end the illegal occupations of this heritage” (Dagrou & Lobe, 2017, our translation). We then argue that change in the local political ecological context since the late 1990s, when inhabitants seemed unconcerned by Mabi and Yaya classified forests as noted by McGraw *et al.* (1998), is best explained by the autochthons’ redefinition of the reserve’s function as a buffering device against “outsiders” during the 2000s civil and military crises.
- 19 Noteworthy, a similar situation appears to have unfolded in the adjacent Songan classified forest in which chimpanzees were also present at least until the late 1980s (Hoppe-Dominik, 1991 in Kormos *et al.*, 2003). Here, the surface area of high canopy forest has initially suffered a 20% decrease between 1989 and 2008, then reaching a loss rate of 63% during the 2008-2018 decade with the development of cocoa, coffee and rubber tree plantations (Kambire, 2019). This strong increase of deforestation rates is contemporary with the massive arrival of allochthonous persons during the crises, leading to an extreme conflictual situation with the autochthons according to a press article: “how can the law prohibit natives from entering this forest and allow foreigners to settle there”, asked one of them (Anonymous, 2010). Symptomatically, autochthons consider that “there is practically no more *land* in this forest” (*id.*, our emphasis), indicating here again that “their” protected area is understood as a land-securing rather than biodiversity conservation device in a context of strong identity and political crises. This, in turn, supports our interpretation of the MYNR case.
- 20 Finally, one may ask if the surprisingly well-preserved state of MYNR’s forest cover, despite the ongoing 1% rate of annual loss (Ouedraogo *et al.*, 2023) and the near elimination of chimpanzees, is not to some extent related to these contemporary land-rights dynamics. Even more so since the autochthons’ concern for the protected area, although detached from any conservationist interest, has emerged only during the last twenty years as argued here. For instance, it is commonly believed that Taï National Park’s comparable forest cover in the Western part of the country is very well conserved because of continuous international investment since the creation of the “Taï project” in 1975 under Unesco’s Man and the Biosphere program (Guillaumet *et al.*, 1984). While we agree with this argument, it does not apply to Mabi and Yaya’s forests which never benefited from such long-term public investments and ensuing scientific

attention. A line of approach could be to ask whether the Attié autochthons have developed, due to their social-political organization, forms of land control that have *incidentally* proved more efficient in preventing deforestation within the reserve. For instance, and contrary to land uses of the Taï region, the neighboring Agni are historically known to have significantly employed allochthonous persons as plantation laborers compared to other Ivorian communities, more often opposing themselves to their land appropriation strategies (Dozon, 1989). Could this apply to MYNR's Attié communities as well? Such forms of access control to the land may also be relevant to explain the last 25 years' spatial pattern of cultivation within the reserve which has predominantly been located on the inner periphery, i.e. closer to the Attié villages, than in the center as pointed above.

5 Conclusion

- 21 The evidence presented here suggests that chimpanzees are now possibly absent from the Yaya compartment of the reserve contrary to previously published reports, and are on the verge of extinction in the Mabi compartment. This appears to be especially due to hunting, and only secondarily due to habitat loss given that high canopy forest still accounted for more than 80% of the reserve's vegetation cover in 2020 despite the possible progression of farming in some of the central parts of the reserve. While this strong population decline fits with the general Ivorian situation for chimpanzees, determining the species' presence or absence in any given protected area today remains essential in order to assess the variability of (post-)war politics effects. For instance, Mont Péko National Park which has largely been transformed into cocoa plantations since the late 2010s and from which chimpanzees were reportedly extirpated, as MYNR (Kühl *et al.*, 2017), actually also hosts a population (Leblan & Soiret, 2021). Further chimpanzee surveys are needed in both cultivated and uncultivated protected areas to obtain a clearer picture of upcoming conservation challenges at national level.
- 22 On the other hand, this article has exemplified the social and political complexity of conservation challenges in at least some postwar Ivorian protected areas. Our investigations were conducted in only one of the 15 neighboring villages to the reserve. Even if this prevents any understanding of MYNR's rejection in two of them, our conclusions are supported by an independent expert report and by journalistic verbatim accounts concerning the adjacent Songan protected area.
- 23 Finally, it appears that only values based on the conflictual promotion of autochthony and associated land rights are currently able to arouse a sense of belonging to MYNR. Thus "community" conservation policies should be reconsidered in light of this strong narrowing of identities. The risk would otherwise be that MYNR's conservation actions contribute to fuel the land-use and ensuing ethnic identity conflicts that laid the foundations for the country's military and civil crises. In addition, these divisions and associated land-rights conflicts are so overwhelming and determinant in the meaning given to the reserve that they clearly call into question the possibility to carry out any "conservation" program that would be perceived as such by a number of MYNR's neighboring residents. We believe these divisions and divergent understandings are one of the main challenges (chimpanzee) conservation stakeholders such as forest administrators, NGOs and researchers will have to address in the new MYNR.

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Conflicts of interest

- 25 The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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ABSTRACTS

Côte d'Ivoire's commercial agriculture policy, coupled with military and civil unrest since the late 1990s, has induced very high tensions with conservation agendas, outside of protected areas as well as within them. This situation has made human-chimpanzee coexistence in shared landscapes nearly impossible, except, paradoxically and unsustainably, within protected areas. The Mabi-Yaya Nature Reserve, which was gazetted in 2019 by merging and upgrading two classified forests, is emblematic in this regard. This article examines the recent history of human and chimpanzee presence within the reserve in relation to the country's political turmoil, based on printed sources and oral accounts as well as a chimpanzee survey. It also questions the motivations for the inhabitants' unexpected level of support for the reserve reported by a conservation NGO, as well as the reasons for the possibly related absence of large-scale deforestation within it. Given the Ivorian political context, this local support and the persistence of high canopy forest appear to be more related to a local understanding of the protected area as a land-securing device against "outsiders" in a context of strong political and identity crises than to any agreement with conservation policies. This has implications for the conservation of Mabi-Yaya's remaining chimpanzees and other postwar Ivorian protected areas. It also questions the governance of such a reserve in a political situation still prone to high-level conflicts among neighboring communities.

La politique agricole commerciale de la Côte d'Ivoire, ainsi que les crises militaires et civiles depuis la fin des années 1990, ont généré de très fortes tensions avec l'agenda de la conservation, à l'extérieur comme à l'intérieur des aires protégées du pays. La coexistence entre humains et

chimpanzés au sein d'un même milieu y est devenue quasiment impossible sauf, paradoxalement et non durablement, au sein des aires protégées. La réserve naturelle de Mabi-Yaya, fondée en 2019 en fusionnant et surclassant deux forêts classées, est à cet égard emblématique. Nous examinons l'histoire récente de la présence des humains et des chimpanzés dans cette réserve en relation avec les troubles politiques du pays, sur la base de sources imprimées et orales ainsi qu'une prospection de chimpanzés. Nous interrogeons aussi les raisons du haut niveau d'adhésion des résidents locaux à la réserve, signalé par une ONG conservacionniste, et ses rapports éventuels avec l'absence de déforestation à grande échelle au sein de celle-ci. Compte tenu du contexte politique ivoirien, ce soutien local et le maintien de forêts sempervirentes découlent sans doute plus de la signification locale de l'aire protégée comme instrument de protection foncière contre des « étrangers » dans un contexte de fortes crises politiques et identitaires que de quelque adhésion aux politiques de conservation. Quelles sont les implications de cette situation pour conserver la population relictuelle de chimpanzés de Mabi-Yaya et des autres aires protégées ivoiriennes en contexte d'après-guerre ? Quelles en sont les conséquences pour la gouvernance d'une telle réserve alors que persistent des conflits de haut niveau entre différentes catégories de résidents ?

INDEX

Keywords: Mabi-Yaya Nature Reserve (Côte d'Ivoire), chimpanzee, protected areas, land-use rights, war

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