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CONSTRUCTING LOCALITY: THE *TERROIR* APPROACH IN WEST AFRICA

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The term *terroir* is a French word that does not have an exact English equivalent. Moreover, the word's meaning has significantly changed over the past thirty years in France. The objective of this article is to clarify the shifting meaning, for Anglophone audiences, of *terroir* as the term is used in French academic and development planning literature. Our thesis is that the meaning of *terroir* as a socio-natural heritage has been replaced by one that views the *terroir* as a mode of governance that facilitiates the control of people and resources within its boundaries. This article's perspective is the outcome of the productive encounter of two research traditions spanning two continents: the *terroir* approach in French academic geography (Boutrais, Blanc-Pamard) and the political ecology approach in anglophone academic geography and environment-development studies (Bassett).

In everyday usage, *terroir* designates a cultivated area but also a cultural landscape with which the inhabitants maintain historical and affective ties. In French intellectual history, the *terroir* concept is associated with a rift between those who idealized rural values and those who favoured progress and change (Barthelémy and Weber 1989). Throughout the twentieth century, an abundant literature praised peasant life and *terroirs* (Guillaumin 1904; Ramuz 1926; Giono 1929; Pourrat 1941; Pagnol 1963). While idealizing the transmission of customs and the timelessness of rural values, it also esteemed *terroirs*

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as constituting the cultural heritage of a people and place. Today, the idea has been invigorated by the notions of authenticity and quality, of closeness to nature, and to the production of artisanal products (Bérard and Marchenay 2000; Barham 2003). The products of a *terroir* are valued for their fabrication in a time-honoured tradition and for the distinctive qualities that set them apart from similar products produced in other *terroirs*. In this article, we are not concerned with the development of these literary, ideological or technical dimensions. Rather, we seek to situate the successive conceptions of African *terroirs* that have been elaborated to better understand and promote the development of African agriculture and the conservation of natural resources.

This article examines the origins and evolution of the *terroir* approach as an organizing idea in development planning in West Africa. We consider the shifting meaning of the concept in three distinct periods: as a research approach crafted in a French geographical school; as a site for research-development programmes, and, most recently, as a tool for conservation planning, territorial restructuring and land privatization.

Our reflections on the history and application of the contemporary *terroir* approach build upon an extensive literature that examines the meaning of key concepts like 'local', 'community' and 'sustainable livelihoods' – all of which convey a positive connotation in current development circles (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Peters 1994; Wilshusen *et al.* 2003; Scoones 1998). What is meant by these terms is not self-evident, and they often conceal more than they reveal about natural resource access, control and management. The fact that the local is inextricably linked to the transnational (international migration, international development banks, global commodity markets) through national and regional-level intermediaries complicates the privileging of one scale over another. Sociologists, historians and political scientists have advanced our understanding of the deeply social and political dimensions of these key words in their examination of the institutional, organizational and political dimensions of community-based natural resource management (Gibson 1999; Alexander and McGregor 2000; Peluso 1992; Wilshusen 2003). In contrast, little attention is given to the *spatial* dimensions of conservation and development programmes (Schroeder 1999a; Zimmerer 2000). Yet the emphasis placed on the 'local' and 'community' has led planners to search for socio-spatial organizations in which natural-resource management projects might take hold.

The current popularity of the *terroir* approach is associated with this quest for community-based conservation geographies that link people to a particular place (Marchal 2000; Blanc-Pamard and Cambrézy 1995). Central to these constructions is the notion of local heritage or patrimony. It is assumed that environmental stewards are more likely to emerge in places where people possess strong historical ties to a specific geographical area. The challenge then for planners is to identify and delimit conservation and development territories that marry local heritage with natural resource management in different

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localities. We show how this search for structural-functional spaces in which conservation and development projects might take root taps into deeply politicized intra-community conflicts over resource control and the meaning of socio-natural heritage. For example, in the process of delimiting formerly unbounded areas, indigenous groups commonly seek to reassert their rights over land and other resources that had been given away to immigrants by previous generations (Gray 2002). In this way, the new spaces of conservation and development become arenas of conflict between juniors and seniors, as well as between indigenous groups and immigrants, resulting in political instability that impedes rather than promotes conservation and development. The case of Côte d'Ivoire is instructive today, although the potential conflicts were already apparent in the 1980s (Chauveau and Richard 1983; Dozon 1985).

THE *TERROIR* APPROACH

Initiated by geographers at the French Overseas Scientific and Technical Research Office (ORSTOM) in the 1960s, the '*terroir* school' contributed to a number of research areas including knowledge of peasant agriculture, nature–society relations in rural areas, and the analysis of agrarian systems, especially their productive efficiency. This attention to rural spaces was not just the domain of geographers, and ORSTOM was preceded by many initiatives during the 1940s and 1950s (Maget 1955; Chiva 1958; Bernot and Blancart 1953).

The *terroir* school was not an isolated endeavour; it benefited from an intellectual current that considered the local as the best level of entry to understand African agriculture and to promote its modernization (Gallais 1960; Hurault and Vallet 1961; Richard-Molard 1951). Its original and innovative contribution lies in its establishing a systematic and structured research approach to the study of agrarian systems and their transformation in West Africa and Madagascar over a period spanning two decades (1962–85). Its objective was to take into consideration the social dimension of local agrarian systems, and it aimed to do this by examining the livelihood spaces of rural communities or *terroirs* with special attention to cartographic analysis of the various research themes (Couty 1992). The *terroir* emerged in this framework as a specific unit of socio-spatial organization. Agrarian spatiality, a favoured theme of rural geographers, was analysed at a fine scale. The *terroir* concept advanced by geographers centred on the modalities of social organization and the construction of village-level agricultural territories (Marchal 1983; Gilg 1970). Thus, from the outset, the school fixed a scale of analysis and a set of research methods. The great emphasis placed on mapmaking led to the publication of these studies in atlas form.

Precursors

Following the Second World War, metropolitan governments began to take steps towards promoting the economic development of

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their colonies. The prevailing view was that African agriculture was outdated and should be modernized; that rapid population growth rates would lead to food shortages and malnutrition; and that national economies needed to grow in order to improve the living standards of the general population. Public investments in these areas became important after 1950. Some were made quickly without prior studies. However, some colonial administrators were aware of the need for scientific research before undertaking large development projects. At this time, statistical offices were created that complemented and in some cases duplicated the activities of colonial census bureaux, agricultural services and provident societies. For example, demographic studies often followed colonial censuses to provide accurate analysis of population growth and distribution in each territory. One of their objectives was to predict and if possible to prevent major food crises, which wreaked havoc during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, as African cities expanded, the spectre of urban famine haunted colonial administrators. Beginning in the 1940s, agricultural statistics were produced by statistical institutes and published in special reports. The collection of agricultural statistics continued into the 1960s. In general, these extensive surveys were of questionable value because of their unwieldiness, poor quality and representation of agrarian systems in simple statistical terms. By their very nature, the statistical surveys were characterized by their broad-scale focus, since planners required data aggregated at the national level. In the quest for national coverage, regional specificity was lost.

The radical counterpoint to large territorial surveys conducted during the 1950s and 1960s were the local monographs based on intensive field studies. The idea was to invert the process. Monographic studies would lay the groundwork and thus facilitate the large economic surveys of the future. They would do so by exposing the *a priori* notions that guided the production of data in the large statistical studies, thanks to the description of local situations which furnished indicators that better represented African rural economies (Boutillier 1960).

The end of the 1950s and the early years of independence in France's colonies were marked by a proliferation of research, reflections and methodological innovations in the domain of African agrarian studies. At that time in France, regional geography was still in vogue. In west Africa the local level was becoming the point of converging interdisciplinary interests and generating innovative research approaches (Izard-Héritier and Izard 1958; Nicolas 1960; Bernus 1956).

The terroir *school and the relevance of the local*

For Gilles Sautter and Paul Pélissier, the founders of the the *terroir* school, there was no fundamental contradiction between the local study of agrarian practices and general agricultural surveys. On the contrary, local in-depth research on agrarian systems could aid larger-scale statistical study by revealing the diversity of agrarian situations.

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Statistical results emphasized averages and their standard deviations for each agricultural year; they did not show how the specific variables combined to form a system in particular localities. From a scientific perspective, the *terroir* studies allowed one to constitute an 'archive of agrarian diversity', particularly in Africa (Sautter 1957, 1962). If the national-scale statistical surveys served to orient the agricultural policies of a country, the *terroir* studies were valued for their practical outcomes. A diversity of agrarian cases could guide policy makers in conceptualizing agricultural development programmes. Better than the national averages, the detailed and localized information might allow policy makers to identify the local practices in which their interventions might take hold (Sautter 1968).

The broad-scale agricultural studies constructed data sets based on the farm household. Their results were generalized at the national level in terms of cultivated area by active worker, total production, yields and family budgets. Between these two analytical levels, the national and the farm household, rural geographers introduced an intermediary level, that of the *terroir*. However, it was concerned less with a scale than with a conception of rural spatiality. For rural geographers, agrarian systems have a spatial dimension that is specific to them. The *terroir* is not just a scale or framework of activities, it is a socio-spatial construction. Geographers who studied African rural societies in the 1950s had the intuition that their work concerned a reality that was different from that presented in statistical data (Pélissier 1953).

To its initiators, the *terroir* study method did not constitute an autonomous research direction. *Terroir* monographs were meant to 'complement the extensive research of quantitative information' (Sautter and Pélissier 1964) by providing detailed information in the form of a control or case study. In fact, such collaborations rarely took place; the *terroir* studies usually ended up as annexes to the large survey documents in which they were weakly integrated. More often, the large agricultural surveys continued to be undertaken without considering the results of *terroir* studies. The anticipated complementary relationship never gelled.

The terroir *as template for agrarian studies*

The foundation text published by Gilles Sautter and Paul Pélissier in *L'Homme* (1964) proposed a definition of *terroir* as 'a portion of territory appropriated, improved and utilized by the group residing there and from which it obtains its livelihood'. This text served as both a research guide and a template for future *terroir* studies. Its aim was to operationalize these studies for researchers doing fieldwork for the first time. The authors stated:

> Through the particular, each study must aim for the general, to illuminate a type of solution or problem, while taking into account the physical environment, social organization, population density, agricultural techniques, the

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> modern economy or external interventions. . . . The local study is to be put entirely at the service of regional research. (Sautter and Pélissier 1964)

Another principle of the *terroir* approach consisted in the construction of an atlas that would illustrate the land-use patterns, landscapes and agrarian structures at multiple scales. 'Maps will not simply serve to illustrate the text; it is the text, on the contrary, that will provide commentary on the set of maps' (Sautter and Pélissier 1964). The text was thus subordinate to the graphic representation, the map being the main analytical work and a tool for reflection (Bertin 1967).

In comparison to other research undertaken at the time at the local scale, the distinguishing feature of the geographer's *terroir* approach was the importance of cartographic documents. In the absence of cadastral maps, researchers were forced to produce their own maps in the field. In order to draw a terroir map, one had to use topographic survey methods and aerial photographs. The map was drawn at the scale of 1:5,000 according to the plane table traversing method and aided by a compass and metric tape measure. Mapping agricultural fields was a time-consuming task that often took six months to complete (ORSTOM 1972). Two examples illustrate this cartographic tradition of the *terroir* school and reveal, in each case, the distinctive character of the agrarian landscape. In both cases, the socio-natural heritage is recognized and reproduced by peasant farming communities.

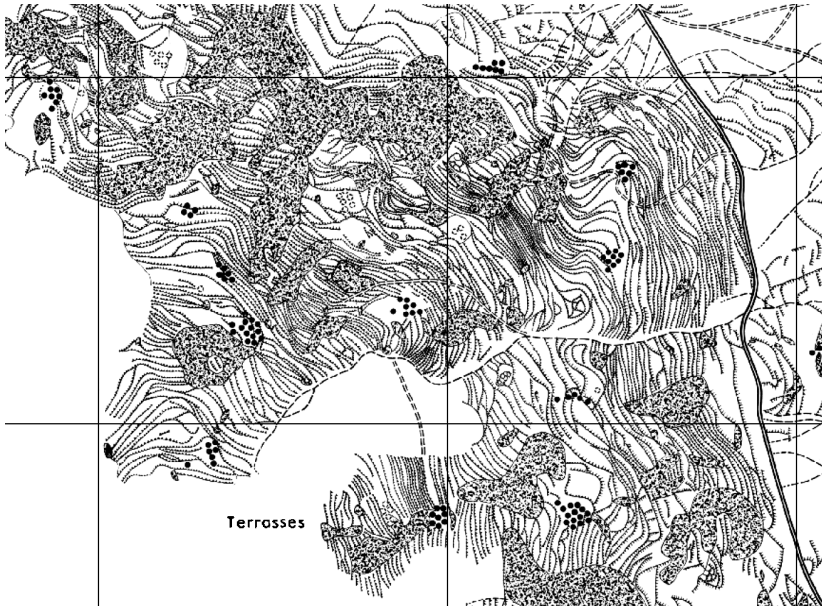


FIGURE 1 The terraces of Magoumaz, northern Cameroon.

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BOX 1: *THE TERRACES OF MAGOUMAZ, NORTHERN CAMEROON*

The map of mountain terraces in Magoumaz made in 1966 is the first detailed representation of this type of agricultural land use in northern Cameroon (Figure 1). Up until this point, this agrarian landscape was only known through literary descriptions. Magoumaz is located to the north of the Mandara Mountains where summit elevations reach 1,500 metres. The map shows a mountain slope where the elevation rises from 850 metres in the east to about 1,000 metres to the west. The entire surface is built up into terraces although their density is uneven across the landscape. At lower elevations and on gentle valley slopes the network is less dense and discontinuous. On the steep slopes of the mid-section, the terraces take the form of a closely spaced staircase. The terraces are degraded on the steepest slopes near the summit. Houses are dispersed throughout the middle section, especially on steep slopes. The entire area is cultivated each year with the exception of a few abandoned and fallow fields.

Terracing simultaneously conserves soils against erosion and improves crop yields. According to Boulet (1975), soil fertility and sorghum yields are high on terraced fields. Terracing is also coupled with high population densities (about 250 persons/km^2 in Magoumaz). Boulet concludes that only a large population could construct these terraces, and, inversely, that a large population is sustained by their good harvests.

Observers have repeatedly commented on the labour-intensive nature of terracing. They also assume that these terraces were constructed in the distant past and thus constitute a socio-natural heritage enjoyed by the current generation. Boulet notes that the Mafa continue to construct new terraces and maintain those that exist. His time budget studies show that terrace maintenance is restricted to the month of April, and then only accounts for 2 per cent of household labour time during this month. Perhaps terrace maintenance is not as high as it was in the past, which may account for the areas designated by Boulet in his map as 'degraded lands'.

The terraces represent a total reworking of the land from the valley floor to the mountain summit. In the 1970s, French geographers wrote about 'integrated land-use planning' and 'the making of agricultural landscapes' with reference to these mountain agricultural terraces. Today geographers readily refer to these distinctive agrarian landscapes as a 'socio-natural heritage'. There is greater awareness today about the fragility of this type of land conversion, and the critical agro-ecological and social processes involved in its sustainability. It has become clear that terraces do not simply represent an agricultural technology but also a heritage whose maintenance cannot be taken for granted in the shifting social-cultural terrain of the Mafa since Boulet's path-breaking study.

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BOX 2: *THE SUDANIAN PARKLAND OF ZAOUGHO, BURKINA FASO*

Zaougho is a small village east of the capital city of Ouagadougou and lies at the limit of the Moose (formed spelt Mossi) settlement area. In fact, the village is not located in one locale but divided into many residential areas and individual compounds that are dispersed throughout the *terroir* (Figure 2). The population density is sufficiently high (80 persons/km^2) that fields are cultivated every year and not put in fallow. The only areas that are not cultivated are non-arable areas. Trees, both spontaneous and planted, dot the Zaougho landscape in contrasting patterns. Overall, tree density is highest in fields and in non-cultivated areas with the exception of the area north of Zaougho. This suggests that the presence of trees is linked to human influences. The tree species are highly varied but there exist groupings of trees of the same species. For example, *Faidherbia albida* dominate to the east of Zaougho while old baobab trees (*Andansonia digitata*) are concentrated round Papanga. The latter are indicative of former village sites from which settlers have since dispersed. J. P. Lahuec (1980) remarked that many other trees were young.

The existence of a wooded parkland, even with light tree densities (less than 10 trees/hectare), is astonishing in the Moose *terroir*. The Moose have a reputation for clear-cutting trees in their fields to minimize competition with cropland. The elders of Zaougho acknowledged that in past times the Moose viewed trees as 'the enemy of farming' and were thus quick to cut them down when they cleared land for cultivation. So how can one explain the Zaougho parkland?

One hypothesis attributes the parkland to a former ethnic group that fled the area or were assimilated by the Moose at the end of the nineteenth century. The Moose inherited their parkland but without valuing trees in the same manner. For example, *Faidherbia* is not conserved for maintaining soil fertility and improving crop yields but simply for furnishing wood. A second explanation put forward by Lahuec is that the Moose of Zaougho have radically changed their behaviour towards trees following the disappearance of natural savannas and the increased scarcity of wood for constructing houses and enclosing compounds. He cites the case of one Moose chief who had begun to conserve young trees spontaneously growing in his fields as well as to plant shade trees. This more conservative attitude towards trees helps to explain the diversity of protected species and the higher tree densities in fields.

Fruit trees constitute another category of trees in the Zaougho landscape. Mango trees are planted near compounds but especially in bottomlands to the west of Zaougho where mango and guava orchards are concentrated. The trees are planted in vegetable gardens and end up shading out vegetable and rice crops. The major attraction of mango orchards is that they do not demand much labour investment but ensure a regular income once they mature. However, this income is captured by a small number of households who possess the right to plant trees. This inequality in land rights is also expressed in income inequalities, as revealed in a household budget study conducted by Lahuec.

The *terroir* studies of the 1970s did not consider parklands as a socio-natural heritage. Nevertheless, the conservation and maintenance of spontaneous trees in the fields of Zaougho can be seen as a process of (re)constructing socio-natural heritage. In contrast, the development of fruit orchards and their private ownership falls outside the realm of heritage making.

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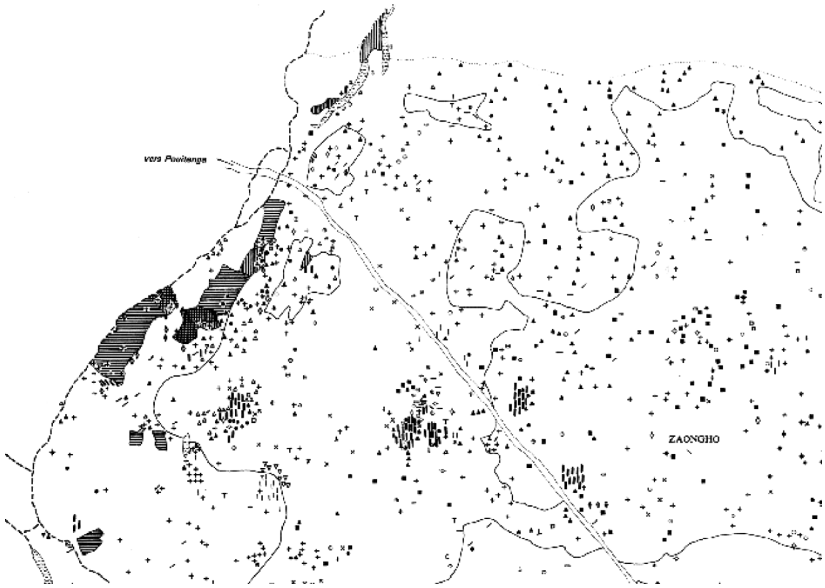


FIGURE 2 The parkland landscape of Zaogho, Burkina Faso.

Between 1967 and 1987, twenty-six *terroir* studies were published by the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and ORSTOM. Together, these individual studies and sets of accompanying maps comprise *The Atlas of Agrarian Structures in Sub-Saharan Africa* and *The Atlas of Agrarian Structures in Madagascar*. Each volume illustrates the twofold orientation of the atlas – monographic and cartographic. Moreover, some twenty summaries of these studies appeared in a special issue of *Etudes Rurales* (Nos 37–39) in 1970. The founders of the *terroir* school introduced the volume with a state-of-the-art essay on *terroir* studies. It emphasized that behind the diversity and richness of the studies lay a 'profound unity of authentic geographical research based upon the spatial imprint of peasant communities and oriented towards the total analysis of agrarian civilizations whose deep understanding conditions development'.[1]

The synergistic effect of the *terroir* studies conferred a strong identity on an entire generation of geographic research, as shown in the map indicating the location of *terroir* studies in West Africa over the period 1965–85 (Figure 3). The wealth and originality of the

[1] It is not our objective here to evaluate this large collection of *terroir* studies. A few reviews have already appeared, the first coming from the promoters themselves, a second issuing from researchers in an edited collected of papers based on a colloquium on the theme 'the study of *terroirs*' (ORSTOM-Petits espaces ruraux 1972). Another critical review authored by an economist and a geographer was published in 1980 by the research group AMIRA at the INSEE (Couty and Hallaire 1980).

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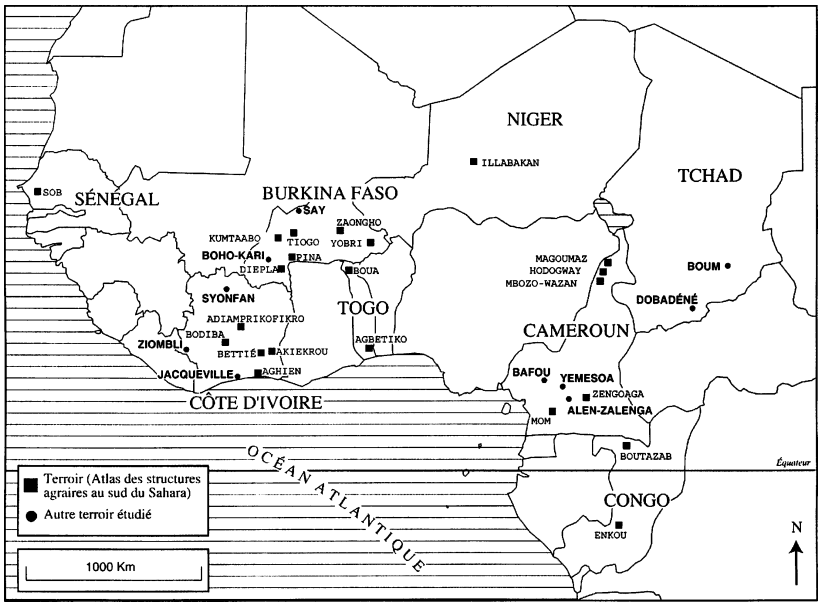


FIGURE 3 The location of *terroir* studies in West Africa.

terroir studies found a large audience in the 1980s. Widely recognized by other disciplines, this research convergence is now viewed as a geographical school, although this was certainly not the intention of its founders.[2]

The terroir *in related disciplines*

The discovery of the scientific pertinence of the local agricultural level is not unique to geography. Other disciplines invested equally in this scale and the research questions associated with it (ORSTOM 1976; Martin 1970). Among agronomists, researchers did pioneering work by advancing development interventions based on their local-level studies. Their innovative research (Schlippé 1956; Guillard 1965) was particularly influential in agrarian studies, especially among geographers, and took place within a development perspective. For example, some agronomists conducted time budget studies of peasant farmers to better understand and explain in graphic form the difficulties involved in introducing cash crops like cotton into a farming system.

[2] While the formal *terroir* studies ended for institutional reasons, the interest in tropical agrarian systems was pursued by research collectives associated with ORSTOM and EHESS, which organized a monthly seminar from 1983 to 1995 on the theme of 'dynamics of agrarian systems'. A series of edited collections issued from this seminar and were published by ORSTOM. From an editorial standpoint, the *A travers champs* series of IRD publications carried forward the *Atlas of Agrarian Structures* in 1989 by enlarging the field of scientific approaches but progressively reducing the cartographic apparatus.

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They assessed the temporal and spatial resources available to farmers that would enable or constrain agricultural 'modernization'.

Among sociologists who had worked at the local scale, the *terroir* approach was valuable for the insights it offered into processes shaping socio-spatial organizations (Cresswell and Godelier 1976; Augé 1970; Capron 1973). *Terroir* studies greatly influenced rural economists interested in agricultural production systems of the South and the logic of family budgets. Thanks to the local scale of investigation, an economist was able to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the functioning and dynamics of production systems.

Thus, in the history of Africanist research, a '*terroir* period' existed among a large number of social scientists. Some seemed to have been influenced by the geographers' *terroir* school; others appeared to have developed this approach independently (Lavondes 1967; Pairault 1966). While the promoters of the *terroir* school viewed their studies as a springboard for agricultural modernization, their work had little impact on development experts. For some time, development practitioners were dissatisfied with the in-depth *terroir* studies like those carried out by ORSTOM researchers, in part because they were never fully applied and partly because the duration of the study was not easily compatible with the time frame of development interventions. Yet, unexpectedly, the *terroir* approach was received with renewed interest some fifteen years after its take-off when in West Africa (and especially in Burkina Faso and Cameroon) a second generation of *terroir* studies was launched.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE *TERROIR* BY DEVELOPMENT PLANNERS

Development failures led rural development researchers, developers and policy makers to search for new directions and alternative rural development interventions. The beginning of the 1980s saw the rise of the research-development concept with specific reference to agrarian systems. This was to be the period of integrated rural development projects, in which planners sought to improve rural livelihoods by simultaneously intervening in a number of sectors (Dugue 1990). Following the great Sahelian drought of the early 1970s, the question of the preservation of natural resources became a pressing concern in rural development programmes. Resource management was conceived in terms of empowering local groups to undertake local actions. 'Village lands management' was presented as a new way of undertaking rural development from the bottom up – that is, by rural communities themselves. Since the 1980s, this approach has been promoted by NGOs concerned with rural development and has received considerable amounts of development aid (World Bank, Caisse Française, GTZ, FAC). Village lands management came into vogue and became a development slogan of the 1990s (Painter 1994; Turner 1999; Fischer 2000).

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*The neo-*terroirs *of development planners*

The different research-development projects that centred on the management of village lands emphasized both the diversity of local situations and the participation of local populations in the conceptualization and especially the implementation of development programmes. The *terroir* (village lands) came to be understood as an operational spatial unit of development planners. As the necessary anchor for all rural development projects (Teyssier 1995), the *terroir* became a scale of intervention or a neo-*terroir*.

The French neo-*terroir* approach to research-development studies shared some common points of interests with the Farming Systems Research approach developed by anglophone researchers during the 1970s (Ruthenberg 1980). Both approaches sought to understand why agricultural technologies developed in government experiment stations were not being adopted by local farmers. As a result, they moved their research sites to farmers' fields to better understand their needs and the constraints they faced in adopting new technologies. The practitioners of farming systems research focused on the farming household as the unit of research and intervention, for which they established a series of agronomic indicators and typologies. In contrast, *terroir* and neo-*terroir* approaches encompassed socio-spatial ensembles of farming households. Beyond these differences, the two approaches shared a common interest in small-scale farming in the developing world as opposed to large-scale farming in industrialized countries (Bonneval 1993; Eicher and Staatz 1990).

Following the devastating drought of 1984–5, development organizations increasingly intervened in rural areas to reduce household vulnerability to future droughts. The *terroir* management project fitted within the more general policy framework that placed increasing emphasis on participatory development and tenure security as necessary conditions for improved resource management. Land-holding patterns and the boundaries of rural communities became central concerns of these integrated development projects.

Village lands management thus appeared as an appropriate step to take in response to questions that were seldom salient in the *terroir* studies but which came to the fore in the context of agrarian crises. These questions included land rights, farmer–herder interactions, security of grazing zones in pastoral areas, technological innovation, agricultural productivity, land erosion and forest preservation.

The *terroirs* taken up by the research-development approach were conceived as a sample of sites where rural development interventions could be tested, often in comparative settings. In contrast to the *terroir* school which envisaged a single study site, the research-development approach selected numerous locations. For a given study area, from four to ten and sometimes as many as sixteen *terroirs* were chosen. In many cases, research was carried out by interdisciplinary teams. Figure 4 shows the location of *terroir* studies undertaken in northern Cameroon over an eight-year period by the Institute for Development Research (formerly part of ORSTOM) in partnership with CIRAD at

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the request of the Rural Development and *Terroir* Management Project (Teyssier *et al*. 2003).

The choice of neo-*terroirs* was guided by their role as markers of different local histories of development and was informed by the underlying idea of stages of development. The concern not to limit oneself to one site but to study many of them in relation to the

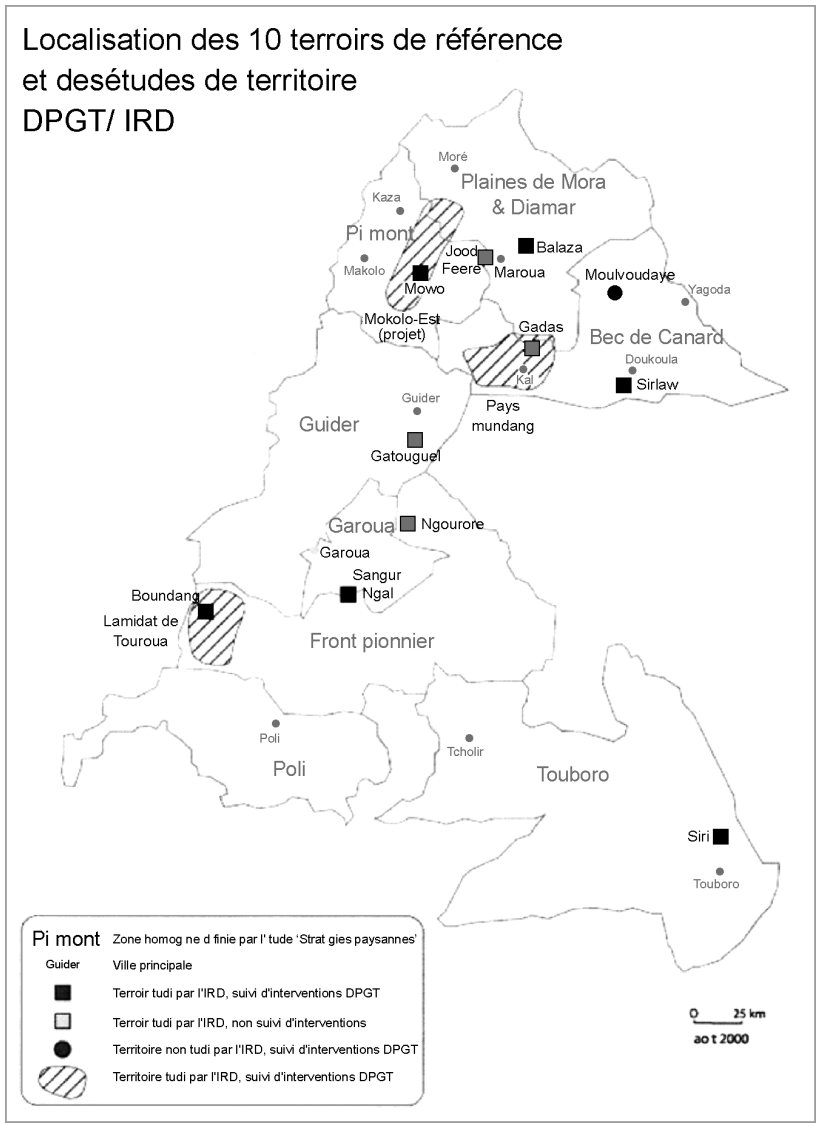


FIGURE 4 Location of ten *terroirs* and territories studied by DPGT and IRD in Northern Cameroon.

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human and physical geographic diversity also reflected an interest in comparative research. The *terroir* school studies constitued a set of high-quality reference works for the neo-*terroir* research-development programme, a sort of scientific patrimony. For example, Iyebi Mandjek and Seignobos relied heavily on the work of Hallaire (1970) in northern Cameroon while Dugue (1990) built upon the work of Marchal (1983) in Burkina Faso.

The neo-*terroirs* extended the earlier studies of geographers in diverse ways. They included a diagnosis of a situation and propositions for intervention. The latter would be put into effect with the participation of local communities. The *terroir* research was sometimes undertaken or continued even after village lands were reconfigured by a land management project (anti-erosion structures or land divisions, for example). A number of studies conducted in Burkina Faso and Cameroon by the ORSTOM-CIRAD Research-Development group indicate that two overarching concerns guided the choice of neo-*terroirs*: (1) the threat of natural resource degradation, and (2) a desire to lend support to expanding agricultural sectors like the cotton economies of Burkina Faso and Cameroon.

Methodological legacies of the terroir *school*

The methodological contribution of the *terroir* school, especially its emphasis on map making, is perhaps the most important influence on the *gestion des terroirs* approach. This cartographic legacy is evident in the widespread use of large-scale aerial photography (1:10,000), the surveying and mapping of village boundaries, land parcels and infrastructure, and the production of land-use zoning maps in areas where the *gestion des terroirs* approach is systematically pursued (Gray 2002). Advances in geospatial technologies such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS), high resolution satellite images and geographic information system (GIS) computer software have greatly facilitated the process of land delimitation and boundary making. When linked to national geodetic grids, the information gathered and mapped in *gestion des terroirs* projects can serve as basic supporting evidence for land titling.

A second legacy of the *terroir* school that is apparent in the *gestion des terroirs* approach is its 'development' orientation. The delimitation of *terroirs* is rationalized in both the *terroir* school and the *gestion des terroirs* approach for its utility in land-use planning. The mutual focus on 'development' has been a major impetus for the merging of the formerly distinct notions of *terroir* and territory. A major difference is that the socio-natural dimension of the *terroir* school has become marginalized if not eviscerated in the neo-*terroir* approach. Local populations and *terroirs* are now viewed as instruments for territorial-based interventions.

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THE *TERROIR* IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

By the mid-1990s, the *terroir* had become the pertinent scale of intervention in rural development projects. Initially funded by French aid (Clouet 1990), the *terroir* approach was welcomed by West African states and other aid donors because it served as a commodious vehicle for carrying forward a new and not-so-new list of policy objectives, such as land privatization, decentralization and natural resource conservation. Development planners in Côte d'Ivoire adopted the *terroir* approach in two distinct domains: (1) wildlife conservation in buffer zones around protected areas, and (2) cadastral mapping. While the former views the *terroir* in terms of the socio-spatial dimensions of a community's natural resource management practices, the latter uses the *terroir* simply as a means of delimiting village territories to facilitate the process of land privatization.

Gestion des terroirs *and community-based wildlife management*

The focus on rural communities and village lands as the primary socio-spatial unit of rural development in Côte d'Ivoire was in part inspired by the community-based wildlife conservation approaches pioneered in anglophone southern Africa. Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE model of wildlife conservation (Agrawal and Gibson 1996) was particularly influential. In the CAMPFIRE programme, communities located at the edge of protected areas are encouraged to conserve threatened species in exchange for a percentage of safari hunting revenues. Land-use zoning is a key component of this wildlife conservation strategy (Matzke and Nabane 1996). Certain areas are set aside for farming and livestock raising, while others are delimited as wildlife zones where safari hunting can take place. A similar wildlife conservation programme began in the late 1990s in the border area linking Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso along the edge of the Comoé National Park. The basic objective of GEPRENAF (Project for the Participative Management of Natural Resources and Fauna) is to allow wildlife populations to recover through community efforts to end commercial and subsistence hunting in the *terroirs* of communities bordering classified forests and the national park. The general scheme is that as wildlife populations expand, the opportunities for ecotourism and safari hunting will increase and become an important source of revenue for local communities. This anticipated economic pay-off would be the primary incentive for communities to continue their conservation activities.

To achieve the basic objective of wildlife recovery, GEPRENAF deployed the neo-*terroir* approach as a land-use planning tool. The process involved delimiting the boundaries of different communities and then zoning large areas of these *terroirs* for biodiversity conservation (Biodiversity Zone). Farming, livestock raising and forest product extraction is meant to take place in the agro-forestry-pastoral zone. Figure 5 illustrates how the *terroir* approach is used for land-use zoning at one of the two GEPRENAF sites in Côte d'Ivoire. The map shows the limits of biodiversity and agro-forestry-pastoral zones as well as the

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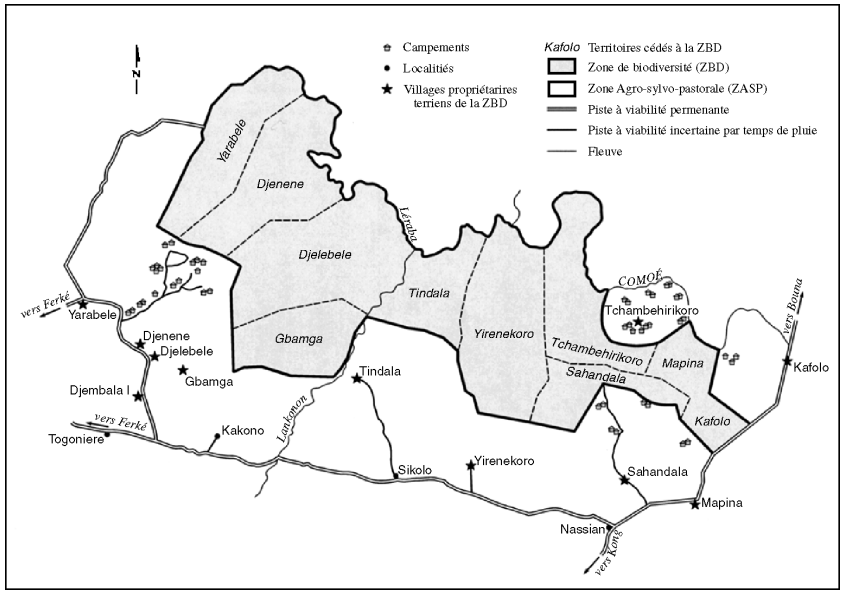


FIGURE 5 GEPRENAF site (Warigué) in Côte d'Ivoire, showing the *terroirs* of participating communities and land-use plan for the buffer zone.

communities (indicated by a star shape) holding customary authority over these lands. The *terroir* functions in this case as the basic socio-spatial unit in an integrated conservation and development project whose goal is to create a conservation territory in which resource use is restricted. The land-use planning map both created and represented the territory in which GEPRENAF's activities were to unfold (Bassett 2002).

A subtle but important shift in the meaning of *terroir* is apparent in the GEPRENAF project. The *terroir* is now synonymous with the notion of territory, with its emphasis on boundaries and external influences on resource use and control. For Pélissier and Sautter, the relationship between a *terroir* and a local community was essential: a *terroir* was locally constructed. A territory, on the other hand, is more often shaped by some external initiative and reflects a preoccupation with boundaries and controlling people and resources (Sack 1986; Scott 1998; Pélissier 1995). If the two notions tend to be merging, their initial denotation was different: the *terroir* was conceived as an endogenous construct, while the territory was considered to be the product of exogenous forces. Thus, GEPRENAF and other village land management projects (*gestion des terroirs*) promoted by governments, aid donors and NGOs are territorial constructs, since the stimulus to their creation is largely external. Of course, such binary modes of thinking (local/outside, endogenous/exogenous) simplify more complicated social processes in which it is difficult to distinguish internal from external influences. This

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is especially true when there is a 'participatory' component to village land management projects. As we shall see below, there was much local support for *terroir* delimitation in Côte d'Ivoire in the context of the 1998 land law and the politics of exclusion linked to the ethno-nationalist ideology of *ivoirité*.

THE *TERROIR* AS A TECHNOCRATIC TOOL FOR CADASTRAL MAPPING

Côte d'Ivoire's new rural land law (*la loi foncière rurale*) requires that all rural land be registered within ten years from the date of the law's promulgation. The application decrees specify the institutions and procedures that are necessary to implement the law. One of the outstanding issues concerns the technical process through which land will be surveyed and registered. This is a critical component of the land law's application because of its implications for the costs of land registration for individuals seeking land titles. One of the concerns of aid donors like the World Bank is that the costs of land surveys be kept low so that poor people are not dispossessed simply because they lack the means to employ a surveyor. One possible way to keep expenses low is for the state to assume the cost of creating the geodetic grid to which local land parcels can be connected. The Côte d'Ivoire government is currently experimenting with a national-scale public works project that will facilitate this process. In its *Terroir* Delimitation Pilot Project funded by the European Union, the government seeks to link the boundaries of village lands to a new national geodetic grid (RCI 1998). The project will survey the limits of 100 *terroirs* in different parts of the country to determine if this scale and method of mapping is cost-effective and capable of being replicated at the national level.

Figure 6 illustrates how the *terroir* mapping process will be undertaken. For each *terroir* in the pilot project, survey teams will go into the field with local and neighbouring land authorities to determine the boundaries of each *terroir*. They will be equipped with enlarged satellite images at the scale of 1:25,0000 called 'spatiocartes' and Geographical Positioning System (GPS) devices that use the same geodetic system as the satellite images (WGS-84). A main geodetic point will be placed in the central location of the *terroir* that will be surveyed in relation to the national geodetic grid. Surveyors will then proceed to note the *terroir*'s limits on the spatiocarte. Once this task is complete, the teams will place primary boundary markers every five kilometres that will be linked to the main marker located in the *terroir*'s central place. In between these primary boundary markers, surveyors will place secondary markers every 500 metres. Once this *terroir*-scale grid is laid out, it will be relatively easy to survey individual parcels of land when individuals initiate the land registration process.

This process of linking individual *terroir* to the national geodetic grid should reduce the costs of surveying individual land parcels. In theory, once the *terroir* has been delimited and land registration

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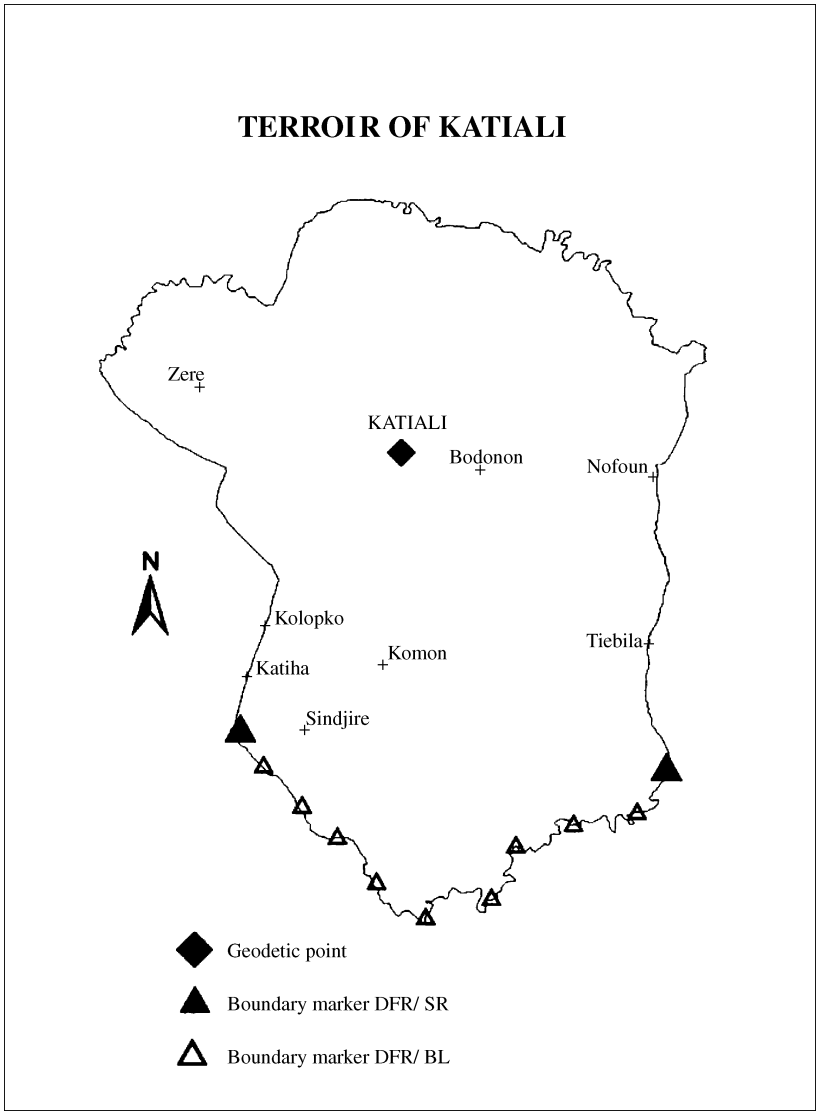


FIGURE 6 *Terroir* of Katiali, showing the various geodetic points proposed by the *Terroir* Delimitation Project.

is complete, communities will be in a position to engage in land-use planning and seek funding for locally designed development projects. The cartographic infrastructure will also form the basis of a cadastre – a public record of land ownership used as a basis for taxation. Decentralization policies hinge on this classic means of revenue generation.

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In the context of implementing a new land law and creating a cadastral map for the purposes of taxation, the *terroir* has assumed a purely technocratic function. Surveyors are purely interested in the boundaries of village lands. The social and biophysical processes shaping these historically shifting forms is not of interest. Yet, if recent land boundary conflicts in the Côte d'Ivoire are indicative, the political ecology of land access, control and use are highly charged issues today. The expulsion of thousands of Burkinabè immigrants from the southern forest region over the issue of land control demonstrates the extreme sensitivity of the land question in Côte d'Ivoire.[3] In applying the *terroir* approach to cadastral mapping and land registration, at least two practical as well as social issues will have to be addressed.

First, the notion that each village has a distinctive *terroir* is problematic in two senses: not all villages possess a *terroir*, and the concept of village land simplifies a complex system of resource rights to the detriment of certain rights holders. Evidence from Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso shows that the land surrounding some rural communities is controlled by members of a different village (Batterbury 1998; Fofana 2000). This is often related to the settlement history of a region in which immigrants receive permission to cultivate land but do not have the right to plant trees, harvest certain wild products, or lend land to others without seeking permission from the original land lender. The notion of 'village land' is also misleading. It is usually not a community but individuals such as lineage heads and earth priests who control land. Thus, a *terroir* is more accurately described as a mosaic of lineage lands in which rights to resources vary among social groups (indigenous vs immigrant, men vs women, early vs late comers). The secondary land rights of these non-landholding groups are often jeopardized by the 'clarification' of land owners and village boundaries in a given area. As a result, the livelihoods of certain groups are made more vulnerable if their rights to resources are not recognized in the *gestion des terroirs* approach. Invariably, the customary system of multiple rights holders to the same land parcel is threatened by cadastral mapping with its emphasis on the rights of primary land owners, understood to be farmers.

Second, the process of clarifying and recording land rights often exacerbates existing or latent land-use conflicts that can result in explosive situations. The expulsion of tens of thousands of Burkinabè from their farms in western Côte d'Ivoire over the past five years is directly linked to the 'clarification' of land rights in the context of an economic crisis and unemployed urban youth returning to the countryside in search of land (Rueff 2001). Land-use conflicts are not only between 'foreigners' and local people, but also between local people who seek to redefine their rights under changing circumstances (Colin and Ayouz 2006). The clarification of land rights, whether in the context

[3] Indeed, one of the demands made by insurgent forces during the 2002 Côte d'Ivoire rebellion was the modification of Article 26 in the 1998 land law that currently prohibits foreigners from inheriting land.

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of the *gestion des terroirs* approach or the new land laws, sets the stage for old agreements to be renegotiated and new claims to be made, leading to a proliferation of land disputes. Rather than increasing security of tenure and investments in land that might be conducive to increased productivity and conservation, such land-use conflicts generally lead to reduced investments and even land abandonment.

CONCLUSION

The *terroir* school has offered both theoretical and methodological guidance to a succession of *terroir* approaches since the 1980s. Its main theoretical legacy is the conceptualization of a *terroir* as a socio-natural heritage that links a local community and its identity to a place. In contrast to the emphasis placed by the *terroir* school on the fashioning of landscapes by local communities, the neo-*terroir* approaches are distinguished by exogenous influences on land management and an emphasis on delimiting village boundaries.

An important shift in the meaning of the *terroir* concept is apparent in its evolving uses. For the *terroir* school, the *terroir* came to represent the *socio-natural heritage of a group* in which its internal social organization and pattern of resource use were inscribed in the landscape. The parklands of the Moose of Burkina Faso and the mountain terraces of the Mafa of northern Cameroon are examples of socio-natural constructions of African peasant farmers. These *terroirs* lacked distinct boundaries. It was not the spatial limits of the *terroirs* there were important but the socio-spatial processes giving them form and meaning.

The concept took on new meaning in the late-1980s as an appropriate *location for on-farm research* by agricultural development planners. This second generation of 'neo-*terroir*' studies emerged within a research-development policy setting that placed greater emphasis on farmer participation in agricultural research beyond the confines of the agricultural experiment station. The *terroir* became both an alternative research site and a setting for mobilizing rural populations to adopt new land management and farming techniques. In contrast to earlier notions of the *terroir* as local heritage, planners viewed the *terroir* as *in situ* sites for agricultural innovations where new technologies and land management practices could be tested. These neo-*terroirs* were in some cases refashioned to conform to the land-use plans and practices promoted by developers. In sum, the *terroir* was emptied of its patrimonial meaning during this research-development period. In the eyes of the neo-*terroir* promoters, the *terroir* became synonymous with development territory.

The meaning of the concept shifted again in the 1990s with the advent of the *gestion des terroirs* approach. In the hands of conservation and development planners, the *terroir* was conceived of as a *scale of intervention* for a host of government, aid donor and NGO programmes. In their search for legitimate community actors and institutions, planners viewed the *terroir* as an authentic territory within whose

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boundaries land-use planning could take place. Indeed, determining the limits of village lands became a primary task for land-use planners whose maps came to resemble puzzles of interlocking village boundaries. The largely exogenous nature of this initiative and the repetitive character of the boundary delimitation process removed much of the patrimonial meaning from these puzzle pieces. In summary, a significant shift in the meaning of the *terroir* concept took place from one in which the notion of socio-natural heritage was dominant to one that emphasized territory and boundary clarification.

In the process of producing bounded conservation and development territories, the *gestion des terroirs* approach is generating land-use conflicts by changing the conditions of resource access and control. The state's instrumentalization of the *terroir* to promote nature conservation and land privatization has in turn been instrumentalized by landless groups who seek to recover the heritage of their ancestors at the expense of immigrants. These moves by the state and indigenous groups to wrestle control over people and resources has deeply politicized the patrimonial meaning of *terroir*. In this period, a new and more exclusive meaning of *terroir* has emerged that severely circumscribes access to resources by outsiders. This reinterpretation of *terroir* as for 'locals only' sharply contrasts with the more inclusive meaning of the *terroir* school. These new *terroirs* have become territories that are claimed by 'local' groups and instrumentalized to exclude others in the name of local heritage.

In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the *terroir* has been seized by certain groups asserting their autochthonous privileges to resources as well as a means of dispossessing immigrants of their farms and other economic assets. Backed by the 1998 land law that excludes non-Ivoirians from owning land, autochthonous claims to customary village lands have been buttressed by the neo-*terroir* concept of the *terroir* as a legitimate, culturally sanctioned space of resource management. In sum, the search for indigenous spaces of conservation and development has produced *terroirs* of violence and dispossession that were at the centre of the Côte d'Ivoire rebellion of 19 September 2002.

The transformation of the *terroir* into a purely spatial unit for conservation and development planning is an example of the social construction of space. In this case, the construction of locality by the state and its partners (aid donors, NGOs, customary authorities) derives from a confluence of intellectual currents in development theory that place emphasis on local institutions for the purposes of governance (frequently decentralization), conservation (as in community-based conservation) and development (grassroots development, for example). The problem with this focused attention on the *terroir* is that it fails to capture the multi-scale dynamics that link global-level process like World Bank policies focused on privatization with local struggles over access to and control of resources. To ignore these local–global dynamics is to risk overlooking the interplay of both endogenous and exogenous forces and their effects on resource access and management. The political ecological approach that we have taken in this article helps

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to illuminate the multi-scale processes that are redefining the meaning of *terroir* into socio-spatial arenas of contestation and conflict.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the origins and evolution of the *terroir* approach as an organizing idea in development planning in West Africa. We consider the evolving meaning of the *terroir* concept in three distinct periods: as a research approach crafted in a French geographical school; as a site for research-development programmes, and, most recently, as a tool for conservation planning, territorial restructuring, and land privatization. An important shift in the meaning of the *terroir* concept is apparent in its evolving uses. For the *terroir* school, the *terroir* came to represent the socio-natural heritage of a group in which its social organization and pattern of resource use became inscribed in the landscape. The concept took on new meaning in the late-1980s as an appropriate location for on-farm research by agricultural development planners. The *terroir* became both an alternative research site and a setting for mobilizing rural populations to adopt new land management and farming techniques. The meaning of the concept shifted again in the 1990s with the advent of the *gestion des terroirs* approach. In the hands of conservation and development planners, the *terroir* was conceived of as a scale of intervention for a host of government, aid donor, and NGO programmes. In summary, a significant change in the meaning of the concept has taken place from one in which the notion of local heritage was dominant to one that emphasizes territory and boundary clarification.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les origines et l'évolution de l'approche du *terroir* en tant qu'idée structurante de la planification du développement en Afrique de

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l'Ouest. L'article étudie l'évolution de la signification du concept de *terroir* à trois périodes distinctes : en tant qu'approche de recherche façonnée dans une école géographique française, en tant que site de programmes de recherche et développement et, plus récemment, en tant qu'outil de planification de la conservation, de restructuration du territoire et de privatisation des terres. On observe un changement important de la signification du concept de *terroir* dans l'évolution de son usage. Pour l'école du *terroir*, le *terroir* avait fini par représenter l'héritage socionaturel d'un groupe au sein duquel son organisation sociale et son modèle d'utilisation des ressources s'étaient gravés dans le paysage. Le concept a pris une nouvelle signification à la fin des années 1980 en tant que lieu adapté à la recherche dans les exploitations agricoles par les planificateurs du développement agricole. Le *terroir* est devenu à la fois un site de recherche alternatif et un cadre de mobilisation des populations rurales pour qu'elles adoptent de nouvelles techniques de gestion et d'exploitation des terres. La signification du concept a de nouveau changé dans les années 1990 avec l'avènement de l'approche de *gestion des terroirs*. Entre les mains des planificateurs de la conservation et du développement, le *terroir* était conçu comme une échelle d'intervention pour un grand nombre de programmes de bailleurs de fonds, gouvernements et ONG. En résumé, la signification du concept a connu une évolution importante : d'une signification dominée par la notion d'héritage à une signification mettant l'accent sur le territoire et la clarification des limites.

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