

## Paper Proposal

By David Drengk

### **Inside a technological forest landscape in West Africa: Material culture and everyday forest life**

This paper explores the everyday life of forest dwellers in the evergreen rainforest of early twentieth century southern Côte d'Ivoire. It scrutinizes the continuous reciprocal relationship between the biological forest environment, people, and material culture. In doing so, this paper leans on Svante Lindqvist's and Francesca Bray's conceptual thoughts on *technological landscape*. Following Lindqvist's original idea of *technological landscape*, this study of the forest uncovers the co-existence of technology indicating both historical continuities and changes at the same time. Telegraph and railway lines, introduced by the French colonial administration, did not automatically replace modes of communication like talking drums or transport like footpaths and river transportation. Using *technological landscape* as a framework to express a general critique of biased and innovation-centric histories of technology, this paper argues that seeing the forest of southern Côte d'Ivoire through the lens of a *technological landscape* enables the historian to scrutinize the history of people's everyday life as consisting not only of material artefacts but also of people's practices and knowledge, all aspects that "a society draws upon to function" (Bray, 2016).

Studying the role of material artefacts in people's everyday lives in this technological forest landscape further allows historians of technology to grasp the complex cultural meanings of such objects and related practices in this specific locale (El Hariry et al., 2021). In the case of southern Côte d'Ivoire, such a study reveals insights into the material cultures of alluvial gold mining along the Mé River, of palm wine production and consumption, kola tree cultivation and kola nut trade, or the everyday maintenance and repair work along the Abidjan-Niger railway line in the forest.

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