

TABOO OF EATING BONOBO AMONG THE BONGANDO PEOPLE IN THE WAMBA REGION, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

LINGOMO Bongoli

Forêt des Bonobos

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ABSTRACT Among the Bongando, an ethnic group living in and around the village of Wamba, a well-known base for research on the bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it has traditionally been taboo to eat bonobo. In Bongando folk taxonomy, bonobos are categorized not as animals, but as human beings. The resemblance of bonobo bodily characteristics and behaviors to those of humans is the main reason for this categorization. While this recognition has helped in the conservation of this endangered species, social and cultural interchanges with other ethnic groups are changing the tradition of “folk conservation.” Through interviews with villagers, we investigated changes in the eating of bonobo meat. This taboo persists in older generations, whereas a certain number of younger people have begun to eat bonobo meat. With regards to this change, bonobo conservation and the meaning of food taboo as a “cultural resource” is discussed.

Key Words: Bonobo; *Pan paniscus*; DRC; Wamba; Food taboo; Folk conservation; Cultural resource.

INTRODUCTION

I. Bonobo Studies in Wamba

The bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) is endemic to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Badrian & Malenky, 1984; Thompson et al., 2008), and is protected by the DRC government (Département de l'Enseignement Supérieur, Universitaire et Recherche Scientifique, 1987a; 1987b; Zairian Institute for Nature Conservation, 1986). Since 1973, a Japanese team has been conducting research on the bonobo in the village of Wamba in the Région de l'Equateur (Fig. 1; Kano, 1992). In 1990, the Luo Scientific Reserve was established. However, due to subsequent political disorder from 1991 and civil war from 1997 in former Zaire and the DRC, research and conservation activities had been discontinued until the mid-2000s (Furuichi & Mwanza, 2003; Tashiro et al., 2007).

The first author (Lingomo) is a native Bongando, born in the village of Iyondje, which is adjacent to Wamba. He has been working with the second author, Kimura, as a local informant in the anthropological and primatological studies of the Japanese team (Kimura, 1992).

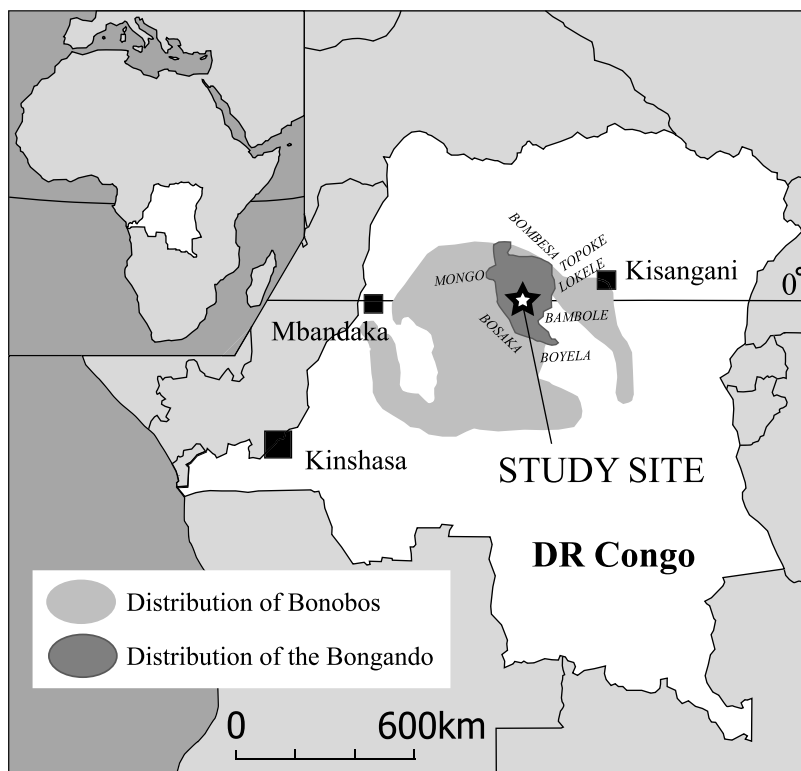


Fig. 1. Study site and the distribution of bonobos in the DRC. Distribution of Bonobos is quoted from Tashiro et al. (2007).

II. The Changing Bonobo Food Taboo among the Bongando

Among the Bongando people residing near the Luo Reserve, it has traditionally been taboo to eat bonobo meat (Réserve Scientifique de la Luo, 1989; Kano, 1992; Furuichi & Thompson eds., 2008). This is one main reason the Japanese team selected this area for its bonobo research.

On one occasion, three Bongando men, including the first author, were invited to dinner in Kisangani. Many kinds of food were served, and the host explained that one of the dishes was bonobo meat. The Bongando men were astonished and did not take any of this meat.

Traditionally, food taboos surrounding bonobo as shown in this episode were common throughout the Bongando ethnic group,⁽¹⁾ rather than in specific clans nor lineages. However, some Bongando have recently begun to disregard this taboo. Influenced by foreigners who eat bonobo meat, they have begun hunting the bonobo, primarily for money, but also to eat the meat themselves. This has become a serious problem in the study and conservation of the bonobo as the numbers of bonobos and other forest animals has been decreasing over the past several decades. Whereas 2.5 heads of game were killed per hunter per week on average in 1968, only 0.17 head were killed per hunter per week in the 1980s,

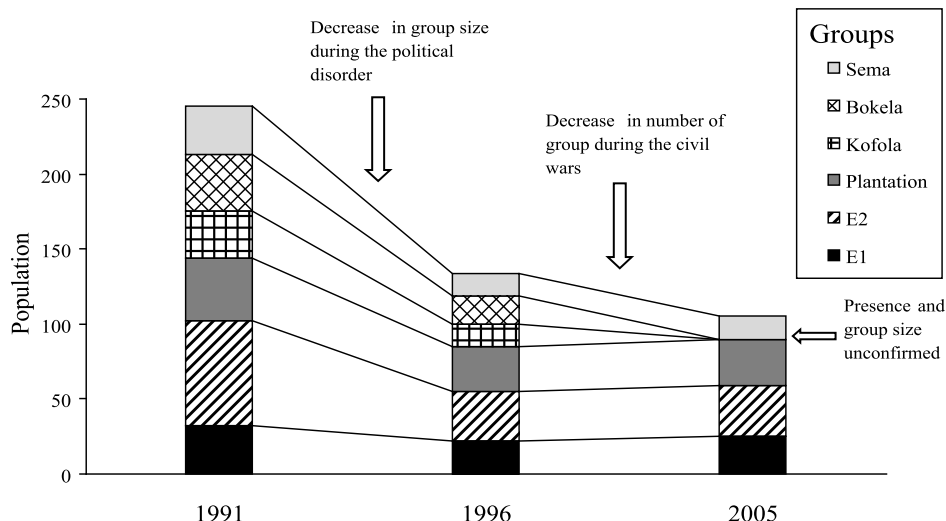


Fig. 2. Decreasing bonobo population near Wamba (quote from Idani et al., 2008).

owing to a decrease of the animal population (Département de la Santé Publique, 1987). The bay duiker (*Cephalophus dorsalis*) has already disappeared from the Nsema and Balanga (Groupements in the Secteur de Luo) forests near Wamba. This “empty forest” situation (Redford, 1992) is referred to as the “hunger period” by the Bongando. To avoid incurring the wrath of God and the ancestral spirits, people make food offerings in the hopes of obtaining game. As a result of the decrease in the availability of other game species, and from further influence of the civil war, bonobos have come to be hunted as a new source of bushmeat. Fig. 2 shows the decline in the bonobo population around Wamba since 1991.

III. Composition of the Paper

In the section that follows, we describe the Bongando people and their subsistence activities. We then discuss the recognition of bonobos by the Bongando people and show why they avoid eating these animals. In the section “Recent Changes in Food Taboos” we describe the current state of bonobo consumption in a village based on information obtained in face-to-face interviews. In the final section, we discuss wildlife conservation and local development with respect to the bonobo.

THE BONGANDO AND THEIR SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

I. The Bongando

The Bongando are a Bantu ethnic group that belongs to the Mongo cluster (Hulstaert, 1961; 1972). They usually speak Longondo (the Bongando mother

tongue), whereas Lingala, a lingua franca of northwestern DRC, is used in communications with outsiders. The population is estimated to be around 450,000 to 500,000 (Kimura, 1992). Other ethnic groups living around the Bongando are the Topoke, the Lokele, and the Bambole to the east, the Boyela to the south, the Bosaka and the Mongo to the west, and the Bombesa to the north (Fig. 1). None of these ethnic groups place a taboo on eating bonobo meat, and all of them consume bonobo meat as food. The Bongando are most likely the only ethnic group who places a taboo on eating bonobo meat. For this reason, coupled with the relatively undisturbed natural forest vegetation, the species is still abundant in the Bongando forest.

II. Environment

The study area is located at 0°11'N, 22°43'E, 300 to 400 m above sea level, and is surrounded by a tropical rain forest. The mean temperature is 24.5°C throughout the year, and the annual rainfall is about 2,000 mm (Vuanza & Crabbe, 1975). Forest vegetation is classified as primary forest, swamp forest, and secondary forest (Kano & Mulavwa, 1984).

Bongando settlements extend along established roads (Kimura, 1992). Crop fields and secondary forests stretch up to 1 to 2 km on either side of the village. A few people live in the *behetsia* (village in the forest with cassava fields) and travel to other villages on small paths. Many people build *nkumbo*, or temporary hunting/fishing camps in the forest. People move their villages from time to time to seek better land for gardens, or to obtain better access to water. People frequently encounter bonobos not only in the primary forest, but also near the village.

III. Subsistence Activities

The most important crop in Bongando agriculture is cassava. Tubers make up the staple of the Bongando diet and the leaves of the plant are used as a side dish. Other produce includes bananas, yams, maize, rice, and some vegetables. Through hunting and gathering, the Bongando consume at least 65 species of mammals, 48 species of birds, 20 species of reptiles and amphibians, 104 species of fish, 50 species of insects, and 95 species of plants (Takeda, 1987). Animal catches near the village are decreasing in number (Sato, 1983); thus, in place of hunting, fishing has become important to provide their principal source of protein. The Bongando fish with nylon nets, fishhooks, and several types of fishing weir.

The Bongando distinguish two categories of food: "food of hunger" (*toma ta njala*), which includes meat or fish, and "food of need" (*toma ta mposa*), which includes starchy foods, vegetables, mushrooms, insects, fruits, and the leaves of forest trees. They also have a specific term for hunger for meat or fish: *bokaku*. *Njala* is a general term to describe the simple feeling of hunger. The Bongando have a strong preference for foods that are rich in animal protein.

The Bongando also keep goats, pigs, chickens, ducks, and pigeons, which are rarely eaten⁽²⁾ but are exchanged as bride wealth (Kimura, 1992). The 150 residents of the study village kept a total of roughly 60 goats, 250 chickens, and 40 ducks.

In former Zaire in the 1980s, animal husbandry provided them with only 8.2% of meat consumed per month, whereas 91.2% came from hunting (Département de la Santé Publique, 1987).

IV. Socio-economic Change during and after the Civil War

During the civil war in the 1990's, soldiers from Kabila's government army were posted around the Wamba area. They made forays into the villages and gave the villagers guns to hunt for bushmeat. When the soldiers retreated, many of their shotguns and bullets were left behind, and the villagers began to use these new tools to kill bonobos. At the same time, the trucking and shipping transportation network of the DRC collapsed during wartime and the villagers were left with no means of selling coffee beans, their main cash crop. As a result, the selling of bushmeat has become the predominant way of earning cash, and they have begun to transport large amounts of smoked bushmeat to Kisangani, a distance of 400 km, on foot or by bicycle. Before the civil war, they hunted mostly for their own consumption, but now they are hunting for cash.

In 2007, afraid of a possible depletion of animals, the DRC government began to restrict hunting from December to May (in what is supposed to be their breeding season) every year to protect the forest fauna.

RECOGNITION OF THE BONOBO AMONG THE BONGANDO

The relationship between man and bonobo is represented in the Bongando's beliefs of supernatural beings, humans, and animals. They have one God called *Ingolongolo*,⁽³⁾ who warns that eating non-edible food and disregarding particular edible but restricted species may result in illness. Certain categories of individuals (e.g., men, women, or children) are prohibited from certain edible species.⁽⁴⁾ However, all Bongando are prohibited from eating bonobo meat.

I. Position of the Bonobo in the Bongando Animal Taxonomy

Fig. 3 shows a part of the Bongando animal taxonomy.⁽⁵⁾ Of particular note is that *elia* (ape) is not classified as *nyama* (nonhuman animal) but as *boto* (human) in the broad sense.⁽⁶⁾ *Elia* is further classified into *elia* in a narrow sense (i.e., bonobo) and *etolo*. *Etolo*, which frequently appears in Bongando legends, has an image quite similar to that of the gorilla.⁽⁷⁾

II. Etymology of Local Names

In the Bongando language, the bonobo is referred to by two terms: *elia* and *engombe*. The term *elia* comes from the verb *mb-ela* (to miss) or *mb-elia* (to block). The Bongando consider the bonobo a species that has "missed" becoming human, or one that was "blocked" on the path to becoming human. *Elia* is used in the central and southern parts of Bongando land, where relatively pure Bongando

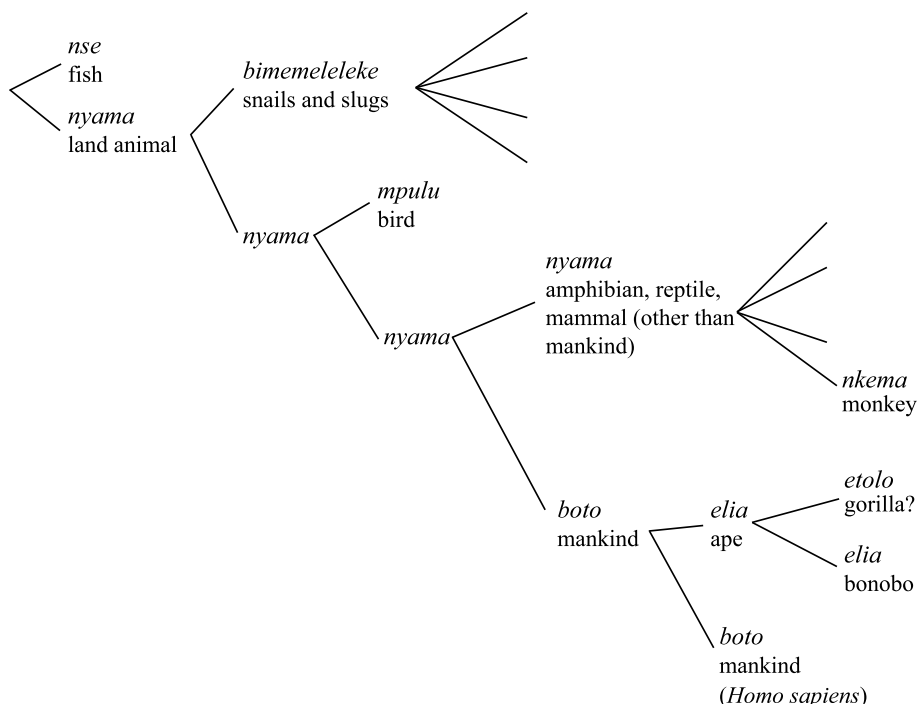


Fig. 3. Bongando animal taxonomy.

is spoken.⁽⁸⁾ The term *engombe* is used in the northern, eastern, and western parts of Bongando land, where many animal, fish, or vegetable names are shared with the other neighboring ethnic groups through commercial exchange networks.

III. Physical Form of the Body

The bonobo's physical resemblance to the human is one of the main reasons for the taboo. According to the Bongando, the following parts of the bonobo resemble those of the human: fingernails and toenails, teeth, ears, the nose, and the shape of the muscles.

The bonobo has no tail, and there are two interesting legends related to this. In some regions where bonobo meat is eaten, the following legend is told in the Lingala language. When God gave tails to animals, the bonobo came last, and all the tails had already been given out. The proverb says, "*Zila, zila mokomboso azanga mokila,*" or "Waiting, waiting, and bonobo missed the tail." In this respect, the bonobo is seen as a kind of animal. In contrast, a Bongando legend says that the animal that came last was the hog, not the bonobo. The hog consequently could not get the horns that God had distributed (but it could get the tail instead). The bonobo does not appear in this legend, because it belongs to the domain of the human.

IV. Behavior

The Bongando people also refer to behavioral resemblances between bonobos and humans. Some of these, however, have not been confirmed scientifically.

- The Bongando have a specific expression for the bipedal locomotion of the bonobo: *Ayakende nganangana* (“It walks slowly [because of curved legs]”).
- The Bongando distinguish four bonobo vocalizations: *Waka waka*, *Oowa*, *Mm*, and *Ndondo*.
 - *Waka waka* and *oowa* come from the same verb: *nv-u-a* or *nv-u-aka*, which means, “to die.”⁽⁹⁾ It is believed that in the presence of an enemy, bonobos scream *waka waka* (“Die, die”). Some say that bonobos also announce the time by calling *waka waka* at sunrise or sunset. This is usually done by a group, not by individual animals.
 - *Oowa* literally means “I die,” expressing a feeling of affliction.⁽¹⁰⁾ It is said that bonobos will emit this cry in a difficult situation, such as in an encounter with a predator. In these situations bonobos are believed to extend their hands to ask for pardon.
 - *Mm*, meaning “yes,” is believed to be emitted when bonobos eat delicious food.
 - *Ndondo* is the local name of a small electric catfish. The Bongando believe that bonobos fish, and when they are shocked by a *ndondo*, they cry “*Ndondo!*” This cry is made in groups.
- According to the Bongando, bonobos laugh. Their laugh resembles that of a woman and is expressed as *ehae hae iyoolee*.
- Bonobos beat the buttress roots of a tree (*liluku*) with their feet or hands. The Bongando believe that bonobos play music and sing the lyric, “*elia’a’akono, bom’ona Ngondey*” (see note 7).
- Bonobos are believed to fish by bailing water out of streams (*mpoha nse*). People say that in shallow streams, circular water pools with dykes can be observed after groups of bonobos have passed, and that these are evidence of such fishing by bailing water behaviors.⁽¹¹⁾
- With regard to grooming, the Bongando believe that a bonobo can ask another individual to look for lice. If a bonobo has an itch, it scratches itself using its fingernails.
- The Bongando are impressed that female bonobos carry their infants on their backs, just like humans.
- The Bongando say that when bonobos feel anger toward a man, they break off a branch from a bush and chase after the man to beat him with the branch.
- Men and bonobos share many common food species in the forest.⁽¹²⁾ In some legends of the Bongando, bonobos, who are *bahamene’a ngonda* (the lords of the forest), taught men about many kinds of medicine and food.

V. Relation to Witchcraft

The Bongando attribute supernatural powers to some animals or birds because of their behavior or appearance.⁽¹³⁾ In turn, bonobos are believed to be harmful

to human beings.

- If a man kills a bonobo, other bonobos cover the body with tree leaves, and as a consequence the man is cursed with death.
- Bonobos will take dead game from traps set by man, remove the game from the trap, and cover it with leaves.
- When a person has a headache, he or she may have been cursed by witchcraft (*boloki*). At that time, a bonobo is believed to exist behind that person.

VI. Utilization of the Body

Although eating bonobo meat has traditionally been taboo among the Bongando, they do use bonobos in other ways. Because it does not break easily, bonobo skin is used to make drums (*mbonda* or *tambulu*) for playing music. Bonobo bones are believed to be good traditional medicine for bone fractures and sprains. The bones are burned and the ashes are applied to small incisions made on the skin (*lokotelo*). These ashes are also given to babies to prevent fractures or sprains.

However, the Bongando usually do not kill bonobos for cultural or medicinal purposes, and they only take skin or bones when they find a bonobo that has died from disease, in an accident, or from other natural causes. Only men are allowed to touch bonobo skin; it is believed that if women touch it, they may give birth to babies who look like bonobos.

VII. The Bonobo in Legend⁽¹⁴⁾

The Bongando distinguish two kinds of legends: those of animals and those of man. Bonobos never appear in animal legends. The legends of man and bonobo highlight four things: (1) their identical origin, (2) their separation, (3) their mutual aid, and (4) their marriage. These legends show the close relationship between man and bonobo.

The Bongando believe that man and the bonobo have the same father, called *Iseliko*, and the same mother, *Ngokili*. The bonobo is the elder brother and man is the younger brother. Man and bonobo once lived in the same place, but they were separated as a result of conflicts over fire and elections.

Fire of the bonobo

One day, when the time came to sleep, man and bonobo both tried to make a fire in the bedroom. The man took fire from elsewhere, but the bonobo brought in a small, red-hot termite mound.⁽¹⁵⁾ The bonobo failed to make fire. In the morning, the bonobo asked the man for help, but the man teased the bonobo. The bonobo got angry and decided to go away into the forest forever. Even now, the bonobo tries to make fire by using cold termite mounds; the Bongando call such small mounds *nkonyi y'elia* (fire of the bonobo).

Elections among the animals

One day, the bonobo visited God to ask why his younger brother, man, was the king of the animal world. In response, God decided to hold an election and asked the man and the bonobo to mount campaigns. The man wore good clothes, but the bonobo was naked. People applauded the man and laughed at the bonobo. Ashamed, the bonobo ran away forever into the forest.

Man and bonobo save each other

One day, a man went hunting in the forest. He was so tired that he could not kill any game all day. On the way to the village, he saw many caterpillars called *betwa* in a tall *hopola* tree.⁽¹⁶⁾ He made a climbing rope (*laasa*) and climbed the tree. While he was gathering caterpillars, the rope suddenly fell and he had no way of getting down. He called for help, but there were no other people in the area. The bonobo felt sorry for him and helped him down. On another day, the bonobo came near the village and tried to eat sugar cane in the fields. The villagers decided to hunt him with nets, but the man who had been saved by the bonobo took away their net, and the bonobo ran away to safety.

Marriage between a woman and a bonobo

There once was a woman called Ngondey. She went alone into a forest camp (*nkumbo*) to look for food. A male bonobo saw her and fell in love, and eventually they got married.

It is believed that the existing Yaingombe lineage in the Groupement de Bakeli, Secteur de Djolu, are the descendants of Ngondey and her bonobo husband. The name of this lineage comes from *engombe* (Hulstaert, 1938; 1961), one of the local names for bonobo in the Bongando language. A similar lineage is found in the Ngombe ethnic group in the Territoire de Bongandanga and is called “Boso'okomboso.” “Boso'okomboso” is the abbreviation of “*boso bokomboso*” which means “(descendants) of *bokomboso* (=bonobo)” in Ngombe language.

VIII. Are the Bonobo “totems” for the Bongando?

From the description below, a suspicion may arise that the bonobo are the “totem” animal of the Bongando ethnic group. Bongando legends point out the similarities between the bonobo and mankind, and the primordial friendship between them. In this sense, the bonobo can be regarded as the totem species of the Bongando. However, if we take a stance that the essential attribute of totemism is the correspondence between “opposition of plural biological species” and “opposition of plural social groups,” as per Lévi-Strauss (1962), the present relationship between the bonobo and the Bongando can hardly be called “totemism.” No other groups (such as ethnic groups, clans, or lineages) within or outside the Bongando are known to have other specific species opposing the bonobo.⁽¹⁷⁾

RECENT CHANGES IN FOOD TABOOS

Although forbidden species are now eaten by some of the Bongando, the number of people who have eaten these species remains small. It is said that people who eat such meat tend to be excluded from Bongando society and are often considered sorcerers who bear bad luck. Sometimes, a person who eats taboo foods may miss his or her opportunity to get married. Additionally, individuals are not allowed to cook taboo foods in normal cooking pots or serve it within or near the lineage's communal hut (*losombo*).⁽¹⁸⁾

I. The Beginning of Bonobo Eating

Prior to 1970, bonobo meat was eaten only in the areas to the east, north, and west of Bongando territory, far from the study site Wamba. With regard to eating bonobo near Wamba, people remember that in the 1960s an engineer called Bobolo first killed bonobos and ate them. He was a Topoke man employed by a merchant living in Nsema village adjacent to Wamba (the Topoke are an ethnic group living in the eastern region of Bongando land; see Fig. 1). After that, his acquaintances also began to eat bonobo. In the 1970s, a teacher of the Yalisele Catholic mission gave villagers shotguns to kill bonobos and eat the meat; however, the villagers were so astonished that they hid in their houses. The teacher was also a foreigner from Mongo lands west of Bongando (Fig. 1). Thus, the custom of eating bonobo originated from contact with other ethnic groups. In fact, most respondents who ate taboo foods stated that they were influenced by outsiders and not by local residents. Because such stories of the first consumers of taboo foods are widespread, it is likely that before this time, eating bonobo meat was non-existent or very rare among the Bongando.

During the civil war of the 1990s, many soldiers (some from outside the DRC) came to the area and gave firearms to the villagers to obtain bushmeat. Many bonobos were killed during this period (Idani et al., 2008; Fig. 2).

II. Changes in Bonobo Eating: 1991-2007

To understand recent changes in this taboo we conducted research in a village in the Groupement d'Iyondje, close to Wamba, in 1991 and 2007. One of the authors (Lingomo) surveyed most of the people in the village except the children.⁽¹⁹⁾ The discussions took place in intimate locations such as in the *losombo* (communal hut), in the kitchen, or on the way to the bathing area at the creek.⁽²⁰⁾ The following kinds of questions were asked of the villagers:

- “Do you eat bonobo meat?”
- “If a dish with bonobo meat appears on the table, will you eat it?”

Typical positive answers to the question were:

- “Yes.”

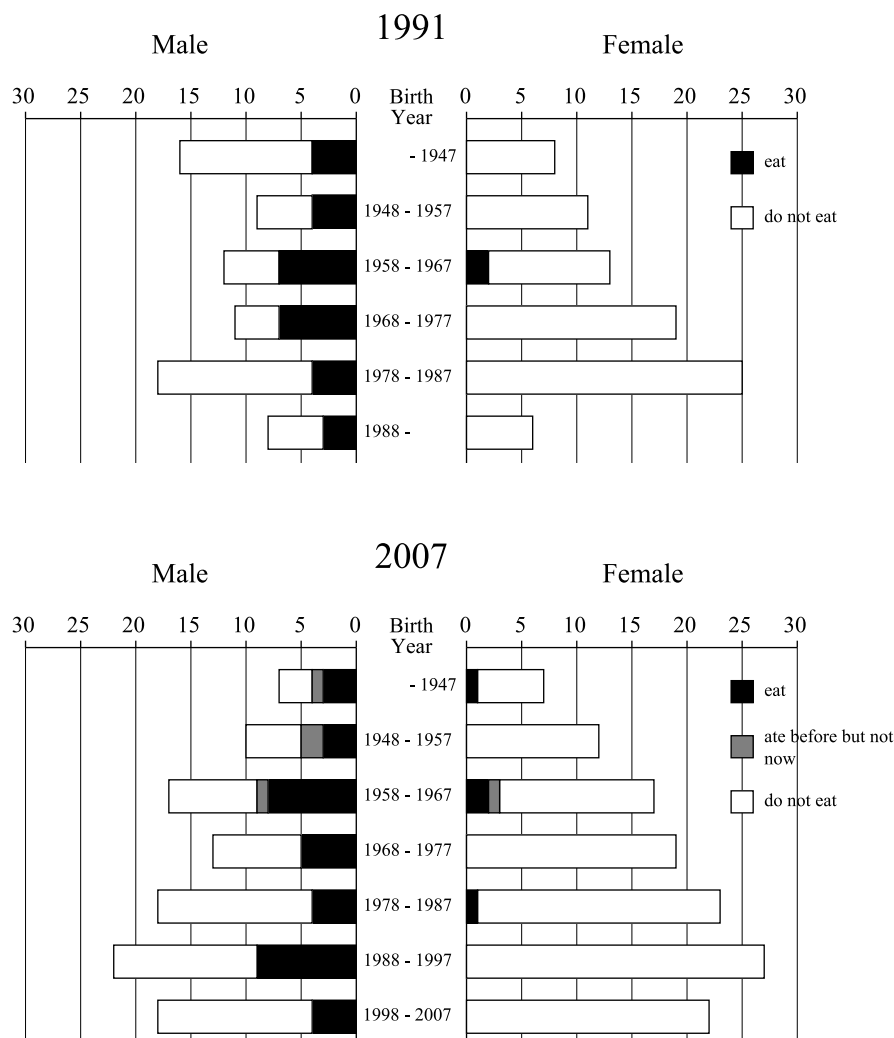


Fig. 4. Distribution of individuals who ate bonobo meat in the village (1991 and 2007).

- “I would eat it.”
- “Give me some, I’ll eat it.”
- “I used to eat it but now I would refuse.”

Negative answers were:

- “No, no, no!”
- “I don’t eat bonobo.”
- “Don’t ask such a thing! That’s not food.”

Even when a person gave a positive answer, it was never the case that he or she ate bonobo meat on a daily basis. The first author remembers that the oppor-

tunity to eat bonobo meat occurred infrequently; among those interviewed in the study village, the frequency was two to three times a year in the 1970's and 80's.⁽²¹⁾ In the 1990's, it decreased to once every 2 years, and in the 2000's, the villagers hardly ate bonobo meat at all, probably because the population of bonobos near the village had decreased and conservation work carried out by NGOs for the bonobo started to take effect.

Fig. 4 shows the ratio of persons who answered that he or she would eat bonobo meat if it were served. In 1991, 74 men and 82 women were interviewed. Of them, 29 men ($29/74=39.2\%$) and two women ($2/82=2.4\%$) would eat bonobo meat. In 2007, 105 men and 127 women were interviewed in the same village. Of those participants, 39 men ($39/105=37.1\%$) and four women ($4/127=3.1\%$) would eat bonobo meat. In both instances, the ratio was much higher among men than among women.

Comparing the data in 1991 and in 2007, we do not find this increase significant. Among those interviewed both in 1991 and 2007 (49 men and 68 women), four men and one woman would eat bonobo meat in 1991, but they later stopped. However, of these same 49 men and 68 women, nobody newly took up the practice. This suggests that the habit of eating bonobo meat is not spreading throughout the older generations, at least in this village. On the other hand, the younger generation is beginning to take up the habit. One avenue for younger generations to pick up this habit is when they travel to urban areas like Kisangani and find an opportunity to eat bonobo meat. Another avenue is when, in August, they go into the deep forest to hunt. Non-Bongando foreigners sometimes come along for these hunting expeditions and initiate the eating of bonobo meat.

III. Attitudes Toward Eating Bonobo Meat

Individuals who ate bonobo meat explained that the meat tasted very good and gave a person the strength to live a long and fine life. However, as with other taboo foods, they do not openly discuss their habit. When talking about it, they do not use the normal local terms *elia* or *engombe*, but prefer to use euphemisms such as *bokofi*, *kamanyola*, or *nyama'a mpame* (game of man). Eating the meat is done secretly in private residences or in the forest behind the residency.

Those who had stopped eating bonobo meat gave the following reasons for stopping:

- After a man had eaten the meat a member of his family died.
- After a woman had eaten the meat she fell ill.
- A man saw another old man eat the meat and acquire a disease as a result.
- A man took ill after he ate bonobo meat.
- A man feared he would age more quickly if he ate bonobo meat.
- In Boende (a city 400 km from the Wamba region), a man inadvertently ate bonobo meat. When he realized what he was eating he felt guilty and stopped.
- A man made up his mind to protect bonobos by working as a member of the local NGO aimed at bonobo conservation.

It is also said that if old people (those older than around 45 years) eat bonobo meat, they will die or will suffer a long, painful illness.

The difference in eating bonobo meat between lineages (*losombo*) has not yet been clearly detected, but it is possible that they may be influenced by close relatives when they begin eating bonobo.

BONOBO CONSERVATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE TABOO

I. Folk Conservation of Bonobo

The Bongando people are closely linked to the bonobo. Through frequent contact in the forest, they have built an extensive knowledge of bonobos. Of course the bonobo is not regarded as a true human being, but the Bongando classify them as humans rather than as an animal species. They have developed numerous legends about the bonobo. The villagers' close relation to the species and the "liminality" (Douglas, 1966; Turner, 1969) between humans and animals may be a major reason for their taboo of eating bonobo meat.⁽²²⁾

In terms of nature conservation, not only the stability and diversity of the ecosystem but also the target species' "similarity to humans" (especially the "presence of intelligence")⁽²³⁾ may provide a key concept. If so, the Bongando's attitudes toward the bonobo (i.e. "they are quite similar to us, so we shouldn't kill or eat them") can rightfully be called a "folk conservation ethic." This being the case, how can we evaluate these ethics and connect this to the benefit of local people and bonobo conservation?

II. Food Taboos as a "Cultural Resource"

Although some Bongando have begun breaking the taboo of eating bonobo, the tradition remains strong. In the village we observed, the percentage of people currently eating bonobo has not increased from the levels observed in the 1990s. However, this situation seems to be unstable. Along with the globalization process, the mobility of people between ethnic groups and between rural and urban areas is increasing, which could result in cases of drastic acculturation.

Let us look back at the history of the human-bonobo relationship in the Wamba area. Before research began on the bonobo in 1973 they were protected only by the food taboos of the local people (i.e., folk conservation). At the outset of the Japanese study of the bonobo, Wamba was selected specifically because the people had this taboo on eating bonobo. Subsequent research activities created job possibilities for the villagers and, for a period of time, tens of people were employed in research activities. One purpose of this employment was to raise the villagers' consciousness of the importance of the bonobo.

From the 1990s, as part of a worldwide surge in nature conservation activities, several international conservation groups entered the bonobo habitat. Against this backdrop, a number of local NGOs were established near Wamba. The mission statement of one such local NGO, "Forêt des Bonobos (Forest of Bonobos),"⁽²⁴⁾

includes the following goals:

- Educating local people by evoking folk knowledge of the bonobo.
- Patrolling the forest to control poaching.
- Setting protection zones for wild animals.
- Developing new protein sources other than bushmeat.⁽²⁵⁾

Through this promotion of nature conservation, local NGOs have attempted to introduce foreign aid for local development. Additionally, bonobo ecotourism has become one target of their activities; at present, however, this has not yet become a reality because of difficulties in transportation, but it may become possible in the near future.

The food taboos surrounding bonobo meat make up the core of such activities, both practically and ethically. On a practical level, bonobo conservation, which has been conducted at the folk level, has made subsequent conservation work much easier. On the other hand, local beliefs about the bonobo (represented in Lingala as “*Tobatela bilia*,” or, “We should protect the bonobo”) constitute part of the Bongando’s ethnic identity. Thus, this can become an ideological banner both for bonobo conservation and Bongando traditions.

The taboo of bonobo meat itself, as a valuable cultural practice representing the close relationship between humans and the animal, may cease to exist in the face of globalization. That said, as mentioned above, the taboo has become a kind of “resource” for local people in the current difficult socio-economic, post-civil war situation. In this context, it could be referred to as a “cultural resource.”⁽²⁶⁾ Thus, the Bongando have found a new purpose in their food taboos, one that should last a long time and bring about welfare for their society.

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NOTES

- (1) However, this food taboo has weakened in the peripheral Bongando areas because of the influence of other ethnic groups.
- (2) Livestock is usually consumed in rituals and on ceremonial occasions.
- (3) The Bongando people also use the term *Njakomba* for God, but this word was probably imported by missionaries from the Mongo ethnic group.
- (4) These prohibited foods are collectively called *ekila*.
- (5) This diagram shows only a part of the Bongando taxonomy. It indicates synchronic classification, not the diachronic process such as animal evolution.
- (6) The term *nyama* appears four times in this diagram. In scientific classification, such nomination may be questionable. However it is a widely observed phenomenon in folk classification. For example, the Bongando people generally say that *nse* (fish) is a kind

- of *nyama* (animal), but when they are shown fish and a mammal body together, they will explain that *nse* is not *nyama* in a narrow sense.
- (7) It is possible that Bongando ancestors passed through gorilla habitats in the course of their migration. When the second author visited Kahuzi-Biega National Park in Eastern Zaire, he bought a poster of a gorilla. When he returned to Wamba and hung it up, many visitors looked at it and said, "Oh, it is *etolo*!"
 - (8) *Elia* appears in a proverbial phrase relating to bonobos: *Elia 'a 'akono, bom 'ona Ngondey*, meaning, "The bonobo, whose body is divided in joints, is the husband of Ngondey" (Ngondey is a woman who, according to legend, married a bonobo).
 - (9) Longando has perhaps seven kinds of imperative mood. *Waka* is an emphatic imperative. The normal form of the imperative is *wa*.
 - (10) *Oowa* is a kind of nursery language. The true Longando is *loowa*.
 - (11) Such fishing behavior has not been confirmed by bonobo researchers. Bonobos do eat earthworms in marshes (Kano & Mulavwa, 1984), which may be recognized as a kind of "fishing" behavior.
 - (12) According to the Bongando belief, foods common to the Bongando and the bonobo are the following: *booye* (*Megaphrynium macrostachyum* [Benth.] Milne-Redh), *londake* (*Aframomum* spp.), *litohe* (*Landolphia* sp.), *lisenda* (*Saba florida* [Benth.] Bullock), *bolonge* (*Chrysophyllum delvoui* De Wild), *nkumbokumbo* (*Leonardoxa ramii*), *bohili* (*Scrodophloeus zenkeri* Harnes), *londend'i'isongo* (*Cola brunelii* De Wild), *bosongo* (sugar cane), *linanisi* (pineapple), *isusu* (a kind of caterpillar), small fish, *mboloko* (*Cephalophus monticola*), *lokanga* (*Guttera pucherani*, crested guinea fowl), *lokiyo* (*Anomalurus derbianus*), *itele* or *bomota* (*Anomalius pusillus*), and *bokau* (*Ancistrophylum secundiflorum* [P. Beauv.] Wendl.).
 - (13) The Bongando feel that, among others, the following animals have supernatural powers: cats, dogs, goats, civet cats, owls (*esukuli* or *esukulu*), Verreaux's eagle-owls (*Bubo lacteus*), rufous fishing owls (*Scotopelia ussheri*), swallows (*eteketeke*), *iyokooke* (*Motacilla aguimp*, African pied wagtail), and *ilole* or *iyokokol* (small bird, unidentified).
 - (14) Bongando legends were collected by Kano and translated to Japanese (Kano & Kano, 1987).
 - (15) The Bongando use the small termite mounds (*etsuka*) as a trivet when cooking.
 - (16) *Petersianthus macrocarpus* [P. Beauv.] Liben (LECYTHIDACEAE).
 - (17) However, it is possible that the bonobo-Bongando relationship is a relic of past totemism. Further information must be collected on man-animal relationships in neighboring regions.
 - (18) Even if the Bongando people openly discuss the evils of eating bonobos, conflicts between bonobo-eaters and non-eaters do not arise on a daily basis.
 - (19) A draft of this paper was written in 1993 by Lingomo, but due to the civil war in former Zaire and the DRC, it could not be presented as a scientific paper.
 - (20) Such discussions would normally have been quite difficult because eating bonobo meat is prohibited by both tradition and law. However, because Lingomo is a native of the Bongando and was personally familiar with each of the villagers, we do not expect their answers to be seriously biased.
 - (21) In these periods, primary school teachers living in the village killed the bonobo with shotguns.
 - (22) Such recognition is, however, commonly shared in areas where bonobos or chimpanzees are found. Regarding the bonobo, Thompson et al. (2008) reported that the Iyaelima people near Salonga National Park in the DRC recognize the bonobos' human-like characteristics. Also for chimpanzees, many cases of food taboo based on their similarity to humans have been reported (e.g., Rebecca et al. eds., 2003: 153). The issue here, at

- least among nearby ethnic groups, revolves around why only the Bongando retain food taboos for the bonobo. In all actuality, the authors cannot find a definitive answer to this question. Even the Bongando themselves explain the reason behind this taboo as “*likambo ya bokoko*,” which in Lingala means, “the problem of ancestors,” or ancestral tradition.
- (23) There is an argument that whales should be protected because of their intelligence, but cattle and pigs should not. However, this represents an extreme view.
 - (24) One of the authors (Lingomo) and volunteers from Iyondje village founded this NGO.
 - (25) Some local NGOs and individuals are attempting to find new protein sources other than bushmeat. One strategy in this respect is animal husbandry. For example, an NGO is beginning to breed pigs on a large scale on a farm in Djolu, 80 km from Wamba. Also, some people have begun to breed tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) in small ponds near the stream. If such movements succeed, the demand for bushmeat will decrease.
 - (26) In recent years, the idea of “culture as a kind of wealth or instrument” has been advanced (e.g., “cultural capital” as set out by Bourdieu, 1979). However, the authors believe that the Bongando case, in which their “taboo” is treated as a resource, has not previously been reported.

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