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<strong> Gabon is situated at the very heart of Africa</strong>, on the Atlantic coast with over 800km of coastline. It straddles the equator as does its neighbour The Republic of the Congo and The Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). In the northwest of the country, along the coastline and embedded within the Gabonese territory, is Equatorial Guinea. The northern border also separates Gabon from Cameroon. The rest of the country runs alongside the Congo, to the east and south. Apart from the Atlantic Ocean, which is to the west, all the other Gabonese borders are artificial and are the result of past agreements:

In 1886, by the decree of governor Savorgnan of Brazza who established the borders between Gabon and The Congo to the south.

In 1900, between France and Spain who established the northwest border.

In 1919, between France and Germany who established the northern border.

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The land mass of Gabon has a compact shape (600 km from east to west) and has a surface area of 267,667 km². It’s the smallest state in central Africa after Ruanda, Burundi and Equatorial Guinea.

<strong>It is a forest country</strong> (with approximately 85% of its land mass covered by forest) where the fauna and flora are still well preserved and protected inside <strong>thirteen national parks</strong> including The National Park of La Lopé, which is which is registered on the UNESCO world heritage.

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Gabon has a typically equatorial climate, that is to say warm and humid, characterised by stable and elevated temperatures all year round (the average temperature is 26°), significant atmospheric humidity due to plenty of r ain, which falls all year round (the average rainfall is 2m).

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Thanks to its small population, significant forest resources and an abundance of petrol, Gabon is one of the most prosperous countries in Africa with one of the highest levels of human development on the continent. Gabon shows evidence of the oldest remains of multicellular life known to date (2017). They go back to 2.1 million years and were discovered in the region of Franceville in 2008.

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With regards to humans, there is evidence of a prehistoric population going as far back as 400,000 years ago and continuing up to the iron age. The six groups, including the Pigmies, which emerged from this population are the first known inhabitants of what is currently known as Gabon. These hunter gatherers settled there approximately five thousand years before the current era, followed by a wave of Bantu, which comprises forty-five different ethnicities. The Bantu left the sahelian zone, which was drying up, five thousand years ago and continued their expansion towards the south and east approximately 1000 or 2000 years before the current era.

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When the Bantu encountered the Pigmies, they discovered that this indigenous population of Africa practises the worship of animal spirits and is made up of “mediators of the sacred”, which change according to the rites.

Throughout the initiation, specific knowledge about the mastery of the forest and the weather elements (rain, lightening…) is acquired, giving rise to a shamanic conception of the workings of the world where the initiated knows how to get in contact with the spirits of nature in order to act upon any given symptoms.

This initiation, when undergone as a rite of passage into adulthood and with a view to encouraging social integration, consists primarily of the consumption of their most sacred plant: Iboga.

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The use of the Iboga root has been known to the Pigmies since time immemorial. The archaeologist Richard Oslisly recently confirmed having found traces of it in charcoal (athracology) that was over two thousand years old, found in a cave in La Lopé, in southern Gabon.

However, it would appear that the Pigmies only shared their knowledge of the “sacred wood” with the closest groups of Bantu during the middle of the 19th century. The first of these would have been the <span class="italic">Apinji</span> (literally <span class="italic">the forest</span>) and more specifically the <span class="italic">Apinji Mokodo</span> clan. Myth has it that the Apinji sought to get in contact with the realm of the dead.

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In order to do so, they would have consumed significant quantities of wood and would have consequently created the first ritualistic practices of the <span class="italic">Bwiti</span> religion, in order to protect themselves from the greater risks involved.

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The etymological root of the word <span class="italic">Bwiti</span>, according to M. Okaba, a linguist from the Chaillu Mountains, is a distortion of the Tsogho word <span class="italic">bo-hete</span>: “emancipation”, “liberation of a fluid” - (<span class="italic">Buetara</span>: “to draw” and <span class="italic">buera</span>: “to reach, to achieve…”).

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Bwiti, therefore, literally means that which enables man to find his freedom.

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Thus, Bwiti is a philosophy of liberation; it allows man to transcend matter, to become a <span class="italic">banzi</span>, which in the Tsogho language literally means “he who has hatched; who has come out of his shell”. And this philosophy is based on <span class="italic">eboghe</span>, “that which heals” (Iboga), <span class="italic">maganga</span> “that which allows a being to renew itself”, and <span class="italic">kangara</span>, “to heat up, regenerate” (the knowledge of plants).

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- Words of M. Hamidou Okaba.

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The arrival of the first Europeans in Gabon during the 15th century (the Portuguese followed by the Dutch) marked the beginning of the abandonment of the indigenous ancestral initiatory traditions due to the forced evangelisation of the Gabonese peoples as well as to the many consequences of the Slave Trade. The practice of Bwiti was then driven underground.

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France began its progressive occupation of Gabon during the middle of the 19th century, after a treaty signed with the “Roi Denis”, in 1839. In 1886, Gabon became a French colony and wouldn’t gain independence until 1960.

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The first time Iboga was referenced in the West was by British naturalist explorer Thomas Edward Bowlich, who, in his description of Gabon in 1819, mentions the existence of a plant used by the autochtones so that they could go on long walks and stay awake at night.

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From that point on, the enormous therapeutic potential of Iboga became increasingly apparent to western scientists, starting with French researchers, and its principal constituent Ibogaine was soon commercialised and was made available to the public in 1901 (<a target="\_blank" href="https://www.google.fr/search?client=firefox-b&dcr=0&q=dragées+nyrdahl&spell=1&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjnkaDOi8HXAhXQLFAKHcl1ByQQBQgkKAA"><span class="italic">nyrdahl</span> lozenges</a>).

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In 1962 an American researcher, Howard Lotsof, discovered for himself the <strong> anti-addictive properties of ibogaine, especially with regards to opiates and other narcotics (heroin, cocaine, crack methadone...)</strong> and started carrying out a series of studies which lead him to file multiple patents on its clinical use. He became an avid international proponent of ibogaine which, combined with the advent of the new media, namely the internet, led to a <strong>a growing global enthusiasm for Iboga</strong>. Ibogaine extracted from Iboga, mainly exported from Gabon, made its entry onto the American black market in the late 60s.

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In the light of this increasing international interest and potential issues with the sustainability of the resource as well as with the illegal nature of its exploitation, the late president of the Gabonese republic <strong>El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba declared Iboga a “national cultural heritage” and “strategic reserve” in July of 2000</strong>.

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Then in November 2011, Gabon became the first country in the world to ratify the <strong>Nagoya Protocol</strong> on the access to genetic resources and the <strong>fair and equal share </strong> of the benefits derived from their use according to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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Despite these commitments, there are, at this time, <strong>more than 200 health centres </strong> (official and informal) using iboga(ine) as well as <strong>dozens of websites</strong> reselling this precious resource, primarily of Gabonese origin and sold at premium prices but without any significant economical returns for Gabon or consideration of its sustainability.

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