



Choice and power: Resistance to technical domination in Senegal's forest decentralization☆☆☆



Papa Faye*

Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern, Langgass-Str. 49a, 3000 Bern 9— Bern, Switzerland

Social Dimensions of Environmental Policy, GGIS Department, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 255 Computing Applications Building MC-150, 605 East Springfield, Champaign, IL 61820, USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the contest for power over forest resources between the Forest Department and elected local government in the context of decentralized forestry in Senegal. Based on ethnographic work with a forestry management intervention purporting to implement decentralization, the paper shows that power struggles center on the formation of local authorities (institutional choice) and the technical framing of forest management. It also illuminates the ways that technical claims and politico-legal counterclaims and their supporting discourses shape these struggles. The project engendered awareness among local governments about the economic and political stakes involved in forest management, which sparked resistance to the project's technically oriented institutional choices. The paper demonstrates the effects of institutional choice legitimated by discourses that privilege technical requirements and outside expertise. Importantly, the research also indicates that power struggles over resources are dynamic. Technical discourses can be countered by arguments that evoke the need for broad-based political participation, lawfulness and democracy.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, 'democratic decentralization' reforms that promise democracy and development have swept the developing world (Ribot, 2003; Ojha, 2006, 2009). However, research has shown that, in practice, the benefits of democratic decentralization have rarely been established. Despite official claims and the establishment of local democratic governments, central authorities have been resistant to implementing decentralization (Peluso, 1992; Salvatore, 2000; Ribot and Oyono, 2005). One way central authorities resist decentralization is by privileging local authorities that are accountable upward to central authorities, rather than downward to the public, as truly democratic decentralization intends (Ribot, 2003; Manor, 2004).

In the forestry sector, a common pattern of resistance to democratic decentralization is the retention of power by upwardly accountable local branches of central forestry departments. These upwardly oriented bodies may attempt to retain power in order to ensure their own control of lucrative resources (Mustalahti and Lund, 2010), and/or due to the prevalence in forestry institutions of 'technocratic doxa': a set of beliefs and behaviors that, consciously or unconsciously, privileges technical

and bureaucratized practices over other methods (Ojha, 2006: 131; Rutt et al., 2015—in this issue).

This article emphasizes power and the power dynamics at play in Senegal's forest management decentralization, where technical forest management plans (FMPs) have come to steer the implementation process. It specifically discusses the power struggle between Rural Councils and the Forestry Department, examining the role of technical claims and political counterclaims in the establishment of domination over and resistance to forest management systems.

Herein, power refers to the temporary and contingent ability to influence social interactions to one's own benefit; that is, power in a Foucauldian sense (Gallagher, 1999). To describe power and power dynamics in forestry decentralization and resistance, I use Ribot et al.'s (2008) 'choice and recognition' framework, with a focus on 'institutional choice': higher-scale actors' selection or fabrication of local institutions and the empowering of these to make decisions and benefit from generated revenues, in sum granting them authority over the resources in question.

In the context of this paper, an institution has power over forests when it can determine the conditions for access to forest resources, thereby controlling other actors' interventions in the forests. The paper describes the way the Senegal Forestry Department, through its forestry management project, established dominance over the processes of choice and subsequent recognition of particular institutions via the transfer of resources and the conferring of decision-making powers to them — to the detriment of pre-existing, local, legally and democratically elected governments.

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* Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern, Langgass-Str. 49a, 3000 Bern 9, Bern, Switzerland. Tel.: +41 31 631 89 99, +1 217 848 60 86.

E-mail address: papafay@gmail.com.

Table 1
Repertoires of domination versus repertoires of resistance (in page 12)

PROGEDE-II and Forestry Department		(President of) Rural Councils	
Repertoires of domination	Effects	Repertoires of resistance	Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of private associations to rule the forests – Denying membership to Rural Council members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Transfer of management power to private bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Withdrawal of the <i>Wulli</i> PCR from PROGEDE events – Sabotage in <i>Gumbee</i> – "Legalization from below" in <i>Uul</i> – Plotting in <i>Nieriko</i> – PCRs' intrusion into the structure of the associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increase bargaining power
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Threats and intimidation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Relative compliance by PCRs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Making the private associations 'public'

The ability to choose and recognize lower-level actors has often been attributed solely to actors in higher-level institutions. However, studies that focus exclusively on higher-level actors can fail to recognize the ways that lower-level local actors participate in and try to affect the process. Thus, local actors are often viewed as 'recipients' whose preferences and views are bypassed in the 'choice and recognition' process (Lund, 2006; Ribot et al., 2008; Ribot, 2013). In fact, however, the establishment and exercise of technical domination operate through the development of manifold 'repertoires of domination.' A repertoire is "the set of acts actors perform to defend – entrench or expand – their positions" (Poteete and Ribot, 2011: 439). The notion that one can 'entrench' or 'expand' one's dominance implies that power and authority are not fixed and are always balanced and challenged by counter-power: repertoires of domination are met with 'repertoires of resistance' (Scott, 1985; Peluso, 1992). In this view, the processes of institutional choice and formation become objects of competition and contestation between powerful, higher-level actors and less powerful local-level actors.

Section 2 describes the case study. The project under discussion is PROGEDE, the World-Bank-supported Sustainability and Participatory Energy Management Project in Senegal, which unfolded in two phases separated by an 'inter-phase' period. Section 3 describes the Forestry Department's achievement of domination through the application of technical claims during Phase I. Section 4 sets out the choices made by representatives of local government after the end of Phase I, when oversight by forestry agents was relaxed somewhat. Section 5 depicts the struggle for power between the Forestry Department and local governments over institutional choices when PROGEDE returned for Phase II. Finally, Section 6 makes sense of the principal observations and draws out their theoretical and practical implications for future natural resource governance in general, and forest governance in particular.

2. Background, case study and methods

This section outlines the case study and explains the methods used in data collection and analysis.

2.1. Background and case study

In the colonial and early post-colonial periods, the production of commercial wood and charcoal was subject to a forestry license issued by the Forestry Department. Throughout this period, state authorities distributed commercial-resource access-rights in a discriminatory manner, favoring individuals holding French citizenship over Senegalese citizens (Ribot, 2001), and urban dwellers over peasants (Ribot, 1998; Thiaw and Ribot, 2005). This imbalance was especially clear in the issuing of charcoal production licenses. Most Rural Councils and residents of forest districts saw commercial production of charcoal as an exploitation and impoverishment of their forests and were hostile to it (Faye, 2006; Ribot, 1998).

In 1964, the Land law established that all lands, excluding privately owned and previously state-owned lands, fell under state jurisdiction. These lands, known as the 'national domain,' covered 95% of the national territory (Caverivière and Debène, 1988). In 1996, a decentralization reform legally transferred authority over natural resources and the

environment from state to elected local governments, including Rural Communities. A Rural Community¹ is intended to be politically and administratively autonomous and is composed of a grouping of villages that share sociocultural traits and are economically and socially involved with each other. It is governed by a deliberative Rural Council consisting of at least 27 elected rural councilors and a President (the PCR) who, with two Vice-Presidents, constitutes the Rural Council's executive body. To qualify for local democratic elections, candidates must be affiliated with legally constituted political parties.

In 1998, a so-called 'decentralizing' Forest Code further supported decentralization in the forest sector, giving the PCRs the power to grant authorization for all commercial forest exploitation, including charcoal production.

Funded by the World Bank and other donors, the Sustainable and Participatory Energy Management Project (PROGEDE), was developed to foster decentralization while enhancing the supply of biomass energy to urban areas. Started in 1998, PROGEDE unfolded in two phases, separated by an 'inter-phase' period: PROGEDE-I (1998 to 2004, extended to 2008) and PROGEDE-II (2011 to 2015). Throughout the project and up to today, there has been critical overlap between PROGEDE project staff and the Forestry Department. During PROGEDE-I, forestry agents oversaw the project's two regional stations, which were supervised by a National Coordinator, a forestry agent working under the authority of the Director of the Forestry Department. In PROGEDE-II, although leadership of the regional stations was handed over to independent consultants rather than to forestry agents, the responsibility for national coordination remained with the Forestry Department.

Throughout its operation, PROGEDE had a 'demand' component and a 'supply component.' This study focuses on the supply component, which the Forestry Department led. The main objective of PROGEDE-I's supply component was to promote sustainable domestic energy production while favoring conditions for the transfer of forest governance to local residents. In the hope of better protecting forest resources, PROGEDE opened up the charcoal sector to people from the villages near the forests (*Ndeymbili*, June 7, 2012), hypothesizing that their engagement in forest governance and charcoal production and trade would decrease both forest degradation and rural poverty while creating the conditions for local producers to replace the urban merchants (who had long held exclusive rights to charcoal production and trade).

The Forestry Department, through PROGEDE, sought to reconcile continued charcoal production with official concerns about forest degradation. PROGEDE staff in conjunction with Forestry Department officials worked explicitly on the expansion and refinement of forest management plans (FMPs), which were required for the approval of any forest management intervention. In the name of scientific and technical knowledge, the Forestry Department required that FMPs follow a series of 'technical prescriptions'. These prescriptions include the 'rule

¹ Rural Communities emerged from administrative and territorial reform passed in 1972. The Rural Council was led by a government appointee, the Sub-Prefect, until 1996, when all the council members, including the Rural Council President, were to be democratically elected on a party basis. Since the last local elections, in June 29 (2014), Rural Councils have become Communes. Indeed, the third step in Senegal's decentralization process promotes 'integral communalization'.

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