



The Colonial heritage and post-Colonial influence, entanglements and implications of the concept of community forestry by the example of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

In literature on Natural Resource Management related policies in Africa and Cameroon in particular, Colonial heritage was defined and identified. The question of this paper is whether “community forestry” which promotes giving back the forest to people breaks with this tradition. The key elements of Colonial heritage in resource management were deduced from literature. Based on these benchmarks the program and practice of community forestry in Cameroon were evaluated. Data about community forestry in Cameroon was collected in 10 selected communities in 2009/10. Today in practice community forestry favors techno-scientific knowledge about the forest, separate nature from human life, is a bureaucratic controlled engagement with nature and is aimed to make nature and people productive. The benchmark identifies a strong Colonial heritage within community forestry in Cameroon and questions whether the aim of including the local people in forest management, correcting their previous exclusion by the Colonial policy in the management of their forest resources, thus, the self determined life of people within the forest can be reached.

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1. Introduction

1.2. The issue of Colonial heritage in Cameroon forestry

Cameroon, with the second largest forest estate among African countries after the Democratic Republic of Congo (Burnham 2000: 32), is found in the Congo basin,² with a rich diversity of natural (forest) resources. The bilingual West/Central African country was first colonized by Germany (1884–1918) and then later divided and colonized by France and Britain (1918–1960/61), as protectorates under the “League of Nations” and subsequently the “United Nations Organization” as trust territories. With its relatively new Forestry law of 1994,³ Cameroon marginally shifted away from its longtime Colonial background by granting some usufruct rights to the local populace in a bid to include them in the management of their forest resources but this

was not in consultation with the local communities (Bigombe, 2003) or their participation. Community forestry promised and is still promising participation from the local communities in sustainably managing of their resources and acquiring benefits through participation (Shahabuddin & Rao, 2010). The central question in this paper is how this concept works in practice (Sunderlin, 2006) and whether there is an influence by the Colonial heritage in Cameroon. The Colonial legacy exists in many aspects of Cameroon's politics (Mbuagbo & Akoko, 2004) especially in natural resources management policy. The Colonial heritage is a special challenge for community forestry because this concept aims at including the local people in forest management, correcting their previous exclusion by the Colonial policy (Jum et al., 2007: 11).

The analysis will be done by checking whether there are elements of Colonial heritage in the formulation and implementation of the program of Community Forestry in Cameroon. The elements will be defined based on the post-Colonial theory discussed in recent literature. The program of community forestry and its implementation will be analyzed based on political theory (Krott, 2005) with empirical data about the case of Cameroon. The conclusion gives an answer whether at all and in which specific elements post-colonialism shapes community forestry in Cameroon.

2. Application of post-Colonial critique, emanating from the post-Colonial theory

The post-Colonial theory is an area of cultural and critical theory that deals with the reading and writing of literature written in former western colonies. Post-Colonial theory may also be literature that was

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¹ Since there are at times naïve assumptions of local homogeneity and discreteness, we define the local community as actors who directly affect or are affected locally by the natural resources management programs. This includes local Common Initiative Groups (CIGs), Village Forest Management Committees (VFMCs), village tradition councils, the municipal councils and the civil society who directly depend on these natural resources for their subsistence.

² The Congo basin is the second largest tropical forest area of the world after the Amazon.

³ The Forestry Law No 94/01 of 20th January 1994 and its decrees of application No 95/531/PM du 23 August 1995.

examinations is the analysis of the role played by representation in installing and perpetuating such notions of European superiority. Simply put, how does representation perpetuate negative stereotypes of Africans and their cultures and how do such stereotypes negatively affect their identity? Furthermore, given the so-called decolonization of many African countries after World War II and the development of so-called "independent nation states", what is the role of representation in the construction of new post-Colonial identities? A concrete example is how the liberation struggles against European colonization by African freedom fighters are represented. Most of the time, the self governance



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