Facing scarcity in a land grab context in Cameroon : residential multilocality and sorcery as resilience schemes among rural communities

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Tsantsa : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Ethnologischen Gesellschaft = revue de la Société suisse d'ethnologie = rivista della Società svizzera d'etnologia**

Band (Jahr): **26 (2021)**

PDF erstellt am: **29.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1007124

FACING SCARCITY IN A LAND GRAB CONTEXT IN CAMEROON

Residential multilocality and sorcery as resilience schemes among rural communities

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a critical exploration of the mechanisms via which communities cope with scarcity resulting from land grabs. It explores two ranges of practices – residential multilocality and sorcery – through the lens of resilience. Residential multilocality appears as a novel living arrangement dealing with resource scarcity, while sorcery is used as a tool for bolstering a policy of resource regeneration. Thus, instead of rushing to nearby cities as a response to scarcity, the communities observed reinstate two silenced dynamics. Firstly, they underscore the rise of inter, and intra-rural mobility entrenched in the paradigm of residential multilocality. The paradigm embodies a scarcity management strategy in the sense that the abundance of vital resources in one rural area attracts villagers from other communities struggling with scarcity. Secondly, sorcery is used as a strategy to command eco-friendly behavior of villagers in order to successfully achieve a resource regeneration policy.

Keywords: *scarcity, residential multilocality, resources, resiliency, sorcery*

Introduction

Recently intensified land grabs are highlighting a new phase of the *scramble for Africa* (Pakenham 1990). Multinational firms, local business tycoons, and other elites are rushing towards the fertile lands of rural areas to develop their activities. In Cameroon, the goal of such corporations is to encourage a "second generation agriculture"; a state-promoted policy with the objectiveis to lift up the local agriculture to an industrial level in order to value more of the country's unexploited lands. Indeed, the country has around 9.2 million hectares of agricultural lands of which only 1.8 million are exploited in a strict economic sense. Thus, only 4 % in absolute value, from the 47 million hectares of physical land of the territory, are exploited (GCN 2010). In order to sustain this state-sponsored policy, land reforms have been passed to give full rights to individuals and companies who are able to shift to an industrial farming model. However, this policy was nothing less than a way to fuel and

encourage the private ownership of communities' land assets, to the detriment of such communities (Cotula 2011).

The dominant literature in sociology and economic geography is structured around the concept of land grabs. The literature's nexus underlines an important fact: individuals and firms are controlling huge lands whose surfaces are bigger than the average plot of lands exploited by a community for commercial agriculture (Hall 2011). Such a dynamic, endorsed by the State, shows how its judicial system is influenced by powerful supranational bodies, favoring multinationals firms over native communities (Polack, Cotula, and Cote 2013). Indeed, questionable transactions for foreigners to acquire plots of land take place without proper community consultations, valuation and compensation (Meliki 2021a). Thus, this article shifts the analysis to the negative impacts of these transactions on local communities. These negative impacts are due, on the one hand, to community properties turning into investor properties. On the other hand, diminishing land surface also poses a threat for communities' food production (hunting, harvesting of forestry products and fishing) as it contributes to food scarcity (Alden-Willy 2011; Shepard and Mittal 2009). This decrease in available arable lands and forests tends to push the communities to engage in an over-exploitation of previously saved plot of lands. Hence, it causes a drastic reduction of communities' previous arable surfaces where vital resources were collected (Meliki 2021a), which leads to the scarcity of wildlife and fish resources for the daily nutrition and economic activities of villagers. This is a key concern when considering the statistical indicators of rural poverty, which show that urban expenses, for each adult in a yearly basis, grew by 4.1 % between 1996 and 2001 while rural areas only displayed a growth of 1.7 % (PNUD 2006).[1]

Given the scarcity and poverty issues emerging from land grabs, this paper, unlike the dominant literature, is interested in scrutinizing local strategies developed to face negative effects stemming from this narrowness of remaining lands. Such limits on the amount of land available deny communities any possibility of maintaining the scope of their agricultural activities or wildlife and fish resources. In this context, resilience is viewed as a set of practices through which rural communities organize themselves to cope and recover from land scarcity. Ecological and psychological perspectives of resilience, pointing toward a restoration of an environment after disturbances linked to scarcity, as well as an ability to adapt to trauma, is the basis for this conceptualization (Ionescu 2012). Theoretically, it is also useful to consider the economic prism of the concept, which is addressing the ability of a local economy to withstand exogenous shocks (Briguglio et al. 2008). With regard to those approaches, investigating communities' resilience involves two tasks: investigating into strategies which help to cope with scarcity, and analyzing initiatives whose objective is to eliminate the cause of this scarcity to establish a new balance within which the shocks can be dissipated (Lallau and Mbetid-Bessane 2010). Thus, this perspective admits a continuity between scarcity containment actions (residential multilocality) and endeavours to reverse

[1] With a national population of 19 406 100 inhabitants, for a demographic growth rate of 2,6 % (3e RGPH 2010), resources scarcity is critical for rural communities who count 9 314 928 inhabitants (3e RGPH 2010), among whom 5.3 million live under the poverty threshold set to 232 547 FCFA per adult in a year, meaning 637 FCFA per day (INS 2002).

and neutralize the roots of scarcity (sorcery practices): defensive, restorative, and preventive dynamics are thus interconnected (Béné et al. 2012; Rousseau 2005).

Such a lens is useful to scrutinize these two processes, whose practices suggest an economic knowledge: resources mobilization (residential multilocality) and resources regeneration schemes (sorcery practices). Indeed, multilocality arises as a change of residential patterns within observed communities. Living from forests and agriculture, those communities' lives were mostly sedentary, despite occasional sporadic individual mobility for various reasons. Economic, social, cultural life as well as livelihoods were anchored around a native place of residence. In this context, the change in locality is the adoption of second residency sites. These second places display the abundance of resources that lack in the native place of residence. Thus, they are at the center of a strategy seeking to counter the scarcity. These mobility trajectories highlight an inter, and intra-rural mobility scheme. As such, this questions the dominant idea that urban areas serve as the main escape for rural communities who grapple with scarcity (Barbier, Gubry, and Courade 1982; Ela 1982; Roquet 2008). This residential multilocality is a hybrid residential scheme. It functions both through nomadism, due to circular moves between stable residencies at a regular frequency, and sedentarism, because secondary residences are made into homes through symbols, objects, and given habits: villagers alternately live in two rural residencies (Urry 2000; Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006). Mostly understood as an urban style of life, residential multilocality has only been accounted marginally as part of villagers' culture. Indeed, mobility historically emerged as a way of life for most African rural communities, not just in West Africa (Chapman and Prothero 1983). Theorized as seasonal circular migrations, forms of mobility sprout within communities, for example joining urban areas during droughts, conflicts, or religious awakening (De Bruijn, Van Dijk, and Foeken 2001). However, most of those seasonal migrations are distinctive from the residential multilocality in question, despite similarities in circularity and residential plurality. Firstly, seasonal migrations imply a lengthy immobility and thus no regular frequency of stay in the geographical spaces within the circular scheme (Boyer 2013). Secondly, the second residency is not as stable as in the observed residential multilocality. This is owing to the fact that there could be both a regular change of places depending on the availability of work and the level of incomes (Daum and Dougnon 2009). Thirdly, the dominant trend of mobility in this article suggests the strong dominance of a rural directionality, as opposed to an urban one, and highlights the existence of a stable second rural home owned by villagers (Meliki 2021b).

As defined, resilience is not only about containing the punctual negative effects of scarcity, as suggested by the concept of residential multilocality. Resilience also combines endeavours intended to reverse land scarcity effects by neutralizing its roots. Indeed, some communities attempted to regenerate resources in their villages as a lasting solution against scarcity. In doing so, sorcery found itself at the heart of this resource regeneration strategy. By ascribing occult power to certain wildlife species and placing fetishes on the communities' main rivers and forests for a given period during which any human activities are forbidden and punished, villagers are able to exert a control over the resources to allow them to develop again. Sorcery is thus at the core of a collective strategy dedicated to the regeneration of wildlife and fish resources. Sorcery, as a set of structured and shared beliefs in occult powers, explains the ori-

gins of misfortune, diseases, or deaths and related sanctions corresponding to those beliefs (Vallée 1985; Geschiere 2005). So, beyond its occult character (Rosny 1981; Clément 2003), sorcery influences the social space by conferring to some members of a group exceptional capacities to act on other members according to certain purposes like protecting the natural resources (Kamdem and Tedongmo Teko 2015). This perspective allows this analysis of resource regeneration attempts to mobilize invisible world categories and understand how villagers are able to impose an eco-friendly behavior on other people to achieve resource regeneration (Geschiere 2000). Hence, based on the aforementioned perspective of resilience, residential multilocality and sorcery, both as defensive and restorative practices (Rousseau 2005), appear as a collective response to the scarcity generated by land grab.

Fields and methodological approach

The paper's methodology follows an ethno-sociological prism. Data was gathered during a research funded by the CODESRIA[2] on "land grab and food sovereignty in Africa" from December 2014 to February 2016. An ethnographic survey was carried out for nine months in three rural communities, namely Abéssé, Bagofit, and Nanga-Eboko; respectively located in the East and Center regions of Cameroon from February to October 2014. Two investigators were paid to help during the data collection stage by taking notes and reporting interviews. Late in November 2017, a follow-up field trip was made.

Methodology of the study

This article's investigation tools consisted of both interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 people equally distributed across the three communities. A snow-ball procedure (Combessie 1996) was used for a quick identification of specific actors dealing with an aspect of the research subject. Key actors were selected regarding residential multilocality practices, villages' chieftaincies, and persons directly deprived of land ownership. Using each informant to choose the next subject, we respectively asked for persons alternatively living either in a host village or in their native one; we also asked for members of the chieftaincy and villagers whose land were seized. Interviews with those categories of people sought to identify and comprehend the strategies that are used to face scarcity. Understanding the causes, forms, and individuals taking part in multi-residential practices, as well as locating chieftaincies' initiatives in relation with scarcity conjunctures was the objective. Interviews were carried out in houses and villages' public spaces. Direct observation helped to witness the scope of privatized lands and the demographic pressure exerted on the remaining land, wildlife and fishery resources of communities' traditional residential sites. In Abéssé, we went to two villages where multilocal residents were numerous, Dimako and Yelan, in order to observe coveted resources in the communities. Additionally, this

[2] Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa.

method also allowed for cross-checking data (Ferréol 1995). Lastly, a field journal was opened to record any information able to shed light on the topic, despite not being generated by the aforementioned data collection tools.

Brief description of the fields of study

Three communities are concerned by this study. The first is Diang, located in the Lom and Djerem subdivision in the East-Cameroon, which has 275 784 inhabitants (Bucrep 2005, 7). The community of Abéssé, in Diang, relies on family agriculture and fauna products. More than 50 000 hectares of Abéssé's lands are monopolized by Chinese who, through a deal with successors of SEITA[3], acquired the lands. The second is Bagofit, which is a rural community located in Abong-Mbang, in the East Region. This area is subjected to land grabs by the then Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the civil cabinet of the Presidency of the Republic (Meliki 2018). Owner of the "Bagofit plantation", he controls most of the community's lands and does not provide statistics on this monopoly. Using these lands, he grows hybrid cocoa, corn, and plantain. The last site is Nanga-Eboko, in the Center region. In Nanga-Eboko, the land was seized by the Chinese capital group Iko, which received more than 10 000 hectares. Located ten kilometers (10 km) away from the city, its residents run farms of rice and cassava (Meliki 2018).

Scarcity and its manifestation under lands grab

In the villages described above, land is the main means of production. However, its concentration in the hands of few people and companies furthers scarcity. Two variables account for this.

Exiguity of farming lands and land conflicts

Privatized lands were reserves that communities used to mobilize once the "human carrying capacity" – the ability of a land to support a certain load of activities – was reached (Allan 1949). This issue leads to many palliative strategies, the objective being to increase farming surfaces. Indeed, the generalized dynamic of arable land control forces localities to engage in agriculture, hunting, and fishing activities on small and less productive lands. Furthermore, "the change is [not only] that people have to walk too far in the bush for new farming lands" (Sabel, Bagofit, 9 March 2015), but that the pressure of food demand on small existing stocks also forces villagers to extend ancestral land limits for food production. To do so, several strategies are observed. Some people use marital relationships to access new spaces of land from their in-laws. Others plead to work on a plot of land for a single

[3] National company for industrial exploitation of tobaccos and matches.

production cycle. However, some individuals are not using those protocols and disregard lands limits, especially as there is often a lack of land registration within rural areas (Lavigne Delville 1988). Thus, lands' natural limits are often challenged, and conflict on land boundaries are addressed by traditional rulers. As this quote highlights, "there are sporadic fights between us just for a mere piece of land. We usually resort to the King before ending up in court (Jean-Jaurès, Bagofit, 15 March 2015). Indeed, in a context of a drastic reduction of community lands, there is "recognition of land value by people who are now ready to defend it at the price of their life" (Armand, Abéssé, 23 June 2015). Each square meter of secured land is vital, as the concentration of agricultural activities on such few plots of land destroyed their fertility and reduced harvest productions. An elder explains that: "I do not succeed any more in making a single attic of corn. Even when I try to widen the farm, we still lack corn to cover the dead period. Whereas, before, whatever the period of the year, I always had corn in abundance" (Ndongo, Abéssé, 21 June 2015).[4] In the region, corn production is not taken home, it remains in the farms. If an attic protects the harvest from rodents, it also helps estimating one's production level. Therefore, attics, through their contents, are used as a concrete indicator of food scarcity.

The specter of hunger

The threat of hunger is a direct consequence of the aforementioned issues of food insecurity. In Bagofit, statements were quite striking, "we are having tougher moments in the village. The forest is empty. Working on the same plots of land every year, made it unproductive. The bush meat and fish are another matter" (Martine, Bagofit, 12 March 2015). As stated, there is uncertainty about stock and food insecurity. This means that there are difficulties in accessing food at the appropriate time and at a low cost with due respect to local preferences (Janin 2006). As aptly captured by a community member during an interview in Abéssé, food stock in rural areas is most reliant on the generosity of nature.

> *Just a few years after SEITA was settled, times got harder. We could not cultivate any more as before, due to the lack of lands. The river Abéssé became so poor, certainly due to manipulated chemicals; similar for bush meat. Famine was knocking at the door. For married people, it was pretty messy.* (Doudoumi, Abéssé, 23 June 2015)

This statement and many more not directly quoted in the text clearly show that the communities are facing dire moments. Soil infertility – due to the lack of resting time for land plots – and the emptiness of bushes and rivers due to their overexploitation account for this threat of hunger. These food scarcity challenges are also reflected in price changes for basic foodstuffs. Table 1 displays two distinctive ranges of prices per item. Prices for the year 2014

[4] The attic is a measure unit for harvested corns in the East region. It refers to a stilt house made with six shrubs as the pillars, with smaller shrubs fastened to each other with a string to compose the floor. Walls, as well as the roof, are entirely made of raphia mats.

were directly gathered during the weekly market day, while those of 2002 were indicated by villagers after an explicit demand for comparison.

Table 1: Growth of basic foodstuff prices

Food items	Previous cost in FCFA* (2002)	Cost under lands grab in FCFA (2014)
A basin of cassava flour	800	5000
A basin of corns	1500	7000
Bunch of cassava	100	300
A partridge	300	1200
Plantain of average caliber	700	2000
Plantain of big caliber	1200	4000
A haze	1000	6000
A whole monkey meat	1000	6000
Kg of catfish	500	2000
Dish of mushrooms (500 g)	200	No more mushrooms

* FCFA: Franc of the African Financial Community

Prices have greatly increased, in a lot of cases they have more than doubled. Such an inflation reflects the level of food scarcity in the region. However, inflation cannot be solely explained by land grabs and the effects of food scarcity. In fact, with a growing rate of 2.6 %, the local demographic growth also exerts a high pressure on land resources (3e RGPH 2010). Thus, even without issues of land grabs, inflation would still continue to pose an issue to villagers. Therefore, land scarcity (linked to land grabs) increases both inflation and food scarcity. Buying food to supply households, then, becomes quite challenging. Indeed, walking through the weekly local markets, food items like mushrooms for example, were barely available. Villagers' narratives highlighted their struggle:

> *It is a waste of time fishing in Abéssé river. You might fix more than a hundred fishhooks at nightfall and proceed to four visits at night, you will still return in the morning without half a kilogram. It is more painful for diurnal fishing.* (Basile, Abéssé, 18 June 2015)

This statement reveals the extreme scarcity of fish in the villages' main rivers, as well as the unproductivity of fishermen's efforts to remedy the situation. The same problem is encountered for wild animals, which are hunted for local consumption and restaurant commercialization. In Bagofit, people are not devoting time to hunting anymore: "it is unthinkable. I enter the bush at 5 pm with a box of cartridges and I quit at the early hours of the morning without firing the slightest blow at a hare or monkey" (Olinga, Bagofit, 5 March 2015). The aforementioned statements underline a dire conjuncture, one of limited access to land, its bareness, the drop in local agricultural production, and the rarefaction of wildlife and fish resources. This conjecture, the article argues, is the active cause for individual and collective resiliency strategies partly expressed via a change of residential pattern.

Residential multilocality and resiliency: living both "here" and "there"

Contrary to the studied behavior of villagers fleeing to nearby cities to face the shocks of food and land scarcity (Roquet 2008), communities in our sample highlight both intra-rural and inter-rural migrations in which some individuals own a house in the host place. A villager, for example, acknowledges that, "for more than 15 years I am between Dimako village and here. There is no choice when you have a family like mine. You have to go to bush, otherwise they starve" (Samuel, Abéssé, 16 June 2015). In Bagofit, another one declares that, "when we began to seek in surrounding villages for another bush for traps and fishing, I used to sleep at my acquaintances. But, today, I own a house of two rooms there. When I'm at my own place, I lend it to people" (Mathieu, Bagofit, 22 April 2015).

Those statements of living intermittently in two rural places to feed households and owning a second stable house at the relocation place, like many other statements, introduce two central facets of this multilocality. The first facet underlines a scarcity context and the endeavors undertaken to face it. It speaks of a strategy whose aim is to counter the ongoing scarcity of vital resources, which leads some villagers to settle in other rural areas to stock up on resources their households, located in the ancestral villages, are lacking. Hence, there is a trend of relocation in the villages. Villagers are transforming surrounding rural areas, endowed with coveted resources, into relocation homes to face food scarcity. In doing so, they give into a mobility which does not imply a definitive settlement on the relocation sites. By intermittently living between their relocation sites and their own villages, these people live in between the spaces, as depicted by this villager "It's been six years that I'm in Bamako. I hustle for my family. I send money to my wife and I go down there every two months to spend two weeks with them" (Jean Essono, 19 February 2015, Bagofit). As highlighted above, this residential pattern involves a circular mobility between two sites of the same administrative region. Hence, it is not a migration or a mere mobility, but a residential multilocality (Sheller and Urry 2006). It is a hybrid residential model occurring both through nomadism, due to circular moves between two stable residencies at a regular frequency, and sedentarism, because places of life are appropriated through stable activities, objects, and living habits: villagers alternately live in two rural residences (Urry 2000; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Duchêne-Lacroix 2013). It is noteworthy that this living arrangement is not new. West Africa has historically been portrayed to embody a culture of mobility (Chapman and Prothero 1983). Indeed, circular migration was already expressing a multilocal residential pattern then, when it was undertaken to escape droughts, hunger, or conflicts by settling in cities (De Bruijn, Van Dijk, and Foeken 2001). However, this article's case shows a shift, not only in a lessening of the dominant directionality of cities as a chosen point by villagers who are grappling with food and land scarcity (Barbier, Gubry, and Courade 1982; Ela 1982; Roquet 2008), but also in the growth of personal houses owned by villagers in their relocation place.

The second facet in villagers' migration is that, in their ongoing residential multilocality, some individuals own houses both in native and relocation places. The frequent presence, over the years, in the same place for specific activities – hunting, fishing, and gathering – was prescriptive of an anchorage in the second residency place. As such, the multilocal resident

cannot be considered a foreigner in their second place of residency. Indeed, because villagers were embarrassed at having to use or lend their acquaintances' houses, owning a house came to be seen as a necessity. With regards to the homes themselves, they are built on the same architectural model as the primary residence. Rural houses are simply made of wall pieces composed of small shrubs on which palm nervures are transversally fastened and holes are filled with mud, with a roof made with raphia mats. However, the secondary home is not as furnished as the one in the native village, and has only simple bamboo beds for bedrooms, a rustic low table which is cut from a big tree trunk, some bamboo chairs and two pots for kitchen as the main furniture. Residency time in both spaces depends on the activities that are carried out. In the case of the native residence, since it experiences a scarcity of vital resources for households, there the time of residence corresponds to the months dedicated to clearing and sowing the farms. It is the space of socio-cultural life, family, self-identification. It justifies a long residential time compared to relocation sites. The relocation site, as a second residential place, is a site where scarcity experienced in the native residence is challenged. These second residential places share the same features: low demography, exuberant forest, weak anthropogenic activities in the natural environment, as well as an abundance of wildlife, fish, and floristic resources. As mentioned before, the villagers choose to move to these second residences in order to stock up on food items they may be lacking in their native residence. Hence, this multilocal strategy is established to make use of those advantages (Weichhart 2015). The time of residency in the second residence corresponds to the free periods of the agricultural calendar of the native residence. Two periods define this time of residency: the beginning of the main rainy season, for setting traps, and the middle of the dry season, for fishing activities. In this context, secondary residences are a place for producing and collecting vital resources in order to fight against food insecurity. Such is the matrix of the multilocal residential scheme for villagers.

In this regard, residential multilocality patterns appear as an economic solution for villagers. It is a strategy to deal with land and food scarcity by producing and finding vital resources lacking in the traditional unit of residency in secondary residences (Ember and Ember 1972; Weichhart 2015). However, it is important to note that even if the majority of villagers chose neighboring rural territories for this economic strategy, some individuals do head to nearby urban cities to counter the effects of such scarcity. This dualism in their choice – urban or rural – leads to questions surrounding individuals' competencies and skills linked to the specific resources they seek for their households.[5]

[5] Being educated or illiterate entails distinctive skills and knowledge leading villagers to choose either urban areas or rural zones for mobilizing resources. Cities mostly attract those who went to school or possess vocational competencies they can use to access the informal job market, whereas villages are preferred by those who master hunting and fishing techniques.

Residential multilocality and scarcity management: listening to multilocal residents

Residential multilocality is a collective economic resolution whose objective is to produce either vital resources – disappearing due to land scarcity – or substitutive products (Roquet 2008).

Relocation sites and resources abundance for a punctual containment of scarcity

Communities depend on bush generosity for meat, fish, and starchy roots, all of which are used for daily dishes. The scarcity in the native villages, as mentioned above, is visible in the villagers' difficulties in accessing food at a reasonable cost and within a reasonable time frame (Janin 2006). This multilocal mobility, as a responsive strategy, in addition to the individual skills considered above, involves geographic areas with key features. Indeed, the mobility observed implies neighboring villages and cities. In Abéssé, two villages appear as relocation residencies, for the majority of people heading to rural areas: Dimako and Yelan. Situated on the same trajectory, on the West side of Abéssé, these areas are respectively 15 km and 30 km away.

> *The place seems better for me. Dimako is not that far, more or less than 15 km; it means only 3 walking hours from the village. With a bicycle it is even faster. From there, I can send off my news home every day and a part of what I collected in the bush.* (Adrien, Abéssé, 11 July 2015)

The closeness of the relocation areas emerges as a central facet to this migration. Indeed, that closeness, in a context of a severe lack of intra-rural means of mobility, underlines a necessity for villagers: the ability to cover the distance by feet, bicycle, or by using passing-by people who will cross ones' village as messengers. Those relocation sites are chosen because they are tiny villages of less than 20 households with unlimited forests. Because of their low population, these villages have no impact on biotopes and wildlife, floristic and fish resources. Subsequently,

> *Once you are over there [in Yelan], you just wonder whether it is wild or domestic animals you are seeing! In the evening, from the porch, I use to observe monkeys coming for fun on big trees. They sometimes get down, up to the roof of the house.* (Ndongo, Abéssé, 21 June 2015)

This statement describes the particularities of all rural relocation territories: a good preservation of animals' biotopes, both for the nearby and distant forests of the village, and an abundance of wildlife resources. Besides these reasons, the villagers' choice to move also depends on the extent to which settling down and carrying predation activities are made easier. For the secondary residence sites investigated, there appears to be no structured tra-

ditional authority. Where it exists, the chieftainship, which is a component of the administrative organization of a village, represents centralized power and ensures that a territory remains well-defined with regards to hunting activities. In such communities, settling down for hunting and fishing, as well as for other activities, is subjected to complex procedures. However, the rural relocation sites investigated showed no sign of structured power, outside of an elder acting as a judge in case of a dispute. Although respected for his age, the elder, when he does not have the attributes of the chief, fulfills a simple consultative role. His authority, although important, is not irrevocable. Therefore, entering and living on the secondary sites is less regulated since there is no land rights transfer. Consequently, regardless of the cumulated time spent by a multilocal resident on a plot of land in secondary residences, neither he nor his siblings can claim any rights on a secondary piece of land. This may explain why tutoring relationships, as a strategy to settle in a village (Chauveau 2007), have not been emphasized by the individuals interviewed. It could also explain why building a house, in Yelan for instance, is reported to be easy and appreciated. In fact, because secondary villages have on average less than 20 households, each new house built there is seen positively as contributing to the growth of the village. Hence, all it takes to establish a secondary residence is to gain the elder's sympathy by offering him goods (wines, soap, and cartridge) while maintaining the harmony of the village and avoiding hunting where natives set their own traps. When all is settled with the village elder, the daily life of the multilocal resident is made of activities related to hunting, fishing and the harvest of natural products (mushrooms and roots) that they can send back to their households. Consequently, since multilocal residents stay out of any native agricultural activities, serious conflicts are not reported because they do not have an impact on existing land systems.

Managing the daily needs "there" while being "here"

Contrary to the classic residential multilocality, here the observed practice of mobility in secondary residences does not affect the resident's life in his native village. Settling down in the second residency does not sever ties, even temporally, with the household left at the traditional home (Pulliat 2013). Because the presence of a villager in his native home is important for managing the needs of the household, a broad range of practices are undertaken to maintain the multilocal resident's presence in the family.

On the one hand, there are "word" and "parcel" practices. A central reason explaining the choice of a secondary residence site is its closeness. The distance between both sites should allow villagers to cover it by foot or by bicycle. This emphasis on the required transport modality that can connect both homes highlights the mobile villagers' will to provide food and news for their native households as frequently as possible. The *word* includes views and directives for important family issues arising during the absence. The *parcel* includes stocks of meat, fish and other foodstuffs to be sent whenever needed. This pattern also applies to the individuals who chose to relocate to urban areas:

Alfred is the person in charge of the family. He takes care of everything. Because of his brothers and problems here, when there is a situation, I send a letter or phone him. He then indicates what I have to do or he quickly makes a roundtrip if we cannot wait for the period during which he usually comes to the village. (Vincent, Nanga-Eboko, 7 January 2015)

Hence, in a context of a mobility erected as a resilience scheme, there is a will of multilocal residents and their families to maintain connections. This means that there is no split between the city or the rural relocation site and the traditional residence. The villager whose choice is "to go" does not leave the village, rather he is in search for additional means to improve the living standard of his household (Azuka 2014). So, the word delivered via diverse channels (letter or word of mouth through persons travelling to the village) and the parcel (foodstuffs, manufactured goods, or money) sent frequently by an intermediary, symbolically perpetuate the villager's presence within the domestic unit.

The "quick journey" is another modality of perpetuating one's presence as well as managing the daily needs of the traditional residence. Indeed, the closeness of the native site, which is a central element in the mobility decision, also reveals the need for personal intervention within one's family, if need be.

Since the bush [relocation site] I always keep one foot there. There are delicate cases that cannot accommodate with a distant management. When such a situation arrives, I make a quick journey. In a few hours, I am home, I solve the problem and I'm back. (Etienne, Bagofit, 22 April 2015)

Both for rural and urban mobility, individuals who undertake the journey are highly focused on the need of a permanent travel to better the traditional residence. In fact, it is this lack of those resources that triggered their mobility decision. Additionally, the frequent trips also help these individuals maintain their presence within their family, despite their absence. As a matter of fact, narratives of urban and rural multilocal residents show that both frequency of visits and the number of parcels sent are higher for multilocal residents that have ties to a rural traditional residence. Despite a slight difference in distance between native villages and urban relocation sites, both frequency of visits and the number of parcels sent are lower than for rural relocation sites, mainly because it is more expensive to undertake such activities from urban settings for multilocal residents. This financial issue is not the case for rural multilocal residents who pick from bush and can travel by feet. This is why, coping with land and food scarcity through residential multilocality, as a punctual measure, is seen as a transitional solution expressing the containment side of resilience schemes (Rousseau 2005). Indeed, resilience encompasses both actions: containing the issue of scarcity, and undertaking initiatives to reverse the scarcity by neutralizing its root (Béné et al. 2012). This is the restorative aspect of resilience as embodied in sorcery for communities who choose to regenerate their own resources.

Sorcery as a restorative tool: mystical practices for resources regeneration policy

Previously rejected by scholars, sorcery is an important variable through which development and individual behaviors can be understood (Fisiy and Geschiere 1991; Esse 2010). Indeed, sorcery in Africa is mobilized not only to create wealth (Geschiere 2000), but also to face societal challenges like scarcity and questions linked to nature conservation (Sousa, Ainslie and Hill 2017).

Chieftaincy and the mobilization of witchcraft for a coercive resolution

Residential multilocality has a structural negative effect: a sporadic devitalization of native villages which leaves them empty. Indeed, the multilocal mobility process intermittently alters the demographic structure of native communities. Sex, age, and knowledge of fishing and hunting techniques are mostly a privilege reserved for adult men. Bamvelé, the local vernacular language in Abéssé, says *ngolok*, meaning adult above 30, to refer to those involved in the residential multilocality. Because of this impact on native villages, traditional 3rd class chieftainship wished to stop it.[6] Antoine, the then former chief, underlined that the main reason for such high levels of resident multilocality was an acute consciousness of resources rarefaction. Vain hunting and fishing parties were pointed out as concrete factors for the observed multilocality trend. This diagnosis was thus indicative of measures to be undertaken in native villages: a regeneration of fish and wildlife species on the available land of the community. Hence, a meeting was subsequently set to determine the basis of a resource regeneration policy.

> *After an agreement with the head of families, we decided that the river will rest at first for two consecutive years without anyone carrying fishing activity there, whatever its form. We also forbade hunting with rifles in the adjacent forests. The gun decimates all it points at and its noise scares and sends remaining animals far away.* (Antoine, Abéssé, 13 July 2015)

For the former chieftainship, the chosen option was a policy to allow the river and neighboring forests rest from human activities.[7] The objective was to allow the rare remaining species to reach maturity, mate and reproduce. Hence, villagers forbade access to fish and wildlife ecosystems, as a prerequisite for the regeneration process. The measure was also backed

[6] A chieftainship is an administrative component. It represents the State and applies its prescription within a defined territory. There are three types of chieftainship: first class, second class, and third class. Each of them controls and exerts power over a subsequent territory. The third class is the one reigning over the smaller circumscription (a village, a block of houses in urban or rural areas).

[7] Regeneration of resources is a set of articulated human and technical capacities helping to stop the excessive exploitation of – endangered – species for repopulation aims.

with the temporary ban of fishing activities in the main river, Abéssé, as well as the ban of hunting with rifles in the neighboring forest. Because the community could not precisely estimate the mating periods of such species and the environmental conditions required to stimulate their reproduction, the rigid prescription of the resting time was meant to fulfill at least three goals:

- enabling ecosystems to self-repair the biotopes of desired species, to create ideal conditions for their return and reproduction;
- not disrupting the species during their reproduction period to avoid their migration;
- guaranteeing the maturation of the species' young, so that they can reach their reproduction stage and repopulate the species more quickly.

However, as one elder stated, "after the meeting that decided to restraint hunting and fishing periods in the village, some people expressed their disagreement. Dissent was looming" (Louis, Abéssé, 13 July 2015). The unprecedented character of the policy, putting an end to the unregulated exploitation of resources within a community whose food base mainly came from fish and wild animals, was generating disagreements. In the case of such disagreements, traditional chieftaincies are perceived by locals as the hand of administration and State power. Subsequently, even when involved, villagers often see a chieftainship's decisions as a State diktat; hence, they subtly boycott chieftainship's decisions using creative actions, invisible resistance and selective compliance, all of which constitute a hidden transcript (Scott 2008). This is why the partial disagreement context in Abéssé needed a collective contract and a larger enforcement tool, in this case: sorcery and fetishism.

Sorcery and fetishism for resources regeneration

A rising literature is showing how sorcery is being used to succeed in diverse initiatives (Fisiy and Geschiere 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). In Cameroon, from the 1990s, sorcery for wealth practices and capital accumulation has been invasive (Austen 1993; Geschiere 2013). Individuals and communities are resorting to various forms of occult powers to face challenges, as witnessed in the field. Because the excessive and uncontrolled exploitation of wildlife and fish species contributed to their extinction, these species were defined as resources to be protected using both a collective agreement and a dissuasive mean by the chieftaincy. Hence, fighting threats of extinction of natural species through the ban of their exploitation, as concluded above, gave a way to an unprecedented local experience.

At Abéssé, a set of heterogeneous objects endowed with supposed mystical powers were installed on the eponymous protected river and forest areas. For the case of the river Abéssé, each bank villagers stepped on when crossing displayed particular materials. These objects were composed of a ribbon with red and black bands, strewed with snail shells and small packages wrapped in pieces of black cloth. Individually taken, each component of the whole object, before being united with others, was powerless and insignificant. However, once assembled, those components came together to form a new identity (Pietz 1985; MacGaffey1994). When these objects were installed by a procession of men and women led by patriarchs and the Chief, Antoine, they were subsequently endowed with ritual power and

thus turned into a fetish. According to a villager, "anyone who would defy the regulations exposes himself to blindness or horrible bloody death. Going beyond the ribbon and initiate fishing activities will end, for most unfortunate, in a bloody death caused by the mystical snake, *ingokdom* (Mekinda, Abéssé, 24 July 2015). Hence, the role of these objects was to scare villagers into following the resource regeneration policy. Here, the role of the fetish is to watch over and protect things or species from being harmed or misused. Academic analyses also conceive the fetish as building a bridge between the human world and the invisible one where powers and metasocial entities can be mobilized through certain processes to produce specific results for their users. Thus, a fetish connects men to a spiritual energy made accessible through the intermediation of objects that materialize fetishes themselves (Surgy 1994). Resorting to a fetish is justified by its "relation with, an exerted power over, the desires, actions and self-identity of individuals" (MacGaffey 1994). Hence, the fetish used by the chieftainship was materializing a collective contract whose terms and intelligibility will be considered below along with diverse uses of supernatural powers.

There is a second aspect to consider about the fetish: the mystical snake, *ingokdom.* Indeed, occult power was also embodied in wildlife species to enforce the regeneration policy. However, transferring power to animals to mutilate or kill people who were not complying with the rules underscored what the local language, Bamvelé, named *mgbwë* to differenciate it from *tãh. Mgbwë* slightly differs from *tãh,* the sorcery, in the extent that, it is not a mere invocation and use of supernatural power for controlling events and people. While doing all these, *mgbwë* adds a compulsive punctual and active destruction as well as killings of people; it is literally translated as witchcraft. In practice, villagers report attacks by a mystical snake, *ingokdom,* who actively punishes infringers. Due to its mythical size, strength and unknown whereabouts, it is believed that *ingokdom* is in fact the product of some villagers who use supernatural powers to shape-shift into a snake (Sousa, Ainslie, and Hill 2017). Furthermore, interviewees report several scenes and accidents encountered by infringers: getting lost in the bush, an encounter with mystical beings like unknown horrible animals and deceased persons of the community, firing whole cartridges on illusory animals or being shot at by another hunter. These narratives are, clearly an expression of the chieftaincy's warnings. Anyone who will go against the rifle ban will face the consequences. This use of sorcery to get villagers to comply with the policy was decided during the meeting and everyone agreed (Norbert, Abéssé, 24 July 2015). This statement, along with villagers' declarations and stress, show an interplay of sorcery, witchcraft, and fetish in the implementation of this resource regeneration policy. Embodying occult power in certain wildlife species and placing fetishes on the communities' main river and forest fulfilled at least two roles.

On the one hand, it materialized the community's agreement in turning a part of the forest and river into an untouchable sacred zone. Indeed, the meeting process and decision-making are descriptive of a collective agreement. The meeting was convened by rulers on a Saturday evening, which is a resting day and meant that most of the villagers would attend. The event, as all those convened by rulers, was held in the public shed built near the royal house. Once the terms were introduced by the chief, the debate was opened to everyone and the dominant opinion was accepted. Thus, there was a collective agreement on the use of such unusual measures as sorcery and fetishes, along with a collective procession to the river and

ritual accomplishment. As such, it was not less than taking a collective oath in favor of a nature conservation policy. The principle of a public discussion and proceeding of rites to embody ritual power on a fetish suggests a form of social contract regarding responsibilities of resource management (Graeber 2005). In this case, we see occult powers and invisible entities been used to help the repopulation of resources (Surgy 1994).

In fact, attributing ritual power to fetishes to protect rivers and forests is exerting control over resources. Hence, practicing fetishism, sorcery, and witchcraft introduces three realities enabling a new resource management scheme in line with the regeneration of species:

– They generate a unique calendar for resources exploitation. Practically, resources can only be exploited when the chieftainship believes that species have had enough time to properly mature and reproduce;
– They have a dissuasive role. These fetishes help the reproduction of species by preventing offenders who would dread the sinister effect of occult powers from damaging their living environments;
– Finally, they generate protected areas.

On the other hand, fetishes and sorcery are instruments of power. Indeed, they enforce this collective agreement on resource regeneration by threatening potential infringers into compliance (as seen with the examples of the *ingokdom* and other fear narratives). Occult powers are mandatorily requesting obedience towards the resource regeneration policy and the nature conservation by punishing dissidents (Graeber 2005). Hence, fetish, sorcery, and witchcraft end up regulating resource exploitation. Summing up, it appears that witchcraft and fetish are used to generate phenomena which are not ordinary. For the chieftainship, they are a means of action, distinctive from ordinary power means, which aim to use the invisible world in order to achieve conservation results sought by the community. Thus, community members, feeling threatened by witchcraft and fetishes, are forced to respect the resource regeneration policy, which they might not do otherwise.

Conclusion

Land grabs drastically reduce communities' livelihood resources. This land scarcity exposes these individuals to various shocks, notably food scarcity, which they have to grapple with. Indeed, after a land grab, the limited available arable land and associated natural resources is often insufficient to maintain a sufficient scope of agricultural activities and guarantee stocks of wildlife and fish resources to feed a community. Hence, this scarcity pushes community members to engage in strategies of resilience, namely residential multilocality and sorcery practices, to face and remedy this issue. On the one hand, residential multilocality, as shown above, helps provide vital resources to native households by allowing certain individuals to travel to a secondary residence in order to find the necessary resources and share them with their original community. On the other hand, occult practices were undertaken to allow for a successful local policy of resource regeneration. Two hallmarks of power, sorcery and fetishes, were turned into policy enforcement tools to impose eco-friendly behavior on members of the community by using their fear of fetishes to ensure their compliance with the pol-

icy. Hence, as articulated, the paper suggests a critical revisiting of the cause-effect assumptions often establishing rural exodus as the major response of villagers grappling with land and food scarcity. Data also calls for a thorough analysis of the role sorcery and fetishes can play in current endeavors to neutralize hunger and recover from issues of resource scarcity.

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Stephanie Engola, Glory Lueong and Maëlys Glück for the language editing of the manuscript.

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