

INSIDERS OUT: FOREST ACCESS
THROUGH VILLAGE CHIEFS IN
SENEGAL

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Insiders out: Forest access through village chiefs in Senegal

Sagane Thiaw and Jesse C. Ribot

Introduction

When asked why village chiefs allow outsiders to cut forests against the will of local people, Makacolibantang's Deputy in Senegal's National Assembly, Kabina Kaba Jakhaté, stated 'the chief is only a pulley – he facilitates but has no authority' (Interview, July 1994 in Ribot 2000: 147). Chiefs are often approached by environmentalists and other development agents as if they represent and act on behalf of local people (Ribot 2004; Nisebeza 2004). They are approached as if their legitimacy – that is their continued presence and reign – is based on respect from local people rather than on fear or a lack of options. Observations in Senegal and elsewhere bring into question some positive assumptions about these so-called 'traditional' authorities (Nisebeza 2004; Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1997; Ribot 1999). In the cases discussed in this chapter, chiefs usually work for their own profit, the interest of government and other elite, and against the interests of villagers.

This study focuses on two Senegalese Rural Communities: Makacolibantang and Pata. The Rural Community of Makacolibantang is located in the Region of Tambacounda, in eastern Senegal. This forested region produces most of the charcoal (cooking fuel made from partially burning wood) for Senegal's urban centres. The Rural Community of Pata is in the southeastern part of Senegal, in the Region of Kolda. Migrants from the peanut basin,

further north in Senegal, have been illegally clearing parts of the forest reserves in this region. Patterns of forest access in this chapter will be explored through two cases: Charcoal production in forests around villages within Makacolibantang, and forest clearing for farms in the Pata forest reserve. These two cases explore the relations among village chiefs, government authorities, other elite and migrants concerning land and forest access.

In both areas, village chiefs currently exercise authority in allocating forest access to forestry merchants, woodcutters, and migrant farmers. In many areas in rural Senegal, particularly in the centre and north (Senegal River Valley), outsiders' or migrants' access to land or resources claimed by insiders is opposed by insiders (Diop 1992: 28).¹ But in this part of the country (East and South East), the opposite is found. Chiefs have facilitated forest access for outsiders, while excluding insiders from natural resources exploitation and from the significant incomes that this generates.

Chiefs seem to be acting as clients of and administrators for the central government as well as political and commercial elite. The chapter poses the questions: Who are village chiefs? Where does their chiefly authority come from? Why do chiefs prefer to privilege outsiders instead of the local villagers? How do insiders view the decisions their chiefs make? The chapter concludes with a few reflections on the implications of uncritically privileging chiefs.

The material presented in this chapter is based on interviews and surveys conducted in August and September 2002 by Sagane Thiaw in the Rural Communities of Pata and Makacolibantang in Eastern and South East Senegal. Village chiefs and villagers were interviewed in ten villages in each Rural Community. In each village the village chief and five men and five women were interviewed. In each Rural Community a sample of rural councillors, the sub-prefect and prefect and local forest officers were also interviewed.

Chiefly authority

Villages of approximately 100 to 1,500 people are common settlement units in the West African Sahel. Each village typically has a chief and some have specialised chiefs who oversee forest use. Additional authorities at village level include land priests, sorcerers, marabouts, Imams, non-village-based pastoral chiefs, griots, merchants, heads of certain castes (e.g. hunters in Mali), and chiefs of the young (*masamari* in Niger) (see Ouédraogo 1994;

¹ Repeated conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists in Senegal Valley in the late 1980s, case of bloody conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists in the 'groundnuts basin' of Senegal (DIOP 1992: 28).

Bassett and Crummy 1993: 6; Roberts 1997; Kini 1994: 21). Pre-colonial chiefs derived their authority from multiple sources: Rights of conquest, control over land, direct descent from ruling ancestors, and membership of a particular ruling family (see Alexandre 1970; Crowder and Ikime 1970: xi; Fisiy 1992; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1987 [1940]: 10-11; Schumacher 1975: 87). The institute of village chieftaincy has existed across Africa since the pre-colonial era. Most European colonisers recognised traditional African chiefs and subordinated them. These chiefs continue to hold authority in the post-colonial era despite changes in their legal and jurisdictional status and their own form of rule. Village chiefs typically have some authority over land and natural resources.

Village chiefs in the colonial period

While village chiefs were important, most of the literature on chiefs focuses on the canton, district, or paramount chiefs, operating on larger territorial-administrative scales. The French did, however, work with, depose, appoint and regulate village-level authorities; deeply shaping the current legal standing and powers of village chiefs. The position of chiefs at all levels has been established or deeply transformed by the process of state formation in the colonial period (Geschiere 1993: 151,165; Bayart 1991: 78; McIntosh 1990: 27; Cowan 1958; Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaaal 1987; Fisiy 1992; Alexandre 1970a: 24; Suret-Canal 1966; 1970; Ranger 1993; Roberts 1997). Chiefs were heavily tainted by the colonial experience which had at once strengthened their powers through subjugation followed by European backing, and had undermined their legitimacy through the excesses and contradictions that external backing and the exigencies of colonial administration produced (Cooper 1996: 12; Mahwood 1983; Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaaal 1987).²

Village chiefs have been integrated into the State as an administrative extension through the colonial periods to the present (Alexandre 1970a; Suret-Canal 1966; Lund 1998: 67). This role has been fraught with ambiguity and tension due to the dual allegiances of chiefs downward to their people and upward to the central state, the competing sources of chiefly power and legitimacy within local culture, and the role of chiefs as links to and agents of the outside world.

As the French worked through and began to back local chiefs, they chose them – 'as far as possible' – by 'custom' (Alexandre 1970a: 52-3). But this was not very far. 'In general, the first "chiefs" [recognised by the French]

² Chiefs were given a meagre salary and expected to collect taxes, recruit *corvée labor* and soldiers, etc. Chiefs often were in conflict therefore with both their *Commandant de Cercle* and their own people. (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaaal, 1987). For an example from French Soudan, see the case of Mademba Sy (Roberts, 1991).

were people who had served or entered into other relationships with the European authorities' (Bayart 1993: 135-6) (cf. Buell 1928: 990; Foltz 1965: 12-3). Under French colonial rule, Africans (such as cooks, translators, soldiers and so on) could become chiefs, even if they were not from the region in which they were appointed (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1987: 6-7). In some cases the pre-colonial authorities sent captives or other caste persons to work with the Europeans (Bayart 1993: 135-6; cf. Geschiere 1993). In the 1930s, due to resistance to colonial rule, the French made a greater effort to align the appointment of chiefs with what they believed was local custom (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1987).

In 1934 a French decree covering Guinea required that village chiefs be (...) designated by the authority of family heads' (Alexandre 1970a: 52-3).³ Then from 1936 the colonial French West African government required that 'the people' be consulted through the medium of village chiefs about the choice of a canton chief (Cowan 1958: 177), reflecting presumed representativity and legitimacy of village chiefs.⁴ In 1947 the colonial government issued a decree on 'Indigenous Rule in Senegal,' stating that 'Village chiefs and commissions are elected by direct universal suffrage by the electors, male and female (...)' for a four year term (Alexandre 1970a: 58).⁵ But in 1957 the colonial government of French West Africa introduced legislation again limiting suffrage to household heads (as in 1934) and a specified list of notables, while limiting candidacy for the position to those from (...) families who have a right to the chieftaincy (...)' (Alexandre 1970a: 61).⁶ No limits were set on their term.⁷

³ Governor General J. Brévié proposed such a policy for the West African colony in 1932 (Cowan, 1958: 44). By the 1940s the British also emphasized the need to introduce elections (Geschiere, 1993: 163). Chiefs were to be replaced by elected 'native authorities'. In the 1944 a district officer in an area with (...) four times as many 'strangers' as natives argued for elections: 'Here you are, the Bakweri Native Administration receiving approximately 1,500 pounds sterling a year in tax money of which the strangers in your midst pay almost exactly half. You benefit by their money and you decide how their money shall be used (...). This is absolutely contradictory for the things we British believe in and it is against the very things for which we are now fighting a war' (in Geschiere 1993: 163). Ironically, as Geschiere points out, the British adage became 'no taxation without representation'. The Bakweri opposed elections for fear of being outnumbered in their own region. They blocked elections until 1958.

⁴ Proposed canton chiefs then had to be approved and appointed by the administration. *Arrêté du 28 Décembre 1936* (Cowan 1958: 177).

⁵ It would be worth digging through the colonial record to find the story behind this short reign of universal suffrage and limited terms at the village level. One can find the reasons evocated by colonial government to stop this first local democracy experience.

⁶ In the late colonial period twenty-nine of thirty heads of village households elected a chief who was (...) not of aristocratic origins, nor was he even from

Chiefs, as instruments of French rule, were backed by the French military, allowing them to make and enforce 'native' laws through the system of 'native' tribunals, *l'indigénat*, gather and deliver tax revenues, and recruit workers for *corvée* and soldiers. During the 1940s, however, chiefs lost much of the power given to them by the French colonial state. Powers shifted away from chiefs as the cadres of professional administrators and specialists within the bureaucracy grew and Africans were elected to political office. At the same time the authority of chiefs was weakened as they lost the power to recruit and use forced labour, with the increased role of technical services and with the activities of political parties among rural constituencies. As Cooper (1996: 276) writes of French West Africa, 'the ultimate sign of a shift in the nature of authority was that "traditional chiefs" in the 1950s tried to organise themselves into trade unions, to be set up regionally and regrouped under *Union Fédérale des Syndicats des Chefs Coutumiers de l'A.O.F.*'. By the end of the colonial period chiefs had risen to and fallen from the peak of their power.

Post-colonial village chiefs

Although French educated leaders such as Boigny, Touré, Senghor, and Keita turned against chiefs during independence in the new West African nations, the role of the chief in local communities persisted. Chiefs in the new independent states were incorporated into the administration as civil servants, in pursuit of national unity in a manner similar to their role in the French colonial administration (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, 1987: 9-21). Despite these transformations, the village chief remains a principal authority for the great majority of rural West Africans (Alexandre 1970a: 24; Fisiy 1992; Ouali *et al.* 1994: 16; Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1987: 23). However, Ouali *et al.* from Burkina Faso's Decentralisation Commission (1994: 16) noted that their legitimacy is 'full of ambiguity'. The awareness that chiefs were often creations of the administration caused (...) the *évolués* ['evolved' - meaning the French-educated Africans] to look upon the chief not as a representative of a way of life that is essentially African, but as a tool in the hands of the administration' (Cowan 1958: 186). While chiefs cannot force governments to take any positive action, everywhere in Africa they possess the power to hinder government policies by showing - as discreetly as they like - that they do not favour popular cooperation. Consequently, although it is seldom mentioned in speeches and development

that region (...)' and he was not the customary inheritor of the chieftainship. Unfortunately, the administrator objected on the grounds that it would be (...) a blow to indigenous authority (...)' (Cowan 1958: 178).

plans, government officials in most countries make special efforts to obtain the local chief's consent on various initiatives (Mahwood 1983: 231).⁸

In independent Senegal, there are still laws in force that structure processes for choosing village chiefs. Village chiefs (usually the head of the hereditary male line) are elected by heads of households, who are virtually all male. Generally consensus is required, but in the absence of consensus, elections are organised (RdS 2003: 161, 165). This system is identical to the colonial system first instituted in Guinea in 1934 and later institutionalised throughout the French West African colonies (Alexandre 1970a: 52-3). The household's choice of their village chief in Senegal must be ratified, by nomination, by the *préfet* after the *sous-préfet*'s proposition. But the *préfet*'s decision will be final after the approval of the Minister of *Intérieur* (RdS 2003: 165).

Village chiefs in these Sahelian countries are not necessarily representative of the populations over whom they preside. The official processes in Senegal systematically exclude women. They are not representative – in any procedural sense. Further, in the presidential decree that specifies their roles, there is no formal downward accountability imposed on them (RdS 2003). While villagers may not be able to remove them directly, the government administration can. Disability, serious breaches in exercising administrative functions, condemnation for crimes and offences, or refusal to carry out laws are the primary conditions for terminating a chief's mandate (RdS 2003: 166).

Apart from the systems of chief selection and administrative removal, there are various social mechanisms that can hold village 'customary' authorities or elites locally accountable (see Fisiy 1992: 213; Spierenburg 1995; Mamdani 1996; cf. Hirschman 1970; Scott 1976; Thomson 1995: 14). Hirschman (1970) observed for instance that the negotiating position of subordinate classes was strengthened by their 'exit options' (cf. Scott 1976). In Bayart (1993: 22) it is noted that dependents were not without a voice within either lineage or central societies. They were (more or less) represented in a range of councils, associations and societies in which they often had important functions. Over a third of the monarchies and the chiefdoms that were investigated included councils of commoners who were involved in political decision-making, and more than three-quarters of the chiefdoms,

⁸ Indeed, as Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal (1987: 23) states: 'When we speak of chiefs in Africa in the present context we are not speaking about an extinct or even a dying species. We are speaking at most about a threatened one, threatened by the intervention of the legislator and the administration, who are all too often of the opinion that through legal reforms, institutions such as that of chieftaincy, still firmly entrenched in African society, can be blotted out or robbed of their legitimacy'.

and the quasi-totality of the monarchies, had created lay courts of justice. These figures provide some indication of the limitations that the subordinate actors were able to impose on the leaders.

Bayart then gives the example of how village chiefs imposed by the powerful Yatenga monarchy were not forced on the population. Chiefs named by the king, but unwanted or disliked, may be met by silent resistance and obfuscation until '(...) a new assignment will be found for the unfortunate chief' (Bayart 1993: 23). These structures, however, still do not guarantee the accountability of chiefs. Some are despots, and others responsible community leaders, depending on the personality of the chief, the specific history of the village in question, and its location in a larger political economy.⁹ International development agencies still, nevertheless, often establish and facilitate their ties to local populations through chiefs, without questioning whether they represent or are accountable to the local population.

In Senegal, chiefs are not always an alternative to the State, but are usually a particular manifestation of state intervention in the rural arena. Current village chiefs are chosen through state-sanctioned processes in which they typically come into the position through inheritance via a patrilineage tracing back to warriors, the founding family of the village, or families chosen by colonial powers to replace antagonistic local leaders. 'The village chief is appointed by the *préfet* [regional administrative authority] upon being proposed by the *sous-préfet*, after the latter has consulted with the chiefs of the village's subdivisions (*carrés*). The decision becomes definitive with the approval of the Minister of the Interior' (article 34, RdS 2003: 165). The chiefs are then administrative authorities in their village under the supervision of the *sous préfet*. Chiefs are charged with – among others tasks – the collection of rural taxes, and the implementation

⁹ The notion that indigenous African chiefs were despots was used during the early colonial period to justify subjugating them to European standards of conduct. For example: 'When the French undertook the occupation of West Africa they were confronted with a number of native tyrants who cruelly exploited their subjects. Life and property were insecure; slavery and human sacrifice prevailed in many areas. In a few cases, local Almanyans had imposed a form of discipline, maintained by terrorism, upon thousands of unwilling subjects' (Buell 1928: 987). Much of this view was probably European projections that served to justify the 'civilizing' mission of colonization. It was clear, however, that under the French, indigenous chiefs were despotic when they could hide behind their French backing. This latter problem helped justify the curtailment of chief's powers over '(...) judicial matters, land and tribute' and more direct control by the French administration (Buell 1928: 987). But these criticisms of chiefs by no means constitute a comparison with or excuse for French colonial administrative practices, which were certainly also despotic, cruel and violent, and fostered despotism among chiefs (Buell 1928; Suret-Canal 1966).

and enforcement of law (Sissokho 2002; RdS 2003). To view chiefs as purely indigenous, 'traditional', local, and accountable representatives of rural populations is to assume too much. Intervening through chiefs may be, as Mamdani (1996) suggests, the continued encapsulation of individuals within community through the administratively driven empowerment of these so-called 'customary' decision makers to 'represent' local people.

The Makacolibantang and Pata cases

The choice of the Makacolibantang Rural Community is based on the history of forest access in this area that was marked, in the early 1990s, by a schism between chiefs and villagers concerning charcoal production by migrants in village forests (Ribot 2000; 1999: 134-5). In the late 1990s, the forest reserve of Pata was the site of a famous and bloody conflict over land between local and migrant farmers. The land in Pata is in a protected forest. Pata was chosen as a comparative case illustrating a struggle over forest access for agriculture.

The Makacolibantang case

In the Makacolibantang Rural Community – a Rural Community being the lowest level of political-administrative jurisdiction usually made up of five to thirty villages – migrant labourers from Guinea and elsewhere in Senegal are engaged in commercial forest exploitation for the production of charcoal. Charcoal is made from wood by partial, oxygen-deprived burning, and is produced to supply the capital city, Dakar, with cooking fuel. Among the ten villages¹⁰ we surveyed, only two villages (Makakoto and Ndoussouan) had autochthonous charcoal makers.

For migrant charcoal makers to work in the forests around villages which are within the 'community forest' domain of the Rural Community, the 1998 Senegalese Forestry Code (article L.4: 8) requires commercial charcoal producers to obtain the authorisation of the President of the elected Rural Council of the Rural Community prior to obtaining wood-cutting permits – delivered by the forest agents. Further, because charcoal makers live in the forest villages, this disposition of the forestry law was extended to village chiefs. The President of the Rural Council is required to obtain the approval of chiefs before allowing authorisation for commercial producers.¹¹

¹⁰ The ten villages are: Makakoto, Ndoussouan, Maka Cissé, Saré Diamé, Saré Niana, Saré Mala, Manigui Kolkassa, Yorodondé, Missirah Seydou and Yoli Souma.

¹¹ This requirement is not a written in the new forestry law, but is an informal agreement between Forest Service, merchants and local elected governments. It

Most of the village chiefs we surveyed in the Rural Community of Makacolibantang welcomed charcoal makers in their villages (Makakoto, Ndoussouan, Saré Diamé, Saré Niana and Saré Mala). In some villages (Yoli Souma, Manigui Kolkassa), chiefs want charcoal makers in their villages – stating that the African tradition dictates that foreigners must be welcomed. But they still do not want them to cut wood in the surrounding forests. Chiefs of these villages give their permission to outsiders, in the name of, and despite the opposition of the villagers. In these villages, chiefs see themselves and are seen by villagers as the 'owners' of the villages. So 'the right to make decisions concerning village life and the surrounding forests belongs only to him', according to a Saré Diamé villager (interview, August 2002). Unfortunately, there are no laws or regulations requiring consultation with the population under the chief's authority, and even if they existed, an opposing voice might be stifled, in this socio-cultural context, by the predominant voice of the chief.

There are also chiefs in the Makacolibantang Rural Community who are deeply against charcoal makers lodging in their villages and cutting surrounding forests. These villages are Maka Cissé, Yorodondé and Missira Seydou. The chiefs of these villages followed the wishes of villagers, with whom they collectively made their decision, and on behalf of whom they are now acting against charcoal production in surrounding forests. Among the reasons advanced by the Yorodondé village chief (interview, August 2002): 'It is not in our practices to cut a tree in order to make fuel. We are agriculturalists; we need the forest in order to have our rainy seasons, so we reject everything that could destroy the rainy season'.¹² Even if most village chiefs allied with outsiders, allowing them to exploit forest resources, there still remain three out of ten villages around which chiefs are following the desires of the villagers and are against migrant outsiders producing charcoal.

The Pata case

In the Rural Community of Pata, agriculture is expanding by the clearing of the Pata forest reserve. This is being done by Wolof and Serere farmers moving from the middle of the country in search of land to farm. When settling new lands, these migrant farmers benefit from the cooperation of local and higher political and religious authorities. Despite even violent opposition by most villagers in autochthonous villages in this area, many new villages were founded in 1990s by migrants who left earlier migrant villages founded in the 1970s and 1980s. These new village founders are

may have been the subject of a circular or decree, but we have not seen the circular or decree.

¹² This discourse that connects the rains to the forests was likely appropriated from various development and environmental agents who have been saying this for years – whether or not it is a demonstrated link.

supported by the chief of the village to which they first migrated. After settling in a new site, the founder is then joined by migrants – who are generally his relatives – coming from the middle of the country. This is the common pattern. As the village chief of Darou Khoudoss explained (in September 2002): ‘I came from the area of Paoskoto [in the Sine Saloum region]. After I first settled in Darou Salam [in the forest reserve of Pata], I founded this village [Darou Khoudoss] in 1993. Then my relatives from Sine Saloum joined me’.¹³

According to the Senegalese forest legislation, clearing is forbidden within a forest reserve unless it is done with an official farming contract given by the Forest Service (Code Forestier 1998: 10, art. L15). In the case of the Pata forest reserve, all official farming contracts have to be signed by both the Forest Service and the Rural Community of Pata, whether for autochthons or migrants. None of the migrants had farming contracts at the time of our fieldwork (September 2002). Despite this, autochthon villagers from Kéréwane, Kohel, and Saré Yoro have witnessed, powerlessly and against their will, the foundation of migrant villages (Sinthiou Telli, Darou Thiendou, Darou Salam, and Sinthiou Abdou) in the forest reserve over the last twenty-five years.

How can the migrants settle in the forest reserve of Pata and remain there without being expelled? An official of the Regional Forest Service of Kolda (just next to Pata), (interview, September 2002) said:

They [migrant farmers] benefited from complicity between autochthon populations and administrative, political and even religious authorities, including village chiefs, rural councillors and council presidents. And all these authorities had not failed to use their powers and influence so that persons at fault would not be punished when cases of infringement were brought against them by forest agents.

But he mentioned that during this occupation of the forest reserve his office had been inconsistent and he lacked the means to play his role.

The past inconsistency of the Forest Service and the Rural Council was confirmed by the migrants’ attitudes towards the forest reserve when these institutions resolved, in the end, to forbid any new clearing in September 1999. About the ban on clearing a migrant installed in Darou Khoudoss explained (interview, September 2002):

When I arrived in 2000, I was informed by the village chief about the decision of the Rural Council of Pata and the Forest Service to forbid any new clearing in the forest reserve. Since this date, I have had no land to cultivate. I always

¹³ Franchette (1999: 7) observed two waves of migration: ‘the first villages founded by migrants coming from Sine Saloum (in the 1970s and 1980s) become real jumping-off points for the foundation of new satellite settlements’.

borrow from the first comers who have land. But I wish to have my own land because those who lend their lands to me today may need it back tomorrow.

This migrant is one of the few latecomers without land who still lives in the villages within the forest reserve. Most of those who came after the clearing ban had to return to their region of origin, the Saloum in the Region of Kaolack.

In both Makacolibantang and Pata there was discrimination over access to land and forest resources. Outsiders from the areas had been privileged by the organisation of the charcoal production establishment, the administration, the technical services (agriculture and forestry), and especially by village chiefs, while the insiders were excluded from forest decision-making processes and, more significantly, from the commercial exploitation of these forests.

Analysis

How can we understand chiefly authority over forest access in these two Rural Communities? What are the main reasons that chiefs privilege outsiders to the detriment of insiders? How do outsiders see the chief’s position on forest access? How does the chief retain his authority locally when his actions are contrary to local needs?

Chiefly authority over forest access

Chiefly authority over forest access in both Pata and Maka Rural Communities comes from at least three sources: The first is the traditional identity as descendant of the village founder. Being the descendant of the village founder, the village chief considers and is considered by the villagers as the owner of the village and the only local authority with whom one must deal in order to gain access to the land and forest resource around the village. This conception about the chiefly authority over forest access comes from the widespread rural notion (often evoked in discussions with villagers and chiefs) of ‘right of foundation’, especially in the South East and Upper Casamance regions of Senegal. Founding a hamlet in a deep forest area is a common investment that a farmer or a herder can make. When this hamlet grows, via arrivals of other farmer or herder families, the founder automatically gains authority over allocation of housing space in the village, and surrounding land and forest. His authority is first recognised by the families that join him, and later by the administrative officers. After he dies, his oldest descendant inherits the position and authority over villagers, land and forests. Access to land and forests depends only on his will. For a typical example, in the village of Saré Diamé (Rural Community of Makacolibantang) when we asked the opinions of the villagers about the chief’s decisions

on forest access, one villager said 'I cannot disagree with our chief's decision on forests because he is the boss, the owner of the village' (interview, September 2002). The chief in this village was a direct descendant of the founder of the village.

A second source for chiefly authority is their location in a network of higher political-administrative and social authorities who use them for access to village resources (human and natural): Chiefs in most of the charcoal production villages in the Rural Community of Makacolibantang claim to be great friends with local and regional political leaders (based on interviews with chiefs in Makakoto, Saré Diamé, Manigu Koliakassa villages). These leaders also have close relations with charcoal merchants, who use chiefs to gain access to the village and to the forests for their migrant labourers. By influencing local and regional political leaders, merchants gain the chief's approval to lodge their employees in the village and to cut the surrounding forest. This network of influence has worked well because political leaders, outsiders and chiefs share the same political party and sometimes the same religious brotherhood. In March 2000, when the *Parti Socialiste's* long rule came to an end, most merchants and chiefs changed parties, maintaining the same convenient alliances. In the Rural Community of Pata, this network of political and religious relationships helped chiefs to found new villages in forest reserves. The higher political and religious authorities protected these chiefs – against the sanction of foresters and the judiciary – during the settlement process and while their villages expanded.

A third and final source can be recognised in the fear on the part of villagers of being excluded from the village or of having bad relations with the village owner/chief: In each village of these two areas studied, particularly in the Rural Community of Makacolibantang, villagers continuously fear being excluded from the village by the chief if they go against his will. He is the chief, the 'owner' of the village, and so he has the 'right', according to himself and to the other villagers, to expel any villager. The expelled villager has no chance to refer the chief's decision to higher administrative authorities – such as the *sous-préfet* – because these authorities, often, back the chief's decisions. If a villager protests against a chief's decisions, he risks exclusion from the chief's network of access to the outside world – such as access to commercial opportunities – and loss of the chief's social assistance and support based on his outside sources of income. In a context of widespread rural poverty, this network of access represents a significant source of income for each household head and the chief's assistance and support are wanted and welcomed. However, in the Makacolibantang case, the chiefs who welcome only outsiders in their villages and not in the forest around have no authority over forest access. They recognised that the forests around their villages are under local Forest Service authority. Here chiefly authority covers only village people, dwelling area and land for farming.

Why chiefs privilege outsiders

The cases above show that chiefs usually privilege outsiders in forest access. Two main reasons lead chiefs to do this. First, pressures from multiple actors within the state and religious hierarchies: This pressure comes mainly from the local elected authorities – rural councillors and the deputy from the national assembly – and the local appointed civil servants – *sous-préfets*, foresters. The local elected bodies sometimes participate, physically, by standing next to the merchants and the forest service agents in the process of requesting the chief's approval for charcoal makers' lodging in the villages. Chiefs do not see or talk with them frequently and when they make requests, chiefs are unable to refuse any request coming from these local elected rulers.¹⁴ For example, in the village of Saré Niana the chief revealed that in 1996 the former president of the elected Rural Council of Makacolibantang met him twice in order to ask him to welcome and give lodging to charcoal makers who would be arriving in the near future. The chief did so, and since this insistent request, charcoal makers have been living in the village and cutting the surrounding forest. Many of the village chiefs were faced with the same situation. Sometimes it is the administrative state agents (*sous-préfets* and their assistants) who pressure village chiefs to allow their dependants (merchants or migrant farmers) to harvest forest products or to farm. Faced with such pressures, chiefs conform to the will (and interests) of State agents. And there is a well-rooted and shared sense that the governed can do little against these State powers.

The second reason is the pursuit for personal material interests: When allowing merchants' workers access to forests or giving forest land to clear to migrant farmers, the chief expects some financial bonus or gifts or project from the outsiders. In some cases he expresses his expectations. In the villages of Saré Mala and Ndoussouan (Rural Community of Makacolibantang), before allowing outsiders to lodge in the villages and to access the forests around them, the chiefs demanded that the outsiders bore a well (Ndoussouan) or redig the existing one (Saré Mala). If in Ndoussouan the chief's demand was satisfied while the outsiders were cutting the forest, it was not yet the case eight years later in Saré Mala village, and despite all this, the chief allowed the merchants to stay. Some chiefs receive or demand money or food (bags of rice or millet) from the charcoal merchants in exchange for their approval for forest access. In most of the villages, merchants accepted the deal, and then it was established as a tacit rule for access to the forest. In the village of Saré Diamé, for example, the chief revealed that 'a sum of 15,000 FCFA¹⁵ was given to me by the merchant who

¹⁴ In most of these villages, it is only in the electoral period that chiefs see these local leaders. The leaders come to ask for the votes of villagers, in turn, the chiefs express some grievances of their people.

¹⁵ Around 23 Euro (Approx. US \$28, at 13 August 2004).

led the first charcoal makers to the village'. 'Since this first arrival,' continued the chief, 'once a year each merchant who has charcoal makers here gives me between 10,000 and 15,000 FCFA' (interview, September 2002). The material interests of the chief are usually small, but significant in the context of rural livelihoods.

In the villages of Yoli Souma and Manigui Kolkassa, the chiefs declared that their decision-making power did not extend to the forests, and therefore they have no reason to allow access to outsiders or not. This neutrality could be due to the chiefs' ignorance of new forestry laws, or to their powerlessness in front of State agents and outsiders. They have been told for years that the forests belong to the forest service.

Insiders and forest access

While chiefs are balancing political and materials interest in forest access control, what do villagers gain and what do they think of their chief's authority over forest access? In the Rural Community of Makaolibantang, villagers living near the forests, except those of the two villages, Makakoto and Ndoussouan, obtained only indirect income from charcoal production. Villagers' income is from services offered to the charcoal makers, like renting out rooms (around 3,000 FCFA per month), selling meals (around 6,000 FCFA per month), and renting their horse drawn wagons (around 1,500 FCFA per day). These expenses are considerably less than the charcoal makers' income – nevertheless, in some cases the charcoal makers leave without paying for the villagers' services. Further, insiders' access to the commercial benefits of charcoal production is delegated by chiefs and merchants (who control production permits) for the above mentioned functions – providing lodging, food and local transportation – that bring in little income. And in return they see others profit from surrounding forests, while they are left to bear the ecological and economic consequences. This makes villagers unhappy with the chief's decisions.

In the Pata forest reserve, the villagers from autochthonous villages of Kéréwane, Kohel and Saré Yoro were unhappy to see the forest that they had protected for at least fifty years damaged in the last twenty years by outsiders pursuing commercial interests. The migrants farmed large areas of groundnuts for significant cash incomes. The vast migrant farms significantly disrupted traditional livelihoods in the forest reserve. So autochthon villagers are resentful and fearful of migrants and are angry with the local elected and appointed authorities and higher political and religious leaders who facilitated forest clearing by migrants.

Conclusion

The discourse of outsiders is consistent. Rural councillors and administrative agents, foresters and development agents claim that the chiefs are legitimate and represent the village. But villagers tolerate chiefs out of a sense of tradition and fear. Their legitimacy does not derive from the good deeds they do or their accountability to the population, but is exerted by dint of their position of power reinforced by outside authorities and tradition. The chiefs are caught in a contradictory double role – as agents of the outside world and as ostensible representatives of the population – so often evoked as a source of double resentment in the post colonial literature. Despite this double resentment, chiefs are still privileging outsiders while the forests are being exploited and the anger of the insiders is growing. Despite this resentment, outsiders, such as development agents, NGOs, foresters and others still empower chiefs by using them as instrumental intermediaries – pulleys – for gaining access to the forest well.

Village chiefs can hardly be said to represent or be accountable to the village population. But villagers are, as Mamdani (1996) describes, 'encapsulated' in tradition by a set of outside actors whose interest is to maintain villagers as subjects so as to facilitate access to forests for their own clients. Requiring elected councillors to consult village chiefs before permitting forest access further extinguishes the voices of rural people by the legitimisation of these non-representative local authorities. This looks suspiciously like a modern reproduction of micro-indirect rule.

If chiefs do not represent local people, why do environmental and development agents like them so much? If local people do not like them, how can the idea that they are 'legitimate' justify working with them? Weber (1982) did not place a moral spin on legitimacy. He viewed it as *status quo* – things are legitimate when there is no open conflict. But are intervening agents aware that they are supporting authorities whose legitimacy often stems from fear, backing by the state (as under indirect rule), lack of alternatives, or lack of any sense that there are other options? Legitimacies based on different forms of coercion should be viewed differently from legitimacies based on appreciation, respect or representation. Environmentalists and other development agents and practitioners should take a critical view of customary, traditional, indigenous and other such local authorities if their interventions are to be emancipatory.

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