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Introduction: Decentralisation in Africa

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Abstract

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Dedication: It is terribly sad that two of the authors in this volume, Dr. Nyangabyaki Bazaara and Samuel Efoa, are being published posthumously. With this publication, may a small portion of their insight, dedication to intellectual work, and the inspiration they have generated be inscribed upon the future.

Dr Bazaara was the director of the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala, Uganda. Bazaara was a thinker and scholar, a musician, patron of the arts, positive-spirited man, and a mentor to many. Bazaara remains present among us through all those he has touched with his generosity, kindness, enthusiasm, and intelligence. Bazaara drafted an article for an earlier volume (Ribot and Larson 2005), which he never completed due to his untimely death in August 2003. Bazaara's last article is the lead article in this volume. His ideas and his spirit have influenced all of the contributions herein.

Samuel Efoa was a Research Technician at the Central Africa Regional Office of the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Oyono and Efoa spent nearly two years working together on the empirical research for their joint paper, particularly data collection in East, Centre and South provinces. With his thorough empirical rigour, Efoa made remarkable contributions to this article in this volume before his untimely death in June 2004.

Introduction

Indirect rule and association were the first colonial-period decentralisations. Colonial powers across Africa decentralised further after the Second World War. At independence most African nations consolidated their rule through re-centralisation, but later began to decentralise again within the first two decades of independence. The current wave of decentralisation, which began in the late 1980s and spread across Africa after 1995, is very different from these earlier movements. It is couched in the inspiring language of local representation and democratisation. Earlier reforms were described as means of better managing rural populations from the centre by mobilising local authorities and involving local people. They too used language of justice and equity—as with the French and British arguments for indirect rule and association—but they rarely pretended to aim toward democratisation. In the current wave of decentralisation reforms, governments across Africa have successfully etched 'democracy' into their decentralisation laws—calling them democratic decentralisations. These governments are still in the first stages of translating these laws into practice. The cases in this special issue highlight the frontiers of this Africa-wide reform movement as it is unfolding in its first decade of intensive experimentation.

The articles in this volume help to map out the progress and limits of implementation in practice, raising the important questions that will have to be asked if the enfranchising discourse of democratic decentralisation is to better the lives of rural Africans. The articles interrogate the implementation of democratic decentralisation writ large through the optic of the natural resource sector. The natural resource lens is particularly powerful for viewing the politics and dynamics of decentralisation because natural resources are the primary source of wealth for national governments and national elite, while also being the source of income and subsistence for a large portion of rural people. As such, natural resources are a necessary point of conflict and cooperation between central and local authorities in any attempt to transfer powers from the centre to the local arena. In the articles, this struggle is visibly played out—in central government and international organisations and agencies—in decisions concerning which powers to transfer and which institutions in the local arena to entrust with these powers. The articles focus on the effects of the resulting institutional arrangements and power transfers on local democracy and natural resource management.

The Director of Senegal's forest service recently proclaimed that in Senegal decentralisation is 'incontournable', meaning 'it cannot be corrupted nor derailed' (personal communication, August 2005). Most foresters in Senegal have recently begun to describe decentralisation as 'incontournable'. True enough, decentralisation reforms are irreversibly transforming rural governance and local democracy across Africa. Governments and their line ministries are marching ahead across the unknown terrain from legislation to practice. While the legislation is now an 'incontournable' fact, there are still many detours and deviations along the poorly marked paths to implementation, and more unknown pathways between implementation and outcomes. This volume contains examples of the winding paths of implementation and the unmapped domain of outcomes in articles on Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Mali, Ethiopia, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe. These articles demonstrate that decentralisation is making headway, but over bumpy ground. While many progressive laws are in place, their implementation does not yet reflect the new discourse.

Evidence on the structure and outcomes of decentralisation reforms is only beginning to roll in from around the world (Colfer and Capistrano 2005; Wallenburg and Anderson 2005; Ribot and Larson 2005; Crook and Sverrisson 2000; Ribot 1999; 2004). This introduction will outline the contributions of the articles in the volume and will end with some research priorities that these analyses suggest.

The Articles

Each article is summarised below. These summaries are not abstracts of the articles; rather they draw out what the guest editors felt were the most pertinent new insights of the authors. In this section we do not cite the primary literature used by the authors, but we do add some cross-references where the arguments relate to other authors in the volume or to a broader literature that may otherwise be overlooked.

The first three articles are on Uganda's decentralisation (Bazaara, Namara, Muhereza). Next are two articles on decentralisation reforms in Zimbabwe (Mandondo and Kozanayi, Mapedza). Articles follow these, on Cameroon (Oyono and Efoua), Democratic Republic of Congo (Nzuzi and Oyono), Mali (Kassibo) and Ethiopia (Feyissa). Together, these articles demonstrate that decentralisation is advancing over the multiple obstacles in its path. Despite resistance by those threatened by decentralisation, at the margins, local people are gaining power from these reforms.

The lead article, by Nyangabyaki Bazaara, begins with the hypothesis that decentralisation can produce the institutional infrastructure for public participation—based on the creation of empowered local representative authorities. In Uganda, a series of laws promulgated since 1992 laid a solid foundation of local representative institutions for democratic decentralisation, reorganising the relationship between citizens and the state (also see Muhereza, and Namara, in this volume). According to Bazaara, representation is the essential ingredient for effective decentralisation of natural resource management and is necessary for the engagement of citizens (also see Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Overdevest 2000; Oyono and Efoua, this volume). Bazaara's article provides several distinct insights into the dynamics of decentralisation concerning inclusion and exclusion of rural people and the nature of powers being transferred to local actors.

Bazaara shows that in Uganda a large portion of the public—or citizens—is outside of the 'represented' spaces (geographic spaces, spaces of belonging and spaces of power) in which natural resource decisions are made. First, governments exclude people from the benefits of decentralisation through a top-down choice of local institutions that represent only a sub-set of the local population. Government is transferring powers to sub-groups within the local arena rather than representative of the local population. The excluded population therefore remains subjugated—directly or indirectly—to central state authority. Second, Government is limiting local participation by restricting the territory covered (i.e. parks and protected areas). Third, government is transferring resources that have no commercial value while retaining control of resources that present lucrative opportunities, significantly

limiting the powers in which people participate. Fourth, government produces dependency through insecure transfers, making local groups upwardly responsive to government if they wish to hold-on to their power (see also Conyers 2003). Fifth, Bazaara also illustrates severe procedural asymmetry between government and local institutions that makes decentralised decision making more cumbersome through excessive oversight and approval processes.

Bazaara's most salient finding concerns the functions of the conflation of technical and political decisions. He shows that government environmental agencies conflate technical with political decisions to their own benefit. They use specious technical arguments about resource management to hold onto allocative decisions. These decisions are not 'technical', they are 'political' because they are about the allocation of access and control over resources—and not about the requirements of sustainable resource management. These decisions could be made locally without threat to the resource. This insight provides us with an important guiding principle for decentralisation reforms. Central government does have a role in defining the technical bounds of resource management and use—determining what resources can be exploited, where, when and how, that is via what techniques, in order to sustain and benefit from the resource. But, government should devolve the political powers of allocation of rights—that is, government should not determine who can exploit.

Agrippina Namara looks at the nature of the 'co-management' partnership between local communities and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) in the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP). Co-management of conservation areas is widely promoted by government agencies, policy-makers, NGOs, and researchers in Uganda—as across much of the developing world. Accordingly, governments are establishing mechanisms for local government and local community participation in the management of wildlife and protected areas (Adam and Hulme 2001; see Muhereza, in this volume). Focussing on the principle of community participation, Namara is convinced that only a democratic decentralisation—with downward accountability mechanisms—can transfer real access to benefits and decision-making power to local communities, and therefore reduce tension and conflicts with the central state (see Goldman 1996; Bigombé Logo 1996). She warns against partial decentralisation (see Kassibo this volume; Muhereza this volume).

Namara recognises that a lot of 'discursive' efforts have been made by community conservation advocates to prove that community participation is actually put into practice in the BINP and that local communities have been guaranteed access to benefits. In spite of this rhetoric, however, she observes

that decision-making remains highly centralised and community access to benefits is fictive at best (see Barrow and Fabricius 2002; Yam Malla et al. 2003). Under such conditions, she argues, local communities continue to be treated as subjects, rather than being enfranchised as citizens (see Ribot 1999; Bazaara this volume; Feyissa this volume). In this article, as in Namara and Nsabagasani (2003), Namara opens up a new pathway for policy-makers and for researchers when they conclude by saying that in most cases of decentralisation, local communities are granted 'favours' not 'rights' and more 'troubles' than 'benefits'. She brings further attention to Bazaara's (this volume) concern that the powers transferred to local people are insecure. She argues that secure rights and powers in the hands of representative local authorities form an incentive to participate—and is the basis of citizenship. Privileges that can be taken away do not produce community engagement or commitment.

Namara recounts that park management was reluctant to embrace co-management, which was donor driven. The park authority is unwilling to trust resource users and to transfer any powers to them. Park rangers are threatened by co-management. They perceive the loss in their authority and do not want others 'to play the role of warden'. Under these circumstances, similar to Bazaara's observation (this volume), the parks created a kind of asymmetry that favours central control. Management plans or 'memorandums of understanding' are designed to favour the park authorities. Plans and agreements in this context become means of exclusion, rather than inclusion. These agreements are negotiated by the park from a 'position of strength', while communities negotiate from weakness. The park is unwilling to discuss resources of any significant value. This observation raises an important question in natural resource decentralisations. Memorandums of understanding, contracts and conventions are now being widely used to mediate the relation between local communities and local people. They are often portrayed as means of empowerment in which local rights are codified (IIED 2005). There is still, however, more work to be done on the line between codification as enclosure and management of rural people's domain versus agreements as security and opening of local people's rights. The line is probably more in the imbalance of initial power relations than in the tool itself, but these processes must be observed and better understood so that this potentially powerful tool can ultimately be used to serve enfranchisement.

Namara makes two other important observations. First is that local community institutions are delegitimised due to the minimal powers devolved to them. Without meaningful powers, representation of any kind is empty. She also observes that within the co-management schemes, community

members were demanding to be paid ‘... for playing their prescribed roles’. Co-management agreements create work for local people. But, they rarely offer pay for this work. Parks and forestry agencies often see the remuneration to work in nature as the future fruits from conservation and management. They do not view this work as labour to be remunerated. While nobody would expect a local community to work without remuneration to build a highway that happened to pass through their community, there is a widespread assumption that the work of conservation—although often justified as a national good—needs compensation. This assumption and its cultural roots within government and international circles must be further explored.

Frank Emmanuel Muhereza explores the dynamics of decentralisation reform in Uganda through the case of forest management in Masindi District. The case reveals significant decentralisation of influence—despite central resistance to real power transfers. Muhereza observes that even with progressive decentralisation and forestry reforms, in practice, reforms are implemented so that local authorities remain upwardly accountable. Local representatives are under pressure from politicians and administrators to account upwardly. Upward accountability is reinforced by the transfer of obligations to local authorities without sufficient funding to implement them, and by the ministry keeping significant controlling and supervisory roles, as well as control over the allocation of important commercial opportunities (permits and licenses). These factors conspire to keep elected authorities dependent on and accountable to the ministry.

Such inverted accountability—contrary to the tenets of decentralisation—is common in many experiments of decentralised management of natural resources in Africa and elsewhere (Larson 2004; Ribot 2004, see Mapedza 2004, this volume; Oyono and Efoua, this volume). Muhereza concludes that the dominant presence of the state and the absence of downward accountability in decentralised management of forests in the Masindi District compromises the engagement of local people as citizens (Mamdani 1996; also see Feyissa in this volume; Namara this volume). Nevertheless, local government in Masindi has gained significant powers in these reforms. District councils in some areas contested the Forest Department’s practice of auctioning confiscated illegally harvested timber and keeping the revenues. In August 2001, the Rakai District reached a precedent-setting agreement with the Forest Department in which the district council now has the right to auction off impounded illegal timber and keep forty percent of the revenue. These changes reflect the effective powers that district councils are gaining and exercising.

In Masindi, commercial groups are also gaining power through privatisation. One pit-sawing organisation tried to use its increased power to influence forest management policy that contributed to the interdiction of a Forestry Department commissioner from office. The private group's motive was to gain a monopoly by reducing illegal competition. Hence, the pit sawyers fought corruption within the Forest Department—they did not, however, succeed in making major changes. Nevertheless, this political engagement was one unintended effect of privatisation.

Two articles recount experiences in Zimbabwe. Based on observations and interviews in the Chiredi District of Zimbabwe, Alois Mandondo and Witness Kozanayi assert that in processes of decentralisation the position of local actors is reinforced most effectively when the local actors demand and take hold powers. Decentralisations led and or granted by the state and other major actors are processes under the discretion of central actors and therefore serve central interests—they are less likely to empower or engage local people. Further, the authors note that whether empowerment is 'demand driven' or granted from the 'top', central authorities are still useful to prevent the exacerbation of local inequities and to provide technical and political support (also see Crooke and Sverrisson 2000).

Thus, Mandondo and Kozanayi contribute to the debate on the legitimacy and the continuity of the central state under decentralisations in general—see, from a different theoretical point of view, Cardenas (2004), Bazaara; Feyissa, in this volume—and under 'demand driven' decentralisations in particular. Local communities are not usually egalitarian. Because of this, decentralisations can lead to the exacerbation of inequality and the marginalisation of sub-groups within local communities. There is therefore a significant role for central actors in making decentralisation more just. Effective and equitable empowerment requires support from above. In addition, local actors require support from the state for political legitimation, technical advice, financial assistance, and problems that transcend the scale of local affairs.

Everisto Mapedza focuses on a co-management experiment in the Mafungautsi forest in Zimbabwe—presented by its promoters as a decentralised natural resource management initiative (Murombedzi 1994; Murphree 1990). The project established its presence in the local arena by setting up management committees—ostensibly as a forum for participation for the local population. Mapedza shows that the management committee members did not account to the local communities, but rather were beholden to external actors—the forestry administration in particular (also see Muhereza, this volume). This system of local governance included a few

interested parties, while excluding the local community as a whole (also see Singleton 2002; Platteau 2004; Ribot 2004; Bazaara, this volume). The local community, sensing that this co-management arrangement was not meeting its needs, reacted with resistance to forestry department activities. They set forests afire and increased their poaching activities. Mapezda justly characterises these outcomes as negative ecological effects from inadequate representation (also see Oyono 2004b; Larson 2004). His key point is that exclusionary governance systems that generate only upward accountability can produce exclusion and resistance, and can undermine or reverse environmental management objectives. Mapedza's case also illustrates co-management operating through highly unequal relations between more powerful foresters and local communities, and how co-management arrangements impose outside objectives through the imposition of outside forms of knowledge about management requirements and techniques biased toward western science (also see Mandondo and Kozanayi, this volume). He points out that for co-management to succeed, these imbalances must be redressed and the net benefits of engagement by communities must be evident to communities and must also follow clearly from the activities they are asked to engage in.

With regard to the situation in Cameroon, Phil René Oyono and Samuel Efoou characterise and assess environmental representation under forestry decentralisation. Forest management decentralisation in Cameroon has created institutional arrangements to represent local communities in forestry decision-making and the management of forest-based income (as have Zimbabwe and Uganda, see Mapedza, this volume; Namara, this volume). The forest sector decentralisation reform has created the opportunity for local communities to establish and manage community forests. Management committees are representing the latter in the public arena. Most of the committees constructed to represent local communities were created with the assistance of external organisations (also see Kassibo, this volume; Mapedza, this volume; and Namara, this volume). The authors observe, however, that these committees lack local sociological and moral foundations.

There are, nevertheless, a few cases where community interests have been represented and upheld, but only via limited, weak and captured representation. The new local forest management institutions are generally governed by individual interests and by the absence of downward accountability. These institutions have produced poor results. In eastern and southern Cameroon, where most of the committee-based forms of representation have no traditional basis, management committees have inadvertently reduced community solidarity and cooperation. By failing to

recognise the importance of social ties as the basis of collective action in this arena, the committees introduce a platform for individual accumulation and undermine existing redistributive norms. Based on these observations, the authors challenge whether effective representation in natural resource management can be produced or implemented without careful prior consideration of endogenous meanings of representation as it fits in existing institutions.

The authors argue that establishment of effective local representation in natural resource management must be complemented by clear criteria for environmental responsibility, systematic monitoring of both resource management and representation, and a framework of sanctions for non-representative behaviour and poor performance by committees, local government and regional and local state agents. The article raises critical questions about the combined effects of local institutional forms and practices and imposed guidelines and sanctions on the production of local democracy (also see Agrawal 2005, who argues that 'environmentality' is established by the transfer of means of regulation). To what degree must outside agents wishing to instantiate local democracy build on existing institutions? To what degree must they impose incentives that make democratic behaviour ineluctable? How can these two approaches be combined?

Phil René Oyono and Francis Lelo Nzuzi describe forest policy change in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This country has the highest reserve of forest resources in Africa. It is thus a focal point in the issue of decentralised management of natural resource. It is also a country shattered by political instability, wars and plundering of natural resources (Trefon et al. 2002; Lemarchand 2002). It was not until 2002 that a new Forest Code replaced the Belgian colonial administration's forestry laws. This new forest law makes provisions for decentralisation (Karsenty 2001; Diss 2003; Lelo et al. 2004; Malele 2004; Diaw et al. 2005), and the transfer of powers to local communities and jurisdictions (provinces). The regulatory texts (implementation decrees) of this new law are still being developed. However Oyono and Lelo Nzuzi draw attention to customary institutions, which they feel are often marginalised in processes of natural resource decentralisations (cf Ntsebetza 2004; see Oyono and Efoua, this volume). The authors argue that customary institutions should be empowered through the forthcoming regulatory texts. They argue that Cameroon provides a kind of decentralisation 'laboratory' for the Central Africa region from which the Congolese 'model'—which has the 'advantage' of still existing only on paper—should draw lessons on the limitations and achievements of forest sector decentralisation.

One of the lessons from Cameroon is that if community and its modes of representation in decision making are not well defined, there can be deep confusion over which institutions can appropriately speak on behalf of and decide for local populations. In both countries the new forestry laws were established under pressure from donors—the most active being The World Bank. The vague nature of many provisions in the new laws can be viewed as a form of resistance to these international institutions. Governments create the laws required of them under conditionalities or pressure from the outside. But they create them with vast room for interpretation and reinterpretation—which often creates ambiguities and uncertainties that can block the decentralisation process.

Bréhima Kassibo's article on Mali demonstrates the risk of project-based forms of local participation backfiring to undermine fledgling local democratic government (also see Baviskar 2005). Since the mid 1990s, the Republic of Mali has undertaken a thorough revision of its local government and forestry laws. While new democratic local governments were legislated in 1996 and local elections were held in 1999, the 1995 forestry laws have not been widely implemented. While waiting for forestry sector decentralisation to take shape, non-state actors, NGOs in particular, have been setting up programmes to involve local communities in natural resource management. They were doing so, however, through traditional associations called *ton*, rather than through the new elected local authorities. In the case of the Forest of Baye, discussed by Kassibo, an international NGO backed by Mali's central government, promoted local participation through the re-institution of ostensibly traditional, pre-colonial management structures. By doing so, they circumvented the local elected government, who are designated by law to be the recipients of decentralised natural resource management powers. Supporting neo-traditional institutions in place of democratic representatives redirected powers that should legally have been allocated to supporting the development of the new democratic local authorities. Ironically, neither the NGO nor the government granted the NGO-backed neo-traditional associations significant discretionary authority over decisions concerning forest resources. Hence, their ability to serve as a local decision-making body through which the community could participate was highly constrained. In addition, the neo-traditional institutions do not have local legitimacy and are being reinstated in a highly transformed post-colonial landscape. Such naïve support for customary authorities of all sorts is seen throughout Africa and is posing major problems for democratisation processes (see van Rouveroy van Nieuw 1987; Kassibo 2003; Ribot 2004; Ntsebeza 2004; Muhereza 2003 this volume).

Dereje Feyissa examines the relationships between central and local authorities in Ethiopia in the context of decentralisation by examining the manipulation of ethnic elites. The author asserts that in post-Menguistu Ethiopia, the new institutional order and decentralisation policy have undermined the process of local integration into the nation by focussing on ethnic identity. Feyissa bases his argument on the case of inter-ethnic cohabitation between the Anywee-Nuer tribes in the Gambela region (Feyissa 2003). For decades now, these two ethnic groups have established local inter-penetration and integrative relations, reducing historical conflicts over access to natural resource. In the past, the Anywee, claiming their position as 'first-comers', had prime control over natural resources. Over time peaceful social relations have been established with the Nuer, strengthening integration. In post-Marxist Ethiopia, ethnic groups have become units of regional political action and decentralised management, as powers have been transferred to ethno-regional groups.

The author notes that decentralisation has created horizontal conflicts at the local level, by introducing new meanings of nationality and ethnicity (Smith 2000). Feyissa assesses the political actions taken by the elite in this situation. He describes how the Nuer elite contesting past relations of local integration, have started rejecting the historical rights of the 'first-comers'—the Anywee—over natural resource (Feyissa 2003). Putting aside other important points, Feyissa reveals two layers of manipulation introduced by the Ethiopian central state via their ethnic-based decentralisation: the ethnic elite is manipulated by the administration, and the local communities are manipulated by their own elite. By so doing, the state is reproducing its interventionism and authoritarianism (see Keeley and Scoones 2000) through the elite of one ethnic group. The 'ethnicisation' of decentralised resource management by the state did not reinforce the powers of communities (see Smit 2000). On the contrary, it led to the resurgence of inter-ethnic conflicts—which threatens sustainable management—and to the legitimisation of supra-local solutions that favour internal stratification.

This article brings into question the wisdom of Ethiopia's ethnic regionalism, which brings into tension ethnic—or identity-based and residency-based—forms of belonging. The lean toward ethnic forms of belonging and interaction with the state has implications for the exclusion of those ethnic groups less able to access and use the state to back their claims. More research is needed on the effects of privileging identity-based forms of representation or belonging.

Conclusion

The articles in this volume characterise the ongoing decentralisation experiment in Africa, raising questions about implementation and effectiveness. The discourse of democratic decentralisation is, by and large, being etched in new natural resource laws. Yet the laws are yet to be translated into practice. Why are Africa's decentralisation reforms stuck in this limbo between law and practice? What difficulties does implementation encounter? This set of papers suggests that the promise of decentralisation is being attenuated in the implementation process. Decentralisation requires local authorities that represent the local population in their jurisdiction to be entrusted with sufficient powers to play a meaningful role in local resource management and use. The articles show that central governments, line ministries, donors, international NGOs, front line agents, and local and national elites have collectively chosen less-than-representative local authorities or have failed to (en) trust them with the minimum necessary or meaningful powers. This set of articles helps us understand how and why this happens and to see why and where the glimmering examples of incipient success can also be found.

Decentralisation is attenuated in its implementation in numerous ways (see Ribot and Oyono 2005). Examples are presented in this volume where intervening agencies and organisations limit the power of local authorities. This has been done via territorial strategies to reduce local authorities' jurisdiction (Bazaara); the diverting powers away from democratic authorities via empowerment of neo-traditional authorities (Bazaara, Kassibo) or via privatisation (Muhereza); or the limiting of access to powers via restricted forms of belonging (Bazaara). Examples are presented in which representation is limited by government or international organisations and agencies choosing inappropriate local institutions. In some instances governments and international organisations choose to interact with chiefs or so-called 'customary' forest managers (Kassibo). Kassibo describes how naive neo-traditionalism encapsulates people in externally produced notions of custom (also see Mamdani). These groups also often choose to recognise inappropriate interest- or identity-based local sub-groups (Bazaara), or they create appointed committees (Oyono and Efoou; also see Manor 2005). Democratic representation is also limited: the means of intervention divides community by working with sub-groups (Bazaara and Feyissa), fails to instantiate new institutions (Oyono and Efoou), facilitates elite capture (Mapedza; Kassibo; Oyono and Efoou), or creates upwardly accountable institutions (Oyono and Efoou to outside actors; Mapedza to government). In addition, Oyono and Efoou describe what they call *tutélisme* in which oversight by administrative

authorities all but eliminates the effective transfer of powers, subjecting 'representative' local authorities to central management (also see Ribot 1999). In addition, these inappropriate institutional choices are often producing local conflict (Feyissa; Oyono and Efoua).

As decentralisations proceed, new light is shed on the depths to which each sector—certainly the environment and natural resources sectors—are still profoundly colonised by European styles of management and control. In forestry, management styles have been passed on from the School of Nancy in France. These practices were established in Africa during the early colonial period and they still serve to facilitate extraction and empower central actors. Nancy-style command-and-control forestry certainly does not enable citizens and local communities to profit from nature and to invest in achieving their own aspirations. Across Africa, forestry and environmental agencies and the natural resource laws that they implement, function as systems of domination, extraction and taxation. These laws sometimes protect critical natural resources—but via the heavy-handed tutélisme described by Oyono and Efoua. Indeed, most of the laws labelled 'forestry', 'environmental' or 'natural resource management' serve more to produce taxes and rents than to protect or conserve the resource. Decentralisation—at least in rhetoric—appears as an attempt to lift this colonial form of domination by transferring the means of regulation (as Agrawal 2005 calls it) to the populations that live in and around natural wealth. The widespread resistance to these reforms throws into relief the persistence of what is a very effective sectoral form of neo-colonial rule. Decentralisation, if successful, is one front of the continuation of decolonisation—sector by sector. If it is not successful, it will turn into one more stage in the articulation of control deeper into the everyday lives of rural people. If successful, it contains a far-reaching enfranchisement potential.

In the cases described in this volume rural populations have taken some control of the resources around them. In Uganda (Muheresa) councils gained more power and commercial groups used new decentralised decision making powers to fight corruption. While the local commercial forestry groups did this in order to eliminate competition from illegal extraction so as to consolidate their own monopoly, their ability to influence local authorities led to better forest management. In Cameroon, representation worked in the interest of rural populations in some instances (Oyono and Efoua). While the results were mixed, the examples showed that rural people could effectively manage and invest funds for their own betterment. Combining these positive examples with the cautionary lessons of these cases provides scholars, activists and practitioners with the guidelines and tools to push the decentralisation experiment forward. Bazaara has provided us with one of these lessons: do

not allow forestry agencies to conflate technical with political decisions—technical decisions can be made at the centre, political decisions can be made locally. Oyono and Efoua provide another: establish clear criteria for environmental responsibility, systematic monitoring of both resource management and representation, and a framework of sanctions for non-representative behaviour and poor performance by committees, local government and regional and local state agents.

Decentralisation is ‘incontournable’. But what will the word ‘decentralisation’ mean in the end? In the space between law and practice decentralisation can easily morph into ‘decentralised’ deeper central control or into local enfranchisement. Governments, donors, international NGOs, scholars, and activists must continuously ask which powers are being transferred to which local institutions. Are the transferred powers sufficient and meaningful? Do the receiving institutions represent local people? These questions can help insure that the discourse, which has been codified at least partly in new and often progressive laws of democratic decentralisation, is translated into practice.

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