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ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

CONCESSIONARY POLITICS IN THE WESTERN CONGO BASIN: HISTORY AND CULTURE IN FOREST USE

by
Rebecca Hardin
November 2002

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Series Editors

Jesse C. Ribot
Peter G. Veit

Institutions and Governance Program
World Resources Institute
10 G Street, N.E., Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20002 USA
jesser@wri.org / peterv@wri.org
(202) 729-7600

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EDITORS
Jesse C. Ribot and David Stemper
COPY EDITOR
Florence Daviet

World Resources Institute
10 G Street, NE
Washington DC 20002
www.wri.org

ABSTRACT

The origin of "concessionary politics" that shape forest use and management in equatorial Africa can be traced to pre-colonial and colonial practices. Yet these political processes are constantly being re-invented, and their consequences for ecological and social systems reach far into the future. Gleaned from fieldwork among residents of a protected area and logging zone in Central African Republic, this concept relates village-level analysis to national and international adoptions of co-managed concessions for the management of tropical forests. Hardly new, the breaking of forests into mosaics of territorial control has been happening since the early days of European expansion. Protected areas were, in many cases, an extension of the concession system for the use and management of natural resources. Conservation has thus long benefited from and contributed to concessionary logics for the use of valued natural resources. Today, as the conservation concession becomes an increasingly formal part of conservation policy in many parts of the world, conservationists need to consider the broader historical and cultural roots of these practices, and hence their long-term consequences.

Constituted through specific steps or stages for defining and controlling spatial concessions, concessionary politics are also characterized by particular cultural practices:

- negotiation at local or regional levels of concessionary rights that have been formally ceded at a national level;
- patron-client relationships involving expatriates that mediate or even replace governance by the nation state; and
- fields of interpenetrating identity politics that, through rivalry, reconfigure notions of core and periphery in the politics and geopolitics of resource use.

This historical and ethnographic investigation of concessionary politics points to a gap in social science literature about environmental conservation; little has been written about the role of capital—not merely state and community—in power-suffused social relations of resource use within and around protected areas. Concessionary politics are not merely crafted through state policies, and imposed from the top down. Rather, forest residents, have, over time, developed abilities to defy and define the limits of state power. They thus participate, with a range of outsiders, in creating and re-creating concessionary politics. In so doing, they may unwittingly further their own alienation from formal control over the natural resources on which they depend, as concessionary politics also constrains their options for development and political process.

Specifically, concessionary politics precludes truly representative, or at least recognizably *political,* processes for maintaining ecological diversity based on, rather than despite, increasingly cosmopolitan forest communities. Today, concessionary politics relies increasingly on "participatory" mechanisms for dialogue between residents and their powerful "patrons," whether businesspeople or conservationists. It produces mosaics of resource management in which competition by outsiders creates revenues for financially impoverished communities and nation states. But it also connects competition for control of species-rich areas with politically charged struggles over mineral wealth, timber, and other commodities. This exacerbates, rather than limiting, both tensions between concerned parties, and pressure on specific resource bases.

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INTRODUCTION

National Independence Day in the Central African Republic (CAR) takes place on December 6. On that day, crowds gather for military-style parades down the central streets of previous colonial outposts that have become regional centers. Children don school uniforms, washed and pressed into crisp, clean lines of cotton cloth.. Women wear brightly colored fabrics with political slogans and portraits of leaders. Men dress in suits or uniforms that indicate their roles in military and civilian life, and walk apart from the women and children, with their colleagues from office, or division. Men, women, and children all walk in single file, past grandstands and sets of neatly stacked bleachers with waving crowds, to the staccato whistling and tapping of military style marching bands.

Most people, when they reach the end of the exercise designed to produce the straight lines of the formal "national holiday," peal out into the concentric circles of Central African celebrations. Men slide into the makeshift *buvettes* (or bars) where older women pour them cups of hard liquor from round glass jugs, or serve beer made from honey or millet in *calabashes* (hollow gourds). Children scatter into the circle dances whose drumbeats remind them of full moon nights, playing in their villages and urban neighborhoods. Elder participants seek the ubiquitous round rattan stools with three legs call *mbalambo* for a comfortable seat; younger women adjourn to the thatched-roof, circular *paillottes* that, even in highly developed urban centers, remain the preferred architecture for restaurants. Here people gather around covered dishes to eat deftly with their fingers of the national favorite foods: steaming round mounds of *manioc* (or cassava flour) with hot greens and meat or fish stews. Each time I see such celebrations I marvel at people's ability to combine idioms; to mix, without cognitive dissonance, elements from varied African and European traditions in their celebrations of national community.

But National Independence Day appeals not only to national unity, it also offers an opportunity for display and rivalry around different sources of cash and commodities within a given region or town. I spent twelve months doing fieldwork in the small town of Bayanga (pop. approximately 3,000; Loudiyi 1995), in southwestern Central African Republic (CAR).[1] I found it to be a remarkable example of such performances of patronage relations. If the area's past was shaped by the rivalries between German and French colonial forces, so too its present is rife with rivalry between these two factions. After decades of French-dominated trade in various forest products, a Yugoslavian parastatal company built a large logging company there in the 1970s. Today, French businessmen manage that logging infrastructure. Their rivals, however, are proponents of a new economy of forest use, centered on biodiversity science and ecotourism, and championed by German and U.S.-based NGOs.

[1] Principal fieldwork was conducted from March 1995 to March 1996. I also lived in Bayanga for 12 months in 1991, for two months in 1993, and for two months in 1997. A recent, brief field visit in 1999 has also contributed to this analysis.

The contrast between these two economic poles, logging versus conservation-based forest uses (such as research, tourism, and trade in non-timber forest products) are important for the purposes of this paper. By 1995 the administration of the Reserve had shifted from a partnership between World Wildlife Foundation (WWF-US) and the CAR government to one between a consortium of interests, spearheaded by a variety of German agencies, including the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), a German international development agency and WWF-Germany.[2] But the sawmill was no longer standing quiet, as it had been during the prospecting and delimitation phases of the protected area's formation in the late 80s and early 90s. Timber exploitation had begun again gradually, under the direction of a new set of logging interests. The company Sylvicole de Bayanga,[3] had awakened the sawmill from its slumber.

At the height of the National Independence Day festivities in Bayanga in 1995, when most of the town had marched in the long parade down the main road, but before too many had dispersed into the more specific celebrations, the Sous Prefet (at that time the most senior national official in local residence) delivered a speech. He stood amid a hushed and expectant crowd. His speech entreated the two local industries described above—loggers and conservationists, French and Germans, respectively—to manage their intense competition (described later in this paper) in the interest of Bayanga's, and CAR's long-term development as a nation:

> I exhort the valiant population of the sous-prefecture of Bayanga to double their vigilance, to jealously preserve the exceptional wealth of wildlife that spills from the dense forest of Bayanga, against the abusive infiltrations of poachers. Of the representatives of Political Parties, I ask a frank collaboration, to keep hatred at bay and to work, with rectitude, to advance the promotional programs of the President.
> Also, on the occasion of this national holiday, I offer up a call in the direction of those who direct the Societe Sylvicole of Bayanga, and the Dzanga Sangha Projects, all from a single mother, to adopt dialogue and consultation, for the peaceful development of the Sous-Prefecture of Bayanga.[4]

Whatever his wishes for national unity and regional development, the day was clearly festive due to the tensions that had been building for weeks in this two-company town. For over a month prior to the holiday, the personnel of the two agencies mentioned by the Sous-Prefet had been furiously accumulating t-shirts, neckties, bolts of cloth, and new shoes, to see who would put on the most impressive march in the Independence Day parade. The GTZ had financed the printing of festive white t-shirts adorned with a sketch of a mysterious creature, *Mokala Mbembe*, said to live in the swamps of northern Congo, from where several of Bayanga's longest term residents had migrated at the turn of the

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[2] Referred to as either WWF-US or WWF-Germany. Joint European/U.S. initiatives are referred to as WWF.

[3] Principal shareholder was Mitcorp Real Estate, of whose capital 50% was held by Lamballe Holding NV, a branch of Elysée Investissements (capital 95% controlled by Edouard Stern of Groupement STERN). From Sylvicole and WWF archives.

[4] 1995. From official speech for the National Independence Day, Bayanga, December 1 (FN).

century. In red lettering, the shirts proclaimed the name of that language group's neighborhood: Quartier Bindjo-Bomitaba. On the back, the shirt read "Projet pour la Protection de la Nature de Bayanga: GTZ." This clear appeal to indigeneity, to place-based efforts to protect patrimony, and to the mystical powers of an imagined, origin point for some people within the forest, was conceived to promote an ecotourism complex in that neighborhood of disgruntled local residents, many of whom opposed the conservation project. Nevertheless, the project's employees were decked out in these t-shirts, topped with faux bow ties and dinner jackets, for the parade.

The wives of logging company employees were preparing to march in new outfits emblazoned with the logo of the Mouvement pour la Liberation du Peuple Centrafricaine, a political party of CAR.[5] Their husbands, largely immigrants to the area from savanna regions farther north, would appear in the hardhats and work clothes that they wore to the sawmill each day. This appeal to the politics of modern nationhood, and industrial labor, was a marked contrast to their competitors' outfits. But where were the goods? The morning preceding the parade was one of expectant silence throughout town, as people scanned the skies for the logging company plane that was to come in from Douala, Cameroon, bearing new bolts of cloth for the wives to wear in the parade. The PDG (President Directeur Generale; a Frenchman heading the company) had personally made the trip to purchase items needed for adequate display of company solidarity and style on this occasion. When at last his plane touched down, at nearly 11 A.M., a cheer rose from the town itself—from the kitchens and palm wine stands where all had been awaiting the buzz of its motor.

The parade was delayed while the PDG distributed goods and participants adorned themselves. Then it unfolded, culminating in the ironies of the Sous Prefet's address to the costumed participants. At once celebration and calculated expression of what, concretely, the two different relationships of patronage looked and felt like, the holiday was most of all a ritual expression of what such relationships are made into within local systems of accumulation and redistribution. While many experts and committed conservationists were tearing their hair out trying to conceive of a single, rational, sustainable, forest use policy for this area, local residents were celebrating and encouraging the proliferation of rival actors with their irreconcilable visions of appropriate development and protection of this place. Such moments, this paper argues, illustrate the extent to which concessionary politics in this part of the world are created by both local populations, within regional histories of rivalry, and by a global elite, and the national government actors and agencies through whom they function in Africa.

The term "concession" refers to a spatial unit of exploitation and development, also to a social process of relinquishment, acquisition, and consolidation of control. A powerful complex of territorial and political practices, it often hinges upon understandings between actors who are socially and/or financially indebted to one another. The term reveals the cultural politics of resource use in several interconnected ways that are both place based

[5] MLPC candidates and constituents, unlike previous parties that have held power, are largely from the northern parts of CAR. This has caused deep tensions between more northern and southern factions, largely in the form of mutinies by southern-backed forces.

(without being fixed in space), and also constituted through social relationships (without being overly abstract and symbolic). It also reflects connections between historic relationships of resource use and more recently emerging ones.

I use the term "concessionary politics" to trace continuities and changes in actual resource use practices over time, and to assess the political possibilities and constraints of current practices. I do so in a region, the western Congo basin (more specifically, the Sangha River watershed), with one of the most brutal colonial histories of exploitation in the world (Hoschschild 1998). Though a place where, today, little monitoring and reporting about human interactions occur, it is one where the meanings of center and periphery, client and patron, constraint and opportunity, are being indelibly refashioned by concessionary encounters. And, in part because it has not been at the center of major civil conflict (though it is surrounded by such tragedy), it offers hope for the breaking of exploitative cycles, and the emergence of new management modes.

In the Congo basin, protected areas emerged from colonial concession practices for extraction of natural resource wealth, and from reactions to—or against—the perceived damage of such practices. The creators of colonial protected areas aimed to conserve rich, natural resource bases for future generations, but their actions and intents were also informed by more extractive and exclusionary purposes. The process for establishing protected areas, then as now, shared much with the establishment of commercial concessions. Like early concessionary outposts for trading human slaves, ivory, and varied forest products, and like later formal concessions for the extraction of timber or rubber, protected areas were (and, as we shall see, are still) forged through particular steps: prospecting, proposing, delimiting, and then "making"—in the sense of micropractices—concessions through negotiated enforcement of access and control at local levels.

Three characteristic aspects of concessionary politics today emerge from long histories of exploitation: local level negotiation, political and material mediation, and reconfigured access through rivalries. Together these aspects do not create a coherent system, but rather a powerful complex of expectations, exchanges, and even infrastructures. This complex emerges from encounters and ongoing relationships that link members of commercial and political elite at national and international levels, with local populations and their "patrons" at local and regional levels.[6] The terms "global" and "local" are woefully inadequate to describe this complex of self-perpetuating practices that have long existed across spatial and social levels. Limited too, are notions of "imposition" and "resistance." Concessionary politics are not imposed upon unwilling rural residents. On the contrary, they are widespread, in large part because many people accept or even agitate for such types of interaction, feeling familiar with them. They are confident about

[6] The term "patron" describes both dominance, and obligation, and relates to both economic and religious hierarchies, as Latin Americanist ethnography makes clear (Nash 1979). It is, as Raffles (2002) has illustrated, about a sense of intimacy, and at the heart of how social interactions and cultural expectations shape systems of resource use. In this case it connotes those who meet the primarily material demands of local populations, while participating at the same time in extra-local processes that alienate locals from control over their land, resources, and labor.

their abilities to negotiate control, manipulate a mediating patron, and align their own interests with those of their allies, diminishing the gains of their rivals.

Such rivalries, expressed at the various levels suggested above, characterize concession systems, and are anathema to effective implementation of "rational" resource-use policies based on healthy competition for access to resources, and economic or ecological evaluations of those competitive outcomes. Shrouded in the inscrutability of intimacies within local populations and their patronage demands, encouraged by the clientelist interests of certain industry and government actors, concession systems are thus forged on multiple levels. In practice, they are difficult to assess and nearly impossible to alter, but they don't defy description entirely. Contemporary concessions share certain features: they privilege growth of non-extractive activities such as conservation and tourism alongside or instead of extractive industry; they define new spatial units of management such as trans-border areas while maintaining mosaics of concessions accorded by national governments; and they foster new forms of power and authority that shape both local and international politics, such as the privatized state, the corporate community, and the civically responsive corporation.

Those prospecting for and proposing concession-based economic activities may be loggers, miners, and, increasingly, conservationists. Those granting concessionary rights to these outsiders are members of the embattled national governments of these African polities. They fiercely defend this gatekeeper role, while nevertheless giving away much of the responsibility for administration and development of infrastructure in hinterlands.[7] The region's residents and those expatriates or few national elite who live and work there providing services to residents and managing their labor *make* concessions during day-to-day negotiations and decisions about what will be done on the ground.

To do justice to such interactions and their implications for Africa's environmental and social future, much more must be understood about the private sector in Africa. The literature describing business dealings generally in Africa is remarkably scarce. My literature search at Yale University's libraries under keywords such as "corporate culture" turned up three hundred references. Of these, only four were relevant to Africa: two on South Africa, one on Tunisia, and one on Nigeria. The keywords "business anthropology" or "anthropology of business" revealed only 29 references, none of which were about Africa.[8] Martin (1997) reviews the paltry anthropological literature on joint ventures worldwide (mostly unpublished dissertations) and offers a convincing lament of the discursive separation between business studies and development studies whereby the latter has generated much work by anthropologists, while the former has been largely neglected.

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[7] Hibou notes in her work on the privatization of the state (1998) that this is tantamount to the Weberian "politique de décharge" or displaced/delegated political control. She cites Weber's *Histoire Economique: Esquisse d'une Histoire Universelle de l'Economie et de la Société* (Paris: Bibliotheque des Sciences Humaines, 1991) 79-92.

[8] Francois, Information Specialist with Overseas Private Investment Corporation, notes in her review of *Major Companies of Africa South of the Sahara 1996* (ed. By D. Franlin, London: Graham and Whiteside, 1996): "Since so much of the world's attention in investing overseas is focused on the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the African continent has often been neglected."

Studies and reports abound, however, pertaining to international policy for concession revenues, and their allocation for national and local development needs in equatorial Africa.[9] In addition, the move in Cameroon toward community based, forest management, in tandem with intensified competition by external actors for access to forest concessions, has begun to produce a significant social science literature that considers the political economy of such policies, and their consequences for villages, regions, and nation-states.[10] Little, however, has been documented at the level of the company town, or the rural village.

There is, thus, a clear role for ethnographic research, to complement such policy documents while filling the void in the anthropological literature. Such work could offer detailed empirical description and interpretation of company towns or villages where capital collides with complex communities under emerging concessionary frameworks for forest management. In the Congo basin, it is in such towns and villages that access to education, basic services and employment, has long been, and increasingly so, mediated by concessionaires. Such interactions, in turn, shape the wider policy climate in surprising ways, as this paper will show. Such research moves toward the development of solid theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the new concessionary regimes, their connections to colonial era concessions, and their implications for emerging management options within a context of increasing political and civil conflict.

Conservationist Choices about Concessions

Contemporary environmental conservation is in a tricky position with respect to the idea of a concessionary model for ecosystem management. Leaving aside the ecological and economic challenges, let us try instead to elucidate the cultural and historical ones.

International environmental conservation's constitutive tensions between its activist "grass" roots and its origins in imperial hunting, scientific naturalism and political paternalism makes its position highly ambiguous in relation to concessionary encounters (Agrawal 1997; Neumann 1998). In recent decades, approaches to conservation that seek to include local populations' rural development needs have given rise to new forms of environmental management, known as Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (or ICDPs). In the wake of such changes in conservation practice, and in light of a more mature corpus of academic work exploring the colonial origins of conservation, conservation science is seeing more analysis of the legacies of both coercive and inclusive conservation schemes in the past.[11] This introspection has varied effects on

[9] Recent documents recommending revised concessionary policies for the logging sector focus on international agreements, tax and revenue redistribution policies, longer duration for concessionary agreements, and reliable, neutral monitoring of extractive practices (Grut et al. 1991; Walker and Smith 1993; Karsenty 2000; Boscolo and Vincent 2000).

[10] See, for example, Karsenty, 1999, Auzel and Hardin, 2000, and Auzel et al. 2001.

[11] ICDP approaches were conceived in response to criticism of coercive conservation that forced people off of land. Many were carried out in the mid-1980s under the auspices of programs such as WWF-U.S. Wildlands and Human Needs Program, seeking "legal and policy instruments which support multiple use

conservation practice: some attempt more militarized enforcement mechanisms,[12] while others attempt to perfect local participation.[13]

Of the two U.S. based conservation agencies discussed below, the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (or WCS) has espoused the ICDP model less wholeheartedly than has the Washington, D.C. based World Wide Fund for Nature (or WWF-U.S.). WCS has relied less on rural development interventions, and more on conservation science (Hardin et al. 1998). That said both organizations, and their European counterparts active in the broader Sangha River region examined here, are turning increasingly to relationships with the private sector in their search for effective control over resource use (Smithsonian Institution 1999). To date, significant partnerships have resulted from efforts at ecotourism development and the search for private funds to support long-term conservation (Bookbinder et al. 1998). Of paramount importance to successful forest conservation in the field, however, are relationships with the tropical timber industry. Logging's road networks and infrastructure often facilitate access to forests for both research and tourism.

Remarkably rich in wildlife, timber, and mineral resources (Fimbel 1996), the Sangha River watershed, where these high profile forest conservation projects are based (see Figure 1), has historically experienced a wide array of resource-exploitation and management strategies (Eves et al.1998). Despite its limited infrastructure, the region faces intensification of logging, mining and hunting pressures (Telesis 1993; Telesis 1991; World Bank 1996). It thus makes an excellent site for analysis of the various forms concessionary politics can take.

In northern Congo Brazzaville, WCS is conducting buffer zone management experiments that redefine the integration of logging and conservation. At present, WCS works in the Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB) concession, contiguous with the WWF project in CAR, mentioned above. WCS personnel live and work with logging company employees in CIB housing, in an experimental program designed to control hunting within the logging concession.[14] Their efforts have been successful in several respects, such as the development of zoning precedents and the training of guards for enforcement of hunting codes. Most remarkable has been the extension of this concession-level experiment to national-level policies that require all logging concessions within Congo Brazzaville to develop hunting control plans and incorporate into operational costs the expenses of a

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of areas and particularly mechanisms which encourage allocation or sharing of benefits not to a central treasury but with local communities" (Putenney 1990). John Oates's book *Myth and Reality in the Rainforest: How Conservation Strategies are Failing in West Africa* (1999) critically engages such efforts, evaluating conservation strategies based on case studies from his long career in the field.

[12] Geisler (2001) goes so far as to argue that the category of "conservation refugee" is increasingly appropriate given the tendency toward militarized enforcement of borders and forced relocation. See also Peluso 1993.

[13] Rodary (1999) concludes that participation is a relational concept, processual in nature, usually achieved through technological means, and for purposes of social transformation. Participation is thus profoundly political, and yet dissociated from democratic governance (see also Ribot 1999).

[14] This project is funded in part by the Global Environment Facility (or GEF), a joint initiative of the World Bank and the United Nations, for large scale, long term projects.

guard force. Such measures have raised prices of wild game, hence increasing concession residents' sense of the resource's value and, the proponents of these practices argue, of their "ownership" of the resource.[15]

The CIB's Congo concession is unique in its size and in the power its holders can wield on a national and even broadly regional stage. The concession controls nearly 60 percent of that country's forest surface, or nearly one million hectares, of which 500,000 are currently dedicated to the relatively new hunting regulations, as they evolve. Rarely are such possibilities for effective management experiments so clearly bolstered by the unchallenged political and territorial authority of the concessionaire. This situation speaks to the unique history of Congo Brazzaville, where concessionary activities for extraction of timber, diamonds, or wildlife from upcountry sites during the colonial era were less extensive and less institutionally and politically elaborated than in neighboring Gabon,-or Central African Republic (CAR). Indeed, the recent development of Congo Brazzaville's significant, offshore oil reserves makes upland concessions only a secondary arena for intense geopolitical rivalries.[16]

Over the Congo/CAR border, back in Bayanga, we see an alternative to the WCS impulse toward integration with private companies. In the southwestern forests of CAR, collaboration with loggers of the kind described above has been elusive. In the early 1990s, The World Wide Fund for Nature (or WWF-US) created the Dzanga Sangha Dense Forest Reserve (RDS) as a co-managed protected area with the CAR government. But WWF-U.S. did not, as they had hoped, displace logging from the region.

In contrast to the tertiary nature of timber concession struggles within Congo Brazzaville's national economy, in CAR we see intense rivalries between conservationists and the logging companies who are also active in the Reserve, both struggling for ownership and the right to manage the logging infrastructure. As the CIB effort in Congo ties into broader WCS international strategies of integration with logging for monitoring purposes, so the RDS effort ties into broader WWF initiatives to supplant logging infrastructure in tropical forests, operating them on a sustainable basis.[18]

Whether characterized by integration with or displacement of existing logging resources and activities, conservationists' relationships with the timber industry reproduce the conventions of concessionary politics.

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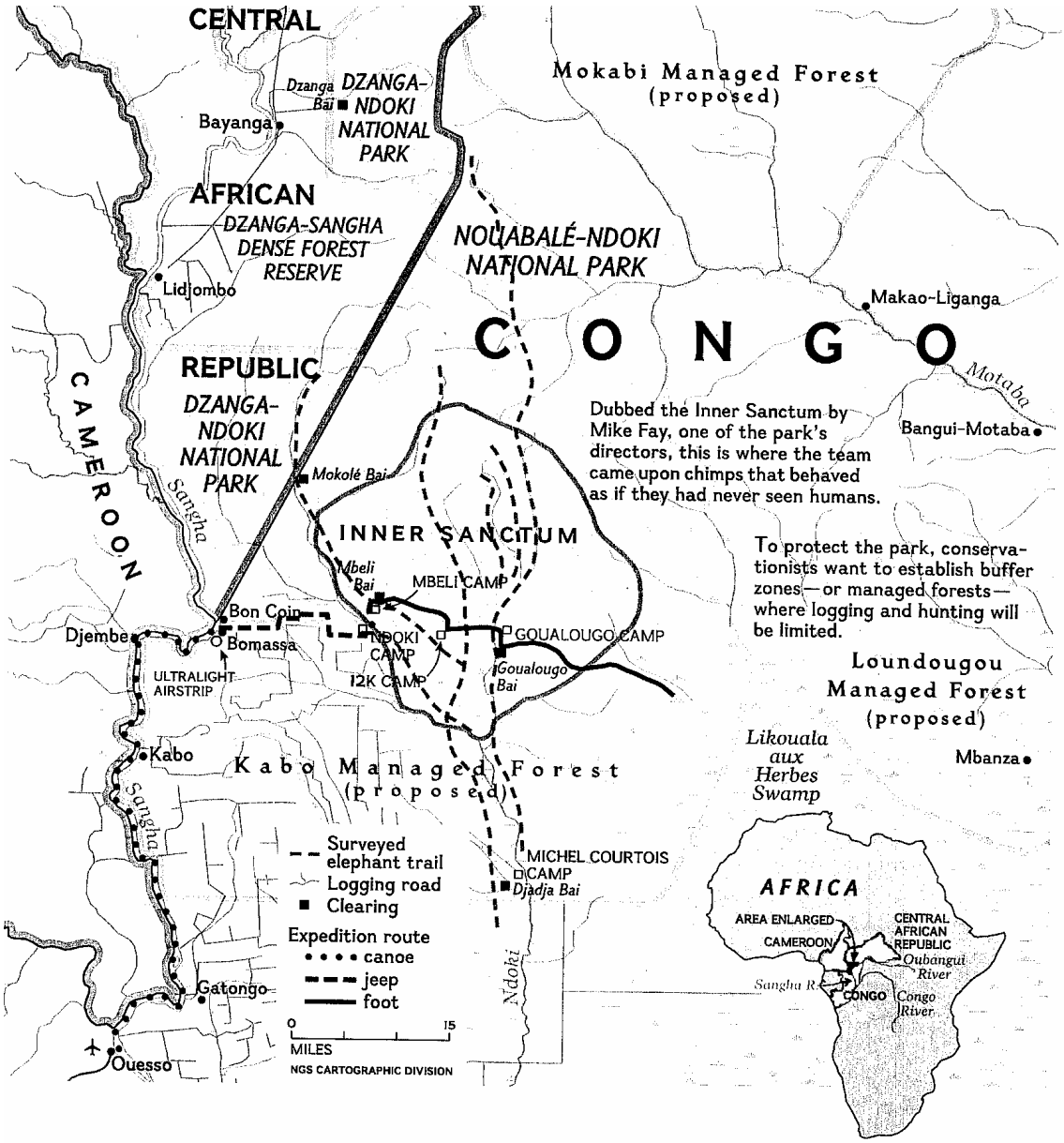
[15] Elkan, Paul, and Elkan, Sarah, (pers. comm. May 2001), at the Meetings of the "Bushmeat Crisis Task Force" in Washington, D.C. Of course, ownership of the resource is not the same as stable and clear ownership of property rights, increasingly acknowledged as a central issue in questions of capitalist development (De Soto 2000).

[16] For a discussion of the intertwined races for oil rights in Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea, see press reports by Corzine (1998a,b), and by French (1998). For a recent country-by-country overview of oil prospects, see Bamber 2001.

[18] I draw this insight in part from Hank Cauley's presentation at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies Conference: The Private Sector and Stewardship in Tropical Forests. The Yale Tropical Resources Institute (TRI) has been involved in provision of baseline data to WWF-U.S. regarding sustainability of various forestry practices. Discussions with Cauley, and with former TRI director Mark Ashton, have shaped my understanding of these experiments.

Figure 1: The Sangha River watershed, from *National Geographic*, July 1995:9



Though often perceived as crisis management with little room for deliberation, decisions to collaborate with large multinationals must be confronted in all their complexity, and with awareness of their trade-offs. Current conditions for conservation in the Congo basin include economic volatility, civil conflict, and increasing disease. Violence characterized extractive economies throughout the colonial era, and remains vivid in the memories of many Congo basin residents. This combination of past and present conditions can compromise people's ability to imagine or work toward alternative political possibilities for environmental management and social development (Mbembe

2000). A specialist working in northern Congo answered, when asked whether she encountered resistance to stringent hunting controls within the concession, "People are just so pleased that we are a stable, reasonable presence; they just don't want more violence" (Name withheld).

Her comment raises two seemingly contradictory issues. First, the actions of field personnel are commendable: they are weathering difficult local conditions and conducting—despite formidable constraints—reliable, innovative experiments in forest management. And yet, second, their commendable actions are clearly limited by the legacies of concessionary politics. Compliance with local desires for stability and relative prosperity—even at the price of more democratic process —is by no means a simple task. Negotiated management of forests in partnership with large companies poses a crucial question for the longer term: can historical legacies of violence and exploitation of impoverished Africans be dismantled as a precondition to sustainable human-environment relations in forest areas?

If work toward such a goal seems worthwhile, then conservationists must push beyond the precedents created by their colonial predecessors, and by their current colleagues and competitors in rural development and business sectors.[19] In short, they must consider the pitfalls of concessionary politics, as it may constrain future options for environmental politics. This consideration must come, unfortunately, even as conservationists explore the potential for concessionary politics to address, effectively and immediately, ecosystem management crises such as the unsustainable and skyrocketing exploitation of bushmeat, or wild animals for game meat.

CONCEPTUALIZING CONCESSIONARY POLITICS

The term "concession" refers in this paper to the territorial units allocated to actors for the extraction of wealth in the form of raw materials. More broadly, it refers to the social interaction through which a state can allocate territories or resources and social rights of exploitation for purposes such as tourism and leisure hunting. Used from the eighteenth century to consolidate central government control over internal and outlying geographical areas, the notion of the concession worked to reinforce the totalizing nature of sovereign power, and then to extend that power through various mediating actors and codes or norms, across varied geographical and social contexts. The construction of nearly totalizing power, as in a fiefdom, was crucial. Take, for example, the following text about the Palais de Luxembourg and surrounding lands (France 1779):

> Kings Patent Letters: conferring concession to Monsieur, as allegiance title, of all lands and sites belonging to the Palace of Luxembourg, reserved by edict of last December by the King to be enjoyed by Monsieur as a titled fiefdom, with all faculties to enjoy the totality of the fiefdom, through all alienations and accessions that he deems necessary for these lands and sites (rendered at

[19] Ferguson (1990) has described the pitfalls of the development project, perpetuating such legacies of violence and exclusion, in *The Anti-Politics Machine,* and explored notions of global citizenship for impoverished Africans (Ferguson 2000). See also Escobar (1995), and Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (forthcoming) for critical analysis of ideas about development.

> Versailles, March 25 1779; registered in Parliament April 23 1779; my translation).

Once established, this totalizing control relied upon forms of mediation by figures of particular authority at regional and local levels in the management of land and labor across a ruler's empire. That is, the concession both formalized power as territorially and materially totalizing, and enjoyable "with all faculties," and made it transposable within the limits of existing territorial control and sovereignty.

The decree cited below placed four barons in control of roadside plantings in the region of Flandres; through the conferral of royal power on a subset of actors at more local levels, the concession could either compel or constrain local practices:

> …who makes concession to the high magistrates of four barons, high lords of justice of Flandres Walonne, of the right to plant belonging to His majesty on all the grand planted roads…to enjoy them as an incommutable property and, in perpetuity, with the faculty to cede all or part of this right, either to the communities or to private actors… . (France 1777; my translation).

More or less absolute, this transposable power was forged not only through the actions of mediating elites, but also through legal and administrative norms that traveled from the inner cities of Europe to the vast expanses of North America, Africa, and elsewhere. The meaning of "concession," ever further from the verb that connected it to a given sovereign, morphed into a noun whose transferability and durability became of crucial importance to all sorts of economic actors. Even where the status of concession no longer forms the basis of such transposable power, the idea of the concession constitutes the historically acknowledged base of such continued power. This extensible meaning of concession works despite geographical distance from the original locus of power, as the below example from Canada suggests:

> Treaty of the Law of Fiefs: that was always followed in Canada since its establishment drawn from that contained in the custom of the prevoté and viscount of Paris, to whom all fiefs and lordships of this province are subject, by virtue of their original title of concession (Cugnet 1775; my translation).

Not only dictating access rights and practices in zones of established-sovereign control, the construct of the concession could confer even the right to explore unknown areas, establishing guidelines for future development. Consider the decree pertaining to rivers and waterways, promulgated by Santa Anna to give General Francisco Garay an exclusive twenty-five year "concession" to use steamboats on the Rio Grande/Bravo and to colonize lands along its tributaries (Mexico 1842). Nash (1979:31) describes the arrival of waves of laborers much later, to Bolivian tin mines; the government had allocated these people's labor (and, due to silicosis and other diseases, all too often their very lives) to companies by "concession." In sum, from the 18th through the 20th century, shifting notions of "concession" have made control over the development and use of new infrastructure, and the movements and productivity of particular work forces, remarkably complete in a variety of far-flung sites.

CONTEXTUALIZING CONCESSIONS IN THE FRENCH CONGO

The 1899 division of forests in the western Congo basin into French concessions for trade created symbolic and practical struggles for control over the resources (and human lives) that continue through independence to the present (see Figure 2). Much work remains to be done on the range of companies that used to be active, and the patterns in their different management strategies. The definitive work on concession companies in the Congo region emphasizes the larger companies, with the most detailed historical records (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1972; Boutellier 1903). It asserts their power as indirect rulers of resource rich rural areas within colonial territories, setting the stage for further analysis of the role certain economic actors play in shaping politics in Africa. Mamdani (1996) gives a more recent account of the shift from imperfect experiments with indirect rule to the emergence of effective, decentralized despotism. He attributes this shift to the combination of private concessionary companies, missionary institutions, and government agencies that became complete in the late colonial era, both in the Congo basin (initially) and in mining regions of southern Africa and elsewhere on the continent.[20]

Cantournet (1991), however, notes that overall, human and other resources for effective concession management were lacking during the colonial era, and that much of the effort put into establishing them was a result of systematic over-evaluation of the area's productive potential. His description of the details of the concession system in French Equatorial Africa nuances Mamdani's view of the concessionary system as a sort of "indirect rule" that was imported and perfected in Africa from the experiments in economic extraction and colonial administration in India:

> The status of the Congolese concessions was close to the ones of the East India Company, as they had a similar monopoly on exploitation of all natural products. But the fundamental difference was the total absence of the delegation of sovereignty. The local administration kept integral power, notably in terms of police, but in principle had to support as much as possible the commercial activities; that said there were to be no physical constraints for locals (Cantournet 1991:15; my translation).

The companies, in return, were to give the State 15 percent of their benefits, provide their own transportation, pay the cost of police forces requested in their zones, maintain plantations to compensate for tonnage exported, help with customs posts, and other minor requirements. (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1998; Cantournet 1991:13). But what were the relationships between such economic practices and the origin of environmental conservation in this part of Africa?

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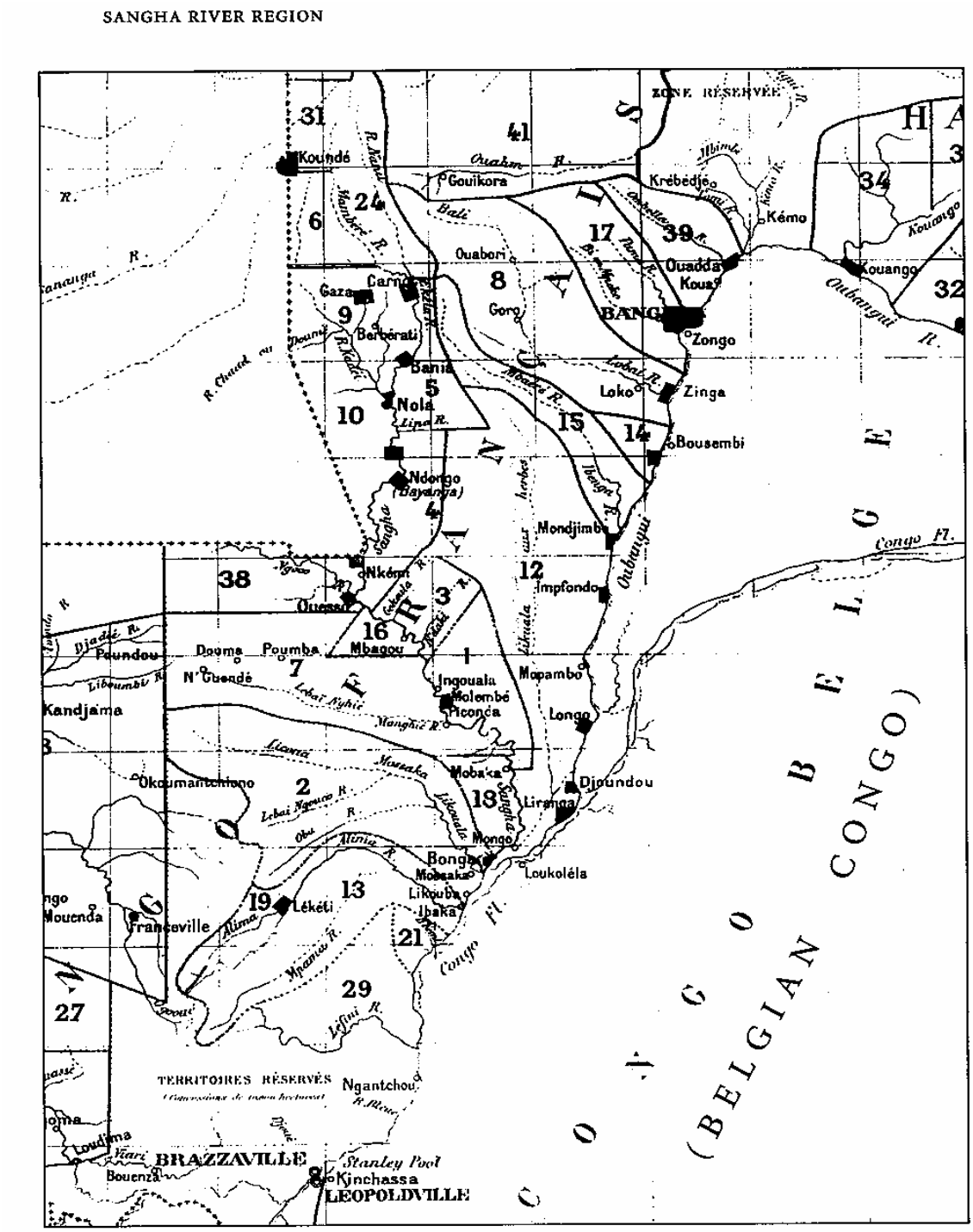
[20] This point is not merely academic, if one considers that community forests as a management tool were attempted initially in areas such as Nepal and India, before being introduced in Cameroon (Auzel and Hardin 2000). There the concept of community forests has provoked much legal and policy effort. Activists are concerned about its shortcomings in an African context where concessions increasingly appear to favor urban elites and their appropriation of forest resources, leaving rural populations constrained to collective management schemes which are complicated and lengthy to have approved. This dilemma is entirely compatible with Mamdani's distinction between "Citizens" and "Subjects" in the history of African political development.

Figure 2: Concessions in the Sangha River basin at the turn of the century, from Coquery-Vidrovitch 1998.



Map of the concessionary companies in the Middle Congo Region (from *The Colonial Dispatch*, 1899).

Conservation Concessions and Competitive Imperialism

Discussions about establishment of protected areas began in the late 1920s in French Equatorial Africa (or AEF, the French colonial acronym). A decree issued on August 25, 1929, forbade Africans to live in or even enter parks. Efforts began to identify areas where human settlement was scarce, what might be called *prospecting* for pristine places. M. Saint-Floris, a hunting inspector for the colonial administration, traveled in AEF for 20 months and submitted regular reports. He saw no need for protected areas in Gabon, due to the impenetrability of the forest and its few big animal species. In CAR and Tchad, however, game parks were recommended in conformity with the procedures stipulated by article 25 of the decrees established on September 25, and December 10, 1933. A special commission submitted a proposition to the Conseil de Gouvernement of AEF. On January 5, 1934, that proposal was accepted, and conservation concessions, as it were, became a reality (Antonneti 1934:2).

By 1935 the system was elaborated that included the existence of scientific, sport, and commercial permits to hunt (Marchessou 1935). By 1944 decrees had been passed, formally recognizing the protected areas and providing for surveillance of some of the most important (or centrally located) ones (Anonymous 1942). Despite the incredibly restrictive tone of the legislation, they were softened in the case of privileged European hunters and their Central African chums. Under lobbying pressure from the International Hunting Council, or "Conseil International de la Chasse," international arms control was liberalized. This facilitated the circulation of arms across international borders, lowering taxes and requiring a simple title by an appropriate authority (such as the Council itself) stating that the weapon was used only for hunting (Edmond Blanc 1937: 2). The strict spatial definitions of bounded territorial units for management were bolstered by strict legislation constraining use by all except certain elites. Thus, a precedent was set during this flurry that, in many ways, persists in today's frequent border-hopping practices by logging interests, safari hunting operators, and, increasingly, conservationists.

CONTEMPORARY CONSERVATION CONCESSIONS: THE CASE OF THE RESERVE DZANGA SANGHA

Nestled within the Dzanga Sangha Dense Forest Reserve, a "buffer zone" of 340,000 hectares, is the 120,000-hectare core area of the Dzanga Ndoki National Park (the ensemble of these distinct protected areas is referred to throughout this text under the umbrella title "Réserve Dzanga Sangha" or RDS). The small town of Bayanga, whose Independence Day festivities we contemplated above, is the area's largest settlement. The establishment (1988) and subsequent legislation (1991) of the Park and Reserve created one of the last protected areas established in the CAR, and one of only two sizeable forest reserves there.

The phases of its establishment are reminiscent of the era of colonial concessions, as described by Cantournet and others, cited above. First there was *prospecting,* including censuses of possible wildlife and plant resources (Carroll 1986, Fay 1998).[18] Next came

[18] This prospecting increasingly includes the detailing of subsistence and/or cultural activities that might make good tourism attractions (Carpaneto 1993).

the search for appropriate international investors, such that a partnership could be proposed, means secured, and a physical concession *delimited*.[19] Finally, the phase ends with the *making of concessions,* based on negotiations at various levels, about labor, and infrastructural or social investments.[20] The rivalries of concession-seeking actors can characterize all of these phases, as we can see by examining the roots of today's regional rivalry between French and German factions. What is important is not the nationalities of the actors (for indeed concessionary politics is often characterized by rivalries of one kind or another), but the underlying logics, attitudes, and interactions that shape such rivalries.

The first formal European exploration missions did not appear in the Sangha River basin until the late 1800s. From 1900-1903, a German-French mission in the Sangha region, for example, was one of the first efforts to fix firm coordinates for the frontiers between the two powers' colonial territories. Though the success of the mission depended upon the collaboration of the two teams, incidents of outright hostility often arose. In every delimitation expedition dossier I consulted, the same general climate of subtle but severe antagonism seems to reign as French and German teams made their separate ways through the forests of the Sangha region:

> …as a result of a tendency which I have remarked among certain members of the German brigades, I felt it necessary to recommend that my Brigade leaders… maintain a certain reserve to prevent overly cordial relations: for example avoiding the exchange with our colleagues of the word: amicable.[21]

After the First World War, France was forced to cede the entire Sangha basin region to German control (see Figure 3). Later un-done by the Versailles treaty, the transfer rankled a great deal at the time. French Administrator Periquet's letter, December 12, 1911, to the Governor General of Equatorial French Africa illustrates the extent to which relations with local populations had already assumed a crucial importance in this contest for territorial and political control:

> Along almost the entire border the neighboring villages were French. The relations I had with them were excellent, they assured me of their Francophile sentiments, but in the end they allowed themselves to be tempted by the insinuations of the German authorities, insinuations about which the indigenous chiefs had briefed me and which were the following: The Germans are richer

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[19] As with prospecting, delimitation is increasingly connected to tourism through what Donald Moore (1998:382) calls "post-colonial politics of conservation where the global discourse of eco-tourism figures prominently." Dieke (1993:44334), in his work on tourism in Zambia, cites Jenkins (1982:91)about the contemporary dynamics of such arrangements:

> Legislative provisions… are introduced to attract investment funds by offering concessions, usually of a fiscal or financial nature, to enhance the probability of earning a satisfactory rate of return on capital employed.

[20] This phase entailed a series of highly charged town meetings, the establishment of a reserve-wide association, and the distribution of money to the local population via funds from the MacArthur Foundation and from newly established ecotourism fees (see Hardin 2000, Ch. 4).

[21] From CAOM carton AEF 2d50, a confidential report from the confluence of the Ouham, March 18, 1913.

> and stronger than the French, who won't be able to protect you against us; if you don't come voluntarily we will bring you by force.
> The French collect taxes from you and we, on the contrary, we give you gifts.
> The French don't bring commerce to your homeland.[22]

Today a variety of local people live in the *quartiers* (or neighborhoods) of Bayanga, flanked by both a logging company and a nature tourism and reserve administration complex. Some Bayanga residents work part time, leading visitors around and explaining the forest and river environments to them, either as trackers (almost always a Pygmy resident) or as translators and guides (almost always a non-Pygmy resident) during trips into forest clearings.[23] Others continue to work in the logging sector.

The multiple use management strategy has thus facilitated intense competition for labor, as well as control over land, with tourism emerging as a core activity that parallels logging in the area, and entails a different set of potential patrons. In 1995, there were new directors involved in both the conservation project and the logging company; each busily advancing his respective vision of Bayanga's future. Each had considerable personal charisma, patronage skills at the local level, and clientelist lobbying and investment strategies at national and international levels. The contest was of interest to almost everyone in town, and was a topic of gossip almost incessantly (as may have been the actions of French and German forces in the colonial context described above). The director of the GTZ component, himself the owner and operator of logging and recycling operations in Germany's black forest zone, had many years of experience traveling, and working in the transport sector in Africa. A committed environmentalist, he had been selected (by backers in Germany, and in the U.S., according to rumors) and sent to Bayanga to take over and resume logging operations there on a more sustainable basis.[24] Sylvicole's "President Directeur General" (or PDG), on the other hand, was a dashing, unpredictable CEO with a background in finance within France and Switzerland. He had a pilot's license, and a taste for high living. His mantra was more about modernization, economic development, and successful exploitation of the southern forests.

These new players pitted material resources and personal charisma against one another in the continuation of an old match for control over the forests of Bayanga that has not yet been conclusively won. Both invested remarkable amounts of their time, money, and energy—indeed, themselves—in advancing their respective visions of Bayanga's development.[25] Each struggled for the complete "seigneurial" rights that the concession should confer upon him; bitterly resenting the other's presence, convinced that he had the Bayangans' best interests at heart.

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[22] From CAOM carton AEF 2 (D) 50.

[23] The term "Pygmy," which some may perceive as derogatory, is nevertheless widely used in the literature and distinguishes these groups of forest residents from neighboring populations called "Villager" or "Bantu." I here use the terms Pygmy and Villager due to the limited scope and length of this paper.

[24] Indeed, it appeared that particular funds were reserved at various levels for political lobbying against the loggers; no doubt such practices existed on both sides of the conflict.

[25] On an Air France Flight from Bangui to Paris. 29 February 1996 (FJ), the Director of the logging company states that: "I promise you, I would never do anything to hurt Bayanga. I love the place, and I realize how special it is; I belong there, in a way…"

Each also played slightly differently to the patronage expectations of various local residents, as one of my key informants, whom I'll call Mendong, made clear. Mendong was born in the village of Bayanga, and initiated into adulthood there. As a young adult, he worked for diamond miners, missionaries, and loggers. He described the Sylvicole PDG as:

> …a very good Patron. He gets that snuff that the older women like to sniff, and distributes it in our neighborhood. On holidays, he buys us cases of beer and slaughters a cow and we all eat meat. When his workers get sick with malaria, he uses the plane to fly them to hospitals for care.[26]

Mendong's views, while not completely characteristic of local sentiment, were shared by many of my neighbors and friends in Bayanga that year. Mendong explained to me earnestly that, had the conservation project been a better patron, they would not have problems such as lack of employee loyalty.

Why is the conservation project perceived as a poor "patron" relative to the logging company? The conservation project employs fewer people than the logging company, producing less in-migration to the area by new laborers, and less competition for local resources vis a vis long-term residents like Mendong. The project also pays more salary and benefits per employee, on average (Hardin and Remis 1997). Yet they are less generous with certain symbolically laden forms of gift giving. Their work to foster frugality in both the consumption of forest resources and the management of cash had not endeared them to the local population, who have traditions of wealth redistribution and charismatic, contingent political leadership (Vansina 1990). These traditions, with precolonial roots and deep colonial imprints, make patronage practices more popular among many residents than new models for what may loosely be called "participatory" rural development.

Concessions, Community, and the Geopolitics of Forest Use

Legal charges, political maneuvering, plying of local patronage relations --all were regular and fairly public occurrences throughout 1995 in Bayanga. The German and French Ambassadors, as well as CAR's Prime Minister, made remarkably frequent visits to the formerly sleepy village on the banks of the Sangha, in efforts at reconciliation between these "warring" factions.[27]

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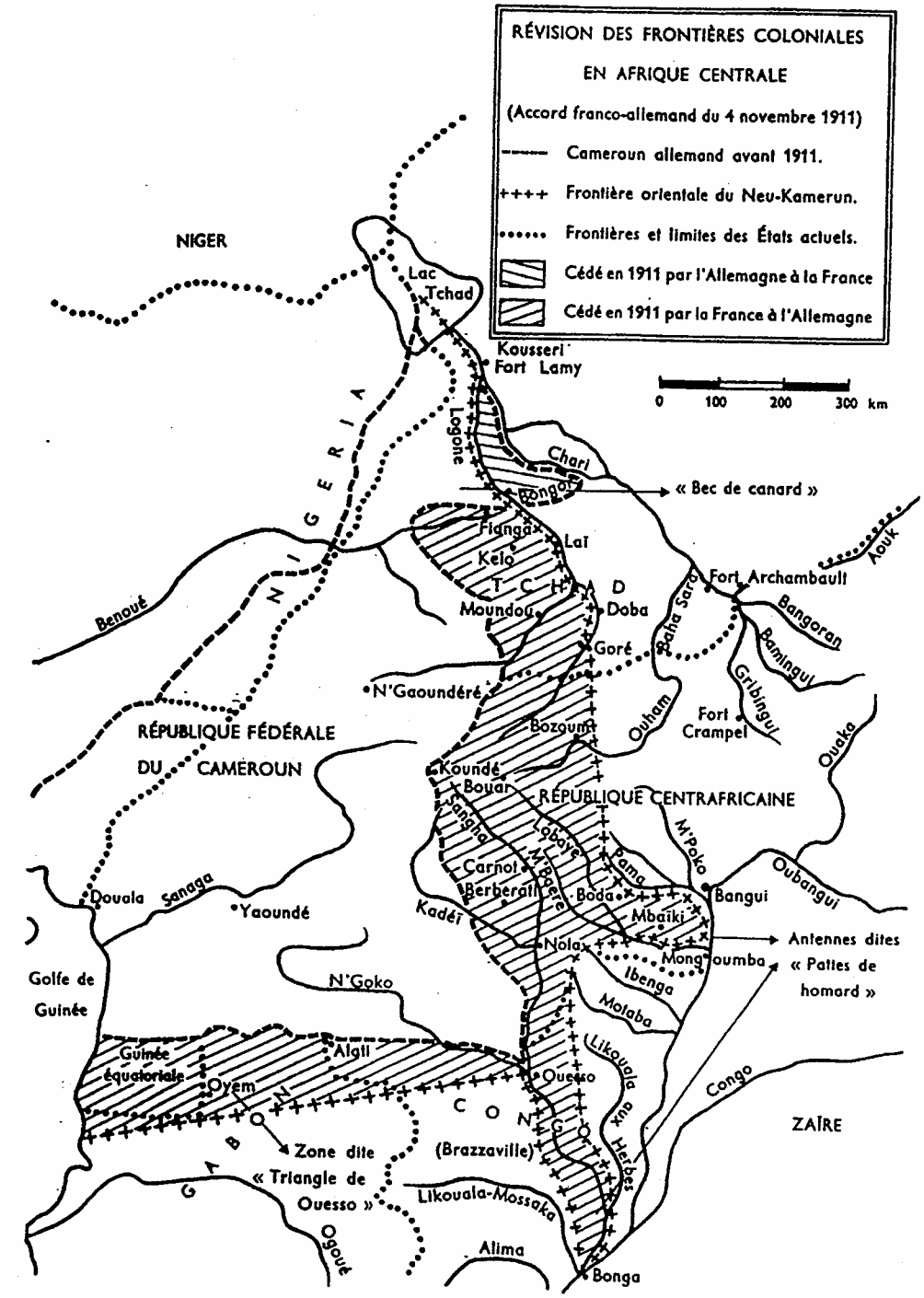
[26] Field notes, January 27, 1995, interview with AMT.

[27] 1995. Lidjombo. Former Santini plantation home. 14 August (FN): Director of the GTZ project states that "The main thing is to win the war. If they are still here in two or three years, then we'll be gone. If we are here, they will be gone."

Figure 3: Sangha basin territory ceded by France to German, then back again, around the turn of the century.



"L'A.E.F. sacrifiée pour le Maroc", Kalck,
Histoire Centrafricaine, p. 288

The National Press even carried running accounts of the conflict. According to an editorial in the weekly *Etendard de la Patrie,* a national newspaper printed in Bangui:

> It appears that the "Sylvicole" logging company of Bayanga is the principal adversary of the German project "GTZ" (and might have been implicated in the sabotage of a plane full of German tourists)...Bayanga is not the property of the sinister "Sylvicole" company. Bayanga must be open to all projects, whether German or otherwise (August 15, 1995:4).

What the editorial does not explicitly consider, however, are the stakes involved in the air crash, that killed 11 individuals—not only tourists, but also key Belgian investors in a scheme to link tourism through regular flights between two crucial conservation areas of northern and southern CAR (including Bayanga). Both regions are rich in alluvial diamonds, and so while the discourse of competition for key tourism concessions is most public, it belies other, more deadly dynamics regarding competition for diamonds, in areas contiguous throughout the country with existing and proposed protected areas.

The conflicting visions of appropriate forest use of rival German and French aid and commercial institutions, covers their common struggle for control of forest access. Their respective prescriptions for forest use eventually led to the creation of a new Ministry of Environment and Tourism, who supervised ecotourism efforts with the technical advice of German specialists. The old Ministry of Environment (now the Ministry of Waters, Forests, Fishing and Hunting) continued to award logging concessions, and was advised on technical matters by French experts. The conflict was thus scaled upward from the village level, with its respective expatriate camps and projects, to the national level, with its respective Ministries and advisors. Flows of expertise and aid connected this situation of schism to international arenas. The resources and formulas for forest use were multiple, and both sides remained frustrated in their efforts, locked in a vicious contest for influence.

The excerpts below are taken from entries written on March 10, 1995 in the Bayanga Welcome Center visitors' book, during a day when a mixed delegation from the newly split ministries and the diplomatic community descended on Bayanga in an effort at forging some form of truce, or at least mutual understanding of the conflict:

> We hope that this effort will develop further, in concert with and in harmony with other entities intervening in the region of Bayanga, for a sustainable development.
> --Minister of Waters, Forests, Hunting, Fishing, Tourism and the Environment
>
> In hopes that the tensions and misunderstanding have been lifted by today's meeting, I hope passionately that the development of Bayanga can have a fresh start, characterized by the clear collaboration of all those intervening.
> --Ambassador of Germany
>
> It was the establishment of the second government changeover on April 17, 1995, that marked the birth of a ministry of the Environment and Tourism that has as its

> ambition, among other things, to make of the tourism sector a veritable productive part of the principle of sustainable development…
> --Minister of the Environment and of Tourism

Both national officials and international diplomats write with mollifying tones that contrast markedly with the more volatile passions beneath the surface. Still, it is difficult to interpret such jingoistic contests as serious reflections of national interest. The French logging company, Sylvicole de Bayanga, seemed to be selling a significant portion of its precious hardwood to German clients. Of course, Germany was torn between Green political movements and industrial elites, and German logging interests in this African region were under immense pressure from the press in Germany to improve their operations' ecological sustainability. In France, the more Gaullist factions were filled with hope for what Jacques Chirac might bring to foreign relations. Yet many in the French political and economic elite were acutely aware of various forms of globalization, Europeanization, and challenges to France's slowly privatizing economy.

These tensions were clearly reflected in interactions between those at various levels of the logging company's hierarchical chain of command. Despite the logging company director's reputation as a supporter of Lionel Jospin,[28] the most prominent leftist politician in France, many of his personnel had distinct political leanings to the right, and often there were either heated discussions or stony silences around the logging company's common table at the end of long work days. One night, during cocktails at the logging compound, a buyer from France spoke at length about the situation:

> The Americans and the French are at war over Africa, and it is a shame. Let's be clear. We have long been allies…and now the Americans bring the Germans into this affair…it will explode—this climbs up to high levels, you know… Americans have never understood a thing about Africa. We know Africa; let us handle it. If you oppose us here, you will lose. At the moment we have a strong president…Balladur wasn't much of a Guallist…then again he doesn't have much in his pants.[29]

The buyer's comments could hardly be more divergent with the political views of the company's Director. Similarly, safari hunters from Texas come to Bayanga, holding political and environmental views distinct from those of most of the American scientists managing local conservation projects. Within each camp—conservation and logging—are fault lines that betray the confrontation of conflicting, deeply rooted beliefs about right and wrong. As such, the cycles of rivalry seldom occur along national lines such as "French" and "German." Players vary from site to site, and those such as the European Union or Malaysian multinationals have made the stage far more complex.

But the underlying mechanisms of divisive tactics at multiple levels, thwarting more representative and rational policy-making, remain the same. Such rivalry--though it

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[28] As one informant noted, "their director gave more than a million francs to Lionel Jospin's electoral campaign, since their competitors up the road had already done all they could for Chirac." 14 August. Bayanga. (FN).

[29] 1995. Bayanga. July (FN).

belies divisions between constituencies in any given faction, impedes clear policy outcomes, and appears anachronistic or even wasteful--benefits Africans in complex relations of alliance and competition with one another. Let us return to the tensions, as they come to a head, at the celebration of CAR's national independence day.[30]

Concessionary Politics and African Strategies

The reluctance of expatriate directors and government representatives to participate in collective rivalry of material display on Independence Day was utterly washed away in the mass enthusiasm preceding and during the event. Bayangans, after all, benefit in many ways from the "two company town" that concessionary politics makes possible. In this sense they are like the national government representatives who, when faced with a choice between alternative and more conventional extractive economies, respond with a strategy of "non-decision," creating ministries for both and increasing the flows of personnel and revenues in all directions,

Multiple sources of authority exist for submission or imposition of claims to forest and human resources. Among these warring interests, a cyclical competitive territoriality continually reproduces itself. One side advances a claim. The other counters the claim. Then both jockey to win political and cultural favor locally, regionally, nationally, and even internationally. During all of this, each produces, in compliance with expressed expectations of patronage, the promise of profit for separate, shifting sectors of central African society. There is almost never, in this Central African case, a definitive political or juridical outcome. The negotiation, remarkably lucrative for some CAR residents but exclusive of others, continues. Fortunately for the CAR to date, such tensions over profit and patronage have not led to the forms of outright violence that can constitute concessionary politics as it slides on a spectrum toward warlordism and outright civil conflict. But the perils concessionary politics poses to the nation-state as a shelter for diverse commercial endeavors and communities must be taken seriously.

Conclusion

While not as chaotic and cruel as the cartels and militias that exploit diamonds in much of west and central Africa, concessionary politics seems to be a close cousin to such systems.[31] Reno (1998) argues that the existence within a central state of patronage networks, however weak and partial, distinguishes warlordism from other forms of governance. Concessionary politics, then, are a crucial point on the continuum from warlords ruling in a state that has been dismantled, to centralized states exercising effective control over resource use and revenue use across their territorial purview.

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[30] Apter (1999:582) notes a tendency toward spectacle and conversion as major fields of ethnographic production about colonization in Africa. Sally Falk Moore (1987:730), argues that certain events make better raw data than others, as "diagnostic events":

> …events that are in no sense staged for the sake of the anthropologist... are to be preferred, together with local commentaries on them. ...and second, the kind of event that should be privileged is one that reveals ongoing contests and conflicts…and the efforts to prevent, suppress, or repress these.

[31] For an account of such violence in the context of Sierra Leone, see Paul Richards's *Fighting for the Rainforest* (1996), and the recent Human Rights Watch Report (2001b).

Several factors may all combine to determine where on this continuum a state may be located at any moment. These include: the nature and wealth of the resource base,[32] privatization and/or decentralization,[33] and political and cultural legacies of the *longue durée*.

The phrase "concessionary politics," as elaborated here, refers to historical realities, spatial demarcations, and a set of social relations involving patronage, property, and power that are constantly being re-invented through intimate arrangements at various levels. The world is witnessing a turning point in the history of territorialized polities, when large-scale planning processes are largely carried out by extra-state regimes, through specific, place-based negotiations (Agnew and Corbridge 1995). Concessionary politics merit close examination as they reconfigure the role of the nation state in the management of species rich or resource rich areas. Intimacy between patrons and residents of a concession both displaces the roles played by state actors and agencies in local and regional politics, and reinforces the relevance of the national government in granting concessions.

That is to say, while national governments retain the power to frame or define the parties involved in these provincial politics of patronage, they are not in complete control of outcomes. They don't have much influence over what services will be provided, to whom, and under what circumstances. They cannot predict what the limits of a given "Patron's" power will be. Analysts of civil conflict and resource use relations in Africa would do well to heed this contribution of a concessionary politics framework: evidence of how international relations can be generated, reflected, and refashioned in the microcosm that is the rural town, with its particular history and shifting social contracts.

Yet, labor comes from beyond such concessions; runoffs and contaminants circulate far beyond the limits of such concessions; and marginalized communities within such concessions may not benefit, in terms of their own development, from the sorts of "understandings" between elites that characterize these regimes.[34] Conservationists should be wary of these precedents, and aware of their own tendencies to be invited by expatriate competitors, national officials, or forest residents, into the reproduction of concessionary politics. The gains for the conservation of key animal species and rural livelihoods may be associated with certain social costs for sustainability in the long run. Conservationists' work with logging companies, for instance, may affirm forest residents'

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[32] In the Sangha basin, shifts in market values of particular commodities, and in regional boundaries over time, make the idea of a resource rich state less compelling than that of resource rich regions within (and between) states. As such, I do not consider in detail here the research on what has been called the "resource curse." See, for example, Luong and Weinthal's recent review of this literature with respect to Russia and Khazakstan, in *Comparative Political Studies* 34 (4): 367-399.

[33] Bayart, Hibou and Ellis (1998) describe the privatization of the state itself in African contexts. For more comparative consideration of decentralization with respect to environmental management, see Agrawal and Ribot (1999).

[34] Loftus and McDonald (2001), in fact, describe the process by which a particular company obtains a concession for water in Buenos Aires, promising reduced rates and expanded service. When neither comes to pass, the government defends the concessionaire against regulators and consumers, in a classic case of concession making that is anathema to efficient, effective, market-driven development of a particular area or commodity.

sense of conservationists as, first and foremost, part of a foreign complex of knowledge, power, and capital that transforms the value of their land and labor.

This contrasts with views of conservationists as allies in a struggle for effective "ownership" that might correspond to a formal property title, or at least to some real responsibility, in the shape of veto power or voting rights, in management planning for the area. Unless conservationists embrace such strategies on a provisional basis, they risk reproducing aspects of an unjust and exploitative past, carrying it forward into the future of Africa's biologically and culturally rich forests that remain, educationally and economically, desperately impoverished.

The workings of concessionary politics merit further comparative analysis: comparisons across regions of Africa, continents, commodities extracted, and multinational corporations involved. The CIB case relates to broader strategies implemented in places such as Indonesia, where the decentralization of key mining and logging activities, similarly intertwined with biodiversity conservation (McCarthy 2000), has bolstered the efforts of some ethnically-based regional elites to exercise greater control over revenues in their areas. This has also enabled some to advance the goal of increased social homogeneity within these areas. In such a case, the nation-state no longer contains and mediates social diversity and political pluralisms.[35] Architects of experiments with concessionary politics caution that the strategies are currently limited by the need to focus on smooth relations with multinational logging companies. They note that such strategies will need to elaborate links with government agents for capacity building and long-term governance, as well as with corporate actors in sectors other than logging.[36]

Even broad scholarship about business ethics and management strategies pays scant attention to the encounter between those at the summit of capitalist institutions and those "Others" they encounter in the course of their "campaigns" to merge, acquire, and achieve profit for shareholders. Little has been written about the interactions of an ethics of commerce with other ethical contexts/concerns (Werhane 1985). Questions remain as to whether the culture of rivalry in the business world of hostile takeovers and all out raids, influences its imperviousness to policy minded reforms, and fosters conflict—particularly in tropical contexts.

A methodological and research difficulty for answering such questions is immediately apparent in the ways that concessionary actors operate to constrain information flow in the interest of protecting their interests, and shoring up their competitive advantages.[37] What are considerations that might inform such research? In what ways do they help us

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[35] Thanks to Tania Li for her thoughts on nationalism, diversity, and decentralization in the Indonesian context. Nicolas Buyse has also contributed to my understanding of Indonesia through his DESS thesis at Paris, Sorbonne. See Barr 2001; Casson 2001; McCarthy 2001; for a brief overview, see also the summary of Indonesian decentralization in the journal *Down to Earth* (2000).

[36] Both Elkan and Bennett discussed these factors at a Bushmeat Crisis Task Force planning meeting in Washington D.C., May 2001. I also thank Mark Leighton for his insights.

[37] Kresl (1976) also gives a thoughtful account of the limitations of concession-based economies for free information flow and fully accurate assessment mechanisms.

ascertain whether the changing technologies of protection and exploitation of natural resources are converging to create new systems for the use and governance of forests?

Figure 4: Elf/Total graphic of feudal knighthood, from Gallois, D. 1999. Les Destins Croisés d'Elf et de Total. Le Monde. October 29:14

The following questions are crucial for analysis of concessionary regimes, linking it to wider work on environment, history, politics, and social change:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses in the historical record about colonial concessionary regimes in Africa?
- What genealogies of relationships among elite families are available for sectors such as logging and mining? What do they tell us about where power resides in current structures and processes?
- What should our field methods be for better description and analysis of the consequences of concessions' suppression of information?
- What social movements are responding to concessionary politics? Examples are the resuscitation of traditional leadership roles and rituals and emerging federations of local land or mineral rights owners, making the identities of indigenous peoples increasingly internationalized.
- What are the characteristics of some corporate cultures that make them resistant to progressive policy reform?
- How can we encourage transformations in corporate structures to increase their provision of basic services in concessions? Such services need to deal with health, education, and environmental issues (for instance, the creation of corporate social investments throughout much of Africa in response to HIV-AIDS).
- What changes in national political processes and power structures are accommodating the creation and maintenance of concessions under emerging regimes? What are their implications for political process?

Colitt (1998) characterizes the inspection of oil drilling in developing countries as ultimately reliant on the companies' goodwill, and "on the vigilance of the natives." Much of the hope for sustainability and transparency lies in this inscrutable intimacy of the patron/population relationship. This relationship, in turn, depends for its texture on a wide range of political, economic, ecological, and interpersonal factors. Today, as in the time of the trading companies described in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the collision of high capitalism and dynamic, regional leadership traditions can produce perverse effects. Imagine a town where televisions are available in company housing and centrally controlled, such that the supervisor at a sawmill can, by switching satellite dish reception, control the viewing of hundreds of employees.[38] Concessionary politics of this kind both facilitates and constrains certain technologies, and flows of information or resources. Certainly, it contains the challenges to its own structures and practices, challenges that might otherwise mature from within the communities that, together, create concessionary politics.

To understand and effectively engage such politics, we must attend to history beyond the archives of colonial companies. As Watts (1989:25) reminds us, "capital may not exercise untrammeled power in Africa" and, "precapitalist structures may be durable." The reconfigurations of capital and community in the Congo basin merit close examination as they interact with that region's history and social structures, mimicking management systems from the colonial era and making way for new management modes.

[38] Personal observation, during field visit to northern Congo Brazzaville, July 1995.

Concessionary politics is a deeply rooted, but deeply flexible system, and thus contains seeds of both hope and caution regarding the future of "business as usual" in Africa's enclave economies (as elsewhere). It perpetuates itself remarkably successfully based on its combination of patronage, polarized identity politics, and intimate, incremental, but irrevocable processes of negotiated alienation for certain groups. Its reliance on intensely local negotiations, within increasingly global management frameworks, undermines policy initiatives for enforceable environmental protection or political reform at national or regional levels. It discourages local efforts at truly representative political process, while encouraging social conflict and over-exploitation of the resource base. It need not be imposed, for it seems spontaneously to emerge--even as new actors such as non-governmental organizations appear who are, initially, opposed to such apparently anachronistic precedents. Soon they are seduced by the collectively created and historically rooted power of concessionary politics. They bolster its power to become contemporary. In so doing, they eclipse whatever truly new experiments with environmental governance might have otherwise emerged.

NOTE

My system of annotation includes four fundamental types of references: Archival, Bibliographic, Field Notes (FN)/Field Journals (FJ), and Taped Interviews. The majority of archival sources are from the Centre d'Archives d'Outre Mer in Aix en Provence, France, and are thus cited as CAOM, followed by a more specific reference in footnotes.

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http://www.panda.org/

Personal Communications Cited

Ashton, Mark. Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. 205 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511. Mark.Ashton@yale.edu

Baldo, Suliman. Human Rights Watch, New York. Baldos@hrw.org Tel: 212 290 4700

Elkan, Paul and Sarah. WCS Noubalé Ndoki Project, Congo Brazzaville.

Eves, Heather E. Bushmeat Crisis Task Force. American Zoological Association. info@bushmeat.org

Landrot, Jean Jacques. Interafrican Forest Industries Association. 6, Avenue de St. Mandé, 75012 Paris.

Mbembe, Achille. WISER Institute, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg South Africa. achille@iafrica.com

Suggested Further Contacts

Chaka, Malik. Subcommittee on foreign affairs—Africa Tel: 202 225 5138

Pilch, Jeff. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney's office; Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights. Alex.pilch@mail-house.gov

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Hardin has worked since 1988 in and on the equatorial forests of Central Africa, first as a Peace Corps Volunteer and later as an anthropologist. Her research focuses on social relations of forest use in the Sangha River region. Her PhD dissertation in anthropology is entitled, "Translating the Forest: Tourism, Trophy Hunting, and the Transformation of Forest Use in the Central African Republic," Yale University. She is currently an assistant professor of Anthropology and Environmental Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. She is also a fellow at the African Studies Council of Yale University, where she directs the Sangha River Network (www.yale.edu/sangha), and an Academy Fellow at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, where she chairs an international research working group on emergent viral disease and tropical forest management.

She can be reached at: Rebecca.hardin@mcgill.ca

Environmental Governance in Africa Working Paper Series

The *Environmental Governance in Africa* Working Paper Series presents position papers, works in progress, and literature reviews on emerging environmental governance issues of relevance to Sub-Saharan Africa. The series is designed to circulate ongoing policy research and analysis that derives from and complements the Environmental Accountability in Africa (EAA) initiative of WRI's Institutions and Governance Program (IGP). Our target audience is the small group of researchers and activists directly involved with EAA. The authors and editors welcome questions and comments from readers. The series aims to stimulate discussion and dialogue on worldwide issues at the intersection of environment, democracy and governance, while providing constructive feedback to IGP and the authors. For more information about IGP and EAA please visit http://www.wri.org/governance.

EAA seeks to foster development of the essential legal and institutional infrastructure for effective, replicable and sustainable environmental governance. This overarching goal is supported by three specific objectives:

- To influence the character of ongoing World Bank, U.N. and other donor-driven African government decentralization efforts to ensure that rights, responsibilities, capacities, and accountabilities are consistent with sound environmental management;

- To promote national-level administrative, legislative, and judicial reforms necessary to accomplish environmentally sound decentralizations and to enable public interest groups to hold governments and private actors accountable for their environmental management performance; and

- To develop regional networks of independent policy research and advocacy groups that are effective in promoting and utilizing the above reforms in the interests of improved environmental management.

EAA achieves these objectives through three inter-related efforts: 1) Decentralization, Accountability, and the Environment, 2) Environmental Procedural Rights, and 3) Non-Governmental Organization Capacity-Building.

The Decentralization, Accountability and the Environment effort aims to identify and promote policies and laws essential for effective, efficient, and equitable decentralization, including those establishing accountable representative authorities for local communities in participatory natural resource management; laws specifying the distribution of decision-making powers over nature among state authorities, civil, and private bodies; laws assuring just recourse; and laws ensuring an enabling environment for civil action. Through informed analysis, the effort aims to influence national-level policy-makers to develop environmentally sound decentralization policies and an enabling environment for civic action concerning environmental policy and its implementation. It reaches this audience directly and through the international financial and donor organizations, environmental policy research institutions, and international and local non-governmental

organizations involved in environmental policy matters. This effort supports research on existing decentralization policies and on the enabling environment for civic action. To further these goals it conducts research jointly with independent policy-focused institutions, the preliminary results of which are presented in this series.

The Environmental Procedural Rights component of the EAA initiative is designed to establish and strengthen an enabling environment for citizens and advocacy organizations both to enforce their constitutional rights to a clean environment and to meet their constitutional responsibilities to ensure sound environmental management. This environment includes fundamental civil liberties, such as freedom of association and expression, and basic rights, including access to information, justice, and decision-making in environmental matters. This component works at three levels. At the national level in pilot countries, the initiative supports the work of local policy groups to improve the law and practice of environmental procedural rights. At the regional level, the initiative supports networks of local organizations to promote legally-binding regional environmental governance instruments, similar to the European Aarhus Convention, that provide for procedural rights irrespective of citizenship and place of residence. At the global level, this component supports African involvement in a coalition of organizations to collaborate on the establishment of international environmental governance norms and on ensuring compliance by governments and private corporations.

The Non-Governmental Organization Capacity-Building component of the EAA initiative aims to strengthen a select group of independent policy research and environmental advocacy groups and their networks. This group includes, for example, the Lawyers' Environmental Action Team (LEAT) in Tanzania, Green Watch and Advocates for Development and Environment (ACODE) in Uganda, and the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) in Kenya. These environmental advocacy organizations seek to improve environmental management and justice by contributing to policy and legislative reform, and ensuring compliance to environmental laws and norms. The groups use a range of approaches and tools to influence policy formation, including policy research and outreach, workshops and conferences, public debates, press releases, and litigation. This EAA project component supports efforts in organizational development, capacity building in advocacy approaches and skills, and technical competence in specific environmental matters. Federations and networks of such NGOs, joint initiatives, and South-South collaborative efforts are also facilitated and supported.

The *Environmental Governance in Africa* Working Paper Series aims to further these objectives. All papers in this series are reviewed by at least two outside reviewers. It is the aim of the editors that select working papers be published in more broadly circulating fora, including academic journals, or as WRI reports. The feedback gained from discussion of these working papers should form the basis for the authors to rewrite their papers for publication.

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For copies, please contact:
Catherine Benson
World Resources Institute
10 G Street NE
Washington, DC 20007
+1 (202) 729-7754
cbenson@wri.org
http://wri.org