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NEW FORMS OF LAND ENCLOSURES: MULTINATIONALS AND STATE PRODUCTION OF TERRITORY IN CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT. The 2008 financial crises led to a scramble for land and other natural resources reminiscent of colonialism by foreign governments and multinational corporations to feed their populations and pre-empt the eventuality of another food crises through large-scale agricultural investment. This paper discusses the creation of capitalist frontiers in the colonial agricultural enclaves of Cameroon’s Littoral region where three multinational plantation companies hold sway. It demonstrates how the coming into the country of foreign investors has transformed the meaning of land and led to contesting legal orders between customary and statutory land tenure, the transformation of man-nature relationship and the dispossession of local communities due to the developmentalist state’s production of territory. In the present neoliberal context, the state is increasingly controlling people and their relations to natural resources including land through the production of territory that is subsequently handed over to foreign investors. The paper adopts the view that the use of the expression ‘new enclosures’ is a misnomer because these developments are taking place at the very sites of the colonial frontier in Cameroon’s Littoral region. It calls attention to the need for land governance reforms so as to restitute local land rights and for the need to respect internationally recognized environmental standards by multinational corporations.

Keywords: frontier, agricultural development, production of territory, communal land rights, land governance, developmentalism

Introduction

Despite the global outreach of the land grab phenomenon (South America, Central America, Southeast Asia and the former USSR), it is most accentuated in Africa and depicts ‘a clear North-South dynamic [echoing] the land grabs that underwrote both colonialism and imperialism’ (Borras et al. 2011: 209). Reminiscent of the colonial era, today’s ‘new enclosures’ involves the taking
away of native land without consultation and for the production of crops for foreign markets—what Zoomers (2010) aptly describes as ‘the foreignisation of land’. It is also accompanied by the reordering of nature and human-nature relationship and natural resource conflicts between multinationals and small-holder farmers. The 2008 global financial meltdown led to the quadruple convergence of finance, food, energy, and the environment. A spate of media reports intimate that powerful (trans) national investors and national governments as well as corporations and private equity funds have turned their attention to the Global South for the acquisition of millions of hectares of arable land for alternative sources of energy production principally biofuels, food crops, mineral deposits and reservoirs of environmental services as a preemptive security measure against future recessions. In Cameroon, the global spike in food prices alongside pent up political disenchantment with the sit-tight Yaounde regime as well planned constitutional change to eliminate presidential term limits led to food riots in February 2008.

This paper uses the protracted conflict over land between smallholder farmers and multinationals in Cameroon’s Littoral region of Njombé-Penja due to the competing legal orders between customary and statutory land tenure as an ethnographic case study to argue that the use of the expression ‘new enclosures’ (Peluso and Lund, 2011; White et al., 2012) is a misnomer. In other words, while colonialism in its various guises has been an omnipresent reality, the land grab phenomenon in the country is actually happening in the very regions that served as colonial agricultural enclaves. This calls for the need to explore the past and historical memory so as to grasp the present, what might be aptly called a “critical junctures perspective” (Kalb and Tak, 2005). Reminiscent of the colonial period, this act of “possession through dispossession” (Harvey, 2005) is facilitated by the state’s claim over all natural resources and state developmentalism that seeks to create governable spaces through the production of territory using the discursive repertoire of terra nullius. Through the production of territory development planning explicitly seeks to shape and order the future, even as, in practice, it often falls short of its stated objectives. Territories that are produced are handed over to foreign agro-industrial business consortiums while the locals remain as spectators. Their livelihoods are determined by the global capitalist economy that is mediated by control over land and supermarkets chains. Stated otherwise, futures are anticipated and evoked through the illusion of development planning (agricultural mechanization) when they have not yet materially manifested and may not manifest at all.

The paper draws on ethnographic interviews with stakeholders in the agricultural sector (labourers and smallholder farmers, civil society activists and the management of agro-industrial complexes) and participant observation to
examine the struggle over land and competing legal norms governing land tenure between smallholders and multinational corporations in the traditional colonial frontier of Cameroon's coastal region. The paper is organized into four parts. It begins with an examination of the heuristic concept of enclosure and presents a snapshot of the land grab phenomenon in Cameroon and the actors involved. This is followed by an examination of the territorialization practices that underpinned colonial and postcolonial developmentalist enclosures. Thirdly, we examine state territorialization practices which present local communities as primitive subjects who must be acted upon in the name of development since they are seen as standing on the way of progress. Fourthly, we examine the conflict engendered by the appropriation of native lands by three multinational corporations in the Njombé-Penja locality of Cameroon. This is followed by the conclusion.

The concept of enclosure goes beyond the mere fencing of land, pastures and woodlands and is intimately intertwined with other complex socio-economic processes mediated by the incorporation of “abstract space” into the market. It entails the incorporation of land as a common property resource into market relationships and the subsequent transformation of local farmers into wage labourers as multinationals takeover the land for export-oriented agriculture. Local farmers are simultaneously drawn into the circuit of global capitalism (see Marx, 1983; Makki and Geisler, 2011: 3; Harvey, 2005; Harvey, 2003) thereby tying their fates to the global supermarket chain. As Fouad Makki and Charles Geisler concede, it involves “the refashioning of land into a commodity through its disenchantment as a lineament of nature and moral economies” (Ibid). Through this process, land is taken away from labourers who as producers are then separated from the land, their relationships and user rights are extinguished. The process is further accompanied by displacement, forced migration using the police power of the state and broken livelihoods (see Cernea et al. 2000, Chatty and Colchester, 2002, Richards, 2013). Enclosure was actually a significant component of the development of historical capitalism: European overseas expansion was intertwined with the enclosure of the commons. The aim of these co-processes was to free up surplus land to be used for “higher profits”. Accumulation by dispossession, Harvey (2003) maintains, is an omnipresent phenomenon that seeks to bring new spheres of social life under the ambit of the capitalistic neoliberal world market. Enclosure was copied from Europe and replicated in Africa by the colonial masters under the smokescreen of developmentalism and modernization that was materialized through the creation of plantations and other colonial infrastructures that were meant to serve as conduits for capitalist exploitation.
Cameroon and the global land scramble

The magnitude of the land grab phenomenon is dynamic, shrouded in secrecy, subjected to differences in definition and the timeframe covered. However, recent global estimates of the total area of large land deals range from 43 million ha (World Bank 2010) to 80 million ha (Anseeuw et al. 2012), and 227 million ha between 2000 and 2011 (Oxfam 2011). These figures and other reports corroborate the fact that sub-Saharan Africa is the hub of at least 60 percent of total acquisitions (Borras et al. 2010:620). Among the 1,272 land deals concluded globally, 62 percent covering 56.2 million hectares is in Africa (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2011). The controversial World Bank report released in September 2010 estimated that 45 million hectares of farmland were acquired around the world, two-thirds of it in Africa (World Bank 2010). Byerlee and Deininger (2011) estimate that 56 million hectares of land, 29 million of which are located on the African continent, south of the Sahara have been snatched up. In 2009 alone, 50 million hectares were reportedly ceded by farmers to corporations. While some of these lands have been outrightly purchased, some have been leased from between 25 and 99 years renewable (Oxfam, 2011). This is the fate of 63% of arable land in Cambodia, 30% of Liberia and 20% of Sierra Leone. The main driver of this phenomenon is a moratorium on new palm oil plantations in Indonesia and limited land availability in Malaysia – the two countries produce 80% of the world’s palm oil exports (Nguiffo and Schwartz, 2012).

Cameroon has become the second most exploited land in Africa after Egypt as the hub of large-scale land acquisitions by a mix of states and private agro-industrial complexes mainly French, Chinese, Singaporean, Malaysian, Indian and American. These foreign investors have been attracted into the country partly through generous tax holiday for agro-business ventures and the complete absence of any fees for the use of water resources for irrigation purposes. However, their aim is that of producing and exporting more than half of their final produce. With a total surface area of 475 000km², Cameroon boast of 7.16 million hectares of arable land which is increasingly up for grabs at the detriment of local communities and minority groups. About 276 000 hectares of land have been occupied by investors who exploit the land and its produce (Sama, 2013). These shady land deals have been facilitated in Cameroon like elsewhere in most of Africa by the institutional context-particularly the state’s claim of monopoly over all parcels of land as well as its lack of teeth in negotiating investment ventures with multinationals because of corruption. Emboldened by its monopolistic claim over land and other natural resources, within the context of neoliberalism the developmentalist state of Cameroon is increasingly carving out territories for agricultural investment allegedly as a mechanism of food self-sufficiency through agricultural mechanization which also entails increasing the surface area for production (DSCE, 2009).
Chinese agribusiness companies have been negotiating for parcels of agricultural land of 10,000 to 100,000 ha, for food and palm oil production projects. In 2006, IKO—a subsidiary of Shaanxi Land Reclamation General Corporation (also known as Shaanxi State Farm), signed a US$120-million investment agreement with the government of Cameroon (GoC), giving it the Nanga-Eboko rice station and a 99-year lease for another 10,000 ha of land -- 2,000 ha in Nanga-Eboko (close to the rice farm), 4,000 ha in nearby Ndjouré District, and 4,000 ha in the west of the country in Santchou. The company has begun trials of rice and maize, and also plans to grow cassava (Carrere, 2010). Part of this land is an abandoned 120 ha rice farm in Cameroon’s central district of Nanga-Eboko in the Upper Sanaga region. Originally established through Taiwanese cooperation in the 1960s, it was deserted when Cameroon switched allegiance to the People’s Republic of China a decade or so after. Also queuing up for parcels of Cameroon’s arable land are Sime Darby—a Malaysian-based multinational and the global leader in palm oil production, which hopes to secure 600,000 hectares (circa 1.5 million acres) to develop oil palms across the South, Centre, Littoral and Southwest regions. Siva Group/Biopalm Energy, an Indian-owned consortium alongside Cameroon’s National Investment Corporation is also about to acquire 200,000 hectares (about 500,000 acres) of land for palm plantations in the South region where three other companies are also seeking land for the same reason. Furthermore, Malaysia’s Sime Darby is said to be weighing up a further $2.5 billion plantation expansion deal. It is estimated that this greenfield land for palm oil production will increase Cameroon’s yearly palm oil production by 80,000 tonnes within the first five years of production, and would add about 30 billion CFA francs to this crude-producing nation’s yearly revenue. Furthermore, a consortium of Indian and Cameroonian businessmen alongside FEICOM and the National Employment Fund have been ceded 155,000 hectares of land for the construction of a sugar mill—Justin Sugar SA in Batouri, east Cameroon. In addition to the highly publicized controversial Herakles Farms palm oil project, Cameroon recently ceded a large amount of land near Kribi for a $200 million - including a 50-hectare (124-acre) plantation, to Goodhope Asia Holdings Ltd—a Singapore based palm-oil processing for a palm oil plantation capable of producing 20,000-30,000 MT per year (Tumanjong, 2011). Due to secrecy, the line between acquisitions, leases rather than sales remains blurred. Further challenging this reconstitution of global property relations and countering to the north-south dichotomy and discourses of re-colonization.

1 http://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/16485#sthash.71dlV1wG.dpuf.
(Borras et al. 2011) is that these deals sometimes involve "partnerships" between local institutions and their foreign counterparts. Whatever the institutional actors, the natural resources targeted through these acquisitions go beyond land, water, sub-surface minerals, carbon spaces, wildlife habitats, genetic substances and labour (Makki and Geisler, 2011:2).

**Developmentalist Enclosure and Colonial Capitalism**

Cameroon's land tenure system is based on, and is a replication of the colonial land tenure regime which reckons development in terms of "effective occupation" through the mechanization of large swathes of land that allies with international agribusiness interests. The colonial masters (Germans and later on the French and British) enclosed large expanse of arable land for plantation agriculture and forcefully turned indigenous farmers into wage labourers. The products were subsequently exported for the production of manufactured goods that were then sold in the colonies. They simultaneously herded the local population into unproductive reserves to acquire fertile land for the establishment of these plantations. They further laid claim on all unoccupied parcels of land which were unilaterally declared as *terra nullius* (as belonging to no one and therefore in need of reclamation). This narrative was aimed at transforming places identified as empty, underutilized or unproductive into developmentalizable entities. In Cameroon, enclosures and the colonial state’s project of developmentalism underpinned the German colonial state’s use of cosmographies of power through the mechanism of spatial governmentality that was meant to free land for the production of tea, rubber, sugar cane, cocoa and palm oil for export. Under German colonial rule in Cameroon (1884-1916), all unoccupied parcels of land were in line with the Crown Lands Act, 1896 placed in the **Grunduch**- (the German land register). After World War I, the British and French inherited the German plantations which were forms of socio-spatial enclosures in the name of “enemy property”. In British and French controlled areas of Cameroon, legislation in 1927 and 1938 handed over local land to the colonial masters. The French Decree of 1932 however permitted individuals to assert their claim over land usage (Belaude et al. 2010:18) meaning that certain parcels of land were excluded from the unilateral category of 'vacantes et sans maître'.

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4 They are master representations embedded in conceptual or physical maps that delineate and categorize places (Raffles, 2002). This is achieved through naming, signifying and locating as value-creating acts that increase the power of those wielding them (Makki and Geisler, 2011:5).
Through the process of land registration the colonial masters came to inject the notion of private property into the traditional tenure arrangement thereby transforming the collective ownership of land by a family or lineage group into individual ownership. This marked the beginning of the dispossession of natives of their land since they "were beyond the space of capital and could therefore not enhance it through labour-induced exchange value". In line with the presumed superiority of this principle of development (the Western capitalist development model), "non-capitalist social spaces were...considered static voids in need of development and progress, dormant traditional places waiting to be brought to modern life". Notions such as *terra nullius* have been figuratively used by postcolonial states in Africa "to figuratively nullify space, enclose it", and then hand it over to foreign entrepreneurs for 'development'. This gives capitalist development a redemptive character: "the antidote to a condition of emptiness" (Makki and Geisler, 2011:7). In the same light, and as shall become evident below, export-oriented agricultural developments are framed as the transfer of technology, the provisioning of employment opportunities and the fight against poverty, foreign direct investment and "partnership". The postcolonial Cameroon state is appropriating the discourse of *terra nullius* through its creation of agricultural frontiers as governable spaces. Cameroon’s 1974 land governance law which is clearly not in tune with present day realities was modelled after the colonial arrangement whose basis is private property. Within the ambit of the 1974 Land Tenure Act, forest is conceptualized as the “private property” of the state. While Ordinance 74-1 is related to Private and Public Property and National Lands, Ordinance 74-2 deals with the public domain in Cameroon (Government of Cameroon, 1974a, 1974b). They are usually read in conjunction to explain the land tenure system which is based on land registration (i.e. all privately-owned land must be registered because all unregistered land is deemed to be either public land- held by the state on behalf of the public- or national land, i.e. unoccupied and under the jurisdiction of customary land law. In line with this legal configuration, while local communities are considered as squatters that can be evicted at any time, chiefs as auxiliaries of the administration are custodians of the land on behalf of the state. The main tenure effect of the state’s appropriation of customary rights is the conversion of customary to state tenure because the latter (registration) is required for governments to make leasehold agreements with foreign investors (Richards, 2013:7). Like in most of Africa, the vesting of all parcels of land in the State and therefore its claim of monopoly over all parcels of land should be understood against the "backdrop of the conflicting landscape and power fields of traditional, colonial and modern authority systems: a hallmark of the land tenure system in which most local communities find themselves today and which has pitted
them against the state” (Pemunta and Fonmboh, 2010:38, see also Pemunta, 2013, Pemunta, 2014, Pemunta and Mbu-Arrey, 2013). Despite legal dualism, the state prioritizes legal over customary land laws. This competing legal order permits the state to create territories (agric frontiers/greenfields) and hand them over to capitalist entrepreneurs against the wishes of local landowners. At the same time, legal pluralism expose tension among different normative orders, as constructs appropriated by different actors to enforce and promote their rights (Belaude et al. 2010:5). The ceding of land to foreign investors and their local allies is clearly an assertion of emptiness as well as new modes of enclosures of social and physical spaces, and constitute forms of terra nullius that are replete in “statistical averages of low population densities, underutilized land and unproductive labour (Bellamy, 2009, Geisler, 2010, cf Makki and Geisler, 2011:7).

The World Bank has been instrumental and an accomplice in the creation and appropriation of the terra nullius narrative. Apart from imposing neoliberal market-oriented policies and privatization on the GoC which led to the withdrawal of subsidies to smallholder farmers, it simultaneously withdrew institutional support from these smallholder farmers in favour of industrial scale agriculture. As articulated in Cameroon’s Strategy Document for Growth and Employment (DSCE) the heart of the government’s agric strategy is the modernization of low productivity farms and the organization of scattered stakeholders (DSDR, 2005, 3.1, DSCE, 2009:6.1.2.378) so as to boast production. This implies that peasants are poor and unable to afford the technology (technology-deficiency) that could lead to greater productivity. The World Bank has subsequently characterized and classified most of Sub-Saharan Africa into the category of “high yield gap” despite the availability of suitable land. In its 2009 report entitled Awakening Africa’s Sleeping Giants, for instance, the bank paints the picture of ‘a vast underused land reserve’ in much of West, Central, East and Southern Africa. The bank then proposes the capitalist exploitation of this supposed terra nullius through an intensive process of agricultural mechanization across the region (Hall, 2010:6). Commenting on the bank’s 2010 and 2009 reports, Hall concedes that “...in this region, low population densities and low mobility prevail, which suggests that agricultural intensification will require larger farm sizes” (World Bank, 2010:64). This neoliberal rationalizing logic is ironically being concretized through massive land mortgages/leases in African countries with high scores on the global hunger index (Robertson and Pinstrup-Anderson, 2010:272). Land reforms in Cameroon meant to reflect the neoliberal ethos have fallen short of expectation. As Belau and colleagues (2010:12) rightly note “efforts to change statutory law in order to better respond to the growth of trade and liberal structures from international agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund, have often continued to disregard the informal and alternative
legal and normative orders at play, including in particular those that govern land”. This includes the introduction of certification which has been dogged by bureaucracy, and corruption as well as skewed towards the rich because of high costs. Although the 1974 Lands Ordinance stipulated that smallholder farmers who had peacefully occupied and productively appropriated a given parcel of land could register and avail themselves of legal titles to that land, it only provided rural farmers with concrete boundary markers, rather than formal titles. Ironically, these markers grant neither legal right, protection nor can they serve as collateral. A conjuncture between high cost and time (6.3 years on the average) for the titling procedure, bureaucracy and corruption has prevented poor farmers from availing themselves of the Ordinance and obtaining land titles. To worsen the situation, in the wake of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the GoC drastically slashed funding for the Lands department but simultaneously increased the titling fee. This increased official and unofficial financial expenditure at local, regional and state level for poor land title applicants in favour of state bureaucrats, elites and businessmen. The overall consequence is that: “Farmers initiate the title process and pay the fees necessary to have state agents place concrete boundary markers on their land. They then abandon their application and pay no additional fees” (Firmin-Sellers and Sellers, 1999:1120, see also Belaunde, 2010:20-25, Njoh, 2008:256). Customary contracts and therefore tenure insecurity therefore remain the norm: it can be taken under the pretense of eminent domain.

Cameroon ranked 36 with a score of 14.5 on the 2013 global hunger index (Global Hunger Index, 2013). Food insecurity and high food prices, alongside the planned constitutional change that cancelled presidential term limits led to strikes in February 2008. It is one of those African countries where the continuation of global agribusiness expansion is transforming the social and physical landscape of the country with unfettered socio-economic, political and cultural effects on smallholder farmers. This pattern of the enclosure of greenfields has reminiscences with colonial spatial governmentality that was operationalized through developmentalist enclosures that were the hallmark of colonial capitalism in Cameroon.

**State territorialisation: Local communities as primitive subjects of development**

In most of Africa, land access, ownership and rights have been influenced by a conjuncture between former colonial territorialisation policies and customary practices, as well as post-independence land reforms (IFAD, 2008:6, Njoh, 2008). These include a myriad of overlapping (at times contradictory) rules, laws,
customs/traditions, perceptions and regulations that govern how people’s rights to use, control and transfer land. The chasm between customary and statutory land rights as well as the prioritization of the latter often culminates in the loss of land rights for the poorest and most vulnerable groups, mostly small-holder farmers, competing for land rights with urban elites and large-scale agricultural enterprises/plantations mostly in the coastal regions of Cameroon (e.g. the case of Njombé-Penja). The Cameroon state’s vested interest in attracting foreign direct investment is concretized through the same territorialisation process of creating governable spaces that characterized colonial enclosures. The creation of governable spaces is also a way of aligning state developmentalist policies with the neoliberal policies of international organizations, the corporate interests of non-state actors such as multinational corporations and international institutions (World Bank and the European Union (EU)) so as to legitimize itself, but which instead leads to the erosion of the legitimacy of the state. It simultaneously transforms smallholder farmers into subjects of development who are at a pre-modern state and must therefore be modernized through the infusion of technology. The acquisition of land by multinational corporations without any clear benefits for the people may negatively affect the relationship between the state and its citizens, thereby eroding the perceived legitimacy of the former. Despite the co-existence of legal dualism in land tenure in Cameroon, it is statutory law that tends to prevail in any situation of conflict and that is appropriated by both the state and corporate actors. While legal pluralism is codified in Cameroon, its colonial legacy reinforces power inequalities (Pemunta, 2014). State monopoly over land and other natural resources implies that private individuals can only be granted access to land through negotiation on the terms of use that ensures “state priorities” (‘interests of state actors in both their personal and professional capacity’ (Belaunde et al, 2010:20). This is the case in Cameroon’s coastal banana belt that is coincidentally the same frontier of colonial agricultural production.

**External actors and the resource minorities of Njombé-Penja**

The production and exportation of bananas in Cameroon’s Littoral region is monopolized by three multinational plantation giants: the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), in a partnership with Del Monte, the French and Cameroonian Company, Société des Plantations de Mbanga (SPM), and the Franco-American venture Companie Fruitiere, Plantations du Haut Penja. The region has rich agricultural lands and is strategically located on the Atlantic coast. Additionally, the area is bedecked by many chronic land related conflicts. Furthermore, the area has witnessed various forms of colonial regimes and hence has many tenure systems in its history making it suitable for land tenure and conflict
analysis between multinationals and small-holder farmers. The area witnessed an influx of immigrants due to its large industrial plantations as well as by the availability of fertile soils. The movement of people into the area dates back to the colonial period. While some voluntarily migrated into the area, others were coerced to work as labourers on German colonial plantations. However, many people also migrated to the area in order to seek refuge from the “maquisards” or “rebels” in the Western region during the pre-independence period (Gyau et al. 2014:30). Even more importantly, the port of Douala connects the region to the wider world. In colonial times, the strategic location of the region allowed the Duala serving as middlemen between European traders and other communities from the hinterland to hold monopoly over trade with Europe (Yenshu, 2003).

The German conquest of Cameroon that lasted from 1884-1916 led to the loss of the Duala’s role as trade intermediaries. They became agricultural entrepreneurs, appropriated the labour of migrant slaves and labourers and managed the commercialization of agricultural products because of their perceived superiority (Austen, 1983). The economic depression of the 1930s led to price volatility in the international market and the Duala were unable to pay their labourers in cash. They rather began paying for labour by granting parcels of land. Former slaves and labourers, largely Bamilekes, but also Betis amassed land and became banana cultivators and agricultural entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, European companies with ties to the colonial administration held sway in the banana sector until after World War II when smallholders began to emerge as key stakeholders in the external banana trade.

The banana trade is today monopolized by three companies: the CDC, in a partnership with Del Monte, the French and Cameroonian Company, SPM, and the Franco-American venture Companie Fruitiere, Plantations du Haut Penja (PHP) in which American giant, Dole owns 40% of shares. These companies that export their products, predominantly bananas (Musa spp), pineapples (Ananas comosus), and ornamental flowers to the EU employ over 8,000 labourers (2,000 by SPM and 6,000 by PHP). Other multinational ventures in the region include les Brasseries du Cameroun et l’usine d’eau minérale Tangui. The three agro-industrial companies have eased out smallholder farmers from the production of banana for export since the latter lack the necessary technology and capital to produce high quality bananas for the international market. While these companies have obtained national concessions from the state, they have also been able to appropriate customary law by buying additional parcels of land from individuals or surrounding village communities. This is an arena in which the competing legal orders surrounding land tenure in Cameroon is at play and exposes the inherent tensions.
In Njombe, smallholders were expelled by PHP and undercompensated for their land. The state had granted a concession of 173ha to a cooperative called SOPRABO which in turn rented out a 63ha to farmers. This concession was unilaterally transferred to PHP through privatization when SOPRABO wind up. It was at this time that the three multinationals took over banana production from smallholders. In the wake of conflict with farmers, PHP re-granted to the forty-three farming families their 63ha while remaining owners of 110ha for the next 25 years. When SOPRABO failed to kick out the farmers, it shifted the responsibility back to PHP who decided to pursue an out-of-court settlement with the farmers on the mutual understanding that they would be adequately compensated for their crops and will have six months to harvest same from their fields. PHP later backtracked on the grace period and cleared the fields. The farmers maintain that they were not given a fair deal. Based on their own surveyor’s valuation, they were owed 600,000 000FCFA whereas PHP gave them a meagre 65,000,000FCFA. This case underscores the blatant violation of citizen’s rights by the state and multinationals. Additionally, it shows that those with resources and state connections prevail in obtaining a land title and consequently, have protection. The beneficiaries include multinationals, elites desiring land for commercial agriculture as a source of revenue when they eventually retire (Gyau et al. 2014), traditional authorities and local administrative authorities. On the other hand, it writes tenure insecurity on farmers and perpetuates a system of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2003). Cameroon’s 1974 Land Ordinance privileged those with resources to acquire a land title thereby leading to the commodification of land.

While competing legal and customary orders were in play, apart from feelings that the amount of compensation was inadequate, the amount cultivated by each individual and each family differed, meaning that the amount due each farmer would have been disproportionate when compared to the other. Accepting the deal would have meant creating conflicts among themselves.

Furthermore, there are competing versions on the benefits accruing to local communities from the so-called multinationals whose activities are transforming people’s relationships with their environment. First off, job quality and job security are key issues. Interviews with labourers revealed that they were paid less 3 USD for a minimum of 12 hours’ work and that they are often threatened with dismissal for taking breaks in the tropical heat.

Salaries are not good...It is abnormal that there should be famine here while we are working tirelessly round the clock so that the French can eat. Since the riots, salaries have increased a bit (minimum salaries have increased from 31,000 FCFA (46,50 euros) excluding bonuses which may bring it to the tune of 45,000FCFA (67,50 euros). But one could be at the door at any time since we have no permanent employment contracts and no insurance. They are really exploiting us like animals (Elysée Mbelle, July 10, 2011).
Whereas, many people do not have access to portable water, partly because water sources are polluted, while the best of portable water in this region is processed, packaged and exported to the rich in the country and abroad by the Tangui company (Jean-Pierre, June, 2011).

The Institute of Pan-African Development (2010) found that many community members suffer from illnesses related to the use of pesticides that also causes environmental degradation and a dramatic shortfall in the supply of fish as well as the contamination of local water supply (cf. Belaude et al. 2010, see also Cernea et al. 2000, Chatty and Colchester, 2002). PHP, although two of its plantations (the Mantem and PHP2 plantations) have Fair Trade certification is further alleged to be using pesticides that are banned in Europe and that have caused damage to both the health of its workers, the inhabitants and the land. Similarly, the Catholic Committee for the fight against Hunger and Development (CCHD) and Oxfam-Agirici have classified PHP as being among the most “unscrupulous” companies in Cameroon that the EU which subsidizes the banana sub sector in order to improve its competitiveness must deal with. The company is further accused of expropriating native land at the expense of local farmers “through dubious, if not illegal means, poor working conditions for its 6000 employees some of who work for as much as 15 hours a daily without compensation, lack of freedom to form unions and wrongful dismissals”. The report further points out that the inhabitants complain of pollution and high number of cancers caused by fungicides and pesticides used by the company, some of which—including chlordecone, a powerful insecticide—recently been banned by the EU because they pose a health hazard (Pigeaud, 2009). As indicated by the report and as corroborated by our observations, the inhabitants also complain of water pollution. An inhabitant in the Njombé locality stated that “Our river, our only source of water is polluted”. Most of the pesticides are sprayed by airplanes which are easily inhaled by both the labourers and the inhabitants. The inhabitants also complained of high incidence of malaria, respiratory tract diseases and skin disorders. The upsurge in these diseases is attributed to plantation farming and to the use of chemical substances to spray the farms. The only available infrastructures— incentives to keep workers on site is a school to cater for the children of PHP employees as well as a hospital to cater for their health at cutthroat prices. The people lack portable water, electricity, good all round seasonal roads and are exposed to environmental hazards which negatively affect their health. A 2011 documentary film “The Big Banana”5 produced by Franck Bleuleu, a Cameroonian filmmaker, and broadcast in France, attests to the widespread poverty in Njombe-Penja: ‘very rich in terms of natural resources,
but with an extremely poor population”. The film chronicles the human and environmental impact of banana plantations in Cameroon. It further outlines the PHPs land grabbing tactics and the ensuing devastation for communities: poverty, pollution, and sickness from pesticides. In other words, the promise of providing social infrastructure as stated in its corporate social responsibility (CSR) statement has largely not been delivered. This shows the state’s failure to monitor and enforce contracts with multinationals because of corruption and influence peddling. Locals as subjects of development have become victims of the development process. Land deals with multinationals are always shrouded in opaque practices that exclude indigenous community members from governance: the deal’s duration, cost and its impact on the local community are known only by a close network of actors. When food riots spontaneously erupted because of a dramatic increase in the prices of basic necessities and coagulated with planned constitutional change to eliminate presidential term limits, the youths of the region vented their anger on PHP and SPM. Apart from heavy material damage estimated at 1,2 milliard CFA (1,8 million euros), hectares of bananas were chopped into pieces with machetes, farming tools carted away and buildings and vehicles belonging to these agro-industrial corporations were torched. Some labourers even allegedly joined the rioters to inflict damage on their employers. According to Belaunde and colleagues (2010:41) the indigenous population were disenchanted because despite the huge amount of food produced and exported abroad, wages in the country remain dismally low while food prices continue to increase. Despite different perception as to why the three agro-industrial companies were targeted, Pierre Moulima, French-born director of human resources at SPM maintained that "We are constantly referred to as "French colonialists". We are being accused of taking the land and of turning the Cameroonian work force into slaves. People who think like that are not educated". On his part, his compatriot Christophe Bresse, director of plantations at SPM presented a benevolent image of these agro-industrial corporations by arguing that they are simply "doing good" by providing employment opportunities to the local population and that the rioters had simply "shut themselves in the leg". The same ethos of capitalist benevolence is articulated in PHP’s first ever CSR statement published in 2011 as a mechanism of greenwashing its image in which all incentives to capitalism are forwarded as ensuring worker’s social welfare (Plantation du Haut Penja, 2011).

Additionally, PHP does not pay any royalties to the community because of corruption. The company is alleged to have high level political connections in the local, regional and national politico-administrative architecture of Cameroon (Pigeaud, 2009). The mayor of Njombé-Penja, Paul Eric Kingué who stood up

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6 http://www.care2.com/news/member/597720583/802356
against the exploitation of the region and his people was awarded a life jail term. Apart from protesting the non-payment of taxes to his municipality by the multinational PHP, he also vigorously deplored the exploitation of plantation labourers who were being paid catechist salaries: 25,000 CFA (37,50 Euros) per month. He was subsequently framed up, and arrested without a warrant, given a kangaroo trial and slammed an outlandish 7 life jail term by the Nkongsamba High Court allegedly on corruption-related charges and for his alleged participation in the hunger-related unrest in 2008. The above resonates with Gramsci’s observation that ‘the ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony is characterized by the combination of force and consent, in variable equilibrium, without force predominating too much over consent… [But] between force and consent stands corruption-fraud, that is the enervation and paralyzing of the antagonist or antagonists (Gramsci, 1975:1638). During the riots, five out of twenty PHP packaging plants and the office of one of the plant’s managers were torched. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the United Nations (UN) has since asked the Cameroonian government to “put an end to the arbitrary detention of Paul Eric Kingué”8. One Civil society activist stated that:

The internal colonization of the Njombé-Penja region and the accompanying human rights violations by French multinational companies is facilitated by their links to powerful state actors in Cameroon. Courageous individuals like Lapiro de Mbanga and Paul Eric Kingué were unjustly imprisoned for allegedly taking part in the 2008 hunger riots that visited violence on these plantations. Their real crime was that they stood up for the rights of plantation labourers and their people (Interview of May 3, 2012).

Conflicts over land and other natural resources demonstrate the entanglement of the global and the local over the competing idea of modernization and food sovereignty—which are subject to the influence, support and legitimacy of outside forces. The ceding of land for mechanized agriculture which is vigorously favoured by the World Bank and foreign governments is accordingly framed as technology transfer. According to IKO’s director in Cameroon, Mr. Zhao:

It’s time for the people of Cameroon to understand that the future is in agriculture… It must move towards the mechanization of its agriculture. It can no longer continue in these times cultivating with a hoe and a pickax. That will get you nowhere. Cameroon also needs considerable capital investments for the development of its agriculture9.

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7 Critics rightly maintain that others convicted of embezzling billions of francs have been handed far more lenient sentences.
9 http://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/16485#sthash.71dLV1wG.dpuf
The excerpt quoted above underscores the fact that Cameroon’s peasants have remained pre-modern. They have therefore remained primitive and need to be modernized through the infusion of technology. They are thus constructed as an object of benevolent intervention--- for purposes of humanitarian modernization, a site for the realization of the modernizer Self through agro-industries. This entails a “powerful intensification of activities and rural transformation, (DSCE, 2009:209) as well as contract farming to corporations which brings “foreign [direct] investment and technology infusion in agriculture” (N’cho Oguie & Charlier, 2009:192). This is in tune with the neoliberal discourse propagated by the duo of the Gog and World Bank according to which, the West is the very embodiment of technology. Such narratives cast Africa as continually on the losing side of harmful binaries – primitive/civilized, traditional/modern – and in an eternal developmental lag. Peasants are presented as lacking technology and therefore their lack of modernity. They therefore also lack agency and must be rescued by modernizers (multinational agro-industrial corporations) who will bring technology. In the words of Escobar “technology [is] seen as neutral and inevitably beneficial, not as an instrument for the creation of cultural and social orders. The West possesses the expertise, technology and management skills that the non-West is lacking” (Escobar, 2009:47). Global news networks such as the CNN and Aljazeera constantly parade images of Africa’s green wilderness and how Western technology through agricultural and other investments will transform this void. This is aptly encapsulated in former’s signature tune to the programme Inside Africa in which land movers and tractors are seen ploughing the soil while the audience is constantly told that “Africa is ripe for business”. This is a clear reference to both its natural and human resources that is increasingly up for grabs by foreign entrepreneurs who are allegedly bringing technology to the continent and creating employment opportunities. Similarly, the Cameroon CFA banknote initially carried the effigy of peasants hoeing the soil and therefore as lacking in modernity. An evolutionary analysis of changes in the banknote shows:

a visual progression from an African community existing out of its pre-modern state in the lowest note to the Western conception of modernity in the highest. On one side of the lowest note there are African children learning math on a blackboard. The other side contains an image of farmland with a tractor on it (modernized agriculture) (Belaude, 2010:46).

Other images are those of land movers, a tractor, a massive dam. These evolutionary modernization guides are void of alternative ideals emphasizing equality, kinship, well-being (in contrast to wealth). They are a visual reflection of the state’s growth strategy that represents peasants through their lack of modernity.
Additionally, it depicts that the land is a resource worthy of exploitation for the achievement of modernity. This is in sharp contrast to the African view of land as belonging to generations-past, present and future. Contrary to the primitive, deficient peasant image forwarded by modernization advocates, peasant movements counter by presenting “a culturally rich being with capabilities that the West lacks, namely, the ability to appropriately care for the land and the people” (Belaude, 2010: 46).

The modernization discourse of technology transfer is shared by Cameroon government authorities and technocratic institutions such as the World Bank, the EU, and multinational agribusiness corporations such as SPM, PHP, IKO and foreign state governments: France, America, India and China. This is in sharp contrast with the “food sovereignty ideology” held by Cameroon peasant organizations including Association Citoyenne de Défense des Intérêts Collectifs - ACDIC (The Citizens Association for the Defence of Collective Interests) - and the Centre for Environment and Development (CED), Cameroon who are ferociously opposed to large-scale land acquisitions and are calling for land governance reforms. The 2008 financial crisis that led to a spike in food prices was preceded by the large-scale conquest of land, water and other natural resources in the Global South including countries such as Cameroon. The GoC and the World Bank share the discourse of growth, production and competitiveness, the mantra of development ideology since the introduction of the SAP. However, the issues of addressing food security and inequality stare large: foreign investment cannot be out rightly and unproblematically equated with technology transfer as an act of benevolent redemption. It entails the subjugation and control of farmers who are turned into labourers, “full domination and control over food and agriculture from the seed to the plate in order to take in huge profits. This exploits workers, concentrates economic and political power, and destroys rural communities” (Campesina, 2008:58).

The Cameroon Growth Strategy (DSCE) was developed within the context of skyrocketing food prices “that rocked the country in February 2008” (DSCE, 2009:8). The government unwittingly plans to increase plantation area up to 500,000ha because of the enormity of arable land begging to be cultivated. This suggests that the mantra of the state’s basic market-oriented strategy is the commercialization of smallholder agriculture. It further implies that the government is aware of the debilitating effects of the World Food Crisis as well as the need to address it. Additionally, this is also a tacit recognition of the unfettered effects of SAP and the supposed “trickledown effect” of allowing the poor to benefit from economic growth that did not materialize. These events led to a shift in the World Bank’s discourse from exclusive to “inclusive growth”. Cameroonian authorities also shifted from the fundamentalist rhetoric of
exclusive growth: the DSCE "places the strong challenge of growth and employment creation in the centre of its strategy for reducing poverty (preface). Whereas "authorities are convinced that the creation of wealth is essential to reducing poverty, it must be accompanied by a strong link to redistribution, which is that of employment" (DSCE, 2.3.133). Despite the cautious tuning down of the modernization discourse, the gulf between the modernization and food sovereignty ideology persists: the failure of the modernization advocates to address the historical context that have affected smallholder farmers in the last three decades, the understanding of the agency of the peasant as well as the relations of production, power and distribution (Belaude et al., 2010: 44). The government's DSCE curiously makes no relationship between farmer's conditions and colonialism or SAP. Against the backdrop of SAP, the government withdrew subsidies from farmers, thereby endangering food production and the right to adequate food. Bello (2009) attests that SAP led to food dependency in Africa and the continent went from exporting small quantities of food to importing 25% of its food needs. The World Development Report 2008 recognized the bank's short-sightedness about the prospect of the SAP to yield the expected market-based results: "dismantled the system of public agencies that provided farmers with access to land, credit, insurance, inputs, and cooperative organization". In the wake of these reforms, the bank laments that "incomplete markets and institutional gaps imposed huge cost in forgone growth and welfare losses for smallholders, threatening their competitiveness and, in many cases, their survival" (World Bank, 2008:138). Ironically, despite this recognition of woeful failure, the GoC and the bank's analysis make no correlation between low peasant productivity and the scourge of SAP.

The Cameroon government's ambitious plan called Vision 2035 is to be achieved partly through grandiose infrastructural projects including dams and hydro-electric plants, the modernization of agricultural technology as well as a significant increase the cultivated land surface. Modernization here should be read as meant to downplay the importance of agriculture in the national income as well as in the labour force so as to catalyze industrialization and make Cameroon a developed country by 2035. The modernization of agricultural is expected to lead to a 3.3% to 8% increase in agricultural production between 2010-2019. This will come about by:

increasing yields and land farmed, the development of partnerships with a high potential for productivity and competitiveness as well by strengthening the use of inputs including fertilizer, seeds etc. "In 2009 the government signed a funding agreement over 20 years with Indian partners to create 5,000 hectares of rice and 5,000 ha of corn (DSCE, 2010,6.1.2.1.380)."
Additionally, the government concluded the interim Partnership Agreement with the EU so as to progressively increase the production of banana exports by increasing the plantation area. The neoliberal alliance of the government and the World Bank believe that “there is no shortage of land, with significant stretches of arable land remaining to be cultivated” (N’cho-Ogue & Charlie, 2009:185). In the light of this, all land is state land and definitely becomes empty insofar as state priorities dictate. The state’s control of land through the terra nullius narrative that is embedded in “state priorities” is an assertion of state power. Through this same ideology, the state controls people and their resources.

The exploitation to which labourers at SPM and PHP are subjected to resonate with local people’s experience with the Chinese project in Nanga-Eboko where there are few signs that IKO is going to improve their future. Workers at the site are paid about US$2 a day, with neither any benefits nor a contract. The workers are disgruntled and do not know where the rice they produce on a daily basis is marketed. One worker at the Nanga-Eboko site, Keman Essam stated that: “We don’t even see where the rice goes that we die producing every day. It’s too much, and I’m going to leave if nothing changes”

Like the bananas produced by the troika of agro-industrial complexes in the Littoral region, this suggests that the rice is not meant for the domestic market, but rather to feed foreign populations, including China’s burgeoning population at home. Although the lands are currently used by local communities for farming, hunting and gathering, it is evident that IKO will throw them out once full-scale production begins since the government has unilaterally ceded the land to IKO.

Presently, the construction of the “training centre” is continuing at the Nanga-Eboko station. The Chinese are constructing a “training centre” which is one of 15 agricultural technology demonstration centres that the Government of China committed to build in Africa at the Beijing Summit of Sino-African Cooperation in 2006. In this case, the overlap between China’s cooperation programmes as well as the EU’s interim partnership agreement with Cameroon and the interests of its companies is clear. Additionally, there is a massive influx of low-skilled Chinese workers working in most of the major major infrastructural projects being undertaken by Chinese companies in Cameroon. This is contrary to the law and is leading to public outcry. The centre in Cameroon, which currently houses about 60 Chinese workers, serves as the site for the development of IKO’s rice operations and will be used by the company to promote its model of agriculture in this region where small-scale peasant agriculture and pastoralism dominate. The complete eviction of smallholders looms large in the horizon and is just a matter of time since they are seen as standing in the way of progress and as therefore hampering the regime’s agenda.

The foregoing case studies underscore the fact that while the global expansion of the culture of capitalism has benefited many; smallholders have incurred the greatest loss in terms of broken livelihood because the expansion of large-scale agriculture has transformed them from relatively self-sufficient food producers to dependent labourers. More recently, economic globalization and the withdrawal of government support has made it difficult, if not impossible, for small-scale farmers to compete with multinational agribusiness. The novelty of today’s rush for land is underpinned by the new mechanisms of land control, justifications and alliances for ‘taking back’ the land, as well as the political economic context of neoliberalism (Peluso and Lund 2011:672).

Conclusion

Reminiscent of colonial development ideology and spatial practices, today’s enclosures involve the taking away of native land without consultation and for the production of crops for foreign markets—what Annelies Zoomers (2010) aptly describes as the ‘foreignisation of land’. It is also accompanied by the reordering of nature and man-nature relationship. State developmentalism through the creation of territories is recasting the state’s internal landscape, consolidating the state’s sovereignty as well as signifying its hegemony. As corporate actors increasingly enter the agricultural scene:

the cosmography of power justifying enclosures is shifting from conceptual mapping to an officially transformed cartography of land use. After the state’s identification of its terra nullius, the state in alliance with corporate capital can now offer developmental opportunities to fill them in (Makki and Geisler, 2011:14).

The World Bank has played a significant role in this process, by conducting research to identify ‘areas of growth potential, where increased public investment in specific geographic and development areas might make an optimal contribution to economic growth’ (World Bank, 2006:i). In the wake of neoliberal globalization, international forces and organizations (the World Bank and the EU) and foreign governments (French, Chinese, Indian and American) are shaping the neoliberal Cameroon state’s production of territory through the creation of frontiers for large-scale agricultural investments that transforms, but at the same time, negatively affect local livelihood systems. This entanglement of global and local forces calls for a ‘critical junctures perspective’ (Kalb and Tak, 2005): the need to examine relations in and out of a place, to take note of history and locality in the analysis of large-scale agricultural investments that are a replication of colonial relationships and are located on traditional colonial frontiers in Cameroon. As an analytical lens,
enclosures captures the large-scale mechanization of agriculture and the subsequent reconstitution of heterogeneous spaces aimed at constructing the ‘homogenous abstract space-time of commodity production and circulation’ (Makki and Geisler, 2011:16) that this development entails. This reconstitution further entails the representation of places as backward, and away from the redeeming logic of modernity. It is rationalized through discourses of improvement and development that are meant to mask the harshly lived experience of violence to which peasants are now subjugated in the ‘last frontier’ of capitalist rationalization.

The socio-economic, political and psychological effects of social emptying out (displacement) have been well documented (Cernea et al. 2000; Chatty and Colchester, 2002; Richards, 2013). In the Njombe region, large-scale plantations also cause air and water pollution destabilizing the socio-economic system and the natural environment (Gyau et al. 2014). The fate of farmers has become connected to a network of supermarket chain and they have been transformed from landowners to labourers. The terra nullius ideology that underpins state developmentalism is “an act of dispossession” (Harvey, 2003) that threatens national, regional and global peace. A land governance reform that re-infuses the modern tenure system with traditional land tenure norms will allow local communities to negotiate with multinationals on their own terms and will also ensure the need to respect internationally recognized environmental standards. Furthermore, it will also permit peaceful co-existence between private companies involved in large-scale plantations and small-holder farmers who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, instead of the present legal hierarchy that represents them as primitive subjects of development who have to be acted upon.

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