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## **Written document on my PhD Thesis : A summary**

### **Behind the development showcase: Forest management and local power in Burkina Faso.**

This anthropological study focuses on the so-called participatory management of the protected forest of Bougnounou in Burkina Faso. The main objective is to understand the local actors' interactions, hidden behind a development showcase in the shape of a forest management project initiated by the Burkinabe state with support of international donors, and to see how these interactions are produced by processes of exclusion and inclusion. Here the term 'local actors' denotes a plurality of individuals that could be classified into three important categories: (a) "people of the village" (*Tiogolia*) composed of all lineages whose rights of access and usage over natural resources are limited; and (b) "owners of the village" (*Tiogotian*) who belong to one large lineage, representing and embodying the local political and religious power manifested in the chief and the "fetish"; and c) "people of the bush" (*Golia*) who are migrants and belong to other ethnic groups of Burkina Faso.

The study explores socio-political dynamics between actors, between groups, between people and the fetish's priest/village chief in order to analyze the close relationships between the local power and the forest management. The pre-existing political, social, and cultural structures establish unequal privileges and structures categorizing the local actors according to different concepts (*Tiogolia*, *Tiogotian* and *Golia*) which define their different rights in the village. The study scrutinizes processes of inclusion into, and exclusion from, these structures and the different means of resistance that various groups use to elude the rules of the game.

The objective of this study is not only to understand the interactions between the local actors, which lie behind a development showcase, but also to see the extent to which these interactions produce processes of inclusion and exclusion molding and organizing the management of the forest. I describe how this management is permeated by local dynamics originating in important social, political and religious interactions. It appears that the forest management, planned and conceptualized far away from the Bougnounou, has been transformed into a local institution "supervised" and "controlled" by a local power, manifested by the village chief, the priest of the fetish called *Kwere Aniaba*.

Power interactions have an undeniable impact on people's forest conservation behavior. For example, many other villages in the region contravene the management rules, as people continue to cultivate on forestland inside the protected forest. Yet in Bougnounou, management rules are followed, and the local power is seen as being capable of influencing people's conservation behavior. Still, the local power is portrayed as antidemocratic, because it controls and guides people's everyday life.

The study wants to answer the following questions:

- How can we understand the forest management of this nuni village as a local sociopolitical construction?
- How does the forest management imply concrete strategies of inclusion and exclusion and how are these processes of inclusion and exclusion embedded in religious and political social relations?
- How is resistance practiced by the local actors who refuse control from different forms of power?
- How is the local power able to influence conservation practices of local actors with respect to the forest management?

### ***Methodology***

Methodologically, the study is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out during nine months between 2003-2006. The main methods of data collection were observation, semi-structured interviews, life histories and focus groups. First, I used three types of observation: (1) participant observation which constituted an important tool to be integrated in the village; (2) descriptive observation which allowed me to take account of all the physical details of this field study; and (3) as I did not observe all events and practices or conflicts when I was not in the field, my assistant's reports constituted a path for semi-structured interviews later on. Second, I conducted a total of 161 semi-structured interviews. Third, I collected life histories of key actors, such as the priest, the oldest man of the village, the president of the UGGF (which is the main cooperative managing today the forest management plan), other villages' chiefs, the land priests of other villages (*Zao*, *Sunè*, *Sala*) etc. Fourth, a focus group was organized with villagers to get feedback on preliminary findings and to engage them in the research process. I used the focus group to observe how different groups of actors (*Tiogotian*, *Tiogolia* and *Golia*) related to each other on certain questions. Moreover, I adopted an historical approach to understand the dynamics of social, religious and political interactions around the implementation of the forest management. This approach concerned two aspects: (1) the history of Bournounou village, and the local construction of autochthony and power; (2) the social history of the forest management. The latter aspect allowed me to obtain knowledge on interactions between the various lineages, and the conflicts underlying the forest management. As fieldwork results 'depend on the connections we make in the field, on whether our respondents like us, and on our biases regarding the object of study [...] every researcher confronts the personal nature of fieldwork' (Saunders 2001, 93), a part on reflexivity closes the methodology part of the study.

### ***Bournounou forest management***

Officially, all land in Burkina Faso belongs to the state. Legally, forest resources are defined in two different legal domains, with respect to history and legal status: the state managed forest domain, and the protected forest domain. The first domain, largely created under the colonial administration, is composed of forest reserves, national parks and fauna reserves. The second domain is composed of protected forests created under Burkina Faso's national agrarian and land tenure's law. Bournounou forest is a protected forest belonging to the community, but is thus legally and nominally a state property.

Natural resources constitute the main source of the country's energy consumption, as some 85 percent are based on wood and charcoal production. The government has been particularly interested in finding a solution to energy production and consumption. The sustainable exploitation of wood through its programs of forest management was launched in the 1980s. These programs, based on policies of participatory management, included rural

actors as active partners in the exploitation of wood and the management of wood market, as well as on the question of the conservation of the natural resources. During the last decades, there have been several experiences to assist local communities in using collective rules in the management of natural resources (Hagberg 1995; Hagberg 2000; Delnooz 1999).

My field site is Bougnounou, situated in the Ziro province in the central western region of Burkina Faso. The area has been recognized as having natural resources potential with its wooded savannahs. The state project PNUD/FAO/BKF/085/011 (supported by UNDP and FAO) therefore engaged local actors to manage the protected forest, to cut and sell fuelwood through a wood chain, and finally to be in contract with the state for the implementation of the forest management plan.

The forest management plan of Bougnounou–Nebiel–Dalo (three different districts) covers a surface of 24.852 hectares divided into 11 units. Each unit is subdivided into 15 parcels (80 to 250 hectares each). As the principal activity of the management plan is wood exploitation, each parcel can be exploited following a revolution system with 15 years interval, allowing for one cut of the half of marketable wood with the safeguarding of the remaining 50 percent.

Bougnounou – as village, old canton, district, and recently rural commune (since April 2006) – represents a diversified social context in which the forest management has become a local development showcase. The forest management represents a “new context” for this village. The constitution of this new social context invites us to look at Nuna society as one characterized by a particular political and religious organization that shapes local actors and their actions. In particular, this organization ensures a social, religious, political and economic control through the use of an “embodied fetish” (*Kwere*) and its priest.

This *Kwere* fetish is equipped with multiple functions and roles, which allow it to manage the village, as well as the natural resources. People and nature are in a kind of social contract in which this “*chose-dieu*” (“thing-god”) (Bazin 1986) that ensures prosperity, fights drought and diseases, and protects people from witchcraft, in exchange for obedience, legitimacy, economic gifts and the control of the village and the lands.

### ***Outline***

The study is organized in nine chapters. Chapter One introduces the study to approach the management of a protected forest in relation to the participation of local actors. It focuses on dynamic relationships between “human-society-resources” through social, political and economical stakes, which constitute spaces of power, of complementarity and of exclusion. Three theoretical approaches are discussed. The first one is on ritual and politics, where I underline how sacred fetishes shape their priests or chiefs. I discuss here how individuals charged with this kind of “god-thing” (Bazin 1986) may use this religious capacity for political purposes but by always claiming and conserving their traditional chief and priest identity. Second, I attempt to grasp the local power interactions between different actors by focusing on power in anthropology. Power is here seen as both a relation and as a substance. My argument about these interactions among actors is inspired by Philippe Braud (1982) and Foucault (1994), and more specifically by scholars interested in patron-client relations (Eisenstadt & Roniger 1980; Foster 1961; Stein 1984; Wolf 1966). Understanding power as a substance is inspired mainly from how local actors define and see power. *Pèlè*, the term that they use, is related to “something” someone possesses to embody an authority. The third theoretical approach is the anthropology of development and natural resources management where I review policies and scientific approaches (social forestry, community forestry) behind reforestation programs across the world (but mainly in Africa). Lastly, I am using

political ecology (Peet & Watts 1996; Robbins 2004) as an approach to analyze natural resources management and local actors' various involvements and interests.

Chapter Two introduces Burkina Faso, its forest laws, and the position of Burkinabe state on energy consumption. The latter constitutes one of the main reasons for initiating the development project supporting forest management activities. This chapter continues with a geographical and historical description of Bougnounou, and the Nuna people of the Gurunsi ethnic and linguistic group. The chapter ends with a description of the socio-economic organization and agricultural practices in Bougnounou.

Chapter Three focuses on the *Kwere* fetish, the definition of the ritual space of the *Kwere Aniaba*. I analyze how people justify their dyadic interactions with the *Kwere* and its economic implications. First of all, I provide the settlement history of the village, as to detail why people prefer this fetish rather than others. In the interaction with the *Kwere Aniaba*, local people are subject to inclusion and exclusion from the collective cult of *Kwere Aniaba*. I also describe the consolidation of a certain form of power around the cult of the fetish.

Chapter Four considers how Nuna people think about power, and opens with a statement provided by an informant: « *Dan ni wulè tio, n'ma yéré pua* » which means 'when there is chief in a place, everyone has just to follow'. The term *pèlè*, which in nuni language means 'power', is conceptualized by the Nuna as a substance, something that someone gets or possesses. The person who possesses *pèlè* can give it temporarily to another person. The Nuna speak often of the *pèlè* as being a "living thing" endowed with a capacity to exercise a legitimized authority. In Bougnounou, the Tiogotian "owners of the village" are considered those who possess the *pèlè*, and use it. The priest of the *Kwere Aniaba*, who is also the village chief, makes use of this power to exercise its authority. There is a historical development from the religious status of the priest of the *Kwere Aniaba* to a political, well-established and functional power. The chapter highlights the daily interactions among the actors, and among actors and the local power embodied by the priest. The priest exerts his power in the form of multiple dyadic interactions by creating a relation of interdependence between the one that possesses the power (patron) and the one who does not possess it (client). In this way, he controls people's access (inclusion and exclusion) to different social, economic and political assets.

Chapter Five is divided into four parts. The first part situates access to and control over land in Bougnounou. The second part shows the place and the roles attributed to the land institution today. The third part presents the spatial organization in the village, illustrating how the Nuna conceptualize the bush and the tree. The fourth part describes current relevant events and practices, and focuses on the land rights of each group and lineage. This allows us to understand how actors are related to the forest management, because the selection of land areas for the forest management clearly relates to power balances between lineages.

Chapter Six shows how social, religious and political dynamics interact with the management of the forest. I analyze the logics behind the forest management plan itself, people's satisfaction and dissatisfaction with regard to issues of participation and autonomy, as forest management activities continue to be strongly under state control. One aspect is the concrete economic benefits for the woodcutters in the wood market chain, their real benefits contra the claimed benefits proposed by state representatives and other observers. But even if economic benefits are low, local actors consider the cutting and selling of wood an effective means to handle their dyadic relationships with the priest: (1) by participating in the project they do not have to rely on the prayers and the goodwill of the *Kwere* fetish to sustain themselves and their family; (2) they can pay the sums of money decided by the priest as sanctions for unruly behaviors; and (3) they can be economically independent. We can therefore observe that the forest management has truly become locally anchored.

Chapter Seven presents three case studies on situations of exclusion and inclusion. People involved face situations of broken socio-political, religious or economic interactions or susceptible of being broken, as a dyadic relation can end, break and leave the actors in a position from where no strategy brings them the adequate rescue to re-establish the dyadic relation. The first case focuses on woodcutting. It is paradoxical that a development project that bases its approach and policy on local participation can witness the exclusion of actors (notably migrants, loggers and women). The second case concerns the migrants whose presence in the village gives the impression that they are “the others”. They are called *Golia* “people of the bush”, those that have limited land rights. However, on the other hand, they maintain solid relations with the Nuna, their land tutor, political tutor and religious tutor. The third case introduces the institution of ostracism as revealing the broken interactions in which individuals are cut permanently from social life and are left with their biological life only. They maintain this identity until they are accepted elsewhere to start a new social life.

Chapter Eight revolves around the question of resistance. Wherever power is exercised, resistance is not far. Thus, I analyze this particular interaction in different situations, whether it is in the development showcase (i.e. the forest management plan), or behind. I discuss resistance as the means for local actors to make their diverse relationships dynamic and their interactions purposeful to obtain a specific social change.

### ***Conclusion***

The findings of this study indicate that the contexts behind the development project – here labeled the development showcase (*la vitrine du développement*) – allow us to understand how the forest management is actually implemented and practically integrated in village life. In particular, the study highlights situations where some actors are excluded from certain socio-political and economic contexts, while others are not. Yet in other contexts and situations, the same actors may be re-integrated. Throughout the study, I have analyzed contexts and situations where exclusion takes place. The interactions with the local power, represented by the priest of the *Kwere*/village chief, influence daily life of Bougnounou, and the local actors’ behavior vis-à-vis the forest management. Understandably, the interactions with the local power also produce a number of conflicts between different actors, and groups of actors.

At another level, the study stresses the importance of integrating the sacred in the analysis of politics and development. Without the ritual and symbolic power of the *Kwere Aniaba*, the local power would not have been able to integrate other sources of power and legitimacy. Equally, without the power and legitimacy emanating from the state and development institutions, the local power would not have been able to reinforce the local legitimacy. What we see in this study is therefore the image of a traditional chieftaincy that skillfully uses local politics and rituals, and state policy and development initiatives to reinforce the local power of *Kwere Aniaba*/village chief.