



ISSN 2336-3274 (Print) ISSN 2570-7558 (Online)

<https://edu.uhk.cz/africa>

Beyond scarcity: Conflicts over land and social relations in south- western Burkina Faso

Author:

Bettina Engels – University Bayreuth, Germany

Recommended citation:

Engels, B. (2014). Beyond scarcity: Conflicts over land and social relations in south- western Burkina Faso. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 2(1), 75–93. Retrieved from <https://edu.uhk.cz/africa/index.php/ModAfr/article/view/143>



University of Hradec Králové
Philosophical Faculty

BEYOND SCARCITY: CONFLICTS OVER LAND AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN SOUTH- WESTERN BURKINA FASO

Bettina Engels

Abstract: Recently, the academic and political debate on resource scarcity and conflict has been revitalized against the background of global trends like climate change and the growing commercial pressure on land. Scholars widely agree that resource scarcity causes or influences conflict via social and political mediation mechanisms. But the respective understanding of social mediation fundamentally depends on theoretical and ontological perspectives. We argue that conflicts over land are indeed distributive conflicts over a scarce resource. But they cannot be understood regarding only the materiality of the resource because the conflicts are embedded in specific social relations. We examine local conflicts over land in the Comoé province, south-western Burkina Faso and illustrate how local citizenship is negotiated in these conflicts. Control of and access to land, as well as social categories of citizenship and belonging are linked to each other in a mutually constitutive relationship.

Key words: *Land conflicts, political ecology, autochthony, citizenship and belonging, Burkina Faso*

Current trends, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, towards large-scale land acquisition ('land grabbing') for commercial agriculture, extractivism, tourism and other purposes remind us that land is a scarce and important resource. At the same time, they give fresh impetus to research on the conflict impacts of resource scarcity. Beginning with the 'environmental scarcity' thesis in the early 1990s (cf. Homer-Dixon 1991, 1994), research on conflicts over scarce natural resources has advanced significantly and become more differentiated in terms of methods and content. Across disciplines and opposing theoretical positions, scholars agree on two points: as a scarce resource, land is subject to conflict; and the

relationship between resource scarcity and conflict is socially and politically mediated. But what does this mediation entail concretely? This article will investigate how social mediation in conflicts over land among local land users works.

Building on work from the field of political ecology, notably from critical development research and social anthropology, we develop a theory-based understanding of disputes over land as expressions of the conflictive processes in the negotiation of collective identities, social group frontiers, membership in political communities (citizenship) and political authority. We argue that while land conflicts indeed represent disagreements over the distribution of a scarce resource, they cannot be explained by focusing solely on the materiality of the resource; instead the explanation must be embedded in the existing social relations on different, nested scales (local, national, regional, global). From this perspective, the question of social mediation shifts away from asking whether, or to what extent, resource scarcity as an allegedly natural process influences or determines social action. By 'social mediation' we mean that every 'natural' process is, as such, already socially structured and produced; we explain this idea in more detail in the theory section below.

The article aims to contribute conceptually to the debate on the conflict effects of resource scarcity. It focuses particularly on the role of social mediation in the relationship between resource scarcity and conflict. Building on empirical insights into land conflicts in South Western Burkina Faso, the article illustrates how social categories of belonging are related to access to, and control over, land, and how they become meaningful in land conflicts. In the institutions that regulate access to land, social relations are negotiated through the question of resource use; in the case of South Western Burkina Faso, this refers to social relations between 'autochthons' and 'migrants'. However, it is important to notice that our aim, in this contribution, is theory-oriented: we intend to contribute to a general debate, building primarily upon insights from selected literature on land relations and land conflicts, particularly with regard to sub-Saharan Africa. The empirical case of Burkina Faso is explored for illustrative purposes only. We do not claim to present in-depth and systematic insights at the micro level. Rather, the case study functions to demonstrate how historically embedded processes on the local, national and regional

scales interact and become relevant for the way in which social relations are negotiated in conflicts over land.

Which social structures become meaningful with respect to access to, and conflicts over, land is historically and locally specific. Within Burkina Faso, autochthony is the most influential category in some places, whereas ethnicity is in others. An analysis of social mediation must therefore start from below the national scale. At the same time, analysis focusing on the local level must not ignore the nation state, as this remains in most cases a central entity of political authority. Control over land is pivotal for political authority; this will be demonstrated by the historical development of land rights and tenure systems in Burkina Faso.

The article is structured as follows. We start by introducing our analytical approach to conflicts over land, based on the assumption of a dialectical relationship between nature and society. Next, we assume that conflicts over land are structured by social categories of inclusion and exclusion, and that the 'land question' is highly relevant for creating and upholding political authority. From these reflections, we draw our understanding of how land as a scarce resource is socially mediated. The case study starts by sketching out how land rights and tenure systems in Burkina have developed historically, and then presents the recent institutions governing access to land. In doing so, we demonstrate first how closely control over land is entangled with authority, and second that access to, and conflicts over, land are structured by social categories of belonging (in this case, autochthony). We illustrate this by examining conflicts over land and local institutions of conflict management in two villages in the province of Comoé in South Western Burkina Faso. The conclusion argues that it is not 'autochthons' and 'migrants' that struggle over land as a scarce resource, but rather that conflicts over land are used to negotiate social categories of belonging to a local political community, linked to the right to use and access resources.

Conflicts over land

The 'environmental scarcity' hypothesis, which has gained some popularity in social scientific research on resource conflicts, states

that resource scarcity leads to conflicts between individuals or social groups in societies where people's livelihoods are based on subsistence farming, pastoralism and the like. Scarcity can result from 'natural' processes such as climate change, from population growth and migration, from overuse and degradation, or from a concurrence of food, meat and agro-fuels production. The question of what causes scarcity (for instance, climate variability or competing land use) is subject to controversial debates. In addition, further exploration is required, in the form of both conceptual reflections and empirical analysis, with regard to how social and political mediation of resource scarcity occurs specifically at the local level, and how causally relevant resource scarcity is compared to political and social factors.

In order to capture the social mediation of material scarcity analytically, we refer to nature and society as spheres not separate from one another but mutually constitutive (cf. Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Bryant and Bailey 1997). Such an analytical approach does not aim to identify single factors of influence or develop causal models. Nature (land, for instance) is always socially produced; at the same time, social relations are not detached from nature's materiality. The use of nature is a central part of social ascriptions, identities and the construction of social and cultural groups. When talking about social mediation, we thus refer to the social ascriptions and relations inherent to nature and the ways in which they impact processes that make nature a scarce resource.

This approach to analysing the mechanisms of social mediation in conflicts over land can build on comprehensive research addressing how access to, control of, and conflicts over land are entangled with relationships of power and domination, and how collective identities and belonging to political communities are constructed and linked to land relations (cf. Peluso and Lund 2011: 668; Ribot and Peluso 2003: 153).

In African studies in particular, numerous studies investigate how land rights and tenure systems have emerged from (colonial) history. Many colonial administrations introduced formalised land rights, thereby creating parallel 'modern' (state-regulated) and 'customary' ('traditional') land rights and impacting local authority relations significantly: 'Colonial rulers confused territoriality with sovereignty, and

conflated African ritual roles, exerting authority over people in lineage, clan or chiefdom. Where the colonial rulers could not identify an appropriate “chief”, they created one. The multiple types of authority and sets of claims over land and its products were glossed by the label “communal tenure”, which became incorporated into the developing body of “customary law”.’ (Peters 2004: 272)

In many cases, this resulted in a racialized property rights system: white settlers owned land as private property; Africans had collective access rights through membership in ‘local communities’ (Berry 2002). Such concepts of ‘native citizenship’ were built upon categories such as ‘tribe’, ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ (cf. Mamdani 1996). Likewise, in many traditional and modern regimes, land rights are linked to membership in such socially constructed groups: clans, ethnic or indigenous groups, nations, etc. Vice versa, control over land is a criterion for defining belonging, as membership in political communities and social groups are not fixed but, rather, subject to social and political negotiation and conflicts.

Social categories of difference and hierarchy (class, race, gender, generation, and ethnicity) are created through social practices, both symbolically and materially. Conflicts over land also deal with the distribution of wealth and assets within societies – determining the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, as Thomas Sikor and Christian Lund put it (Sikor and Lund 2009: 2). Necessarily, this provokes the more general question of which social structures constitute these ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’: which practices reproduce these categories and how stable or contested are the social structures.

Territorial ties are important to the construction of social identities and the demarcation of social groups. In many ‘modern’ nation states, people have to indicate their ‘homeland’ or ‘village’ in order to claim participation at the local or national level (Lentz 2007: 37). (Local) citizenship – the construction of belonging to a political community – defines who can articulate political interests and whose claims to access resources are seen as legitimate. Territorial claims are often legitimated by references to collective identities and fixed by national and international land rights systems (cf. Assies 2000). In many contexts, autochthony is an influential concept linking collective identities to territory and thus legitimating claims to land.

Territory refers to physical spaces where people live, functioning as a category of inclusion in, and exclusion from, political communities. 'Autochthony' constructs social groups that have allegedly 'always' or at least 'for a very long time' lived in a certain area. Inherent in this is an essentialist idea of origin; the 'others' are those who live in the same territory but arrived 'later': the 'migrants'.

In order to understand conflicts over land, to explain why and how in certain temporal and spatial contexts scarce land resources are contested, the analysis must be linked to social and political relations. By focusing on the social mediation of resource scarcity, we dispel the notion that resources run short due to influences external to society, leading to, for instance, distributional conflicts among social groups that could be prevented or resolved by 'better' resource management tools (management and planning of land use, social politics, etc.) Instead we argue that scarcity is always socially produced, since the use of nature is shaped by conflictive processes of social negotiation and is also an integral part of collective identity construction.

Methodology

The field research for this case study was conducted at four locations in Burkina Faso (Ouagadougou, Banfora, Toumousséni and Siniena) in November and December 2012. The primary research consisted of 32 interviews. Interview partners were representatives of national ministries and other authorities, local and regional administrations, international development agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other associations, and the *chefferie* ('traditional chiefs'), as well as farmers and herders in Toumousséni and Siniena. Interviewees were selected with the aim of gathering a maximum of information from different perspectives on current land use and changes in land rights, as well as on land conflicts both in Burkina Faso in general and in the study area in particular. State representatives were selected from a range of institutions and political levels (local, regional, national). The interviews focused on land use, conflicts over land, conflict management, and formal and informal institutions of land rights and land tenure. Secondary sources included documents by state actors on different levels (local, district, national) and studies by state actors, NGOs and researchers.

Land rights institutions in Burkina Faso from a historical perspective

In Burkina Faso, land rights are shaped by overlapping – sometimes complementary, sometimes competing – formal and informal institutions, originating from different historical phases characterised by specific relationships of power, domination and authority. Membership in political communities and ascriptions of collective identities are central elements here.

Local, customary institutions of land rights vary within Burkina Faso. One characteristic feature present in all regions is the strong influence of the *chefferie*. In francophone Western Africa, the *chefferie traditionnelle* is an institution based on the religious or cultural authority of the chiefs.¹ Their legitimacy originates, first and foremost, from ancestry. At the beginning of the colonial period, colonial authorities attempted to break local authority structures and disempower the *chefferie*. But since control over the colonised territories was difficult to maintain due to a lack of resources, the colonial authorities rehabilitated the chiefs and integrated them into a system of indirect rule. Chiefs who resisted or were unwilling to collaborate were killed or removed and replaced by new ‘local authorities’ (von Trotha 1996: 80). The chiefs became intermediaries between the colonial authorities and the population and played an ambivalent role as administrative functionaries and people’s representatives, a role they still play today (von Trotha and Klute 2001: 688). In Burkina Faso, the *chefferie* is still a central actor in land rights and land conflicts.

French colonial authorities introduced numerous land rights regulations at the central state level in what is today Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta (Arnaldi di Balme and Hochet 2010: 45). These regulations, in combination with the promotion of commercial and export-oriented agriculture, were primarily aimed at world market integration (Dialla 2003: 7). Introduced in 1925, the *Certificat Administratif* inscribed the categories ‘autochthon’ and ‘migrant’ into state land rights (AOF 1925). Subsequent regulations further promoted individualised land rights (Dialla 2003: 9). In 1932, private land ownership was formally legitimated and codified by the introduction of formal land titles (*titres fonciers*) (AOF 1932). Existing customary land rights

1 I am grateful to one anonymous reviewer for clarifying this point.

institutions were widely ignored during the formalisation process. In 1935, all parcels considered untilled and uncultivated, and on which no land title was claimed, were declared to be state property (AOF 1935; Traoré 1999: 124). The colonial land rights system appointed the *chefferie* to be in charge of administering the communal lands. This colonial codification of customary rights led to enduring disputes over hierarchies within the *chefferie* and border demarcations of communal land properties between different groups (Lentz 2007: 39).

The first governments in place after Upper Volta acquired independence, under the presidencies of Maurice Yaméogo (1960–66), Sangoulé Lamizana (1966–80), Saye Zerbo (1980–82) and Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo (1982–83), by and large adhered to colonial land rights (cf. Englebert 1996; Kaboré 2002; Traoré 1999). Only Thomas Sankara (1983–87), by establishing the ‘law on re-organisation of agriculture and soil’ (*loi portant réorganisation agraire et foncière*, RAF) in 1984, attempted to fundamentally reform land relations. The RAF was oriented towards the state-socialist paradigm that functioned as the ideological base of Sankara’s regime. At least in the understanding of its authors, the RAF aimed at guaranteeing access to land – and thus to subsistence farming – for a maximum of Burkina’s population. It would restrict the privileged position of the ruling class with regard to land ownership and limit the *chefferie*’s control over land, widely replacing customary land rights institutions with ‘modern’ national institutions. For this purpose, the RAF included abolishing private land ownership and declared all land to be principally national (state) property. Land titles were annulled and replaced by usage rights (Arnaldi di Balme and Hochet 2010: 45–46). Officially the RAF also eliminated existing customary regulations on access to land (Gensler 2002: 9; Gausset 2008: 54). However, its attempt to ‘purify [land] of all symbolic and traditional socio-politico ascriptions’ (Zongo 2009: 123, our translation) failed. Customary regulations on access to land widely remained in place (Gray 2002: 168–169; Ouédraogo 2002: 13–14). In effect, either the *chefferie* or the new political elites at the local level retained control over land. In some cases, these local elites established authority only by controlling access to land. Control over land and political authority are mutually linked: control over land contributes to constructing authority, while authority comes along with control over land (cf. Sikor and Lund 2009: 9–10).

The reintroduction of private land ownership was among the main changes in land rights by the government of Blaise Compaoré, who took over the presidency in Burkina Faso in 1987 and was in office until popular revolution in 2014. After Sankara and his predecessors failed to abolish existing customary institutions of authority, Blaise Compaoré adopted a strategy of incorporating the *chefferie*. This has also been reflected in land rights: the most recent and, since the RAF, most wide-reaching reform of land rights aims at systematically integrating the chiefs into the formal state institutions. Law no. 034/2009 acknowledges the chiefs' control over land and formally integrates them into the newly established commissions on soil allocation in the rural areas (*Commission Foncière Villageoise*; loi 03/2009, articles 81 and 82). In times of inner-state political pressure on Blaise Compaoré, who recently attempted to change the constitution in order to enable himself to remain president for a fifth term after the elections scheduled for November 2015 (Loada and Romaniuk 2014; ISS 2014), he and his ruling party *Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (CDP) rely on support from the countryside and attempt to make the *chefferie* a source of legitimacy.

Autochthony is a central category for traditional land rights institutions in Burkina Faso (cf. Bonnet-Bontemps 2006). Identifying oneself and being identified by others as either 'autochthon' or 'migrant' refers to whose ancestors were the first to clear and cultivate land in a specific area. Territorial reference to concrete place is pivotal to collective identity: more or less everyone is able to indicate 'his' or 'her' village, reflecting the construction that everybody had an ancestor or ancestors at the beginning of his or her genealogy, and that these ancestors can be attributed to identifiable places. Hence a family may live in a village for generations and still be seen as 'migrants'. At the same time, territorial demarcations of the land attributed to an 'autochthon' group are frequently as blurred as the social demarcations of the group itself. At the local level, customary land rights institutions regulate the relations between long-time residents and newcomers regarding the use of agricultural and pasture land. All over Western Africa, typical institutions exist that oblige 'autochthons' to provide land for subsistence farming to new arrivals (cf. Chauveau 2005; Chauveau and Bobo 2003; Chauveau and Richards 2008). In most cases, this does not mean granting property but rather usage rights, linked to certain social and material duties. For instance, migrant land users

have to deliver a share of the harvest to the autochthon owner of the land, offer presents for feasts, or help by working in the owner's fields.

In South Western Burkina Faso, customary institutions are currently the main references in regulating access to land, and the *chefferie* plays a central role. New or additional parcels are usually granted via one of two land institutions: *don* (donation) or *prêt* (loan). Both are provided by the *chef de terre*, the representative of the local *chefferie* in charge of land matters. 'Autochthons' receive an additional piece of land (for instance, when the land available to them is no longer sufficient to feed all the members of the household) from the *chef de terre* as a *don*. Receiving land as a *don* and cultivating it implies full usage rights. 'Migrants', that is, everyone who is not an 'autochthon', receive land as a *prêt*. Several interviewees reported that in recent times land given as a *prêt* was limited to a maximum of five hectares, and that the duration of use was also limited. The reasons given for this trend were increasing conflicts in the transfer from one generation to the next, scarcity of land produced by the return of Burkinabe migrants from the neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and inner-state migration from the Sahel area, and the risks of land being sold for commercial purposes instead of subsistence farming. The main difference between *prêt* and *don* is that for *prêt* land, usage rights are limited and imply certain duties. All land that belongs to the village, according to customary law, is owned by individuals, families, or in the case of commonly used land, the village community. Traditional land rights institutions oblige landowners to grant land that they do not cultivate to others (e.g. individuals or families that have newly arrived in the village) who need it to feed household members, if the *chef de terre* so decides. In return for cultivating a piece of land as *prêt*, a frequent duty in the form of a share of the harvest, money, or a sacrifice, is demanded from the land user by the owner from the second year of harvest onwards. The amount depends on the land user's income. In addition, the owner retains the principal right to claim the *prêt* land, meaning that if the owner needs the land for his own cultivation, the 'migrant' user has to give it back. Usage rights for *prêt* land are also restricted; in particular, trees may not be planted on *prêt* land. Planting a tree is considered to be an illegitimate investment in loaned land, even if the right to use the land has been granted for an unlimited time period. When land where investments have been made goes back to the owner, the question of reimbursement arises. 'Durable'

investments, in particular trees, are considered ownership claims by migrant land users, thereby challenging the land rights institutions and regulations (Gausset 2004, 2008).

The categories 'autochthon' and 'migrant', as well as the institutions *don* and *prêt*, turn out to be somewhat flexible and permeable in social practice. Some interviewees report that migrants can be granted land as a *don*, too, without temporal limitations and without duties, but have to accept the owner's principal claim to the land. Such expanded rights are granted to 'migrants' whom the community accepts as '*fil du village*' ('son of the village'). 'Migrants' attain this social position by marrying an 'autochthon' or proving special engagement for the village community. Not only do the categories 'autochthon' and 'migrant' have a central structuring function regarding access to land in South Western Burkina Faso, but conversely, land also plays an important role in constructing collective identities. According to the idea that everyone has a village, a place, a piece of land from which he or she originates (although the person may never have been there), 'autochthons' are attributed a spiritual bond to 'their' land – a bond that 'migrants' do not have, or only have to some other place. Ancestry is crucial to the construction of autochthony; when 'migrants' are accepted as '*fil du village*' and thus granted expanded rights, this does not mean that, in consequence, they are perceived as 'autochthons', not even in the next generation (cf. Bierschenk et al. 2001; Bonnet-Bontemps 2006).

Conflicts over land and conflict management in Toumousséni und Siniena

The villages of Toumousséni und Siniena are located in the municipality of Banfora in the province of Comoé, Cascade region, in South Western Burkina Faso, near the border to Côte d'Ivoire. With average daily temperatures reaching 30–35 degrees Celsius, about 1,000 mm annual precipitation, and a dry season lasting five to six months, agricultural conditions are favourable in the region compared to other parts of Burkina Faso. Two rivers, the Comoé and Léraba, carry water throughout the year. More than 80 per cent of the population rely on agriculture for their livelihood, mainly through small-scale, rain-fed farming (cereals, cotton, sesame, peanuts and tree fruits) (FEWS NET 2010; Loye et al. 2009; PRCCU 2005). Large-scale sugar cane and cot-

ton farming, as well as timber production, make the region around Banfora the third most important industrial location in Burkina Faso after the capital Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso (PRCCU 2005: 36). Due to the comparably good agro-ecological conditions, the South Western region traditionally receives inner-state migration from the drier and more drought affected north and central plateaux. Thus, numerous inhabitants of Toumousséni and Siniena are ‘migrants’.

Migration to the region increased between the end of the 1990s and the year 2002, when tens of thousands of Burkinabe migrants returned from the neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire. This was due to xenophobic attacks in Western and Southern Côte d’Ivoire, which peaked in November 1999 with more than 15,000 migrant farmers expelled, and in mid-September 2002, when an inner-state armed conflict started in Côte d’Ivoire after a failed coup d’état. Many returnees, farmers in Côte d’Ivoire, tried to establish new lives in the agricultural areas of South Western Burkina Faso, close to the Ivorian border, and were in need of land. Not surprisingly, this had a significant impact on the region’s land reserves (Brédeloup 2006; Loada 2006; Ouédraogo 2002; Riester 2011).

Demographic development in the Cascades region² (MEF 2010: 2)

Year	Population size
1985	253,360
1996	334,303
2006	531,808
2007 (estimated)	544,621
2008 (estimated)	566,843
2009 (estimated)	589,741

From our empirical data (interviews and observations), we can differentiate between two forms of autochthon–migrant land conflicts occurring in the study region: distributional conflicts over the scarce resource of land (competing claims to one piece of land, conflicts over border demarcations, etc.) and conflicts over the rules and regulations regarding land use. Distributional conflicts emerge less from the ar-

2 The Cascades region is one of 13 regions in Burkina Faso, encompassing the provinces of Comoé and Léraba, with Banfora as the regional capital.

rival of new land users than from the passage from one generation to another, when the children of an 'autochthon' family raise claims to land that has been used by 'migrants', often for generations. In Siniena, 'migrant' land users reported in interviews that their 'autochthon' neighbours expanded their parcels from year to year. One interviewee stated his fear that, after his death, his children and grandchildren would ultimately be expelled from the land. Though land conflicts in Burkina Faso have only escalated to violence in a minority of cases so far, conflicts between individuals, families or generations have often transformed into inter-group conflicts between 'autochthons' and 'migrants' (Gausset 2008; Zongo 2009).

Conflicts between 'autochthons' and 'migrants' over the rules and regulations concerning land use often emerge in relation to investments on *prêt* land, particularly when migrant land users plant trees (cf. Gausset 2004; Gray 2002). Regulations also exist for trees already growing on *prêt* land. In Toumousséni, for instance, fruit from these trees belongs to the village community; everyone has the right to eat it. Migrant land users are not allowed to sell fruit from trees growing on *prêt* land. Conflicts over challenges to, or violations of, land use rules are also distributional conflicts in as far as planting trees on *prêt* land or claiming exclusive access to these trees' fruit are considered long-term claims to the land by 'migrants'. But first and foremost, in conflicts over the rules and regulations concerning resource use, social relations are negotiated that grant 'autochthons' a privileged position vis-à-vis 'migrants' with respect to access to land.

For the customary management of conflicts over the distribution and use of natural resources in South Western Burkina Faso, the *chefs de terre* also play a central role. In Toumousséni und Siniena, conflict parties seek them out when property or usage rights or parcel demarcations are in dispute. The *chef de terre* makes his decision by drawing on his own knowledge and asking village inhabitants. If he feels unable to regulate the question at hand, or if one of the actors concerned does not accept his decision, other institutions are activated. When conflicts are framed in a way that goes beyond questions of access to, and use of, land, the village assembly – consisting of the *chef de village* and the village elders – takes charge of the negotiations. Issues not limited to land fall under the responsibility of the *chef de village* and village elders. In the village assembly, only men have the right

to speak; women can take part as observers. The *chef de village* chairs the assembly. After the conflict parties and witnesses have spoken and all questions have been answered, the village assembly discusses the case and the elders reach a decision. In cases of material damage (i.e. damage to the fields, stalls or granaries), the aggrieved party makes a suggestion for compensation. If the conflict parties cannot agree on the amount of the compensation, the *chef de terre* acts as a mediator. For certain damages, there is a fixed compensation that is widely accepted within the village community. If someone is found guilty of breaking the rules of resource use, the elders decide on sanctions ranging from a sacrifice to exclusion from the village community. But only 'migrants' can be banned from the village; *fils du village* and 'autochthon' inhabitants can at most receive a monetary penalty for breaking the rules. Hence, the social categories 'autochthon' and 'migrant' also structure the management of land conflicts: exclusion from the community can mean the denial of access to resources and, in conflict cases, can result in physical exclusion from the village, too.

Conclusion

When increasing numbers of people have to make do with fixed amounts of land, the land becomes a scarce and contested resource and may be subject to different kinds of social conflict. In this paper, examining the case of land conflicts in South Western Burkina Faso, we have identified two factors that contribute to an increase in the number of land users: returning migrants from the neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, and inner-state migration from other parts of Burkina Faso. Whereas other scholars point to migration as a link between environmental change and conflict, and thus a cause, trigger or enforcing factor for resource conflicts (e.g., Homer-Dixon 1999; Kahl 2006), we argue that migration cannot be identified as a triggering or causal moment for conflicts in South Western Burkina Faso. Migration is, rather, a common and socially legitimated practice, regulated by local institutions (of land rights, among others). In the study area, conflicts over land can indeed be observed mostly between 'autochthons' and 'migrants' (whereby the ' *fils du village*' is a relevant category regarding land use rights but not in land conflicts). However, the conflicts are not a result of migration but, rather, a forum in which to negotiate social ascriptions and relations. 'Autochthon' and 'migrant' are

categories of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging or not belonging to the local political community. Conflicts over who can make claims about political participation and access to resources occur in all societies, and in these conflicts, social categories are steadily produced and reproduced. Social relations – here, between ‘autochthons’ and ‘migrants’ – are neither given nor stable but socially produced and continuously negotiated. This negotiation is potentially a conflictual process.

In conclusion, what role does resource scarcity play in the emergence of conflicts? As natural resources, agricultural and pasture land are principally renewable; nevertheless, at a given point in time, they are only available in a limited amount. Thus, land is indeed a scarce resource from which, under certain conditions, a growing number of people have to live. But as the case study on land conflicts in South Western Burkina Faso has demonstrated, it is analytically curtailed to infer a linear causal relationship from scarcity and growing population density to resource conflicts. Instead, in the analysed case, conflicts over land did not necessarily accelerate when numerous migrants returned from Côte d’Ivoire and population numbers increased in a relatively short period of time. It was not the arrival of ‘migrants’ or returnees that tended to trigger conflicts but rather the passage from one generation to another. This is reflected in the local institutions of land rights. Access to land, and its limitations, are linked to categories of inclusion in the local community (notably, autochthony). According to the local land rights institutions, access rights are only inheritable without limitation by people whose unlimited membership in the community is not contested. Thus, when ‘migrant’ land users die, their children and grandchildren may risk having to give up the land. When they raise claims to land that their parents used as *prêt*, this implies, in addition to the material claim, a claim of belonging to the village community and wanting to enjoy the corresponding rights. In this sense, conflicts over land during the passage from one generation to another are a form of negotiating broader social relations, namely the entanglement of local citizenship and access rights. In this respect, it is unwise to analytically separate distributional conflicts over a scarce resource from conflicts over the negotiation of social identities. It is inaccurate to claim that pre-existing ‘autochthon’ and ‘migrant’, ethnic, or other social groups struggle over a scarce material resource; rather, conflicts over the distribution of this resource construct and

reinforce these social groups in the first place. Material inequality and the socio-cultural construction of categories of power and difference are inseparably interwoven.

References

- AOF. 1925. «Décret du 08 Novembre 1925 instituant un mode de constatations des droits fonciers des indigènes en AOF.» Afrique Occidentale Française.
- . 1932. «Décret du 26 juillet 1932 portant réorganisation de la propriété foncière en AOF.» Afrique Occidentale Française.
- . 1935. «Décret du 15 Novembre 1935 portant réorganisation des terres en AOF.» Afrique Occidentale Française.
- Arnaldi di Balme, Luigi and Hochet, Peter. 2010. *Aperçu du Cadre Juridique et Institutionnel de la Gestion des Ressources Naturelles et Foncières au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou/Paris: Laboratoire Citoyennetés/Gret.
- Assies, Willem. 2000. «Land, territories, and indigenous peoples' rights.» In: *Current Land Policy in Latin America: Regulating Land Tenure and Neo-liberalism*. Eds. Annelies Zoomers and Gemma van der Haar. Amsterdam: KIT.
- Berry, Sara. 2002. "Debating the Land Question in Africa." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, No. 4, 638-68.
- Bierschenk, Thomas, Georg Elwert, and Dirk Kohnert. 1991. *The Long-Term Effects of Development Aid - Empirical Studies in Rural West Africa*. MPRA Paper 4217, Munich: Munich Personal RePEc Archive.
- Blaikie, Piers M. and Brookfield, Harold. 1987. *Land Degradation and Society*. London: Methuen.
- Bonnet-Bontemps, Cristelle. 2006. *Access to Land and the Roots of Social Order: Questioning the Tutorat Relationship in Dégué-Dégué (Burkina Faso)*. Paper prepared for the Colloque "Les frontières de la question foncière: Enchâssement social des droits et politiques publiques", 17-19 May 2006, Montpellier.
- Brédeloup, Sylvie. 2006. "Réinstallation à Ouagadougou des 'rapatriés' burkinabè de Côte d'Ivoire." *Afrique Contemporaine*, No. 217, 185-201.
- Bryant, Raymond L. and Bailey, Sinead. 1997. *Third World Political Ecology*. New York: Routledge.
- Chauveau, Jean-Pierre. 2005. "Les rapports entre générations ont une histoire: accès à la terre et gouvernamentalité locale en pays gban (Côte d'Ivoire)." *Afrique contemporaine*, No. 214.
- Chauveau, Jean-Pierre and Bobo, Koffi Samuel. 2003. «La situation de guerre dans l'arène villageoise. Un exemple dans le Centre-Ouest ivoirien.» *Politique Africaine*, No. 89, 12-32.

Engels: BEYOND SCARCITY IN BURKINA FASO

- Chauveau, Jean-Pierre and Richards, Paul. 2008. «West African Insurgencies in Agrarian Perspective: Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone Compared.» *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, No. 4, 515-52.
- Dialla, Basga Emile. 2003. "La question foncière sur les périmètres hydro-agricole du Burkina Faso. Série Document de Travail DT-CAPES N°2003-07." Ouagadougou: Centre d'Analyse des Politiques Économique et Sociales.
- Englebert, Pierre. 1996. *Burkina Faso: Unsteady Statehood in West Africa*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- FEWS NET. 2010. "Livelihood Zoning and Profiling Report: Burkina Faso." International Development Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET).
- Gausset, Quentin. 2004. "Le foncier et les arbres dans le sud-ouest du Burkina Faso. Présentation de l'approche contractuelle de PETREA." In: *Etablir le lien entre la recherche et la politique. Bridging research and policy. Proceedings of the workshop, 2-3 December 2004*. Eds. Anette Reenberg and Henrik Secher Marcussen. Ouagadougou: Sahel-Sudan Environment Research Initiative (SEREIN).
- Gausset, Quentin. 2008. "L'aspect foncier dans les conflits entre autochtones et migrants au sud-ouest du Burkina Faso." *Politique Africaine*, No. 112, 52-66
- Gensler, Marlis. 2002. «« Une fois loti... » : Bodenrecht und Siedlungsgeschichte in einer westafrikanischen Kleinstadt (Diébougou, Burkina Faso).» Working Paper. Mainz: Universität Mainz, Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien.
- Gray, Leslie. 2002. «Environmental policy, land rights, and conflict: rethinking community natural resource management programs in Burkina Faso.» *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, No. 2, 167-82.
- Homer-Dixon, Thomas. 1991. "On the threshold: environmental changes as causes of acute conflict." *International Security* 16, No. 2, 76-116.
- Homer-Dixon, Thomas. 1994. "Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases." *International Security* 19, No. 1, 5-40.
- Homer-Dixon, Thomas. 1999. *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- ISS. 2014. "Risks ahead of the constitutional referendum in Burkina Faso." *ECOWAS Peace and Security Report*, No. 9, August 2014, Pretoria.
- Kaboré, Roger Bila. 2002. *Histoire politique du Burkina Faso: 1919-2000*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Kahl, Colin H. 2006. *States, Scarcity, and Civil Strife in the Developing world*. Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press.

- Lentz, Carola. 2007. "Land and the politics of belonging in Africa." In: *African Alternatives*. Eds. Patrick Chabal, Ulf Engel and Leo de Haan. Leiden: Brill, 37-58.
- Loada, Augustin. 2006. "L'émigration burkinabè face à la crise de « l'ivoirité »." *Outre-Terre*, No. 17, 343-56.
- Loada, Augustin, and Peter Romaniuk. 2014. "Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso. Toward National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity." Goshen: Global Center on Cooperative Security.
- Loye, Alexis Salvador, Tinguéri, Rose Koirine, Zida, Yemdaogo and Zoma, Lamoussa. 2009. *Monographie de la Région des Cascades*. Ouagadougou: Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- MEF. 2010. "La région des Cascades en chiffres." Ouagadougou: Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances du Burkina Faso.
- Ouédraogo, Moussa. 2002. "Le foncier dans les politiques de développement au Burkina Faso: Enjeux et stratégies." London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Peluso, Nancy Lee, and Lund, Christian. 2011. «New frontiers of land control: Introduction.» *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, No. 4, 667-81.
- Peters, Pauline E. 2004. "Inequality and Social Conflict over Land in Africa." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4, No. 3, 269-314.
- PRCCU. 2005. *Plan de Développement Communal de Banfora*. Ed. Générale des Services. Ouagadougou: Projet de renforcement des capacités des communes urbaines.
- Ribot, Jesse C., and Peluso, Nancy Lee. 2003. «A Theory of Access.» *Rural Sociology* 68, No. 2, 153-81.
- Riester, Andrea. 2011. *Migration and Conflict. The Integration of Burkinabe Migrants Displaced from Côte d'Ivoire*. PhD thesis submitted at the Institute for Social Anthropology, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg.
- Sikor, Thomas, and Lund, Christian. 2009. "Access and Property: A Question of Power and Authority." *Development & Change* 40, No. 1, 1-22.
- Traoré, Djibril. 1999. «L'État, la tenure communautaire et la participation populaire au Burkina Faso.» *Réforme Agricole*, No. 1-2, 121-35.
- Trotha, Trutz von. 1996. "From Administrative to Civil Chieftancy: Some Problems and Prospects of African Chieftancy." *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, No. 37-38, 79-107.
- Trotha, Trutz von, and Georg Klute. 2001. "Von der Postkolonie zur Parastaatlichkeit. Das Beispiel Schwarzafrika." *Jahrbuch für internationale Sicherheitspolitik 2001*. Ed. Erich Reiter. Hamburg: Mittler, 683-707.

Engels: BEYOND SCARCITY IN BURKINA FASO

Zongo, Mahamadou. 2009. "Terre d'Etat, loi des ancêtres? Les conflits fonciers et leurs procédures de règlement dans l'ouest du Burkina Faso." *Cahiers du Cerleshs Tome XXIV*, No. 33, 119145.