

Bagyeli Forest Management in Context

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**Tropenbos-Cameroon
Reports 99-2**

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PREFACE

The knowledge laid down in this report is due to the valuable input of a lot of other people. Here's the place to acknowledge my profound gratitude to all those that helped and supported me in various ways, both with the contents and the process of my work. I sincerely hope that I have not forgotten anyone, if so: please accept my apologies.

First I would like to thank all my Bagyeli informants in my main research locations Mangamé and Ndtoua, and the other locations: Binzambo, Bitumbi, Kaba-Mbango, Maboulo, Assok/ex-Mamba, Maschooh-Maschooh, Ngalé, Nyamenkoum and Yanebouti. They have been exceptionally patient with me, answering all these questions and taking me along. Excuse me for not mentioning you all by name here. A special thanks go to my Bagyeli research assistants Seh Michel, Tchagadic Jean, Nzouongo Pierre, Songmbpile Pierre, and Mabouang Paul. *Awa bvubvu!* I am sorry for the death of Songmbpile and Mabouang. Both belonged to the first Bagyeli to receive formal education; I can only hope that their intellectual capacities and perseverance will be a source of inspiration for the generations of Bagyeli to come. The Petites Soeurs de Jésus will not mind being bracketed together with their Bagyeli friends. These catholic nuns, when still in Bipindi, have been invaluable for me from a personal and practical point of view, but also as a 'mirror' for my developing thoughts on the Bagyeli with whom they are so much more familiar.

I would like to thank my husband Howard for supporting me along the way; his care definitely allowed me to go on with my work, and to stop when other aspects of life deserved my attention. He is the one standing by me through thick and thin.

Peter Geschiere and Franz von Benda Beckmann, with their respective expertise, have each contributed to sharpening my thoughts on the current Bagyeli management of forest resources. The advantage of bringing out these chapters before the actual thesis is published, is that I here have the possibility of thanking them for their valuable support in this sense.

The chapter on the dynamics of Bagyeli management has been greatly improved by the input of the MILANTRO "saving group of intellectual capacities". Particularly the comments by (and discussions with) Herwig Cleuren, Ariëne Henkemans, Mayke Kaag, Marie-Trees Meereboer, and Manon Osseweijer have been very stimulating and encouraging. And although, nowadays, Hans van den Breemer may not have the possibilities of being that actively involved in coaching my work, he was at the very basis of it.

Here is where I get at my Tropenbos colleagues and staff. Obviously, if it were not for the Tropenbos Cameroon Programme, and the funding by the ITTO, this research could never have taken place. Special thanks go to Marc Parren, who kindly provided me with archival material that happened to contain a key to the answer of an important research question. I enjoyed discussing the logging activities in Cameroon with him, with Gart van Leersum and Jolanda van den Berg in the context of writing our joint article. The interesting discussions with Guillaume Lescuyer in the context of us co-supervising Marijke should not be forgotten, as well as Wim van Driel and Han van Dijk sharing their house, veranda and crates of softdrinks in Kribi. Wyb Jonkers should be thanked for selecting and transforming my ideas regarding the programme to something more feasible.

Finally, I would like to thank the following Tropenbos students for their valuable input in the form of reports and discussions: Marijke Booijink, Guy Patrice Dkamela and Joris vd Sandt deserve to be especially mentioned, but also Cor Hanssen, Simone Henning and Hermine Ngo Mboua.

This text is still 'under construction', so I hereby kindly invite those having suggestions for improvements to contact me by E-mail, at kbiesbrouck@rullet.leidenuniv.nl.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to adhere to the prevalent social conditions for sustainable forest management, externally induced forms of such management -like that to be proposed by the Tropenbos Cameroon Programme (TCP)- have to respect local tenure arrangements. Eventual recommendations by Tropenbos (or any other agency) for future forest exploitation will be just another layer of arrangements added to the existing ones: Cameroonian forest law (and other legal texts) and the various local forms of tenure and management pertaining to natural resources. Each of the actors in sustainable forest management holds perceptions coloured by their own views of ‘the truth’ with respect to issues of, e.g., ownership of forest resources. It should be borne in mind that it is impossible to *objectively* establish the legitimacy of the supremacy of one of these sets of arrangements over another. Every choice in this respect is a normative one, and such choices are heavily influenced by politico-economic considerations, especially in the Cameroonian setting, where huge profits related to timber-exploitation are at stake. A scientist can draw the attention to the co-existence of these various perceptions on ‘the truth’. In the Tropenbos Cameroon research area, Bagyeli ‘pygmies’ are a vulnerable minority. As hunter-gatherers, their livelihood largely depends on forest products and services, and their relative power position is particularly weak. Being an anthropologist, and doing research among them, I was interested in Bagyeli tenure arrangements, as well as their dynamics. These are the subject of this report, for such perceptions determine this actor’s behaviour. There is a number of key elements of Bagyeli tenure arrangements that are important in this respect.

Access to forest resources is distributed via residential units and kinship relations. Those people having collective rights over an area can exclude strangers, but, if asked, the first can also grant these strangers access to particular resources. In that case, certain conditions are defined. This stranger will have to “satisfy” the residential unit by the distribution of gifts, share the produce, and behave according to the arrangements made, or otherwise the agreement will be suspended. In terms of local tenure arrangements, a logging company is as much a stranger to the area as any other. As a consequence, Bagyeli, being a vulnerable stakeholders in the area, should be involved in the decision-making process starting from the phase of strategic planning. It is in this early phase that the outlines are made for the major developments in an area, including the scale and site of commercial logging activities. In other words, that is the moment for Bagyeli to (co-)determine whether or not logging companies, as strangers, will get access to the timber resources in the forest, and, if so, under which conditions.

Furthermore, in Bagyeli tenure arrangements, investments imply a more individual form of property over a resource, and other people are expected to respect these. In case logging activities, or any other external interventions regarding forest exploitation, have a damaging effect on the investments done in uncultivated but valuable forest resources, then some form of specific compensation is required. Recent developments, such as the compensation for certain NTFP’s by a consortium envisaging an oil-pipeline through the area, as well as other forms of commoditization of uncultivated forest resources, only contribute to the necessity of this arrangement in the domain of forestry.

This report consists of seven chapters, the outlines of which are given below. The report intends to give some insight in (the development of) Bagyeli management of forest resources in their social, political and historical context. The text of this report is a part of the author’s doctoral thesis in anthropology. The idea at the basis of this PhD research is that, in the process of sedentarization, Bagyeli will come to depend more on forest resources in their immediate surroundings. The assumption is that this leads to the development of more strict notions as to their ownership. In the thesis, the chapters preceding this text indicate that several forms of mobility can be distinguished, and -by implication- several forms of sedentarization. The factors influencing Bagyeli mobility are dealt with; these include social tensions with Bantu villagers as well as Bagyeli, economic activities and governmental policy. At this moment in the process of writing the thesis, drawing conclusions is somewhat presumptuous. This is why, for the time being, this executive summary should be sufficient for the reader of this report.

In this report, **Chapter 1** is on Bagyeli classifications of space. The location, or rather the type of location, on which a natural resource is found, is important in determining which group has access to it. Three main categories of space can be distinguished: field, fallow land and high forest (*pandé*) respectively. The differences between the categories are structured along two axes. First, there is the 'legal' status of an area (or resource, for that matter), which is fundamentally changed by making investments, such as 'breaking' the high forest and transforming it into agricultural land. From an analytical point of view, such 'investments' lift resources to another category. Second, tenure arrangements regarding natural resources differ in view of the fact whether or not an area is actually under exploitation.

Chapter 2 is about a few of the basic principles governing the acquisition of access to natural resources in the high forest, and on the roles, in this respect, of residential units, kinship and "good relations". In the research area, two different "social entities" arrange the distribution of rights to natural resources. These entities overlap each other, but they do so only partly. Every person is labelled as belonging to a residential unit, a base-camp, as well as being a member of particular sections of father's and mother's patri-clans (a house). As residential units are geographically bounded, some readers might expect a geographically defined group of users for each particular part of the forest. This idea is one of the basic assumptions behind the debates on community forestry. It is therefore important to stress that such is not the case for Bagyeli in our research area. This is mainly a result of the fact that kinship relations, next to belonging to a residential unit, are another factor determining the rights to natural resources. These kinship relations create a complex network of mutual rights, stretching over considerable distances. The actual use of these rights depends on the state of their relationship with their kin. The importance of "being on good terms" with others for the actual exploitation of resources to which he has a right. Boundaries in the *pandé* enable rightholders to exclude people belonging to other residential units. The most immediately recognisable component of exclusionary mechanisms is the spatial differentiation in "ethnic" terms. But similar agreements also have to be made for exploiting forest resources claimed by the neighbouring villages.

Rightholders can allow others to exploit and utilise those resources. Here, good relationships play an important role. These "others" can be distant relatives, or friends who live in another village. The privileges may range from the possibility to temporarily utilise one particular resource in a limited area, to a more general possibility to exploit resources in the entire area. A stranger announcing himself and expressing the wish to hunt with a rifle in the area, "has to satisfy the village", for example by sharing the yield. The approval of those having the right to control the exploitation is generally considered a precondition for having good luck during the hunt, and a protection against "accidents".

Chapter 3 deals with some of the arrangements regulating the access to natural resources *among* several local people, all of them right-holders. Elements occur of more or less individual control over natural resources: some resources are appropriated by individual persons or a small group by means of investments, personal efforts. These investments turn collectively held resources into more or less private property: the person (or persons) who catches or gathers the product can decide what will happen to it. Such investments can take many different forms, ranging from temporarily reserving a resource by marking it, via catching and collecting forest resources, the transformation of forest into agricultural land, and putting snares, fykes, piling up fruits, to planting trees.

Chapter 4 concerns the interaction between Bagyeli and logging companies. Locally, there is a close mental association between *Nomba* (the logging industry) and white people who do 'something' that is beyond the framework of understanding, e.g. removing logs out of the realm of their control (the same applies to gold and diamonds), and for reasons that remain obscure. There is a profound distrust against these activities. The connection with witchcraft is in line with this association.

To some extent, the arrival of logging companies follows the logic of the announcement of a ‘stranger’. Prior to entering the forest for the (preparations for) logging activities, companies organize a meeting in or near the road-side villages concerned. A number of elements for establishing a ‘good relationship’ occur in this interaction. The alleged aim of this first meeting is to ask for permission to enter the forest and start the activities. Villagers ask for counterprestations, such as infrastructural works (repair of minor roads and bridges, community centres, football fields). The company promises to provide certain gifts, distributes ingredients for the meal and drinks that commonly underline the existence of cordial relations, and subsequently starts its activities. In the sense of tenure arrangements, Bagyeli are not a closed social entity: there are no separate Bagyeli forests. Logging activities touch the very core of Bagyeli economic activities, but despite this, they are usually not invited in these or any other meetings concerning logging. Bagyeli perceive the arrival of a logging company in terms of the arrival of a stranger, who has to ask for permission before entering the forest, and distribute gifts in order to "satisfy the village". Bagyeli frustration about their non-involvement seems mainly directed towards villagers who do not share the gifts, not towards the logging companies who do not invite Bagyeli to participate in the meetings. There were no complaints about the disparity between the relatively insignificant monetary value of the gifts and the financial value of the timber, but this is certainly linked to the lack of knowledge among Bagyeli as to the mercantile value of timber.

Still, one should not be too romantic either about this parallel with customary ways of “creating good relationships” prior to gaining access to natural resources. There are major differences. The meetings between villagers and logging companies are not genuine negotiations, for villagers have hardly any control over the process. They cannot deny a logging company access to the forest, nor can they determine the conditions to its exploitation, for they are fully aware of the fact that the logging is legitimised by contracts made with the state at the national level. Furthermore, as said, Bagyeli participate in these meetings only seldomly.

In general, commercial logging and its ecological effects are negatively valued by Bagyeli. It is thought to destroy or waste the forest. The noise made by the machinery of the logging company has repercussions for the availability of larger game in the area. Furthermore, damage is done to valuable types of vegetation, especially trees providing kernels and medicinal bark. And although some Bagyeli, from a human point of view, accept that loggers cut trees for timber to earn a living, the destruction of vegetation for the construction of infrastructure is considered senseless. Moreover, pathways, points of orientation are destroyed, as well as places where honey, seeds from the *Strophantus* climber and porcupines used to be found. There is ambiguity in the appraisal of the understorey becoming more dense. The job opportunities are equally perceived with mixed feelings. Men, especially youngsters, like to earn money and be involved in such a modern activity. However, only few of them actually manage to get a job, and their experiences are usually shortlived.

Recent developments in the area may well influence future dealings of Bagyeli (and villagers) with logging companies. In the context of the oil pipeline project, some of the damage to non-timber forest products will be compensated for. This means that such products are priced. In that case, such will definitely have consequences for Bagyeli attitudes vis-a-vis logging companies destroying or damaging these products in the future.

Despite the local arrangements sketched in chapters 2 and 3, and much like in all other normative systems, conflicts appear over natural resources. These are the situations dealt with in **Chapter 5**. Social control appears to be very important in preventing the trespassing of the rules, and fear for punishment by means of supernatural powers is another factor in this respect. Bagyeli informants found it inconceivable that a complete stranger or outsider would come to exploit a forest without prior permission of the right-holders. Notwithstanding the existence of these conflicts, the principles of local tenure have potential for structuring more sustainable externally induced forms of forest management.

Several mechanisms exist to deal with conflicting views on rights to particular forest resources. In stories on Bagyeli disputing natural resources three mechanisms for conflict resolution appear rather

frequently. A common response is to overtly tackle a trespasser on his conduct, by talking about his/her perceived misbehaviour. Besides, people having some moral authority are asked to intervene (especially elder men). Furthermore, the aggrieved party decides to sink one's differences for the sake of peace and quiet, especially if this will prevent social tensions within the family. In other words: the actual application of such principles of tenure depends on the specific social and political context. Two other mechanisms are put into use, albeit less frequently. Overtly threatening to use witchcraft is used both to prevent and to resolve conflicts. In other situations, Bagyeli consciously draw back (e.g., by putting their snares elsewhere) in order to prevent an escalation of the conflict. Remarkably enough, the analysis of mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts over natural resources among Bagyeli does not show any involvement of the village chief, or of the weekly *tribunal coutumier de justice* at the village.

Chapter 6 shows that Bagyeli management can only be understood in relation to villagers' exploitation and management of the same forest area and resources. Bagyeli share with villagers membership of the social entities distributing collective rights to resources: they are part of the same clans, and Bagyeli residential units are considered a division of the nearby village. In addition to this, they share with villagers the physical objects of collective rights: villagers can use the same forest space and resources as Bagyeli. Furthermore, they share important parts of the normative framework, which is at the basis of the distribution of the various rights: both in terms of classifications of space and in the relations between the social entities and the objects.

Nevertheless, Bagyeli management of natural resources is not identical to that by villagers. From a management point of view, these groups cannot be considered a homogeneous unit. In conflicts among Bagyeli, the residential units that applied were of another scale: in dealings with other Bagyeli, they think of collective rights in terms of a base-camp as the residential unit, whereas in dealings with villagers they think in terms of a more encompassing residential unit, namely the village. Furthermore, when comparing disputes among Bagyeli with those also involving villagers, the type of the contested resources varies. Between Bagyeli and villagers food crops, and the agricultural lands on which they grow, are a frequent source of conflicts. Among Bagyeli, however, such conflicts do not seem to occur. On the other hand, Bagyeli hardly dispute individually appropriated "wild" forest resources with villagers. In addition to this, conflict solving mechanisms used in conflicts opposing Bagyeli to villagers differ from those used among Bagyeli. In such conflicts, the village chief is asked to intervene, be it in his function of president of the village 'court of justice' or not. Especially the villagers involved in the conflict brought the case to the attention of this institution, much like they do in conflicts among themselves.

The previous chapters dealt with the situation found at the time of doing fieldwork. Such, however, is only the result-for-the-moment of various processes of change. Therefore, **chapter 7** is about some of the dynamics of Bagyeli forest management. In the course of one generation, Bagyeli transferred the right to control and allocate forest resources from the level of a group of base-camps related to one village, towards smaller units: single base-camps. The current result is that the inhabitants of a base-camp, and their close relatives living elsewhere, each hold such rights in their respective sections of the forest. This transfer was one of the results of new restrictions to the use of forest resources put upon Bagyeli by farming villagers. Villagers' restrictions were related to the political and economic context of the region at the time.

For a long time, alliances between villages had enabled their inhabitants to exploit also the forests belonging to neighbouring villages. Bagyeli habitually made use of this possibility for their hunting and gathering activities. In the 1950's, however, villagers' interest in boundaries of forest lands increased, and they put an end to these alliances. This was related to the growing importance of cacao as a cash crop and especially of its function as a strategic tool in their struggle over agricultural space. This phenomenon was rooted in the profound unrest created by colonial authorities'

classification of forests into *forêts domaniales* (which is an administrative form of appropriation) and the associated limitations put to these forests' use. This classification took place in view of the commercial exploitation of the colony's timber resources. The restrictions meant, e.g., that these forests could not be turned into agricultural fields, and villages were held collectively responsible for the maintenance of the new regulations. At the time, this also led to an increase in villagers filing dossiers for the official recognition of titles to land.

As a consequence, villagers perceived the boundaries between their forests differently and they denied people from other villages the access to their forests; this also applied to Bagyeli. The consequence for Bagyeli was a restriction of the forest area easily accessible for, e.g., hunting and gathering. Bagyeli, due to their weak power position, were unable to influence this process. This change implied that membership of a residential unit and of a house/patrilineage became more important as instruments for getting access to uncultivated forest resources. Good relationships with individuals holding rights over other forests have since then become a prerequisite for Bagyeli to get (conditional) access to resources in these other areas. After some time, Bagyeli took these farmers' ideas one step further, and applied them even in situations opposing them to unrelated Bagyeli belonging to other base-camps connected to the same village.

1 BAGYELI CLASSIFICATIONS OF SPACE: *NGENG, BVOUTI, PANDÉ*

The location, or rather the type of location, on which a natural resource is found, is important in determining which group has access to it. Three main categories of space can be distinguished: *ngeng*, *bvouti*, *pandé* (field, fallow land and high forest respectively). The differences between the categories are structured along two axes. First, there is the 'legal' status of an area (or resource, for that matter), which is fundamentally changed by making investments, such as 'breaking' the high forest and transforming it into agricultural land. This is what distinguishes *ngeng* and *bvouti* from the *pandé*. To put it differently, these 'investments' lift resources to another analytical category. Second, and this is the further differentiation between *ngeng* and *bvouti*, tenure arrangements differ in view of the fact whether or not an area is actually under exploitation. These are issues dealt with in this chapter. In addition to this, insight is given in local perceptions on the spatial distribution of these categories.

Pandé is the notion applied to "virgin", "untouched", or "black" forest, having "real" -big-trees. The closed forest canopy hardly allows sunlight to reach the soil; hence, shrubs or lianas are rare. These parts are easy to cross by foot, and hunters have relatively little difficulties detecting their game. There are terminological subdivisions to this area, based on physical characteristics such as swamps and hills. Such subdivisions, however, do not influence local forest management, whereas the general notion of *pandé* does. The forest is brought under human influence in several different ways. Particular areas within the forest bear geographical names, probably referring to those of the ancient settlements, many paths have names referring to their respective frequent users. The notion of *pandé* is reserved for those areas on which, according to collective memory, no one has ever "worked" (that is, cultivated crops), and this is the crucial contrast with the two other main categories of space: *ngeng* or fields, and *bvouti* (pl. *mabvouti/mabouti*) or fallow lands.

So the difference with *ngeng* and *bvouti* is that, in these spaces, a person is known to have "broken" the forest (*bouo pandé*) by felling many of the trees and transforming the plot into agricultural land. *Ngeng*, fields, are plots of agricultural land on which crops are grown. They are as tidy as slash and burn fields can be. After a few years, soil fertility reduces, the crops hardly produce and the field is abandoned. It turns into a fallow, *bvouti* on which wild vegetation is allowed to grow again. The result is dense soil vegetation with many tree trunks and lianas. Physically, such a fallow will come to resemble the *pandé* in the course of time. The re-growth of the wild vegetation blurs the differences that were visible to the eye. In fact, there are places in the "real" forest (*pandé*) which physically remind one of a fallow (*bvouti*). Such is the case in parts of the forest where soil vegetation flourishes as a result of the opening in the forest canopy: a tree has fallen, be it by natural causes or because of commercial logging. These parts of forest are called *mbimbo* or *kaatu*. They are considered particularly suitable for net hunting, as wild animals are known to use the dense vegetation as a shelter.

However, to Bagyeli informants the main point of difference (from a tenure perspective, that is) between fallow lands and the *pandé* is not the vegetation, but the legal status. The act of "breaking" the *pandé* by turning it into agricultural land entails an important change in legal status for this particular part of forest space. Most forest resources can be used by the inhabitants of the residential units. However, a person who "opens" a part of the forest and transforms it into agricultural land becomes the owner of the plot. This person has rights to the agricultural crops grown on this plot. After the death of this person, the members of his house, *ndabu nya buti*, inherit the rights to cultivate on the spot. The limits of these fields are marked, for example by plants. Knowledge of these limits is transmitted by mouth to other generations and newcomers. Exploitation within this area is subject to rules other than those for resources in the *pandé*.

Even the status of the uncultivated resources found in fields and fallow lands is changed by "breaking" the forest. The right to exploit them (e.g., fish, kernels, and game) is restricted to the group of people having the right to cultivate the land and use the crops. The act of clearing the plot in the forest transforms these resources from common property of the inhabitants of the nearby base-camp to common property of the field's owner and his relatives¹. Taking uncultivated but valuable products from the field or fallow without permission is perceived as theft, and one knows one can get into trouble because of it. This is perfectly illustrated by the following case. The story is told by Manzang, who lives with her husband in a Bagyeli camp called Bitumbi. Manzang is a modest yet self-confident mother who always looks glorious. The event took place in Yanebouti, her area of birth in the hills of Bidjouka, during a long visit to her parents.

Manzang heaps up fruits in someone else's fallow

"My mother and me left Yanebouti to make a big pile of Ngale fruits. We knew the tree bore the name of a person, Nzo'o. The tree was under the authority of a Bagyeli woman named Nlati, who also lived in Yanebouti. In the evening we went home and left the pile as we intended to come back the next day to remove the kernels.

The next morning, Nlati found the pile. She had planned to break the Ngale of this tree herself, keep half of the kernels and give the rest of the kernels to her brother Bitélé, as he was the one who gave her the right to command the fruits. She destroyed our pile, and made new piles out of it, nearer to the houses.

My mother and I were unaware of this. We wanted to leave with a basket and the axe to break the kernels. Nlati knew that we were the ones who had made the pile, and she came to talk to us. She said that the tree was on Bitélé's land and he had commended the tree to her care, but now everyone started to take away her kernels. She stated that we did not have the right to do so, as the land did not belong to us. Nlati's husband suggested that we could keep the kernels in the pile we had made, but we left it at that. That is how it ended."

This story shows how Bitélé's rights to a fallow provided him with the right to exploit the wild tree which grew on it. He decided to transfer this latter right to another person, Nlati. This authorisation allowed the latter to restrain other women of her village from collecting the fruits. Conversely, would the tree have been in the forest, *pandé*, the woman would not have a case at all, as is illustrated by the following excerpt from a discussion with one of my research assistants, Leboh:

"A tree in a fallow belongs to a person, as it was this person who had the idea to surround the tree by a field. I can find a huge *Gyabo* (*Baillonella toxisperma*) deep inside the forest. Many women of the village come and fill their baskets with its fruits. I can take up the plan to make a field there and put the tree into the sunlight. People will say the tree is found in Leboh's field. I am the one who allows the tree to grow and to produce a lot, and the tree already belongs to me. No one is allowed to touch it like that, as the tree is within my fallow land. I could create problems to someone stealing from my fallow land. On the other hand, I cannot refuse someone from this village to collect some products deep in the *pandé*. In that case, the other person would not accept it if I would say: 'Who allowed you to come here?'"

1 An excerpt from my research proposal explicits the assumptions I held when entering the field: "In the case of common property, rights to control access and rights to exploitation are shared equally and are exclusive to a defined group of people. The co-owners have a right to deny non-members access to the resources (and non-members have a duty to abide by exclusion). They also have a right to grant non-members permission to farming, hunting or other ways of using resources (e.g. logging). In that case the co-owners may ask for periodic gifts or other ways of acknowledging their authority over the resource. Individual members of the management group (the "co-owners") have both rights and duties with respect to use rates and maintenance of the resource (Berry 1988: 63; McCay and Acheson 1987: 8; Swallow and Bromley 1992: 10)". If, on the other hand, access would be open, I quoted Swallow and Bromley (ibid.) in my research proposal, "then there is no defined group of users or 'owners' and so the benefit stream is available to anyone. Individuals have both privilege and no right with respect to use rates and maintenance of the [resources]."

My informants perceive this act of transforming forest into a field as an investment. This investment fundamentally changes the status of the land as well as that of the wild resources found on it.

In the rest of this report, I will focus on uncultivated resources, and more particularly -but not exclusively- those found in the *pandé*². For a full comprehension of the following text, the reader should understand the spatial distribution of forest, fields and fallow lands. There is a broad network of passable roads along which the villagers live. Each village is stretched along one of these roads. Their houses are situated next to each other in rows paralleling these roads. Behind these houses, a mixture can be found of fields and fallow lands in several stages of secondary forest. Streams cross and border these agricultural plots. In bird's eye view, one would see a broad strip of fields and fallow lands on both sides of the roads. In the Bidjouka area, the steepness of the hills north of the road hampers the expansion of the fields in this direction. Therefore, the more remote agricultural fields on the opposite side of the road are at more than an hour and a half (walking distance) from the road. West of Bipindi, the pressure on land is lower. Behind these agricultural areas, one can find the *pandé*, the forest. This is where most of the hunting and gathering takes place. It is important to note that this forest space is used by Bagyeli and villagers alike and that, despite the fact that "the average Bagyeli" depends on these forest resources more heavily than "the average villager", there is no such thing as a separate "Bagyeli forest". Most Bagyeli camps are located in the forest, not too far removed from these villagers' fields and fallow lands. The area is relatively densely populated, which implies that the forest is subdivided in parts, each of which is bordered on all sides by villages, each with their respective fields and fallow lands. In general, this is how Bagyeli attribute the forest to different groups of people. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from an interview with two Bagyeli men, Nkouagga and Bvuriga two brothers living at Minlolemio, Ndtoua:

“We cannot hunt anywhere we like. There are limits between the forests. We have our limits, and so do the Bulu. Our limit is behind Doubé, our hunting camp. These limits exist for a long time already, at any rate they date from before the independence. When we were young, our parents used to tell us: ‘Here is the boundary. If you continue in that direction [south], you will arrive at Bulu terrain, so you have to stop at this level. Otherwise it is like attacking them.’

Let me draw you a map. This is the road. We live here. [Bvuriga draws a line perpendicular to the one representing the road]. I can say the Bagyeli of Ngale³ are on the other [west] side of this line. On their hunting trips, they stay in their huts, and they arrive right up to this limit. [He draws another line more to the east, again perpendicular to the road] That is where those Bagyeli of Bitsilbilandi always hunt⁴. They belong to other clans. Sometimes, they also hunt here with us [between the two lines perpendicular to the road], but that is stealing someone else's forest and then we create minor problems to them, we chase them in order for them to draw back. Well, if you start from our place and walk [to the north] beyond the camp of Bitumbi [where their father's sister lives with her children], you will arrive at the river Lokoundje. This is a long way, and we can hunt all over there. On the other side of the Lokoundje, you will meet with the Bassa who live near the road

2 An obvious reason for doing so, is the fact that this is generally where hunting and gathering take place, the main economic activities of my Bagyeli informants. A second reason for this choice is related to the objective of the Tropenbos Cameroon Programme, the framework within which this research was done. The programme aims at developing methods and strategies for sustainable forest management, and commercial logging is considered an important element to be taken into account. Logging mainly takes place in the *pandé*, which was all the more reason to concentrate on this type of space. Furthermore, other social scientists in the programme paid attention to farmers' management arrangements regarding agricultural fields and fallow lands (van den Berg; Tiayon; and the student Hijman, Ngo Mboua).

3 Ngale is a Bagyeli camp belonging to the neighbouring village of Bandevouri.

4 Bitsilbilandi is a Bagyeli camp that also belongs to the village of Ndtoua.

connecting Bipindi to Elog-Batindi.”

To put it differently: if a person leaves the road and continues to walk away from the road, he will first come across fields and fallow lands belonging to the inhabitants of the village he just left. After that, he follows footpaths traversing the *pandé* that is exploited both by these villagers and by the Bagyeli belonging to this village. He will arrive at the point where, normally, he would turn back if on a hunting trip: the boundary of the area that belongs to the group of which he is considered a part. When continuing his way, he arrives in a part of the *pandé* which is closer to a village on the road parallel to the one he just left, and this is where Bagyeli and villagers of the next village exploit the forest. This part of the forest belongs to those others. When moving on, he will arrive at another village's fields and fallow lands, behind which the next village can be found on the roadsides. When crossing that road, the same sequence will be met again.

Elderly informants perceive qualitative changes in the forest, mainly in the sense of a reduced diversity and quantity of the fauna, and of some valued tree species becoming rare. Logging activities are considered to have played a crucial role in this process, and some informants related faunal changes to an intensification of hunting practices. Despite this, most Bagyeli seem to think of the forest as an interminable resource. During a group interview at the initial stage of my research, I asked whether it was possible that there would come an end to the existence of the forest with all these logging activities around. One of the Bagyeli women put it thus:

"No, the forest cannot end, somewhere there will always be *pandé*. You know, wherever you are, there is the sky, the forest and the earth. You can go anywhere, but you will always find these things. Just like you will see villages and fields every now and then. We have never seen that the forest ceased to exist, there is no place without a forest."

2 BAGYELI ACQUIRING ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES: THE ROLE OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS, KINSHIP AND "GOOD RELATIONS".

The cases in the preceding section showed that the sole act of transforming a part of the forest into agricultural land give the person in question and his inheritors more exclusive rights to that particular area. But whom do the wild resources in the *pandé* belong to in the first place, or: *do they*? Whom should one meet in order to acquire access to those wild resources in the *pandé*? Bagyeli informants gave accounts of limits in the *pandé* near their camp. The boundaries are marked by plants, trees, rocks, and rivers or streams. Within these boundaries, the informant does not need to ask anyone's permission to exploit wild resources. But which type of outsiders should these boundaries exclude? This chapter clarifies that residential units, kinship, are crucial in defining who can have such general rights (to control, allocate, use) over these resources. Furthermore, it is shown that 'good relations' play an important role in determining whether such rights are actually put into use. These cordial relationships are also at the basis of the distribution of (temporary) privileges to actual exploitation.

In a way, this report is partly about property relations with respect to natural resources in my research area. The way in which authors look at property is a convenient tool in looking at natural resources. Obviously, one has to interpret property in its broadest sense of juridically defined social relations, e.g. in terms of the distribution of social entitlements (Hann 1998:7). These relations are economically and politically embedded, and ownership is about control and power. Property relationships, as the Von Benda Beckmanns (1997:7-14) clearly pointed out, are structured by four elements:

- "the social entities being the holders of property relationships": categories of property holding groups;
- "the objects of property relationships" these can be material (e.g. the fruits of a tree) or immaterial (e.g. the right to put one's traps in an area);
- "the relationship between holders and objects", or perhaps rather the relationship between persons vis-à-vis those objects: this is about the content of the rights held, several levels of abstraction can be distinguished (e.g., the right of a person to determine whether another person is allowed to exploit a resource is different from that of a second person who merely has the right to utilise these resources);
- "the temporal dimension in which property relationships are expressed": the duration of rights can range from an indeterminate to a well-defined period (e.g., one season, or for as long as a marriage lasts).

This characterisation has the dazzling charm of common sense. In a concrete management situations, these elements all figure in combination with each other for the various resources in their respective contexts.

The idea of this exercise is to sketch some of the basic principles, allowing for a general understanding of what happens (as opposed to systematically describing a supposedly complete set of management-norms and practices). This chapter starts by roughly marking off the local situation by focussing on the social entities, and combining these with the content of the rights held by these different these categories. I will mainly focus on the social entities and the objects of property relations, paying a little less attention to the exact contents of the rights held by these different categories⁵. I will give a particular twist to the fourth -temporal- dimension of property relationships in the chapter on the dynamics of Bagyeli tenure arrangements.

5 For such would require a more indepth juridical anthropological research.

In the research area, two different "social entities" arrange the distribution of rights to natural resources. These entities overlap each other, but they do so only partly. Every person is labelled as belonging to a residential unit, a *kwaato* (base-camp, please keep this in mind: the notion of *kwaato* is quite frequently used in this report) as well as being a member of particular sections of father's and mother's patri-clans (more specifically a house, *ndabu nya buti*). Bagyeli are members of the same clans as farming villagers. My assistant, for example, is a "Biwélé from Lolodorf" and most people know his mother is a "Sabvila from Yanebouti". This combination provides each person with rights to control and allocate access to natural resources in specific parts of the forest. Persons share these rights with the other members of the property holding group to which they belong. Again, this group consists of Bagyeli and villagers alike. They also share with them, and cannot be denied, another right in that region: the possibility to tangible, physical exploitation of these forest resources. Their affines derive these latter rights from their marriage⁶. These types of rights find themselves at analytically separate levels (Von Benda Beckmann 1997:9).

Those persons having these rights can decide to permit others to actually exploit and utilise those resources. The distribution of these privileges is structured by a different mechanism: good relationships, *magyouo*, are essential in obtaining these privileges. These privileges can be withdrawn unilaterally. The privilege can range from a rather general exploitation of all kinds of resources, to -more confined- particular resources. This can be for an indeterminate or a well-defined period. This can be transferred among Bagyeli, but also between Bagyeli and villagers (and vice versa). These practices may well seem to be outside the realm of property relations, but the mechanism is crucial for understanding the full range of the actual use and management of forest resources in the research area. The two different social entities, residential units and kinship relations are subject of the following sections.

2.1 BELONGING TO A RESIDENTIAL UNIT GIVES RIGHTS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

Members of residential units share rights to part of the *pandé*. People share these rights to exploitation with the other members of those property holding groups. It is not possible for them to prohibit those other members the exploitation of these resources in the forest⁷. The daily exploitation of wild forest resources takes place on this basis. One leaves in the morning for a hunting trip in the area, gathers some plant products on the way and the women carry everything home in the basket on their back. One does not have to ask anyone for permission. At the same moment, other members of the village or kin-group are exploiting other resources in the same forest. One will notice these other forest users when coincidentally meeting them on one of the pathways, or when discovering the signs these people left for those coming behind them. Or one hears evidence of them at some distance: the cries to drive up game, distant gunshots echoing through the forest, women laughing and shouting while fishing. When going through the forest, my informants could guess who is there without being able to see through the foliage. They halt for an exchange of salutations, ask for information and continue their way.

The chapter on classifications of space already mentioned the existence of boundaries. Boundaries in the *pandé* serve to exclude people belonging to other residential units. The most immediately recognisable component of exclusionary mechanisms is the one along "ethnic" lines.

6 In my view, the distinction between rights and privileges is gradual. The norms for providing categories of persons with privileges may be so strong that, in practice, one can hardly distinguish them from rights.

7 With the exception of particular resources which had been appropriated by sub-groups of these social entities. I will elaborate this later on.

Most of my research locations were situated in the district of Bipindi, along the road Lolodorf-Kribi, an east-west connection with many Ngoumba-, and some Fang-speaking families. When leaving the road and walking in the northern direction, one will meet with "the Bassa". When leaving the road and walking southward, a large river marks the boundary with "Bulu-country"⁸. To hunt beyond these boundaries, one needs permission from the others. My Bagyeli informants explained: "The Bulu told us not to hunt in that forest, as it does not belong to us. It is their forest over there." One ought to make an arrangement prior to hunting or gathering in other peoples' forest, otherwise it will be considered as a "provocation", as "stealing the others' forest".

This spatial differentiation in "ethnic" terms is only part of the story: such an agreement also has to be made to exploit forest resources claimed by the neighbouring villages to the east and west on the same road, villages that equally consist of Bagyeli, Ngoumba and Fang. A person has rights in an area because he is considered a "child of this village" or "a child of this *kwaato*". There are numerous variations to the following example:

"A guy from Bissiang [considered "far away", because three villages removed from the informant's habitat, KB] may want to come and hunt here, catching the game that otherwise we, the owners of the terrain, could have caught. We think that people living far from here should not come just like that and hunt at our place. Such a person has to announce his arrival with us. As he does not even live with us, we will first ask him about his reasons for coming to hunt over here. We can try to arrange things, but if we do not succeed, we will not allow him to enter the forest." (Tchagadic, Ndtoua).

In other words, boundaries in the *pandé* serve to exclude people belonging to other villages and *kwaatos*. Residential units (villages and *kwaatos*) are one means of categorising property holding groups, social entities in the sense of Von Benda Beckmanns' paper.

Please note that Bagyeli are not a closed social entity in the sense of management arrangements. There are no separate Bagyeli forests, as I wrote already in the text on the classification of space. Bagyeli share the physical space with neighbouring villagers, as much as they share many norms with respect to the exploitation of resources. On the other hand, differences exist. This will be developed in later chapter.

2.2 RIGHTS ON NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRIBUTED ALONG KINSHIP LINES

As villages are geographically bounded units, some readers might then expect a geographically defined group of users for each particular part of the forest. This idea is one of the basic assumptions behind the debates on community forestry. It is therefore important to stress that such is not the case for Bagyeli in our research area. This is mainly a result of the fact that kinship relations, next to belonging to a residential unit, are another factor determining the rights to natural resources⁹. The above-mentioned notion of being a "child" of the village already hints at this aspect. These kinship relations create an extensive network of mutual rights, stretching over considerable distances. This network of kinship relations results in an intricate and vast web of mutual rights.

Ndungo Lucien lives and hunts with his maternal uncles in Ndtoua

8 This notion is applied to indicate an area in which Bulu and Fang speaking villagers dominate (as opposed to the Ngoumba). Bagyeli live in that area too.

9 Another reason was that persons who had abandoned a site still maintained their rights to specific resources, for example to a fruit tree which he had planted. One could here statements similar to this: "Mougou Bande is our former village, we still have some prune trees over there, and the tomb of my junior brother". These rights even served to prove the relation between that person and the area.

Most of the adult male inhabitants of the Bagyeli camp on the road-side in Ndtoua are descendants of two brothers, and they are part of the Yesou clan. A number of their sisters married men from the coastal area south of Kribi, roughly referred to as "the Lobé". They moved to settle there. During her first marriage with a man from the Litumbo clan, one of these sisters gave birth to Ndungo Lucien. Ndungo Lucien grew up, married two women in the course of time and got children with them. For most of my fieldwork period he lived with his maternal uncles in Ndtoua, at some fifty kilometres from his parent at "the Lobé". They hunted, gathered, tapped palm-wine and practised agriculture in Ndtoua without having had to ask anyone for permission. Even in times when tensions rose, his maternal uncles accepted Ndungo's presence: after all he was their sister's son.

In one of the later fieldwork periods, Ndungo was in mourning because of the loss of his second wife. He had left Ndtoua to recover with his parent in "the Lobé" region, and made use of his rights there.

In the research area, rights to control, allocate and exploit natural resources are derived from father's as well as mother's patri-clan. In the previous case this facilitated Ndungo Lucien to switch habitat so easily, and, in general, this web of rights allows for different kinds of mobility¹⁰. Marriage settlement is predominantly virilocal¹¹. An analysis of 30 Bagyeli couples in four different locations shows 21 virilocal marriage settlements, eight uxori-local settlements and one couple having yet another arrangement. Those eight couples include five young couples who temporarily settled with the woman's family in order to perform bride-services. These young couples took full part in all economic activities, including the exploitation of forest resources. This may well be a temporary situation in each of these respective cases, but the phenomenon in itself is permanent. As a consequence of this virilocality, most unmarried children grow up in the area where their father was born. At birth they derive rights to exploit natural resources in the forest on which their father's patri-clan has claims, this holds true for sons as well as daughters. They are shown the boundaries to the area in which they have rights to exploitation. Usually, the sons remain within this area, and their respective wives -other men's sisters- will join them. When living with her family-in-law, a woman derives rights to several natural resources from her relation to her husband. Ngyang, during an conversation in Nyamenkoum, phrased this in a clear way:

"Let us suppose that you are my wife. We live here with my family in Nyamenkoum. As we are married, my mother becomes your mother too. My mother was the first one to get married here. Now I have got married. At the start of the season when the *Ndtoua* fruits (bush-mango) start to fall, she will take you to the places where she usually collects the kernels. From then on, each year during the season you will go there with her to gather again. Whenever my mother dies, you will be the replacement of my mother. No one else is allowed to touch these fruits: you are now responsible for everything she has left behind. If there are lots of fruits, and you feel like bringing along other women to harvest the kernels, you are free to do so."

This woman's husband will clear fields for her to cultivate, they go on hunting trips together. Her marriage gives her the right to dig for rats in the area, hunt, fish and gather other wild resources in the *pandé*. Even if she becomes widowed, she can continue exercising these rights, at least as long as she does not marry a man from another family. Her rights continue only as long as the marriage lasts: a divorce will imply the woman's departure from the area, her relation with her former family-in-law will become strained and this will cease her rights. In other words, the woman has

10 This report contains the text of one of the later parts of my thesis. In the thesis, chapters on mobility and sedentarization precede this text. Readers who are interested in having a quick overview in these matters are welcomed to read Biesbrouck 1999.

11 For those readers less familiar with anthropological terminology: virilocality refers to a situation in which a woman, upon her marriage, leaves her village of birth and moves to settle with her husband and family-in-law.

conditional rights in the area into which she moves upon her marriage, primary rights in the area of her father, and primary rights in the area of her mother's brothers. Upon their marriage, women retain their rights to forest resources in their area of birth, as well as in that of their mother's, and they exercise them too. Those women can return to their area of birth at any time, whether in view of the exploitation of particular forest resources, simply for paying a visit to her relatives, or in times of crises either between her and her husband, or between the couple and the man's kin. The reader will remember the example of Manzang collecting fruits near the *kwaato* of her parents. A similar arrangement holds true for a man in the area of his family-in-law. During his marriage, he derives rights from his relation to his wife. His family-in-law can not deny him access to most of the resources in their area¹². In the hypothetical case that they would do so anyway, this would bring their sister in a difficult position.

Children to whom a couple gives birth, have rights in the area of their father's relatives. The reader will remember Ndungo Lucien's rights with his paternal relatives in the Lobé area. In addition to this, they obtain like rights in their mother's area of birth, that is with their maternal uncles. An informant (Nzié, in Nyamenkoum) plastically sketches this by characterising his relation with his sister's children:

"My sister's sons can do anything to me here, they are *Nta* to us. Everyone knows that even if they were born in Campo, they are our direct sons. Even if they feel like creating a mess here, they are free to do so. You see: if we have a mourning here at our place, at least one of them will come and probably create lots of commotion. He is capable of killing some chickens while saying: "What is the matter here? Do you not know that I went to bed yesterday without having eaten well? What is it that your women actually do here?". Everyone will be trembling, the women will quiver for "the director". Even if my sister's son was not born here, he can do whatever he wants."

A sister's son has a joking relationship with his mother's brothers, with privileges and certain obligations (see also Ngima Mawoung 1993:188-189 for more details). The fact of being a *nta* gives them undeniable rights to also exploit the forest belonging to the village where their maternal uncles live.

This right to natural resources of a *nta* is far from a theoretical exercise. These rights are actually made use of, be it temporarily or for long periods. In fact, in practically all of the Bagyeli camps where I did fieldwork, at least one of the male inhabitants is a sister's son to the others and freely exploits the forest in the vicinity. Ndungo Lucien, whom I dealt with above, is an example in Ndtoua. Sister's children have rights in the area of their maternal uncles which are as secure as those in that of their father's relatives. At any moment in time a person can live with his father's kin, with his maternal uncles, even with his family-in-law, etc. while retaining his rights elsewhere¹³.

Kinship ties provide a person with rights in several locations at the same time, and this is why a group of right-holders to forest resources is not geographically bounded to a village. In determining whether a person will actually make use of his rights to the exploitation of resources in an area, however, the existence of good relationships plays an important role. These two points are nicely illustrated by the case of Ntunga Paul in Mangamé.

Ntunga Paul needs cordial relations in addition to kinship in order to make use of his

Uxorilocality is exactly the reverse.

12 The word "most" is used in view of those resources to which -more exceptional- individual claims pertain, such as those on fallow lands and fields. Section of this chapter will deal with these types of claims.

13 Ntunga's paternal nephew did suggest to me that Ntunga be sent away from Mangamé by his maternal uncles if ever a particular resource -agricultural land- would become scarce and the support for his rights would diminish with the death of one of the connecting women. However, I have not come across any examples in which sister's children were actually faced with this kind of problems.

rights to natural resources

When I settled to do my fieldwork in Mangamé, Ntunga Paul was my immediate neighbour. He lived with his wife at the time, Mabua Mairie, and their baby. Mabua cultivated her fields near the camp. These fields had been attributed to Ntunga by some of the other male inhabitants, who, in their turn, had derived the right to cultivate these plots from a related villager long ago. The couple regularly went on hunting trips in the *pandé* together with the other inhabitants of Mangamé.

Ntunga belonged to the clan of the Sambuambo. His father was an inhabitant of Maschooh-Maschooh, his mother a Yembi from Mangamé. He had the right to utilise natural resources¹⁴ near both locations, as well as the (more abstract) right of controlling access to these resources. With the help of a villager, his father had paid the bride-price to his in-laws. When Ntunga was twelve years of age, his mother abandoned his father and she brought all her children to Mangamé, to live with her parents and her brothers in Mangamé. Some years later, Ntunga's father died. Ntunga's mother refused a levirate, her relatives did not pay back the bride-price and the children did not return to their paternal relatives. His mother married another man and moved in with the latter.

Usually, Ntunga lived with his mother's brothers in Mangamé for most of the time, except for a period between two marriages when he wandered through the region in search of a new wife (this covered most of my research period). His paternal relatives repeatedly invited him to come and settle with them in Maschooh-Maschooh. After all he belonged to their village. As a son of the *kwaato* of Maschooh Maschooh, Ntunga had inherited rights to fields, fruit trees etc. in the area once cleared by his father, as well as the right to hunt and gather in the surrounding *pandé*. But Ntunga always turned the offer down in an evasive way: "It will not take long before I will return to Maschooh-Maschooh." Ntunga's refusal to live there was based in the bad relationship he had with his father's family.

Bika, his mother's mother, also lived in Mangamé. According to one of Ntunga's paternal relatives, Mabuang, it was mainly due to Bika's support that Ntunga kept having access to agricultural land near Mangamé. Mangamé is surrounded by villagers' fields and fallow lands and the Bagyeli inhabitants only had limited agricultural space. Possibilities to create new fields from forest land were lacking, at least in the vicinity of Mangamé, so Ntunga and his children would always need to work on other peoples' fallow lands. In the course of time, when both Ntunga's children and those of his mother's brothers in Mangamé would be adults, Mabuang foresaw a shortage of agricultural land. The latter expected problems as, according to him, Ntunga's maternal uncles already began to feel themselves overcrowded. Mabuang predicted that if ever Bika would die, that could be a moment for them to try to make Ntunga leave Mangamé¹⁵.

Mabuang assumed that if such were the case, Ntunga would return to Maschooh-Maschooh and join his paternal family. In fact, relations between Ntunga and his mother's brothers in Mangamé became strained. This was caused by an "incompatibilité d'humeur", and had nothing to do with access to resources. Contrary to Mabuang's expectations, Ntunga did not move to Maschooh-Maschooh but preferred to take his new wife and their child to move in with a third party, the villager who once helped his father to pay the bride-price for his mother.

Ntunga Paul's case indicates the importance of "being on good terms" with others for the actual exploitation of resources to which he has a right. Ntunga belongs to this minority of persons residing and performing their economic activities with their maternal uncles, where he has rights to control and allocate access to resources, as well as the right to their utilisation. He has similar rights with his late father's relatives in another area. He maintains his rights, but the bad state of his relationship with his father's brothers and their offspring make him choose not to have frequent

14 With the exception of those resources which had been appropriated by others, such as other peoples' fallow lands.

15 We should not forget that Mabuang, as a paternal relative who wanted his brother's children to settle with him in Maschooh- Maschooh, had good reasons to be pessimistic about Ntunga's chances of a good life with the latter's maternal uncles.

contact with them and not to live with them in Maschooh-Maschooh. So, in practice, the lack of a good relationship influences his tangible exercise of the latter right. Towards the end of the case, the deteriorating relationship with his maternal kin made him to leave the latter. He moves to live with a farming villager, who provides him with some land.

There are comparable examples elsewhere. In a similar vein, the strained relations between the descendants of the late Doubé Emile (who are living in Mangamé) and their maternal uncles in Sabvila¹⁶, impedes the former to physically make use of their right to exploit the forest resources in the vicinity of the latter. These tensions are based in a feud which started decades ago. One of these descendants, Mbang, strictly refuses to talk about the feud¹⁷, but told me that he simply does not feel like going to his maternal kin: "That is what my heart dictates". In this case again the rights remain, they simply are not made use of because he fears that his presence there might drag up the old quarrel.

These cases illustrated the role of good relationships in resource exploitation in the area. We saw persons who have rights to control access to resources as well as rights to their exploitation in the areas of both their paternal and maternal relatives. These rights are based on kinship relations. Wherever they lived, they pertain their rights in these areas. The actual use of these rights depends on the state of their relationship with their kin. In the next section, I will turn to these good relationships.

2.3 STRANGERS CAN ACQUIRE ACCESS: THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD RELATIONS

Belonging to a *kwaato*, as well as being a member of particular families, provides one, as said, with the right to control and allocate access to natural resources, and also with the right to tangible, physical, exploitation of the resources. This combination of partly overlapping geographic entities *kwaato* and the kinship entities (members of the house, *ndabu nya buti*, plus sister's children) explains an important part of the actual use of natural resources. However, having these rights, one can decide to permit others to actually exploit and utilise those resources. Frequently, these "others" are somehow related, or friends who live in another village. This practice blur the edges of the right to exploitation of resources, by creating new possibilities for their actual use. In such a case it is said that the other "passes on the name of" the person actually holding the right to allocate access. This can mean a rather general exploitation of all kinds of resources, or be confined to particular resources. This can be for an indeterminate or a well-defined period. This can be transferred among Bagyeli, but also between Bagyeli and villagers (and vice versa). It is at this stage of granting permission that the "good relations" came in. Without these "good relations", a stranger requesting access to a particular resource will be sent off empty-handed. In order to avoid the unpleasant confrontation resulting from a bold refusal, the person who does not feel like sharing the resource with the stranger will say such things as "I just came back and collected over there", and "It is at a rather remote location and there is hardly anything left".

The Bagyeli term referring to good relations is *magyouo*, the research assistants applied the French notion *entente*. Local indicators for such lasting good relationships are regular courtesy

16 In fact, the research assistant Songmpilé in the previous example was one of those maternal uncles. When emotions ran high due to alcohol consumption, reference was made to this conflict. In some instances the assistant felt physically threatened by his relatives and fled until tensions diminished. The romantic image of pygmies being "peaceful" and "harmonious" people definitely needs an update (see also Frankland 1998).

17 This may be due to the fact that I always communicated with him via a translator. I started with Songmpilé as a translator, who happened to be a party in the conflict. After the regrettable death of Songmpilé I worked with another

visits and the assistance at mournings. There are also possibilities of creating an instant good relationship by distributing gifts: a part of the yield/catch or providing a meal. I will come back to this, but first I would like to illustrate the functioning of these good relationships by two cases in which the main persons use their *magyouo* (respectively their supposed *magyouo*) with another person who has such rights¹⁸ to acquire access to resources they need. Both do not belong to the *kwaato*, nor do they have kinship relations close enough to have any claims on these resources.

Mbvuo derives access to resources from his good relationship with a villager

Mbvuo is a Bagyeli man, a traditional healer, hunter, gatherer and farmer. Mbvuo's father Mangom was a protégé of villager Bigyo, and the latter had paid the bride-price for Mbvuo's mother. Bigyo claimed he had brought up Mangom as if he were his own son. This was why Bigyo felt a special tie with Mbvuo. When Mbvuo was young, he lived with his parents in the *kwaato* of Mangamé. He is part of the Bito'o clan, which is different from that of Bigyo's and that of the current inhabitants of that location. When living in Mangamé, they had the right to hunt and gather in the *pandé* forest south of Mangamé. In this area, rights to hunt and gather are not exclusively restricted to Bagyeli. Bidjouka villagers -including Bigyo- equally hold rights here and many of these villagers actually do some hunting in the area.

After several years, Mbvuo's family moved to Binzambo, at some eight kilometres to the south-east. They lost the right to hunt and gather in the vicinity of Mangamé. Meanwhile, Mbvuo grew up, found a wife and got children. As time passed by, tensions rose in Binzambo, and Mbvuo wanted to move to live elsewhere. Villager Bigyo repeatedly invited Mbvuo to come and live with him. Bigyo had a house and most of his fields and fallow lands at some two kilometres west of Mangamé. At the beginning of 1996, Mbvuo and his family moved to settle near Bigyo. His host allocated him some land on which to build a house, as well as a parcel to cultivate crops. As from that moment, his "good relation" with Bigyo also allowed Mbvuo to hunt and gather near Mangamé once again, and he did so without encountering any problems. Everyone knew he was there on behalf of his good relation with Bigyo.

The main person had enough of the continuous fights among his kin in his *kwaato*, he explores the possibilities to settle, and perform his economic activities, elsewhere. Villager Bigyo seized the opportunity to restore his tie with Bagyeli. In Mbvuo's case, his good relationship with Bigyo is the basis for his current privilege of exploitation of the forest and agricultural land near Mangamé. He can strengthen this relationship by regularly providing Bigyo with gifts, especially bush-meat. However, if ever this relationship between Bigyo and Mbvuo would deteriorate in the course of time, Bigyo will chase Mbvuo from the lands the latter has borrowed from him¹⁹, and also withdraw the other privileges Mbvuo derived from him. Being a "stranger" in terms of rights to control access to natural resources near Mangamé, Mbvuo's possibility of exploiting forest resources can be withdrawn unilaterally by the villager under whose responsibility he worked. This example concerned a rather broad range of exploitations of natural resources including both fallow lands and the forest.

Songmbpilé's case, following now, equally involves a movement into an area within which he hardly has rights, but, contrary to Mbvuo, Songmbpile does so without having been invited by someone who does have the right to allocate resources.

Songmbpile puts traps in a fallow land, without having the right to do so

Songmbpile lived in Yanebouti, in the hills north of Bidjouka. He was a member of the

translator whose mother's brothers lived in Sabvila. Mbang did not want to set off the latent conflict by talking about it.

18 As it happened, both cases concerned Bagyeli acquiring access via a villager.

19 In fact, this is what happened to Mbang and his family in 1988/1989, after having lived with Bigyo for several years.

Sabvila clan. Due to his temporary job as my research assistant he had to move and settle in Mangamé. This job and his poor physical health allowed him to hunt there only infrequently. During the first few months of his stay, the inhabitants of Mangamé hardly shared their bush-meat with him, despite the fact that he was a classificatory "maternal uncle" to most of the adult men in Mangamé. Songmbpile preferred regulating his own supply of bush-meat to depending on the well-disposedness of his kin, and he decided to put up some snares in the rainy season to come. His temporary job combined with his physical condition tied him to the immediate surroundings of the camp.

Would Mangamé be located in the *pandé*, normally his kinship ties would easily allow him to set lines of snares in the forest near the camp. Mangamé, however, was completely surrounded by fields and fallow lands. Setting traps in someone else's field was impossible. First of all, the neighbouring villager with the largest area of land had his own snares in the barricades surrounding the fields and forbade Songmbpile to put his traps there. Furthermore, past experiences in the area had shown that the sudden loss of agricultural crops from a field easily provoked conflicts between the owner of the field and the man having traps on this field. At the discovery of "theft" of crops, the owner of the field immediately pointed an accusing finger to the hunter, as the latter had regularly had the opportunity to steal products when crossing the field to check his traps. These situations were considered unpleasant, and most people preferred to prevent them.

Setting traps on fallow lands would be a possibility, but Songmbpile would still need permission of the owner of the fallow to do so. As these fallow lands hardly produce food, a hunter could get permission for setting traps much more easily, especially if he would create a good relationship by promising to give part of the catch in return for this privilege. However, his Bagyeli relatives were unable to offer him to put his snares into their nearby fallow lands, as they practiced agriculture on a small scale and therefore only had tiny fallow lands. Furthermore, their willingness to grant him permission to do so would have been limited. There was a certain tension between them and Songmbpile as a result of their disappointment about him keeping most of his earnings to himself (as opposed to providing them with regular supplies of alcohol)²⁰. All the other fields and fallow lands surrounding Mangamé belonged to villagers. Although Songmbpilé was remotely related to some of those villagers, these ties did not provide him with any 'legal' opportunity to set his snares in this area.

At the start of the small rainy season of 1995, Songmbpile put his snares in a Odjoukou's fallow lands, without, however, asking the latter for his permission to do so. If Songmbpilé would have asked the owner of the fallow for permission prior to putting his traps there, he could expect being asked to share his catch with the owner (in order to create a good relationship). Songmbpilé knew that if ever this villager would discover these hidden traps, Odjoukou could ask him to remove them. Songmbpilé took this risk, arguing to me that if such would occur, the chances were low of this villager creating any serious problems. In fact he took an advance to the good relationship that would flow from this villager's tie to his sister. He knew that Odjoukou was in the early stages of having a love affair with Songmbpilé's sister. Songmbpile told me he reckoned that the villager would not chase him away from his fallow: the villager would know that his new girlfriend would not appreciate such an act and that she would draw conclusions with respect to his liaison with her.

To put it briefly: circumstances made Songmbpilé settle in an area in which he hardly had any rights to exploitation, and he did so without an invitation by a person who did have the power to allocate such rights. He wanted to apply one particular technique of exploitation, setting traps, and was bound to do so on other persons' fallow lands. Instead of creating a good relationship himself by making an arrangement with the owner of a fallow, which would have cost him part of his catch, he set his traps secretly. He hoped that if ever his act would be discovered, the liaison and resulting good relationship between a member of his family and the owner of the fallow would temper the latter's anger.

These cases showed that *magyouo*, good relationships, can be the sole basis for privileges ranging from the possibility to temporarily utilise one particular resource in a limited area to a more

20 An old feud between the two families may have played a role too.

general possibility to exploit resources in the entire area in which the host has rights. In fact, the examples of Songmbpile and Mbvuo were the only recent cases I found in which people move to settle into an area without an explicit agreement or invitation by relatives. I heard a few stories about asking permission to the chief of the neighbouring village if a group of Bagyeli intend to hunt in the forest belonging to that other village. The good relationships much more frequently accompany kinship ties which, in themselves, are insufficiently "close" to obtain rights to exploitation. I will deal with two such instances here.

Members of a clan feel themselves related to each other, like brothers. In the course of time, subsequent removals of parts of such a clan have made for their dispersal over large areas. The clan-relationship can be referred to when asking for permission to utilise resources in the area. The Yembi provide a well documented example.

Clan relationship at the basis of resource use in Nyamenkoum

The area of Nyamenkoum was deemed to be the basis of the Yembi, and part of the Bagyeli belonging to this clan still lived there when I did my fieldwork. Oral history had it that some great grandparents once accompanied villagers on their quest for salt through the forests to the coast of Kribi. On their way back to Nyamenkoum, some of them decided to stay in Bandevouri (a village west of Ndtoua). These people repeatedly moved from one *kwaato* to another, but remained within that area until today (Henning 1997:27). One of their Yembi descendants however, Doubé Emile, had left Bandevouri in the 1940's and settled near Bidjouka, just north of Nyamenkoum. His wife and offspring, my informants in Mangamé, still lived near Bidjouka. Other Bagyeli of the Yembi clan left Nyamenkoum in the 1960's to settle in Ebimimbang and the immediate surroundings (Van de Sandt 1999:222). Part of their offspring joined their paternal relatives in Nyamenkoum again some thirty years later.

The Yembi living in Nyamenkoum still considered themselves as belonging to the same family as the offspring of the people who once left them to settle elsewhere. This would facilitate the latter's use of natural resources near Nyamenkoum. An inhabitant expressed himself at the normative level:

"Let us assume that we belong to the same family but you have gone to settle elsewhere. If you want to hunt here with us, you will apologise and explain what you want to do. We will give you the freedom to enter the forest after you've made a gesture. We cannot do otherwise, or we would become isolated and dishonoured."

I have evidence at my disposal that this norm was respected and actually put into practice. By the time I was in Nyamenkoum the Bagyeli offspring of the Ebimimbang part of the Yembi clan had already been living, hunting and gathering in the area for four years. Furthermore, in the beginning of the 1970's my Yembi informants in Bidjouka/Mangamé had made use of their clan-relationship to those living in Nyamenkoum for a continuous period of several years to find a refuge after having left the area within which they had rights. The latter stated in their turn that they would be willing to receive their Yembi "brothers" from Nyamenkoum if those conditions would occur.

Most informants will allow their wives' brothers (*nyale*), access to natural resources, provided that the relationship between them is good. The informants transfer the effectuation of part of their rights to forest resources to their wives' brothers, who can subsequently exploit the forest under their responsibility. But the wife's brother will have to create support for his activities among the informant's kin by offering them gifts. If, in the course of time, the marriage does not work out well, and the wife's family "takes her away", this is considered the end of the good relationship between the man and his *nyale*. He will withdraw their access to the forest resources, warning them "never" to set foot in the area again.

Possibilities exist of creating an occasional, or instant, good relationship by giving gifts to the person allocating the right to exploitation, be it a part of the yield or catch or a meal. Silpen

Jeudi gave the following rich account of a situation in which a female villager has created a good relationship with a Bagyeli woman, the informant's sister-in-law. Silpen is a bright, young, Bagyeli mother, who once made good use of the possibilities for formal education that were offered to her, but stopped her schooling when she married Tchagadic.

Silpen collects bush-mango on fallow land of female villager when living with her family-in-law

"Last year we lived with my husband's sister, near the Lobé river. My husband and his kin belong to the Yesou family. A female villager who was related to the very same family allowed my husband's sister and me to collect bush-mango on one of her fallow lands. Let's say her name was Angeline. She asked us to inform her if ever we would see other women on her fallow.

We gathered bush-mangoes several times and then we met another female villager, a widow, on this fallow. She said that we, pygmies, do not respect villagers' goods. According to her, we should rather gather another type of kernels, *Ngalé*. She continued by saying that villagers knew a bush-mango always belonged to someone, and she claimed that this particular bush-mango was hers. As she insulted us, we merely collected bush-mangoes, and peeled them only at home. She had warned us though, that "we would get to know her" if we would take these bush-mangoes.

Upon our arrival in the village, Angeline asked why we had peeled so little kernels. We told her we had had problems and explained her what had happened. Angeline took her machete, went to see the widow and asked her "Why do you defend the pygmies to collect bush-mango? Are you related to the Yesou? I was the one who sent them out to collect the bush-mango. And you defend them as if the mangoes were yours." The widow insulted her. Angeline went home and told us: "You can continue collecting tomorrow, the tree is mine."

We left early next day, and on our way we met the widow. She threatened to do something to us if she would ever see us again. In fact, she put magical products [French: *remèdes*, KB] under the bush-mango tree in order to prevent anyone else from touching the kernels. Angeline came and destroyed the magical products with her machete. She collected the remains of these products, brought them to the village and publicly sowed them underneath the widow's veranda. She said: "As you put these products under the mango, I will do the same to you."

My sister-in-law decided we would not collect these bush-mangoes, and leave the two village women with their fight. Neither of these women gathered the kernels, whereas the tree produced a lot. Angeline said: "Why would we stay here in the village, let us go to my fallow and gather the fruits." We went there, and found the fruits. We started to remove the kernels and filled a whole basin. The widow came to see us on the spot and asked whether we would give her a small amount of kernels, but Angeline refused.

At the end of the day we went back home. Angeline's husband met with the widow's children. These children said that their mother stole other persons' property. The villagers arranged the case among themselves. They told us not to get involved in the discussion as someone else had allowed us to collect.

The widow, however, demanded bush-meat, as she said we would have taken her bush-mango. I replied: "If the other woman would have asked us bush-meat, I could give it to her. But I cannot give it to you. Why would I do that?". The widow said that she would not leave it at that, she would file a complaint against us with the village chief. Angeline said that if the widow would actually put charges against us, we should not go to court. She would go there in person as she was the one who sent us to the tree in question.

In fact, the widow did not meet with the village chief, but she called in another villager for help. The widow and this other villager came to see us and announced that they had come to discuss the problem of the bush-mango. The widow's children were also present at the discussion. Angeline said: "This mango tree is on a field which I have used ever since I came here to live with my husband. Now you tell me that it is yours? You do not have land over here. I have come here so often to peel these kernels. If I meet with Yesou pygmies to whom I am related, I can send them here. The tree is on my fallow. What reason do you have to come here and kill? You try to involve the pygmies, but do they know about this land problem? If you are looking for problems, you ought to come and see me, not the

pygmies."

The other villager said to the widow: "Can't you see how wrong you are?". After that, they arranged the case. We asked the widow to prepare a large quantity of shrimps, and we gave it to those who arranged the affair. Angeline did not want to ask the widow for money, she said this should be the end of the affair. And this is how it finished.

Silpen's sister-in-law has permission to gather bush-mango on the female villager's fallow and she will share the produce with Silpen. The Bagyeli sister-in-law worked under the responsibility of the female villager, and this clearly came to the fore when a second female villager contested the Bagyeli's right to utilise the bush-mangoes. This particular case unveils some of the elements of the resolution of conflicts with respect to natural resources to which I will return later, in chapter 5.

Songmbpilé's case, which I dealt with earlier, is interesting because he tried to avoid sharing his catch by acting in secrecy. At the normative level, however, all informants agree that either sharing the proceeds or offering a meal is the appropriate way of establishing (or keeping up) the good relation, much like they would do themselves if they want to exploit in another village. When we discussed the hypothetical possibility of a stranger announcing himself and expressing the wish to hunt with a rifle in the area, it is often said that "He has to satisfy the village", for example by leaving the first few animals he caught to the group of people who gave him this permission. It is interesting to note that the act of providing a meal can also create such a good relationship, as this strongly resembles the last phase in the settlement of conflicts within -or between- families: a meal is offered by the person who is considered to have been wrong. This person will ask for forgiveness, the others will accept. The meal is jointly consumed by the parties involved in the conflict, and this is taken as a sign that there are no hard feelings left, the friendship could start anew. The approval of those having the right to control the exploitation is generally considered a precondition for having good luck during the hunt, and a protection against "accidents".

3 ELEMENTS OF PRIVATE / "INDIVIDUAL" CONTROL BASED ON INVESTMENTS

In the previous chapters on principles of Bagyeli tenure, it was described how a combination of belonging to a village with belonging to kin-groups provide people with rights to allocate and control natural resources in different parts of the *pandé*, as well as with rights to exploit and utilise resources. People share these rights to exploitation with the other rightholders. It is not possible for them to prohibit those other members the exploitation of these resources in the forest. The daily exploitation of wild forest resources takes place on this basis. The current chapter is about the arrangements that exist to regulate the access to natural resources *among* members of those property holding groups. Some particular resources are appropriated by individual persons or a small group. Their rights rest on the basis of investing energy, on personal efforts. The other inhabitants of the village are supposed to refrain from exploiting them. The duration of these more exclusive rights vary. In this way, elements occur of more or less individual control over natural resources. When describing the classifications of space, I indicated that the transformation of *pandé* into fields is considered to be such an investment. The reader will remember that this act does not only determine the status of the land and the crops on it, but also of the resources which grow there in the wild.

Such investments can take many different forms, I will concentrate on the more common ones. The simplest of the other types of investment (read: appropriation) is the catching and killing of an animal or collecting plant material. These activities turn common property resources into more or less private property: the person (or persons) who catches or gathers the product can decide what will happen to it. The right to hunt for game may well be a common property of the entire group, but something changes once a particular animal is trapped in a snare: as from that moment it belongs to the owner of the snare. Likewise: fish and crabs in streams in the forest are freely accessible to the inhabitants of the village and the kin-group, but the same fish will be private property as soon as it is in a fyke. In a similar vein, as soon as a woman took the pains of piling up fruits in the forest, that did not belong to someone in particular, they are hers. Would someone else remove this bush-meat from the snare, fish from the fyke or fruits from the stack, this act will be considered as theft.

Regularly, such common property resources are appropriated in a collective effort. Bagyeli have their ideas as to the distribution of the produce in such cases. The following story about an event that took place during a hunt, such as told by Manzang Pauline, is quite telling. Manzang originated from Yanebouti, where the event took place. She is a modest informant, as many women were, but she told vivid stories. I met her when she stayed in Ndtoua with her husband's maternal uncles. Her family had left their nearby base-camp Bitumbi to recover from the loss of her husband's mother.

Who gets a share of the duyker?

We were hunting near a hunting camp north of Yanebouti. We co-operated with lots of my paternal relatives and their partners. Jeanne, my cousin's wife, discovered a *lekeno* (a small duyker), in a hollow tree. That day, we hunted by pursuit, so we did not have any of our nets with us to catch the duyker, in case it would flee from its hole. We wondered what we could do to catch it. Nzunga was with us, as his family-in-law lives in Yanebouti. He told us not to move. He plaited a frame out of branches and lianas and quietly put the frame just in front of the duyker's hiding place. He told the others to go behind the tree and frighten the animal. The duyker tried to escape and jumped, but Nzunga's framework withheld it and Nzunga killed it with his lance.

All of a sudden, Lekouai claims that he is the one who usually kills the duykers at that

site, and that he therefor has a right to two of the duyker's legs. But he was lying. Nzunga said to him: "Dear friend, you are lying. We did not know that you used to find those animals here. You told us that you wanted half of the animal only after another person had discovered it. But you are only allowed to have such a share in case you had, for example, lent your dog for the hunt and your dog was the one to actually stop the animal." Nzunga and Lekouai had a long talk about the affair. All the others said we should just take the duyker home as the day's hunt was over anyway, but Lekouai insisted to have his share immediately. Nzunga offered to give him the head of the animal, Lekouai did not accept this and said he wanted the two legs, either with or without the head.

The next morning we were alarmed by a messenger from the base-camp who told us that someone had died in a neighbouring camp. Nzunga decided that we would stop hunting in the forest and return to the base-camp. Lekouai still wanted to have his share, even though the others said to him "Have you not heard the bad news?". This messenger tried to calm this matter down. He said "Lekouai, you are wrong. Since when do you think this is the way we act? Nzunga, his wife and Manzang are older than you are, and you dispute the duyker with them instead of waiting for your share during the meal? You are an adult, then why do you behave like a child?".

For an entire week, Lekouai refused to speak with the others. Upon our arrival at the base-camp, the "deceased" appeared to be seriously ill, not dead. They had misled us in order to compel us to return as quickly as possible.

Manzang may not be too clear about it here, but the person who found the *lekeno* in the first place has rights to the bush-meat precisely because of that fact. As several people are involved in the actual killing, others have a right too. Being the leader of the hunt, Nzunga is allowed to take the head of the animal (which is why he can offer it to Lekouai). In this case, he would have yet another reason to claim part of the bush-meat, because he did not only find the solution to catch the animal, but he actually killed the duyker as well. Lekouai tries to put forward the argument that he ought to have a share on the basis of him being a "regular harvester" of duykers at that spot. The bad timing of his announcement made the others doubt as to the value of his declaration. He is reminded of the fact that he would have had a point would he have been the owner of the object or tool used in catching the animal. In a nutshell, these are the arguments used in distributing the yield of a collective hunt. Women involved in a joint effort to gather forest products (e.g., kernels) partition the yield, they distribute the catch of a collective fishing enterprise among themselves. Men co-operating in harvesting the seeds of the *Strophantus gratus* liana, divide the pods between them.

Another type of investment, which provided the first finder with the exclusive right to extract them, is the visible marking of spots where some other resources have been found, such as honey, the seeds of the *Strophantus gratus* lianas and big fish. In the preceding story about the duyker, Lekouai put forward a variant to this principle: he tried to make the others believe it is generally known that he is a regular client of a site where game was found. Usually, the harvest of a marked resource is not suspended for long, at most a few days, and the finder's right to it "evaporate" with its exploitation. This turned out to be rather convenient when a Dutch filmmaker, Sjoerd, suddenly came to visit my informants and me at Ndtoua. He intended to shoot pictures for a Tropenbos promotional video and only had limited time available.

Nzouongo collects honey that his wife marked months ago

Sjoerd visited me in Ndtoua for some days, as he wanted to film the exploitation of non-timber forest products by Bagyeli. We had established a short list of scenes to be recorded, and harvesting honey was one of them. Discovering honey in the forest is a matter of luck, and weeks could pass between two findings. However, Sjoerd did not have the time to wait for this to happen. Nzouongo, one of my Bagyeli informants remembered that his wife had found and reserved honey somewhere in the forest several months ago, when they were hunting for rats. At the time the honey was regarded as not yet suitable for consumption,

and, since then, he had not yet taken the opportunity to collect it. Nzouongo's wife gave us instructions as to the exact location of the honey-tree and we walked for about an hour to get there, accompanied by the filmmaker. Arriving on the spot, we saw that the shrubs underneath the tree containing the honey had been removed and the tree itself had been notched to indicate accidental passers-by that this honey had already been appropriated. The honey was still there, untouched. Sjoerd could immediately start filming its harvest.

Putting snares, *malambo*, or creating hiding places for fish are other forms of investment providing one with near exclusive rights to the game, respectively fish, in that zone of the forest. These rights last only as long as these structures are present. Loosely piling up stones and plant material in the water transform sections of streams into places attracting fish. These piles are called *leviso*, and especially women make use of them. The maker announces the place where she has made this investment and she has a right to expect other women to refrain from fishing in "her" section of the brook. A similar line of reasoning holds true for trapping. At the start of the trapping season, each hunter chooses a direction into the forest in which he sets his snares. Footprints left by the game indicate their frequent passage, and the snares are set along those trails. A hunter is supposed not to put his snares in a zone in use by other people's traps, as the latter are considered to be "waiting for" these particular animals. If he likes to do so nonetheless, he ought to contact the owner of the traps present and try to get at an arrangement as to the spatial distribution. In any of these cases, a hunter catching substantially more game in his snares than his neighbouring trappers, will be suspected of obstructing the latter's investments by supernatural means. He is thought to have put a charm by using *remèdes*, attracting the game into his snares, thus ensuring that he kills many animals, while the other snares are rendered unsusceptible²¹. Such a person is said to want to boast about his trapping capacities, "whereas he has simply blocked the forest". This is unacceptable.

Planting a tree, or protecting a young tree that sprouts spontaneously, equally gives one more exclusive rights to its products.

"It is possible that you like a certain part of my fallow and you want to plant corn there. You will come to visit me and tell about your plans. I will allow you to do so, and I will indicate the place where you can start cultivating. Well, if we are on good footing, you will be allowed to plant fruit-trees, such as orange-trees and lemon-trees. These trees are yours. Even your children will come and collect the fruits. I will merely pass by, knowing that you were the one who took the pains of planting those trees there.

In our village we actually have a plot of this type ourselves. This is an arrangement that dates back long ago when an old woman allowed my father to cultivate on a particular terrain. Palm trees grew on it, and nowadays these produce clusters of *malendi*, oily palm fruits. If my brother or I find clusters with ripe fruits there, we will take them home. We know this is our father's terrain, even if it is only small." (Leboh).

Planting of trees by Bagyeli usually happens quite near the houses or on a field. The rights to these products last long and can even be inherited by others. Years after a *kwaato* (base-camp) has been abandoned, the claims to trees planted or protected in its surroundings still apply. In fact, these rights even serve to prove the relation between a person and the area. Leboh's quote show that fruit-trees are a crucial issue. Planting of trees on borrowed land will be allowed only if the owner and the borrower are on good footing. At the end of the quote, the reason becomes clear: planting and protecting trees turns a borrowed piece of land into the borrower's property.

The process of appropriation of the forest products is linked to the theme of foodsharing. Food, in the sense of being an appropriated resource, can be distributed as gifts to family/friends,

21 I found it quite striking that even my Bagyeli translators used the french word *remèdes*, which usually has the connotation of drugs or medicines, even to indicate products with a magical power aimed at enlarging private gain.

much like alcohol, tobacco, clothes etc. However, there is a discontinuity in norms, for at this point in the process of appropriation of edibles, the individual owner can decide freely what to do with the products. If distribution takes place at all, the products can be given away raw or processed. Countless are the times that children are sent to deliver huge chunks of fresh meat in neighbouring huts. The sharing of meals is another alternative. However interesting this process may be, it deserves more attention than can be given within the confines of this research²².)

Summarizing briefly: this chapter dealt with some of the arrangements regulating the access to natural resources among several local people, all of them right-holders. Each of them shares his/her rights to exploitation of most resources with the other members of those property holding groups, but some particular resources are appropriated by individual persons or a small group. These rights are based on investing energy, on personal efforts. Several forms of appropriation were addressed in the text, ranging from temporarily "reserving" a forest resource by marking it, via "catching and collecting" forest resources, the "transformation of forest into agricultural land", and "putting snares, fykes, making piles", to "planting trees".

22 For those interested in food-sharing among foragers I can refer to e.g. Ngima Mawoung (1993) on the Bagyeli; Bahuchet (e.g. 1990) on the Aka; Hawkes (e.g. 1993) on !Kung, Ache and Hadza; Nicolas Peterson (1993) on Australian foragers.

4 LOGGING-, AND PIPELINE-COMPANIES: "STRANGERS" CLAIMING RIGHTS TO EXPLOITATION²³

In the chapter on Bagyeli acquiring access to natural resources, some attention was paid to the case of strangers arriving in the area, wishing to exploit particular forest resources. In view of the function of the text, I limited myself to events involving Bagyeli and villager strangers. Here, however, I would like to make a comparison with the arrival of such 'strangers' as logging companies and pipeline-related companies. This allows me to also say something about Bagyeli perceptions of logging companies and the impacts of their activities.

In a way, the arrival of logging companies follows the logic of the announcement of such a 'stranger'. Prior to entering the forest for the (preparations for) logging activities, companies organize a meeting in or near the (road-side) villages concerned. Although Bagyeli hardly ever participate in these meetings, and logging companies communicate with villagers only, they are an interesting interaction. To some extent, at these meetings, the concessionaire manifests the behaviour of a stranger in terms of local tenure arrangements. A couple of elements for establishing a 'good relationship' occur in this particular type of interaction. The (alleged) aim of this first meeting is to ask for permission to enter the forest and start the activities. Representatives of the logging company, often backed up by a high ranking civil servant, announce the company's plans. Villagers in their turn ask for counterprestations, such as some infrastructural works (repair of minor roads and bridges, community centres, football fields). The company promises to provide certain gifts, distributes ingredients for the meal and drinks that commonly underline the existence of cordial relations, and subsequently starts its activities.

Nlonkeng: Tropenbos research programme mistaken for a logging company

In fact, as part of a multidisciplinary team of Tropenbos researchers in January 1994, I experienced something peculiar, which is quite telling in this context. We were one of the first teams of Tropenbos researchers actually starting the activities in Cameroon, and we wanted to do a Rapid Appraisal in order to select topics that deserved further study. We arrived in Nlonkeng in a couple of brandnew four-wheele driven Tropenbos cars. Until then, in the village of Nlonkeng, the only foreigners to arrive showing interest in forests had been representatives of logging companies. This defined the villagers' attitude towards us, unaccustomed as they were to the phenomenon of a large scale scientific research programme.

I was one of a handful of researchers unfamiliar with this area, but we were the ones taking the lead in the appraisal. Previous fieldwork in other parts of Africa and Cameroon led us to believe that we knew how to behave at the start of new fieldwork. Our time was limited, so we wanted to quickly launch our interviews and observations. But, to our surprise, our presence appeared to cause an enormous tension in the village, quite a frightening experience in fact, even to the extent of preventing us to start working. The villagers told us that we absolutely had to organise a meeting, threatened that otherwise we would not be allowed to start working with them or in their forest. While awaiting the actual meeting, we felt so bad at ease that we thought we would have to leave the area, and we even considered moving to work elsewhere. During the meeting, the Bulu villagers asked enormous gifts to us and a meal. We considered these gifts absolutely disproportional to our research activity, and we felt checkmated. We were unaware of the fact that villagers felt that we were supposed to behave like logging companies.

Lucky enough, we had some experienced Cameroonian researchers in our team, they took

23 The information on villagers and loggers in this section mainly stems from stimulating discussions with my Tropenbos colleagues Parren, van Leersum and van den Berg, discussions for which I am very grateful. This exchange took place in the context of writing a joint article on social and legal aspects of sustainable forest management aimed at timber production. The information on Bagyeli, however, results from my own fieldwork and that of my students.

up the role of mediators, and gave us instructions on how to behave during the meeting. There was a lot to clarify, and it was a tremendous palaver, but in the end we were allowed to actually start our appraisal.

A fundamental remark to be made is that Bagyeli hardly ever participate in these meetings. Several successive logging companies have been active in the forests around my key research locations, but they rounded off their activities about ten or fifteen years ago. As I wanted to make sure that time had not eroded my informants' memories of their past experiences with logging activities, I paid a brief visit to a site where logging was quite a recent experience, namely the camp of Kaba-Mbango, located to the south east of Lolodorf. From his sickbed, an enterprising elderly Bagyeli, Maschué Pierre, who is rather famous as a successful traditional healer, gave me the following account:

"When the people of Wijma [the logging company, KB] arrived, they met with the village chief. The village chief met with the people surrounding him [villagers] and they came to an agreement. They fixed the date on which the Europeans could come. The chief asked them for food and drinks as a condition to giving his permission to enter the forest. The company gave him the meat of a cow, red wine and fish. The villagers distributed it amongst themselves, and the company arrived with its equipment. We, who know the forest best, did not receive anything of the gifts. This is why we are angry with the villagers. I mean, we share this forest, and if they receive anything, we want to have our portion as well."

This is in line with the findings in my common research locations, where these events have taken place years ago. Bagyeli do indeed perceive the arrival of a logging company in terms of the arrival of a stranger, who has to ask for permission before entering the forest, and distributes gifts in order to "satisfy the village". One of my research assistants explained it thus:

"Let us assume you would be a person coming from Kribi with the intention to hunt with a gun in these surroundings. First of all you need a good relationship. You will have to satisfy the village of the pygmies who live there, by giving us for example two monkeys. Well, and the day you will catch real big game, you are going to give me a portion. Because if you catch a large animal, you have to share it with the entire village. If you behave like that, your hunting will be successful. This is similar to the case with the logging companies. If they want to enter the forest, they have to satisfy the village first by offering food and drinks. This will open up the forest to them, and they will not encounter any upheaval or problems."

In the opinion of one of my French-speaking Bagyeli informants, such gifts "legalise" the logging activities. As said, in many of the road-side villages in the research area, the employees of the logging company organised formal meetings asking for the villagers' approval for their entrance into the forest. Bagyeli however, despite the fact that logging activities touch the very core of their economic activities, are usually not invited in these or any other meetings concerning logging. In their view, this is because villagers behave as if such events are none of the Bagyeli's business, and not so much because of an omission on behalf of the logging companies. For most Bagyeli, the geographical distance separating them from the occurrences on the road-side may well have played an additional role, but even those few Bagyeli living on the road-sides themselves, who usually are far better educated and more self-confident, are not involved. This is underlined by an event on one of the first days of my stay in Ndtoua.

Julio, a young Ngoumba speaking villager came to visit me, and asked me to explain the aims of the Tropenbos Programme. I tried to explain the point of sustainable forest management and the use of doing research in order to make a management plan. He then told me that if such were the case, it was useless to do my research among the Bagyeli, as they did not have any rights to the forest. Just after that moment, two Bagyeli youngsters,

who had been following the conversation interestedly, stood up, and walked out of the room in order to conceal their discontentment with this utterance.

In fact, one of the elder members of the family of these Bagyeli youngsters later declared to me during a conversation that he had not taken part in the decision-making as to the work of the logging company, and he had not had the courage either to demand their share of the loggers' food in front of the villagers. His account clarifies how the distribution of food and drinks took place. It must be born in mind that this informant, Tchagadic, is a member of the imaginary Bagyeli "elite" in terms of education, wealth and respect.

"When the European staff of the logging company arrive, they give the food and drinks, for example the meat of a cow, some forty litres of red wine and two large bags of rice. All this is subdivided over the wards and clans. Within the ward, it is distributed over the houses. I was unable to claim a share, I do not have the freedom to come and demand. Aiaai! I cannot go there. Villagers were discussing among themselves, as some had taken large quantities, leaving little behind for the others. A villager friend of mine did go and speak up. He gave me some of his portion. But the villagers could never have shared with me in public, no! If I would go there they would beat me up. Each villager jealously looks at this small quantity of food and wine."

Tchagadic, by means of a friendly villager, managed to get a portion. But in all of the other Bagyeli research locations even this is not the case. They resent this, but the local balance of power makes them feel not to be in a position for claiming their voice in the matter. They may well grumble against an interested outsider, but accept these things and avoid the confrontation.

A piquant exception is formed by events that took place in Kaba-Mbango after my brief visit to the site and prior to the arrival at this location, two years later, of a student researcher. The reader will remember the account given to me by this enterprising Bagyeli traditional healer, about logging companies only distributing gifts to the villagers of Kaba, without the Bagyeli receiving a share. This student was told the following forceful story (Booijink 1999:85):

There has been a meeting between the logging company and the villagers of the Kaba area. The Bagyeli men of Kaba and Malang Si did not attend this meeting, nor did they receive a share in the gifts provided during the meeting: liquor, the meat of a cow, dried fish and salt. (This is what Maschué Pierre had also told me at the time). Some time passed before the logging company actually commenced its activities in the area. When they did, they met Bagyeli in the forest. These asked the representatives of a logging for a gift, and they were presented with a sum of 50,000 FCFA²⁴. These Bagyeli men did not share this amount with villagers, but, of course, the latter heard the news. The villagers were angry. The Bagyeli men replied that the villagers did not even have a right to a share in this money. Firstly, they said, because the forest in which the Bagyeli lived did not belong to those villagers, and, secondly because the type of their relation by no means implied such obligations. The Bagyeli informants were given a serious beating for this attitude, and, as a result, contacts were suspended ever since.

Remarkably enough, Bagyeli frustration about their non-involvement is mainly directed towards villagers who do not share the gifts, not towards the logging companies who do not invite Bagyeli to participate in the meetings. Furthermore, it also struck me that there were no complaints about the disparity between the relatively insignificant monetary value of the gifts and the financial value of the timber. It should be stressed, however, that this dissimilarity is unknown among Bagyeli, as they are unfamiliar with the mercantile value of timber²⁵.

24 For 'ordinary' Bagyeli 50,000 FCFA is an enormous amount of money. However, at Kaba, the common revenues of the -allegedly successful- traditional healing activities of Maschué Pierre makes that these particular Bagyeli perceive such sums differently. This contributes to the credibility of this story.

25 This notwithstanding the fact that some few Bagyeli men temporarily worked in the lower echelons of the logging industry.

The exceptional Bagyeli men who did participate in this kind of meeting, such as some of those living in Nyamenkoum, have a rather down-to-earth opinion on the event (Booijink 1999:83-85). They consider it a mere formality, as, they say, the contract has been established between the state and the 'white' representatives of the logging company long before the latter even organized this meeting with the villagers. They do not feel they can influence this process. Furthermore, the gifts are considered as little substantial. Indeed, the general impression of these 'negotiations' is that they are absolutely not about the fundamental questions of whether or not there will actually *be* any logging, and -if so- under which conditions.

Still, one should not be too romantic either about this parallel with customary ways of 'creating good relationships' prior to gaining access to natural resources. There is a major difference between such meetings of villagers and a logging company on the one hand, and the behaviour of an 'ordinary' stranger on the other hand. This type of meetings with logging companies is definitely not a genuine negotiation, for villagers have no control over the process. Usually, the company sets the date, place and agenda. In addition to this, villagers are unable to actually deny this logging company type of 'stranger' access to the forest, or set conditions to its exploitation, for everyone is fully aware of the fact that the logging is legitimised by contracts made with the state at the national level. In this sense, the occasional presence at these meetings of a civil servant accompanying the logger is just a reminder. Furthermore, villagers have hardly any means to tackle this stranger about non-observance of the arrangements that were concluded at the meeting. They only have at their disposal such 'weapons of the weak', like damaging machines, destruction of infrastructure (blocking roads, ruining bridges) and the threat of taking the personnel in hostage. At the local and supra-local level, there seems to be no possibility for controlling the access of these 'strangers' to those resources. Local tenure arrangements, designed to regulate the use of natural resources and protect it against strangers, were overruled by arrangements made at the national level.

The question comes to mind how Bagyeli perceive the impact of commercial logging²⁶. In general, logging and its ecological effects are negatively valued. It is thought to destroy, spoil or waste the forest. In interviews, I often heard such emotional phrases as "*Le Nomba*²⁷ *te gâte la forêt*", and "*Ça fait mal au coeur*". The noise made by the machinery of the logging company has serious repercussions for the availability of larger game in the area. Experiences are that the shy ones of these animals return to the area only years after logging has stopped. In Kaba, Maschué Pierre and his father Bibanga gave an account of the events when a company called Exitbois used to exploit timber in their area.

"There was noise: Koum! Koum! And the larger game wanted to flight. We felt it in our hearts when we saw that the game fled the spots where we were used to hunt. The chimpanzees went on the run as soon as they heard the noise, and so did the wild boars and the gorillas. We can no longer hear their calls, except for the places back there, where there are no logging roads yet. The rats and the [small] duikers remained. We are a bit angry because the foresters destroy our *Ndtoua* (*Irvingia gabonensis*) and the seeds of the *Neh* (the *Strophantus gratus* climber) and trees that are useful to us. We are afraid that if things continue like this, the foresters will destroy all those things, such as the *Pando* (*Poga oleosa*); these are trees that help us to survive"

Furthermore, damage is done to valuable types of vegetation (especially trees providing kernels and medicinal bark). This type of damage is of special concern to women (kernels) and professional healers. Contrary to that against agricultural crops, the damage done to fauna and uncultivated but valuable forest plants is not compensated for. And although some Bagyeli

26 Readers interested in this topic are kindly referred to Biesbrouck 1996 and 1997.

27 *Nomba* is the local notion applied to logging companies. Later, I will elaborate this term and its other

comprehend that loggers cut trees for timber to earn a living, the destruction of vegetation in the construction of infrastructure is considered senseless: ‘Why cut down trees that are useful to us if these are not even going to be used?’. Bika and Kowé, two Bagyeli women of Mangamé:

“We do not want [the logging companies to come back] because if they come, they remove everything, they destroy by making the road. If they would come only to find timber which is useful to them, that would be OK. But they should not destroy the forest without reason. When making the roads, the logging companies do not think of the fact that certain species are valuable to us. If they need wood for a bridge, they simply cut a tree as it suits them. They should not touch on the species that provide us with food. They must not devastate the forest.”

Moreover, pathways, points of orientation, as well as places where honey, seeds from the *Strophantus* climber (usually found in older trees) and porcupines used to be found, are destroyed. However, there is some ambiguity about the valuation of the understorey becoming more dense. On the one hand, this vegetation is a hindrance when pursuing game, according to the informants it has the same affect as hunting in a fallow land. On the other hand, after some time, the game is known to use exactly these tight places for hiding: the game can easily be encircled during a nethunt. Furthermore, on the spot where a tree has been cut and the surrounding vegetation damaged in its fall, it is easier to start an agricultural field.

The job opportunities flowing from the temporary presence of a logging company are equally perceived with mixed feelings. Obviously, men, especially youngsters, like to earn money and be involved in such a modern activity with all the exciting technology around. Only few of them (e.g. in Nyamenkoum and Ndtoua) actually manage to get a job. Most of those think of the work as very heavy, and characterize the working atmosphere and payment uncertain (see also Booiijink 1999:88-90). This is why their experiences are usually shortlived only. Part of this is also due to their downright fear for work-related accidents.

Let us now take a closer look at the notion used in referring to the logging industry: *Nomba*. *Nomba* in this meaning is a term used by Bagyeli, but also by Ngoumba and Fang speaking villagers, to refer to the whole complex of logging, the construction of roads, the search and exploitation of gold, diamonds and mercury (quicksilver). Apart from this, there is another meaning to the same term, and this combination is definitely telling about local perceptions of logging: *Nomba* also refers to taking blood samples and receiving vaccinations (Booiijink and Seh 1999:49). In general, there is a close association between *Nomba* and white people who do ‘something’ that is beyond the local framework of understanding, e.g. removing things out of the realm of their control, for reasons that remain obscure. There is a profound distrust against these activities. In line with this association, is the mental connection with witchcraft. In local perceptions, sudden accidents to employees, who are severely injured or killed by a stem that falls in an unexpected direction, simply can not be ‘just’ bad luck. There *must* be more to it.

Booiijink, a Tropenbos intern, gives a Bagyeli account of a car accident of a white representative of the logging company. The white man is said to have ‘sold’ people, and these have become *fantômes*, who work for him. This would be at the base of the accident. Other informants explained to her that ‘black’ people also used witchcraft to attract the undivided attention of the *Nomba* to them alone (1999:88-89).

Recent developments in the area may well have an impact on future dealings of Bagyeli (and villagers) with logging companies. A consortium of oilcompanies is (about) to construct a pipeline transporting oil from neighbouring country Chad all the way through Cameroon, and the last part of it is to cross the Lolodorf-Kribi area (Biesbrouck and Dkamela 1998; Horta 1998:125-128; Jackson 1999:284-285). One of the differences in the first contact (of these companies and loggers

meanings.

respectively with pygmies) is, that the oil companies do not even try to create the impression of asking for permission prior to starting their work. They do not ask Bagyeli (or villagers for that matter) for permission to enter the forest and, contrary to their logging colleagues, nor do they organise these "quasi negotiations". They merely distributed information in the potentially affected Bagyeli camps about the technical sides of the future pipeline and unilaterally established the compensatory measures. But there is another, more fundamental difference. In the context of this project, some of the damage to non-timber forest products (NTFP's) will also be compensated for, similar to the damage to agricultural crops that is already provisioned for. This means that NTFP's are priced. This is -at least partly- the result of the international attention called upon this project by an alliance of NGO's. If this is actually going to happen, such will definitely have consequences for Bagyeli attitudes vis-a-vis logging companies destroying or damaging these NTFP's in the future.

5 "NOT EVERYONE BEHAVES ACCORDING TO THE RULES, THAT'S THE WAY IT GOES".

In the preceding text of this report, I described the norms on access to natural resources as well as actual exploitation. It became clear that much of the exploitation of natural resources took place in accordance with these rules. However, "not everyone behaves according to the rules, that's the way it goes", as one of my female Bagyeli informants put it in a down-to-earth way. What follows is an account of such situations, but I would like to stress here, that these conflicts should not be used to argue away the potential use of principles of tenure for more sustainable externally induced forms of forest management, as this would be throwing away the child with the bath water²⁸. Many actors, and not only Bagyeli, try to stretch the boundaries of their behaviour to the limits of others' control, if possible even beyond that. Having said that, let us have a look at Bagyeli disputing forest resources. Many of the cases pertain to situations in which someone is considered not to respect another person's investments in a forest resource. There are other cases of contestants each using contrasting norms in arguing their respective claims on collectively appropriated natural resources.

In the field, social control appears to be very important in preventing the trespassing of the rules. Having grown up in an urban area myself, I was surprised to see that these people kept so close an eye on each other. They knew exactly who has gone where to do what that day, thanks to a perfect mastering of the techniques of chatting and gossiping. This also held true for the exploitation of resources. Fear for punishment by means of supernatural powers is another factor in this respect. I will get back to that later.

Another remark that should be made concerns the striking lack of a certain type of conflicts. Despite my purposive questions, there are no tales figuring a Bagyeli stranger or outsider coming to exploit a forest without prior permission of the right-holders. I discussed this observation with one of my research assistants, Tchagadic. I explicitly asked him what will happen in the hypothetical case of an unrelated Bagyeli, someone unknown to him, coming to exploit the forest area in which my informant has rights. This is completely inconceivable to Tchagadic: "Such a stranger," he said, "would not want to stay with us, as he is not even part of our village, and does not belong to our race [clan, KB] either. We cannot treat him like a child of this village, and we will tell him to return to his own area. Really, he cannot get into the forest and start exploiting like that."

Despite all this, some trespassing of the local rules for the management of natural resources does occur, much like in all other normative systems. However, it is particularly difficult to obtain information on deviant behaviour or on conflicts involving Bagyeli, including those on natural resources. As a methodology, observation had its limitations in this respect, as such events are rare and, almost by definition, unannounced. I had to be there coincidentally when the discussions took place and I had to put up with restrictions in time and place. In Bidjouka, I consulted the archive of the local customary court of justice, among other things in order to find cases of Bagyeli disputing forest resources. The archive covered a period of more than twenty years, and I found a few cases of Bagyeli disputing natural resources with villagers. But it does not show a single case of Bagyeli fighting among themselves over natural resources.

28 Whom of my readers never picked fruit in someone else's orchard, or angled without a licence to do so? In a similar vein it was not uncommon of logging companies to occasionally harvest more timber than announced at the tax office, harvest outside their proper boundaries or fell trees below the legal minimum diameter. Does this ever make people doubt on the utility of written law as a regulating tool?

Of course, interviews are an obvious alternative means of getting such information. However, whereas the informants felt free to talk about the norms for access to resources, I obtained elusive answers when it came to actually coming out with real stories about trespassing the norms. It was as if these were gossips not to be talked about to a researcher for fear that the latter would recount these stories elsewhere, out of their control. Especially in one location, Mangamé, I felt that the informants constantly feared talking about past conflicts, as if this would flare up old resentments again. As time was running out, I had to find another solution.

A minor accident had immobilised me and this temporarily turned me into an "armchair anthropologist by necessity". At the time, I worked with Seh Michel as my research assistant. He was fond of walking around with my miniature tape-recorder, and was eager to learn how it worked. I decided to put my assistant's desire into use. I explained to him that I wanted him to go around and stimulate other Bagyeli to tell stories about discussions on forest resources. He should "hunt" for stories and "catch" them by means of the recorder. The procedure enabled the informants to continue their story in their mother language without having to wait for the translation. Every now and then Seh stopped by and proudly told me how well this worked. On quiet moments Seh and I sat down to translate the stories as literally as possible into French. The stories typically began with the phrase "One day I have seen" and ended with "That is what I have seen one day."

This provided me with a collection of stories on events which took place in several different locations, and over a long period of time. Most of the stories, some thirty three, are indeed about Bagyeli disputing resources in the forest, *pandé*²⁹. Twenty one stories dealt with discussions among Bagyeli, they are the basis of this chapter. Eleven stories concern disputes between Bagyeli and villagers. I combine these with seven of such cases that I had found in the archive of Bidjouka. One final story is about an argument between several villagers with Bagyeli accidentally getting involved. The analysis of such stories and cases helps me to get an insight into the diversity of the contested resources as well as the arguments Bagyeli put forward in disputes over natural resources. They also provide information on how these conflicts are dealt with: the mechanisms for their resolution. I will focus now on the mechanisms used by Bagyeli between themselves in conflicts with respect to uncultivated resources found in the forest³⁰. So far the methodological considerations, let us now get to it.

Several mechanisms exist to deal with conflicting views on rights to particular resources in the forest, *pandé*. Two stories are complementary in illustrating my main point, about the most important mechanisms used by Bagyeli for the resolution of conflicts on such resources. As it happens, both events took place in Maschooh Maschooh. The first account is told by Silpen Jeudi in Ndtoua. Ntsam the main person in the story, is her mother, who lives in Maschooh Maschooh.

Ntuwa tries to cheat Ntsam, who lent her a hunting dog

"My mother Ntsam owns a hunting dog and Ntuwa asked her if she could borrow the animal. Ntsam agreed, she said: "You will hunt very well with the help of my dog. Could you pass me at least one rat when you return home?". Ntuwa answered: "I will, I am not like the other persons around here who often borrow your dog". Ntuwa took the dog and they hunted in the forest. After a while, the dog alerted Ntuwa that he had found something. Ntuwa managed to kill both of the porcupines the dog had found, and in the evening she took the catch home. She secretly hid the largest of the porcupines and only presented the smallest of the two to Ntsam, saying that this was the catch of the day. She divided the animal in two equal parts and gave Ntsam her share, as it was her dog who was used in the

29 Apart from these on *pandé*, I had some "additional catches" in the form of nine stories concerning disputes on resources found in fallow lands and fields, both among Bagyeli and between Bagyeli and villagers.

30 The conflicts involving Bagyeli and villagers will be dealt with in a separate section of this report (6.2.2)

hunt. She went to her house in the other part of the camp. There she met with a villager-woman, who temporarily stayed in Maschooh Maschooh in order for her debts to be settled. Ntuwa took out the larger porcupine and sold it to her.

The next day, the village woman visited Ntsam in order to make her pay her debt, explaining that she intended to return to the village down the hill as soon as possible. Ntsam went to her stock, took out a rat and immediately paid her debt. She asked the village woman if she had managed to have her other debts paid already. The village woman explained that Ntuwa had just paid her a large porcupine the other day. Ntsam asked whether this was really true, which the villager confirmed. Ntsam became very angry. She went to see Ntuwa straightaway and asked her what had happened. Ntuwa offered her excuses and said that she merely wanted to pay off her debt as quickly as possible, as soon as her husband would get a porcupine in one of his snares, she would give it to Ntsam. Ntsam went back to her own house.

Mandoumbi, an old man, who is one of Ntsam's neighbours, heard of the matter. He went to see Ntuwa and said to her: "No, I am the replacement of the chief of the camp, what you did was wrong. You should have showed both porcupines to Ntsam. I do not want such things to happen again here with us. You are going to find a porcupine and give it to Ntsam, do you understand?". Ntuwa said she agreed. Several days afterwards, Ntuwa did in fact give a porcupine to Ntsam. Ntsam took off a leg and sent it back to Ntuwa. After that, the relations were good again."

People meet and exchange news so often that behaviour hardly remain unnoticed. This quickly brought to light Ntuwa's act of hiding Ntsam's share. Ntsam asked Ntuwa to justify her conduct. An elderly and respected person intervened, reprimanded Ntuwa and proposed a way to restore the relations within the camp.

In the other story Seh Michel, my research assistant, loses part of his yield of his cash "crop" *Strophantus* because his classificatory maternal uncle ignores signs marking their reservation. I could see how he felt, as I knew the person he was talking about, and had personally experienced the latter's limited reliability combined with beautiful and funny stories. This is Seh's account.

Emanuel ignores reservation of a tree bearing *Strophantus* liana

"You know, during the season, we go through the forest looking at the lianas on the trunk of the trees in order to collect the seeds of *Strophantus* high up in there. I live with my family-in-law at Maschooh Maschooh, but at the time I collected seeds in the forest of neighbouring Yanebouti, my mother's place of birth. It was near the end of the season, when it becomes hard to find any remaining *Strophantus* seeds. But I know where I can find the good trees, every year I check whether the climbers still produce there. One day I planned to tackle five trees with large quantities of this liana, but after having climbed four of them, I was tired. Climbing these trees is a dangerous job, you can encounter snakes up there, or risk falling when grabbing a branch which appears to be rotten. I decided to return the next day to harvest the liana in the fifth tree. I made some markings to indicate that the liana in this tree had been reserved. The following day I changed plans, instead of going into the forest, I stayed in the camp and removed the seeds from the pods.

Well, Nzouer Emanuel, who lives in the camp where my mother was born, passed by the tree, and he saw the *Strophantus*. He must have seen the markings, but he was stubborn. He must have thought something like: "I do not see anyone's name written on the tree". Emanuel is not too old, but he weighs a lot more than I do. He felt that he would not be able to climb the tree, so he just cut it down in order to get at the pods. This was really a stupid thing to do, because he killed the liana and the tree of course. Meanwhile, I was at my family-in-law's, removing the seeds and chatting with my wife. I told her about the liana I had left behind. I estimated it could bring me in three or four kilos of *Strophantus* seeds [with a value of about 20,000 FCFA, KB].

The next day I went back and discovered that the tree had been felled. I went to Yanebouti in order to find out who did it, and people told me Emanuel had been harvesting *Strophantus* in that area. I asked Emanuel's elder brother, who is the chief of that neighbour-

ring camp, to see into the matter. But my wife told me to leave the case, as Emanuel belongs to the same house as my mother does. And this is what I did, simply because he is my maternal uncle. Would I have done anything against him, people would talk badly about me. So that is why I abandoned the matter. I just told him that he should not do such things: our children could have harvested the seeds from the liana growing in that tree, and now it is dead. I also told him: if you are unable to climb the tree, instead of chopping it, ask a quick boy of thirteen, fourteen years of age to help you. Emanuel had mixed the seeds of "my" tree with the yield of the other days. He told me that he would offer me a beer at the day of the payment of the seeds, but he never kept his promise."

These two stories show three of the most important mechanisms for conflict resolution among Bagyeli with respect to forest resources. In these stories, the aggrieved men as well as women went up to meet the person trespassing the rules and overtly talked to them about their misbehaviour. This element of tackling someone on his conduct recurs very frequently in such stories (in eight out of twenty one), to be precise³¹), as will be visible when going through the cases to follow.

Another common way of dealing with conflicts among women as well as among men, is the involvement of what is called in French *les grands*. The latter are people with experience in life, whose recommendations are respected because of their self-controlled behaviour and their insights in human relations. Often, these are elderly people, especially men. In Ntsam's situation, a *grand* called Mandoumbi intervened, and he and other persons also appear in other stories about conflicts over natural resources (in nine out of twenty one cases such a person intervened). The activities of these men are usually described in terms of "calming down the affair" by stressing the fact that the contested resource is not worth such a fight, and in terms of recapitulating the proper human relations, for example by telling that only children, not adults, are allowed to behave like that. They also gave suggestions for the restoration of the *magyouo*, good relations.

A third common way of dealing with conflicts is consciously choosing not to provoke a discussion, a matter of sinking one's differences for the sake of peace and quiet. Another way of saying this, is that the actual application of such principles of tenure depends on the specific social and political context (see Holleman 1985:123-124). Seh's wife reminded him of the fact that whatever Emanuel might have done, he is his maternal uncle. Seh considers demanding the resource, and this, in fact, was put into practice in some other stories of this kind. But Seh refrained from doing it, as he realised that making lots of commotion over the seeds of *Strophantus* he had lost, would imply that encroached on his friendly relations with his maternal family. When analysing the stories, it struck me that this option of choosing not to disturb the peace by is mentioned frequently (eight out of twenty one stories), yet only in stories with men as the main actors. Furthermore, this applies only to conflicts with -male- Bagyeli who are somehow related by kin.

Apart from these more frequently mentioned conflict solving mechanisms, there are a number of others, a few of which I can only discuss briefly here. Two stories told by Bagyeli at Ndtoua are helpful in explaining some of them. The first one is told by Nkouagga, a remarkable man because of the perpetual sardonic look in his eyes. It took him a very long time to abandon his reserve against me, but once he started talking the most wonderful and humorous stories came out.

A hunter does not take no for an answer and uses magical powers

"A few years ago I stayed some months with my family-in-law. We were net-hunting together with my family-in-law and had attached our nets to the bushes in order to encircle a place. All of a sudden, my brother-in-law yelled that he had stabbed a duyker with his

31 In some stories several different mechanisms for conflict resolution occurred.

lance, and that we should send the hunting dogs towards him. We were rather close to him, and when we arrived, the duiker had already died. After some time an old man arrived who hunted together with us. He heard the dogs bark and saw they were next to some game. He took his lance and pierced the duiker. He said that he was the one to kill the duiker. All the others laughed and told he had just speared a dead animal. They asked him why on earth he had done so. The old man took the matter seriously and merely said that he wanted to have his share [that is, he referred to the rights of those participating in a collective exploitation, KB].

Another elderly man calmed the matter down. The old hunter, however, was not satisfied at all with the solution. He said that he would block the entire hunting period by means of magical products. He actually did so, because in the subsequent three months we hardly killed any animals."

This is telling about the importance of witchcraft in preventing and resolving conflicts on natural resources. I heard several stories figuring the use of *remèdes* or charms. There are other stories of people who have discovered theft of an appropriated resource, and who publicly threaten to use magical means to scare off the thief and persuade him to hand it over to the rightful owner. Furthermore, the reader will remember the outsiders' fears for accidents caused by supernatural powers if they exploit forest resources without prior permission³².

The other story is by Régine, Nzouongo's youngest wife. Nzouongo has an elder sister who married Segyoua, a calm white-haired man. Sometimes, Segyoua and his family lived on the road side, a few hundred meters removed from Nzouongo and Régine's place. At other times, they moved to a camp just behind villagers' fields.

Segyoua requests other hunters to draw back from his snares

"About two weeks ago, we left for a *bwimo* (net-hunt) in an area near the place where Segyoua's young relatives had put their snares. While we were busy hunting, these boys came to check their traps and heard our screams to drive up the game. They yelled to ask who was there. We replied that we were the ones. One of them asked why we were hunting there, whereas this was not our forest.

He suggested that we would hunt back there at our place, near the river Mpang. We understood the message, and we decided to leave that area immediately. We could not do any net-hunting over there again. As from now we will watch carefully that they do not disturb our traps during their net-hunts."

Here, people drew back from a place of exploitation in order to prevent an escalation of a conflict over natural resources. In this case, the noisy net-hunt will scare away the game from the area in which the others have put their snares.

I will briefly mention the other mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts with respect to natural resources. In a small number of cases, a man is asked to resolve the conflict in his function of chief of the camp. He acts in a way similar to the *grand* I described above. In some other cases an occasional passer-by intervenes and performs these calming tasks. Furthermore, in two stories women start a fierce fight in an attempt to settle a conflict over reserved natural resources.

Those readers more familiar with the ways in which farming populations in the area deal with their conflicts over natural resources will have noticed the remarkable absence in the results of this analysis of a particular means for conflict settlement. In fact, Bagyeli do not involve the village chief, nor the weekly *tribunal coutumier de justice* at the village, in conflicts among themselves over natural resources. This is all the more remarkable because the archives of such a *tribunal* in Bidjouka show that it is used regularly by the very same Bagyeli when settling all

32 Please see the section on logging companies and their fear for witchcraft. This fear seemed to be one of the reasons for organizing village meetings to obtain permission for entering a village's forest.

kinds of other debates among themselves. Adultry and other marital problems, as well as (threats with) physical violence are among the more common ones. Even in affairs between them and villagers with respect to natural resources, they turn to this institution. But, and I repeat myself, I have not found any cases of conflicts between Bagyeli with respect to natural resources that are fought out at this village court of justice³³. Mabuang, at the time a Bagyeli teacher at the boarding school in Bipindi, was probably right when he said that Bagyeli prefer to reconcile such affairs within the family.

³³ It really is a pity, in this respect, that the rich report by vd Sandt (1997) focusses on conflicts between Bagyeli and villagers only.

6 BAGYELI MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN RELATION TO THAT BY VILLAGERS

The previous chapters provided a rough sketch of the principles underlying local management of natural resources. It goes without saying that, among Bagyeli, variations exist in the concrete interpretation of such principles. Some of these differences are gender related, others are rather regional/local. Here, I will not elaborate this point, as I want to turn to the context within which to understand Bagyeli management. The function of this chapter within the report as a whole legitimates this separate description of Bagyeli management. However, Bagyeli management can only be understood in relation to villagers' exploitation and management of the same forest area and resources³⁴. This is the subject of this chapter.

Bagyeli share with villagers membership of the social entities distributing collective rights to resources: they were part of the same clans, and Bagyeli residential units were considered a division of the nearby village. In addition to this, they share with villagers the physical objects of collective rights: villagers can use the same forest space and resources as Bagyeli. Furthermore, they share important parts of the normative framework, which is at the basis of the distribution of the various rights: both in terms of classifications of space and in the relations between the social entities and the objects. The next chapter will clearly show the importance of this interrelation in determining the dynamics of Bagyeli forest management.

Nevertheless, the analysis of two types of conflicts³⁵ leads to the conclusion that Bagyeli management of natural resources is not identical to that by villagers. In conflicts among Bagyeli, the residential units that applied were of another scale: in dealings with other Bagyeli, my informants thought of collective rights in terms of a *kwaato* as the residential unit, whereas in dealings with villagers they thought in more encompassing terms, namely of the village as the residential unit. Furthermore, the type of the contested resources varies when comparing disputes among Bagyeli with those also involving villagers. Between Bagyeli and villagers food crops, and the agricultural lands on which they grew, were a frequent source of conflicts. Among Bagyeli, however, such conflicts did not seem to occur. On the other hand, in conflicts among Bagyeli, individually appropriated "wild" forest resources were a frequent cause of conflicts, and so is the yield of collective activities. This type of conflicts figure relatively less in the category of conflicts opposing them to villagers. In addition to this, conflict solving mechanisms used in conflicts opposing Bagyeli to villagers differ from those used among Bagyeli. Whereas in conflicts among themselves (with respect to natural resources) Bagyeli do not ask the village chief to intervene, in the other category of conflicts, the village chief is often asked to do so, be it in his function of president of the local court of justice or not. Especially the villagers involved in the conflict brought the case to the attention of this institution, much like they will do in conflicts among themselves.

Of course, by allowing logging companies to fell trees national forest law strongly influences the resources available in the forest. To some extent, the law also influences the techniques applied in local hunting. The use of guns, for example, is confined by legal arrangements restricting the possibilities of purchase. Due to several reasons, however, law-enforcement is problematic. In fact, most Bagyeli are hardly aware of its contents. The aim here is

34 It should be borne in mind that the various groups of villagers also differ in their more concrete ways of managing natural resources. It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to perceive farming populations' management of natural resources in a comparative perspective. Despite such eventual differences, the general point I make in this section should be applicable for the various situations.

35 Conflicts involving only Bagyeli were compared with those opposing them to villagers. This difference was

to understand the way in which Bagyeli use forest resources, and these national laws are hardly contribute to achieving this. Therefore, in this report, I will not go into these other layers of forest management arrangement that pertain to the forest area³⁶.

6.1 BAGYELI MANAGEMENT INTERRELATED TO THAT BY VILLAGERS

Bagyeli management of natural resources is related to that by villagers in several ways: Bagyeli share with villagers membership of the social entities governing the distribution of collective rights to resources, as well as the physical objects of collective rights and important parts of the normative framework which is at the basis of the distribution of the various rights. It is possible to characterise Bagyeli management of natural resources as a special variety of a regional form of forest management.

In the context of management arrangements, Bagyeli are *not* a closed social entity. They belong to the same groups as villagers do: they are part of the same clans, and Bagyeli residential units are considered a division of the nearby village. Their relationship to villagers has a long history and consists of several elements. Notwithstanding the many changes that took place in this relationship in the course of time, the kinship element of their relationship persists. Indeed, Bagyeli still reckon kinship relations among themselves via the (villagers') clans to which each belongs. And, as I have shown earlier in this report, membership of these clans is one of the bases for the distribution of collective rights to natural resources.

The other social entity governing the distribution of collective rights, residential units, partly overlap with the kinship element. Members of a clan are dispersed over a large area, and their members are also specified by the residential unit (village, base-camp) to which each belongs. Bagyeli base-camps were referred to by separate names; villagers and Bagyeli alike perceive the base-camp as a component of the village. An example clarifies the point. I spent an important part of my fieldwork period in Mangamé, a Bagyeli *kwaato* in the Bidjouka area³⁷. Many essential commercial and logistical facilities were to be found along the road, and one has to walk about an hour to arrive. At the occasions when I wanted the immediately neighbouring villagers to know of my whereabouts during my absence from Mangamé, I used to pass by and say goodbye to them. Whenever I said that I was "leaving for Bidjouka", these villagers used to laugh and correct me by saying that the very place where I stood was Bidjouka already. The Bagyeli camp is conceived of as an integral part of the village, and this also shows in management arrangements.

According to local tenure arrangements, villagers can not deny the access to collectively held forest resources to Bagyeli who belong to their own village. Boundaries exist to demarcate the limits of the area under influence of each village. A person who wants to use forest resources beyond the boundaries of his/her village, is supposed to ask permission to do so, except if he is related to inhabitants of that other village. Many of my Bagyeli informants explained: "The Bulu [the inhabitants of the villages south of those to which my informants belong, KB] told us to keep from hunting in that forest, as it does not belong to us. It is their forest over there." One ought to make an arrangement prior to hunting or gathering in other peoples' forest; otherwise one will be considered "provoking", or even "stealing other peoples' forest". Similar agreements have to be made to exploit forest resources claimed by the neighbouring villages to the east and west on the same road, villages that consisted of speakers of the same languages.

understood in the context of conflicts between villagers.

36 I would like to refer readers with a particular interest in this topic to my colleague, Mrs. van den Berg.

37 Bidjouka is the name of the village.

To put it briefly, in the research area, a combination of belonging to a residential unit with belonging to kin-groups, provided one with rights to use, allocate and control natural resources in the *Pandé*. Membership of these social entities and groups is shared by Bagyeli and villagers. This is one of the manners in which the management of natural resources by these people is interrelated.

In principle, villagers can use the same physical space as Bagyeli, so they also share the physical objects of collective rights. The daily exploitation of wild forest resources took place on this basis. When I accompanied my informants on a hunting trip into the forest, in order to dig some rats, gather some mushrooms and kernels, and take some firewood along on the way home, I would observe several signs of the presence of villagers using the same parts of the forest. This occurred, e.g., when we accidentally encountered (hunting) villagers on one of the pathways through the *Pandé*, when we discovered their lines of snares, or when my informant showed me the marks these people had made for those coming behind them. Or we could hear them when distant gunshots echoed through the forest.

In fact, the current spatial distribution of Bagyeli and their collective rights to natural resources, is largely a result of arrangements stemming from their incorporation in villager's kinship system. In the past, a good relationship to a villager, usually combined with a -symbolic-kinship relation with the very same person, helped Bagyeli getting long-term and general access to natural resources. The villager provided the Bagyeli with a portion of his land for them to build on and to cultivate. The relatively recent case of Tchagadic's illustrates how this came about.

How Tchagadic got access to the land on which he lives at Ndtoua

Tchagadic, one of my Bagyeli key-informants, belongs to the Yesou clan. He lives with his brothers, their respective wives and children, and some other relatives on a plot immediately bordering the road at Ndtoua. On two sides, the houses are surrounded by gardens. Although their ties to Bidjouka are much more ancient, (Tchagadic's grandfather was said to have had excellent relations with Yesou villagers), they occupied this particular plot only in the 1980's. The plot was granted to them by a villager of the Yesou clan.

Before that, they used to live at some five hundred meters from their current place, a site that was equally situated along the road side. This former area of residence, that was called Mabouli, had been allotted to them by the village chief in view of the governmental resettlement campaign of the 1960's. This happened with permission of its owner, an elderly villager, Nkwendang, who lived in town. After having resided there for several years, the Bagyeli had left the site (for health-related reasons). Upon their return to Ndtoua about a decade later, Nkwendang had died. His junior brother had come back to Ndtoua from town and said that the pygmies could not resume living at Mabouli, as he did not bear cohabiting with them. The Bagyeli took this villager for a witch and therefore they did not dare to reinstall themselves again. The villager in question went back to town, his resolved reintegration into the village was a failure; during my entire fieldwork period, Mabouli was deserted and the weeds had grown high up.

Tchagadic's immediate neighbours to the west of the present plot were Yesou villagers. In the course of time, Tchagadic and his relatives managed to build a relatively luxurious house on this plot. Successively, separate "kitchens" were added to suit the needs of the various women on the compound. This expansion took place in western direction, yet still on the plot once allotted to them, and the remaining space was used for cultivating. However, their current Yesou neighbour, belonging to a younger generation, repeatedly contested the boundaries of their plot. When I ended my fieldwork, this Yesou man was still unsuccessful in doing so.

Tchagadic's is anything but the only Bagyeli base-camp that is located on plots of land allotted to them by related villagers. Such a villager, or one of his descendants, appointed a small parcel to his Bagyeli "relatives": my Bagyeli informants or their (grand-)parents. The latter can settle on it and use it for cultivating some crops. Hunting and gathering, of course, generally took

place in the nearby forests. Villagers use the very same forest for hunting and collecting forest products, albeit less intensively. As long as tensions do not run too high, Bagyeli felt themselves attached to such an area, even in periods when they were physically absent.

Not only do Bagyeli share with villagers the membership of these social entities distributing collective rights to resources and the physical objects of collective rights, such as indicated above, but also the normative framework which is at the basis of the distribution of the various rights. In order to make the comparison, I set literature on management of natural resources by farming populations in southern Cameroon alongside the issues dealt with in previous chapters on current Bagyeli management³⁸.

In the first place, classifications of space by Bagyeli bore strong resemblance to that by farming populations in the area. In Bagyeli discourse on access to resources, the relevant distinctions were that between *Ngeng* (fields), *Bvouti* (fallow lands) and *Pandé* (virgin forest). This classification, with one further specification, is also said to apply for Bulu, Fang and Ngoumba speaking villagers in the area. Villagers in the very same area distinguish between 1) field with food crops or cacao plantation; 2) fallow land; 3) old fallow land (secondary forest); and 4) high or virgin forest (van den Berg 1999; Diaw 1997:19; Dkamela 1999; Hijman 1996:35; Tchuisseu 1997:33; Tiayon 1997:25-26).

Furthermore, when comparing Bagyeli with farming villagers, there is a striking similarity in many of the principles regulating access to resources, or, in other words, in the relations between the social entities and the objects. Villagers, like Bagyeli, recognise the possibility of allowing strangers temporary rights of access to specific resources ((Diaw 1997:16; Dkamela 1999; Tiayon 1997:19). But the resemblance becomes very obvious when looking at the different ways of individual appropriation of collectively held resources.

For Bagyeli, the basis for the fundamental change in legal status of collectively held land lay in the act of transforming virgin forest into agricultural lands. Ngoumba, Fang and Bulu equally hold this principle, to which the various authors refer as “axe right”. This right presumably stems from the period of the various migratory waves of the farming populations, when the first occupants of an area cut trees and thereby vest their claims over it (Diaw 1997:15). The holders of this right can exclude others from particular forms of exploitation. Nowadays, this phenomenon even appears to be used by some villagers in a strategic way, especially in areas with a relative high pressure on land. Ngoumba speaking villagers in Lambi expected a shortage of agricultural lands near the village and consciously created new fields in view of setting such plots aside for their descendants (Ngo Mboua 1996:19). By transforming these areas into agricultural lands, they enabled themselves to deny the access to these plots to fellow villagers who will be competing with them for these lands. Ngoumba villagers in neighbouring Bidjouka are known even to argue that fellow villagers do not have the right to transform the forest area immediately bordering their fields in the forest, as these are needed for future expansion of their fields and plantations³⁹. The same holds true for Bulu villagers (van den Berg, personal communication).

The planting of trees is a particular instrument in this effort to vest claims in land. Earlier, Bagyeli were shown to use this argument in proving their rights over abandoned areas (the reader will remember the case of Tchagadic’s grandfather). As Leplaideur already indicated for the Beti villagers, the farmer planting crops, including tree crops, has rights to the land as long

38 A profound analysis of the ways in which Bagyeli management is related to that by farmers requires additional information on the farmer part. With respect to this, Tiayon’s and van den Berg’s work is expected to fill this vacuum within shortly. Meanwhile I will have to use a combination of my own observations with written sources, including student reports.

39 Usually, those farmers who had also cleared more remote forest areas in the same direction were more

as these crops produce. As tree crops such as cacao produce over a long period, this act provides one with long-lasting rights, which even overrule the axe right that was mentioned above (Leplaideur 1985:434, 492). This also holds true for other fruit trees,

The previous remarks concerned similarities in obtaining claims over land, but, in individually appropriating uncultivated forest resources, villagers also used arguments akin to those employed by Bagyeli. Ngoumba, Fang and Bulu speaking villagers, like Bagyeli, regard the personal investment of energy in a natural resource as a mechanism for narrowing down the number of persons having rights of access to it. In the perception of these groups, the first person known to discover a resource, to catch or collect forest resources can expect to have rights over the product. In similar ways, these villagers also recognize the near exclusive rights to exploitation of a resource for the person(s) to install facilities for catching game or fish (Diaw 1997:23-24; Dkamela 1999)⁴⁰.

To some extent, restrictions put up by villagers even structure the limits to exploitation of natural resources that Bagyeli apply among themselves. This is particularly the case for temporary access to those resources based on good relationships. This will be elaborated in the chapter on the dynamics of Bagyeli management of natural resources.

Summarizing this section: Bagyeli shared with villagers membership of the social entities distributing collective rights to resources: they were part of the same clans, and Bagyeli residential units were considered a division of the nearby village. In addition to this, they shared with villagers the physical objects of collective rights: villagers can use the same forest space and resources as Bagyeli. Furthermore, they shared important parts of the normative framework, which is at the basis of the distribution of the various rights: both in terms of classifications of space and in the relations between the social entities and the objects. The next chapter will clearly show the importance of this interrelation in determining the dynamics of Bagyeli forest management.

In view of such interrelations, one could ask whether the separate description of Bagyeli management is justified. In terms of management, however, the groups cannot be considered a homogeneous unit, their management is not identical. This will be shown in the next section on some of the differences that exist between Bagyeli management and that by villagers.

6.2 BAGYELI MANAGEMENT NOT IDENTICAL TO THAT BY VILLAGERS

Disputes occur between Bagyeli and villagers with respect to natural resources, as can be expected in a situation of shared collective rights to the very same physical objects. For the sake of analysis, in this section a distinction is made between two categories of conflicts: conflicts among Bagyeli (those were dealt with in chapter 5); and conflicts between Bagyeli and farming villagers. How do conflicts *among* Bagyeli differ from those *between* Bagyeli and villagers? This difference is understood in the context of conflicts exclusively involving farming villagers. In the analysis, remarkable differences appear in the nature of the resources generally contested. In addition to this, the mechanisms used in the resolution of such conflicts contrasted. Furthermore, in conflicts among Bagyeli, another scale is applied as to residential units if compared to those conflicts also involving farming villagers.

successful in putting forward this claim.

40 For Ngoumba farmers, written sources with respect to this point are lacking. Here, I rely on my own observations.

6.2.1 Scale of residential unit

In conflicts among Bagyeli, base-camps were the residential units used in arguing whether or not another person will have rights to collectively held resources. In their view, the members of a different *kwaato* will not have rights to the natural resources found near their base-camp. Bagyeli explained they will not exploit resources in the forest related to another *kwaato* unless their kinship relations provided them with the right to do so, or unless they have been explicitly invited to do so on the basis of cordial relationships, be it by a villager or another Bagyeli. Several different Bagyeli base-camps can belong to the same village, but this fact hardly mattered for Bagyeli in these cases. This was already revealed in Nkouagga and Bvuriga's explanation (chapter 1) of the way in which forest is attributed to different groups. In their account, "those Bagyeli of Bitsilbilandi", who were part of the very same village but who were not related to them by kin, had to "draw back" at the discovery of their attempt to "steal" the informants' forest. At Namangouma, near the village of Bidjouka, a similar picture is sketched by Mbang⁴¹:

"If Bagyeli from Maschooh Maschooh would want to set their snares down here with us, we would create minor problems. A Nti [most Bagyeli of Maschooh Maschooh belong to this clan, KB] cannot cross the road and set his snares far from where he lives. The road is a limit. Normally, the members of a clan set their snares near their place of residence. Those Bagyeli of Binzambo trap over there, and we set our snares at Namangouma. If a person from Maschooh Maschooh would want to put his snares at Namangouma anyway, he should have cordial relations with us."

I should nuance this before going on. Several male inhabitants of Maschooh Maschooh, on the other hand, argue that they can go to Namangouma in order to collect the valuable seeds of the *Strophantus* liana. This is not only an assertion, it actually happened. The relative scarcity of this particular resources at Maschooh Maschooh and its relative abundance at Namangouma legitimises this. They also explained this to me in the presence of Mbang, who made no sign of objection.

In villagers' perception, however, forest space is divided over villages. Inhabitants of a village can use the entire area under its influence. The difference becomes more explicit by means of paraphrasing the village chief of Bidjouka, who repeatedly assured me of the fact that Bagyeli from either of the base-camps in his village were entitled to harvest forest products all over the Bidjouka area.

"Young men from the centre of Bidjouka, for example, also set their snares in the forests behind other quarters. Even up till the boundaries with Ngovayang and Evouzok [neighbouring villages, KB], but they stay on our side. Here and there, we do everything together. Prohibition is out of the question. One does not ask such things as "Why do you set your snares here, with us?". No. And the same holds true for the pygmies too. The pygmies living in the hills can come down and collect *Strophantus* all the way until the river Lokoundje. They hunt, they do everything, and when they're done, they return to their camp site in the hills."

This may well be the way this village chief thought of it, Bagyeli have their own norms, as exemplified by the quotes from Nkouagga, Bvuriga and Mbang. In brief: in dealings with other Bagyeli, my informants thought of collective rights in terms of a *kwaato*, Bagyeli base camp, as the residential unit, whereas in dealings with villagers they thought in more encompassing terms, namely of the village.

41 Each of the Bagyeli camps of Namangouma, Maschooh Maschooh, and Binzambo belongs to the village of Bidjouka.

6.2.2 Type of contested resources

When further comparing conflicts on natural resources among Bagyeli with conflicts opposing Bagyeli to villagers, remarkable differences appear in the type of the resources generally contested. Disputes *among Bagyeli* mostly pertain to uncultivated forest resources that have been more or less individually appropriated by means of an investment of energy. In general, the disputes concern situations in which individually appropriated resources were contested by people who each do have rights to collectively held resources in the area. The reader probably remembers the case of Nzouer Emanuel in chapter 5, who disregarded the marks indicating the reservation by another person of seeds of the *Strophantus gratus* liana. Another important source of conflicts among Bagyeli is the distribution of the catch or harvest that result from a collective effort. The argument between Ntuwa and Ntsam in chapter 5 was an example of this type. In this case, Ntuwa lent Ntsam's hunting dog, an act that turned the hunt into a collective enterprise, but she refused to give Ntsam a rightful share of the catch. In addition, there were remarkable differences in mechanisms used for conflict management, I will turn to this later.

Discussions between Bagyeli and villagers, on the other hand, only infrequently concern uncultivated resources in the forest. In such cases, Bagyeli and villagers accuse each other of theft of game from a snare set in the forest, or of interfering with one's investments (e.g., lines of snares, or fykes in a stream). The relatively small proportion of conflicts on "wild" natural resources in conflicts between Bagyeli and villagers is striking, if compared to that in conflicts among Bagyeli. There are several possible explanations for this. One of them is that, in general, villagers use such resources relatively less intensively. Their packet of economic activities makes villagers relatively less dependent on forest resources than Bagyeli. For most villagers, hunting is a secondary activity. Their fields with food-crops attract game, and the snares villagers set around their fields are a major source of bush-meat. A number of villagers has guns (Tiayon 1997:59-60), and these men sell bush-meat to other villagers, e.g., in the form of *Ovianga* -meat snacks- (Dkamela 1999; Tiayon 1997:59-60). An additional explanation is, that farming villagers catch and collect an important amount of these valuable resources on their own fields and fallow lands (Falconer 1994; Tchuisseu 1997:46). There seems to be a rough spatial disparity between the two groups using natural resources (van Dijk in press.; Trenning 1998).

In this category of conflicts, however, other types of resources were much more commonly contested: rights to agricultural land, or to resources found in fields or fallow lands. Particularly Bagyeli were accused of theft of food-crops and palm wine, much like what happens in the following case, opposing villager Bimem Victor (of Bidjouka) to some related Bagyeli youngsters.

Accusation of theft palm wine leads to death Bagyeli youngster

Bimem, a retired professional driver, has a vast cacao plantation that he inherited from his father. Not being used to the hard agricultural labour, he frequently asks "his" pygmies to work for him. The Bagyeli related to his family live in two different base-camps, and one of them is called Mamba. On a Sunday morning in January 1994, Bimem was under the impression that a nineteen year old Bagyeli boy from Mamba stole a demi-john of his palm wine (containing twenty five litres, worth some 1.250 FCFA). The very same Bagyeli boy is thought to have also stolen wine at several other occasions. Bimem is accompanied by his son when facing the three pygmy boys, one of them is the assumed culprit. Bimem and his son handcuff them with lianas and tie them to a mango tree. Bimem orders his son to whip them as a punishment for stealing his wine.

Other villagers are attracted by the noise, and, provoked by Bimem into joining the maltreatment, the matter gets completely out of hand. The passers-by contribute to the maltreatment of the boys by beating and kicking them. This goes on for about ten hours, as

the audience that crowded to prevents the tied boys from escaping. The presumed thief has severe internal injuries. The other two boys are less injured. After a week of traditional treatments, the boy is taken to the various hospitals in the nearby villages, transported by a French teacher employed by the catholic mission. The “thief” dies as a result of this injuries while awaiting the first research at the sub-district hospital.

In the lawsuit resulting from this death, the eye witnesses declare that the three palms producing the wine were theirs, so they never stole the wine.

The ties between Bimem and these Bagyeli were very close. More than a year later, I interviewed Beh Michel, an elder brother of the deceased, about their relation to Bimem: “He was our villager,” he said, “the person representing us when we are in trouble. If things happen to us in the forest, we have to rely on him. We were family, he is like a brother.” And: “In former days, when we left the forest in order to visit people on the road side, we used to visit him first. Suppose my clothes would have soaked during the walk, then Bimem was the one to borrow me dry ones.”

In view of these crimes, the matter was brought to the Criminal Chamber of the court of justice in the departmental capital. In this context, of course, the focus was on the crimes and only the accused stressed the occasion that led to the maltreatment. The whole region talked about the event and its aftermath, especially about the fact that pygmies now appeared to be able to use the juridical system in a way that resulted in the imprisonment of four villagers for several years plus a financial compensation for the Bagyeli. Relations between Bidjouka villagers and Bagyeli in general became extremely restrained. The surviving relatives moved to settle in the forest belonging to another village. They make use of the cordial relations based in years of bartering. For years, the remaining other Bagyeli in Bidjouka, even those who were not even related to the victim, feared being poisoned or beaten up by villagers for the slightest misbehaviour.

When I explicitly asked Beh Michel what was behind all this, he said:

“We often worked on Bimem’s plantations, but he refused to give us anything in return. Ndungo (the boy who died) and Binzyoli were always together. Both of them were to die that day, but I do not know why Binzyoli survived whereas my junior brother died. I do not understand it. Every time these two were accused, every time. They always had problems with villagers about alcohol, and also about agricultural fields. But even if these villagers were fed up with them, this is no reason for them to kill our relatives just like that.”

Various other people told me that this case was far from the first conflict on food crops and palm wine between villagers and the Bagyeli of Mamba. The disproportionately violent reaction of the villagers to this particular minor theft can be explained as a culmination of these villagers’ anger on several previous suspicions of theft. Mbang, living in a neighbouring Bagyeli camp, explained:

“There had been many problems before this event! Always cases of theft of goods such as coco-yams or bunches of plantains. These villagers did not forget this and said to themselves: ‘One day they will fall into our hands’. That particular day, they saw these boys stealing palm wine. Such minor debts often cause problems.”

This view is supported, among other things, by declarations at the Criminal Chamber of two of the other villagers on trial for this maltreatment:

“Ever since November 1993, I have a conflict with one of these youngsters. I ordered seeds of the *Strophantus* liana with the value of 1,000 FCFA, a shirt and a pair of shorts, but he never kept his promise of providing me with the seeds. This is how it started.”

“I heard noise and went up to see what happened. Bimem ordered me to join the beating, and I accepted the order. I realised that pygmies had stolen things from me at several occasions ever since I lived in Bidjouka, as from 1980. I caught them red-handed only once, in 1991. Actually, I had forgotten all about this, but at this occasion, I suddenly remembered these events. This is why I joined in, I started kicking about three hours after

the other ones began whipping and beating.”

The violent way in which these villagers expressed their anger is exceptional, but the antecedents of this case are indicative for an important portion of villager-Bagyeli conflicts: accusations of theft of food crops and palm-wine. Especially at the start of my fieldwork, when villagers and various local authorities still hoped that I would exert a disciplinary influence on my Bagyeli informants, such complaints regarding the theft by Bagyeli were a recurring theme in ordinary conversations. Bagyeli sources, as well as personal observation, confirm that particular Bagyeli occasionally gather food crops in villagers' lands. This pertains especially to some of those Bagyeli who practice agriculture on a very small scale only. In some cases it is something of a grey area, whenever run-wild crops from old fallow lands were the issue, or collecting, e.g., corn cobs from a befriended village woman, believing she would not mind. Anyhow, Bagyeli in their turn complained that villagers were very quick in pointing at Bagyeli in case of the discovery of theft, and a teacher at the Bagyeli boarding school clearly said: “As if villagers never steal anything”.

The point is, that these arguments on food crops and palm trees (or wine) were typical for conflicts opposing villagers to Bagyeli, but hardly figure in conflicts on natural resources among Bagyeli. Further scrutiny into this particular case supplies another common source of conflicts between villagers and Bagyeli: conflicts on agricultural lands, be they fields for food crops or (in some exceptional cases like this one) cacao-plantations. In this case, the pygmies and Bimem held different interpretations of the ownership of cacao-plantations. On the day that Beh Michel gave me his account of the events leading to the death of his junior brother, he was on his way to Bipindi in order to meet with the commander of the gendarmes as well as the catholic nuns.

“My father gave me a cacao plantation, but now villagers told me that if ever I will set foot on this plantation again, they will kill me too. This is why today I want to see the commander of the gendarmes, I will ask him for a piece of paper stating that I am at liberty to work on that plantation. There was another guy who cut a branch of one of my cacao trees with his machete. [Locally, this is considered a way of attacking a person, KB]. In the hands of his family. I want to see one of the catholic nuns about this matter. Damaging a tree during the rainy season is a bad thing. Cacao is money, so I want to talk about it with one of the nuns.”

At the time, the first signs of Bipindi becoming a sub-district were apparent, for example the instalment of the commander of the gendarmes. The sub-district officer, however, had not yet been installed. The latter is formally the president of a sub-district committee settling particular kinds of conflicts with respect to land. In the absence of this *sous-préfet*, if asked to do so, the commander of the gendarmes played this role (Ngo Mboua 1996:42).

I then remembered my first encounter with Beh's paternal uncle Mbvuo, December 1993 at Binzambo, who is equally one of “Bimem's pygmies”.

At the time, I visited this camp on my quest for suitable research locations, and we were still unaware of the upcoming maltreatment of his nephew. Mbvuo explained that villager Bimem once inherited many cacao-plantations from his father. He would have left “his” pygmies with a vast but neglected plantation not too far from the road before setting off to work in Gabon for years. Meanwhile, the pygmies worked on the plantation. Upon his return, problems started. Mbvuo said Bimem had forbidden him to come to that plantation again, and menaced him (“He will kill me”). When we did this interview, that was the status quo for two years, and meanwhile the harvest was rotting. Mbvuo considered to file a complaint against Bimem for this matter, but he said he was not yet sure where to turn.

This probably never happened, as the death of the Bagyeli boy overshadowed everything in the subsequent period. Nevertheless there were other signs of Bimem contesting land⁴². In May 1996 one of the catholic nuns told me:

“Mamba was a beautiful site, but it has been abandoned for some years now. Lately, one of the former inhabitants came over from Assok to Mamba, as he wanted to harvest a bunch of plantains from his own field. But a villager threatened to kill him and forbade him to harvest any products there again. I really think these Bagyeli’s tie with Bimem is broken.”

At the basis of many of such conflicts on land is the fact that, in the course of time, one of the parties gives another interpretation to a previous transfer of rights. Especially the absence of one of the parties tends to strengthen such “confusions”. Such will also become apparent in the next case. I would like the reader to retain the type of contested resources from the Bimem case, and not so much the way in which the conflicts were fought out by this particularly combative villager.

The next case shows the long-lasting struggle over rights to land between a villager and the Bagyeli inhabitants of Mangamé, both belonging to different branches of a “House” (part of a clan). Bagyeli got involved as the dispute concerns the ownership of a plot to which they had been granted rights. At several occasions, the Bagyeli had to defend their right to their agricultural lands immediately next to their base-camp.

Villager Souck Mana contests agricultural land with Doubé’s heirs

In order to understand the arguments used in the dispute, the reader should know something about the history of arrival of several members of the Yembi family in Bidjouka. Oral history had it, that somewhere in the distant past, three brothers (villagers of the Yembi clan) left a place called Mamba in order to settle at Mangamé, near the current village of Bidjouka⁴³. One of these brothers was Ndjaga Mbvoum. Ndjaga Mbvoum and his brothers invited another male member of their house, the villager Ambelé, to come and live with them in Mangamé.

Ambelé used to live in the village of Bandevouri, he accepted the invitation and moved to Mangamé. Bagyeli were attached to Ambelé’s family in Bandevouri, and the young boy Doubé Emile was one of them. Ambelé in his turn invited Doubé to come and join him in Mangamé. He paid the bride-price for Doubé Emile’s marriage with Bika, and this implied that their offspring would equally belong to this House of the Yembi clan. Ambelé had already transformed forest land into agricultural fields, and he allowed Doubé to use a small part of this area for settlement and for practising agriculture.

Ndjaga Mbvoum died young, and his children, including his only son, grew up in various places outside Mangamé. Meanwhile, Ambelé’s son Mayo Mana extended his rights over the agricultural area of Mangamé. Doubé Emile and his family frequently –but not permanently- used Mangamé as their base-camp. Ndjaga’s son only returned to Mangamé when he was an adult man, and by that time his rights to the agricultural lands of his father were already weak. He died shortly after his settlement in Mangamé; he had several sons, and Souck Mana was one of them. At the time, Souck Mana and his brothers were too young to know the boundaries of their father’s lands, to claim the land and manage it. Mayo used it for them, while these children received their education elsewhere.

Mayo’s current male heir is Mana Moize, a civil servant who lived and worked in the provincial capital of Ebolowa. The parcel of land alongside the main road intersecting Bidjouka, that was meant for the houses of this branch, was completely empty except for some fruit trees. In Bidjouka, there was only one –elderly, female- member of Ambelé’s branch left. Souck Mana, the grand son of Ndjaga Mbvoum is adult and, with the help of his wife, he had a substantial area under cultivation. Some minor plots near Mangamé were inhabited and cultivated by Doubé Emile’s heirs. Over a period of more than twenty years, when Mana Moize was absent most of the time, Souck Mana repeatedly tried to expand his (already substantial) area of agricultural land, and this at the expense of his Bagyeli

42 See the case in 7.2 opposing Bimem to Kane.

43 Villagers used to refer to Mangamé as Bingambili.

neighbours. Rumour had it that the actual reason for his expansion was not so much the land, but rather the palms on it, that were suitable for wine-production.

Souck Mana put forward several arguments in substantiating his claim. First of all he contended that his branch of the House had the oldest rights to the plots in Mangamé. In addition to this, he said that Doubé Emile was an *allogène*, as the latter was born outside of the Bidjouka area. In his view, such an *allogène* would not have any rights to land. He says: "They cannot discuss lands with us, no." He thus disqualified the Bagyeli for the discussion.

Doubé Emile's heir, Mbang, of course, had another view on the situation. He said Mangamé was his base-camp, his father had lived there for a very long time, and everyone knew very well that Bidjouka was his village. He did not think of himself as an *allogène*, he said, as he was born in Mangamé and had grown up in the area. His father showed him the boundaries of the area belonging to them. In addition to these plots, his family used fields further into the forest, near the base-camp of Namangouma. Here, Bagyeli members of Mbang's family were the first to transform forest into agricultural lands. Mbang said he "had done everything" in Mangamé (that is: build a house, cultivate crops etc.). According to him, his rights over this base-camp and the small plots surrounding it were inalienable: the boundaries of their area had been confirmed by third parties, and no one would be able to alter them like that.

In 1984, Mbang became involved in a boundary conflict between the two branches of his House of the Yembi clan. His father had just died, and shortly after that his brother, Mana Doubé, also died. A villager of Mbang's branch of the House had permitted him to cut some palm trees on the villager's plot in order to produce wine for the ceremony following Mana Doubé's death. Souck Mana, however, contended that these palms grew on lands that belonged to him, and therefore the other villager would not have had the right to order Mbang to fell them. Souck Mana took the case to one of the two courts available in the village of Bidjouka, namely the court of justice presided by the chief of the Groupement. The court judged that Souck Mana was not right. Souck refused to accept this judgement, and he brought the case under the attention of the court at the sub-district level, in Lolodorf. Mbang received a convocation, he was accompanied by two representatives of his branch of the House, as well as by the village chief of Bidjouka. The villager responsible for ordering him to fell the palms was unable to attend the hearing. This court came to the conclusion that the village chief of Bidjouka had to establish the boundary between the lands of the two branches of the House. And this was what happened.

It was probably this last event that strengthened Mbang in his view that the boundaries of the land to be used by him were fixed. Souck Mana, on the other hand, was still not convinced and he repeatedly attempted to claim ownership of the lands used by Mbang, and especially of the palm trees standing on it.

Yet another example of the struggle for agricultural land was already provided in section 6.1, when Tchagadic (Bagyeli) had to defend his claims to a parcel near the road side at several occasions against a Yesou villager, whose relatives once appointed the plot to Tchagadic. At any rate, it is evident how Bagyeli rights to some of the agricultural lands are profoundly interwoven with those of villagers. Those are the plots often causing tensions between Bagyeli and villagers. The pieces of forest land that have been transformed into agricultural land by Bagyeli themselves are less subject of debate.

When taking into account the relatively minor importance of agriculture in Bagyeli economic activities, the prevalence of conflicts on agricultural lands between them and villagers may well come as a surprise, especially if compared to the apparent absence of such conflicts between Bagyeli. Such conflicts, however, usually start when a neighbouring villager envisages an increase of his agricultural area at the expense of his Bagyeli neighbours. Several studies of archives of the local courts of justice in the area indicate that agricultural land is an important source of conflicts among and within farming populations. Boundaries of agricultural lands, especially of fallow lands, and ownership of cacao-plantations, cause tensions among farming

populations (Hijman 1996:39; Ngo Mboua 1996:19; Tiayon 1997:23). For villagers, Bagyeli are simply additional competitors in a struggle for land near the village, a struggle they chiefly fight out between themselves.

In brief, the nature of the contested resources varied when comparing disputes among Bagyeli with those also involving villagers. Between Bagyeli and villagers, food crops and the agricultural lands on which they grew, are a frequent source of conflicts. Villagers regularly accused Bagyeli of stealing food crops and palm wine from their fallow lands and fields. Villagers questioned their Bagyeli neighbours' claims to land once appointed to them. However, among Bagyeli such conflicts do not seem to occur. Here, frequent causes of conflicts are individually appropriated "wild" forest resources, and so is the yield of collective activities⁴⁴. Conversely, this type of conflicts hardly figured in the category of conflicts opposing them to villagers.

There are several possible explanations for these differences in types of contested resources. They can partly be due to the relative value attached to particular resources. As Bagyeli, in general, largely depend on uncultivated resources in the forest it is not surprising that, because of this, they frequently contest these resources. All the more so as these forest products are sometimes procured in joint efforts, which gave rise to questions as to the distribution of the yield. For villagers, these forest products are also significant, yet their importance is further counterbalanced by that of agriculture. They collect part of these uncultivated resources in their own fields and fallow lands, and this rough spatial disparity between the two groups collecting such resources might have prevented further conflicts of this kind. For them, agricultural land is the most important resource, and this is reflected in the number of disputes among them. Bagyeli happen to be just another "victim" of villagers' quest for land. Furthermore, straightforward "logistical" reasons may well have played a role too: Bagyeli base-camps are often near villagers' fields and fallow lands. This occasions conflicts on land and the food crops and palm wine producing trees found in them. As the physical distance between two Bagyeli base-camps is usually considerable, there is less basis for conflicts to arise with respect to such resources.

6.2.3 Mechanisms for conflict resolution

Mechanisms exist, of course, to solve conflicts with respect to natural resources occurring between Bagyeli and villagers. Remarkably enough, conflict solving mechanisms used in conflicts opposing Bagyeli to villagers differ from those used among Bagyeli⁴⁵.

Let me first briefly recapitulate the most important mechanisms used in solving conflicts among Bagyeli (such as described in chapter 5). In stories on Bagyeli disputing natural resources, three mechanisms for conflict resolution appear rather frequently. A common response is to overtly tackle a trespasser on his conduct, by talking about his/her perceived misbehaviour. In other cases, or in addition to this, people having some moral authority are asked to intervene (men, especially elder men). In a number of cases, the aggrieved party decides to sink one's differences for the sake of peace and quiet, especially if this will prevent social tensions within the family. Furthermore, albeit somewhat less frequently, two other mechanisms are put into use. Overtly threatening to use witchcraft is used as an alternative means both to prevent and to resolve conflicts. In other situations, Bagyeli consciously draw back (e.g., by putting their snares elsewhere) in order to prevent an escalation of the conflict.

⁴⁴ These were discussed in section 4 of this chapter.

⁴⁵ In this section, I use conflicts as a point of departure. I am aware, of course, that management is more than the resolution of conflicts only. Furthermore, what happens in 'trouble-cases' may sometimes be atypical of daily life (pers.

In the accounts of conflicts on natural resources opposing Bagyeli to villagers, another picture appears. Here, villagers often ask the village chief to intervene in such conflict, be it in his function as the president of the local court of justice, or outside of this institution. The matter is brought to the attention of formal institutions to which Bagyeli would never have referred in conflicts on such resources among themselves. In the previous case opposing villager Souck Mana to Mbang, his Bagyeli neighbour, a dispute concerning Mbang's land, the villager sought in the help of the tribunal of the chief of the *groupement*, and at his initiative, the case eventually appeared at the tribunal at the sub-district level. Also in the case of the Yesou villager contesting the boundary of Tchagadic's land near the road side, villagers were the ones who brought the matter to the attention of the court. In the "Bimem case", on the other hand, the village chief of Bidjouka had *not* been involved in any way, but the latter overtly resented this:

"Bimem Victor and the others made a mistake: if they catch a thief, they should not beat him up. There is a government, but Bimem did not even inform me, and, by the way, neither did the catholic nuns."

In some of these stories, the decision is made to rest the case. It is remarkable that Bagyeli are usually the ones who thought it better to avoid a conflict with a villager, and to leave things as they are.

Many mechanisms and institutions figure in texts on villagers resolving conflicts with respect to natural resources. The analysis of such texts sheds some light on the differences between the two categories of conflicts. In conflicts among villagers, they call in formal institutions having moral and/or physical authority, such as the church (the parish council) and the gendarmes (Hijman 1996:39; Ngo Mboua 1996:42; Tiayon 1997:22). Furthermore, villagers turn to courts of justice at various levels: from courts in villages, via those in the *groupements*, the sub-district and district level, to the provincial and national level (Hijman 1996:40; Ngo Mboua 1996:27-41; Tiayon 1997:22). In addition to this, they ask members of local and regional courts of justice having experience in conflict resolution to arrange conflicts outside the arena of the court. Examples of such established authorities are the village chief or the chief of the *groupement* and the *porte parole* (assistant of Bulu village chief, arranges *à l'amiable*) (Hijman 1996:39; Ngo Mboua 1996:26,38). This explains why these mechanisms turn up in cases opposing these villagers to Bagyeli. Furthermore, villagers solve conflicts at several levels within the family (Hijman 1996:39; Ngo Mboua 1996:23, 38-39).

For the sake of completeness, a methodological remark should be made. Conflicts on natural resources are hard to observe, if only because of the relative infrequency of their occurrence. Consequently, a researcher has to rely also on other methods for obtaining data. In the case of Bagyeli, generally, such conflicts are not documented in written form; hence my attempts to "hunt" for spoken accounts of such events. To a large extent, the reconstruction of Bagyeli management is based on these accounts. The archives of the formal institutions called in for dealing with such conflicts provide valuable material for a researcher. However, there is a possibility that the richness of such archives prevents researchers among villagers from looking for data on the manifold events that are solved before ever reaching these formal institutions. Therefore, if mechanisms noted for Bagyeli do not appear in texts on conflict resolution by villagers, this does not necessarily prove their non-existence among the latter. For practical reasons, however, I based myself on such texts. Unfortunately, information on their relative importance for villagers is not available.

In brief, the analysis of the two types of conflicts⁴⁶ led to the conclusion that Bagyeli management of natural resources is not identical to that by villagers. From a management point of view, these groups cannot be considered a homogeneous unit.

In conflicts among Bagyeli, another scale is applied as to residential units: in dealings with other Bagyeli, my informants thought of collective rights in terms of a *kwaato* as the residential unit, whereas in dealings with villagers they thought in more encompassing terms, namely of the village as the residential unit.

Furthermore, the type of the contested resources varied when comparing disputes among Bagyeli with those also involving villagers. Between Bagyeli and villagers food crops, and the agricultural lands on which they grew, are a frequent source of conflicts. Among Bagyeli, however, such conflicts do not seem to occur. On the other hand, in conflicts among Bagyeli, individually appropriated “wild” forest resources are a frequent cause of conflicts, and so is the yield of collective activities. This type of conflicts figured relatively less in the category of conflicts opposing them to villagers.

In addition to this, conflict solving mechanisms used in conflicts opposing Bagyeli to villagers differed from those used among Bagyeli. Whereas in conflicts among themselves (with respect to natural resources) Bagyeli do not ask the village chief to intervene, in the other category of conflicts, the village chief is often called to intervene, be it in his function of president of the local court of justice or not. Especially the villagers involved in the conflict brought the case to the attention of this institution, much like they will do in conflicts among themselves.

46 Conflicts involving only Bagyeli were compared with those opposing them to villagers. This difference was understood in the context of conflicts between villagers.

7 “NOWADAYS WE DEFEND OUR FORESTS”: DYNAMICS OF BAGYELI FOREST MANAGEMENT

The previous chapter provided a description of current Bagyeli management of natural resources. Without being disrespectful to my own work, I can say that this description is a “snapshot” impression of the situation at the time of my fieldwork. Its function was to introduce the reader to the major principles currently governing the access of Bagyeli to natural resources. After all, the respect and recognition of such local tenure principles is a recurring condition for more sustainable forms of forest management.

This chapter indicates how such current management is the result-for-the-moment of various gradual adaptations. In order to shed some light on the dynamics of this management, I will sketch some of the major changes that took place in the last five decades or so. It will become clear that the adaptations took place in response to changing social, economic and political contexts, which implied new values being attached to forest resources. One can safely assume that such adaptations will continue to occur in the future.

The account begins by indicating that at some point in time, Bagyeli started to deny access to forest resources even to those Bagyeli belonging to other *kwaatos* connected to the same village. I will argue that this was one of the results of new restrictions to the use of forest resources put upon Bagyeli by farming villagers, and show how this in itself is related to the political and economic context of the region at the time. The explanation departs among villagers, particularly in their increased interest in boundaries in forest lands. For a long time, alliances between villages had enabled their inhabitants to exploit also the forests belonging to neighbouring villages. Bagyeli habitually made use of this possibility for their hunting and gathering activities. In the 1950’s, however, villagers put an end to these alliances. This was related to the growing importance of cacao as a cash crop and especially as a *marqueur de terre*. This latter phenomenon was rooted in the profound unrest created by colonial authorities’ classification (appropriation) of forests into *forêts domaniales* and the related limitations put to these forests’ use. This also led to an increase in villagers filing dossiers for the official recognition of titles to land. This classification took place in view of the commercial exploitation of, e.g., the colony’s timber resources. The consequence for Bagyeli of farmers’ new perception of boundaries in the forest was a restriction of the forest area easily accessible for, e.g., hunting and gathering. Bagyeli were unable to influence this process. This change implied that membership of a residential unit and of a house/patrilineage became more important as instruments for getting access to uncultivated forest resources. Good relationships with individuals holding rights over other forests have since then become a prerequisite for Bagyeli to get (conditional) access to resources in these other areas. Bagyeli, in the course of time, took this idea one step further.

7.1 RESIDENTIAL UNITS: A MORE EXCLUSIVE TIE TO FOREST AREAS

The previous chapter described the main principles underlying current forms of access to natural resources. I indicated that belonging to a residential unit is one of the means for acquiring access to natural resources. These boundaries in the *Pandé* can be used to deny access to forest resources to Bagyeli belonging to other villages and *kwaatos*. Inhabitants of *kwaatos* belonging to neighbouring villages are supposed to respect the bounds of the forest areas belonging to their village, at least in case these others cannot base any claims to access on kinship or marriage. Within the confines of the forest connected to the village of which they are part, Bagyeli of the

various *kwaatos* maintain their own limits, as illustrated by the following excerpt. The quotation stems from an interview with two Bagyeli men, Bvuriga and Nkouagga, who belong to the village of Ndtoua, more specifically to its westernmost quarter, which is named “Ndtoua 1” or “Minlolemio”⁴⁷.

“Let me draw you a map. This is the road. We live here. [Informant draws a line perpendicular to the one representing the road]. I can say the Bagyeli of Ngale⁴⁸ are on the other [west] side of this line. On their hunting trips, they stay in their huts, and they arrive right up to this limit. [He draws another line more to the east, again perpendicular to the road.] That is where those Bagyeli of Bitsilbilandi⁴⁹ always hunt. (...) Sometimes, they also hunt in our area, but that is stealing someone else’s forest, and then we create minor problems to them: we chase them in order for them to draw back.”

The inhabitants of Bitsilbilandi belong just as well to the village of Ndtoua, they are all related to villagers living at Ndtoua Centre. As we can see from this excerpt, the Bagyeli of Minlolemio do not wish to share their forest area with those living in Bitsilbilandi, regardless of the fact that the latter belong to the same village. Similar examples can be given for the Bidjouka area. There are no clear kinship ties nor good relations between the Ndtoua informants and “those of Bitsilbilandi”; on the contrary: hardly ever did one of my informants at Minlolemio go to Bitsilbilandi on a courtesy visit –or vice versa–; and my informants usually spoke slightly of the latter.

The more general point I want to make with this example is this: currently, Bagyeli consider forest space as subdivided in terms of areas related to *kwaatos*, even if these *kwaatos* all belong to the same village. Farmers, on the other hand, do not apply this subdivision, and allow themselves to use the entire forest area connected to the village. This is an important distinction between Bagyeli and villagers, and it has repercussions for interventions aimed at sustainable forms of forest management.

Nevertheless, this particular subdivision has not always been the case among the Bagyeli. In order to get a clear view of the situation that existed one or more generations ago, I focussed my questions on hypothetical situations of the unexpected arrival of a person, a stranger, who could not derive rights to resources from his kinship relations, nor from pre-existing good-relationships, but who wanted to hunt or set his snares nonetheless in the forest area in use by the informant’s ancestors. Inspired by Swallow and Bromley’s texts on common property (1992), I was curious to know whether the ancestors of my informants were able to deny such a stranger the access to these resources⁵⁰. The following account by two Bagyeli key-informants

47 The quotes in this paragraph stem from data gathered in the Ndtoua area. Characteristics of situation in Ndtoua eased the analysis (if compared to Bidjouka): the informants had more frequent contact with members of neighbouring Bagyeli camps, be it those within or outside their village. Furthermore: in Ndtoua the forests on both sides of the road can be quickly reached. First of all, the density of farming population in the Ndtoua area is less, and as a consequence the strip of land under cultivation by farmers is not as wide. In addition to this, there is no need to bridge a difference in height before getting at the other forests. In both research areas, ideas with respect to access to forest products were comparable.

48 Ngale is a Bagyeli camp belonging to the neighbouring village of Bandevouri.

49 In fact, “Bitsilbilandi” is a general term indicating two mutually closely related Bagyeli camps: Kutaba and Ambia.

50 An excerpt from my research proposal explicits the assumptions I held when entering the field: “In the case of common property, rights to control access and rights to exploitation are shared equally and are exclusive to a defined group of people. The co-owners have a right to deny non-members access to the resources (and non-members have a duty to abide by exclusion). They also have a right to grant non-members permission to farming, hunting or other ways of using resources (e.g. logging). In that case the co-owners may ask for periodic gifts or other ways of acknowledging their authority over the resource. Individual members of the management group (the “co-owners”) have both rights and duties with respect to use rates and maintenance of the resource (Berry 1988: 63; McCay and Acheson 1987: 8; Swallow and Bromley 1992: 10)”.

If, on the other hand, access would be open, I quoted Swallow and Bromley (ibid.) in my research proposal, “then there

Tchagadic and Lendi, both men, gives an impression of how arrangements with respect to trapping and net-hunting must have been at the time⁵¹.

Our ancestors were much more amiable, they would easily accept persons from other families to come and live with them. Let us take the example of a Bagyeli man who came from, say, Bidou or Bissiang. This guy could stay here for years, no one would think of sending him away, eventually he may get married, the others will not put any pressure on him. He will become a part of the the *Ndabu nya buti* [the house in its socio-political sense], but not of the family [clan]. This *Ndabu nya buti* has a chief. When this chief dies, this guy will be the chief of his own family. No one can forbid him, or refuse him.

You know, at his arrival, none of my ancestors would even feel like refusing him to stay with them. The guy would explain, for example, that he belonged to the clan of the Nti, who lived in this or that area, and he would point to the fact that one of the women to whom one of my ancestors was married was also a Nti. My ancestors would accept him as a ... [he cannot find the right word in French]. Yes, that's how it would have happened.

Let me give you another example. There is a group of Bagyeli at a neighbouring village, named Grand Zambie. Before these Bagyeli came to hunt over here, their chiefs would organize a meeting with ours. During that meeting they would roughly plan their hunting sessions: who is going to hunt in which part of the forest this year⁵². After the chiefs had come to an agreement, they could tell the other hunters of Grand Zambie that they could come over to hunt together with us. After the hunt, they would just go home again. There was no question about them hunting here without our ancestors' knowledge. No. They could not come and directly enter these forests to set their snares without notification. Even in these days there were interdictions.

Especially from the point of view of trapping, there is a big difference between former days and the actual situation. At the time of my parents, several unrelated persons could set their snares in the same forest area bounded by a few streams⁵³. It was like a public space. Everyone could hunt the way they wanted to. One did not consider it a problem if game that might enter one's snares could accidentally tread into someone else's. But you should understand that, then, whenever you killed an animal, you simply ate it. We were unfamiliar with the use of money. Nowadays, when we start to hunt, the first thing to do is reserve parts of our forest for ourselves. I would only allow my brother and my nephews and cousins to join me in this area.

In general, one or more generations ago, such hypothetical Bagyeli 'strangers' from *kwaatos* associated to *other* villages were expected to announce their hunting activities in the forest area used by the informant's parents. These parents could ask for an explanation as to the reason behind this operation, and it was probably possible to deny them access to these resources. However, for several reasons, such a denial seems to have been rather hypothetical. In the first place, there was no rationale for such a heartless attitude (think of the fact that, at that time, e.g., bushmeat was not a commodity for Bagyeli). In addition to this, especially in the event that the stranger was willing to settle himself among the ones usually exploiting that particular forest area, the broad interpretations of the kinship idiom provided opportunities of "turning" this

is no defined group of users or 'owners' and so the benefit stream is available to anyone. Individuals have both privilege and no right with respect to use rates and maintenance of the [resources]."

51 I am fully aware of the fact that such memories may well contain distortions. This can be ascertained, e.g., by comparing such oral accounts of the past with written documents stemming from that very period. However, even a possible misrepresentation is an interesting source of information in itself and it does not necessarily put away with the point I want to make.

52 Bagyeli know from experience, that it is best not to return to a forest area for at least a few months after having hunted there with nets and/or dogs.

53 Game is known to preferably avoid crossing streams, small rivers thus acting almost like fences guiding the game in the direction of the snares.

stranger into a (classificatory) relative, and eventually even incorporating him into the *Ndabunya buti*.

Nevertheless, at the time, the situation for unrelated Bagyeli belonging to *kwaatos* associated to the *same* village was entirely different. These Bagyeli were not confronted with such surprised questions, and they did not need to “juggle” with kinship relations either. The fact that they were associated to the very village was sufficient for providing them with access to the forest⁵⁴.

By comparing this account of the past with the situation described in the previous chapter, one of the contours of the dynamics of Bagyeli management of natural resources becomes apparent. In the course of time, the group of people has grown who, as regards the access to natural resources, are considered outsiders, ‘strangers’. A generation ago, Bagyeli belonging to the same village shared rights to the forest resources. The right to regulate access to resources in the *Pandé* near a village was located at the level of those Bagyeli reckoned to be members of a group of *kwaatos* (all belonging to the same village) and those considered to be related to them by kin. Unrelated Bagyeli from neighbouring or other villages were supposed to announce their plans to exploit these resources, and, at least in theory, this request could be denied. In the course of one generation this right became subdivided over several single *kwaatos*, who now each hold such rights in their respective sections of the *Pandé*. Nowadays smaller units are applied in situations confronting Bagyeli with other Bagyeli. Bagyeli have related forest areas to their own residential units, *kwaatos*. Presently even Bagyeli from the same village but from other *kwaatos* are regarded as ‘strangers’ in the context of regulating the access to forest resources.

This was one of the ways in which Bagyeli management of forest resources has altered over time. At the same time, another change took place. The (grand)parents of my informants would simply expect a ‘stranger’ to announce his plans to exploit resources in their forest, and there were hardly any reasons to oppose such plans. My present-day informants themselves, on the other hand, require such a stranger to ask for permission for the exploitation. They can deny him the access, and they actually do so, be it directly or with a story.

Such restrictions obviously limit the scope for hunting trips. The above could give one the –false- impression that Bagyeli are now refrained to hunting within the one forest area connected to their *kwaato*. Such, however, is not the case. The previous chapter shows that two social entities govern the access to resources. The residential unit, *kwaato*, is one of them. The other one is constituted by the relations of kinship and marriage; the effect of the abovementioned restrictions is alleviated somewhat by the opportunities provided by these relations. Bagyeli reckon their kinship patrilineally, but the relation to mother’s patrilineage is almost as important. The reader probably remembers the examples of Ntunga Paul and Ndungo Lucien, each living, hunting and gathering at their Mother’s Brother’s. In addition to this, marriage relations constitute a basis for alliances of *kwaatos* to share forest space.

Case: Tchagadic’s sisters marriages create alliances with the ‘kwaatos’ of Mangule and Segyoua

54 Among the readers, some confusion may well arise from Tchagadic’s statements that “everyone” was allowed to hunt the way he felt like doing, and that even areas already containing snares were “public”. But one should bear in mind that, when making such general statements, he started from ideas of what is usual to him, namely a situation of persons hunting within the area connected to the residential unit to which they belongs, or at least in an area in which kinship relations provided them with rights of access to resources. The type of hypothetical stranger with which I confronted my informants, clearcut for analytical purposes guided by Swallow and Bromley, was so uncommon to them, that they did not include him in their frame of reference.

Two of Tchagadic's elderly sisters⁵⁵ each married men who lived in neighbouring *kwaatos*. One of these sisters, Baba married Segyoua quite some time ago, and Segyoua settled himself with his in-laws. In the course of time, he went about his own way, and split off from his in-laws, but settled in camps within hearing distance. Nowadays their children are adults. When Tchagadic and his male relatives want to do some net-hunting, a collective activity, they ask Segyoua and his children to join them with their nets. The same applies for the other sister, Amvu, who at some moment in her life married Manguele and lived in Bitumbi. In the course of time, other kinship relations established themselves. In general, relations are excellent: these people visit each other almost on a daily basis, join in parties and mournings, and let the others share in the fruits of their work (bushmeat, honey, agricultural crops) or such pleasant surprises as the gifts provided by the resident anthropologist. When Tchagadic's nephews Bvuriga and Nkouagga described the area within which they could hunt without any problems, this included the forests near Bitumbi and Segyoua's.

In the subsequent sections, I will argue that this type of change was brought about by the dynamics of neighbouring villagers' relations to forest lands, and particularly by their changed perceptions of forest boundaries. This is related to the economic and political situation at the time, more specifically to the growing importance of cacao as a cash crop and particularly as a *marqueur de terre*. This latter phenomenon, in its turn, was rooted in the profound unrest created by colonial authorities' classification (appropriation) of forests into *forêts domaniales*, which was a precondition for the commercial exploitation timber resources.

7.2 CONTEXT OF THIS CHANGE: CACAO AS A STRATEGIC TOOL IN VILLAGERS' STRUGGLE FOR AGRICULTURAL SPACE

The first part chapter six was about the interrelatedness of Bagyeli management of natural resources with that by farmers. In the 1950's Bagyeli were confronted with villagers who, more than before, wanted the boundaries of the forests related to their villages to be respected. This was the result of these villagers attributing new values to land for various reasons.

Villagers, from their point of view, have a right to exclude people from other villages from their *Pandé*, provided, at least, that these others cannot base any claim access based on either kinship or marriage. Obviously, the existence per sé of these limits does not exclude the possibility of villagers contesting their lay-out. Today, some individual villagers even make "investments" in the forest in order to strengthen their claim and "reserve" forest areas, including its valuable uncultivated forest products. They assert having the right to exclude others from access to it. This situation is indicated by the following case.

In the course of time, the lay-out of the boundaries between villages of Bidjouka and Ebimimbang became subject to dispute, as is shown by the following case derived from research by Dkamela⁵⁶ (1996:43). Ebimimbang is a village immediately south of Bidjouka. A vast area of forest separates the fields of the inhabitants of the respective villages. As will become clear in Bigyo's account below, the inhabitants of Bidjouka regard the river Lokoundje as the southern limit of the forest belonging to their village. One of the forests bordering this Lokoundje is called Bitam. Two village men play major roles in the dispute that arose when one of them, Kane of Ebimimbang, perceived the location of the limit as unfair, and decided to put it to the test. At any rate, in this case, he found himself opposed to Bimem Victor of Bidjouka.

55 In actual fact these are uterine sisters, as they result from a previous marriage of Tchagadic's mother. I am very sorry for the death of Amvu, who was very kind and a patient and openhearted informant, the first Bagyeli person whose answers I could understand even without my assistant's translation.

56 Dkamela (university of Yaoundé 1) was an intern at the Tropenbos Cameroon Programme.

Bimem already figured in another case in the previous chapter as the person responsible for the violent events leading to the death of the Bagyeli youngster.

Bimem and Kane contest the boundary between the villages of Bidjouka and Ebimimbang

“The conflict is rooted in the perception of the limits of the forests (Bitam, Ayarr, Sông) shared by the two villages. The struggle is mainly fought out by two men (Kane for Ebimimbang and Bimem for Bidjouka). These forests cover some 23 kilometers between the two villages. According to the villagers of Bidjouka, the boundary is formed by the river Lokoundje, in other words, almost the entire area is theirs, as the strip between the Lokoundje and the village of Ebimimbang is only 800 metres wide. The Fang in their turn consider the river Songo to be the limit. This would imply that eight out of the 23 kilometers would be theirs, and the remaining 15 kilometers belonged to the Ngoumba of Bidjouka. For the time being, the two contestants did not seek the intervention of the village chiefs, nor that of the court at Kribi. Jean-Marcel Kane explains: “I am waiting for them to file a complaint, so that it will become evident how quarrelsome they are. (...) How can people walk 23 kilometers to come and install themselves on my doorstep? Now I will chase by any means every stranger entering this area.” In fact, his main opponent (Bimem) is serving [several years] in prison [...]. It is probably his absence that allowed Kane to go his own way. At the moment he is creating a large cacao plantation at Bitam, attesting his control in view of the rule “the soil belongs to the one who is the first to *mettre en valeur* “. In this way, he will confront his adversary with a *fait accompli*. The question remains whether he will be able to conquer the entire area claimed?” (Dkamela 1996:43; my translation from French)

The case may well have flared up after the departure of the student-researcher, as Bimem was released from prison after a successful appeal, and immediately resumed his activities for the dominant political party, whereas Kane became the village chief of Ebimimbang some two years after this debate.

Currently, among villagers, the existence of such boundaries is considered a fact of life, as shown in the beginning of the following excerpt of an interview. But this does not preclude the fact that villagers occasionally contest their exact lay-out. This paragraph investigates the developments preceding the current stage, as these influenced the possibilities for Bagyeli to exploit forest resources. I will argue that this influence was at the basis of changes in the ways Bagyeli distributed access to natural resources among themselves. For the sake of the clarity of the argument, I will focus on the situation in the Bidjouka area, but refer to both villager and Bagyeli informants. This is how Bigyo André remembered the villagers’ changing perspectives on forest boundaries some few years before Cameroonian independence.

Bigyo André is the village chief of Bidjouka. He considers himself a Ngoumba⁵⁷ and is a member of the Nti clan, the very clan that also provided the *Chef de Groupement Ngoumba Sud*. In the course of each week, Bigyo and his wife commute between their house at the centre of Bidjouka and that on their fields with food crops at an hours walk. On fridays they walk back to their house on the road side, where his wife prepares and sells *Ha’a*, the local palm gin. During the weekend, Bigyo performs his duties as a village chief, conflict settlement, both in informal ways and –all dressed up- as the president of the local *Chambre de Reconciliation*. He fought in Europe during World War II, and later for the French in Vietnam. His advanced age enables him to put things in a historical perspective. In his capacity of president of this local “court” he has become quite experienced in resolving all kinds of conflicts on land between villagers. In his spare time, he used to sit quietly on one of the benches of the hangar in front of his house, looking at the passers-by. Such were good moments to ask him about his views.

57 His mother’s brothers belong to a part of a Fang clan, the Yimbvi, that –in the words of one of its members- have almost become Ngoumba, to the extent of speaking Ngoumba among themselves.

Bigyo: “The boundary between Bidjouka and Lambi (neighbouring village to the west) stretches all the way south to the river Lokoundjé. Well, to the north you go up into the hills, beyond the waterfalls and continue until the river Nguengue. That is the northern limit. Our ancestors used to live in that area. You know, at the time there were wars between us -the Ngiamba Mabiama⁵⁸ of the Ngoumba- and the Bakoko. My ancestors chased these Bakoko to the north, and my grandfather then settled himself to live at the frontier, in order to see to it that no one passed from the northern direction. My grandfather actually died over there. To the east we also have a boundary with the villagers of Bikiliki, and it continues right down to the river Lokoundjé.

“Nowadays things are different. In the past, the Bulu living south of the Lokoundje river crossed that river in order to make their cacao plantations on our side. But we have never gone to the other side to do something over there⁵⁹! We do not get along well with the Bulu, there are always quarrels. Nowadays, whenever Pygmies living in Bidjouka want to hunt over there at the Bulu’s, they have to search for a guarantee from the latter. The animals they will kill over there, are all covered [French: *commandés*] by the Bulu. If the pygmies do something stupid over there, the Bulu will chase them away or even hit them in the mug: “Why did you come to hunt over here?”. Meanwhile, we too have changed. Today every family, clan or village has its own affairs. I cannot just go and hunt in the forests of Lambi, no, I have to ask for permission. Of course, if a marriage announces itself, there will be a wedding [This implies privileges for the respective in-laws, KB]. But the alliances that we used to make in the past do no longer occur: now every village has its own affairs.”

“These limits have been established in the period when I participated in the wars. I came back here in 1955, and that is when I discovered these limits in the forest between Bidjouka and Lambi. You cannot cross. Until now, one does not cross. At the time, Cameroun was a mandate. The country has changed, and now we have become a democracy.” [Bigyo laughed in a cynical way before pronouncing the word “democracy”. Then the subject of the conversation changed.]

In other words: the contemporary idea of village-related boundaries in the Pandé, or at least the villagers’ protective attitude towards them, is a relatively new phenomenon as it dates back to the 1950’s⁶⁰ only. However, it is not completely new either, as one cannot overlook the persistence of elements dating back to the precolonial period. In order to get a clearer picture of the precolonial and colonial period with respect to land tenure, I rely on literature with respect to neighbouring or related groups, such as the Pahouin group and the Maka. The authors come up with the precolonial notion of lineage-“zones of influence”. In the colonial and postcolonial period, this notion reoccurs, yet in a new shape: expanded (in the sense of encompassing larger, multi-lineage groups), and with a more permanent character.

In the precolonial period, houses/lineages of farmers lived dispersed over the forest area. What, in this period, was the role of agricultural land and forest? Leplaideur’s description of the Beti sheds some light on what may well have been the situation for the Ngoumba. The agrarian system was based on a six to twelve year long period of fallow after two years of cultivation (Leplaideur 1985:121-123). A farmer derived rights to land where he was the first to “pierce” the forest and to transform it into arable land. Usufruct rights were based on food crops, and the planter was their owner. The duration of such rights was limited, as it was related to the relative short lifecycle of the crops (Leplaideur 1985:177-178). Groups of farmers migrated in search of

58 This is the name of a particular section of the Nti clan.

59 This is less surprising than it may seem: the Lokoundje river is at more than three hours by foot from Bidjouka, which makes the opposite bank hardly of interest to its inhabitants. On the other hand, this neighbouring Bulu village on the southern bank is very close to the Lokoundje, which hardly leaves room for the expansion of the area under cultivation.

60 I am unable to give a more precise date, as several of my informants remember it differently. It is probable that it took some time for such change to occur. Furthermore, the various research areas may have differed in pace in

new land as well as women and slaves. Land was readily available, it was not considered as a form of wealth, it was not inherited, and was rarely cause for dispute. These groups used the forest adjoining their agricultural fields for hunting and gathering purposes, and this temporary “zone of influence” was limited only by that of their neighbours (Leplaideur 1985:378-379). The phenomenon of ties between people and forest land existed, but the group consisted of persons whose mutual relations were discussed in terms of kinship and marriage, and, more importantly, the tie between that group and a particular forest area was only temporary.

The German colonial regime, however, forced farmers to resettle on road sides. At the end of the nineteenth century, the influence of this regime on the Kribi-Lolodorf area was considerable, as it was on the axis connecting Yaoundé to the harbour of Kribi. Several measures were taken by the colonial regime in order to create circumstances favourable for reaching its goals. The caravans transporting export goods should be enabled to travel safely. There was a need for porters and for people maintaining the pathways. It was a period of disarmament of populations in an attempt to arrive at “pacification” of the area. The newly created villages along the road sides assembled members of several different houses/lineages. A new type of local leaders was installed, and these leaders were endowed with means of power to control the inhabitants. A halt was put to the migrations that used to occur every few years. Meanwhile, agricultural activities continued to take place. Each different family had its own direction into which it worked into the forest. Bigyo remembered that villagers of Bidjouka used to be divided into two “parties”. The members of certain houses/patri-lineages cultivated lands in the hills north of the village, whereas those belonging to other houses had their lands to the south of the village near the banks of the river Mougoué⁶¹.

This may be a situation similar to that for the eastern-cameroonian Maka, who are linguistically closely related to the Ngoumba. Geschiere states that the relationship between Maka patrilineages and “their” areas within the forest persisted throughout the colonial period and despite the forced resettlement on the road sides (1979:22). The villages created as a result of German colonial rule consisted of several patrilineages, who each had their own path leading into the rain forest. Such a path led towards the patrilineage’s former area of residence, and this group often retained its exclusive rights to these lands. The practical consequence of the resettlement was that people living in road side villages sometimes had to walk for more than an hour to reach their agricultural fields. Some other patrilineages would have lost large areas of land, when other patrilineages in their turn were forced to settle there (Geschiere 1979:22-25).

One of the effects of the sedentarization of the farmers early in the colonial period was that relations between them and specific stretches of agricultural land became more permanent. Furthermore, as the farming population and their fields were concentrated along the roads, pressure rose on lands within easy reach of the village. This pressure became more apparent when, as from 1928⁶², the many porters and former labourers of infrastructural works returned to their villages. All of a sudden, this category of men, that had been employed in the colonial enterprise for some decades, needed land for cultivation. For these men, cacao was an interesting crop, not only in view of economic progress, but also simply in order to pay the taxes. According to Leplaideur, this perceived scarcity turned agricultural land into an element of wealth, which resulted in contests for land between members of a lineage. This led to the

carrying through such a change.

61 Please note that such is no longer the case. According to Bigyo, the cacao plantations altered this pattern..At the time of the fieldwork, the fields of the members of a house/patrilineage were patchily dispersed over village space, and not nicely clustered.

62 That is: under French colonial regime.

development of rules with respect to usufruct and conveyance (Leplaideur 1985:394-395, 432-434).

The forest areas in this period, areas that are not under cultivation, seem to have received far less of the authors' attention. In this respect, Bigyo's implicit remark seems to be of crucial importance: villages seem to have shared their forests. Alliances enabled their inhabitants to make use of neighbouring forests, regardless of the existence of ties by kinship or marriage. Bagyeli pygmies made good use of these opportunities for hunting in forests related to neighbouring villages. They were not hindered in doing so, as farmers were interested in the bushmeat with which the hunter-gatherers could provide them. The traditional healing capacities of some Bagyeli were another reason for which villagers gladly accepted their presence in their forests. However, Bigyo's account denotes that, upon his return from Vietnam in the mid 1950's the villages no longer made such "alliances". As from that moment "every village had its own affairs". This was expressed by farmers' sudden protective attitude towards boundaries in the forest. How can this change in attitude be explained?

At the time, the colonial government put a lot of effort into enhancing productivity of cacao cultivation. Cacao was to become the main export crop, and several organisational measures were taken in order to increase the profitability of its production. Farmers were directly stimulated to produce high quality cacao, and teams travelled through the area distributing pesticides (Rietsch 1992:277-278). Governmental discourse had it that all this was to improve the standard of living of rural populations and with it their economic independence, but in practice it was mainly to serve French interests. Newly created administrative structures, such as the *communes rurales* (1952) and *bureaux de village* (1954), were meant to strengthen the control the central authorities would have over rural populations in general, and over cash crop producing farmers in particular (Rietsch 1992:261-262).

Farmers had their own reasons for cultivating cacao. Over the past few decades, cacao had become an important means to fulfill tax payment obligations. In '53-'54 producer prices for cacao doubled, and even though prices dropped again soon afterwards, farmer incomes rose steadily due to the sale of cacao. In the eastern part of the *Océan* district this must have led to an increase in cacao plantations at the time, for in 1966 this was one of Cameroon's important cacao producing regions (Leplaideur 1985:90, 446-448)⁶³. Part of the income derived from cacao was invested in children's (sons') formal education, as schooling became essential for obtaining new jobs (private companies, bureaucracy) and the associated forms of status. But farmers saw yet other advantages in cacao. Tenure arrangements were based partly on usufruct rights, which lasted for as long as the crops produced. Whereas the other common crops only produced a few years at most, cacao is a tree crop yielding as long as thirty to forty years. This leads Leplaideur (1985:445) to characterize cacao as a *marqueur de terre*, a soil marker. The tree crop allowed farmers to have a longlasting, inheritable, tie to land, and this was important in view of the growing scarcity of land near the roads. Cacao thus became a strategic tool in the struggle for agricultural space. It is therefore probable that the explanation for these farmers defending the village boundaries in the forest against "strangers", lies (at least partly) in their fear for losing control over the forest, much like what happened recently in the case opposing Bimem of Bidjouka against Kane of Ebimimbang at the beginning of this section.

63 It takes some fifteen years until a newly planted cacao tree is fully productive [check period].

7.3 WIDER CONTEXT OF THIS CHANGE: THE (COLONIAL) FOREST SERVICE “APPROPRIATING” FORESTS

The above explains why villagers were alert to other farmers “pinching” their forests. In fact, Tiayon (1999:98-99) reports several Ngoumba clans fiercely contesting major areas in Bidjouka in the 1950’s. Pygmies in the area, however, were anything but great cacao-farmers. Why then did villagers apply similar restrictions to Bagyeli hunter-gatherers? And why did all this happen in this particular period? Basing myself on confidential letters and reports dating from this period available in the National archives⁶⁴, I will show that governmental classification of forests created a lot of unrest among farmers at the end of the 1940’s and the beginning of the 1950’s. This unrest, combined with the measures taken by some farmers to secure their individual rights to land, offers a plausible explanation for the “sudden” attention farming populations paid to boundaries in the forests connected to their villages, and the ensuing restrictions put up to exploitation of their forests by “strangers”, a category including Bagyeli in certain cases.

By the end of the 1940’s and the early 1950’s, the colonial authorities in Cameroon classified vast forest areas. This was done in view of the issue of exploitation permits to logging companies. The forest service *Eaux et Forêts* considered the classification of forests to *forêts domaniales* a precondition for their “rational” management. Commercial timber exploitation was seen as a good means for such management, and, above all, it offered good opportunities for profitable exploitation of these vast and “empty” forests.

Colonial authorities maintained that they had the duty to manage the territory in a rational way. At the same time, the natural resources of the colonies had to be exploited as well as possible. A law dated 8 May 1946 established the obligation to exploit all arable lands in the overseas territories (Source: A 6⁶⁵). The time had come to reap the benefits of the investments done in the logistical and administrative infrastructure of the colony. The forested areas were perceived as enormous. The forest service considered the (human) population so negligible that the latter could easily be argued away by spreading the idea of “uninhabited” forests. For the sake of convenience, the colonial authorities assumed that the forests they saw as impenetrable, were *terres vacantes sans maîtres*⁶⁶. Later on, legal specialists put much effort into justifying the validity of this concept for much of the south Cameroonian forests (Source A 6). This handful of farmers living on the edges of the forests, “feeble” as they were, would not be capable of working these vast areas. Exploitation of these forests by issuing logging concessions was deemed a rational solution.

In 1948, French logging companies in the Kribi region had been granted concessions covering an area of at least 714,000 hectares of forest land. At the time, some of those logging companies had already rounded off the preparatory phase and were about to start the actual exploitation, whereas some other companies were only slightly behind that schedule (Source: A 4). Such concessions lasted 25 years, so the companies were deemed to perform “silvicultural operations”, making the forests “richer”. These companies needed guarantees that the *coupes* would continue to provide timber, and, therefore, these areas must absolutely not be transformed to agricultural fields. The forest service considered classification of forests into *forêts domaniales* (that is, belonging to the state) a “normal” procedure to achieve this. A decree

64 I want to express my profound gratitude to my colleague Marc Parren, who provided me with these documents.

65 The references show an overview of the documents used. However, for the time being, the archive numbers are still lacking.

66 In fact, this was a continuation of the ideas of German crown lands, see Fisiy 1992

dated 3 May 1946 contained the prohibition to perform ‘slash and burn’ agriculture in classified forests (Source: C 2). *Terres vacantes sans maître* automatically fell to the state (Source: B 7), and could hence be added to the *forêts domaniales*. The classification of the forest known as Kienké Sud had already been accomplished, and the administrative authorities strived to quickly do the same with the forests named Kienké Nord, Mboké and Lobé Ntem⁶⁷. The confidential correspondence and reports point out that the *Chef de la Région* and the *Chef service des Eaux et Forêts* played important roles in this process of classification. The latter wrote a letter (24 July 1948) to the High Commissioner explaining that big logging companies (e.g. CIFA and SFT) had obtained concessions over vast areas. This size would necessitate rational management [that is: the exclusion of shifting cultivation, KB], but such would only be possible in *domaine classée*, as classification, in a way, “concretises the dominiality of the forest”.

Farmers in these areas, on the other hand, fiercely protested against classification of forests as *forêts domaniales*. Some farmers filed requests for the official recognition of their individual appropriation of lands. However, when the Official Journal of 15 January 1949 announced the classification of Mboké forest, and probably also that of the other forests mentioned above, they were still awaiting the authorities’ decisions regarding their dossiers. I will go into the farmers’ point of view below, but first I want to describe the authorities’ reaction to these farmers’ strategies, and particularly the reaction by the forest service. In April 1953, the conservator (chief of the forest service) sent a letter to the heads of all forest inspections. This letter was a request for the protection of the *Domaine forestier* against farmers who, according to the conservator, tended to appropriate terrains with the express purpose of eventually drawing on neighbouring classified forests. It is obvious, he wrote, that farmers’ demands for recognition of rights to lands in “classified” forests must be opposed by the inspectors. However, the very letter also warned them against claims that farmers (may well) make on yet “unclassified” forests. The conservator argued that the *domaine forestier classé* encompasses only a minimal portion of the territory’s forests. “We do not have the right to neglect the rest [of the forests] under the pretence that current circumstances [the farmer’s opposition] do not allow future expansion of the classified area.” He urged his inspectors to “carefully watch” claims made by farmers in yet-unclassified forests. They should prevent at any rate that such requests would create “enclaves” in forests to be classified in the near future. Otherwise, these “homogeneous massifs” [forests] would be as leaky as a sieve, thus endangering their conservation and management [that is: timber exploitation, KB] (Source: C 1)⁶⁸.

These measures and worries mainly concerned timber and forest lands. However, in the same period other natural resources, such as game, were subjected to formal regulations too. In 1952, for example, the Territorial Assembly of Cameroon took measures regulating the hunt. They established (the tariffs for) hunting permissions, particular game to be caught, entry to the Waza faunal reserve etc.

Farmers in the area, through the more eloquent and influential ones, unfolded their dismay by these administrative measures. The cases developed below indicate that they used meetings organised by the classification committee to massively, and fiercely, express their dissatisfaction, and they wrote letters which were as plain as day. They particularly feared that the classification of forests would signify losing their rights over them. As farmers they strove

67 Kienké Nord is the forest south of Ndtoua, Bandevouri, Makouré etc. Mboké lies north of Bipindi. So these concerned the immediate vicinity of my major research locations. Lobé Ntem is in the Campo area, south of Kribi. Please keep in mind that the picture sketched here will not be representative for areas more to the east of southern Cameroon (pers. comm. Marc Parren, October 5 th 1999).

68 This fear is grounded, as the example of Ivory Coast would show (Parren 1994).

to preserve the possibility of creating new fields in the forest. They perceived the forest as a phenomenon advancing towards their villages, threatening to choke them if it were not for their attempts to push it back. Therefore, they employed several strategies to secure their rights to lands. One of these strategies was using cacao plantations as *marqueurs de terre*, this was described in section 7.2 in terms of the local tenure arrangements. At the same time, this very strategy served to convince the colonial authorities that the terrain was already *mise en valeur*, which was a relatively certain way of preventing it to be considered as *terre vacante et sans maître* and thus its classification into *forêts domaniales*. Another strategy, and I will elaborate this one by means of the second of the two subsequent cases, was to apply for the official recognition of the individual (or collective) appropriation of lands.

Before getting at the cases, I should explain that the decree of 3 May 1946 (article 9) stated that the classification committee was made responsible for establishing the boundaries of the forest area to be classified, as well as the existence of usufruct rights for the inhabitants of the nearby villages. This decree described that the venue for such meetings was the capital of the region or subdistrict. However, in the cases of the classification of the forests called Lobé Ntem, Kienké Nord, and possibly also Mboké, these meetings were held in villages in the area itself. I will here confine myself to the events surrounding the classifications of Kienké Nord and Mboké.

The committee in charge of the classification of the Mboké forest organised a *tenue de palabre*, a palaver, in Makouré in June or July 1948. Reports written by the *Chef de Région de Kribi* and the forest inspector of the Littoral province (sources A 1 and B 1) on this event allow for a reconstruction.

Stirring events surrounding the classification of the Kienké Nord forest

The meeting by the classification committee was attended by some three hundred farmers. At this meeting, the forest inspector stressed the national interest in his explanation of the regulations regarding the exploitation of forests and of the importance of the regeneration of forests. He argued that the area is so thinly populated that classification will not hinder the cultivation of crops in any way, and that the population will retain their traditional rights to exploitation as long as they bear in mind the list of protected species.

The *Chef supérieure* of the Ngoumba, employed by the colonial authorities as an intermediary between them and the inhabitants of several villages, handed over a document to the committee. In it, he stated that the administration does not have the right to make a classification of the forest, and he also asked why the “French flag flutters above a forest that does not belong to anyone else but the population” [the flag is put on a camp-under-construction for the forest service, KB].

In his account of the events, the *Chef de la Région* states that the “mentally backward” farmers were predisposed, and the atmosphere was anything but pleasant. The proposed solutions were noisily refused by farmers’ spokesmen. They reacted triumphantly and ironically to his attempt to close the meeting. He concluded his account by stating that the classification must absolutely be continued, as the public interest of the territory is more important than the resistance of a few hundred farmers. He suggested to do so without any further consultation of the population, as, he stated, it is better to continue the classification without taking their views into account, than it would be to proceed after them having rejected it.

The forest inspector in his turn is boiling when he reports about the (hostile) rebuff which he (and the other authorities) encountered at the meetings. He was welcomed with catcall. He recognises the arguments put forward by the farmers, and therefore interprets their resistance as the result of “propaganda” originating from the adjoining Sanaga Maritime region [this is an area in which many Bassa speaking people live, who were relatively early and overt in their protests against the colonial regime, KB]. The farmers dared questioning the legitimacy of the French flag on the camps of the forest service, and they said these flags hung there clandestinely. One of the other representatives of the administration replied

that the French flag can be put up over the whole of Cameroon, and he was publicly hissed at. In the end, the farmers dispersed while providing the authorities with hostile comments. The meeting on the classification of the forest was seized by farmers as an opportunity to ventilate anti-French feelings. The forest inspector goes on to state that the authority and prestige of the administration wane day by day. He therefore concludes that classification of these forests should be pushed through, and quickly, otherwise future classifications will be jeopardised, as well as the work and position of the forest service.

The head of the forest service also writes a letter to the High Commissioner of the Republic in Cameroon and the Head of the “Research” section of the general secretariat. In his letter he concurs with the forest inspector and the Chef de la Région.

The procedure leading to the classification of the Mboké forest was not exactly smooth either. Although I am not sure whether a similar palaver took place in this area, I do have quite a number of different documents proving that this classification equally met with broad resistance by farmers (sources: A 5, A 6, A 8, B 3, B 4, C 4)

The classification of the Mboké forest in a context of farmers’ demands for official recognition of their rights to land

On 27 January 1949, some ten Cameroonian chiefs and “notables” of the Lolodorf region undersigned a letter. They stated that the administration, by means of the classification of the Mboké forest, is hypothecating terrains that are the heritage of their families. There are no *terres vacantes sans maître* as “all our terrains are limited”. The official titles to land for “indigenous” people fail to appear, whereas the French administration frantically classifies forests and distributes forest concessions to the colonisers. They felt that these concessions hindered their need for lands, whereas the forests threaten to overgrow their villages. They maintained that their refusal of the classification is justified as this will invade their *terroir*. They asked for a suspension of the issue of concessions and requested the initiation of procedures regarding the recognition of indigenous rights to land. Furthermore, they asked the administration to readapt the “regimes domaniales et forestiers”, as these have been established without the consultation of the populations concerned. In this letter too, anti-French sentiments seep through the phrasings: We, the *African* chiefs and notables refute measures taken by the *French* administration, measures that are in favour of the French and about which we, first interested party, have not been heard.

Some two weeks later, the chief of the village of Nsola sent a more politely formulated letter of resistance to the Chef de la Région de Kribi. He feared that rights to lands will be lost by the classification of the Mboké forest. He was unsure whether the classification actually applied to the lands for which a particular family demanded the official recognition of their titles, and asked the *Chef de la Région* for a definite answer. His letter also shows the slowness of the administrative apparatus: at the time of the proclamation of the classification of the Mboke forest, six months had passed since the submission of the family’s dossier asking for the recognition of the title to land.

The *Chef de la Région* of Kribi forwards the January letter along with some other documents to the High Commissioner of the Republic, but not after having added a few remarkable commentaries. He argued that the “perhaps somewhat excessive” policy of distributing concessions and classification should be counterbalanced by a quick recognition of African rights to land. This is a sensible matter, he said, as the recognition of rights to land and forest regards vast areas *simples terrains de parcours* claimed by clans, and not, “as one would expect”, the related or planted parcels of land. In order to reduce the resistance of the “autochtones” and in view of making them understand that the interests do not run counter to the idea of *mettre en valeur*, he suggested to grant collectivities rights to lands along roads, pathways and riverbanks and possibly to individuals applying for such recognition. Such rights, he continued, should pertain to areas in use for the cultivation of food crops or *mises en valeur* by establishing cacao and oil palm plantations. In this way, he went on to suggest, we can prevent that such areas will be included in *forêts classées*.

In another note he explained that the area is “rich” but the population is opposed and does not wish to be limited in its influence over land. The classification, “albeit justifiable from a technical point of view”, should be suspended in order not to incite public resistance. Only

after “active propaganda” aimed at convincing these farmers that it is really a matter of renewed classification, can the process be resumed, in a limited sense [original underlining].

He was well aware that families filed dossiers asking for the recognition of their rights over areas up to 2,000 hectares. He interpreted this as an attempt to let these areas be classified as *domaines privés*. He estimates that “they” will see reason if “we” allow them loyal recognition of lands useful to them. He foresaw future disputes on land and therefore proposed to found, under his surveillance, a kind of land register (“cadastre”) employing African land surveyors. He proudly lists the advantages of this solution. It will take the edge off the propaganda emanating from the Sanaga Maritime area, as, currently “we are unable to find arguments against it”; it meets African wishes; allows for a classification of goods as well as a stability of the crops. The Africans will solve the discussions among themselves in *conseils terriens*, and, last but not least, “we” will remain in control of the process.

The director of the service for Political and Administrative Affairs forwards the whole pile regarding the Mboké forest to the *Receveur de l'enregistrement, du Domaine et du Timbre, Conservateur de la Propriété foncière*. And the latter returns the following comments. He states that it becomes more and more urgent to determine everyone’s rights and to establish which forces traditionally pertain to the soil. Probably in advance of eventual complaints about the slowness of his service, he writes that his service does not have the manpower and material necessary for the research and land surveys required to stabilise the *situation foncière*.⁶⁹ One of the reasons, he pursues, why the “histoires de terrain” are so seldom solved to the satisfaction of the “autochtons” is that the latter maintain that there are no *terres vacants et sans maître* as all these lands belong to “indigenous collectivities”. He then provides a number of arguments why this attitude is incorrect, but his suggestions for solutions are more interesting. His solutions are founded in a more strict application of a decree dating back to 1932. This decree stipulates which are the goods recurring to the state, and provides a watertight definition of *biens vacants sans maître*. Now, he proposes, if the Territory would succeed in establishing a vast *domaine privé*, a simple reference to that decree would easily “arrange” all objections of principle, especially those against the issue of rural concessions [to logging companies]. Furthermore, he suggests, the excessive claims by collectivities can be curtailed by charging soil taxes, especially if the tax will be higher on lands that “they” do not occupy or exploit.

To be brief, the feeling of insecurity among farmers, resulting from governmental classification of forests in view of commercial timber exploitation and the related legal texts, provides a plausible explanation for the “sudden” increased attention of farming populations for the limits of the forests connected to their villages. Hence their wish to exclude strangers from these forests. This fear pertained to farmers as well as pygmies.

A later event only added to the insecurity in the Bipindi area and its vast surroundings, thus reinforcing the attempts to exclude “strangers”. The violent struggle by and against armed *maquisards* related to the UPC⁷⁰ severely shook the Bipindi area and its vast surroundings. People mistrusted even each other for being a potential “terrorist”, let alone strangers. In the very period, fundamental changes also took place in relations between farmers and pygmies (see also Chapter 3). As from 1956, which was the start of the “africanisation” of the administrative staff, villagers had new opportunities to achieve status positions. Being a *patron* to pygmies, then, became less important a source of such status. Furthermore, the catholic mission installed itself in the area, focussing on pygmies, and purposively “opening up” the -until then- exclusive

69 The High Commissioner for the Republic in Cameroon was aware of farmers’ dissatisfaction with the slow treatment of their dossiers. He knew that a UN research commission was to visit Cameroon in 1949. He feared that farmers would seize this opportunity to call for international attention to this matter and accuse the administration of purposefully delaying the attribution of farmers’ titles to land. Therefore, he contacted this receveur, as well as the service for the enregistrement du domaine and the heads of the regions and subdistricts, to speed up the procedures with respect to the farmers’ claims to land (Sources: A 2 and A 3).

relation of some farmers to pygmies. These nuns wanted pygmies to be treated as ordinary human beings, not animals or children. Villagers tended to deny “strange” Bagyeli the access to their forests and its resources by arguing that the latter would only be tempted to steal agricultural crops from farmers’ fields. All this reduced villagers’ willingness to protect pygmies against negative influences. Pygmies, due to their mobility and their dependence on forest resources, felt the effects of these restrictions put to their exploitation of forest resources in their daily lives.

7.4 BAGYELI TAKE THE IDEA ONE STEP FURTHER

How did Bagyeli perceive this change and its consequences? For the sake of clarity I will again confine myself here to the views of Bagyeli connected to the village of Bidjouka, as this is the area to which the account pertained that formed the point of departure for the analyses above,⁷¹. Bika, an elderly Bagyeli widow living with her sons at Mangamé, provided me with a down-to-earth account of how villagers could impose such measures on Bagyeli. At the time, the inequality of the power relations between them and the villagers was such, that Bagyeli were unable to oppose anything at all. The issue of Bagyeli facing farmers’ restrictions put to the access to forests other than the one to which they belong, is confirmed by one of my research assistants commenting on Bika’s words afterwards:

Bika: “In the past, we used to move around and follow the game. We put up our camps wherever we could find game. Sometimes we were with the Bulu⁷²: we did not have problems hunting near places like Ebimimbang, Mimfombo, and Nyamenkom. Then again we used hunting camps near the Ngoumba, here near the village of Bidjouka, but also in Bikiliki. We could even reach as far as Lolodorf. You know, in these days there was plenty of bushmeat, it just came falling from the skies. In case we happened not to find game, or when we had too many debts, we simply moved on again. Our lives were easy then. What did we know about rights to the forest? We were stupid then, we did not know anything whatsoever. We did not speak up against villagers, did not negotiate with them. I mean, even if we would bring them an elephant, we would just wait to see whatever they felt like giving us in return! A lot of things changed when the catholic mission arrived in Bipindi [1952, KB Check date]. The nuns said that we should be treated like any other human being. Before that, hardly any Bagyeli went to school. Everything has changed, our behaviour, our way of life. Nowadays we are even able to turn a villager into prison, but things have not always been like that.”

Songmbpile: “It is true that we⁷³ used to be able to hunt even as far as Ebom, Mvié and Ebimimbang. However, nowadays the villages, chiefs and the government forbid us to hunt in the forests near Lolodorf, Ebom, Ndtoua etc.. These forests are no longer freely accessible to us, we have to ask for permission in advance.”

Bagyeli, intensive users of forest products, were confronted with these changes. They may well have disagreed with villagers’ arguments and strategic moves, but there was little they could do to prevent this from happening. Mabouang was one of my Bagyeli key-informants at Maschooh. Maschooh, he vividly recalled this period of transition:

Mabouang used to be a teacher at the boarding school for Bagyeli children, he was the president of a young Bagyeli NGO, and, in the course of my fieldwork, he became an employee of yet another NGO focussing on the Bagyeli population.

70 Union des Populations du Cameroun, a political organization, founded 1948.

71 The experiences of my informants in the Ndtoua region were similar.

72 Often, the notion of “Bulu” is used as a generic term, including the Fang-speaking inhabitants as well.

73 Songmbpilé was born in Yanebouti, which also belongs to the village of Bidjouka.

Mabouang: “I remember a situation when I was still a little boy⁷⁴. We set out to hunt in the forest of the village Bikala. We did it just like that, without telling the chief of Bikala. And at some point this caused problems with the villagers over there. A whole group of them arrived and (physically) attacked us. They said that there were boundaries, and this particular section of the forest belonged to them. That is when we started to arrange things little by little. You know, we thought we could still wander about as we pleased, just like in the early days, when we could use the entire forest⁷⁵.”

This had some very practical consequences for Bagyeli:

Mabally: “Nowadays, if we want to hunt in the forests of Bikiliki (neighbouring village), we will first go to the village chief in order to tell him what we want to do. We will tell him that we are coming to his zone in order to hunt. This chief knows he cannot refuse, as he will profit from our presence: the catch from our first hunting session will be his. After that, he will give us free access to the forest.”

In view of the relative importance of the various economic activities, land as such is not that important a resource to Bagyeli. Game, on the other hand, is a crucial resource. Hence the fact that (male) Bagyeli informants’ discourse links the dynamics of their management especially to hunting practices:

Mbang: “In the early days, we used to live by hunting and collecting things from the forest. Even villagers did some hunting, but this did not cause any problems. At the time, there were only few means for hunting. Pygmies used to hunt with their spears, and villagers chased game with their dogs. Nowadays this is no longer the case. Now, there are many additional ways to hunt, such as hunting with a gun, with snares, and with cross-bows. In addition to this, many different people do hunt: children as well as the adults, villagers as well as pygmies. With all these different hunters around, one could no longer allow strangers to come over and hunt in their forests.”

Kowe (Mbang’s wife) added: “One cannot exploit other peoples’ terrain without asking their permission.”

Songmbpile continued to relate the restrictions on forest exploitation to the increasing scarcity of game in the area⁷⁶: “You know, pygmy men do not remain stupid in their ignorance. There was less and less bush-meat in our villages. They had to take precautions in order to defend their livelihoods. In the past, the forest used to be occupied by pygmies only. They could hunt as much as they needed for their subsistence, and live their lives well. But, nowadays, things have changed and everyone defends the forest that depends on his name. One has to ask the village for permission before one starts to hunt elsewhere, otherwise one risks serious accidents, especially when hunting with a rifle. After independence, villagers could buy guns. Right from the start of [agro-industrial, KB] companies like HEVECAM and SOCAPALM, their employees hunted near their areas of work [with guns, KB], and the catch provided them with money while awaiting their salaries. On the other hand, the authorities founded *Eaux et Forêts* [the ministry in charge of managing forests], and one needed an official permit to hunt.”

In the text above, this relation between the establishment of such boundaries and Bagyeli wishing to restrict hunting by outsiders has been established for the Bidjouka area. A similar

74 Mabouang was borne in approximately 1958.

75 Again, the reader should bear in mind that, when talking about ‘the entire forest’, Mabouang’s reasoning departed from ideas of what is usual to him, namely a situation of persons hunting within areas connected to the residential unit to which they belongs, or at least in areas in which kinship relations provided them with rights of access to resources. At any rate, the idea of setting out to hunt in a strange forest was completely unthinkable, hence not included in the frame of reference.

76 Songmbpile was one of the first Bagyeli men to receive formal education. His work as an extension officer at the parastatal SODECAO, and in other companies, allowed him to travel and to make comparisons. This might account for the degree of alienation in his following phrases (talking about Bagyeli men in terms of “they”).

phenomenon also took place in Ndtoua, where Tchagadic gave his opinion on the question of how Bagyeli boundaries in forest had come about:

“Let me just give you an example: a guy from Bissiang came over here to hunt, and in the meantime, he took away the game that otherwise we, the owners of the area, could have hunted. We thought that such people who live far away should not come over to hunt here at our place. This is how the boundaries were drawn, starting in the fallow lands and continuing in the Pande. Guys from Bissiang or Ndombé cannot enter our forests without problems, no! We defend it, and this is why we have these limits.

It took some time before Bagyeli, in their contacts with other Bagyeli, started to apply restrictions that were similar to the ones with which they themselves had been confronted by villagers. When they did, unrelated Bagyeli inhabitants of other *kwaatos* turned into ‘strangers’ in the context of the distribution of access to uncultivated forest resources. Bagyeli ties to these resources had become more exclusive: the right to regulate access to forest resources in the *Pandé*, which used to be located in (the inhabitants of) an ensemble of *kwaatos* related to one village, was transferred to single *kwaatos*.

7.5 CONCLUSION

This is where I have “come back” to the point where I started this section. Nowadays, in situations confronting Bagyeli with other Bagyeli, the right to regulate access to resources in the *Pandé* in an area is located at the level of *kwaatos* (residential units). In this context, even Bagyeli from the same village but from other *kwaatos* are regarded as ‘strangers’. However, a generation ago, the right to regulate access to resources in the *Pandé* near a village was located at the level of those Bagyeli reckoned to be members of a group of *kwaatos* belonging to the same village and those related to them by kin. Rights to forest resources were shared by Bagyeli belonging to the same village. At the time, alliances between farmers from different villages allowed their inhabitants to exploit also the forests belonging to neighbouring villages. Bagyeli habitually made use of this possibility for their hunting and gathering activities. So, in the course of one generation, Bagyeli of a *kwaato* limited the group of people having access to forest resources to those living in the same *kwaato* or their relatives and affines. This right was transferred to smaller units, single *kwaatos*, who each hold such rights in their respective sections of the *Pandé*.

Looking at the historical development of villagers’ management of natural resources facilitated our understanding of this change. Events such as the ones described for the Bidjouka area illustrate a general change in villagers’ tenure arrangements with regard to natural resources. In the 1950’s, villagers put an end to their ‘alliances’. This was related to the growing importance of cacao as a cash crop, and particularly to its importance as a *marqueur de terre*. In the same period, farmers increasingly filed dossiers with the colonial authorities, asking for an official recognition of their titles to land. These farmers’ strategies for securing interests in land were rooted in the profound unrest in the area created by colonial authorities’ classification (appropriation) of forests into *forêts domaniales*. This classification took place in view of the commercial exploitation of, e.g., the colony’s timber resources. It implied that limitations were put to certain forms of exploitation of these forests, and villages were held collectively responsible for the maintenance of these new regulations. As from that period, farmers perceived the boundaries between their forests differently and they denied people from other villages the access to their forests, this also applied to Bagyeli.

The consequence for Bagyeli of farmers’ new perception of boundaries in the forest was a restriction of the forest area easily accessible for, e.g., hunting and gathering. This change

implied that membership of a residential unit and of a house/patrilineage became more important as instruments for getting access to uncultivated forest resources. Good relationships with individuals holding rights over other forests have since then become a prerequisite for Bagyeli to get (conditional) access to resources in these other areas. After some time, Bagyeli took these farmers' ideas one step further and applied them even in situations opposing them to unrelated Bagyeli belonging to other *kwaatos* connected to the same village.

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- A 4** Letter from Chef du Service des Eaux et Forêts
To Haut Commissaire de la République au Cameroun, à Yaoundé
And Chef de la Section d’Etudes du Secrétariat general
Dated: 24 July 1948
- A 5** Letter from Chef de la région de Kribi
To Haut-Commissaire, Direction du Cabinet Civil à Yaoundé
Dated: 8 February 1949
- A 6** Letter from Receveur de l’Enregistrement, du Domaine et du Timbre,
Conservateur de la Propriété Foncière
To Directeur Affaires Politiques et Administratives
Dated: 8 June 1949
- A 8** Letter from Bikoue Bikoue Pierre, Chef du village de Nsola
To Chef de la Région de Kribi
Dated: 18 February 1949
- B 3** Letter from Chef de la Région de Kribi
To Haut Commissaire de la République, Direction du Cabinet
Dated: 7 February 1949
- B 4** Letter from “Verité”
To Chef de la Subdivision de Lolodorf; Chef de la Région de Kribi
Dated: 22 February 1949
- B 7** Summary of a decree dated 3 May 1946 regarding the Regime forestier du Cameroun
- C 1** Letter from Le conservateur, Chef du Service des Eaux et Forêts
To Chefs de tous les Inspections Forestières
Dated: 14 April 1953
- C 2** Letter from Le conservateur, Chef du Service des Eaux et Forêts
To Directeur du Service des Affaires Politiques et Administratives à Yaoundé
Dated: 24 June 1954
- C 4** Letter from Chefs Supérieurs, de Groupement, de Village et Notables
Dated: 27 January 1949