

TWENTY YEARS LATER: MIGRATION, INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND LAND RIGHTS IN NEW SETTLEMENTS IN BURKINA FASO AND NIGERIA

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In many West African regions, migration has for a long time been a strategy of securing economic and social resources. Not only did nomadic pastoralists go out in search for new territories, but also farmers who, according to eurocentric stereotypes, are supposed to be more sedentary than hunters, fishers or other mobile elements of West African societies. Moreover, reaction to crises such as famine or warfare has often been a reason to migrate. In recent times, the drought years in the seventies and eighties, which affected the West African Sahel and Savannah zones, have initiated movements of groups that were partly spontaneous, partly directed and controlled by the state. New financial resources such as the oil revenues in Nigeria or funds from international donors in Burkina Faso have helped to establish large scale development programs that were designed to protect farmers against the effects of unreliable climatic conditions or diseases.

Since the mid-seventies, development projects and new settlements have been founded in the Lake Chad area in north-eastern Nigeria as well as in the Black Volta river basin in south-western Burkina Faso. Migrants were attracted to these areas because they offered both agricultural and alternative economic resources. In both areas the new settlements are inhabited by different ethnic groups. We will first summarise the developments that led to the creation of new settlements and then discuss the negotiation of land rights and the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations.

In the Nigerian case a twofold development took place almost simultaneously. First, there was a national development initiative, leading to the establishment of a huge irrigation project. The second initiative was an individual and spontaneous movement of people towards Lake Chad, following local strategies of coping with environmental or economic hazards.

The state enforced development started in the mid-1970s, when the South Chad Irrigation Project (SCIP) was established (KIRSCHT 1999: 248). The area under discussion is considered as one of the most arid zones in Nigeria. The only permanent source of water is Lake Chad. Therefore, the possibility of using water from the lake for irrigation had been considered since the early colonial period. In the 60s, when the preliminary studies for the project were done, the lake had reached its highest level during this century and an abundance of water seemed to be available. The experience of the severe famine in 1972/73 hastened the project's implementation. Regular, high

incomes were promised to everybody, provided they entered irrigated farming and allowed their land to be taken away. The expropriation of land began in 1974, with almost all of the Kanuri farmers in the surrounding villages losing some of their fields. Farmers whose fields had been expropriated were compensated according to the size of farmland they lost. Each adult farmer whose family lost land to the project had the right to receive 10 acres of irrigated farmland in return. In order to receive the compensation, farmers had to prove that their land had been "owned" by their family for generations. Traditionally, this "inherited land" remained in the possession of a family even if it was not used for decades. However, the project authorities refused to compensate people for land which, according to their observation, was uncultivated bush, even if ownership was confirmed by other witnesses.

The initial concept of the irrigation project was not fully accomplished, with the acreage irrigated so small that not even the local people could acquire their promised allocation. Nevertheless, during the first years irrigated agriculture was successful. Yields gained by individuals were high and for a few years wealth increased among the rural population. In 1983/84 the maximum extension of irrigation was reached, but this was less than 15% of the intended area covered by the scheme. From then on the project started to decline. In 1984/85 and again in 1990 no irrigation at all was possible due to the low level of Lake Chad. In addition, by 1990 the irrigated area decreased to much less than half of the 1983 area and the decline in yield was even more dramatic. One of the principle assumptions of the feasibility study - a high level of Lake Chad - was flawed. The inauguration of the project happened during a period when the average annual rainfall was low, and rainfall continued being low for a period of 20 years. Despite the increasing average rainfall during the last four years, the pre-70s level of the lake has never been reached.

This contraction of Lake Chad since the mid-70s lead directly to the second initiative mentioned earlier, the migration to the shores of the Lake and the foundation of new settlements in the formerly flooded areas. People who went there followed a strategy that had already been employed by local farmers for a long time. Although the diminishing lake had been detrimental to the irrigation project, it provided new economic alternatives for farmers who started cultivating the fertile former lake floor. Since the mid-70s, many villages which had been temporary camps of fishermen, became permanent settlements. Other villages were newly created on what had been shallow islands or even the lake bed. In recent years, Lake Chad has become an El Dorado for many fishers, farmers and people who are offering a wide range of services. On the south-western edge of the lake within Nigeria, more than 40 settlements have been founded during the last twenty-five years. Most of these settlements are multiethnic and even multinational: migrants come not only from Nigeria, but from Niger, Chad, Cameroon and even from Mali and Ghana. However, the majority of are Kanuri, Shuwa, Hausa and Fulani and originate from northern and north-eastern Nigeria. The size of the settlements

may vary from a couple of families to up to 10.000 inhabitants during the peak periods (see also KRINGS and PLATTE, this volume).

Today the settlements are incorporated into the north-east Nigerian bureaucratic and administrative system. Village authorities hold the right to allocate farmland to newcomers and local titleholders are regulating the access to water related resources. Since the mid-90s, water and land resources are getting increasingly scarce. The conflicts that emerge sometimes develop along ethnic lines but dispute can also break out between pressure groups related to political parties or local "big men" (KIRSCHT 1997). The shortage of land due to the recent rising level of the lake has especially aggravated the situation.

Again back in the mid-seventies, a large national agricultural development project that focused on the Volta valleys was established in Burkina Faso (MCMILLAN 1995). Due to the prevalence of river blindness, these valleys had only been sparsely settled in spite of their fertile soils. The severe droughts and famines in the West African Sahel zone led to an increasing land scarcity and population pressure in the central areas of the then named Upper Volta. In 1974, the WHO launched a huge eradication program throughout West Africa in order to eliminate the flies that spread the river blindness disease. In the same year, the national project A.V.V. (*Aménagement des Vallées des Voltas*) was created. This project recruited, amongst others, Mossi farmers from the central areas to the Volta basins.

In the project zone Pô-Est in the South-West of Burkina Faso, six project villages were established between 1977 and 1979. Mossi farmers from the central plateau as well as Dagara farmers who originated from the local area were recruited into the project. The allocation of land was strictly regulated by the project. The number and size of fields for the A.V.V. farmers was fixed, agricultural methods and crops were prescribed. The adherence to the A.V.V.'s regulations was supervised and controlled by agricultural extension workers.

Although the project did not fail as in the case of the Nigerian irrigation scheme, it also never attained its original goals. Not all of the planned project zones were implemented, the number of project farmers and agricultural extension workers was never as high as intended, and the cash crop production of cotton did not yield as well as expected. The south and south-west of Burkina Faso did not become the "granary" of the country as was hoped for initially. Still, most project farmers have enough cultivable land, and these farmers keep supporting their relatives with cash and foodstuffs or alternatively accommodate kin from their home villages in cases of need. In 1989 the A.V.V. project was officially concluded.

The migration of Mossi farmers from the central part of Burkina Faso to other parts of the country, however, is not a new phenomenon. In order to escape population pressure, land scarcity and famine, many Mossi farmers have gone to other regions of Burkina since the beginning of the century (MATHIEU 1994). By the local populations this expansive movement is

perceived as not merely a demographic but political "Mossification". This often results in conflicts between a local population and the Mossi migrants. In contrast with other regions of Burkina Faso, the Mossi farmers in the A.V.V. villages in the South-West are not aggressive colonisers, but constitute a minority. However, in spite of the cultural differences between the two groups that were stated during group interviews in the respective Dagara and Mossi quarters of the project villages, there are many social and economic relations that cut across the ethnic boundaries.

Both in Burkina Faso and Nigeria, the migrants have settled in ethnically segregated quarters. The formerly flooded floors of Lake Chad constituted a territory where land claims were vague. Only when the land use pattern of this region changed, the need for definite land rights emerged. Kanuri farmers who moved there found themselves in competition with other ethnic groups such as the Hausa whose claims on land were no less justified even if they did not originate from the area. Hausa migrants could acquire titles in the traditional political hierarchy that authorised them to allocate land to other newcomers. Whereas migrants to the Lake Chad area negotiated land rights among themselves, the migration to the South-West of Burkina Faso was directed by state authorities. In spite of the project's intention to break up traditional political hierarchies and ethnic segregation, the project farmers refused to settle in ethnically mixed quarters. Nevertheless, in both cases the co-residence of different ethnic groups did not generate serious problems such as violent clashes as long as there were no open conflicts about economic resources. When these resources became scarce, pressure groups emerged that often constituted themselves along ethnic lines. But also factions within ethnic communities, or alliances among adherents of political parties or clients of big men that cut across ethnic boundaries, were created. Access to resources is always negotiated in different social or political arenas, as is the case of land rights.

In Burkina Faso and in Nigeria, as in other African states, different "layers" of land rights that emerged during different historical phases co-exist. Generally speaking, in pre-colonial times there were no individual rights of ownership of land. Land-use rights were held by corporate groups based on kinship such as lineages. One can roughly distinguish between three types of land rights: 1. the primordial rights of first settlers, 2. secondary rights that may develop into a kind of ownership, and 3. rights of temporary land use (STAMM 1996). In many cases, claims to be first settlers are actually held by kin groups who have arrived later but have managed to attain a superior status over the original settlers. Lineage or settlement representatives, like earth priests or village heads, confer land use rights on newcomers to the area. The concept of the earth as a supernatural being, and of the earth priest as the custodian of its shrine, is widespread in the West African Savanna and is recognised by both Mossi and Dagara in Burkina Faso. It does not exist in north-eastern Nigeria where Islam was introduced many centuries ago. Here,

rights of settlement and land use are conferred by village or ward heads who are authorised by the highest local Muslim authority, the Emir or the Shehu.

During the colonial period, national jurisdiction and development programs such as irrigated farming and the cultivation of cash crops superseded the traditional forms of land use and land rights. However, national land rights never completely substituted older forms of land use and ownership. In the development areas and newly founded settlements in north-eastern Nigeria and south-western Burkina Faso, different layers or levels of land rights continue to co-exist.

On a local level, there are the prerogatives of local lineage, village or ward representatives who base their claims on “traditional” rights that are in fact often a combination of pre-colonial and colonial patterns of land tenure and political power. These prerogatives remain valid or are revived in spite of the sometimes massive intervention of state regulations as in the case of expropriation and resettlement in connection with the establishment of agricultural development schemes. On a regional level, there are the legal rights of the colonial and post-colonial state that in many countries define all land as state property except where titles of private ownership are admitted. The state may appropriate and allocate land according to national development planning, regardless of existing claims or actual use. However, the state can not and does not interfere at all levels. The actual appropriation of land rights is often negotiated on a local level, as in our study areas.

In the case of north-eastern Nigeria, several Kanuri farmers who lost their land to the state-enforced irrigation project were not compensated. Others, however, managed to manipulate the re-allocation procedure to their own advantage. In the former A.V.V. villages in Burkina Faso, the land rights of Mossi farmers are increasingly jeopardized. They have neither received an official title of land ownership by the state nor the permission of a local authority like an earth priest. Although the Dagara farmers were originally recruited to the project at the same time as the Mossi farmers, they now reclaim an “autochthonous” status with regard to land rights (WERTHMANN 1999, see also SCHMID et al., this volume). Consequently, many Mossi farmers have purchased real estate in the capital of the Bougouriba province in order to retreat there after “retirement”.

Although the case studies from Nigeria and Burkina Faso differ in many respects, they also show some significant similarities. In both cases, previously existing claims on land were not recognised by the national authorities who implemented development projects. But as a contrast, in the Nigerian case people had to move out of the territories that were now claimed by the state, whereas in the Burkina case people were brought into an area that was declared state property. As a result in both cases, this had specific implications for the inter-ethnic relations in the respective regions. In Nigeria, Kanuri farmers moved to new fertile areas that incidentally emerged parallel to the development efforts of the state. There, they settled in multiethnic villages without pre-existing social and political structures. The shores of Lake

Chad as well as the A.V.V. villages constitute “frontiers” (KOPYTOFF 1987), where ethnic affiliation and alliances between different groups become instrumental in the competition about resources.

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