

study of the problem, which stands almost alone in this area of study. The book is essential reading for an understanding of the politics of land in Zimbabwe.

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LOCAL VALUES AND FOREST DYNAMICS

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Contesting Forestry in West Africa. Edited by REGINALD CLINE-COLE and CLARE MADGE. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000. Pp. xi + 324. £42.50 (ISBN 0-7546-1253-8).

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During the last decades much concern has been voiced about the loss of tropical forests and related environmental degradation. Recently several scientific studies have challenged the often neo-Malthusian perspectives on which these concerns are based. The books of Tiffen *et al.* on *More People, Less Erosion* (1994) and of Fairhead and Leach on *Misreading the African Landscape* (1996) have been very influential in stimulating discussion on the relation between natural resource dynamics and socio-economic trends. A major question is whether local societies in tropical regions should be considered as agents of deforestation or as creators of dynamic forested landscapes. *Contesting Forestry in West Africa* is a new addition to this discussion. Its main premise is that multiple realities exist regarding the use, management and dynamics of forest. Forestry should be considered as 'a set of negotiated ideologies and practices which need to be situated both historically and geographically' (p. 38). Moreover, 'forestry laws and policies are contested, circumvented, selectively applied, interpreted and reinterpreted in their making and application' (p. 56). Consequently, 'patterns of construction, contestation, meaning or interpretation concerning the forest environment in any given society are grounded in historical processes' (p. 120). These ideas are put forward in the introduction by the editors on 'Constructing, contesting and situating forestry in West Africa' and elaborated in 13 chapters divided over four sections on historical contestations, cultural negotiations, institutional negotiations and environmental inter(e)actions respectively.

The main premise of the book is expounded in two major themes. In the first, the multiple meanings attributed to forests within local societies are stressed. Several chapters provide valuable information on the socio-cultural and productive roles of forests and trees for local communities. In two chapters by McCaskie and Madge detailed descriptions are given of how forest is embedded in the cultural identity of the Asante in Ghana and the Jola in south Senegal respectively. The specific local uses of forest resources in the woody savannas of Bénin are described by Schreckenbergh. These chapters include various examples of how local values regarding forest have affected indigenous management practices for forested landscapes. Also Bassett and Boutrais's chapter on the interaction between cattle and trees in the savanna areas of Cameroon and Ivory Coast, and Thomas's chapter on environmental change in riparian forest in Nigeria, include insightful description on the nature and effects of indigenous management practices. Such practices are dynamic in response to the regular contestation and renegotiation of forest values, which result from changing religious and cultural identities, growing economic aspirations, changing social and demographic conditions as well as changing ecological conditions.

In the second theme much attention is given to the different perspectives of local communities and official forestry policies regarding the nature and value of forest. Eight chapters analyse official forest policies in different West African countries and the environment–people perspectives on which these are based. McEwan describes how forest was represented in colonial literature. Cline-Cole, Fairhead and Leach, and Amanor describe for various countries how forest is officially defined, and how this affects the viewpoints on forest use and dynamics. They demonstrate how forestry and environmental policies are embedded in political, economic and institutional interests, which are often not directly related to the livelihood strategies of local communities. Schroeder, Ite, Alexander and Ribot present the results of different official forestry development projects, i.e. a conservation-with-development project in a National Park in Nigeria, the community forestry programmes in Gambia and Senegal and the cultivation of Eucalyptus plantations on Nigeria's Jos Plateau. A common consideration is that the policy perspectives on which the projects are based are not well adjusted to the local realities. In some cases the development interventions are contested or ignored by the local people, in other cases they are negotiated and locally adjusted.

This book can be read in two ways. First, it can be enjoyed for its detailed and insightful descriptions of the multiple realities of forest, including the multiple reconstructions of the dynamics of forest, reflecting basic perceptions of the nature and social value of forests. The book demonstrates that local forest conditions and trends can only be understood in their location-specific context of dynamic socio-cultural, economic and ecological conditions. Moreover, forest conditions should not be considered in isolation, but within an overall landscape. Several examples provide good illustrations that the question of whether a forest landscape should be considered as degraded or (semi)domesticated and resource enriched is often not as straightforward as suggested in the prevailing official policies. Not only ecological conditions, but also the economic and cultural role of forest resources for local communities, should be considered. In view of these multiple realities, a reinterpretation of forestry policies are called for. Such new policies should be based on an approach of location-specific negotiation between the various interested parties.

Second, the book can be read as a polemic on wrongly focused professional forestry development and conservation policies and the lack of policy attention to location-specific forest values and environmental processes. This polemical approach of the book is demonstrated by its title and is reinforced by often-repeated statements on the discrepancy between location specificity and policy generalization of forest conditions. The book would have gained from a more analytical elaboration of this conclusion through a more systematic comparative contextualization of the various studies. Relatively little attention is given to the specific ecological and socio-economic context of the case-studies. It is sometimes not clear whether the observed location-specific phenomena are considered to represent more general trends. In several articles also little attention is given to how demographic changes, newly advancing land-use technologies and newly emerging economic forces impact on the local phenomena described. The book is also limited in its geographic coverage. The chapters mostly deal with former British colonies and little attention is given to the differences in forestry policies between the former British and French colonies.

The book offers a very interesting overview of the multiple realities of forestry in West Africa. However, the argument might have been placed in a less polemical and more analytical context by focusing on 'negotiating and constructing' rather than 'contesting' forestry.