

## INTRODUCTION



Indeed, one of the paradoxes of our times is the upsurge in our strong preoccupation with belonging ... Appeals to the soil – as in the notion of autochthony [‘sons of the soil’] – play a particular role in this respect as some sort of primordial form of belonging, with equally radical forms of exclusion as its flipside. The emotional charge these notions have recently acquired in different parts of Africa – Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Congo, to mention the most blatant examples – will be well known (Geschiere 2011a: 81).

This book draws from my PhD research in development sociology and is based on fourteen months of research conducted in different phases between October 2011 and January 2016 in the East Region of Cameroon. In total, there were twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork (split into six months, four months and two months) during which I collected ethnographic data from both Bantu and Baka communities. During the two months of desk research, I visited both the national and missionary archives to collect historical data. Secondary sources consulted spanned scholarly works, accounts of early travellers and missionaries in the region, government policy documents and legal texts, and reports from local, national and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) working in different capacities both with the Baka as well as with the Bantu.

The book explores the ways in which the Baka, who now live on roadsides in the East Region of Cameroon, assert their belonging in order to participate in development projects within the region. The book inscribes itself into

the broader scope of development sociology, with a focus on the so-called 'forest peoples'. The title of the book, *The Forest People without a Forest: Development Paradoxes, Belonging and Participation of the Baka ('Pygmies') in East Cameroon*, highlights three key issues that have been explored in the book.

Firstly, the expression 'the forest people' is borrowed from Turnbull's classic anthropological publication, *The Forest People* (1961). In this book, Turnbull provided 'thick descriptions' of the Mbuti Pygmies of the Ituri forest, calling them forest people. He presented these Pygmies as being hunter-gatherers, who were intimately attached to the forest, and whose being and survival were inconceivable without the forest. These descriptions sold an imagined image of all African Pygmies as 'forest people'; thus, in contemporary times, it is common to read and hear about Pygmies being referred to as 'forest people'. Nonetheless, while this book borrows the phrase 'the forest people' from Turnbull, it does not consider the Pygmies as people whose being and survival is dependent on a forest. Rather, it calls to question the presumed forest-boundedness of the Baka as Pygmies considering that, in Cameroon, they have been ejected from the forest and made to resettle on the roadsides with no or very limited access to the forest. Hence the book's title, *The Forest People without a Forest*.

Secondly, the 'development paradoxes' in the book's subtitle have their roots in a cumulation of contrasting development policies and interventions that have been implemented among the Baka both by the government, as well as by non-governmental organizations. In effect, the above-mentioned eviction of the Pygmies from the forest and their resettlement on roadsides were motivated by developmental policies, most of which equated development to sedentary agriculture and assimilation for the Baka (Abega and Logo 2005). At post-independence, it was assumed at the national level that the 'savage' could evolve to become a citizen mainly by contributing to national development through agriculture (ibid.). In light of this, the Baka, then considered as 'savages', were made to resettle on the roadsides to be assimilated as sedentary agriculturalists like the majority of the Cameroonian population, and thus become integrated citizens (Pemunta 2013). This assimilatory approach to the integration of the Baka in Cameroon was in line with the then integrationist stipulations provided by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 107 of 1957 on 'indigenous and tribal people', which Cameroon, intriguingly, did not ratify.<sup>1</sup>

Paradoxically, although Cameroon has not ratified ILO Convention 169 of 1989, which emphasizes respect for diversity and the protection of indigenous cultures and livelihoods, it voted for UNDRIP. In this regard, while the Baka continue to reside on the roadsides – where integrationists' approaches to development made them resettle – the forest is being

staged as their homeland, where they belong. Cameroon's vote in support of the adoption of UNDRIP did not initiate an end to the existing sedentary agricultural assimilative development approaches for the Baka. To this end, both approaches to development are being implemented among the Baka, who now live on roadsides with no or very limited access to the forest and its resources. These phenomena are captured in this book as 'development paradoxes'.

Following the above-mentioned vote for the adoption of UNDRIP which emphasizes respect for cultural and livelihood diversity of indigenous peoples – in this case the Baka, who now reside on roadsides, but who are also experiencing assimilative sedentary agricultural development interventions – two anthropologists, Rupp (2011) and Pyhälä (2012), independently conducted research on the sociocultural situation of the Baka in eastern Cameroon. Interestingly, these two anthropologists came out with contrasting findings that reflect the paradoxical development policies and interventions implemented among the Baka. In effect, Rupp, in her groundbreaking ethnography *Forests of Belonging* (2011) questions the making of the Baka ('Pygmies') as a 'distinct category' (indigenous forest peoples). She calls it simplistic, and goes further to argue that such dichotomous categorizations of 'Pygmies', 'hunter-gatherers' and 'indigenous peoples' versus 'villagers' (Bantu tribes) are very stereotypical, misleading and blind to ongoing interactions between the Baka and their neighbouring Bantu peoples. According to Rupp's findings, the Baka are integrated, assimilated citizens. Beguilingly, Pyhälä in her own ethnographic report titled 'What Future for the Baka?' (2012), defines the Baka as being 'an indigenous hunter-gatherer society inhabiting the western range of the Central African rainforests ... whose culture and lifestyle differ significantly from those of the dominant Cameroonian society, not only in terms of language, customs and traditions, but also in that, their livelihoods and identity depend entirely on their rights and access to their traditional lands and natural resources' (2012: 18, 16). Based on Pyhälä's findings, the Baka are excluded and marginalized indigenous forest peoples.

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned development paradoxes, as well as the disparity in the conclusions arrived at by Rupp (2011) and Pyhälä (2012), the main question that guides the discussions in this book is: How do the Baka assert their belonging in order to participate in development interventions and in the community? Do they assert belonging on the roadsides where most of them have been residing for more than three decades, or do they assert belonging to the forest where many of them have never resided? Do they consider themselves to be assimilated citizens or indigenous forest peoples, and why? Is there any differentiation in the way that the Baka assert their belonging? How do the ways in which they assert their belonging

influence their participation in development interventions? These questions are analysed taking into particular consideration the fact that, in the East Region of Cameroon, belonging is highly contested and gives access to differentiated livelihood resources (Geschiere 2009). In effect, this book focuses on the confrontation of two versions of belonging (autochthony and indigeneity). The book does not aim to analyse interethnic relations between the Baka and the Bantu, nor the state of protection of indigenous peoples' rights in Cameroon.

### Key Words and Concepts

In this book, I have used some contextualized words and concepts that need to be discussed. The words include: Pygmies, Baka, Bantu, roadsides and camps. The concepts are: autochthony, indigeneity, development, participation, home and belonging.

**Pygmy:** In countries that make up the Central African subregion, including Cameroon, the term Pygmy is generally used to refer to a category of Africans who either currently live in the forest and survive mostly from hunting and gathering, or those whose ancestry is linked to forest dwelling, hunting and gathering. For the most part, Pygmies were and still are represented as short, 'primitive' and 'uncivilized' people (Barns 1922: 149; Ray and Varma 2008: 35; Dasen 2013: 179). Some of these representations have also been captured by Mendosa<sup>2</sup> and Shahin,<sup>3</sup> just to name a few. The etymology of the word 'Pygmy' has been traced from the Greek word '*pygmaioi*' (meaning 'fist', or the measurement equivalent to the length from the elbow to the knuckles). Homer, the ancient Greek poet, first used this word in the *Iliad* to describe a tribe of dwarfs<sup>4</sup> (Breverton 2011). Since the nineteenth century – especially following the German ethnologist and collector of African art Felix von Luschan – they are usually described with the ethnologically obsolete term 'Pygmies'. Some scholars consider the word 'Pygmy' to be derogatory and scientifically incorrect, charged with prejudices, stereotypes and imagined physical characteristics of a group of people (Cummings, Jordan and Zvelebil 2014: 935; Hewlett 2014: 1890). More so, some of these scholars argue that most of the people concerned 'do not use the term Pygmy to refer to themselves' (Giles-Vernick 2001: 131).

In some African countries like the Republic of Congo, the use of the word is said to have been banned.<sup>5</sup> In effect, Paragraph 2 of Article 1 of law no. 5-2011 on the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples' rights prohibits the use of the term Pygmy in the Republic of Congo because of its pejorative connotation, and it is punishable by the Congolese Penal

Code.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, in Cameroon, the word is still in use. It is often used synonymously with appellations like ‘hunter-gatherers’, ‘forest peoples’ and ‘primitive people’. Some government officials even hold that Pygmies are ‘a people who are culturally evolving and moving up’ (Hewlett 2000: 380). In like manner, the word is inscribed in policy documents like the famous ‘Pygmy People Development Plan of the Forest and Environment Sectorial Programme’ (PPDP/FESP). In Cameroon, the word is used to refer to three ‘groups’ of people; the Baka in the East and South Regions, the Bakola in the South Region and the Bedzang in the Centre Region. In the context of this book, the Pygmy ‘group’ Baka are the subject of study. For the majority of the Baka, the word ‘Pygmy’ is considered to be insulting. Only a few of them use the term on rare occasions for ‘cultural marketing’.<sup>7</sup>

**Baka:** In the East Region of Cameroon, the appellation Baka is the name by which the people categorized as Pygmies call themselves. This appellation is very much based on the definition of their ethnicity, and is widely accepted both by those concerned as well as by anthropologists (Rupp 2011). In this work, I have sided with using the term Baka, as opposed to Pygmies. However, when discussing development policies and approaches that were designed ‘for Pygmies’, I use the word ‘Pygmies’ because the policies were designed for the Baka, as well as the Bakola and the Bedzangs. Moreover, these development policies were, and often still are, officially titled as being ‘Pygmy development policies and/or strategies’. This is, for example, the case with the above-mentioned PPDP/FESP. Linguistically, ‘Baka is a[n] Ubangi-Adamawa language (ALCAM no. 309) spoken by 50–60,000 Baka, also know[n] as Pygmies, in southeast Cameroon. The language shares similarities primarily with Ngbaka Ma’Bo’ (Léonard 2011: 1), and it varies phonetically as one moves from one region to another (RASED, 2006). In Cameroon, the Baka are one of three ethnic groups historically referred to as ‘Pygmies’. Nonetheless, the Baka are also found in other countries of the Central African subregion. In Cameroon, they are found inhabiting the southeastern region of the country, in the Republic of Congo, in DR Congo and Gabon, they are found in the northern regions, and in Central African Republic, they are found in the southwestern region. Although the exact numbers are difficult to determine, either because of their lack of inclusion in national census programmes, or due to their sometimes mobile nature, ‘the Baka are currently estimated to have a total population of somewhere between 50,000–70,000, of which a large portion (approximately 40,000–60,000) are found in Cameroon’ (Pyhälä 2012: 14).

**Bantu:** The word ‘Bantu’ as used in this book is meant to refer to a category of Cameroonians whose livelihood has for the most part been historically

associated with sedentary agriculture. While it is largely agreed that not all Bantus are sedentary agriculturalists (Selin 2003), Feierman and Janzen have shown that ‘the spread of food cultivation and sedentary society southward through and around the equatorial rainforests has come to be associated with the spread of the Bantu languages ... of Bantu-speakers, in what is now the border area of Cameroon and Nigeria’ (1992: 170). In the East Region of Cameroon, the word ‘Bantu’ combines a number of ethnic groups, including the Maka, the Pols, the Badjoué and the Bangando, just to name a few. In this region of the country, the word is used synonymously with the words ‘villagers’ and ‘agriculturalists’. The word ‘Bantu’ is very much applied in linguistics, and is considered to refer to a family of languages spoken by the above-mentioned ethnic groups. In this regard, people whose mother tongue is Bantu are considered to be Bantus. This linguistic underpinning of the word has been criticized as being incorrect (Robillard 2010: 39). However, although the use of the word is criticized by some scholars, the Bantu, unlike the Pygmies, do not express discontent about this appellation. I use the term in this book, because in Cameroon it is accepted and used by policy makers and development actors, as well as by the Bantu themselves. To this end, my use of the term is not suggestive of my approval of its correctness.

**Roadsides:** In the East Region of Cameroon, roadsides refer to territorial land surfaces located in the vicinities of a constructed road, which may or may not be tarred. In most cases, these land surfaces constitute part of the agricultural areas defined in the country’s 1994 forest law as the agro-forestry band (*bande agro-forestière*). Administratively, these roadsides are considered to be part of village lands where residents also practise agriculture and other livelihood activities. Nonetheless, due to the tensions surrounding the politics of belonging in the East Region of Cameroon, the Baka tend to contest this administrative positioning of roadsides in relation to villages (which are on the most parts, mainly Bantu villages). It is important to mention that there is a difference in meaning here from the regular English meaning of the term roadsides: roadsides are not only limited to the immediate sides or verges of the road with distances between zero and five metres. Rather, roadsides refer to land surfaces located at distances of up to five hundred metres from a constructed road. The designation is well known and understood, and in the francophone forest regions of the country is referred to as *‘bordure de route’*. Figure 0.1 illustrates two different Baka roadside ‘camps’.

**Camp:** In the East Region of Cameroon, the term camp is used to refer to different Baka settlements. For the Baka, the term invites a lot of controversy and is subject to contestations, as will be discussed later on in this work. For most Bantus however, the term is used to suggest a dimension of ‘temporariness’,



**Figure 0.1** Examples of Baka roadside ‘camps’ in the East Region of Cameroon.  
*Source:* photographs by the research assistant in Mendjou and Abakoum respectively (Nov. 2011).

‘unrootedness in the soil’, ‘not belonging’ and ‘stranger’ status of the Baka who reside on the roadsides. In effect, since the birth of multiparty politics in 1990 and subsequent decentralization in 2004, the country has witnessed the re-emergence of ethno-regional politics,<sup>8</sup> such that the presumed ‘unrootedness in the soil’, as well as the ‘stranger’ status of the Baka have awakened discussions about the concept of ‘autochthony’, being a local, as well as the ‘politics of belonging’ which were actively suppressed by former president Ahidjo in his attempt to cultivate a single national identity that would dominate any ethnic or local identities. These discussions around autochthony, being a local, as well as the ‘politics of belonging’ have become dominant in everyday negotiations of access to power and resources among Cameroonians (Geschiere 2009), to the point that they have created a ‘pervasive and disturbing issue of exclusion’ (Sama 2007: 192), which has made people to express their identities in ways that are profoundly more entrenched in the local than the national (Geschiere 2009). The process of expressing this identity in a deeply rooted ‘local’ is called the politics of belonging (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000). Its most prevalent form is ‘autochthony’, which means ‘born from the soil’ and confers an undeniable primordial right to belong, which is often employed in politically charged attempts to exclude ‘others’ (Geschiere 2009).

In like manner, the emergence of the global category of ‘indigenous peoples’<sup>9</sup> as interpreted by the UN and ILO has further opened up another space for people in Cameroon to assert their belonging, since the category of ‘indigenous peoples’ also confers some sort of ‘authenticity’ and programmed development assistance. Thus, in Cameroon, autochthony and indigeneity are highly sensitive because they are directly linked to the question of governmentality and development. Even though autochthony and indigeneity offer different spaces for people to assert their belonging in a bid to access related resources, Pelican (2009: 52) has noted that these concepts, although different, are interrelated and often interpreted differently by the many different actors at the local, national and international levels. Sonnè also alludes to the same twist of interpretation in the Cameroonian context when he writes that an autochthon originates from the country/territory in which s/he lives, while ‘indigenes’ are the first occupants of a given territory:

An autochthon is an individual originating from the country or territory in which he lives. He shares the same soil as other members of his community. So it is with indigenous or aboriginal populations: they are the first inhabitants of a region or of a given territory (Sonnè, Wang. UNESCO-MOST); my own translation).

In this light, the understandings of the terms indigenous and autochthons as applied in Cameroon are not immediately clear.



## **‘Indigenous Peoples’: Multiple Understandings**

To use Pyhälä’s words, ‘another extremely complex and sensitive subject in Cameroon is that of “indigenous peoples”’ (2012: 15). Unlike most countries in Africa, where all Africans are considered indigenous (Lutz 2007) without any further special categorization, Cameroon is one of the few African countries that voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 and is currently in the process of recognizing the existence of ‘indigenous peoples’ as a distinct category in its territory. Nonetheless, in the country, on the ground (local) understandings of the concept differ significantly from its Euro-American/international conceptualizations (Pelican 2009). This arises from a long history behind the use of the word ‘indigenous’ in Cameroon. As Niezen puts it, ‘the agendas of international institutions do not reveal or reflect cognizance of the history of the terms they use or the cultural innovations introduced by conceptual-diplomatic efforts’ (2010: 105–106).

In the African continent, and Cameroon in particular, the use of the word ‘indigenous’ has drifted from its etymological meaning since colonial times. The word originates from the Latin ‘*indigena*’, made up of ‘*indi*’ meaning ‘within’ and ‘*gen*’ or ‘*genere*’ meaning ‘root’, thereby translated as ‘born in’ (Barume 2010: 20). During colonial times for example, the word was used in English Africa to refer to peoples found in colonized territories, regardless of whether or not they had been born there, or if they were newcomers. The term was used interchangeably with the word ‘natives’ (ibid.). This colonial understanding of the term continued until after the creation of the ILO,<sup>10</sup> the first organization to deal with the issue of the term ‘indigenous’.

The ILO introduced the first formal definition of the term, which considered indigenous people as ‘workers belonging to, or assimilated to indigenous populations of the dependent territories of members of the organisation, and workers belonging to, or assimilated to the dependent indigenous populations of the home territories of members of the organisation’ (Barume 2010: 22) in Convention 50. This definition was highly criticized for its double meaning since, at the same time, it implied indigenous by origin and indigenous by assimilation. Countries like South Africa, which had assimilated whites and black Africans, were sharp examples used to criticize the definition, which only lasted until the mid-1950s. Following this criticism, the definition was amended in 1957 and called Convention 107 titled ‘Convention Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-tribal Populations’. This new convention redefined the term ‘indigenous’ as:

members of tribal or semi-tribal populations in independent countries which are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations

which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation and which, irrespective of their legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time than with the institutions of the nation to which they belong. [In this definition,] the term semi-tribal includes groups and persons who, although they are in the process of losing their tribal characteristics, are not yet integrated into the national community (ILO Convention 107, Articles 1(1b) and 2).

In other words, the convention defined indigenous peoples as ‘peoples who are indigenous because of some historical event such as conquest or colonisation and who are still living in the tribal or semi-tribal form’ (ibid. 2010: 24). This redefinition added the point that governments shall have the primary responsibility for developing coordinated and systematic action for the protection of the populations concerned and their progressive integration into the life of their respective countries (ibid. 2010: 26). After some decades, this convention again came under severe criticism for its assimilationist and integrative dimensions, thereby leading to the adoption of the current Convention 169 of 1989 which applies to:

1. (a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural, and economic condition distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
- (b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions [and];
2. [Emphasis on] Self-identification as indigenous or tribal ... as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply (ILO Convention 169, Article 1).

This last convention, therefore, removed the assimilationist orientation of Convention 107, which encouraged integration (Hogdson 2002: 1038) and rather emphasized the recognition of, and respect for, ethnic and cultural diversity. The UN as an international development actor does not, for its part, have a legally binding definition for indigenous peoples (Hogdson 2002: 1039). Although these new interpretations to help identify indigenous peoples were indicative rather than legally binding, most African countries rejected their adoption, as well as their implementation in the continent, arguing that all Africans are indigenous and deserve equal access to natural resources (Barume 2010; Lutz 2007). In 2007 however, some African

countries including Cameroon made an exception by voting in favour of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Since the adoption of this convention in 2007 by the UN General Assembly (Pelican 2009: 52), Cameroon in some of its policies in 2008 branded the Pygmies and Mbororos (non-agricultural populations of the country) as indigenous peoples on its territory. This is the case for example with the World Bank-funded Chad-Cameroon pipeline project whereby, ‘under the World Bank’s policy on indigenous peoples, the Baka, Bagyeli, Bakola and Bedzang – all Cameroonian indigenous hunter gatherers – are considered as ‘indigenous peoples’ and the government has recognised and taken ownership of the Pygmy/Indigenous People’s Development Plans of the Chad Cameroon Pipeline’. Despite this, the official government terminology for indigenous peoples in Cameroon in other contexts not related to World Bank projects is ‘marginalized people’ (Ndobe 2013) and their affairs are managed by a department in the Ministry of Social Affairs. Intriguingly however, during the 2014 celebration of the UN International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon, Cameroon’s Minister of Social Affairs explicitly said that only Mbororos and ‘Pygmies’ are considered to be indigenous peoples (IWGIA 2014).

This process of recognition of indigenous people in Cameroon based on ILO Convention 169 has opened doors to local, national and international non-governmental organizations to implement targeted development programmes for the said indigenous peoples, thereby making the country’s own rather assimilative and integrative approach to indigenous peoples an ‘extremely complex and sensitive subject’ (Pyhälä 2012: 15–16). Each of the three reinterpretations of indigeneity applied to the African continent demonstrates clearly that the term ‘indigenous’ embodies different categories of people.<sup>11</sup> Firstly, the colonial interpretation of the term made all Africans indigenous. Secondly, only people living in tribal and semi-tribal states were considered indigenous; and finally, the term referred to people who defined themselves as indigenous or who were identified as such by NGOs and INGOs.

Autochthony, the sister term to indigenous ‘people’, is another complex term that calls for clarification.

### **‘Autochthony’ Versus ‘Allogeny’ (Strangeness)**

The word ‘autochthony’ is as ‘old as the world or at least the state’ (Bayart and Geschiere, 2001: 128). It has been traced back to France and Great Britain during the sixteenth-century state formations, and political conquests where divides between ‘son of the soil’ and strangers tended to emerge (ibid.).

Nevertheless, in French colonial Africa, the concept of autochthones was rarely used. Rather, the word '*indigène*' referred to natives, who at that time were people whom colonial masters met in the colonies. The term was used to mean that natives were sons and daughters of the soil (Pelican 2009). In recent years, the concept now coined in anthropological literature as 'autochthony' has become very prominent. It has become a special political watchword in the 'unexpected corollary of democratization and the new style of development policies ("by-passing the state" ...) [to get to the local grass roots level]<sup>12</sup> (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 385). The prominence of this concept as engrained in development policies that seek to get to the locals has resulted in 'the exclusion of supposed "strangers" [*allogènes* – people not born of the soil] and the unmasking of "fake" autochthons, who are often citizens of the same nation-state' (ibid. 2005: 385). Sonnè, discussing autochthon-stranger relations between Cameroonians living in Cameroonian territory notes that within a given community in the country, an autochthon can have an '*allogène*'/stranger as a neighbour:

An autochthon may have a stranger ('*allogène*') as a neighbor. This is an individual 'born elsewhere'. He is settled on this land undoubtedly for various political, economic or cultural reasons. He knows his origin and genealogy; irrespective of the efforts that he makes in his area of residence, he knows from the depth of his heart that his land is 'elsewhere'. ... There are many strangers whom the autochthones have generously welcomed on their soil (Sonnè in UNESCO MOST) programme, not dated; my own translation).

From this it can be argued that, in Cameroon, the concept of autochthony builds on the argument of 'prior settlement' to establish and legitimize specific political rights for the benefit of those who see themselves as natives, and to exclude those whom *they* label as 'aliens or strangers'. Bayart and Geschiere (2001) have aptly summed up this process using the French description '*J'étais là avant*' ('I was there first'). In this regard, the characteristic of political, social, economic and cultural struggles between autochthones and '*allogènes*' (strangers) are of the order 'I was here first'.

This is the intriguing case observed between the Baka and their Bantu neighbours. The Bantu claim that they were first on the roadsides, and only brought the Baka out of the forest recently to settle with them on 'their roadside villages'. So the Bantu consider themselves the real autochthones (Leonhardt 2006), while the Baka are strangers. The Baka on their part, however, argue that they were first in the forest, but have been dispossessed of their ancestral lands. This constant struggle of 'we' rightfully belong and 'they' are strangers is the politics of belonging which Rupp has aptly summarized as having 'brought together two powerful political currents: autochthony as a vehicle to ensure that power and resources remain in the hands

of the regional elite and their followers, and the international insistence that resources are channeled to communities that conform to Euroamerican, institutional definitions of “indigenous people” (2011: 52).

## **Development**

Development is a wide concept that cannot be defined independently without considering historical, social, economic and political factors that come into play in the process. In this light, development is qualified as being a complex concept to define, and for which there is no single agreed-upon definition. The commonest definition is one that approaches development from an economic perspective, thereby reducing it to economic growth and increased national gross domestic product (GDP). However, Sen has criticized this economic perspective as too narrow, arguing that development should be conceived of as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (2000). In the same light, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) uses the term ‘development’ from a human development perspective to mean, ‘to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community’ (UNDP: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev>).

For his part, Escobar critically questions the very rise of the concept of development. To him, the whole concept of development is a pervasive hegemonic discourse which created the so-called Third World (1996). Escobar argues that the whole project of development needs to be rethought with possibilities for counter-hegemonic alternative development. Escobar’s stance on what development is questions development as reflected in the writings of Heilbroner. According to Heilbroner in Bodley, development means helping to ‘transform “tradition-bound” societies into modern societies. Nothing short of a pervasive social transformation will suffice: a wholesale metamorphosis of habits, a wrenching reorientation of values concerning time, status, money, work, and an unweaving and reweaving of the fabric of daily existence itself’ (1963: 53 in Bodley 1990: 96).

Even though the concept of development is contested, the focus of this book is neither to evaluate development projects initiated for and/or by the Baka, nor is it to analyse how the various understandings and interpretations of development are good or bad. Rather, this book focuses on understanding how ‘development’ interventions shape relations between different communities, as well as whether people within these communities instrumentalize the construction of their belonging in a bid to be included in ‘development’ interventions. To this end, this book does not adopt a given definition of development. Rather, development in the context of this work is taken to

mean programmes and interventions thus named, and implemented in the East Region of Cameroon as such, irrespective of whether they are geared towards economic 'growth', 'increased' freedoms, 'improved' health and education or 'a wholesale metamorphosis of habits'. The reason for taking development as a given, defined by those implementing it, is to enable me to analyse how shifting framings of development affect the social dynamics of targeted communities.

### **Participation**

The concept of participation cuts across disciplines, and its meaning changes as one switches between disciplines. As a concept, participation can be variously understood in terms of its content and forms. In social sciences and development theorizing most especially, participation has a long history (Hickey and Mohan 2004). Oakley (1991: 6) has aptly condensed these various interpretations into the following four categories:

- ... A voluntary contribution by the people in one or another of the public programmes supposed to contribute to national development, but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or criticising its contents.
- With regard to rural development ... participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes, and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes
- Participation is concerned with ... the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.
- Community participation [is] an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values that they cherish.

The World Bank, for its part, understands participation as 'the process by which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocation, and program implementation' (Klugman 2002: 237). In this way, the World Bank argues that participation can enable stakeholders to improve on their decision-making processes, strengthen project ownership and help poor people and disadvantaged groups (World Bank, Social Assessment Guidelines, 10 May 1994).

From these, it is clear that the concept of participation, just like that of development, is contested. The concept of participation is engraved into the bigger project of participatory development which was seen as a panacea for the failures of top-down development approaches. Participation is projected to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision making (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Participatory development envisages the recognition of 'the importance of entrusting citizens with the responsibility to shape their own future' (Jennings 2000: 2). To this end, participatory approaches are believed to be capable of helping to extend the concept of participation to citizenship, so as to 'recast participation as a right, not simply an invitation offered to beneficiaries of development' (Gaventa 2004: 29). This dimension to participation is said to enhance local people's capabilities (Hickey and Mohan 2004: 62). Namara has, however, argued that the word 'participation' has been highly instrumentalized by NGOs to secure donor funding without any effective participation on the part of a project's beneficiaries (2009, 2010).

Nonetheless, considering that the objective of this book is not to evaluate the effectiveness of participatory development programmes in the East Region of Cameroon but rather to investigate how the Baka negotiate their belonging to participate in development interventions, this book focuses more on what the different development interventions consider participation to be. It is also worth noting here that, during the past decade in Cameroon, decentralized local development interventions have supplanted national development approaches such that, in general, people can participate in and benefit from local decentralized development interventions only if they belong as locals (autochthones) at local community levels. In other words, a local decentralized development project destined for indigenous peoples in the East Region of Cameroon is considered to be for the Baka (because they belong as indigenous peoples). This is what Robillard (2010) has called positive discrimination in the East Region of Cameroon.

## **Home and Belonging**

The conceptual relationship between home and belonging has been widely explored in migration and refugee studies. In the past, scholars explored migrants' experiences of leaving their countries of origin which they called home, to settle in a new country, which they called 'strange lands' (Ahmed 1999; Ahmed et al. 2003). In contemporary times however, the focus of these studies has often been to understand how migrants reconstruct 'home' in these new countries. A couple of these studies have shown that the concept of home is much contested (Malkki 1995). In general, one reads a tension

between the conceptualizations of home as either a physical place, a symbolic place, or both. Traditional conceptualizations of the concept define it to be a safe and territorially fixed place to leave and return to, a space under one's own control and of familiarity. In this conceptualization, a home could be a house, a village, a region or a nation, a space of right and/or entitlement (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 7). Olwig (1998) and Demuth (2000) have nonetheless shown that the concept of home entails both a concrete physical space and an emotional feeling of belonging such that feelings of home are intricately tied to where one belongs or wants to belong. In this way, one may conceive of home as being both a concrete geographical place of origin and/or where one feels one can belong and participate in the everyday life of the community.

Exploring the relationship between home and belonging, however, is not only peculiar to scholars of migration and refugee studies. Recent 'obsessions' about autochthony and decentralized local developments in most African countries has brought this relationship between home and belonging into question for internal migrants or displaced populations within a given country (Geschiere 2009). This is especially because in most of these countries, Cameroon included, displaced populations face challenges with issues of home and belonging. In the context of Cameroon for example, citizens construct home at two levels – the national and the local – such that feelings of belonging are often expressed in terms of 'national' and 'local' citizenships. In this regard, the home of displaced citizens is at first often taken to be a fixed locality from where they originated, while they are considered to be strangers in the community in which they have resettled. They are considered to be not at home and to not belong, even though they are citizens of the same country within which they have been displaced. These challenges significantly increase the value of claims to belonging and local participation for these displaced citizens. Lund illustrates this phenomenon when he says that, 'while people may share national citizenship, the idea of autochthony – first arrival – is often invoked as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion ... [such that] not belonging [at the local level], i.e., not being a local citizen, may outright deny [a] person a legitimate opportunity to stake a claim' (2011: 74).

This is the situation that this book explores among the Baka, who are to a large extent considered Cameroonians at the national level, yet their claims to belonging and to home at the local level within the East Region of the country remain contested. This study takes into consideration the fact that at the local level in the East Region of Cameroon, local citizenship is developed in line with the modalities of land occupation and exploitation, which are closely linked with the metaphor of 'rootedness in the soil'. This conceptual relationship between home and belonging for the Baka in the context of development interventions and participation is of particular interest for this book. This is because in this era of decentralization and local



development, local citizenship defines who can participate in and/or benefits from these local decentralized development interventions. In this light, the ways in which the Baka construct home and belonging at the local level (in roadside communities) need to be properly understood. It is worth mentioning here that, while the challenges surrounding the Baka's local level citizenship could well be conceived of as discrimination against them, this book will not explore discrimination, because such analysis risks demonizing the Bantu as discriminatory without throwing significant light on the local social dynamics of community life in the region.

### **Organization of the Book**

This book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 briefly discusses local and national constructions of Pygmies in Cameroon. The chapter also highlights the ensuing challenges to the belonging and participation of the Baka in East Cameroon. Chapter 2 examines how the Baka assert their belonging, considering that they now reside on roadsides while their belonging continues to be ascribed in terms of 'the forest'. The chapter shows that in East Cameroon, autochthony and indigeneity are projected as versions of belonging that conflict with one another. Based on these conflicting versions of belonging in East Cameroon, Chapter 3 explores the ways in which the Baka authenticate their claims to either version of belonging. The chapter focuses on analysing the ways in which the Baka reconstruct their rootedness to the soil so as to authenticate their rootedness in the soil on the roadsides where they now reside. Chapter 4 answers the question of whether or not there is 'groupness' (as employed by Brubaker and Cooper 2000) in the way that the Baka assert their belonging. The chapter highlights and discusses an emerging internal differentiation among the Baka, who have in the past been categorized as being a group of egalitarian indigenous forest people. Chapter 5 analyses how belonging influences the participation of the Baka in development interventions, as well as in community life in the East Region.

### **Notes**

1. For an elaborate understanding of these integrationist stipulations, cf. Article 2 of the convention. Cameroon has also not ratified convention 169. However, it voted in support of the adoption of UNDRIP in 2007 and in '2008, the government decreed official celebrations for International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon' (IWGIA, 2013: 406).

2. 'Ten Pygmies and One Tall Westerner', by David Mendosa, 2008, Fitness and Photography for Fun blog. Retrieved 15.06.2016 from <http://www.mendosa.com/fitnessblog/>.
3. Sahin Tahir, 'PYGMIES Primitive African People'. Retrieved 27.04.2014 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F721NH20mbg>.
4. Some authors have challenged this stance, arguing that dwarfism is a physiological condition that is also visible among other Africans, and it is thus misleading to associate Pygmies with being dwarfs (Dawson 1938: 185).
5. Personal communication with Mentui Samuel of Mballam Baka in East Cameroon. Also see Article 2 of law number no. 5-2011, which promotes and protects the rights of autochthonous populations in DR Congo.
6. Ibid., law no. 5-2011 of the Republic of Congo. Retrieved 10.10.2015 from [http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia\\_files\\_news\\_files/0115\\_Loi\\_n5\\_2011\\_du\\_25\\_fevrier\\_2011\\_portant\\_promotion\\_et\\_protection\\_des\\_droits\\_des\\_populations\\_autochtone.pdf](http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_news_files/0115_Loi_n5_2011_du_25_fevrier_2011_portant_promotion_et_protection_des_droits_des_populations_autochtone.pdf).
7. By cultural marketing, I mean a situation whereby some Baka expressly referred to themselves as being Pygmies, in order to reiterate their perceived mysterious abilities to use tree leaves and skins in treating various ailments. More of this will be discussed in Chapter 6 in the section 'The Baka-Baka'.
8. In Cameroon, this policy existed during colonial times and was a colonial strategy for administrative management. However, at independence, President Ahmadou Ahidjo suppressed it and sought to cultivate a single national identity. For more on this, see Chapter 1.
9. Due to the negative connotations of the colonial term '*indigène*', the English and French versions of the UN declaration respectively refer to 'indigenous peoples', and '*peuples autochtones*' rather than '*peuples indigènes*' (Pelican 2009: 54).
10. The ILO was created in 1919 (ILO: webpage). Retrieved 02.03.2012 from <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/history/lang--en/index.htm>.
11. Drifts from the etymological meaning to the colonial usage of the term in English Africa, through ILO Convention 107 and finally ILO Convention 169.
12. This is not meant to suggest that grass roots-led development projects are bad, nor that state-led national development is the best model. Rather, it is illustrative of how the concept of autochthony becomes significant in the process of constructing the 'we' boundary and excluding the other, 'them'. As already seen, Cameroon is governed along ethnic lines, which only further strengthens autochthony.