

An Anthropological Perspective of Power Dynamics and Conflicts in Smallholder Plantation Agriculture in Africa: The Case of Mbandjock, Cameroon

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Abstract

This article investigates the power dynamics and conflicts arising in smallholder plantation agriculture in Mbandjock, Cameroon. Smallholder plantations agriculture everywhere in the world including Mbandjock help to ensure food security. The smallholder plantations agriculture in Mbandjock, Cameroon, have seen significant growth, yet the emerging power dynamics and conflicts within this sector have received little attention. The questions are; What are the perceptions of stakeholders in smallholder plantations agriculture in Mbandjock? What are the changes which are currently going on in smallholder plantations agriculture in Mbandjock? What are the causes of conflict in these smallholder plantations in Mbandjock? The study seeks to examine; the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of stakeholders involved in the emerging plantations in the region, the changes which are taking place in these smallholder plantations, and the sources of conflicts in the smallholder plantations. The research was purely qualitative in which we used methods such as observation, interviews and photography to collect data. This data was analysed using content analysis and interpreted using the theories of cultural dynamics of Balandier and the conflict of Marx. Major findings reveal that smallholder plantations have brought about new power dynamics across political, spiritual, economic, and social spheres, leading to significant lifestyle changes. Land grabbing has occurred under two distinct land tenure laws; customary and state laws, resulting in conflicts between the indigenes and administrative, political, and traditional authorities. This study highlights the complex interplay between power dynamics and conflicts within smallholder plantation agriculture in Mbandjock, Cameroon. It emphasizes the necessity for further research and policy interventions to address these challenges.

Keywords: power dynamics, conflict, culture, smallholder plantations agriculture, food security

1. Introduction

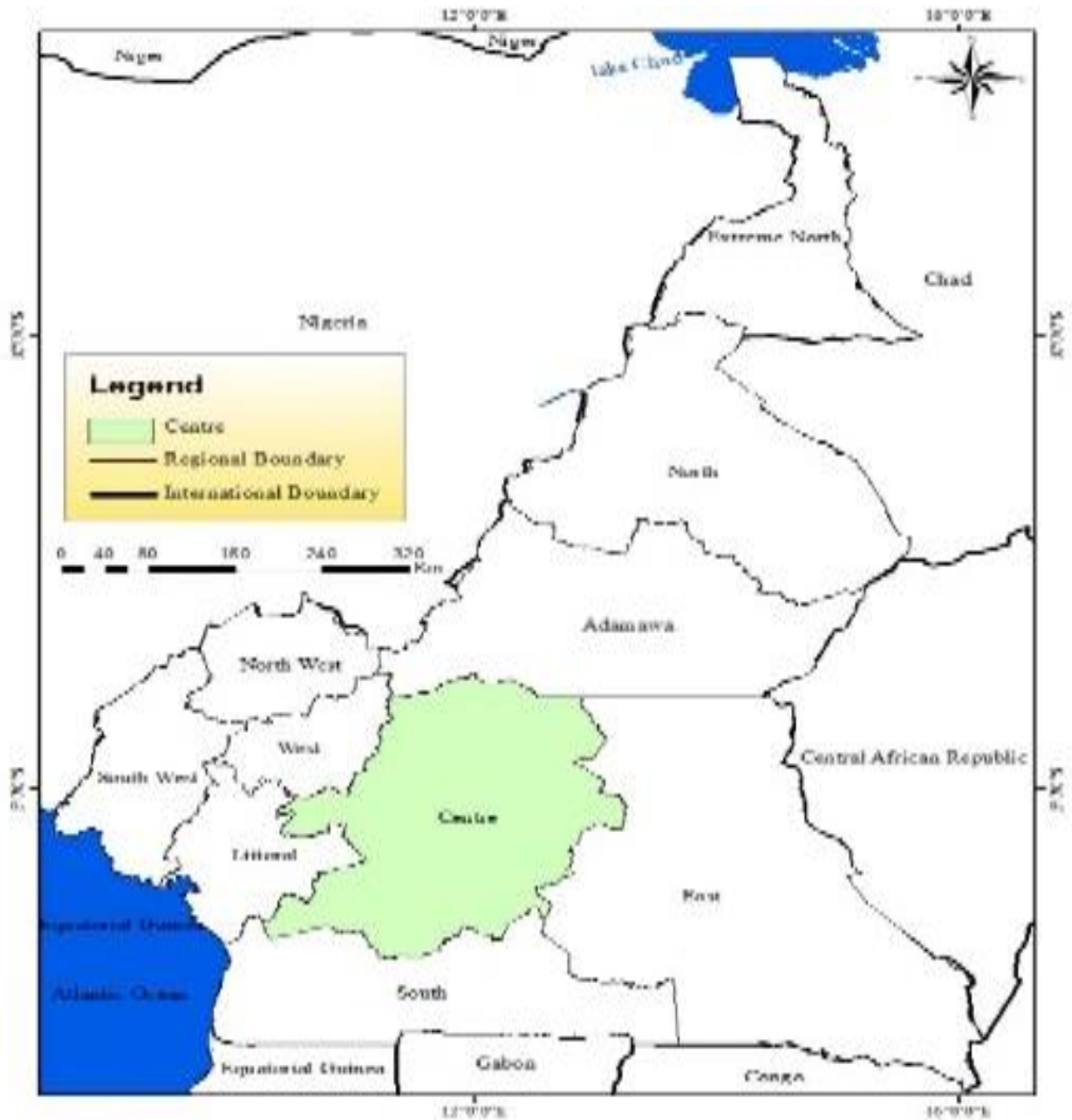
Smallholder plantation agriculture, involves small-scale farmers cultivating crops on limited land for both subsistence and commercial purposes. The land which they work on range from one-to-many hectares. Land here, is owned by families as well as the villages. Family land is under the custody of the family head meanwhile village land is controlled by the chief. Some of this land be it family or village land is sold out to influential personalities who comprise politicians, government officials and most times businessmen. Variety of crops are cultivated in this area, they include cash crops like cocoa, coffee, and palm oil, alongside food crops like maize, cassava, plantain for both commercial and local consumption. Those who provide labour in the smallholder plantations are family members, minimal mechanisation and sometimes settlers from the three Northern Regions and the North West Region of Cameroon. These smallholder plantations agriculture serve as the main source of food security in Mbandjock Sub Division in particular and Cameroon in general. The plantations benefits the people as they improved livelihoods through cash crop income. Smallholder agriculture promotes community cohesion through cooperatives that enhance resource access. In all, it plays a vital role in rural development, poverty alleviation, and local economies.

Although smallholder plantations agriculture helps to secure food security, they have given rise to new power dynamics and conflicts in these plantations. Smallholder plantations have led to the emergence of new source of power. Economic and political powers are controlled by the owners and operators of smallholder and large-scale plantations. The many smallholder plantations in Mbandjock has given rise to land grabbing. This land grabbing phenomenon is one of the sources of conflicts at the family as well as village levels. Such conflicts have impacted various aspects of the community's spiritual, economic, political, and social spheres.

2. Background of Research Area

Mbandjock is located in the Upper Sanaga Division of the Centre Region of Cameroon as demonstrated in maps 1, The Centre Region is one of the ten (10) regions that make up the Republic of Cameroon. This is the political capital of the country.

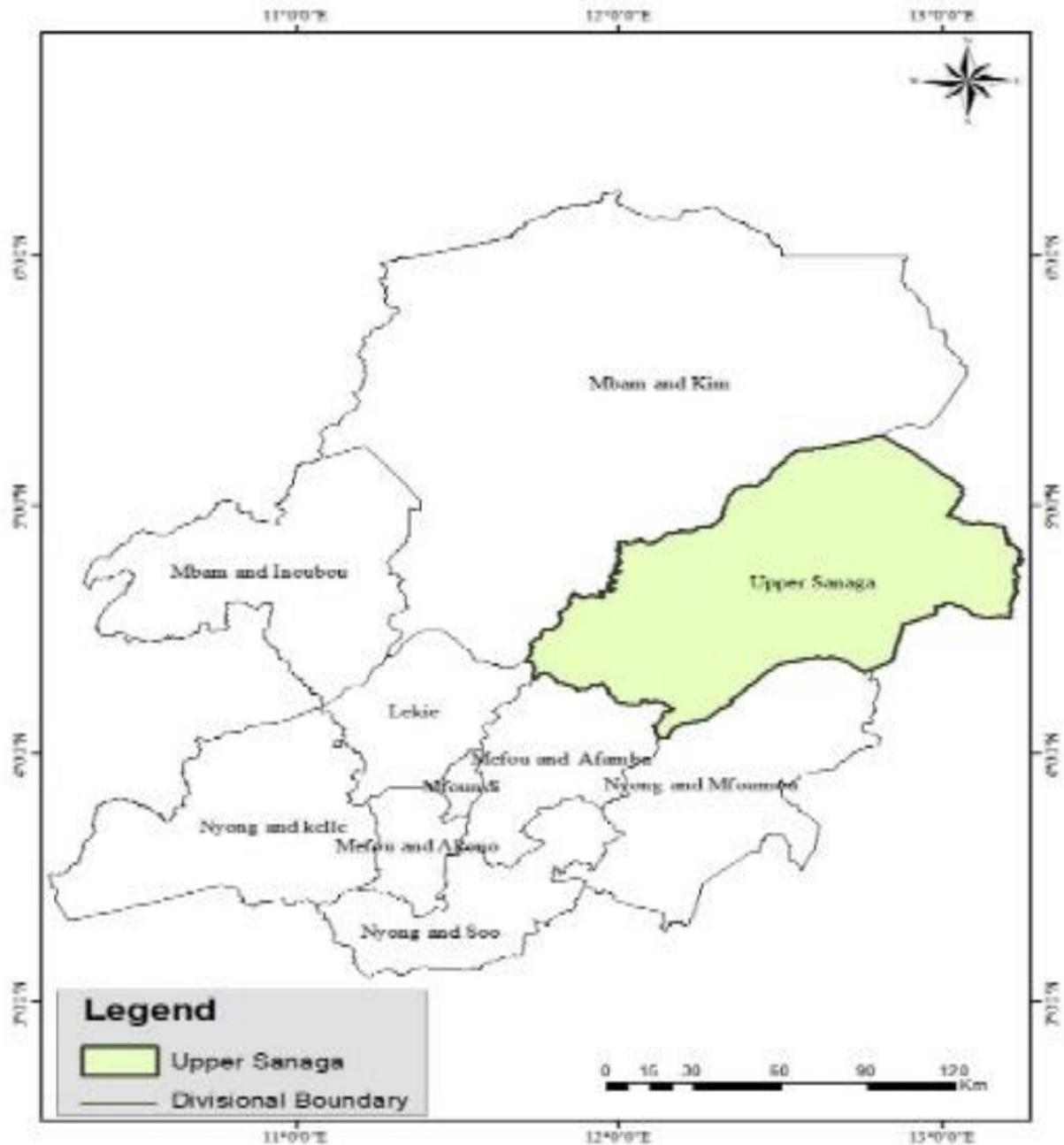
Map 1: The Centre Region of Cameroon



Source: National Institute of Cartography (2021)

As mentioned above, Mbandjock is located in the Upper Sanaga Division of the Centre Region of Cameroon (see map 2). The other divisions in this region are Mbam and Inoubou, Mbamand Kim, Mefou and Afamba, Mefou and Akono, Mfoundi, Nyong and Kelle, Nyong and Mfoumou and Nyong and So'o.

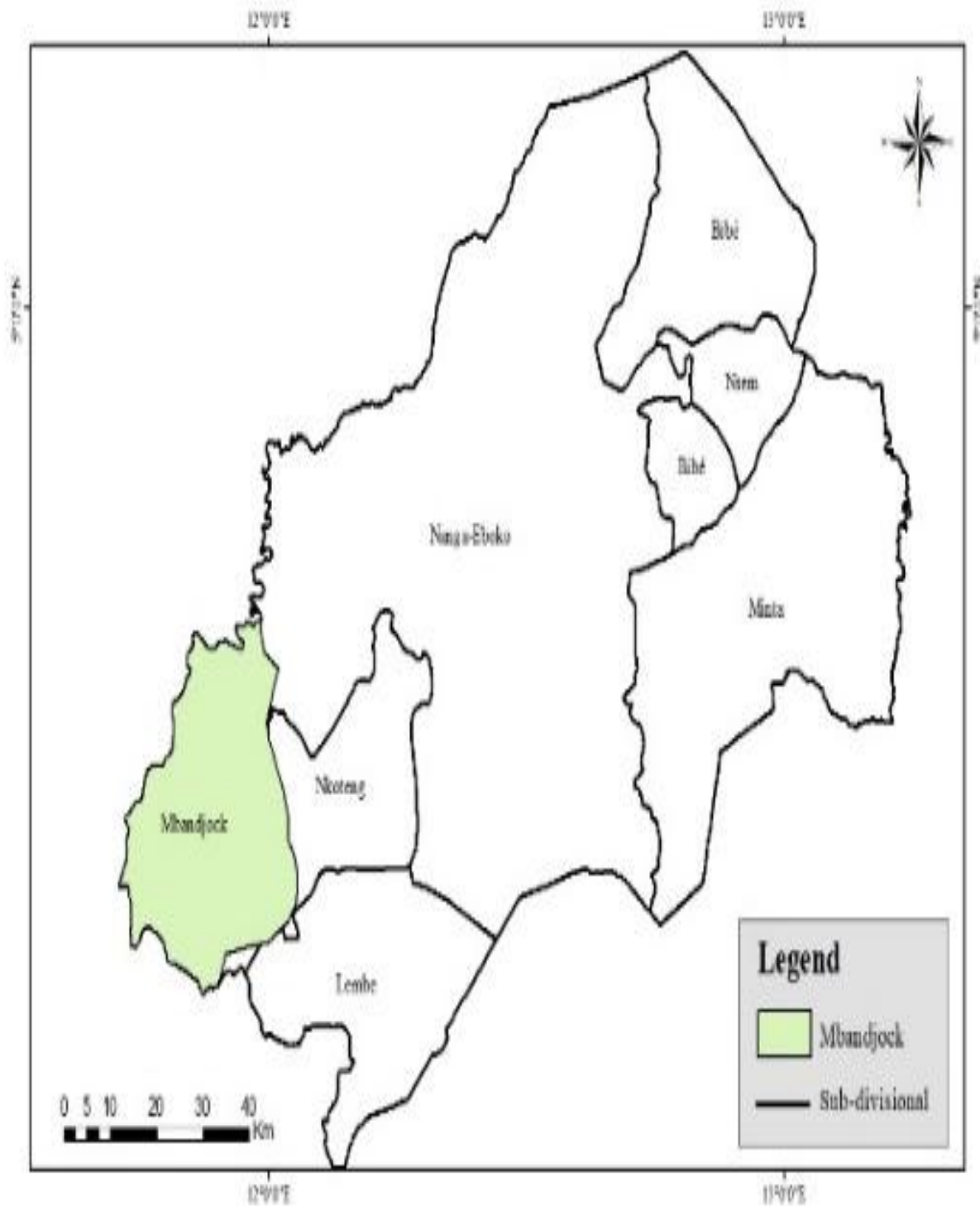
Map 2: The Upper Sanaga Division of the Centre Region of Cameroon



Source: National Institute of Cartography (2021)

Mbandjock as portrayed in map 3 serves as the headquarters of the Mbandjock Sub Division, encompassing nine villages across three groups: Ndjore (Mbandjock, Ndokoa, Minkouma, Nio Baboute, Ndjore I, and Ndjore II), Ndo (Biboto and Ndo), and Mekomba (Mendouga and Mekomba). Geographically, Mbandjock lies approximately between latitude 4.44° N and 11.90° E of the equator and longitude 11.54° E and 11.61° E. It is situated 78 km (48 miles) from Yaoundé town along the Yaoundé – Nanga Eboko highway. The population of Mbandjock is estimated to exceed 21,076 inhabitants, with youths constituting more than 60% of the population.

MAP 3: Mbandjock in the Upper Sanaga Division



Source: National Institute of Cartography (2021)

Mbandjock is an agricultural area where Cameroonians come from far and near to farm. Farming is the main economic activity here where farmers cultivate both seasonal and cash crops. Some of the crops cultivated include maize, yams, cassava, groundnuts, ginger, cocoa and many more. Mbandjock there are many smallholder plantations owned mostly by influential personalities who are made up of ministers, politicians and other businessmen. These smallholder plantations used the services of indigenous people as well as settlers to work in the farms.

3. Literature Review

A number of authors have written on smallholder plantations agriculture in Africa and the world. This could be understood under the following themes; size of smallholder plantations, power dynamics in agriculture and conflicts at the family and village level due to land selling for agriculture.

The presence of small-scale farmers in sub-Saharan African countries plays a crucial role in ensuring food security within their communities. George (2015) highlights that a significant proportion of the developing world's rural population, approximately two-thirds of 3 billion people, reside in around 475 million small farm households, operating on land plots smaller than 2 hectares. In different regions across the globe, the size of smallholder farms varies significantly. In China, nearly 98 percent of farmers cultivate plots smaller than 2 hectares, while in India, around 80 percent of farmers are considered smallholders. Latin American countries exhibit a trend where smallholder farms tend to be larger, such as in Nicaragua with an average size of 5 hectares. Conversely, in Asian countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam, smallholder farms are notably smaller, averaging 0.24 and 0.32 hectares respectively, influenced by factors like soil quality, technology, and productive assets like irrigation. In the African context, smallholder farms are relatively larger but still modest in size. For instance, Kenyan smallholders typically farm 0.47 hectares, while in Ethiopia, the average small farm size is 0.9 hectares. Countries like Egypt and Tanzania have a high prevalence of small farms, with Egypt seeing nearly 90 percent of farms being smaller than 2 hectares. In Tanzania, where agriculture contributes significantly to the GDP and a majority of the population resides in rural areas, there are approximately 3.7 million smallholdings, constituting 80 percent of total farms.

Power dynamics in agricultural settings have been a subject of interest for researchers across various disciplines. Authors such as Scott (1977) have examined the influence of power structures on smallholder plantations, highlighting how intergenerational wealth transmission impacts decision-making within farming families. Bennett (1982) and Lobley et al (2004) have highlighted the significance of power dynamics in shaping household-level motivations and farm management strategies. Jonovic et al (1986) and Salamon (1992) have explored the socio-cultural factors that shape agricultural practices, emphasizing the role of socialization and off-farm work experience in revitalizing farm operations. In the same light, Gasson and Errington (1993) have also contributed to this field by discussing how power dynamics influence agricultural decision-making processes. Silva (1999) has provided insights into the impact of land tenure systems on power relations within farming communities, shedding light on the complexities of land ownership and its implications for farm management. Mailfert (2006) has also discussed the role of cultural values in influencing power dynamics within agricultural settings. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) (2007) introduces the critical role of societal and cultural factors, particularly those influenced by farmer race and ethnicity, in shaping agricultural productivity. Their insights underscore the need to understand the unique historical and cultural legacies of different ethnic groups, which influence farm structures, resource access, and future aspirations. Additionally, NASS (2007) emphasizes the gendered values that impact farm structures, highlighting the increasing role of women in principal farm operations and their specific preferences for low-input production and direct marketing.

Chiappe and Flora (1998) and Trauger et al. (2008) found that gender and sociocultural factors play a significant role in shaping agricultural perspectives. Women, in particular, emphasize the environmental and economic benefits of sustainable agriculture, as well as the link between agriculture and community sustainability. Barbieri and Mahoney (2009) pinpoint age as another influential factor in agriculture. Younger farmers, especially those new to farming, are more entrepreneurial and willing to take risks associated with innovation. However, older farmers may face obstacles due to limited skills and challenges in socializing older children into farming practices. Clark, (2010) emphasized the impact of generational differences in farming. Multi-generation farmers and first-generation farmers may lead to specialization in specific production systems, affecting adaptation to new systems. Inwood and Sharp (2012) noted that multi-generation and first-generation farmers have distinct motivations and values. Maclean, (1977) discussed sumptuous rituals associated with the first harvest in different cultures. The Greeks celebrated the “festival of flowers” in March, honouring the goddess of agriculture Demeter. Saharan African tribes marked First Fruits festivals in January. Shamans or priests oversaw these rituals, with a focus on fertility and rejuvenation of the growing season. Among the Kayan people primarily found in Indonesia, in the province of East Kalimantan, priests held significant status and passed on knowledge orally. These diverse perspectives collectively underscore the complex interplay of cultural, social, and generational factors in smallholder agriculture. By integrating these insights into research and policy initiatives, it becomes possible to develop more holistic and contextually relevant approaches to sustainable agricultural development.

Smallholder farmers often face challenges such as limited access to resources, market uncertainties, and competition for land. These factors can lead to conflicts among farmers, as well as with other stakeholders such as agribusinesses, governments, and local communities. Studies have demonstrated the role of power dynamics in exacerbating these conflicts, with more powerful actors often exploiting or marginalizing smallholder farmers. Power dynamics in agriculture have been a central theme in many studies, with a particular focus on how power is distributed and exercised within agricultural systems. Land grabbing, for example, is a manifestation of power imbalances where powerful actors acquire land from smallholder farmers through coercive or manipulative means. This phenomenon has been extensively studied in various contexts, revealing the detrimental impacts on smallholder livelihoods and food security (Che, 2023).

Moreover, the emergence of new sources of power in agriculture has been a growing area of interest in recent years. With the rise of technologies, global markets, and changing consumer preferences, new actors and dynamics are shaping agricultural systems. According Che (2023), agribusinesses, multinational corporations, and technology companies are increasingly influencing agricultural practices and policies, often at the expense of smallholder farmers. Studies have explored how these new sources of power are reshaping traditional agricultural systems and exacerbating existing inequalities.

4. Theoretical Framework

Understanding power relations and conflicts in agricultural contexts requires a theoretical framework that encompasses various perspectives and dynamics. One key theoretical approach in this paper is the political economy framework. This theory was put in place by Galbraith (1967). It discussed the role of corporate power in shaping economic policies and resource distribution, stressing the influence of large corporations on government and economic systems. This theory helps us to examine how power is distributed and exercised within agricultural systems. The role of economic and political actors in shaping power relations in smallholders is inevitable as they determine land access and the choices of crops to be cultivated. These agribusinessmen and government officials’ influence and control agricultural practices, resources, and policies. Political economy analysis also considers the impact of power imbalances on smallholder farmers, often leading to conflicts over land, resources, and market access in Mbandjock.

Social conflict theory, primarily developed by Marx (1848), posits that society is in a state of perpetual conflict due to competition for limited resources. This theory suggests that social structures and relationships are defined by power dynamics and inequality, leading to conflicts between different groups. Recently Giddens (2009), emphasize how these conflicts are shaped by broader social, economic, and political factors. In the context of smallholder plantations in Mbandjock, this theory interplays the struggles between small farmers and larger agribusinesses, where the latter often monopolize resources and decision-making power. These economic disparities create tensions within communities, as smallholders fight for their rights and livelihoods against more powerful entities. In Mbandjock, the intersection of land ownership disputes, access to markets, and social hierarchies reflects the ongoing relevance of social conflict theory in understanding agricultural conflicts today.

Balandier's (1974), theory of cultural dynamics, explores how culture shapes social structures and power relations within societies. In this paper, it shed light on how cultural dynamics shape power relations and conflicts. For instance, cultural norms around gender roles and labour divisions influence power differentials between male and female farmers, impacting access to resources and decision-making authority in Mbandjock. It explains that, cultural beliefs and practices influence agricultural practices and community interactions. Balandier emphasizes that power is not merely held but is produced and reproduced through cultural processes, making it essential to consider local customs and values in understanding conflicts. In Mbandjock, traditional authority structures and social norms play a crucial role in determining access to resources and decision-making power among smallholders. Conflicts may arise when external influences, such as agribusiness interests or government policies, disrupt these cultural dynamics, leading to resistance from local farmers. Balandier's perspective highlights the importance of recognizing the interplay between culture and power in shaping conflict, providing an anthropological lens through which to understand the challenges faced by smallholder plantations in the region.

5. Methodology

The data of this paper is purely qualitative. The data collection process encompasses various techniques, including direct observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, life histories and photography. These technics were utilized to gather rich and nuanced data that provide insights into the complexities of the social phenomena being investigated. The researchers took part in some of the activities of the indigenous people where they had the opportunity to observe the processes which are involved in the sale of land, and rituals that are involved. Here, they were able to see those who were actually engaged in the selling of land and how land is valued in Mbandjock Sub Division. During such observations, they took some snap shots of the different activities.

In-depth interviews were conducted with some chiefs, notables, family heads, elderly men and women, young boys, and some influential personalities who have bought land in Mbandjock. A total of 30 informants were interviewed. Interviews were carried out with four (4) chiefs and four (4) family heads who had once sold land. This was to understand, the criteria considered before selling a piece of land, the processes and rituals involved in the sale of land, and the origin of conflicts in selling of land in particular and smallholder plantations in general. With the elderly men and women, the researchers sought to comprehend how land is valued and how conflicts resulting from the sale of land in Mbandjock are resolved. Three (3) elderly men and three (3) elderly women were interviewed. Interviews were equally conducted with three (3) notables to know the power dynamics and sources of conflicts in smallholder plantations. They also sought to comprehend the cultural significances of the different rituals involved in the sale of land. Five (5) young men between the ages 25 and 30 were equally interviewed to understand how they reacted to family land which was sold without their consent. Land, whose sell deprived them of available farmland for farming. The researchers also interviewed six (6) owners of smallholder plantations to know how they bought land, the procedures they went through

to buy land and how they influenced the activities in the area. The researchers equally sought to comprehend from them those who provided labour in their plantations and how these labourers were treated. Various tools such as interview guides, focus group discussion guides, observation checklists, and life history guides were employed to facilitate data collection and analysis.

This methodological approach enabled the research team to delve deeply into the social fabric of the studied communities, shedding light on the intricate interplay between social representations, cultural dynamics, and individual experiences.

6. Findings

Smallholder plantation agriculture is common in Africa. They serve as a major source of food security as discussed earlier. That notwithstanding, there are usually power dynamics and conflicts in such plantations. The findings in this paper are presented as follows; smallholder plantations as new sources of power, the involvement of smallholder plantation in political dynamics, and conflicts in smallholder plantation areas.

6. 1. Smallholder plantations as new sources of power.

In Mbandjock, smallholder plantations predominantly involve local farmers and their families who engage in subsistence and cash crop farming. These individuals typically belong to rural communities where agriculture is a primary source of livelihood. The category includes small-scale farmers, landowners, agricultural workers, and sometimes migrant labourers who contribute to the cultivation of crops such as maize, cassava, and cocoa. These plantations are often characterised by their reliance on family labour, limited resources, and traditional farming practices, which can create a strong sense of community and shared responsibility among participants.

The involvement of these individuals in smallholder plantations is driven by several factors. Primarily, they seek to ensure food security for their households while also generating income through the sale of surplus crops. The socio-economic context plays a significant role; many families depend on agriculture as their main source of income due to limited access to alternative employment opportunities in urban areas. Additionally, cultural ties to the land and agricultural traditions often motivate participation in these activities. The potential for economic empowerment through cooperative efforts and access to markets further encourages these farmers to engage in smallholder plantation agriculture, fostering resilience within their communities despite the challenges they may face.

The presence of smallholder plantation generally led to the emergence of new sources of power due to the creation of smallholder plantations. These economic activities come with growth in the population. The expansion of families increased the demand for the creation of smallholder plantations. With these plantations, the people will be able to feed and guarantee sustainable growth of the population. Once a plantation is found somewhere, there is the development of new power structures in the region. While spiritual powers are held by the local population, economic and political powers are wielded by the owners and operators of large-scale plantations and smallholder plantations. However, both the locals and smallholder farmers share social powers, emphasizing the diverse sources of power at play in Mbandjock Sub Division.

This situation sheds light on the intricate power dynamics among stakeholders involved in smallholder plantation agriculture. In Mbandjock, smallholder plantation investors, despite possessing economic and political powers, heavily rely on spiritual powers for the protection of their farms, products, workers, and overall activities to ensure sustained production and reproduction. This crucial spiritual power is bestowed upon them by the chiefs and local population of Mbandjock, underscoring the significance of community cohesion and productivity. This goes in line with Gasson and Errington (1993) who propound how power dynamics influence agricultural decision-making processes.

However, conflicts often arise within smallholder plantation agriculture due to the competing interests of various stakeholders. As different parties navigate their roles and responsibilities, conflicts may emerge, highlighting the complexity of power dynamics in agricultural settings. Understanding and addressing these conflicts are essential for promoting sustainable development within the community. This implies that, recognizing the spiritual powers held by the local population and integrating them into smallholder plantation agriculture can enhance production and ensure food security. The incorporation of cultural practices, such as rituals and belief systems, into agricultural activities underscores the interconnectedness of social, cultural, and economic factors shaping agricultural practices. Preserving cultural heritage and traditions in agricultural activities is crucial for fostering community development and sustainability in smallholder plantation agriculture in Mbandjock sub-division.

6. 1. 2. Spiritual power of smallholder plantations

In smallholder plantation agriculture, there are usually rituals conducted to attract spiritual powers. These spiritual powers play a pivotal role in ensuring the protection and productivity of farms. The chiefs and local population provide this essential spiritual power through their rituals and belief systems, which have been passed down through generations as part of the people's cultural heritage.

The *Kemoyui* ritual is one of the rituals linked to spiritual power in Mbandjock. This ritual marks the end of the traditional year and is a crucial element in the community's spiritual and agricultural life. It is a source of spiritual power for the chiefs and indigenous people, playing a vital role in the smallholder plantation and food security system. The ceremony begins in the early morning. Villagers, led by notables and quarter heads, gather at the main graveyard arena before the chief and king's makers. Each quarter presents a calabash of raffia wine. After inspecting all the ritual items, the villagers participate in cleaning the graves of those buried in Mbandjock. Cleaning is done with machetes, hoes, and other working tools. Key rituals include; the pouring of palm wine which is libation offered to ancestors as a sign of respect and to seek their blessings. Giving of food to ancestors. These foods are placed at the centre of the graveyard, it signifies the nourishment of the spirits of the ancestors. As such the ancestors will be happy and will revert their happiness with protection and abundant food. The shaving of people's heads. This symbolises the act of cleansing and renewal, signifying a connection between the living and the departed.

The *Kemoyui* ritual involves a wide range of stakeholders, including; the Chief and Kings' makers who are spiritual leaders that guide the ceremony and mediate between the living and the ancestors. The notables and Quarter Heads who are representatives of different community sections, ensuring broader participation and representation. All villagers participate, contributing to the communal cleansing of the graves and seeking blessings for their farms and families and finally the ancestors who respond to their quest. At the end of the grave cleaning, the population are fed as demonstrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Common meal at the ritual of cleaning of the graveyard in Mbandjock



Source: Che, (Mbandjock December 2019)

These rituals do not only contribute to the productivity of crops but also foster a sense of community cohesion and sustainability in smallholder plantation agriculture. Integrating these cultural practices into agricultural activities can further enhance food security and promote sustainable development within the community.

While smallholder plantation investors may wield economic and political powers, they also heavily rely on spiritual powers for the protection of their farms, products, workers, and overall activities to ensure sustained production and reproduction. This crucial spiritual power is bestowed upon them by the chiefs and local population of Mbandjock, underscoring the significance of community cohesion and productivity. However, Edjenguèlè (2005), illustrated that culture is the ways of life of a given population of which they use in solving their daily problems of how to eat, drink, sleep, and make love, shelter and more. Therefore, culture refers to the actions, reactions, productions and all other elements that accompany a society in their daily life found in all age groups taught by the oldest to the youngest.

This implies that, community development and sustainability are profound. Recognizing the spiritual powers held by the local population and integrating them into smallholder plantation agriculture can enhance production and ensure food security. The incorporation of cultural practices, such as rituals and belief systems, into agricultural activities underscores the interconnectedness of social, cultural, and economic factors shaping agricultural practices. Preserving cultural heritage and traditions in agricultural activities is crucial for fostering community development and sustainability in smallholder plantation agriculture in Mbandjock. Crop cultivation was intensified in Mbandjock when *Société Sucrière du Cameroun* (SOSUCAM) and the people integrated in their culture. Hence, the older generations have been teaching the younger ones in these areas with crops cultivation. This is affirmed

by Parson, T (1949) who said culture...consists in those patterns relative to behaviour and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genes. The rituals practice in Mbandjock has been from generation to generation and has significant consequences on smallholders' plantations. A majority of smallholder farmers in Mbandjock offer rituals to their ancestor in relation to crops cultivation.

Part of these spiritual powers is used to fixing the farms. The spiritual power of fixing the farm is some of the powers detained by the chiefs and indigenous people to guarantee food security in areas where smallholders are found. These are spiritual, rituals, traditions, in fact cultural values that the host society has over their land which is their cultural identity and belonging. With this spiritual power, they are able to protect their crops and even workers against any eventual spiritual attacks. Spiritual powers play a crucial role in production and reproduction within smallholder plantation agriculture areas.

The chiefs and indigenous people hold significant spiritual powers that play a crucial role in smallholder plantation agriculture and the food security system. The sacrifices and rituals performed in the graveyards are aimed at obtaining blessings and protection from ancestors for production, reproduction, and the overall well-being of the society. This spiritual power gives them control over the growth of crops in smallholder plantations, providing blessings and protection for individuals, properties, and crop cultivated. There are three graveyards in Mbandjock with the main being a place where the very first chief of Mbandjock was buried.

Attendance in the graveyard cleaning is compulsory for all the local populations especially girls of reproduction age, farmers who wants favour from their ancestors, businessmen, in fact all those who may want favour from the ancestors. The wine and the food signify the unification of the villagers. One of our informants testify,

The sacrifices and rituals we do or practice in our graveyards is to obtain blessings and protection from our ancestors. The protection ranges from the protection of individuals, properties and even crops. By this ritual, all the notables, quarter heads and the villagers represent their respective quarters with a calabash of palm wine, at the main graveyard arena before the Chief, the king makers and the villagers. When the items for the rituals are all checked, the ceremony begins in the early morning where all villagers are expected to be present with machete, hoes and other working tools for the cleaning of the graves of all those who have been buried in Mbandjock. (Interview conducted in Mbandjock, 05/04/2019).

This reveals that the indigenous people's spiritual powers are instrumental in controlling crop growth in smallholder plantations. Through sacrifices and rituals practiced in the graveyards, they obtain blessings and protection from their ancestors for production and reproduction, as well as for the safeguarding of individuals, properties, and crop cultivation. There is profound connection between indigenous spirituality and agricultural practices. Spiritual powers influence crop growth among indigenous people of Mbandjock. This connection illustrates how farming is not merely a physical activity but also a deeply spiritual endeavour. Rituals and sacrifices are seen as essential for ensuring successful harvests, indicating that the society recognises the interdependence of the natural and spiritual worlds.

This Kemoyui ritual is an act of ancestral reverence. That is to say, the act of seeking blessings from ancestors which signifies a strong respect for lineage and heritage. Ancestors are viewed as guardians who provide guidance and protection. This reverence fosters a sense of continuity within the community, linking past generations with present agricultural practices. The rituals serve as a means of honouring those who came before, reinforcing social cohesion and collective identity. The societal nature of these rituals fosters collaboration among villagers. When smallholder plantation owners seek

blessings collectively, it reinforces social ties and encourages shared responsibility for agricultural success. This collective approach strengthens community bonds, promoting mutual support and cooperation in times of need.

The *Kemoyui* ritual also serve as a cultural Identity to the Mbandjock people. The rituals performed in graveyards contribute to a distinct cultural identity for the society. They are rooted in tradition and reflect unique beliefs, values, and practices that differentiate this group from others. Such cultural expressions are vital for maintaining group solidarity and pride, especially in the face of external influences or modernization.

The *Kemoyui* ritual symbolises a life cycle. This ritual focuses on production and reproduction within the context of these rituals symbolises broader themes of life cycles. That is birth, growth, death, and rebirth. By engaging with their ancestors through these rituals, community members acknowledge the cyclical nature of life, recognizing how each generation contributes to the ongoing story of their people.

This is followed by a tune and singing of a song by all presents which is only stopped at the request of the Chief. After a while, for the Chief to show the success of the ritual and end of ceremony, he incarnates to the ancestors and gods of Mbandjock as well as to the population. This was approved by a Chief who happened to be one of our informants in an interview. He said that;

I will ask the population present to be silence. After their silence, I transmit my message of blessing, protection, good production and reproduction to the villagers. I used to insist on unity, fertility, good harvest of all the agricultural products and others as the ancestors instructs me. It is then followed by the announcement of the rest of the activities in the village. Nobody should lie to you about the death, the death are very strong, if you obey, remember, give them food and wine, everything you want they will give it to you (Interview conducted in Mbandjock, 05/04/2019).

This means that, if one performed and participated in the rituals, the ancestors protect their properties and activities. For those who practice agriculture in general and crop cultivation in particular, when they take part and contribute toward these rituals, their crops are protected from the evil people. They are blessed with abundant harvest that can sustain their families. Those who cultivate crops for business purpose, will generate enough income for them. Maclean (1977) eminent that, agricultural festivals were where people gathered to plan and chart on the calendar future rituals. Sumptuous rituals are performed with the first harvest, the Greeks celebration was known as “festival of flowers” and was celebrated in March, coinciding with the spring equinox. The First Fruits festivals are celebrated in January by Saharan African tribes.

6. 1. 3. Economic power of smallholder plantations

In smallholders' plantations, economic power is very visible. The economic power has a significant impact on power dynamics among different stakeholders. Various sources of economic power, including personal savings, bank loans, buyer's loans, and subsidies from governmental and non-governmental organizations, enable smallholder plantation investors to finance their operations. This economic power allows them to determine what crops to produce, how much to sell them for, and who should produce them. Smallholders wield this economic power by influencing what is cultivated, consumed, and the standard of living in the community. One of our informants testify that smallholders have the economic powers by saying that:

Smallholders in Mbandjock through their economic power determine what we produce, what we eat and even how much we sell and buy our farm out puts and inputs. When they start producing maize, we all will do so if not, you would not have the person that will buy the different product you cultivate. You eat what you produce, and what you cultivated is determine by the smallholder plantations. They do not only determine the crops which we grow, they

equally determine the selling prices of our crops. That is to say, if they fix the price of cassava at ten thousand (10 000) FCFA per bag and you do not want to sell at that price, your crops will not be sold and may definitely get bad. The activities which they carry out, determine the standard of life of the people here. If they pay their workers well, they will live well but if they are paid low, their life standard will be low (Mendouga village, 20/11/2020).

The presence of economic powers and their activities have brought a lot of changes in the domains of food crop and cash crops production in Mbandjock. Their powers have been able to influence from crop types cultivated, techniques, period of cultivation, changes in farming methods, changes in tools used, changes in the market, changes in the source of finance and changes in the labour force. This implies that there are actually changes in smallholder plantations agriculture since most of the respondents admitted that fact.

Conflicts often arise from competing interests in smallholder plantation agriculture, particularly concerning pricing and market access. For example, if a smallholder sets the price of cassava at a certain level, farmers who do not agree may struggle to sell their produce. This can lead to tensions within the community and impact the livelihoods of local farmers. The economic control exerted by smallholder plantation owners can create power imbalances and disparities in economic opportunities.

Smallholder plantation owners therefore own the economics power in Mbandjock. The culture of what to produce, how much it should sell and who to produce is determine by them. After harvesting, the problem of price fluctuation arrive which discourage most small planters to go in for plantation investment. Due to an improvement in the level of education by these investors, they have realized the importance of farmers' corporations which permits them to sell their output at better prices. For example, in Mendouga village, we can find the Femmes Active de Mendouga (F.A.M) cooperation which permits productive members bargain for better prices for their product and even have working equipment at low prices or at credit thought the cooperative representative. All these are more of economic strength of small plantation holders. It goes in line with Rapsomanikis (2015), assertion that, all stages of development, smallholders operate their farms as entrepreneurs operate their firms. They raise capital from multiple sources and invest in productive assets. Many of them own items such as bicycles and motorcycles which facilitate their movements to the farms. These means of transport are very important assets to them.

They equally make risky as well as profitable decisions when is concerns agriculture. They decide on when to plough, what to plant, to seed to plant, which inputs to use and how, when and how to harvest; how much to keep for consumption in the household and how much to sell to raise income, or how much to store. Smallholders often make these decisions in an economic environment in which markets do not function well, if at all, and which is also subject to many risks, such as adverse weather and price surges. And this has significant implications for their choices and their livelihoods. It also affects their choices on investing on themselves and their children on how to attain social and human capital objectives, such as education and health.

6. 1. 4. Social power of smallholder plantations

Small scale plantation has also brought about a lot of changes in the social life of the people where smallholder plantations are found. Some if not all aspect of their culture is modifying in one way or the other. It happens as a result of the powers of smallholder plantations on the population. These things are easy to find in Mbandjock because many workers of the plantations come from different cultural settings with their different culture and blend with the culture of the people of Mbandjock is gradually producing a new way of life in Mbandjock. Smallholder plantation depend on the indigenes and settlers for labour force. These indigenes and settlers (labourers) work for low wage and sometimes work is given to them on contract bases. In Mendouga village, smallholder plantations usually undergo

contractual agreements where an individual will work a farmland and he is remunerated at the end of the year or the harvesting season.

6. 1. 4. 1. Small scale plantation power of changing local people's lifestyle

One of the key characteristics of culture is that it is dynamic or elastic. Culture therefore is dynamic, learned, copy and transmitted from one generation to another. However, with the creation of plantations in Africa, the culture of zones of these plantations is gradually been modifying in one way or the other. Plantation agriculture influence movement of people in the area. These people come to work. At times they come and never go back. They also come along with their culture. With the presence of settlers, the cultural activities of the Mbandjock people are gradually changing due to the new way of life proposed by the settlers. We observe an on-going disappearance of food crops very often multifaceted in favour of monoculture which occupies a bigger part of the arable land. Then, all the residents who were once fishermen, sculptors, hunters, may continue with their trade and also take on farming or divert from their trade completely to become planters because of the profit they will derive from it. This therefore will bring about a diversity of trades. According to Awah (2017),

A greater majority of the residents of cities come from some rural area and bring their cultures into the city. Culture is a continuous umbilical cord that links urbanites to their villages or tribes. When these cultures meet in town, they undergo transformations and new cultures emerge, for example amongst socio-professional and ethnic groups. At the same time, urban characteristics are spilling over into rural areas. My urban and rural comparative approach portrays the beliefs, understanding and behaviours that people in urban and rural areas have and share about cultural issues.

This implies that, smallholder plantations and indigenous people food security system issues cut across cultures and need to be understood from both rural and urban perspectives so that solutions to the food insecurity can be more broad-based. It is thus not surprising that small-scale farming in Cameroon is largely limited to high-value and specialist ventures such as fruit, vegetables, flowers, intensive pigs and poultry; and where local processing plants, often fairly large-scale, are necessary for crops such as sugar cane, tea, rubber and coffee. These are cases where large capital investments are necessary, or where industrial organisation of production generates physical productivity that cannot be achieved on small units. The government of the state has encouraged young persons to go into agriculture. The aim of the plan was to promote private plantation development. Noordwijk et al. (2008) established that a divide between agricultural and forestry strategies has been recognized as a barrier for developing plantations practices that have smallholder farmers as the main beneficiaries of plantation. Therefore, they recommend more consideration be given to developing both national and international policy enterprises to achieve a 'level ground' for plantation and agroforestry management and seeing them as strongly synergetic management options. In their view, this would mean a shift from primarily supporting large-scale plantation operations to also giving support, in every probable form but not creating specific privileges, to smallholder farmers who grow trees in their own agroforestry systems.

6. 2. The involvement of smallholder plantations in political dynamics

Smallholder plantation implantation in many localities in Africa, comes with a lot of changes in political life of the people. In these areas, plantation owners have a lot of influence on the politics of the municipality. Those who own the land and the plantations, have a lot of influence on political decisions of their workers. In African, your boss, is usually consider as your father, mentor and guardian. So, these group of people exhibit a lot of control and political decisions in these areas. They even at times control the political economy of the people from whom they grabbed land. They are so involved in the decision of who becomes the head in the local administration. They do this so that, their choice of local authority will in return protect their interest and their vicious cycle will continues. At times, these people even influence the choice of who becomes the next traditional leader and even family heads, has an influence on the culture of the people. This was confirmed to us by one of our respondents, who said

that:

We already know here that if SOSUCAM and the other rich smallholder owners do not support you, you can never be a councillor talk less of being a mayor in the Mbandjock council. The former and late Mayor of Mbandjock, chief of Ndjore was a SOSUCAM worker and member of the rich smallholder plantation group before becoming Mayor. He was supported by SOSUCAM and he made over 30 years as mayor of the Mbandjock council. The new mayor who came up just last year is still a worker of SOSUCAM and equally a smallholder plantation owner who belong to common initiative groups. I am telling you all this to show you that our political power here is controlled by plantation owners (Interview in Mbandjock, 15/01/2021)

Based on the above statement, we can affirm that political power in Mbandjock Sub-Division is in some way controlled by plantation owners. They even give money to sponsor their campaigns. In return, when those Mayors are in place, they only do what the smallholders owner want. If not, they will be change. Most smallholder plantation is granted subsidies or financial support, agricultural training seminars and population sensibilisation on eco-friendly agricultural practices that help them in one way or the other. For example, people in Yezoum and all Mbandjock nearby villages are free to ask for financial help from the Mbandjock council to finance their projects by providing tangible proves of the existence of their projects. The council determine the type of crops and areas they intervene in. Meaning the smallholders can only do what the council wants if they want support from the council.

6. 3. Conflict in smallholder plantation areas

Conflict refers to a state of opposition, disagreement, or incompatibility between two or more individuals, groups, or entities, often resulting in tension, competition, or violence. In the part of the paper, the researchers used the conflict theory, also known Marxist conflict theory, with roots in the works of Marx (1818-1883). In this theory, Marx argues that conflict arises from the inherent contradictions and inequalities within capitalist societies. To him, conflict arises from the struggle between two main classes: the bourgeoisie (those who own the means of production) and the proletariat (those who do not own the means of production and must sell their labour).

When smallholder plantation agriculture establishes in a locality, it is more likely to create conflict. Conflict may also arise in farmland delimitation and this later applies mostly to the local natives. Provided that there are no appropriate land limit demarcations of each native, this tends to bring constant ownership conflicts among the village natives and this happens in every family and recurrently. According to Scott (1977), once the centrality of the subsistence problem is recognized, its effects on notions of economic and political justice can also be seen. Scott draws from the history of agrarian society in lower Burma and Vietnam to show how the transformations of the colonial era systematically violated the peasants' *moral economy* and created a situation of potential rebellion and revolution. The conflict in smallholder plantations in Mbandjock are in many dimensions, but we have focused on four of them namely; land grabbing, cultural conflict, theft and farmers' grazers' conflict.

6. 3. 1. Land grabbing conflicts

Land grabbing is an act of taking control of a parcel of land forcefully in areas where plantation agriculture is practice. This land becomes more than gold to the stakeholders. In Africa, land is even considered as a cultural identity to the people. It is known that, the more land one has, the more wealth, power and even a more important social status he/she has. It is against this backdrop that business tycoons or administrators either for agricultural, housing purposes or industrial development grab land from the local people. These local people regard their ancestral land as their identity. While the wealthy people are using their wealth and influence to acquire land for their businesses, the indigenes are determine resist and die in defence of their ancestral land handed to them from one generation to another. This situation is bringing about conflict between the indigenes and the tycoons. According to Fru (2020), by prompting food security fears within the developed world, new found economic

opportunities for agricultural investors are created, and this was radically promoted by the food price upsurge, which caused a dramatic spike in large scale agricultural investments, primarily foreign, in the Global South for the purposes of food and biofuels production. Although hailed by investors, economists, and some developing countries as a new pathway towards agricultural development, investment in land has recently been criticized by some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and commentators who argue that it has had negative impacts on local communities. International law is implicated when attempting to regulate these transactions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 article 25, which states that, everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care. Secondly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966 (entered into force in 1976), article 11 posit that, the State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing, and housing.

Thirdly, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of 2007, article 26 postulate that, indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop, and control the lands, territories, and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use.

Fourthly, the voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (FAO) of 2012 emphasize on the responsible governance of land tenure and the need to respect the rights of individuals and communities. Also, the International Investment Agreements (IIAs) with the example of the Energy Charter Treaty of 1994. The treaties included the provisions that can impact land rights but vary widely in their protections for local communities versus investors. And the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 15 (Life on Land), which emphasize sustainable land management practices.

These legal instruments collectively provide a framework for addressing land grabbing by promoting human rights protections and sustainable practices while highlighting community rights over land use. In areas where these plantations are found, land grabbing problem is usually from the political, economic elites, traditional rulers and administrative authorities. Those involved in the grabbing frequently do so by giving wine, food and small money for many hectares of land. The indigenous people whose land is grabbed either for plantation agriculture or other economic activities are left with little or no land for their own plantations. Most often people grab the land so much so that the local population do not even have where they can even do their own household agriculture. An informants said that:

In fact, some unenlightened patriarchs of the village, some of whom are already dead today, in particular the heads of the second and third degree chiefs, and some heads of families who are ignorant had been deceived to sell thousands of hectares of land. Such land sold include forests and the valleys. This land is sold to some senior Cameroonian public administration officials including ministers, and law enforcement authorities whose investments in these forests bear the names of some of them. Some chiefs and family heads sell all the land without leaving any space for family members to be able continue their agricultural and agro-pastoral activities. This is particularly the case of the vast forest located in the village called Zili in which a company has established its tourist side called Sanaga Camping Beach. Thus, today, when the young people of the village, many of whom have completed their secondary and higher education, go to these lands to cultivate and exploit them, they are intimidated and threatened by these authorities. Some are even arrested and placed in permanent custody in the cells of the police stations and gendarmeries of Nkoteng and Mbandjock. Worse still others are kept in pre-trial detention for

months in the main prison of Nanga-Eboko for reasons such as: Destruction of goods, disturbances of use, thefts in co-action (Interview in Mbandjock, 15/01/2021)

Land grabbing is an old age culture all over the world but this is a new cultures in Mbandjock which the economic and political class are introducing. Huge pieces of family or village land are sold to transnational companies, government officials, and individuals as a demonstration of their wealth, power and eventually leading to prestige. The fact that wealthy as well as influential politicians purchase vast land for 'small' amounts of money is creates conflicts between these rich buyers and the local people who lack farmlands to work on. It takes another dimension when educated children and people of this region, after education come back to engage in agriculture which they think can pay. They usually do not have land to cultivate crops. When it comes to their notice that their many hectares of land was given out for mere wine, food and just small money, they wage war to regain their land which led to conflict. To testify how their land was sold at very low prices, one of our informants testify that:

To grabbed land in Mbandjock, the buyer comes few days with his representative and wine. The wine is for the notables and the person owning the piece of land. His representative is present in this process in other to accompany him and the village administration in the morning to the land in question. After this, all the people present, who went to the land will sit and consume the wine. When this drinking is over, the buyer and the seller or land owner will discuss in private the price to be paid for the land concern. After this private discussion between the buyer and seller, the buye will then ask the chief what else is required to complete the deal. This deal usually completed with the provision of food and drinks. The buyer will give an appointment on the date he will the food and money for the land. The food is distributed to all the notables and elders and the money is given to the land owner. When the money is handed to the seller of the land, the chief signs a customary law waiver to this buyer to attest that he is a witness to the act. The chief has a fraction of the amount of money paid to the seller. This money is used to finance the chief's transportation to the divisional officer's office to give reports on the land sold. This process applies to both small and large plantation holders (Interview in Mbandjock, 11/05/2021).

This means that, it is the belief system of the people that if someone buys a piece of land, s/he has to provide food and drinks to the people. As the people eat this food, they are in communion with their ancestors, the rightful owners of the land. Failure to provide food and drinks to the people, it is believed that this land will not have high yield. It is also the belief of the people that once you have bought land from a family, you become an in-law or a member of that family because land is regarded as a woman. That is why Moffor et al. (2024) state that among the Betis of Cameroon, when someone buys land, s/he is regarded as an in-law in the family of the seller. And as an in-law, s/he has to continue to participate in all manifestations which concern the seller of the land's family. Because the buyer of the land is expected to pay tributes to the seller and his family for the rest of his life, sometimes this generates conflicts. It could create conflict because some buys refuse to continue to participate in the ceremonies of their buyers.

In Mbandjock, the conflict becomes more severe when a chief sells land which belongs to another chiefdom. In this area, cases have occurred where a chief sold land and another chief claimed that it was his or her village land meanwhile the chief who sold the land equally claimed the same. When a chief encroaches and sell the land of another chiefdom, conflict is bound to begin between these chiefdoms. This conflict between chiefs sometimes degenerate to involve the population of both chiefdoms. This is because each chief may ask his or her subjects or population to fight and defend their mother land. Such disputes usually lead to loss of property and lives.

6. 3. 2. Conflict of who owns the land

Another area of conflict that emanates from the presence of smallholder plantations in a locality, is the land grabbing conflict. It usually come about to situate who actually owns the land. When the economic importance of land is known to stakeholders, everybody has interest in controlling the land which come with a lot of power. This situation usually comes up times without number between chiefs, subjects, smallholder owners and the indigenous. In Mendouga one of the villages of Mbandjock Sub Division, we noticed that many Mendouga people sold the village lands without the chief's or any local authority's concern. So, when Mr. Ava Dieudonner was enthroned as chief of Mendouga village, he reclaimed all the lands occupied by non-locals. This brought about conflict between the chief and the local people who sold the village land without the knowledge of the village authorities. According to these people,

Chief Ava claimed land from Mr. Essola Gabriel. This claim was based on the fact that, Mr. Essola secretly sold a piece of land to Mr. Eyala a non-native. Mr. Essola on his part is pretending that he gave the piece of land to the later free of charge, however, he also tells the village that Mr. Eyala promised to pay for the piece of land once he had enough funds. But many decades have passed since the deal was made and, nothing has been given to the chief to distribute to the indigents as our culture demands. Although nothing has been given to the chief, many persons including Mr. Essola claim that he (the chief) has received the land payment from Mr. Eyala if he (Mr. Eyala) is exploiting the land for smallholder plantation. As a consequence, there has been conflicts between the chief and Mr. Essola. Many similar problems created conflict between the chief and the local people (Interview in Mendouga, 11/10/2021).

This implies that, some of the conflict of land grabbing cause by smallholder plantations in Mbandjock is due to cultural bridging. Conflict raised most often in Mbandjock because of the violation of the culture of the local people by smallholder exploiters. The culture of the Yezoum like the Baboute warrens that when land is bought, the buyer especially a non-native, will need to give food to the local people passing through the chief to be distributed to the indigents as their culture demands. When is it not done, then conflicts are bound to arise between the chief, local people like with smallholder plantation owners.

Most small holders arrived in Mbandjock when the place was still very under populated. They benefited from the low population to buy lands at nearly no cost. They equally bought lands through selling contracts with the pioneer's settler without the chiefs concern. Such land was sold with the hope that when the money will be paid appropriately, the chief's will be informed but this is not always the case. When these natives who usually sold land without the knowledge of the chiefs became aware of the mistake they were subjected to, they often went for reclamation of the sold land. This most time bought conflict between the sellers and the buyers.

6. 3. 3. Conflict over land between family members

Land grabbing in smallholders plantations has also brought conflicts at the family level in Mbandjock. Sometimes, these conflicts are among family members who owns which portion of land and who is actually responsible for sale of land. Even though the family lands in most localities are demarcated, with short-life span plants like flowers, trees, among others, such land boundaries are not always adequately demarcated because many of the plants used in the demarcation may last only for a few years. When these plants die, the neighbours most times encroach in each other's land. This create tension and land dispute between the families concerned. One of our informants indicated that:

In May 2021, Mr. Essola had a conflict with Mme Zouga over Mr. Essola's father farm land. This lady (Mme Zouga) claimed the land was hers as she opposed the limits of the land presented by Mr. Essola. This problem was solved in favour of the Matriage because as the custom says a child should not dispute with a parent as did Mr. Essola with the Matriage Zouga (Interview in Mbandjock, 12/10/2021).

This means that land grabbing has brought about numerous conflicts among family members as to who owns which portion of land and or who is responsible for selling land. These conflicts at times are engineered by smallholder plantation owners to exploit the situation and grabbed land. All of these cause a lot of conflict in the Sub Division.

Still at the level of the family, there are usually land conflicts. This problem is recurrent as some family heads usually sell family land without telling or seeking the concern of other family members. It becomes aggravated if the family land had been distributed among the siblings. In the case where a family head sells the land of his brother or the mother's land which belongs to his sisters, the brother or sister whose land has been sold must fight to recover it (the sold land). In polygamous families, this conflict can become so severe that it can make brothers and sisters to cease communicating with one another. Most times such conflicts can lead to loss of lives. It goes in line with Scott (1977), in his study "The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Survival in Southern Italy". In this work, Scott examines the economic and social conditions that affect peasant households, focusing on their subsistence strategies and the moral frameworks that guide their actions in the context of oppression and exploitation. The emphasis on peasant household subsistence is a critical aspect of his analysis.

6. 3. 4. Smallholder plantations Farmers' grazers' conflicts

Farmers' grazers' conflicts are another area of conflict present in areas where smallholder plantations are found. It is usually between farmers and grazers for one encroaching another's land and vice versa. Cattle rearing have damaging effects on the smallholders' farms as cattle destroy crops and this most times led to grazers' farmers' conflicts. During the movements of cows from one place to another, the cattle get in to farms and destroy food crops while other times, herdsmen set fire on grazing lands in order to regenerate new pastures. The fire sometimes trespasses and burns the farms of smallholders. Worthy of note here is the fact that this poor practice by grazers made and still making farmers' grazers' conflicts so rampant.

Moreover, after the dry season, when smallholders' farmers harvest their crops, the second season is followed by the cultivation of food crops which at times is often destroyed by the cows found in the smallholders' fields. This is because most of the cattle are left uncontrolled and there is often disregard for transhumance tracts to water points and dry season grazing areas. The consequences are trespassing into farmlands and crop destruction year in year out. It should be noted here that while the cultivation of food crops is seasonal, grazing is not seasonal and is carried out throughout the year.

In recent times, measures have been taken by the government, traditional authorities, and NGOs to manage the rampant farmers' grazers' conflicts in Mbandjock Sub Division. Nchang (2015) says the government of Cameroon in 1974 nationalized all farming and grazing land. So, farmers and grazers were only given due rights in their respective zones following the 1978 ordinance, that created the Agro-Pastoral Commission in all the Divisions and Sub-divisions of Cameroon. The fact that the commission was headed by the D.O actually helped in reducing farmers' grazers' conflicts.

Moreover, a locally base NGO, FAP in collaboration with the SOSUCAM, MINADER, MINEPIA and MINATD have greatly helped in the eradication of farmers' grazers' conflicts through the education they give the population of Mbandjock via programs that shows the importance of practicing sustainable agriculture. (FAPs report 2007). This report also shows how smallholders farming can co-exist with cattle rearing without any eventual conflicts. In addition, being the custodian of their lands, traditional leaders have over the years adopted measures to manage these conflicts in order to promote peace and food security in the plains. However, the traditional leaders of the villages that make up the Mbandjock Sub-division have actually restricted the Mbororos grazers from grazing around farmlands located.

6.3.5. Cultural conflict in smallholder plantations

Cultural conflicts are those between different cultural groups. In Africa in general and Mbandjock in particular, there are cultural conflicts. This is because Africans love to keep their cultural identity and pass it down to future generations. In Mbandjock when these smallholder plantations were created, they needed and still need workers. These workers most of whom came from the three northern regions of Cameroon (Adamawa, North and Far North) and the northwest region of Cameroon. These people have their own cultural practices which they move with as they searched for jobs. In some parts of Mbandjock Sub Division, for instance in Banjo, the population of the local people less than the population of settlers. Most often the settlers impose their cultural practices. By so doing, sometimes, they do not respect the taboos, customs, of the local population. Some of the cultural problems found in Mbandjock because of the presence of smallholder plantations are; non-respect of some cultural values of the indigenous people by the settling people. For instance, settlers kill and eat snakes which some are taboo to the Baboute people who believe that the snake is their totem. It is a snake that helped them to cross the river Sanaga to their present side Mbandjock. One of our respondents told us that,

Sometimes we may see non-native plantation holders performing certain activities in that may be a taboo to the natives of the locality and vice versa for example in Mbandjock tribe, it is forbidden to eat a snake but we may see many SOSUCAM non-native farmers eating snakes (Interview in Mbandjock, 08/10/2021).

Another cultural conflict area is at the level of festivals and rituals. Most of the settlers' populations disregard these festivals and rituals perform in the different villages of Mbandjock Sub Division. As many smallholders and large holder plantation in most if not all the rural localities are mixture of natives and non-natives, this brings about a variety of cultures which may be contradictory to each other. For Scott, (1977), insofar as all economic activities and relationships depend on moral norms and ethical dispositions. These norms and ethnics are found in the culture of the people. As such when they are not respected it becomes a conflict between the parties concerned.

6.3.6. Conflicts between labourers and owners of smallholder and large-scale plantations

Conflicts also exist between workers and owners of smallholder and large-scale plantations. Such conflicts arise because the labourers or workers think that they are being exploited by the bosses, that is, the owners of plantations (smallholder and large-scale). This exploitation has a socio-cultural implication on the labourers. The labourers work under precarious working conditions, long hours of work, inadequate wages, and uncovered health risks. These working conditions have a social consequences on their families and communities. Recent events, including a strike action in January 2025, underscore the urgency of addressing these issues and the need for government intervention. The sugar cane industry in Mbandjock and other smallholders' agriculture ventures have led to significant economic growth in the area. However, this growth has not been matched by equitable labour practices. Workers often endure harsh conditions with minimal compensation, leading to persistent conflicts between such labourers and plantation owners (Ngwa et al, 2023). Labour exploitation in agricultural sectors is not a new phenomenon. According to Adeyemi (2022), many workers are subjected to long hours with inadequate pay, particularly in developing regions like Mbandjock. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of legal protections for workers, making them vulnerable to abuse from employers.

Labourers in Mbandjock often begin their day before dawn, sacrificing family time for meagre wages. This sacrifice reflects the dire economic situation many families face due to low salaries that do not match the demanding nature of their work (Tchouankep, 2023). The physical toll of plantation work is significant. Workers report various health issues due to exposure to hazardous conditions without proper safety measures. The inability to afford medical treatment results in preventable deaths among colleagues, further compounding the hardships faced by these communities. The impact of labour exploitation extends beyond immediate economic issues; it affects family dynamics as well. Children

are often left unsupervised while parents work long hours, leading to increased risks of delinquency and substance abuse. Many families struggle to pay school fees due to low incomes from labour intensive jobs.

The conflicts between labourers, smallholders, and large-scale plantations like SOSUCAM are deeply rooted in exploitation, economic disparity, and a lack of support. Labourers face a gruelling routine, often waking up at 4 AM to work in hazardous conditions while leaving their children to fend for themselves. This sacrifice is made with the hope of earning a good income, yet they are paid meagre salaries that do not reflect the hard work they put in. Many times, these wages are delayed for months, leading to severe financial strain and health crises among workers who cannot afford medical treatment.

The emotional and social toll on families is profound. With parents' absence for long hours, children become vulnerable. This vulnerability usually leads to negative effects, including crime and substance abuse. The cycle of poverty and neglect perpetuates as labourers struggle to pay school fees and provide basic necessities for their families. When complaints about working conditions are voiced, rather than addressing the issues, plantation owners' resort to threats of termination of work, which further entrench the conflict.

The recent strike action in January 2025 highlights the extent of these tensions. As labourers took a stand against their exploitation by blocking roads and burning sugarcane farms, they faced violent suppression from military forces called by the company. This tragic response to their legitimate demands underscores the deep-seated issues within this dynamics. The strike was not just about immediate grievances but also a cry for system change and government intervention to protect labourers from ongoing exploitation. One of our respondents, a labourer described the situation as follow:

Every day, I wake up at 4 PM and head to the farm, leaving my children to prepare themselves for school. We toil under the banner of SOSUCAM, enduring significant risks and health hazards in our quest to meet the company's demands. Despite our hard work, we are compensated with meagre salaries that are grossly insufficient for the labour we provide. Often, we go for months without receiving even this small payment.

The consequences of this financial hardship are severe. Many of my colleagues have tragically died due to their inability to afford medical treatment. Countless others are left sick and broken from the arduous nature of our work. We struggle to pay school fees for our children, and our absence from home leaves them vulnerable. Many of them become involved with older men or fall into drug abuse and crime.

Our grievances about the deplorable working conditions often lead to threats from the company rather than any constructive dialogue. When we voice our concerns, we face the risk of being laid off, creating a persistent conflict between us labourers and our employer.

In January 2025, tensions reached a boiling point, culminating in a strike action where we blocked roads and burned sugarcane farms in protest. Tragically, some among us were killed and others wounded when the military was called in by the company to suppress our legitimate demands. This violent response only highlighted the ongoing conflict between plantation owners and workers like us, who suffer under exploitation. The reasons behind our strike were clear. We wanted solutions to our problems. It equally a called on the government to intervene and address the exploitation labourers face at the hands of plantation owners. Our collective suffering has pushed us to demand change and justice in an environment that has long ignored our plight (Interview in Mbandjock, 08/02/2025).

Recent strikes in January 2025 illustrate the growing frustration among workers regarding their treatment. As noted by informant, “the recent strike action where we blocked roads and burnt sugar cane farms was a desperate cry for help against over-exploitation.” The violent outcomes of these protests signal an urgent need for dialogue between labourers and plantation owners.

Conclusion

Mbandjock is an agricultural zone. Its rich soil favours the cultivation of both seasonal and cash crops. In this area, there are many smallholders plantations engaged in agriculture, cultivating seasonal crops like maize, cassava, yams, groundnuts and cash crops such as cocoa and coffee. They use the services of the indigenous people as well as settlers in the plantations. These indigenes and settlers work as labourers in the plantations but sometimes farms are given out to them on contract bases. The many settlers in Mbandjock are gradually imposing their ways of life in this area. The smallholder plantations are owned by influential government officials, politicians and businessmen. These wealthy people purchase huge portions of land from family heads as well as chiefs at very low prices. Family heads sometimes sell the land of family members without their concern and this creates conflict most times between the family head and his siblings. There are also times that some chiefs sell land belonging to another chiefdom. This too is another source of conflict between chiefs and their chiefdoms. Therefore, there are power and conflicts in Mbandjock Sub Division created by the presence of the culture of smallholder plantation agriculture in Mbandjock. These powers ranges from spiritual, economic, political and social. This has affected the lives of the people involving their farming life. The farmers mainly sell their produce to large cooperations and in the bigger markets in Cameroon.

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