Journal of Rural Studies 65 (2019) 22–31

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

Leading rural land conflict as citizens and leaving it as denizens: Inside forest conservation politics in Burkina Faso

Mawa Karambiri[a,*], Maria Brockhaus[b]

[a] Viikki Tropical Resources Institute (VITRI), Department of Forest Sciences, P.O. Box 27, Latokartanonkaari 7, FI-00014, University of Helsinki, Finland
[b] Department of Forest Sciences, P.O. Box 27, Latokartanonkaari 7, FI-00014, University of Helsinki, Finland

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Citizenship
Political belonging
Rural change
Land conflict
Accountability
Resistance

ABSTRACT

Based on an empirical study of struggles concerning access to land and political inclusion (and exclusion) in the context of a forest conservation project in rural Burkina Faso, this paper analyses environmental politics through the lens of citizenship. In Centre-east Burkina Faso, a peasant resistance to a newly demarcated forest conservation zone turns into an identity and political conflict involving an international conservation organization, the state, decentralized and customary authorities. Based on shared history and residency, a new citizenship of migrants had emerged. These new citizens, finding their given lands within the new forest conservation area, rejected the project-proposed forest boundaries, put forward their citizenship entitlements and engaged in resistance. Eventually they also found themselves in conflict with their polity, lost their claims along with their still-fragile citizenship. Consequently, they were evicted from the forest and labelled as *les déguerpis,* denied citizenship and became *denizens*. Beyond confirming the fragile, processual, nature of citizenship these findings also bear theoretical and conceptual implications, challenge the mainstream way environmental politics are analysed and suggest the need to understand political belonging and citizenship as the very basis of environmental struggles.

1. Introduction

In 2010 in the peaceful village of Tensobtenga Centre-east Burkina Faso, a violent conflict emerged among villagers, the local government and a forest conservation project over forest conservation planning. The disputes and contestations began when the project proceeded to the demarcation of the forest conservation area as the villagers claimed that the project had taken more lands than what they had agreed to release for the forest. The late-comer migrants who settled in the area before 1984 cultivated those lands. Acting upon their shared residency, ethnicity and political belonging to the village, they rejected those forest boundaries, refused to leave the forest and engaged in resistance. After losing the case, they were eventually evicted from the forest, labelled as *les déguerpis* and furthermore were denied citizenship turning them into *denizens*. These struggles over forest limits turned this identity and political conflict into an issue of political belonging, entitlements and citizenship in the local arena.

We apply a citizenship lens as simultaneously a status, a process, a practice and an outcome to examine these environmental struggles and their implications. We conceptualize citizenship as membership, identity and political belonging to a polity and the ability to act and be seen as a full member. Accordingly, we operationalise citizenship through three interactive elements: the material base of the membership (which helps build) the individual's sense of political belonging and identity (which are necessary pieces for) the performance of the acts of citizenship. The exercise of citizenship or the *citizenship practices* (Moro, 2016) not only involves the capacity of the citizens to hold the public leaders accountable (Sparke, 2004) but also constitutes a means to reconfigure citizenship itself beyond the state (Hoffman, 2004). By enabling such dynamics, citizenship raises as a vital democratizing institution (Isin, 2008) but it may also involve conflict.

Conflict and citizenship are not an unexpected duo. They are both ongoing turbulent processes, subject of contestations and continuously re-claimed. Thus, citizenship is always politicized, contested (Woods, 2006) and under construction, *en devenir* (Werbner, 1998). In this sense, the exercise of citizenship is a form of political contestation that gives sense to the relationships between the individuals and groups who identify themselves as citizens (Clarke et al., 2017). The confrontation at the core of conflict is one of the manufacturing moments of citizenship (Rancière, 1998). The claims made in the pursuit of more citizenship can result in gain or loss of citizenship rights (Isin and Turner, 2007). However, few studies have empirically explored the nexus

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: mawa.karambiri@helsinki.fi (M. Karambiri), maria.brockhaus@helsinki.fi (M. Brockhaus).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.12.011
Received 25 May 2018; Received in revised form 18 November 2018; Accepted 16 December 2018
Available online 21 December 2018
0743-0167/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

conflict-citizenship and environmental struggles in rural situations, hence, our contribution to fill in these gaps.

We argue that forest conservation politics transcend the fold of the natural resources, shape reform and unintentionally produce uneven forms of citizenship by creating *les déguerpis* (those evicted from the forest) and turning citizens into denizen (those denied citizenship). We show how citizenship is fragile, processual, and embedded in ongoing struggles. The empirics illustrate how citizenship is formed, shaped and reformed over shared residency, forest conservation and rural politics and how those who lose their claims underwent exclusion and denial of their ultimate citizenship and thereby were turned into denizens.

By doing so, we contribute to the overall rural and agrarian studies and shed critical light on how mainstream environmental politics is approached and analysed. We suggest that peasants' struggles over natural resources–whether structured or unstructured, open socio-political, identity or ethnic conflict (Libiszewski, 1991; Homer-Dixon, 1991; Hirsch, 2017) or 'everyday forms of peasants' resistance' (Scott, 1990) are not always only about mere access to resources and benefits but also often about political belonging. We also argue that those struggles beyond the scope of resistance entail a history which itself finds root within inclusive (and exclusive) struggles for citizenship. Furthering the understanding of how political belonging and citizenship is formed and reshaped over time and amid those struggles provides crucial information on how the access to natural resources is claimed, maintained and undermined.

We first introduce the theoretical framework and the methods. Second, we indicate the process of creating citizens through the recognition and legitimization of those considered migrant *late*-and *latest-comers* compared to the *first comers* or autochthons (Lentz, 2013); we present the demonstration and reformation of citizenship with the different stages of the conflict. We conclude by discussing the results and their implications for the broader rural, agrarian studies and environmental politics literature.

2. Conceptualising citizenship and conflict and theoretical approach

Citizenship is a highly theorized and disputed notion in social sciences. It has no commonly shared definition available to date but scholars agreed that citizenship depicts a relation between the citizen and his/her polity. We conceptualize citizenship from a communitarian perspective as membership and belonging to a social or political group and the ability to act and be seen as a complete member (Trudeau, 2012). Membership and belonging lay out the foundations, the terms of rights, the opportunities of participation and the resources at the citizen's disposal for acting and being recognized as such by others. In this sense, citizenship is not static; rather it is exercised, inclusive and exclusive and might change over time. It also entails a plurality of meanings as a status, a practice, a process, and an outcome. This plurality makes citizenship a fertile concept for understanding political belonging on multiple dimensions. We build our analysis on three interactive elements of citizenship, linked to the different actors within the conflict case study:

3. Material base and access

The first element is the material base of one being socially and legally accepted as a member of the social or political group, i.e., the status and the inherent privileges and expectations (Moro, 2016). This suggests the existence of a higher authority that recognizes the membership, for example, a village chief and the definition of the entitlements attached to the position. Specifically, in agrarian societies, being recognized as citizens may not necessarily entail direct rights to land but it does legitimize one's claims over land (Lund, 2011). Our empirics illustrate how citizenship is formed through examples of late-comer migrants being acknowledged by the autochthons of Tensobtenga as citizens of the village and thereby granted access to lands and political position.

3.1. Identity and belonging

The second element is the sense of identity and belonging to the group as a full citizen (Moro, 2016). The sense of identity is formed and reformed over time by the individual in his/her experiences and interactions with the group. It implies a shared and collective values, rules and norms among the group members and a standard definition of what is required to be—or not to be—a citizen in a given context. This conditions and prepares the citizen to take a stance, exercise membership rights in everyday life and shape the destiny of the society. In our case, the late-comer migrants already endowed with the first element put forward their identity and belonging to the village to demonstrate their perceived citizenship and make claims over the forest planning.

3.2. Acting and holding leaders accountable

The third element acting is necessary to demonstrate and shape or reshape citizenship because 'what people do with citizenship is of crucial importance to give shape to citizenship itself' (Moro, 2016, 26). Acting propels the powerless as actors of power (Foucault, 1982) and turns subjects (those passive under an authority) into citizens claiming rights, social justice and social change (Mamdani, 1996). The acts of citizenship are dual dimensional: the citizens taking actions, for example to curb the forest processes, influence and eventually sanction (positively or negatively, formally or informally) the decision makers who in turn respond to those actions (Oyono, 2004; Ribot, 2004; Schedler, 1999). Observing the citizen's acts from such an accountability angle instead of as social movements (Woods, 2008) or activism helps to uncover the interrelationships between the citizens and their polity. In this sense, our empirics highlight the means, practices and strategies used by the claimants to effectively make their case, influence and hold the local leaders accountable for their decisions in the forest planning.

3.3. Actors in conflicts

This process of claim making might occur in or lead to a conflict conceived by Colvin et al. (2015) as an episode of social life made of varying escalation phases (conflict construction, manifestation and aftermath) that produce the conflict's legacy likely to serve as a basis for future conflicts. In such conflict situation social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) helps to uncover the acts of citizenship through the processes of self-categorization of the *in-group,* the actors holding the same opinion and the *out-group* consisting of their opponents (Colvin et al., 2015; Hogg, 2016). Within and between these groups, actors might change their position and thereby determine whether the conflict will yield social change. This helps us categorize our conflict's actors: those primarily favourable to the new forest limits, such as the mayor, those who initially opposed them but eventually accepted (such as the village chief), those who thoroughly conducted the contestation and those who were brought in as mediators. The conduct of the conflict involving these three elements of citizenship results in the reformation of citizenship itself and the production of denizens. We use these elements as analytical lenses when investigating the different stages from status towards an (temporary) outcome, of the conflict and of citizenship in Tensobtenga.

4. Methods

4.1. Data collection and analysis

We were introduced in the village of Tensobtenga in June 2012 through the local government of Lalgaye with the objective of

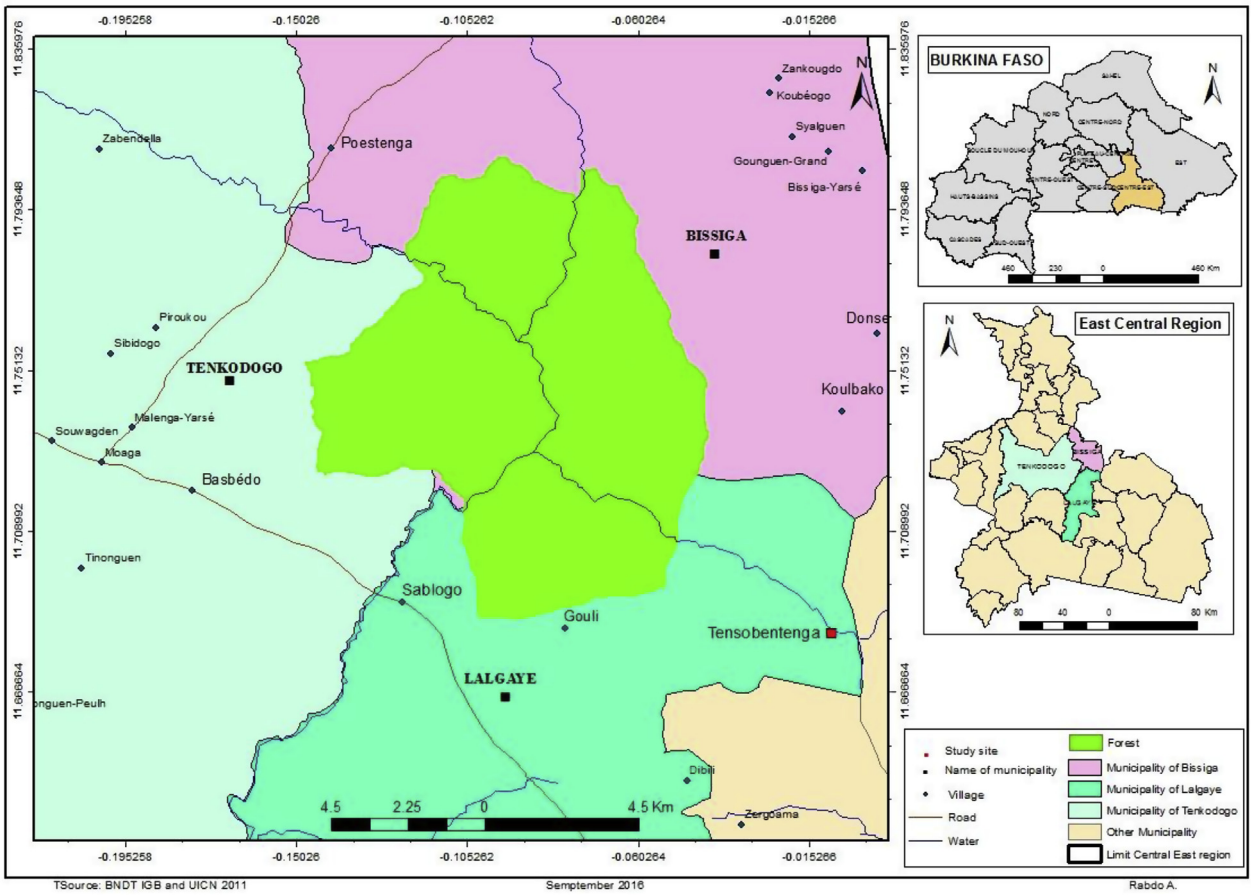

Fig. 1. Map of the study site.

investigating the forest conservation process (Fig. 1). Naturally, our discussion began with the village chief. Since he realized our interest in the forest conservation events and specifically the conflict, he recommended a list of people we must interview. He also implicitly advised us on the neighbourhoods we might avoid because they opposed him on the matter of the forest limits. The village atmosphere was still volatile, as the violent events had happened barely two years ago. Therefore, we complied with his advice and we interviewed the people he recommended. Understanding the field context and building a relationship of trust with the villagers is an essential step in qualitative analysis (Elo et al., 2014). Thus, we travelled to and stayed in the village four times between May 2012 and April 2013 and September 2017 for a total duration of four months to ensure a relationship of trust with the villagers. After we exhausted the village chief's list of recommended people, we expressed our need to interview more people as a requirement of our study and we then informed him of our intention to extend our interviews to the 'rebellious' neighbourhoods. There, they were waiting for us already as they saw us in the village discussing with some people and they wanted to tell their version of the story. Notwithstanding the circumstances, to ensure the viability and validity of the data, we applied a snowball technique (Aurenhammer, 2016) to recruit our final interviewees who were directly or indirectly involved in the forest conservation process, the conflict and witnessed the events during the project implementation period.

We carried out in-depth and semi-structured interviews with a total of fifty-eight actors composed of forty actors from Tensobtenga village (twenty-four autochthons and sixteen late-comers) and eighteen actors from municipal and national levels: local government leaders from Lalgaye municipality, the project staff and actors from the ministries of environment and decentralization. With the villagers, we explored the core issues raised in the forest conservation planning, the events that contributed to the conflict, the claim-making means and strategies, the conduct and responses of the forest decision makers. We also explored the conflict procedures and litigation, the resulting changes in the local decision makers' legitimacy/authority and the changes in identity and belonging of the claimants. With the municipal and national actors, we discussed their involvement in the forest conservation process, the actions and strategies used by the claimants to hold them accountable and the changes in their legitimacy/authority as a result. On this specific issue, we asked both the villagers and leaders to weight the changes using numbers (minus one = decrease, zero = no change and plus one = increase).

We used participant observation throughout the data collection period: we participated in Tensobtenga markets and social events during our stays in the village, two project meetings with forest management groups in Lalgaye in June 2012, two municipal council sessions in Tenkodogo in June 2012 and in Lalgaye in May 2013. In addition, we were involved in one workshop with the mayors involved in the forest conservation in Tenkodogo in April 2013. Three requested interviews were refused: the deputy and the former village development council president (CVD) both accused by the interviewees of supporting the migrants' protests and the delegate of the village, who was accused of being the instigator of the changes in the forest limits.

Our data corpus for the analysis consisted of the transcribed interviews, as well as our field notes and observations. We used content analysis because of its feature of enabling both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Content analysis guides the research process systematically and helps organize the data into meaning units, categories and conclusions that derive from it (Elo et al., 2014). The qualitative content analysis presents the results in the form of text and topics

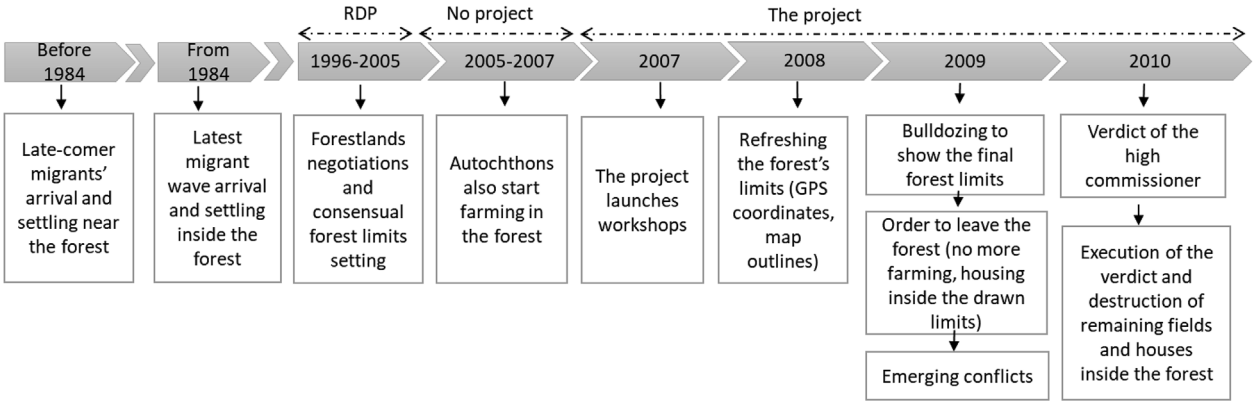

Fig. 2. Timeline of the forest conservation planning.

(Krippendorff, 2004) while the quantitative feature uses numbers and frequencies to show the significance of a given fact. Maxwell (2010, 6) did argue that 'the use of numbers is a legitimate and valuable strategy for qualitative researchers when it is used as a complement to an overall process orientation of the research'. Here, we narrate the forest conservation's events using the informants' contributions and we present the changes in the leaders' authority using number and frequency as processed in an Excel spreadsheet. Beforehand we anonymized the informants' identity and the project's name as 'the project' throughout the paper.

4.2. Study area and context

The State Rural Development Project (RDP), implemented in the Centre-east region including the municipality of Lalgaye and the village of Tensobtenga from 1996 to 2005, was the first attempt to conserve the community forest (Fig. 2). Though the mandate of the Rural Development Project (RDP) was rural development, the issue of creating a forest conservation area emerged as necessary to sustain livelihoods because of increasing deforestation, extensive agriculture practices, population settlement inside the forest and overgrazing. Thus, the RDP decided to plan the local space between the livelihood practices of agriculture, forestry and livestock. The customary land rights holders were identified and consultations, negotiations and study trips were carried out with them so that they could release parts of their lands to create the forest conservation area. First, on a map and afterwards on site, each village's representatives showed the limits of the forestlands that they consensually agreed to dedicate to the forest area and the bordering trees were marked red to show those limits. At that point, the migrants, essentially the late- and latest-comers cultivating and living inside the forest, expressed their fears about the loss of their fields. Therefore, the RDP foresaw two main scenarios: either those cultivating inside the forest would be displaced from the forest with compensation for their relocation or they would be kept inside the forest with a guarantee that they would stop extending their current fields, which would avoid further deforestation. If needed, the village chief agreed to provide lands to those affected. Here, it is critical to notice that the decision to displace the population for the conservation of the forest had not yet been made. This detail is important as it will contribute to legitimize the resistance that later arose against the forest conservation planning. The RDP ended without concretely drawing the final limits of the forest nor deciding whether the population settlements inside the forest would be displaced or not, how and under what conditions. From 2005 to 2007, the autochthons who did not have fields inside the forest also started farming there so that they would also be eligible for eventual compensation. As specified by P50, a former RDP leader, from 'that period everyone was farming inside the forest. The only difference was that the autochthons were spending their nights in their houses in the village while the migrants had their homes inside the forest' (Ouagadougou 07-07-2012). These events are essential to recall as it will help to categorize the migrants, the land tenure relations binding them to the autochthons and the roots of the contestations that will raise under the forest conservation project led by an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO), invited in 2007 by the mayor to continue with the RDP activities. The INGO funds the project and one of their employees, who was an outsider to the area, led the implementation. It is under this INGO forest conservation project that the events at the core of the paper will take place. Below we present an account of the relevant institutions, the actors involved in the project's implementation, the significance of their role and their accountability duties to the population.

The project leaders held information and consultation workshops with local, regional and national level actors to discuss upcoming activities. These actors worked within three main institutional structures; each of them played a prominent role in the process and advocated for or against the project: First, the decentralized authorities include the deputy who will advocate against the project by supporting the resistance of those opposing the forest zoning. The mayor, the municipal councillors will authorize and coordinate the project's implementation in the villages. The village development committee (CVD) on behalf of the villagers will be involved in the forest delimitation. Second, the State appointed officials namely the high commissioner and the national gendarmerie representative, brought in the conflict's litigation will work for the respect of the forest planning as set by the project. The forest officer on duty will be involved in the bulldozing of the forest boundaries. Third, other local institutions including the customary or village chief and the president of the forest management group (GGF) will represent the village interests during the project's meetings but later in the course of the conflict, they will shift sides and support the project. The village delegate, siding against the migrants' resistance, will also be involved in the contested forest delimitation. While the decentralized authorities are downwardly answerable to their constituents, the State appointed officials are upwardly accountable to the State. The customary body is subject to moral accountability to the whole village, whereas the community-based organization is only answerable to their members. These details on the actors and their advocacy regarding the project help better understand their stance and decisions throughout the conflict. The accountability flows are also worth mentioning, as they will determine the selection of the means used by the claimants and the choice of the local leader recipient.

5. Results

5.1. Formation of citizenship and the construction of conflict

5.1.1. Conflict evolution

On the issue of the forest area delimitation, the project made it clear

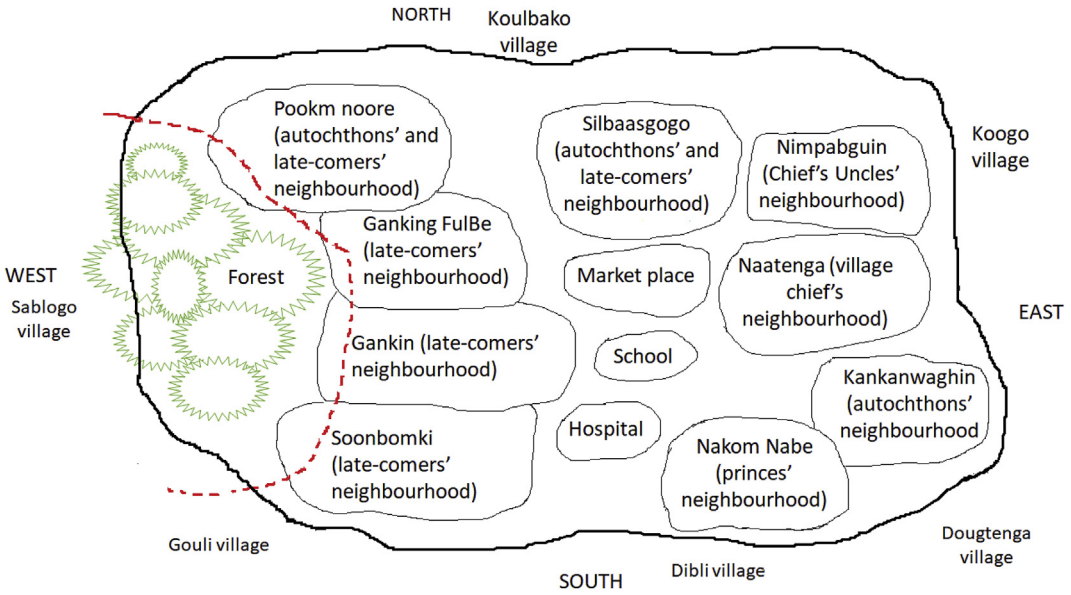

Fig. 3. Map of the village presenting the new forest delimitation in dotted line.

that they will build on the work already done by the former RDP and therefore respect the consensual existing forest limits. However, due to the degradation of the forest cover, the project asked for an extension of the forest area to meet the project cost effectiveness and the sustainability of the future forest conservation plan. The project leader (P49) explained:

On site, they [the villagers] saw that there was a significant change in the state of the forest since the end of the RDP. We told them that, 'As it is now, we cannot keep the former forest limits because you now have schools and wells inside the forest. Now, as you still want to preserve, show us what portions you want to spare for the forest?' Afterwards, we received the minutes of their meetings, the forest limits were determined and we moved to the materialization and the mapping of these limits. At that point, those who were inside these limits knew that they must leave the forest. (Ouagadougou 09-05-2012).

Some villages accepted this request and enlarged the limits of the forest in their area and some others, such as the village of Koulbako, did not. In the village of Tensobtenga, our study site, a violent conflict grew as the villagers claimed that the bulldozer sent by the project to mark the final boundaries of the forest had taken more lands than what had been agreed to release for the forest. Uncovering what happened in Tensobtenga during this process is necessary to understand the roots of the conflict that emerged and how it relates to political belonging and citizenship.

In December 2008, the forest officer's team recorded the GPS coordinates of the forest boundaries in Tensobtenga and they used red marks on the bordering trees to refresh those limits with the guidance of the two representatives of the village: the former CVD president and the village delegate, who were appointed because they had led the forest delimitation process during the former RDP. In 2009 when the project sent the bulldozer to the area to mark on the ground the final forest boundaries, again these two representatives were to direct the bulldozing as the forest officer explained:

The residents, the locals, led us and fortunately, there were still red marks that showed the forest limits. However, as the contractor [the bulldozer] could not do the work [the bulldozing] without technical assistance the first and second day I attended. On the third day, I had a workshop in Tenkodogo; therefore, the village representatives themselves led the remaining work. Just after the bulldozing complaints came to us because the villagers realized that, the forest limits were changed. After my investigation, it turned out that those who helped us do the job had an apparent desire to include in the forest area the fields of some people with whom they had a dispute within the village. Since we did not know the real limits, we relied on them who knew the limits because they had led the activities at the time of the RDP. (E45, Kaya, 11-11-2013).

In other words, the forest area in the village was extended at the expense of the agricultural and grazing areas. Our respondents unanimously attributed this change to the village's delegate, as he was the only one person to represent the village in guiding the bulldozer that day. None of the interviewees had accused the second representative instead; he was among those who had lost fields. Thus, he further stood with those contesting these limits. We will elaborate more on the case of this actor in the next section as an example of how a late-comer migrant becomes a citizen. For now, as A1, an autochthon farmer reported: 'The village delegate, one of the village representatives, decided on his own to change the forest limits without prior consultation, neither with the village chief, the municipal councillor nor with the forest management group' (Tensobtenga, 10-04-2013). The mayor asserted that the forest boundaries were not changed and that the people farming inside the forest only had usufruct rights; therefore, they knew that they could be removed at any time from the forest. The project's leader also argued that they had negotiated with the people on the forest conservation process for a long time and that the local government and customary authorities were committed to provide farmlands to those affected. Therefore, they claimed not to understand this upcoming conflict. In addition to the internal disputes, the informants pointed out that the village chief and the CVD president were the only ones invited to the workshops with the project. The peasants settled inside the forest were not involved in these discussions. Since their fate was not decided within the RDP, these peasants were not expecting the current decision that would expel them from the forest and especially not without any compensation, as they explained in the interviews.

This background information contextualizes the root reasons for the emerging conflict and helps to explain how in its escalation identity and belonging (ethnicity, the status of residence) became central features (Fig. 3).

5.1.2. *Legitimizing late-comer migrants as citizens of the village*

The village of Tensobtenga is attractive to population migration for people from the arid northern and eastern parts of the country who move in search of fertile agricultural and grazing lands. The village chief administers the people but shares land rights with other lineages. The Yana ethnic group are the autochthons whereas the Moose and

Fulbe are the regular migrants. The migrants' arrival and settlement in the area establishes dyadic social relations between them and the autochthons lands' holders. For example, a newly arrived migrant seeks a host family in the village to introduce his land demand to the village chief or other landowners. After customary rituals, he gets a piece of land to settle in and farm for an undetermined period. This land allocation contract or *land mentoring* (Zougouri, 2006; Léonard et al., 2012) though oral and fragile is the material base of the acknowledgment of migrants as members or citizens of the village. It furthers various socio-economic and political relationships where the autochthons remain the commanders; as a municipal leader A46 explained, 'The forestland discussions concern only the autochthons, because with us, once you as a migrant arrived here and we gave you a piece of land, you no longer have free decision making. What the autochthons tell you to do, that is what you do' (Ouagadougou, 23-05-2012).

Besides the regular migrants Moose and Fulbe, in Tensobtenga there are Yana migrants from neighbouring municipalities. Though sharing the same ethnicity as the autochthons, the village chief noted that 'These Yana migrants came here a long time ago asking our parents for agricultural lands. They first sought the hospitality of the chief of Lalgaye who recommended them to our chief, my father' (Tensobtenga 15-01-2013). Thus, the migrant population can be categorized into two groups: the late-comers including the Yana migrants and certain Moose that settled in the village before 1984 and the Democratic and Popular Revolution in Burkina Faso (1984–1987). The latest-comers are essentially Moose and Fulbe that settled in the village after 1984, thanks to the agrarian and land reform law, *la Reforme Agraire et Foncière*, stating that lands belong to the State and therefore no Burkinabè can be prevented from getting access to it for livelihood's purposes. What is important here is that, though migrants have limited authority as argued above, they still have agency that helps uncovering the formation of citizenship through the example of the late-comer migrants who were acknowledged and legitimized as citizens of the village.

Practically, the late-comers have their neighbourhood and farmlands near the village and inside the forest; the latest-comers do not own land near the village but only inside the forest. Consequently, this last community left the area after the forest bulldozing, as they did not have other lands to farm in the village. They did not engage in resistance either as the forest officer argued:

When the order of leaving the forest has come, the migrants obeyed immediately without questioning it. I am talking about the Moose who came from elsewhere. They sold their millet and moved from Tensobtenga. Some of them went to Saponé and others to Leo. I knew a family from Sanmentenga that even had to leave the grave of their father that was next to their house inside the forest. (Kaya, 11-11-2013).

In contrast, the late-comer migrants who also borrowed the lands were so well integrated into the village's social and political life that the other villagers perceived them as full citizens enjoying the same privileges as the autochthons. They were consulted in the decision making over the village affairs and the village chief even appointed some of them to higher functions. For example, a late-comer migrant was appointed as the president of the Village Development Council (CVD). Thus, he represented the village in various instances:

He was the one who led all the activities of the RDP in the area. He is also the one who represented the village in showing the first limits of the forest to the RDP. We came to consider them as autochthons because they had been born there. (A44, Lalgaye 19-06-2012).

M4, also a late-comer migrant, was chosen as the president of the forest management group because:

The village chief and me—we get along very well. If there is anything morning or evening, he calls me. I am the president of the forest management group but I did not ask for it. The village chief thought that I could be patient with people; therefore, he appointed me. He asked the people if they agreed and they said yes. (Tensobtenga, 19-01-2013).

When the final demarcation of the forest occurred, this group of citizens lost their fields under cultivation and they stood up against the boundaries and the order of ceasing all agricultural activities in the forest demarcated area:

After the first delimitation [during the RDP], our fields nearby the forest were spared. However, the final [current] delimitation took over those fields and included them in the forest area. Even if they had asked half of our people to leave the forest and half of them to stay, that would have been better for us. We would have shared these fields among ourselves. (A37, Tensobtenga 07-03-2013).

When asked about the identity of the people opposing the forest limits, some argued that: 'those who were born in the village, the Yana and others—they refuse to leave the forest' (E45, Kaya, 11-11-2013). A44 also argued that 'Those who refused to leave the forest are not the true autochthons of Tensobtenga. They came to negotiate land for agriculture and they took here as their residence. These people came from Komienga' (Lalgaye 19-06-2012).

Nevertheless, why did this group of people feel entitled to contest the forest decision? A43 affirmed that they are 'people who came from elsewhere; we welcomed them and with the marriage relationships woven between us throughout history, they thought that they had become autochthons, landowners' (Lalgaye, 21-01-2013).

These actors also considered themselves as autochthons because of their integration into the village life and the fact that they were born there. A18 reaffirmed 'I am an autochthon from here because I was born here' (Tensobtenga, 25-2-2013). A31 also argued that 'We were born here and we grew up here and we cultivated the forest that belongs to all of us and there was no dispute among us' (Tensobtenga, 02-03-2013).

5.2. Demonstrating citizenship and conflict manifestation

Being recognized by others as a citizen and seeing one's self as such as demonstrated above opens spaces for the exercise of citizenship through claim makings. The group of citizens in this journey employed various strategies to make their case. They started by negotiations with an alignment of the local leaders such as the village chief and the mayor of the municipality. A19, one of the movement's leaders, recalled:

We went to the village chief [of Tensobtenga] and asked him to help us recover our fields because the situation was going to be difficult for us and our families. Therefore, he mobilized all the head of households. They escorted him to the town hall in Lalgaye about 17 km away to seek the mayor's intervention to reduce the new forest boundaries set by the bulldozer. In seeing such an energetic crowd, the major became scared and refused to receive us. We went there again the next day and he finally agreed to meet with us. He said that it was too late to reconsider the forest limits and that we should have contested them at the time of marking the boundaries with paint and bulldozing [four months earlier]. We did not get any prior information regarding this painting and bulldozing operation. I had seen it because I was in the forest by coincidence that day. The mayor reminded us that the project reiterates its goal of late 2010 for the end of agriculture, livestock, logging and hunting within the forest boundaries. Through private exchanges, he was able to convince our village chief to accept the new boundaries and therefore our relocation from the forest. Thus, our village chief detached himself from the struggle and with him many of the villagers. This turn in the events brought a broad division among us. Thereafter, we walked with knives, ready at any moment to defend ourselves. (Tensobtenga 26-02-2013).

The village chief left the movement and rallied the position of the mayor and the village councillor to endorse the forest boundaries and thereby support the project. A considerable number of the villagers also joined his camp. Among them was M4, a late-comer migrant who witnessed this shift:

I had to flee to Djidjega because of the tension. Any time I came to the market, in the neighbourhood men, women, and children were

insulting me all the time. From the beginning, I knew that we would no longer have the forest to cultivate since I attended some meetings in Bissiga, Lalgaye and Tenkodogo. The way I saw the planning of the project's activities, I knew that there would be no hope for us continuing to cultivate inside the forest. That is why I decided to leave the contestations and follow the village chief and the project to gain at least some upcoming benefits. If you failed behind, you must not fail ahead. (M4, Tensobtenga, 19-01-2013).

The local leaders were subjected to rumours, criticism, insults and attempts to damage their reputation. A44, the municipal councillor reported:

They said that I, the chief of Tensobtenga and the chief of Lalgaye, had sold the forest to rich people and then asked them [the migrants] to leave the area. When I was passing by, people would complain and some would insult me looking for war in the village. (Lalgaye 19-06-2012).

This leader also suffered threats while patrolling the forest:

We were surrounded. In the meantime, one farmer passed behind me with a machete. Had not a forest officer turned and covered my back, he would have chopped me and run away. Even today, there are neighbourhoods in the village where I cannot go safely. (Lalgaye 19-06-2012).

The forest officer was also threatened with death:

They almost managed to kill me in the forest. I got a call from the governor asking me to go and inform these people that they must leave the forest but they did not want to leave. Afterwards, the gendarmerie came from Ouargaye and I accompanied them in the forest. The first farmer we met was sowing with his wife inside the forest. When we asked him, he responded that we should go and ask the deputy; 'He is the one who advised me to continue to cultivate here and that no one could prevent me from doing so'. The gendarmerie arrested him and he was released afterwards. When I departed from them, a group of 10 people came to encircle me with machetes saying that they had decided that if a forest officer comes here, he must be killed. I was standing there in their midst with my PA [weapon] ready to defend myself. I advised them to observe 6 m from me; otherwise, I would have to shoot. I intimidated them like that and at some point, I opened a debate. I joked with them to cushion the shock. It began to go well until another group of people arrived saying that it was death or nothing. What saved me was an old man who came to take me out of there. (E45, Kaya, 11-11-2013).

Following the failure to get the case through negotiations with local level authorities, the claimants shifted their strategy in taking the case to higher regional level authorities such as the deputy referred to earlier and the high commissioner to judge the case. A31, another leader of the movement reported:

We decided to go forward with our fight because the fields we have outside the forest are now insufficient. The autochthons gave up because they have been guaranteed other land unlike us migrants even though our ancestors came here over a hundred years ago. We called on the deputy who is from our village of origin, Komienga. In June 2009, we also brought the case to the high commissioner in Ouargaye. He received us twice and congratulated us for our endurance. After our 2009 harvest, we were still awaiting the verdict. Meanwhile, we began to sow in the forest for the 2010 crop season. At our third meeting with the high commissioner in August 2010, he also invited the project's leader and the mayor. Only the high commissioner spoke. The mayor wrote something on a piece of paper and passed it to the high commissioner who immediately suspended the meeting. When we came back, the high commissioner gave his verdict that we must leave the forest without any delay. We begged him, the mayor, the village chief and the project leader to allow us to harvest this year with the promise of not cultivating inside the forest anymore. They refused. I kept working on my farm. One day as I was there, the gendarmerie handcuffed and took me to Ouargaye; and at the same time, they brought cattle to graze and destroy all our crops—rice, maize, sorghum—that were almost ready for harvest. After pressure from my companions, they released me the next day. Just after these events, one of our leaders died violently hitting a tree with his motorbike, maybe because he swore on the village's land while threatening the village chief. Now, we are no more interested in what is happening in the forest. (Tensobtenga 02-03-2013).

Other means used to curb the project's decision on the forest boundaries included the use of magic. As witnessed by A42, the protestors have:

Buried black oxen alive in the forest. They also abandoned at the entrance of the village an entire goat slaughtered, stitched with needles and roped in a red piece of cloth as a sacrifice. They wanted to stop the enforcement of the relocation order issued by the project. (Tensobtenga 19-01-2013).

Since these claim-making tactics and strategies were meant to influence the leaders and hold them accountable for their actions in forest planning, it is important to uncover the extent to which these leaders were in fact influenced.

5.3. Reformation of citizenship in the conflict's aftermath

5.3.1. Changes in forest decision makers' legitimacy and authority

The leaders who were held accountable by the claimants for their stand in the forest affairs observed gains and losses in their authority in the local arena, especially the Tensobtenga village chief, the delegate, the mayor and his municipal councillor and the deputy. Other leaders, namely the State representatives, experienced no changes in their authority. In the results presented below, we asked the leaders to discuss the changes in their legitimacy in the eyes of their constituencies and in their capacity to engage with them in the forest-related activity and in the community in general. We also asked our interviewees to rank their perceived changes in the leader's authority in the local area (Table 1).

The Tensobtenga village chief acknowledged a decrease in his legitimacy, influence and authority in the village. As he confessed, 'I cannot mobilize the entire population now because some thought that I had abandoned them and they do not trust me anymore' (Tensobtenga, 23-06-2012). As this leader failed to prevent the loss of agricultural and pasture lands for his population, A5 stated, 'He has no more respect because by him accepting the forest limits, people accuse him of treason' (Tensobtenga, 14-02-2013). A2, an autochthon added that 'he is still chief because of the customs; otherwise, he does not have power as he had before' (Tensobtenga 18-01-2013). M25 a migrant farmer added, that he is 'weakened because the population is not happy with him and he is powerless. His strength is the population. If the population is weakened, he is weakened' (Tensobtenga 28-02-2013). M4 another migrant clarified: 'I remember every time the chief came to visit us in the forest, he left with hands filled with gifts. For his customary festival, we were sending our contributions as well. He has none of these now' (Tensobtenga 19-01-2013). He also no longer has extended control over his population because of the division induced by the conflict and he cannot mobilize the whole community for the forest-related activities.

Table 1
Assessment of changes in power relations.

Leading authorities	Shift in power relation following the project' events (in %, N = 40)		
	Strengthen	Weakened	No change
Local elected government	95	3	2
Village chief	18	77	5
Village delegate	5	95	–
Forest officer	65	–	35
Others (high commissioner, gendarmerie)	–	–	100

The village delegate accused of misguiding the bulldozing and changing the forest limits has lost his leadership and authority in the village. He is no longer consulted in the forest affairs and 'there is a great resentment towards him and he has no more respect here' said M9 (Tensobtenga, 21-01-2013). According to A23, a late-comer migrant, 'previously respected and feared, now, he cannot mobilize the community for whatever common interest activities. He is the laughing stock of the whole village' (Tensobtenga, 28-02-2013).

At the municipal level, the local government mainly, the Mayor and the Tensobtenga councillor gained in legitimacy and authority. They were both re-elected during the municipal elections of December 2012. The councillor appreciated this and said, 'I am respected and called to solve the slightest problem because I kept silent about the insults while looking for social peace. I was also able to get two new wells for the neighbourhood of those relocated from the forest' (A44, Lalgaye 21.01.2013).

In contrast, the deputy who supported the resistance came out of the events weakened. He was not re-elected because 'he chose the wrong camp by supporting the protest that finally failed. Therefore, he could not realize his promises to the people' (A43, Lalgaye 21-01-2013). A leader of the protests also commented that '[we] failed in making our case, yet it is as if it was the deputy who failed because he supported us' (A31, Tensobtenga 02-03-2013). Throughout the project implementation, the governor questioned this leader on his responsibility in supporting the protests. Since then, he gradually ceased supporting the resistance. Here, the results of these elections, however, cannot be seen entirely as a negative sanction imposed by the people of Tensobtenga since they were not the sole voters but they are indicators of the evolution of this institutional actor.

The forest officer declared no change in his authority, as he was the State representative and thereby mandated to support the forest conservation activities planned by the project. However, our interviewees reported an increase in his authority, as he remained the first supervisor of the forest. Other leaders such as the high commissioner, the gendarmerie as outsiders and the State appointed officers were not affected or sanctioned by the population. These differentiated changes depict how the conflict and the exercise of citizenship not only effectively influenced the leaders but also foreshadowed the coalition of belonging and the emerging of a "denizenship".

5.3.2. Emerging forms of belonging: les déguerpis

The same way the claim-making influenced the leaders, the citizens who engaged in these processes observed a reinforcement or weakening of their belonging as citizens of the village. The citizens who thoroughly conducted the protest and lost the case, in the end, were subject to exclusion and denial of their identity as full citizens. They are now labelled as the 'troublemakers' in the village and they are called *les déguerpis,* those evicted from the forest. They are no longer informed of the forest-related activities nor do they participate in the annual reforestation activities as M25 witnessed:

I have never set foot in the forest since we were evicted from there. I ignore what is happening there and I am no longer interested. I only heard that the mayor sponsored some people each rainy season to plant trees there. We are not informed about the village's events either. We only seek and share information with our fellow *déguerpis* people. (Tensobtenga 28-02-2013).

Those affected by this conflict are reluctant to enquire about the forest or the promise of land distribution as argued by A19: 'Since this conflict, I am afraid to ask anything in relation to the forest, because I would be accused of being one of those *déguerpis* people who do not like peace and always seek troubles in the village' (Tensobtenga 26-02-2013).

In fact, the village chief has distributed lands to those who lost their fields but none of the labelled *les déguerpis* was served. They are farming their old fields left near the village as A40 specified:

All they told us was to leave the forest. We, in fact, left the forest under duress. What will allow us today to stand in front of the chief and ask him for the lands they promised? If we had left the forest in good humour, we could continue this kind of discussion. However, as this has not been the case, we cannot go back to see the chief anymore. The lands that they wanted to distribute were not enough for themselves and they even fought in the bush while sharing it. Nobody got a piece of land here. Nobody has ever asked us to come and get land either. (Tensobtenga 08-03-2013).

Some of those who led the protests denied their belonging to the village and therefore stopped participating in the market and other social events. The village chief regretfully acknowledged this fragmentation of identity within his population: 'Today these people are out of the forest but a grudge remains between them and us. Some of them decided to go and register themselves in Komienga. Though they are still resident here, they no longer belong to the village' (Tensobtenga 26-06-2012).

Among others is the case of A31, one of the leaders of the protests. When asked about him in the marketplace five years later in September 2017, we were first met with silence and a few hours later after insisting, A42 the current president of the village development council told us that, 'I do not know if he is going to visit the market. Neither can I advise someone to guide you to him because we do not deal with him anymore' (Tensobtenga 13-09-2017). We then asked M4, one of his companions who also joined the protests but stopped halfway; he also told us that he could not guide us to him because he wanted to avoid troubles in the village. When we finally managed to get to him, he confirmed that since the forest demarcation and the conflict's events:

I no longer visit the market. Since I left the forest eight years ago, there has never been an exchange of words between the chief and me. I never went to greet him even once. Because if I go there, they will use the past grudges against me. I must know how to carry myself. We cannot go either to the mayor or to the forest officer to complain because the autochthons here are going to treat us worse than what they did before. They will argue that the conflict is over and that we want to bring up the subject again and create problems in the village. We are afraid to talk about this issue of land again. (Tensobtenga 13-09-2017).

6. Discussion

What gave those late-comers, now called *les déguerpis*, the confidence in the first place to stand and challenge as citizens those who govern and the new demarcations of the forest conservation project? This question is legitimate as those that resisted were initially late-comers, migrants to the community, with limited-to-no land rights as opposed to the autochthons (Turner and Moumouni, 2018). Our findings indicate that their claim-making was based on their citizenship, acquired through shared history and residency and—at least initially—shared interests with autochthons and local authorities (Ribot, 2007). Moreover, this *local citizenship* (Lund, 2011) was not static but was reconfirmed and expanded beyond what was granted locally, as the 'new citizens' claim-making was taken seriously and considered across levels of hierarchy during the conflict. These findings are in strong contrast to the well-established literature focusing on autochthony as a political and claim-making strategy over resources in exclusion of migrants declared as non-autochthons or 'strangers' (Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005). While Hochet (2011) acknowledges a plurality or spectrum of peasants' citizenship, he maintains this dichotomy of autochthon versus migrant where he refers to the autochthons as 'maximal' and the non-autochthons as 'minimal' citizens. Hence, we argue that overlooking the nuances of citizenship and maintaining a dichotomous perspective as still found in agrarian studies and environmental politics literature may risk undermining the agency expressed by those who are already in a socially or culturally disadvantaged position (e.g., migrants) but have been successfully claimed citizenship.

Citizenship including rural citizenship empowers (Woods, 2006). It opens space for protests and gives the rights to shape citizenship itself.

The expressions of citizenship take multiple forms, ranging from being an *activist* citizen referring to those who create new spaces to make their claims like the claimants in Tensobtenga, to being *active* citizens, those who execute citizenship within existing spaces (Isin, 2008). Beyond what Oyono (2004) pointed out in a case from southern Cameroon, the means used to make claims and express citizenship in our case included threats, magic, violence and attempts to damage leaders' reputation. However, authorities rejected the claims and decided in favour of the forest conservation project. What strengthened the position of the project over those that expressed their citizenship and claimed the forestland as theirs? Our findings indicate that over time the project was successful in gaining legitimacy and support from authorities across all levels for the protection of forests as a 'noble' cause and a necessary choice for sustainable livelihoods beyond individual interests. Moreover, what began as resistance against the underlying structural problems with top-level decision making over forestland use and a questioning of the legitimacy of an international environmental NGO within these processes, had turned into a localized conflict between citizens and local authorities. This process of rendering the conflict local, non-structural and non-political, might explain the overall outcome of the conflict.

Those citizens that resisted but lost the case and therefore were evicted from the forest are now called *les déguerpis* and have been turned into *denizens* (Turner, 2016). Here, the concept of denizen transcends the scope of first and late comers and forest conservation to stress the overall rural politics. What was claimed, acted upon and lost is first the material foundation of the membership to the village such as access to land resources. Second, it is the sense of identity and political belonging and third, the entitlement to be political, act and curb the forest planning in the sense of one's own interests. This finding confirms Isin and Turner (2007) and Moro (2016) who argued that demonstrating citizenship de facto implies forms of confrontation that might put citizenship at risk. This also confirms the well-known fragile and continuously under construction nature of citizenship (Bellamy, 2008). The future will determine how the denizens will cope with their new status and whether they will renew their claims for citizenship.

Furthermore, the findings have broader theoretical and conceptual implications on how we analyse environmental politics and how the concept of citizenship helps to uncover environmental conflict as struggles over political belonging, much beyond the natural resources' boundaries. We can infer that struggles over the environment are not only about access to resources and benefits but also struggles for political belonging and citizenship. These struggles are also more than mere resistance but historical struggles for or the continual undermining of citizenship. Finally, understanding such evolvement and dynamics of citizenship over time and throughout environmental conflict sheds critical light on how environmental access is ultimately claimed and sustained.

7. Conclusion

This paper showed how forest conservation politics reach beyond the forest resources to produce, adjust and reform intermittent forms of citizenship in rural Burkina Faso. Through the lens of citizenship conceptualized as membership, identity and political belonging and the ability to act and be seen as a full citizen, the paper showed how citizenship is acquired, demonstrated and ultimately lost over forestland conflict. This illustrated how citizenship is dynamic, fragile and always under construction.

The findings imply that citizenship is also a rural phenomenon and scholars analysing ongoing environmental struggles and focusing on conflicts in the context of forest conservation will need to pay even more attention to citizenship formation and reformation and the underlying interests, strategies and opportunities as well as the risks those conflicts might bear. Hence, it suggests a novel approach to the analysis of environmental politics. Our case study strongly supports ideas of environmental conflicts being more than struggles for a natural resource but may represent claims for political belonging. They entail more than mere resistance but are socio-political struggles embedded in people's history and experiences. Overlooking or ignoring these aspects of the strategic acts of those employing citizenship to influence decision-making and to hold decision makers accountable might lead not only those managing such projects but also those studying them to undermine citizens' agency.

Declarations of interest

None.

Acknowledgements

For their financial support and guidance, we are grateful to the Responsive Forest Governance Initiative in Africa (RFGI) funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Building Bio carbon and Rural Development in West Africa (BIODEV) funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. We thank Fobissie Kalame, Arttu Malkamäki and Ann Degrande for their comments on earlier versions of this paper; and Marlene Broemer for her support in editing. We are in deep gratitude the people of Tensobtenga village for their hospitality and participation in the research. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their pertinent comments and suggestions.

References

Aurenhammer, Peter K., 2016. Network analysis and actor-centred approach—a critical review. For. Pol. Econ. 68, 30–38.
Bellamy, Richard, 2008. Citizenship: a Very Short Introduction, vol. 192 Oxford University Press.
Ceuppens, Bambi, Geschiere, Peter, 2005. Autochthony: local or global? New modes in the struggle over citizenship and belonging in Africa and Europe. Annu. Rev. Anthropol. 34, 385–407.
John, Clarke, Coll, Kathleen, Dagnino, Evelina, Neveu, Catherine, 2017. Disputing Citizenship. Policy Press.
Colvin, R.M., Bradd Witt, G., Lacey, Justine, 2015. The social identity approach to understanding socio-political conflict in environmental and natural resources management. Global Environ. Change 34, 237–246. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.07.011.
Elo, Satu, Kääriäinen, Maria, Kanste, Outi, Pölkki, Tarja, Utriainen, Kati, Kyngäs, Helvi, 2014. Qualitative content analysis. Sage Open 4 (1) 2158244014522633.
Foucault, Michel, 1982. The subject and power. Crit. Inq. 8 (4), 777–795.
Hirsch, Cecilie, 2017. Between resistance and negotiation: indigenous organisations and the Bolivian State in the case of TIPNIS. J. Peasant Stud. 1–20.
Hochet, Peter, 2011. Une citoyenneté paysanne Ethnographie comparée parmi les Minyanka et les Bwaba (Mali, Burkina Faso). Citizen. Stud. 15 (8), 1031–1045.
Hoffman, John, 2004. Citizenship beyond the State. Sage.
Hogg, Michael A., 2016. Social identity theory. In: Understanding Peace and Conflict through Social Identity Theory, vols. 3–17 Springer.
Homer-Dixon, Thomas F., 1991. On the threshold: environmental changes as causes of acute conflict. Int. Secur. 16 (2), 76–116.
Isin, Engin F., Turner, Bryan S., 2007. Investigating citizenship: an agenda for citizenship studies. Citizen. Stud. 11 (1), 5–17.
Isin, Engin F., 2008. Theorizing acts of citizenship. In: Isin, Engin F., Nielsen, Greg M. (Eds.), Acts of Citizenship. Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK, pp. 15–43.
Krippendorff, Klaus, 2004. Reliability in content analysis. Hum. Commun. Res. 30 (3), 411–433. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2004.tb00738.x.
Lentz, Carola, 2013. Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa: Natives and Strangers. Indiana University Press.
Léonard, Eric, Chaveau, Jean-Pierre, Kaboré, Ramané, 2012. Enjeux fonciers et dynamiques des rapports sociaux en milieu rural ouest-africain. Territoires d'Afrique (4).
Libiszewski, Stephan, 1991. What is an environmental conflict? J. Peace Res. 28 (4), 407–422.
Lund, Christian, 2011. Property and citizenship: conceptually connecting land rights and belonging in Africa. Afr. Spectr. 46 (3), 71–75.
Mamdani, Mahmood, 1996. Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism. Princeton University Press.
Maxwell, Joseph A., 2010. Using numbers in qualitative research. Qual. Inq. 16 (6), 475–482.
Moro, Giovanni, 2016. Democratic citizenship and its changes as empirical phenomenon. SocietàMutamentoPolitica 7 (13), 21–40.
Oyono, Phil René, 2004. Assessing accountability in Cameroon's local Forest management. Are representatives responsive. Afr. J. Political Sci. (AJPS) 9 (1), 126–136.
Rancière, Jacques, 1998. The cause of the other. Parallax 4 (2), 25–33.

Ribot, Jesse C., 2004. Waiting for democracy." the Politics of Choice in Natural Resource Decentralization. World Resources Institute, Washington DC.
Ribot, Jesse C., 2007. Representation, citizenship and the public domain in democratic decentralization. Development 50 (1), 43–49.
Schedler, Andreas, 1999. The Self-restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
Scott, James C., 1990. Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts. Yale university press.
Sparke, Matthew, 2004. Political geography: political geographies of globalization (1)–dominance. Prog. Hum. Geogr. 28 (6), 777–794.
Tajfel, Henri, 1974. Social identity and intergroup behaviour. Information (International Social Science Council) 13 (2), 65–93.
Trudeau, Dan, 2012. Constructing citizenship in the shadow state. Geoforum 43 (3), 442–452.
Turner, Bryan S., 2016. We are all denizens now: on the erosion of citizenship. Citizen. Stud. 20 (6-7), 679–692.
Turner, Matthew D., Moumouni, Oumarou, 2018. Mosaics of property: control of village land in West Africa. J. Peasant Stud. 1–25.
Werbner, Pnina, 1998. Exoticising citizenship: anthropology and the new citizenship debate. Canberra Anthropol. 21 (2), 1–27.
Woods, Michael, 2008. Social movements and rural politics. J. Rural Stud. 24 (2), 129–137.
Woods, Michael, 2006. Political articulation: the modalities of new critical politics of rural citizenship. In: Handbook of Rural Studies, pp. 457–471.
Zougouri, Sita, 2006. Tutorat et pratiques foncières: migrants entre pouvoir de la terre et pouvoir des “dieux” à Bougnounou (Province du Ziro–Burkina Faso. In: Paper presented at the International colloquium “Les frontières de la question foncière–At the frontier of land issues”, Montpellier.