



## Discourse and the Inclusion of Rural/Indigenous Communities in Environmental Governance: Insights of Selected Grass field Communities in Cameroon

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**Abstract:** *Cameroon is fondly referred to as Africa in miniature. This is due to the fact that she encompasses a cross section of the attributes and potentials which exist in other African communities. One of these is the richness of her biodiversity and climatic features which from a general consideration, are degenerating over time. This paper undertakes a discursive appraisal of the dynamics of environmental governance at an indigenous level in N.W. Cameroon. It seeks to critique the ways in which traditional or indigenous stakeholders interpret issues of environmental relevance as opposed to the modern outlook. It acknowledges that environmental degradation is still a persistent concern and interprets it as an interdisciplinary issue. This paper which aims at critiquing the relevance of language in use to environmental governance is of the major hypothesis that language use enables us to decipher inherent ideologies that motivate human interaction with nature and consequently the environment. This line of motivation if well analysed, can offer a meaningful leeway towards negotiating acceptable behaviour change from grassroots communities for an improved ecological impact. A Critical Discourse Study therefore offers a suitable framework for such discernment, with the specific approach of this paper being the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). Using both print media and oral data, this article reviews the **dominant discursive strategies** of the texts within the geographical context of selected grass field communities of the North West region of Cameroon, and equally undertakes a **socio-diagnostic, discourse immanent, and perspective critique** of the situation. It equally cites embedded implications of power and dominance and therefore concludes in favour of a more meaningful and inclusive synergy between the different orders of discourse which could help to improve on the present picture.*

**Keywords:** *Discourse; indigenous communities; Environmental Governance; Critical Discourse Studies (CDS).*

### 1. INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND / CONTEXT/

A vast range of issues have placed the environment at the fore-front of societal concerns especially in such domains as education, research, the media, government policy, and many others. The rural sector remains a domain where people's livelihoods are invariably linked to the natural endowments around them, especially, the land, the flora and the fauna. These are some of the realities within which this paper was conceived. Understanding this background is very important in this paper because it guides the choice of textual data suitable for an understanding of the issue, the contexts of their production and other previous texts referred back to (Koller 2009). Again, it is noteworthy that texts are typically produced, distributed and received in the context of social relations of some kind between text producer and text recipients. Furthermore, texts act as carriers for ideology (ibid).

More than ever before, there is a growing consciousness on the adverse trends in nature which collectively build up to environmental degradation. This growing human consciousness necessitates multi-sector, multi-racial, multidisciplinary and multidimensional interventions. To take the multi-racial dimension for instance, The African always prides himself of his culture being his identity. This in a way highlights the place of culture in the ultimate existence of the African. If this perspective were to be advanced and harnessed into ecological trajectories, then the green dream which the world (desperately) needs to harness would certainly witness a giant leap forth. For example, the Ubuntu Philosophy (coined from the Zulu phrase; 'ubuntu ugumuntu ngabantu'-Nkomo 1996) explained to mean 'I am because you are' captures the existential ideology of the people. In the light

of this example, if one *is* because others *are*, then my preoccupation in this paper is to argue that an effective indigenous approach to environmental conservation is that the notion of '*being*' can be reconstructed to convey an inherent environmental responsibility. This would be interpreted to mean that 'if I *am* because you *are*, then, in all that I do on *our* environment which can affect our common existence, I should consciously seek to protect either *your*, or *our* common interest since the two interests are inextricable'. This would be an example of how culture can be harnessed to foster ecological trajectories. It thus becomes incumbent on researchers to explore ways and means of exploring or harnessing aspects of such cultures through which to accommodate in whatever ways possible, the world's eco-hazardous trends. This means that any credible culture has potentials of impacting on the environment in a desired way. Put otherwise, this article is written on the premise that most African cultures are imbued with both eco-friendly and eco-hazardous tendencies alike. As such, indigenous communities stand a credible chance to contribute towards the protection of the environment and so need to be given more accent in this engagement. It is important for researchers from different shades of opinions and disciplines including those of language and communication, to get engaged on current human efforts to redress prevailing environmental hazards. Of course, cultural exigencies are expressed through **language** and other associated means of meaning-making or communication. As such, since the environmental dispositions of any given community are embedded in what they 'say', this leads to the conviction that **expression reflects mindset and mindset engenders action**. If this is the case, then one would suppose that judging from what one says the person's mindset can be altered or re-oriented and consequently their attitudes.

The above syllogism therefore can be brought home to the topic of this paper. This will mean that what is said and written by people in a specific community can help bring out their predispositions and biases towards nature or the environment and that when these predispositions are identified, attitude engineering to the benefit of the environment is possible. This, in my opinion, falls in line with assessing the role or impact that language plays, or can play in fostering environmental standards, or what it does to exacerbate the current environmental crises as the case may be. As such, our cultures, however green or '*anti*'-green they may be at moment, can be made greener for the betterment of the earth. All of these can be deduced through linguistic traces from a variety of data that appropriately reflects the traditional and official standpoints in Cameroon. It is for this reason that the print media is spotted as a medium that blends the traditional and official world views in Cameroon at a very pragmatic level.

In actual fact, most of what happens in the world is driven by worldviews likewise most of what happens in the environment. A World view as Carol Hill defines is 'the basic way of interpreting things and events that pervades a culture so thoroughly that it becomes a culture's concept of reality- what is good, what is important, what is sacred, what is real.' He argues that a world view is more than culture even though the distinction between the two can sometimes be subtle and he thinks that it extends to perceptions of time and space, of happiness and well-being and that 'the beliefs, values and behaviours of a culture stem directly from its worldview.' Such worldviews are both personal and collective as Craig Rusbult confirms in an online article .

*A persons worldview is affected by many factors- their inherited characteristics, background experiences, and life situations, the values, attitudes, and habits they have developed and more – and these vary from one person to another...world views (of different people) are shared , yet unique. Or could it be useful to think about an individual's world views (plural) instead of their worldview (singular)?*

*(accessed on 13<sup>th</sup>/11/ 14 at 4.00 pm.)*

This question of singularity or plurality is a direct pointer to the multiplicity of discourses or at least discursive variation that is anticipated from analysing the data in this work; variation because, world views are usually disparate. A particular aspect of this write up that warrants justification is that, the language through which these discursive postulations shall be illustrated is the English language which is one of Cameroons official languages and more precisely, the one with which this researcher identifies more closely. Furthermore, it is the language with which the issues are articulated on the official platform. Lastly, in as much as part of the primary data was collected in the mother tongue, it had to be transcribed into English for international comprehension.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Most of the debates and adaptive strategies on environmental challenges are negotiated on elitist platforms. Consequently, the interpretation, language, deliberations and resolutions are elitist to say the least, while their implementation follows in the main, a top-bottom approach. The environment unfortunately remains a persistent scourge according to scientific assessments, with the main cause attributed to anthropogenic forces. Yet, these anthropogenic forces have a high propensity to persist in the indigenous areas partly because of inherent multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary cultural imperatives. These cultural drives contribute towards propelling human interaction with nature for alternative reasons to environmental management or conservation.

### 1.2. Hypothesis

In this article, I uphold the view that the anthropocentric element which poses as a challenge in environmental management is exacerbated by opaque discursive factors in rural communities, one of which is the exclusion of grassroots potentials. A Critical Discourse Study helps debunk such contextual issues, improves on communication and offers prospects of behavior change.

**Theoretical framework:** Judging from the above intricacies, a suitable theoretical framework that discerns the complexities of the situation by examining what stakeholders have said or written through which study appropriate perspectives can be taken is Critical Discourse Studies. The specific approach chosen will be the Discourse Historical Approach. (Wodak and Mayer:)

### 1.3. Motivation

My motivation in this article stems immensely from two aspects: my activities as an environmental activist and my encounter with the work of Sara De Wit (2011), precisely her thesis in the AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE in LEIDEN University entitled, *AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE ENCOUNTER OF GLOBAL AND LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSES IN THE BAMENDA GRASSFIELDS, CAMEROON*. While I have always contemplated the link between my profession as an English Language and Literature teacher and my avocation as a horticultural landscape/environmental activist, De Wit (2011) reinforced my convictions that:

- The fight for environmental degradation is not an exclusive preserve of natural scientists but today, it is a concern for people of all walks of life.
- There is an African side of the environmental story; an indigenous or a grass root discourse which can enhance the battle for conservation if well exploited.

This article therefore combines the insights of an educationist, an environmentalist and an indigene and seeks to propose the latter as a useful tool for abating the global challenge of environmental degradation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned above, De Wit (2011) is a very resourceful and illuminating publication with information on the domain of traditional environmental discourse in the Bamenda Grass fields which is immensely true for the Bafut community. It explores the rather sketchy ‘discursive journey’ of globally constructed climate change discourses and their encounter with the ‘local’ and the different translation regimes through which the discourse flows. De Wit agrees with one of my motivations in arguing that climate change related research has been dominated by climatology and other natural sciences. While social sciences and the humanities were nearly absent in the debates on climate change (De Brujin & Van Dijk 2008), these disciplines are increasingly getting involved in this area of study. Even so, ‘very little or no concern at all has been expressed for a critical assessment of the social construction of climate change and thus for the impact of climate change discourses upon the local level.’ De Wit opines that all the talks, Earth Summits, proposed solutions, meetings and negotiations shape (our understanding) of the world. The social construction of reality is inextricably bound to the language that we use and the talks that we are engaged in. Put differently, “what we do about climate change depends on the stories that we tell about it, and as the stories change, the world changes too. (Onuf 2007: xi). It is essential to gain an insight into the stories that are being told, by and to whom and who are excluded from storytelling. What happens when global climate change discourses -which can be characterized as fairly alarming or apocalyptic messages – ‘travel’ from the global to the national and to the local level but only rarely travel back again.? And finally, what does it entail to “think globally and act locally “for a farmer in the Bamenda grass field?

Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) in *The Future of Ecocriticism* advocates a position in every literature department for a specialist in literature and environment and aspires to see candidates running on a green platform elected to the highest offices in our professional organizations. She stresses the need in future, to see ecocritical scholarship becoming ever more interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international;

*...ecocriticism has been predominantly a white movement. It will become a multi-ethnic movement when stronger connections are made between the environment and issues of social justice and when a diversity of voices are encouraged to contribute to the discussion... for environmental problems are now global in scale and their solution will require worldwide collaboration. (The Ecocriticism Reader xxiv).*

This article is bringing forth the indigenous potential as a contribution to the global platform.

Ernest Khalema in an article entitled *Infusing African Indigenous Knowledge in Global Environmental Discourse: Rethinking "Development" in South Africa* argues that

*As an attempt to "modernize" and "develop" their economies, desperate governments in the developing countries take ideological positions that are consistent with foreign interests and thus making them ideologically dependent on the West for their own development. As a result, they frame or construct their version of reality about their surroundings (in this case the natural environment) by delimiting what is important and meaningful for the majority in their own communities. These foreign constructs of reality (about the environment and development) are then adopted by governments that are eager to develop in their policies while ignoring or even devaluing local input and knowledge about development and its relation to the environment.(accessed online: June 10<sup>th</sup> 2017 at 2:00am)*

This position is illuminating to the context of this work especially in certain traits of the official discourse. A simple illustration can be in the case of the Cameroon government's advocacy for "clean energy" in spite of the fact that a majority of her population are below the poverty line with very little or average incomes and in some cases no incomes at all. Such people inevitably rely on such energy sources which they can obtain free of charge such as gathering wood for multiple domestic uses such as cooking or lighting. Clean energy will entail the use of such options as biogas, and hydro-electricity power which is far-fetched to the indigenous reality.

More literature on ecological awareness, context and discourse immensely validates the perspective of this article. *P2Pfoundation.net* is one of the sources which holds that ecological knowledge (as a natural scientific knowledge) is in principle not sufficient to solve many ecological problems and that it is incapable of meeting the environmental issues of contemporary culture, despite the fact that we apparently know why the number of species in the world is decreasing, the human population is growing...The solution of these problems in the view of the writer also requires in addition to the knowledge of ecological processes, an understanding of human behaviour, because the semiotic aspects of human-nature relationships are of great importance everywhere and these particularly are still not sufficiently taken into consideration or understood.

It is in this vein that this article takes interest in the behavioural dimension of the sampled population through their discourses on the environment to see how such a dimension can ameliorate environmental issues. While focusing on the Bafut people, the onus is to show how and what environmental discourses are embedded in their beliefs, customs and daily modes of life. True to the above intimation, this sees such a dimension as an imperative option towards a better understanding and resolution of environmental issues. According to a critical publication on *P2Pfoundation.net*;

*...there exist different types of cultures among them, some which have been able to create balanced relationships with nature and many others which automatically create environmental problems for themselves. Thus the understanding of both cultural and biological parts is relevant which means that cultural semiotics and ecology can constructively interact in the field. Consequently, ecosemiotics seems to be a possibility for facing these most important and most difficult challenges of the contemporary world. (online)*

To reiterate, it is because I subscribe to the relevance of context in communicating environmental issues that I have chosen to explore the ecosemiotics of an ethnic community in the Cameroon grass fields.

The idea of situating semiotics likewise ecosemiotics within a context is further advocated for by Buhler (1934:34-37) who holds that message transmitted in communication, is directed outside of the communicative situation and towards the context. Also the classical communication model of Roman Jakobson, asserts the relation between meaning and context by claiming that the referential function of communication is directed to the context. (Jakobson 1981:21). Also, to concur with Timo Maran, the question of context and its influence on the semiotic processes has in different forms been essential to many distinguished scholars who have been active in the border areas of semiotics. One of the best-known conceptualists, British language philosophers I.A Richards stresses the relevance of context in the determination of linguistic meaning. He writes:

“The effect of a word varies with the other words amongst which it is placed. What will be highly ambiguous by itself becomes definite in a suitable context. So it is throughout; the effect of any element depends upon the other elements present with it.” Richards (1938:178-179). From another angle, Maran (n.d.) quotes the translator, Eugene Nida has emphasized the importance of context in translation processes. According to his views, meaning of the words and texts can only be communicated in relation to specific situations, and in the process, context has the essential role. To describe the effect of context on the text, Nida distinguishes different types of contexts such as syntagmatic and paradigmatic contexts.

According to Jakobson, context must be either verbal or capable of being verbalized, i.e. accessible to the receiver. He holds that the openness of the communicative situation towards the surrounding world is still relevant regarding the possible ecological potential of semiotics. Contextual thinking has also served as a base for the works of interdisciplinary scholar Gregory Benson who says, ‘all communication necessitates context, [...] without context, there is no meaning. (Bateson 1980:18).

At this point, one notes that all the critics above are unanimous that the concepts of context and conceptualism seem to serve as possible ground for relating semiotics with ecology. Eugene Nida gives an example with many ecosemiotic associations by using the word, run whose possible meanings depend on our knowledge of different animal species. For instance sentences such as ‘the boy is running’, ‘the horse was running’ and the salmon is running, project different contexts because movement on two legs is different from the movement of a quadruped and different from movement with fins in water.

The above example is quite inspiring in the case of such expressions as ‘climate change’ as would very frequently be used in official environmental discourses but which manifests differently in different communities. While some are witnessing droughts, others are suffering from floods, others changing patterns of rainfall, and some alterations on crop productivity and so on. So the meaning of change in a concept as climate change is relative as opposed to being universal. That is why in this paper, the standpoint is that, linguistic traits in response to such environmental changes be explored in different discursive orders so that definitions of such concepts can be contextualized for a better practical response. Dryzek (2005) under the heading, *The Changing Terms of Environmental Politics* holds that over the years, the politics of the earth has featured a large and growing range of issues. The early concerns were with pollution, wilderness preservation, population growth, and depletion of natural resources. Over time these concerns have been supplemented by worries about energy supply, animal rights, species extinction, global climate change, depletion of the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere, toxic wastes, the protection of whole ecosystems, environmental justice, food safety, and genetically modified organisms. All these issues are interlaced with a range of moral and aesthetic questions about human livelihoods, public attitudes, and over proper relation to other entities on the planet...thus the whole environment is home to some heated debates and disputes ranging from the implementation of policy choices in particular localities to the arguments of philosophers debating the appropriate ethical position to apply to environmental affairs. The terms of these debates have changed substantially over time. Consider the following illustrations: once areas of marshy lands were called swamps. The only sensible thing to do with swamps was to drain them so the land could be put to useful purpose. Governments subsidized land owners to drain swamps. Today, we call these same areas wetlands and governments have enacted legislation to protect their value in providing habitat for wildlife, stabilization of ecosystems and absorption of pollutants. (Pg2)

These changing terms suggest an evolving official discourse which highlights the need for such an evolution to be harmonized. This can only be enhanced or ascertained by revisiting the different discursive orders as advocated for in this project.

Anne Cooper (2002) in a paper entitled *Contending Environmental Discourses: Multilateral Agencies, Social Movements and Water*, says ‘any water management system cannot simply treat water as a physical resource because culture does not treat water as a physical resource.’ Her paper considers water as a site where contending perceptions meet, and as a social and political resource. Water conflicts reflect the physical and symbolic character of water (ibid:1) She examines water as an environmental challenge highlighting the six-fold increase in water use in recent times and predicting that 4 billion people will live in conditions of severe water stress by 2025. Reference is made to Ismail Serageldin who has been one of the most important voices calling for attention to issues of water as saying that ‘if the wars of the last century were fought over oil, the wars of the next century will be fought over water ...unless we change our approach to managing this vital resource.’(19) Such intimations in the most part are global speculations and such knowledge either resides in exclusive elitist spheres or do not inspire an immediate impact to the grassroots indigene because, it descends to him as some form of external reality.

On a national platform, Serageldin’s position is very valid in as far as this write-up is concerned. Not only is Cameroon decrying the over 90 percent loss of water registered in Lake Chad, but the Bafut community has migrated from one water supply project scheme to another because of drying water sources. The digging of wells is fast gaining currency as more and more household that can afford for this option are resorting to domestic wells as a source of portable water and the less capable neighbouring residents leaning on them for the valuable resource both in urban and rural settings alike. In this project, we seek to understand how the Bafut community interprets this phenomenon in its diverse nature especially traditionally.

Furthermore, the mere idea of **contending Discourses**, Cooper (2002) is an affirmation to the fact that views on environmental issues are sometimes characterized by disparities. The idea of contending discourses on the environment mentioned in this work is therefore not an imagination. However, this work has a tilt from water as a focus, to land and the surroundings in exploring such contending environmental perceptions. It also focuses on a specific grassroots context, assessing the case of the grassroots customary dispositions.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- **The Choice of Data for Traditional Environmental Discourses**

Data from court proceedings from the Bafut customary court in N.W Cameroon was explored to represent the traditional legal perspective. The inaugural speech of the Cameroon traditional rulers association against climate change also offered perspectives from the traditional leadership position and finally, Focus Group Discussions from sampled grassroots actors.

Whereas these sources may in a hasty glance be regarded as material from diverse sources, on a careful consideration, and in line with the context and aims of this research paper, this happens to be a very harmonious combination. Firstly, this paper does not only seek to analyse discourse critically. Rather, it aims at first of all, identifying inherent discourses before analysing the major discourse in question. This calls for a broad base selection of the necessary data so that it shouldn’t be restrictive and possibly deficient. The environment can be considered a macrostructure. It is an interdisciplinary domain of life. Again, it is a rule-regulated domain in the national legislature. This means that issues and practices in this domain have some legal dimensions, be they obscured, overt or implied. For this simple reason, it would not have been appropriate to exclude data from the traditional legal setting which is the customary court; even if customary law has no explicit items pertaining to environmental governance as was found out.

In this case, land related proceedings availed me with the opportunity to extract language excerpts uttered within the legal frame and which express in-depth perceptions of the Bafut culture with a bearing on the environment. Furthermore, the legal domain is one in which all utterances, whether made in-session or recorded can be considered serious. Though the onus bears on land related

proceedings, there is a rather thin line between land and the environment as far as indigenous perceptions are concerned, and this is exactly the case with Bafut. As mentioned earlier, this consideration required the use of excerpts from the Bafut customary court proceedings.

As for the inaugural speech of the Cameroon Traditional Rulers Against Climate Change, (CAMTRACC) it has the qualities of an advocacy Document, a piece of propaganda, a life text, the collective voice of the Bamenda Grassfield communities of the N.W. Region of Cameroon (including the Bafut community used as a sample) . Again, it is an interdiscursive text from two counts:

1. It is traditional discourse articulated from an informed perspective. As such it perceives traditional practices and *modus vivendi* from an enlightened mindset. This therefore, represents the mindset of the enlightened population within this community and of course, they really form a significant population.
2. Also, this is discourse from a traditional mindset, articulated in an international language. This means that the ideas are translated from native language forms into an international language. This is a typical habit in the ethnic communities where the average member of the community is either literate or fairly literate. It is therefore good to work such text uttered originally in English. These first two texts can also be considered as being produced in somewhat formal or semi-formal contexts which moderate the liberty of expression that an informal opportunity will offer. Because of this, this more liberal atmosphere is achieved in the context of the third data type.

As for the third set of data, the Focus Group Discussions, the intention is to allow a cross section of the sample population to state their own points of view directly to the researcher without any mediation. It is avails me with an opportunity to witness the paralinguistic aspects on the communicators which in themselves embody a dimension of meaning. Such include aspects like gestures and gesticulation, facial expression, tone, mood, etc in a relaxed informal context.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The phenomenon of environmental degradation and more especially climate change has progressively seeped into the core of human consciousness right through to the traditional sphere. That notwithstanding, there is sufficient evidence to show that to the grassroot communities, the related concepts to environmental degradation such as climate change and global warming have for a long time , and even up till now, remain largely western notions or constructions of reality. Left to the rural communities, climate or weather abnormalities are partly attributed to sacred or superstitious causes they are powerless to avert. Thus they are bound to condone and cope with such unprecedented phenomenon. Efforts however have been multiplied in recent years to create awareness right through to this rural sector.

In November 2009, the Cameroon Traditional Rulers Against Climate Change (CAMTRACC) was launched in the North West Region. Inspired by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, traditional rulers of the North West Region united to form a ‘solid front’ at the grassroots level in order to fight against climate change. During this forum, the traditional rulers (also called *Fons*) were informed about the possible risks of climate change by the FAO representative in the following excerpt:

*Climate change is the rapid change of general weather conditions faster than the normal climatic conditions that human kind has been used to since the beginning of time. These changes are caused by land use changes leading to the faster and increasing emission of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere which resulted in the depletion of the ozone layer that protects the earth against Ultra Violet Rays from the sun.(...) Africa is one of the regions of the world particularly vulnerable to the potential impacts of climate change. (...) It is affecting water resources, agriculture and food security, economic activities and health and in particular, the poorest countries where poverty limits the capacities of adaptation.(quoted by Sara De Wit:2011pg16)*

According to De Wit (2011:9) while the international organization’s aim was to establish collaboration with the rulers, the traditional rulers themselves ‘seized the opportunity to have their own piece of the hegemonic pie’. Since they are the ‘natural rulers’ and custodians of culture –and are inextricably bound to the environment, climate change turns out to be an outstanding opportunity for

the *Fons* to reinforce their (symbolic power) and revitalize their ‘traditions’. The then president of CAMTRACC, the *Fon* of Guzang’s address included an excerpt which discursive features will be critically analysed below.

Meanwhile, even prior to the analyses of the traditional leadership, my observation disclosed so much of the indigenous mindset which tells a lot on their environmental attitudes. For instance if any abnormality observed in the environment cannot be referenced to any theme or cause, then it is a mystery and in the lore of the Bafut man for example, any mystery perceived by an individual warrants some sacrifices or rituals in the case of the traditionalists and serious prayers on the part of the Christian or religious adherents. If such a mystery is collective, then the traditional leadership is expected to take its sacred and spiritual responsibility (for the traditionalists) or ecumenical efforts (for the religious ) as it happened once during the week of Christian unity in Bafut to appease the tragedy of ‘*ndiāla’ambueh*’ in the late 2000s.

Rather than blame the actors for precipitating climate change, the authorities are likely to be blamed for not having pleased the gods or for not living up to expectation in their spiritual responsibility which results in such weather alterations. Thus when ‘*climate change*’ will be mentioned at all as a loan phrase in Bafut, it is used almost derogatorily in such deictic expressions as

“ This should be **that** climate change **you/they** talk about.”

“**That** climate change is actually true o..!” (*actually, the often talked about climate change is real!*)

“This is **that** climate change”

“it means **that** climate change **they** talk/were talking about is true?”

These indexical representations point to the following deductions: the persistent use of the deictic pronoun ‘*That*’ shows that hitherto this moment, it lives more as a rumour than a fact. It is reality as constructed by ‘them’, i.e. others and talked about *them* to *our hearing*. It has been so much a distant or an alien concept which surprisingly seems to be true. It is ‘THEY’ ‘who talk about it. Not that ‘WE’ know it. Left to these indigenes on the contrary, their utterances in the face of environmental challenges have been such views as:

“*The heat this year will remove someone to go and die*”(the heat this year can kill)

“*The dry season is becoming too ‘strong’*”. (i.e. harsh)

“*The time for the end-of-the- world will soon reach* (i.e. the end of the world is at hand)

“*This world is turning into what one doesn’t know.*”

“*The gods are angry with our deeds.*”

“*The cold these days can make someone’s body ‘harden’.*” ( get one frozen.)

“*This cold can kill one*”

“*The animals of those days...*”( referring to evolved habits)

“*Animals that have gone missing*” or “*animals that once lived*” (extinct animal species)

“*The/that ‘woodash’ in the air*” (unusual whitish dust that floated persistently in the atmosphere in Bamenda town and environs around April 2010)

(N.B The above are non standard forms of expression due to transliteration from participant observation. Better equivalents are found in brackets)

Meanwhile, the language used within the traditional legal sphere in Bafut and the issues evoked there equally convey indigenous insights relating to the environment. The main issue under consideration is land conflict, which generates utterances worthy of analyses. Amongst the rhetorical devices the following could easily be sorted.



- **Rhetorical Devices in Indigenous Interactions**
- **The Use of Declaratives**

In English grammar, a **declarative sentence** is a sentence that makes a statement, provides a fact, offers an explanation, or conveys information. These types of **sentences** are also known as **declarative statements**. A **declarative sentence** is the most common type of **sentence** in the English language. It is equally the most common type used in communication across the data used for analyses here. It expresses what the speaker holds as fact, and beneath the fact usually lies a discursive significance. For example, in prelude to actual interrogation over a case of disputed land, litigants declares: ‘...: *I am 50 years of age ...*’; ‘...*I am 63 years of age*’.

In strictly legal circles or in the official context, these statements will carry the implication that ‘*I am not still a minor and so I am liable to legal sanction.*’ But in the traditional context, it has a moral and a social implication in the Bafut culture where the statements are made. Morally, it has the implication that ‘*I am no longer a child so I can’t be lying*’; socially, the implication is that ‘*I have come of age and so I merit what I am standing here to defend- the piece of land in question. It could even be stretched to imply that, ‘...if I am older than my adversary, then I stand a better chance to merit what I claim.* Both of these considerations effectively hint an ecological disposition of the culture: the ideology that ‘**age**’ is synonymous to ‘**right**’. Thus, people, by virtue of their age or seniority, presume a liberty to take decisions that are impactful on the environment and can rule or instruct either for or against eco-friendly habits suggested or being practiced by younger ones or even their learned children. They do not see what new thing a ‘*puerile*’ mind can tell them when they have spent more time ( several decades) on earth doing things their own way and getting away with them! Sensitisation measures and other means of education on the environment must consider this both in choosing the actors involved and in toning the messages to be communicated.

- **The Use of Idioms**

Idioms have always been both a fascinating and a problematic group of expressions, not only from a theoretical linguistic perspective but also from the point of view of psycholinguistics and language acquisition (Keizer: 2016) .Communication in the Cameroon grassfield communities systematically use idiomatic statements as a mode of expression e.g. ‘...this place was *given out* by my father...’ (Text 1A) ; ‘...*he [My grandfather] called me and told me that I should **take that place**...*’ (Text 1B); ‘...*Nobody worth the ‘salt’ on this world can be indifferent to this **global quagmire**.*’

To ‘give out’ is an idiom in Bafut and it has different shades of meaning. In this context, it is ambiguous because to *give out a piece of land* could mean selling the land, leasing it out or just authorizing somebody to exploit it. The use of this expression of giving is directly opposed in meaning to the use of the word ‘take’ by his interlocutor.

In literal usage, one may ‘**take**’ something but may not necessarily ‘**own**’ it. In this context where elderliness is revered, the word of an elder is more or less a law unto whom it is bestowed, and it remains even when the elder becomes an ancestor. ‘Take’ here means that the place was willed to her and the seriousness of it is not inferior to that of a written will. If the grandfather were to approve or proscribe certain practices on this said piece of land, there won’t be any gainsaying whether the idea is right or wrong, eco-friendly or eco-hazardous. Rather, it would be considered a kind of secret order to be respected throughout life. Quoting the grandfather here is a mark of self-assertion and a confidence building technique in the rhetorics of the Bafut culture. This form of confidence inspires the speaker to stand firm over what is her inheritance and empowers her to use her discretion over the land such as habitation, (‘...*I planted plantains*...’); agriculture /deforestation, (‘...[I] *made a foundation*...’) etc. usually such activities performed on the basis of the actor’s right over the land go with no reservations about environmental interest at the grassroots except where culture warrants such..

- **Deictic Expressions**

The use of deictic expressions in the customary court extracts helps to reveal much about the perceptions ‘place’ by the Bafut cultural community. Some expressions include:

*'...this place was given out by my father ; ...this palm bush [was] being tapped by a Chinda' '...It is surprising to me that recently when my children went to work on that land, they were being frightened and threatened and they even brutalized me personally. 'was there anything on that place when you scattered us?' ...when my grandfather was about to die, he called me and told me that I should take that place. ...I was in that land before the last two Fons, Ndenecho and Asanchuri*

The deictic expressions above lay emphasis and create assertiveness and express authority. To say 'this place' instead of 'the place' and 'this bush; instead of 'that bush' in the first two statements for instance quoted above shows how closely the place is attached to the speaker and thus reinforces the impression of ownership.

- **Personal Pronouns**

The speakers also use personal pronouns to communicate a conflicting relationship; a sense of opposition between the 'We' 'I' and 'me' of the respective speakers and the 'they' 'him /her' or 'them' of the interlocutors. Eg. THEY even brutalized ME serves to highlight the outrageousness of the deed within the context.

- **The Use of Euphemisms** e.g. *'...we took it (the problem) to the Fon and thought that he was going to support us not knowing that in the end he will say it was his place.'*

It is obvious that from the speaker's perspective, the *Fon* is a cheat; that he is lying; and that he is grabbing their land upon knowing the history of it. She however chooses to mitigate this opinion of the *Fon* in the above statement instead of saying out rightly that he is lying. This shows that she is a vulnerable victim both for being a woman and also a mere subject under the *Fon*. Thus gender and status exert an environmental impact be it directly or indirectly. The fact that women in Bafut culture generally play second fiddle to men (Lem : 2010; Aletum: 2008) saves the environment of some of the hazards that they could have caused it ( e.g. reckless farming, burning , etc) and also deprives the environment of some of the benefits they could have rendered to it .( e.g. women in Bafut based on their activities are more protective of trees than men)

One peculiarity of the customary court excerpts I analysed (text1 and 2) is that they oppose a traditional ruler; an authority, with a subject which is a rare feat, more interestingly a female subject. This text is therefore suitable for analyses because it is relevant not only for discourse identification but also for power connotations at different levels: political, social and gender wise. Again, more revealing is the context of the utterance- a court session. Here the subject enjoys relative liberty and freedom to express her opinion since in legal confines; there is a presumed equality before the law. (This does not however give room to insubordination on her part.)

The text equally reveals some sociological parameters that count in the traditional discourse such as , the age of the social actor, longevity of occupation over an area, the activities carried out as testimony of ownership, etc. these details are quite telling. For instance, no matter how important trees may be to the environment, no one would dare plant trees on a borrowed piece of land because it would be interpreted as an attempt to claim permanent ownership over the said portion.

Also, the role of natural features in identifying or defining land boundaries between neighbours is equally brought out in the text. These are discursive aspects that help to reveal the environmental dispositions of the culture and which can be exploited to enhance ecological values.

- **The Use of Native Proverbs**

e.g. *'only a madman will sleep with his roof on fire.'* (Text 2); *'when a man loses his culture, he is a lost man'* (Text 2)

Proverb one is an insinuation that the danger is not still lurking. It is already manifesting. The house is human life, the roof, the environment while the fire is natural hazards and catastrophes. But this rhetorical technique has used passivisation to delete the actors responsible for the 'fire' who are the inhabitant of the earth.

The second proverb is assertive of the fact that the culture is blissful and that just by sticking to its values, the environmental issue will not arise. This is a mere of an allegation, however, it is true that, Bafut, being a subsistent community, has little or an insignificant incidence of industrialization compared to the west world.

**The Metaphorical Construction of Nature**

e.g. *No doubt mother earth has turned against her own offspring.*

*‘...the soul of our culture is our natural environment.’*

The earth is personified as a ‘mother’ the figure of one is supposed to nurture its children. Ironically, the speaker constructs her as one who has instead turned against the children. Considered more critically, the expression above is embedded with irony at even deeper levels. In practice, human activities relegate the earth to a patient; i.e. a passive sufferer of human action. But when things go rough, the earth is subjectivised. This calls for reflection on the part of the *actants* (Collins: 2014, online). In pursuit of a fully inclusive conservation strategy, the speaker’s community needs to implore deeper meaning from the ‘mother’ metaphor. They need through it to see that they equally owe the obligation to protect the ‘mother earth’ just as much as they look forward to being nourished by it. A nature- culture symbiosis has to be cultivated.

The second metaphor (*‘...the soul of our culture is our natural environment.’*) above valorises the place of the environment in verbal utterance using the English language. Strangely as deduced from the FGD’s, whereas the ideas are beautifully expressed English, only approximate words exist in the mother tongue standing for the environment so far. This is the case with tribal languages like Bafut prompting one to doubt how there could be such a lacunae on the ‘soul’ of a culture.( discourse immanent critique) Certainly the above metaphor is an overstatement made to suit the audience and occasion.

The texts from which the above excerpts are quoted contain certain core discursive traits that will be analysed in line with Wodak’s analytical framework for the DHA. The analyses are presented below. These three texts referenced above x-ray certain dominant features of the traditional environmental discourses. The texts will be analysed below in accordance with Wodak’s analytical strategies for the DHA as established on page16.

• **Discursive Strategies**

The above discourses shall be analyzed through the framework of Wodak’s analytical strategies for the DHA. To begin with, the following are some of the prominent discourses identified in the traditional texts under discussion.

**Table1.** *Discourse Identification.*

DISCOURSE	LINGUISTIC TRACES	COMMENTS
<b>A Solidarity Discourse.</b>	<i>My dear people, your royal highnesses, the fight against climate change is a collective responsibility. No one man or group of people can succeed. (Text 2)</i>	Soliciting all hands on deck for a way forward; seeing challenges as a community and environmental issues as a tribal concern.
<b>An Authority Focused discourse.</b>	<i>Traditional rulers are the custodians of our culture, and natural heritage, the guarantors of our traditional knowledge and the fathers of our land -it is time we the national leaders of our land, we, the custodians of culture, and carriers of indigenous know-ledge act and fast.</i>	Who is who over land or who wields the power determines action. He equally has an influence over environmental concerns over it.
<b>A conservative discourse</b>	<i>-Our parents showed us good and bad trees( Text 11)( so we are doing the right thing with trees)</i>	What our parents upheld is what we seek to uphold today
<b>A Binary- Perception Disposition.’ (‘We’ versus ‘others’)</b>	<i>-The government doesn’t want us to burn because they want us to buy their own fertilizer which is very expensive.(FGG1)</i>	We have our line of thinking and the government has quite another.
<b>A DISCOURSE OF CHANGE</b>	<i>-I used to hear mothers talk of the “Abin<sup>1</sup>” rain. The phrase ‘Abin’ rain has long ceased. They talked of 11<sup>th</sup> February rain, it no longer exists. - Streams have dried up seriously and the water in existing streams too drops more than ever before... (FGD2)</i>	Something has changed from what obtained and is still changing,

<sup>1</sup>Abin: The Bafut annual traditional dance that usually holds in the month of December.

In addition to the above discourse identified from isolated linguistic traces, the following discourses were identified from a general appraisal of the various texts and situations.

1. **A Private Interest Discourse** which stresses who has a right over place, space or environmental resources.
2. **An Environmental Appropriation Discourses** which stresses active utilization by social actors, evidence of occupation, habitation, or exploitation.
3. **A Reductionist or delimited constituents discourse.** (Focusing on space and place).
4. **An Anthropocentric Discourse** – putting man at the Centre.
5. **A Supplication Discourse-** showing total dependence and reliance on the dispositions of nature, customs, or ancestral beliefs.
6. **Impunity or Laisser Faire Discourse-** acting in anarchy.
7. **An Economic interest Discourse.** Reaping all that is economically valuable from the environment.

• **Referentials and Nomination**

This examines how social actors are referred to or nominated. Here attention is on honorifics, and any other status signals or dignifying attributions issued on social actors. The objectives deduced examine the constructions that the nomination strategies afford the social actors in question and situates them within the discourse. They equally seek to verify the way the actors are represented as illustrated in figure 4A.

**Table2.** *Referential and Nomination Strategies in Sampled Traditional /Customary Texts.*

❖ REFERENTIAL / NOMINATION STRAGIES.		CONSTRUCTION OF IN-GROUPS AND OUT GROUPS	MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIZATION, META-PHORS AND METONYMIES, SYNECDOCHES...
TEXT	LINGUISTIC TRACES	OBJECTIVES DEDUCED.	DEVICES IMPLORDED
1(A)	<p>(i)...<i>she is occupying a piece of land that belongs to the royal family;</i></p> <p>(ii) ...<i>this bush [was] being tapped by a Chinda [whom my father assigned]</i></p>	<p>❖ Distinguishing between privileged nobles and the underprivileged commoners (social inequality)</p> <p>❖ Asserting palace authority over the helpless commoner. (social inequality)</p>	<p>❖ Membership Categorization</p> <p>❖ Class inequalities instituted through land possession. Transitivity through action to create authority.</p>
	<p>1. ...<i>Nobody worth the 'salt' on this world can be indifferent</i></p> <p>2.... <i>the custodians of culture, and carriers of indigenous knowledge</i></p>	<p>Those that remain indifferent are sub-human or irrational as opposed to us. (Constructing a positive 'self' and a negative 'other' relationship).</p> <p>❖ They are a focal point on culture and indigenous awareness and thus reliable and dependable in problem solving initiatives. (Nforbi 2019:20 )</p>	<p>❖ Idiomatic expression highlighting human responsibility.</p> <p>❖ metonymy and metaphor which both reinforce attributions of power</p>
1B	1. <i>I was not married</i>	-as an unmarried woman, I could not settle permanently on the land, reason why the men want to deprive me out of the land. Lem (2010)	<p>❖ A DECLARATIVE hinting membership categorization</p> <p>❖ Power disparity between males and females to the latter's disadvantage.</p>
	2. <i>My grandfather's children wan-ted to take the place</i>	❖ for being a mere woman, the children sought to confiscate the land.	❖ IDIOM showing woman as an underdog

	3. ... we took it to the Fon and thought that he was going to support us <b>not knowing that in the end he will say it was his place.</b>	❖ royal authority victimizes the power-less masses over land ownership ❖ Fons see themselves as ‘custodians’ of all land, a euphemism for ‘ownership’.	EUPHEMISM expressing opaque dimensions of power and agency in environmental discourse. A place can be acquired just by laying claim to it .it has to be exploited to authenticate ownership.
	4. <b>I planted plantain and made a foundation</b>	❖ planting and occupancy or habitation as hallmarks of ownership	Investment creates a lee-way to one’s impact on the environment.

• **Argumentation Strategies**

Argumentation strategies seek to justify positive and negative practices by the social actors. As can be inferred, the utterances carry the undertones of arguments for or against something, usually the actions of individuals. From the justifications, one identifies inherent topoi where the justifications are tenable, or fallacies where they are not as illustrated below.

**Table3.** Argumentation Strategies in Sampled Traditional Texts

	❖ ARGUMENTATION. LINGUISTIC TRACES	JUSTIFICATION OF POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE PRACTICES.	TOPOI, FALLACIES.
1(A)	<i>...This palm bush [was] being tapped by a Chinda (under the Fon’s instruction) ...The Fon’s rest house is at the summit of the hill</i>	❖ -You establish your authority ownership on a place by working or carrying out activity on it. Hence, any unused land is free land. ❖ -A house at the summit means you own the whole hill down to the valley.	Justifying land ownership by tradition. Symbolism. The house is a symbol of occupancy; hence, Any unused land is free land. <b>( anti-) environmental</b>
	<i>On the left of this place are palm trees <u>planted by my father</u></i>	❖ You own land just by having planted trees on it and such land becomes a heritage. (Thus trees are not planted for the sake of the trees but for the cultural implications)	Justifying land ownership by tradition. Pro-environmental. Tree planting is not new, but what type of trees is useful to plant in this context is the issue. <b>( pro-environmental)</b>
	<i>...this place was given out by my father ...I want her to quit the royal property because I don’t know how she got into it</i>	❖ -Most village land belongs to the Fon who shares or keeps at will. ❖ -she could only own it if the palace knew and approve of it	Royal discretion on village land ( <b> anti or pro environmental as the case may be</b> )
1(B)	<i>After his death I built a small house in the forest</i>	❖ A house is a mark of possession just as is the case above.	Having no sign of habitation on a place fallaceously suggests no ownership authority-(anti-environmental)

• **Perspectivation Techniques in Traditional Environmental Discourses**

The main technique used for perspectivation, framing or discourse representation in text three is the exaltation of the speaker’s culture. The speaker seeks to present the reality of climate change and environmental degeneration through a strictly traditional lens projecting the culture as inherently good, well informed, and eco-friendly. This construction is achieved through utterances such as:

- ... our culture and tradition is directly linked to nature;
- ...With the advise, culture and leadership of the **traditional rulers**, we adapted our lifestyle to suit the demands of nature.

...You will agree with me equally that our culture and tradition is directly linked to nature and **the soul of our culture is our natural environment**;

...Our culture and indigenous knowledge- inherited from our ancestors- who taught us that our natural environment with all the trees and bushes and animals is not a resource that we should use at our will to satisfy our needs at all costs **but the environment is part of us**.

...because of this complementary relationship, we are not to use our natural environment abusively.

... We should apply our sustainability instinct whenever we have to cut a tree or use an animal ... our culture taught us that **we are not to cut down any young tree – no matter the size, we are not to kill female animals** with the capacity to reproduce

...we can go on and on and on, to portray the indigenous knowledge that protects the environment.

The above evidently frames the speaker’s orientation in the speech because in repeatedly using ‘our culture’ for example the speaker wards off two facts: firstly, he ignores the fact that there is no world culture and so the collective pronoun ‘our’ involves only a sub-group. Secondly, nothing is evident as to what other cultures equally say and so it is not evident whether this culture in question is exclusive in the values it projects. (Indeed, this construction carries the undertone that, our *culture is this good, as opposed to yours or others that do the contrary*.) this exaltation is further reinforced by metaphoric utterances such as, “... **the soul of our culture is our natural environment...**”. The implication here is that, any anti-environmental action an individual indigene is a blemish on the soul of the people’s culture. But from an informed perspective, one would not be wrong to question the sincerity and veracity or the pronouncement given that there are no spelled out regulations in the customary law in defence of this natural environment- the purported soul of the community’s culture. In the face of such metaphoric projections, It suffices to take a little pause here in the spirit of a **discourse immanent critique** to re-examine the above statements and to lay bare some inconsistencies or ambiguities in the pronouncements of the Fon.

**Table4.** *Perspectivation, Framing or Discourse Representational Strategies*

PERSPECTIVATION, FRAMING OR DISCOURSE REPRESENTATIONAL STRAGIES USED		EXPRESSING INVOLVEMENT, POSITIONING SPEAKER’S POINT OF VIEW.	REPORTING, DESCRIPTION, NARRATION OR QUOTATION OF EVENTS AND UTTERANCES.
TEXT	INTENSIFICATION, MITIGATION	MODIFYING THE EPISTEMIC STATUS OF A PROPOSITION.	INTENSIFYING OR MITIGATING THE ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE OR DISCRIMINATORY UTTERANCES.
<b>1B</b>	<i>...my grandfather... called me and told me that I should take that place.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Ownership dates back to the days of my grandfather.</li> <li>❖ I am duty bound to own the land as a mark of obedience.</li> </ul>	Reporting, quotation of events to the effect that land is a heritage and consequently the environment. ownership Thus warranted.
	<i>she is occupying a piece of land that belongs to the royal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ One should not trespass or encroach on land not duly attributed to them</li> <li>❖ Merely working on land can be a sign of occupancy and a claim to ownership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Hegemony. (She is a commoner occupying palace land; She is only a woman but occupies palace land.</li> <li>❖ Gender and class disparities factor into environmental realities</li> </ul>

	<i>... our culture and tradition is directly linked to nature;</i>	❖ Keeping cultural norms is synonymous to respecting environmental norms.	Positive or affirmative construction.
	<i>...With the advice, culture and leadership of the <b>traditional rulers</b>, we adapted our lifestyle to suit the demands of nature.</i>	❖ The traditional rulers are important stakeholders in environmental protection.	The culture is flexible and susceptible to change when necessary.
	<i>...because of this complementary relationship, we are not to use our natural environment abusively.</i>	❖ We are adequately aware ❖ We are making a positive effort.	We uphold a nature-culture symbiosis
	<i>...We should apply our sustainability instinct whenever we have to cut a tree or use an animal ... our culture taught us that we are not to cut down any young tree – no matter the size, we are not to kill female animals with the capacity to reproduce</i>	❖ Our culture imposes environmental prescriptions and proscriptions	The culture is eco-friendly, and sustainable.

- **A DISCOURSE IMMANENT CRITIQUE**
- **(Representations and Constructions In Environmental Discourse)**

Traditional discourse at first sight projects a blissful culture in the above text. How however, this may not be entertained universally if a discourse immanent probing is done on some of the intimations to see if there could be any contradictions or inadequacies. Inherent contradictions are part of the preoccupations of the DHA under the **discourse immanent critique**. Selected statements from the above text could thus be critiqued (by detractors) as in the following examples:

1. ***‘... our culture and tradition is directly linked to nature ’.***

How? What does it mean to be ‘linked’ to nature? What is the nature of this link? Is it positive or negative and from who’s perspective? What necessitates the link? Does ‘link’ entail that one depends on the other or that there is mutual interdependence between the two? Etc. The Fon certainly meant this last opinion.

Thus, the statement could carry more layers of meaning than one can guess at first sight. It reveals a fact from a traditional position, but from a critical standpoint, it could conceal just as much as it reveals. Communication on issues of climate change should thus be done with maximum clarity to avoid misinterpretation

2. ***‘...With the advice, culture and leadership of the traditional rulers, we adapted our lifestyle to suit the demands of nature.***

What was the nature of the lifestyle prior to this adaptation? When was such an adaptation effected? What are these demands of nature? Is this adaptation yielding the desired results? What evidence is there to the result following this adaptation? In saying ‘with the **‘culture and leadership of the traditional rulers’**, whose culture is meant? The culture of the people or that of the traditional rulers? Any these questions may only apply to outsiders because the answers are obvious to those within the culture.

The above statement therefore is probably both an image booster on the part of the traditional rulers than a balance sheet comment on community life as it looks.

3. ***‘...the soul of our culture is our natural environment;’***

How is this manifested practically? Which of the two interests is prioritized? Human interest or nature’s interest? What instrument is there to ensure a practical justification of this metaphor on a collective platform?

This metaphor, beautiful though it sounds is one of the statements motivated by the context. The concept of the soul is not a reality in African traditional religion. It is a concept from western religion. This statement therefore would not be made (in the Bafut language) to a group of indigenes for instance, in a strictly traditional setting. But in this forum, it makes much meaning and carries a highly intellectual appeal.

**4. ‘...Our culture and indigenous knowledge- inherited from our ancestors- who taught us that our natural environment with all the trees and bushes and animals is not a resource that we should use at our will to satisfy our needs at all cost but the environment is part of us.’**

Do the focus group discussions confirm this mind frame? Obviously not. It probably had been so but today, dispositions have changed especially pushed by economic adversity. The people are rather very keen on survival strategies and consider environmental resources as endowments for their upkeep. The mere conviction that someone ‘owns’ a piece of land by the traditional ownership standards, makes him feel he is the proprietor of everything permanent on it.

Also, people such as hunters, hunt whatever animal they see. Catching certain wild animals is a sign of bravery and skill that has sometimes in the past, even attracted recognitions and decorations with traditional titles. Thus, observed practices, contest the validity of the above pronouncement in some aspects.

**1. ‘... because of this complementary relationship, we are not to use our natural environment abusively.’**

‘Abusively’ from whose perspective? What is meant by ‘**natural**’ environment in this context? What other environments apart from the ‘natural’ are implied in the statement and are ‘we’ consequently encouraged to use these other ‘environments’ abusively? Abusively here is certainly from the imperialistic perspective.

**2. ‘... We should apply our sustainability instinct whenever we have to cut a tree or use an animal ... our culture taught us that we are not to cut down any young tree – no matter the size, we are not to kill female animals with the capacity to reproduce’**

Where is the place of rationality in the traditional set up? Is action by ‘instinct’ reliable enough to contain a sensible issue like environmental degradation today? ‘*Our culture taught us that...*’, why ‘*taught*’ and not ‘*teaches*’? To say that *we are not to cut down any young tree – no matter the size, we are not to kill female animals with the capacity to reproduce*’ is it not an overstatement? Would one easily and readily put off the necessity to kill because of an instinct or because of the age or sex of the tree or animal even if there is no alternative? This of course is not likely.

The possible conviction arrived at after this critique is that, the traditional environmental discourse from the above vantage point is rather more verbose than pragmatic. One deciphers from the speech of the traditional leaders the frantic effort to speak in the spirit of the times; to match up with the trends; to accommodate and even appropriate the scientific phenomenon of climate change into their traditional lore and indigenous standards. The outcome is an inter-discourse, which is neither strictly traditional or indigenous, nor strictly scientific or official.

This kind of interdiscourse brings to the limelight, the importance of context in discourse. That is to say, the context within which the speech is made influences the presenter’s overall diction and tone, mood of expression, semantic orientation, figurative usage, logic and argument, and even the use of technical jargon in the presentation. This is certainly conditioned by the forum and audience. There is a hidden intention behind this defensive position towards the culture in public; an intention which ranges between valorising the culture in the least expectation to courting recognition, soliciting aid or even international funding! That is why the speech is presented under the canopy of a collective body; a body which (purportedly) ‘leads’ and ‘advices’ the people to adapt their lifestyles to favour environmental interests. In this vein, grass root actors in general, (and not just the traditional rulers need to be empowered to pursue this noble vision



- **The Environment and Power in Traditional Discursive Circles**

This topic is a logical consequence of the above discussion. It is clear through a critical eye that the issue of the environment, lends an opportunity to social actors to ride on to power. To start with the traditional rulers, the speech seeks to project the traditional rulers as influential actors in the quest for environmental stability.

*With the advice, culture and leadership of the **traditional rulers**, we adapted our lifestyle to suit the demands of nature. We implored [...] the rain makers to bring forth rain in times of severe dryness. We called on the traditional healers to act in terms of health crises and pleaded with Mother Nature when our general weather conditions frowned on us. **You will agree with me that traditional rulers played a very vital role in the conservation of our natural ecosystems (Text Two)***

The statement above adds a layer of authority to the traditional power of the rulers. Theirs as per this pronouncement goes beyond mere political power. They are at the forefront of environmental protection. They are equally natural conservators; a domain through which they aim at going beyond a national network to a continental one.

There is equally a dimension of gender power reinforced through the environmental debates. Men usually own the land which women need to cultivate. This puts men in a dominant position over women.

Socially, the more the amount of land one owns the more he is likely to attract social recognition, respect and influence which is a dimension of power. Also, such an individual has the power to determine what can be done or what cannot be done on such landed property. There is the needed for such actors to be sufficiently informed.

Text 1(B) equally affirms this construction of an eco-friendly culture of the traditionalists: ‘...*On the left of this place **are palm trees planted by my father***’. The palm tree is an important cultural symbol in Bafut with diverse uses. Its products are numerous including palm wine and palm oil, which are virtually indispensable accompaniments of the traditional meal which is *Achu*. In addition, palm oil and palm wine are used for most of the traditional rites in the Bafut community. Therefore, just as culture is a way of life, planting or protecting the palm tree as well as other culturally relevant trees is a way of life to the Bafut man. This opinion is confirmed especially by Focus Group Discussion 2. Pillars are not known in the demarcation of traditional boundaries. Trees of different species are used including the palm tree as in the above quotation. The palm tree is equally a symbol of manhood or maturity to own a palm tree forest just like it is a source of wealth. Therefore the culture is one that places value on trees depending on the importance of the particular species of trees to the people and consequently, such an aspect of the culture is environmentally friendly.

With this finding, the take home message is that it is worthwhile to bear this aspect in mind when sensitizing people of this cultural background, these details should animate the content of the sensitization messages so as to look realistic and convincing to the Bafut people. Merely harping on the need to plant more trees and even supplying unrecognizable species free of charge will still not do the magic.

Another construction is that the culture is morally upright: ‘...***But behold, in a world where moral values are fast disappearing, where the culture of people is considered archaic, where the wisdom of our ancestors is considered useless, where a foreign culture takes precedence of our own, we will not expect any better***’. Here the speaker positions himself on the side of the right values through the above utterance. From this, two implications can be inferred: What obtains in his culture according to him is a model of moral uprightness. If other cultures had emulated theirs, environmental standards would today not be found wanting.

From such positioning, environmental degradation becomes agented whereas humans who are the real agents are projected not as causative agents of the phenomenon but as passive victims: ‘...***The streams are drying up, the children lack food, the waters lack animals, the rain patterns are changing, plants and animals are confused and gestation periods are no longer obeying...***’

The focus group discussions subsequently abbreviated (FGDs) further concur with the conclusion above. For example, in FGD3, the impression one gets is that, members of the locale (Bafut) do not see climate change as a consequence of human interference with environmental standards. Rather, they perceive it as a kind of spontaneous malignant force which imperils man's comfort on earth and in front of which man is a helpless victim. He may as well, just watch the unfortunate drama passively. *'My brother, don't mention the issue of this heat again. It is something about which one should just remain speechless'; '...Many streams have simply dried up'.*

The good times seem passed: *'I used to hear mothers talk of the "Abin<sup>2</sup>" rain. The phrase 'abin' rain has long ceased. They talked of 11<sup>th</sup> February rain, it no longer exists'.*

The people have a conservative tendency which could be positive or eco-friendly:

*'...I know that our mothers used to isolate and protect trees of edible plants when working and that is the attitude I have adopted. If you go to our bush and ask for the demarcations of my mother's own farms, they will show you based on the rich variety of edible tree plants she planted there...' (FGD 2)*

This entails that the habits that obtained in the days of their parents which were beneficial to a sustainable environment live on till today. These include apart from the above comments, such practices as, the growing of raffia forests, the respect of the palm tree, the preservation of shrines such as special trees, forests, streams or isolated lands.

On the other hand, they could be hazardous or anti-environmental. For example *'if you own a piece of land, you have the right to do whatsoever you like on the piece of land except killing a man on it...'* (FGD1) or in the following responses:

- ❖ *...I cannot cope without burning. They said we should keep animals so that we can use the dung; but animal feed prices have risen so rapidly to such an unaffordable cost that animal rearing has become the preserve of rich people. So I have to burn the soil so as to obtain better yields without manure...(inclusive strategy: support farmers with organic manure )*
- ❖ *...I am forced to burn the 'Ankara' so that crops like pumpkin, calabashes and cocoyams can do well. It's only from it that one can be sure of such crops. Calabashes and pumpkin especially cannot do well in any other type of ridge... (inclusive strategy: the need for alternatives methods of cultivation)*
- ❖ *...One would die of hunger if we never cultivated the 'Ankara'. Here in Bafut our cultural meal is Achu produced out of Cocoyams. The cocoyams flourish best in our local 'ankara'... (inclusive strategy: high yielding areas can receive subvention to boost production and redistribution)*
- ❖ *...Sometimes, one is forced to burn because of the high cost of labour. Hiring labourers for clearing, you would sometimes think that you are working for the individual. It becomes cheaper to burn because labour cost is one of the things in the world that is going 'wild'. -FGD 3 (inclusive strategy: mechanised agriculture should be brought to the grassroots.)*

## **5. FINDINGS/RESULTS**

In all my discussions about environmental issues and climate change as perceived by the interviewees, a general tendency was perceivable. First, phrases such as *'climate change'*, *'ozone layer'* *'clean energy'* as a technical term are rarely, almost never used. As such, they do not have ready alternatives in the daily speech of the grass field communities. This is not necessarily because there is no evidence of it but because the indicators are perceived through some sort of cultural lenses. For example in the case of climate change, there is a customary way of interpreting natural phenomena. The norm is that there has been a certain trend associated with the two alternating seasons for instance. i.e the rainy season and the dry season. What obtained in the distant past was regarded as a standard. Fluctuations have over the years been coded culturally and referenced to a supernatural order- the gods or ancestors. The inhabitants or indigenous social actors will question such alteration as a delayed onset of the rains, prolonged rainfall after the usual end of the rainy season in mid-November, intensive droughts, unprecedented cold temperatures etc. A Metaphorical statements such as *'...the soul of our*

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<sup>2</sup>Abin: The Bafut annual traditional dance that usually holds in the month of December.

*culture is our natural environment.*' As stated above valorises the place of the environment in verbal utterance using the English language. Strangely as deduced from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) however, whereas the ideas are beautifully expressed in English, only approximate words exist in the mother tongue standing for the environment so far. This is the case with tribal languages like Bafut prompting one to doubt how there could be such a lacunae on the 'soul' of a culture. At the level of discourse immanent critique, this sounds like an overstatement made to suit the audience and occasion. A recommendation in view of inclusion is therefore that, grassroot communities should be motivated to exploit strategies of how to translate these figurative messages into practical reality.

All these considerations effectively hint an ecological disposition of the sampled indigenous culture. Also, there is the misleading ideology that 'age' is synonymous to 'right'. Thus, people, by virtue of their age or seniority, presume a liberty to take decisions that are impactful on the environment. Such social actors can rule or instruct either in favour of, or against eco-friendly habits being practiced by younger ones or their learned children.

### **How An Inclusive Paradigm of 'Being' Would Reshape Environmental Governance**

This vision would be feasible through the following:

- A reviewed paradigm of 'being' within the indigenous communities constructed to include general interest in their daily activities and environmental practices is a promising option to concrete environmental protection.
- The sacred discourses on land would enhance conservative practices in that when land is considered as sacred, it is freer from anthropocentric threats than if otherwise. This perspective is almost a unique virtue of African culture vis a vis the west.
- The conservative instinct of grassroot residents are a resource to sustainability if they are empowered by helping them to resist the economic, cultural and political marginalization that pushes them to unfriendly environmental options such as bush fires.
- It will forster agenda 21 of the united nation's (i.e. Think globally and act locally)

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In this article, selected texts have been analysed and the inherent discursive overtures have been brought out with suggestions on how indigenous practices can be made more eco-friendly. This can be done by re-considering the policy platforms. The write-up has answered such questions as what rhetorical devices, discourses and discursive strategies animate environmental concerns in the sampled communities? How do indigenous or grassroots communities in the Cameroon grass fields interpret environmental realities and adversities?

How do indigenous communities perceive 'land' as a component of the environment and how can they contribute towards the protection of the environment? What initiatives are underway in response to the phenomenon of environmental degradation? The analyses have been done within the framework of the discourse historical approach to critical discourse analyses by Wodak and Resigl. A discourse immanent critique has been done and the power implications embedded in the environmental discourse at this level have been commented on.

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TEXT 1 (A): Source: Civil record book 1/2013 pg 456 in the Bafut customary court holden on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of November 2013.(highlights and emphasis mind (see Appendix C)

Against this was the following rebuttal by the defendant, reason why the two are considered as one text.

TEXT 1 (B) Source: Civil record book 1/2013 pg 456 in the Bafut customary court holden on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of November 2013.(see Appendix C)

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