

52nd KUASS (Kyoto University African Studies Seminar)

Date and Time: 28 June 2016 (Tue), 14:45 – 17:00

Venue: #318, Inamori Memorial Foundation Building (3rd floor), Kyoto University

Title:

Mbororo perspectives on indigenous identity and Mbororo-Pygmie relations

Speaker: Dr. Michaela Pelican (University of Cologne)

Abstract: In this presentation I will focus on the relationship between Mbororo pastoralists and Pygmie foragers from the perspective of Mbororo indigenous rights activists in Cameroon.

Besides their international recognition as indigenous peoples of Cameroon, the Mbororo and Pygmies seem to share little in common. The Mbororo are an (agro-)pastoralist group that entered Cameroon in the late 19th century and mostly live in Cameroon's savannah region favourable to cattle grazing. The Baka, Bagyeli and Bakola, also known as Pygmies, live in Cameroon's southern forest zone and count as the region's first inhabitants. Direct contact and cohabitation of members of the two groups mostly occur in Cameroon's Eastern region around Bertoua, an area that over the past decade has experienced an increase in Mbororo population due to the influx of refugees from the neighbouring Central African Republic.

My research has focused on the Mbororo of northwest Cameroon and personally I have had very limited encounter with members of Pygmie groups. However, with the Mbororo's growing struggle for recognition as an indigenous people and participation in joint development initiatives, the Pygmies have become a relevant reference group for Mbororo indigenous rights activists. In the past years, there has been an ongoing and controversial debate within Mbororo society on what it means to be 'indigenous' and if the Mbororo want to be seen on the same level with Pygmies. In this presentation I will elaborate on this controversy and its ideological underpinnings.