GROWING COTTON: HOUSEHOLD NEGOTIATIONS IN EXPORT-ORIENTED AGRICULTURE IN AFRICA, BURKINA FASO

BY

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DISsertation

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ABSTRACT

Conventional knowledge assumes that production of cash/export crops jeopardizes household food crop production in developing economies, and above all, mars women’s potential for economic autonomy. In Southwest Burkina Faso, observations in cotton-producing households appear to challenge such assumptions. Cotton is the driver of food crop production; and members of cotton farming households operate within a framework of negotiations and bargaining to attain production objectives. Still more, some developments in the cotton sector opened unexpected avenues for some women, in Southwest Burkina, to produce cotton independently from the conventional cotton farms owned by the male head of household. This dissertation asks why some smallholder farmers in Southwest Burkina choose to grow cotton in addition to commonly grown food-crops, and how this impacts relations between spouses, and parents and children within the household. It reaches the conclusion that a host of complex factors influence smallholder farmers’ decision to produce cotton, which requires looking beyond the need for greater cash incomes. The research methodology combines participant observations, informal interviews, conversations, focus groups, life histories, and social interactions, with formal surveying methods. This study contributes to ongoing theoretical debates on intrahousehold relations, and women’s access to resources in a growing cash crop economy in Africa, and the Global South. It also revisits the discussions phrased in terms of agency and rationality in actions among farming households. More broadly, it can contribute to reconcile cash and food cropping, and suggest tools for the economic empowerment of rural women through their full integration in cash farming.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Her broad smile loosened the muscles of her sweating face, as she responded to my greetings with a mild voice. Her baby, strongly strapped on her back with a threadbare cloth, was sweating as well. The heat of the bright sun was unsympathetic, and even the large straw hat that her husband wore, did not secure him any better fate. Despite the heat of the sun and the weight of the baby, Nanyèn – as she was called – was working stoically, and her adroit fingers were picking the cotton balls deftly. As I walked closer to her I perceived scratches on her arms’ skin. I gathered that the rough, dried, and tall cotton plants might have inflicted the damage. “Harvesting cotton is a difficult work, really difficult,” she said. “But as long as I suffer and benefit from it, it’s fair game with me,” Nanyèn added as she looked as if day-dreaming, perhaps visualizing the proceeds of her small plot of organic cotton that she would soon cash and share with her husband and other household members, in addition to the proceeds of the larger family conventional cotton. Her husband grinned and added: “She’s right. Cotton farming, especially the conventional cotton, demands a lot of work and money investment. However, production helps in many ways. The new cotton, uh… the “women’s cotton” [organic cotton] seems very promising. Once you can afford to make the compost, you need to purchase very little fertilizer to grow it. That is why everybody wants to grow it now (Field notes, November 3, 2007, Naoulé).

The portrait of Nanyèn, the woman in the scene described above, would have seemed to conform the classic position of African women in commercial farming, toiling under the complete authority of a male head of household, had she not made the quick disclaimer: “as long as I suffer and benefit from it, it’s fair game with me.” This short statement, added to the husband’s explanation, encapsulates larger dynamics underlying smallholder cotton production in Burkina Faso, especially at the level of the household. Moreover, the reality of women engaging independently in cotton farming is a recent development in many parts of Burkina Faso.

This study investigates the factors that motivate smallholder farmers of Burkina Faso to grow cotton for export, the underlying constraints of production, and the way cotton production affects relations within the household. In Burkina Faso, export cotton, which had not always benefited from farmers’ support, has become the most grown crop for market in recent decades.
The farmers’ current positive attitudes vis-à-vis cotton is at odds with the rough trajectory of the adoption of this crop as the major export commodity since colonial times, in the 1920s (Schwartz 1993, 1997). Besides representing a major shift in farmers’ perception and attitudes about cotton, the popular production indicates some degree of success in the government’s approach in inducing farmers to grow cotton, an overlap between government’s and farmers’ objectives. Moreover, the shift suggests that farmers benefit one way or another from growing cotton.

The production of cotton for export, in the colony of Upper Volta, today’s Burkina Faso, was initiated in the 1920s by the French colonial administration in the framework of its economic development plan of the colonies, mostly known as the *Mise en valeur* (Sarraut 1921: 18; Schwartz 1997: 291). The colonial administration inscribed cotton farming in what is today dubbed “agriculture for development”; and the production of this crop has since then benefited from superior organization and special government support and attention – a support that was substantially enhanced in the postcolonial era. The increased government interest in cotton became more visible in Burkina Faso after 1994, when the CFA franc - the common currency of Burkina Faso and many other West and Central African countries – was devalued by 50 percent in light of structural adjustment initiatives.

As I elaborate in Chapter 3, the devaluation gave a boost to export cotton production, and allowed cotton, finally, to become Burkina Faso’s main export commodity. The close state commitment to the sector ultimately aims to attain a sustained growth that matches the government’s ambition to strengthen the national economy through agricultural production through participation in the global economy. Consequently, seed cotton production has experienced continued growth since independence, despite slumps in the early- and mid-1990s and signs of crisis since 2007-08, mainly blamed on falling prices on the international market.
and erratic rainfall. From a modest beginning of 16,297 tons in 1966, production of cotton rose to over 59,000 tons in 1976, 128,200 tons in 1996, and nearly 800,000 tons in 2006 (Tables 3 & 4). Cotton generates about 60 percent of all foreign exchange earnings of Burkina Faso (Schwartz 1993, 1996a; African Economic Outlook 2006; Burkina Faso 2007). It also involves over 200,000 farming households, mostly smallholders, and affects more or less positively the lives of some 3,000,000 people nationwide. The increasing harvests made the country the top African producer in 2005 and 2006. Besides, the male gender-bias that had characterized production of export cotton since its inception in the 1920s is now becoming obsolete. Since 2004, an organic cotton farming project promoted by Helvetas, a Swiss non-government organization, has integrated many women into independent cotton production on small plots at very low input costs, in areas of the country where a “women’s cotton” would have previously sounded impossible.

The significance of this momentous change in the rural economy toward export cotton production, at a level not even imagined a few decades ago, makes a scrutiny of the trajectory and realities of its production in Burkina Faso timely. Today, cotton is unquestionably the most important export commodity in Burkina Faso, despite the impacts of the global economic crisis. Although the production of cotton still brings to the minds of some villagers negative memories of colonial era coercion, cotton plays a leading role and function at various levels of the Burkina economy. It is a reliable source of revenue for the national economy, and the driver of agricultural transformation. Many rural Burkinabe view cotton, rightly or wrongly, as a metaphor of hope, referring to it as “white gold.” The allusion involves an ironic recognition of the country’s lack of petroleum resources (black gold) and hints at the revenues this crop contributes to the individual households. The government’s strategic focus on export crops and the
peasants’ growing need for cash have noticeably transformed local agricultural technologies and material conditions for some smallholder farmers. However, the “success story” of the cotton business often overshadows realities and dynamics at the levels of individual households and communities.

The success of cotton production is mediated by complex factors, including access to sufficient areas of productive land, availability of a labor force, and good rainfall. It is also made possible by effective labor mobilization and production strategies, access to production inputs and credit, production of food crops, allocation of returns, and off-farm and non-farm activities. More importantly, successful farming of cotton is conditioned by the efficiency of the negotiations among actors involved in the process. The social relations underpinning these core aspects of production are often obscured by the national cotton success story. These omissions constitute important missing links, which are brought to light through an anthropological insight that facilitates our understanding of farmers’ “loyalty” to export cotton production in Burkina Faso – despite the low prices they receive for their harvest, a combined result of subsidies in developed countries, a weak US dollar, and a depressed producer’s price at the national level.

The Research Question

The cultivation of export cotton dates back to the coercive economic development policies of the French colonial administration. By the 1950s, however, the administration began to adopt incentive-based approaches to convince farmers to produce (Gervais 1984; Sanon 1994; Schwartz 1997) with the creation of French textile company, Compagnie Française de Développement des Fibres Textiles (CFDT, then Développement des Agro-Industries du Sud (DAGRIS), the antecedent of the current Géocoton. After independence in the 1960s, the government developed various support strategies for cotton growers, including loans, village
cooperatives, technical and scientific assistance, and a price guaranteed at the beginning of the season. Because of these discriminatory incentives for cotton to the detriment of other crops, a growing number of farming households in the country started growing cotton. Therefore, after the 1960s, production grew exponentially, with the exception of a brief period of reversal in the early 1990s.

Negotiations carried out with international partners and financial institutions, in the 1990s, led to the liberalization of the cotton sector in 1998. With liberalization, the long-established parastatal cotton company, Société des Fibres Textiles du Burkina (SOFITEX), which formerly controlled production and marketing now, in theory, competes with two new companies. Yet, SOFITEX currently is still the sole player in the country’s most fertile and extensive cotton zone in the west, and buys over 80 percent of the country’s exportable cotton. The new cotton companies, Faso Coton and SOCOMA, operate in the central and eastern zones of the country respectively. In agreement with the national cotton producers’ association, each of these companies provides producers with technical assistance, credit, inputs, and purchases all cotton grown their respective zone. They also propose a unique minimum guaranteed purchase price prior to the start of the agricultural season in order to stimulate producers while they are deciding how many acres to plant in cotton. After liberalization, production continued to skyrocket until the 2007-2008 season, when it declined significantly because of uneven rainfall and, above all, because many farmers found the farm-gate price too low compared to the costs of input and labor. More recently, in 2004, the Swiss NGO Helvetas has introduced a pilot program for the production of organic, fair cotton that targets women. For the past two years since 2007, Victoria’s Secret, the American lingerie company, has distinguished itself as a crucial partner of Burkina women’s organic cotton farming.
Despite its tribulations in the recent years, the expansion of cotton production has had an indisputably favorable impact on the life conditions of many farmers. For example, in addition to generating cash to successful farmers and bolstering the macro-economy, cotton allows farmers to access fertilizers on credit, which they could never have accessed otherwise. Many farmers also divert quantities of the fertilizers initially meant for the cotton farm to their food speculations. However, the expansion also raises issues brought to light under anthropological scrutiny. These issues include the farmers’ perceived link between cotton and food crop production and the various views of cotton as a path to improvement or poverty. Moreover, I also focus the gender relations and negotiations between household members in the process of production, distribution, and consumption of proceeds; and finally, investigate the organization and mobilization of labor for household work demand. Two questions, especially, need to be explored: Why do some farmers decide to grow cotton - in addition to the subsistence crops that every farmer grows – while others do not? What are the consequences of cotton production for the intra-household relationships?

There is a host of complex factors that influence smallholder farmers’ decisions to engage in cotton production in Burkina Faso; this complexity requires a deeper explanation than merely farmers’ need for greater cash incomes. This context poses the three pressing research questions this dissertation seeks to answer. (1) What conditions shape smallholder farmers’ decision to grow cotton? (2) Why do some male heads of household allow their wives to grow small plot organic cotton, when such a decision visibly increases the total workload of the household? (3) Why do women and other dependents in the cotton-producing households tolerate the increased workload in service of the head of the household even when they often receive no cash or only a nominal gift in return? Many facets of cotton production and minor puzzles such
as these can receive considerable light from an anthropological study that combines participant observation, informal interviews and chats, and life histories with formal surveying methods.

I argue that despite numerous structural constraints in the production of cotton in Burkina Faso, male and female smallholder farmers make informed decisions to engage in cotton production, and strategize to draw some benefits amid these constraints. This study aims to contribute to the knowledge about the relationship between food and cash crops, by reconciling the two categories of crops put in opposition in the literature; in fact, changing circumstances currently level the tensions between the two. It also sheds light on the reconfiguration of men’s and women’s access to resources in cash-crop production, and the opportunities this reconfiguration offers women to increase their bargaining power in the household and enhance their economic empowerment.

The Plan of the Dissertation

This dissertation is articulated into seven chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 presents the theory of development and disentangles it from its practice as it applies to Africa. It presents the debates over the dominant development models, and the way these debates evolved in time, and the impacts they had in the practice of development. The chapter focuses on issues of the production of the “agriculture for development” in Africa, sometimes also referred to as commercial agriculture, export farming, or cash crops. It surveys some of the extensive literature on the production of Agriculture for Development and the way this affects access to land, gender, and broader social relations within production units in Africa. I argue that despite the undisputable global and national structuring of production, smallholder farmers who engage in agriculture for development strategize to derive various benefits.
Chapter 3, which looks at the historical trajectory of export cotton production in Burkina Faso from the 1920s to the present, provides a case study of the development models presented in the previous chapter. It highlights the broader agricultural development plans in which the strategies for the organization of the cotton sector were embedded, the role of global forces and transnational and parastatal companies, and the way the relationships between such forces and the State affect cotton production and farmers’ livelihoods. I also stress the constraints of the Burkina cotton sector in the wake of global economic crisis, the uneven and dysfunctional rules of the global market, and how these rules affect the national economy. Finally, I explain the recent integration of women as independent growers of this long-time “male crop,” and address the ongoing debate over the production of transgenic cotton in Burkina Faso.

In Chapter 4, I present substantial ethnographic material that supports the broader argument of the dissertation. I first elucidate the factors that induced smallholder farmers Southwest Burkina Faso to engage in the production of cotton over the past decade, despite recent unfavorable market conditions. The second goal of the chapter is to revisit, using case studies, commonly held views about the exclusion of women from commercial farming and the incompatibility between production of so-called cash and food crops, which have also been categorized as “men’s” versus “women’s” crop (Boserup 1970; Mikell 1992; Escobar 1995). I explore the material and symbolic significance of cotton cultivation, as well as its constraints, through an analysis of several farmers’ biographies. This approach aims to highlight the villagers’ understanding of success, and the various dynamics that emerge in the process of production, consumption, and allocation of revenues at the household level. I also examine the link that farmers establish between cotton production and food security. Finally, I discuss women’s changing roles in cotton farming, the economic and bargaining power that some
women and youth muster despite constraints, and the sociocultural changes that emerge within rural communities in Southwest Burkina Faso because of cotton farming.

Chapter five argues that, with an increasing emphasis on export farming, access to labor, the major production constraint, is being reconfigured; and that there are signs that the traditional kinship-based form of agriculture is similarly changing. The chapter focuses on labor organization in and for the household, and the various mobilization strategies. It builds on existing scholarship on rural labor production in Africa (Meillassoux 1978; Saul 1983; Bassett 1988; Swindell 1990; Netting 1993) and examines the variations in a social setting characterized by increased export farming, insufficient wage laborers, and no landless farmers. I also give special attention to the local categorization of farms, and the way these categories inform the production of work and the nature of budgets within households.

Granted the significant contribution of non-household sources of work to household cotton-related activities, I also stress the role of inter-household and extra-household sources of labor in an area without landless laborers. In this setting, money alone is insufficient to mobilize enough quality labor at the right time. Many farmers with large productions therefore rely on social networks as alternative sources of labor to supplement household sources. In this vein, I draw on Bourdieu’s notion of capitals to explore the way larger cotton growers marshal their social connections and economic capitals to recruit alternative large-scale labor (Bourdieu 1980:2, 2005: 195). Then, I explain the kind of relations that are necessary for large-scale mobilization, and clarify the various ties that create mutual obligations between actors involved in the kind of pyramidal scheme of labor recruitment observed, as well as the cost of such labor recruitment.

Chapter 6 discusses how structure and agency interplay in Burkina Faso’s “cotton growing” area and era. I provide further insights into the social organization of production, especially the
rules of land access and inheritance. The Dagara understand the economy as ultimately rooted in agriculture, in turn controlled by the spirits of the ancestors. Thus, the chapter examines some perceptions of money and socio-economic activities, the changing roles of widows and married women in generating income, and the strategies they use to control incomes from various on- and non-farm activities. I show why the widow-friendly rule of land access in the research site falsifies recent portrayals of widows in Africa as vulnerable and as victims of dispossession and land-grabbing (Catell 2003; Izumi 2007). In addition, I explain some limits that widows and women face, and the empowering role of agency and choice.

Chapter 7 concludes the work by recapitulating the arguments developed in the previous chapters. I also discuss women’s participation in organic cotton farming and offer some reflections on the ripple effects of cotton cultivation on other aspects of rural life in the wake of global economic crisis and unfavourable international markets.

**The Study Site**

The site of this research is the Dano area in the Ioba Province in Southwest Burkina Faso. The administrative region of Southwest Burkina Faso is consisted of four provinces, and part of the zone of the country, which receives the highest yearly rainfall, with isohyets comprised between 900 and 1,200 millimeters. It belongs to the Sudanian climate type, and is characterized by an even terrain with about 450 meters in altitude. It belongs to the Sudanian phytogeographic domain with savannah-type vegetation (Burkina Faso 2005: 180). The population of the Dano area is predominantly Dagara-speaking, practicing subsistence agriculture and an embryonic pastoralism. The area is part of the “food basket” and the western “cotton zone” of Burkina Faso, and controlled by SOFITEX, which produces over 82 percent of the country’s exportable cotton. I have chosen this site for my research for three reasons. First, it is important for cotton
production at sub-zonal and national levels. Second, women who had been playing secondary roles in cotton production in the area are integrated now in the cotton economy as independent producers. Examining this unconventional gender role in cotton farming more closely will allow to sort out discrepancies and to understand reality on the ground. Finally yet importantly, I have first-hand knowledge of the area and am familiar with the subtleties of gender relations compared to other areas of the country.

At least two reasons dictate the need to study the intrahousehold and extra household dynamics that inform or result from the options of high input and organic agriculture in cotton production. In addition to the obvious importance it has for the region and the prospects of the national economy of Burkina Faso, the study I propose promises to yield theoretical insights into smallholder production under circumstances of greater involvement in export; which can inform policy on gender and commercial crop development elsewhere in Africa, and other developing economies.

The area of study has been a late comer in participating in the cotton boom of the past three decades, but the recent growth of production eventually convinced the then sole national cotton company to open a local agency to monitor cotton growing activities, input credit supply, and purchase of harvest. More remarkably, it has been one of the three pilot sites in the country a Swiss nongovernmental organization, Helvetas, elected in 2004 to initiate organic cotton production. The region has illustrated itself as the top producer of organic cotton nation-wide with a harvest of half the 2,000 tons in 2008-09. The organic cotton project promises to pay a fair price to producers. Furthermore, it promotes women’s production of their cotton. As a result, in the past five years, some women have been producing their own cotton on small plots, while still working on their husbands’ conventional cotton plots and the family food crop farms.
As I later elaborate in chapter 6, land is controlled and administered by patrilineal groups in this area, as explained in the classical ethnography of Goody (1962); and senior males have a privilege in administering this patrimony. However, people engage in agriculture individually. In the case of a household headed by an adult male, the produce of his main farm belongs to him, with the provision that he meets the “requirements” of his dependents. He is responsible for taking decisions on expenditures. Polygyny is widespread and practiced by men who can afford to pay multiple bridewealths. Unmarried women can have access to farming plots from their fathers or brothers, to be returned once they get married. Married women may also have access to small plots through their husbands or friends, generally, for temporarily growing small cash crops or garden produce. Until recently, women’s main produce was peanuts or soybeans, meant to enrich the woman’s “cooking-pot.” Men grow sorghum, millet, and maize, usually intercropped with beans, for the family staple, using in addition to their labor that of their wives and dependents. However, food crops can be sold for cash, depending on the head of household’s wishes or the household’s money needs. Heads of household also produce other cash crops such as rice, pepper, peanuts, etc. However, since the 1990s the dominant cash crop is cotton.

The Social Organization of the Dagara

The people the administrative district of Dano and surroundings are mostly Dagara-speaking and farmers. Labouret (1931) has categorized them in the earlier ethnographic literature into the “Lobi Branch,” that group in the Southwest of Burkina Faso, which Labouret thinks, shares cultural communalities. Each Dagara person primarily claims membership to a dɔwru (or dɔwluru), which represents a large group of females and males, who claim common descent from a mythological male ancestor whose name they usually do not even recall. It is impossible to build a genealogical tree of the dɔwru despite the strong implicit or explicit idea of a belonging to a
group descended from that male apical ancestor. It is impossible to build a genealogical tree of the ɔwru despite the strong implicit or explicit idea of a belonging to a group descended from that male apical ancestor. Each ɔwru is distinctive for its major totem, usually an animal, which they should neither touch, nor hurt, nor kill – directly or by complicity. The members of a ɔwru may live in the same geographical location or be dispersed in space, and are also bound to observe a set of taboos. The totem and taboos of each ɔwru define it in opposition to any other ɔwru.

There exist some vital and dyadic relationships between various ɔwru; to the fore of such relations is joking partnership, locally called ɔluɔru. Joking partners, ɔluɔru, can normally tease each other, even in extremely tense situations, without running the risk of upsetting the other party. The ɔluɔru can also serve as mediators or appeasers between the living and the dead, the humans and the spirits of the reciprocal joking ɔwru in situations such as death, initiation ceremonies, and even in some reconciliation sacrifices. The major function of the joking relationship is to deflect tension that involves members of the reciprocal joking group. This is achieved usually through ridiculing teasing. Because of the intercession role of the ɔluɔru, he/she is referred to among Dagara also as tampɛlɔru, that is, the mediator who pacifies situations by pouring ash to the spirits to cool their wrath. It entails from the above that the ɔwru corresponds to what is known as the patriclan in the anthropological literature, and the Dagara count over forty of them (Somé 1986).

Dɔwru is the paramount identity marker to the Dagara, and each ɔwru “includes all and only the offspring of its male members” (Scheffler 2001: 26); which underscores the prominence
of patrilineality among Dagara. People of the same dɔwrɔ consider each other as kin, whether they previously met or not; as a result, they can in no way engage in legally and socially acceptable marital or sexual relations. Consequently, marriage among Dagara is exogamous to the dɔwrɔ.

It is also common to find some supposed mythological affinity between one dɔwrɔ and another specific one; and such a relationship usually precludes marriage between the two dɔwrɔ involved. Groups of dɔwrɔ, which maintain such a relationship, act as special reciprocal mediators in various social situations, and more importantly, in funerals. A dɔwrɔ that plays this role vis-à-vis another is known as kiɛkutaa-dem. Each dɔwrɔ is exogamous to its kiɛkutaa-dem; although the totems and taboos of one dɔwrɔ do not bind its kiɛkutaa-dem. Local mythologies explain such “inter-patriclan” kinship as symbols of a surviving bond that remained after fissions that occurred within a single group of dɔwrɔ at an earlier stage of the development cycle of the larger Dagara group.

Each dɔwrɔ is made of a plurality of “houses” (yir, yie in the plural), to which the individual feels tightly related. Though the word yir evokes the physical house or an aggregate of houses, what is more important is its social dimension. Yir refers to all the male and female inhabitants of the building, or related blocks of buildings, who are offspring of a male parent who traces his relationship of descent to the original male ancestor and founder of the “house.” Membership to a yir is dependent on birth into that yir after transfer of bridewealth to the person’s mother’s (father’s) yir. This double situation gives the impression that the patrilineal character of the yir can be questioned, but a closer look reveals this is not the case. If a child is born from a woman for whom the father’s yir did not transfer bridewealth, the child, it is said is
not automatically a member of his father’s yir, unless further proceedings, including arrangements towards a fast correction and proof of good will of the father are made. However, in today’s economic context, such rules are loosely enforced, especially as no yir prides itself for owning or raising an out-of-wedlock daughter’s child. Such a child is stereotypically referred to as san-yir-bie (child procreated in the mother’s father’s house), normally remains in the mother’s father’s yir. Such cases would seem to imply that people are not always members of their father’s yir, merely by way of biology. In fact, such children are in an anomalous position and do not become full members of their mother’s yir either. This kind of situation is perceived as an embarrassment to the members of the mother’s yir because of cultural and spiritual dangers surrounding children born and residing in these conditions. Most members of the yir prefer not to live with a san-yir-bie, especially if it is a boy. The child’s residence in the mother’s yir does not make him/her a member of that yir when it comes to access to ancestral shrines and other rituals (Fortes 1953). The child is excluded from the mother’s yir shrines because of his/her unconventional and complex identity. The notion of yir implies a more or less known genealogical link (but reconstructable with some effort) between a chain of males and the apical, founding ancestor, from whom the members claim common descent. Thus, yir corresponds to the patrilineage in the anthropological literature, and forms the socially most relevant level of descent group. I provide further information on other aspects of the social organization in Chapter 6, especially as it relates to land issues.

Research Methods and Activities

The research villages included Yabogane, the highest cotton-growing village of the Dano district, and Tambirkpere, its lowest producing village (See Map 1). However, I also observed relevant developments and events, and collected data in various surrounding villages. During the
field research, I combined participation in and observation of farm and non-farm activities. I also conducted interviews and had conversations with research participants in various settings including dwelling homes, sorghum-beer taverns, cotton sales’ arenas, funeral places, village weekly market places, and other social gatherings. Data from life histories and focus group discussions also yielded crucial insights.

In addition, I gathered archival and secondary source data from village cotton producers’ unions, extension agents, and the Ministry of Agriculture, and implemented formal surveying methods. Then I used a Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) software to analyze the quantitative data. The data generated from the household surveys and those collected from the secondary source data revealed some general characteristics of households and their farming systems, and enhanced my criteria for selecting the households and farmers to consider in the qualitative data collection and analysis.

In order to answer the research first question, i.e. “What conditions shape smallholder farmers’ decision to grow cotton?,” I used information from the archival and secondary data on sale, acreage under cultivation, farming loans, chemical inputs bought, and credit owed or paid. These clarified the relationship between cotton and food crop production, and gave me an idea of the allocation of labor between different crops. I also used information from a survey questionnaire administered to 156 households. The survey questionnaires administered specifically in the main sites of Yabogane and Tambirkpere with the assistance of two

Map 1: Location of the Research Zone.
enumerators per village, whom I trained for the purpose. However, I used the questionnaire as a template to gather preliminary information on other households from other villages (see
Appendix A). I made sure that the head of household plus, at least one other member, usually a female spouse, were interviewed. I also used the survey responses – which set the socio-economic and demographic context, the property regimes in households, and the source of property acquisition – to answer this question. In addition, I mined my field notes from hangouts and interactions to find out the local social perception of and justification for cotton growing, and its perceived impact on non-cotton and non-farm activities.

The second question sought to understand why some male heads of household allow their wives to grow small plots of organic cotton, when such a decision visibly increases the total workload of the household. To answer it, I used data on labor organization, the aggregate time budget and allocation from households with women organic cotton growers, which I recorded during on-site observations. In addition, to assess the extent to which women’s production of cotton constitutes a household negotiation tool, which may increase women’s and men’s bargaining power, I used the information on household interviews, labor exchange, hang-outs, focus group discussions, and observations from husband/wife or head-of-household/woman-cotton-producer relations. I also tracked the allocation and destination of women’s cotton money, and used data recorded from participation in household decision-making and degree of decision implementation – as declared by household members; moreover, I compared this to the bargaining power of non-cotton household heads and husbands of non-cotton growing women.

As for the third question, it aimed to grasp the reason why women and other household dependants willingly provide labor in the personal farm of the head despite no or little cash remuneration. To answer that question, I relied on enumeration of women and dependents’ individual material possessions and their opportunities for off-farm economic activities. I also considered the overall household wealth, including food crop production and access to daily food
in granaries, the type of house, the quality of farming tools and equipment, household source of labor combined with information from focus group discussions, informal interviews, village informal conversations and observations.

**The Sampling**

The cotton company of my research area classifies producers into high, medium, and low categories (Schwartz 1996c). These categories correspond, respectively, to growers who produce an acreage of cotton equal to or over 6 hectares, between 2 and 6 hectares, and below two hectares. In Yabogane, the highest producing village, I found that only two households grew cotton farms of 6 and 7 hectares in 2007-2008 whereas the highest cotton-farming household in the Dano region had 16 hectares under cotton. In fact, the high cotton production ranking of Yabogane in the aggregate cotton production scale is due to the fact that every household grows it, although most of these declared to have only between 0.5 and 2 hectares. Though Yabogane is the highest cotton-growing village, very few households in it distinguish themselves with very large acreages under cotton. In fact, the big number of households involved in cotton gives the village an enviable reputation production its fame. Based on the production records, the highest cotton-producing household in Yabogane had cotton on a surface of 7 hectares in 2007, and 7.5 hectares in 2008. Only 5 percent of households grew cotton on surfaces between 4 and 7.5 hectares. An important distribution of households also declared surfaces between one and 2 hectares in Yabogane, 89.9 percent of the total.

Because of the popularity of cotton and the stigma that attaches to those who do not grow it in Yabogane, it is understandable that there are only three non-cotton growing households in the village. Conversations with the heads of these non-cotton households provided the reasons of their abstention promptly. One of the households was headed by a widow who lost her husband
at the beginning of the 2007-farming season. Her late husband, who reportedly used to grow cotton, still had his name in the previous year’s records of the farmers’ union. The second man, who did not grow cotton, underwent major surgery in 2007 and his decision was based on the fear of bad harvest and debt because of his physical condition. Finally, a single man, who composed the third household, opted out of cotton because he earns non-farm income as a woodcarver.

Each potential cotton grower declares his interest and intention to grow before the beginning of the season, as the cotton company requires. Farmers communicate these intentions through their village producers’ organization, to which they also convey their needs in inputs bought on credit. This allows the company to plan in the supply of fertilizer and insecticide in the requested quantities. One way for the company to estimate how much land is farmed for cotton is to look at the amount of fertilizer it supplies. For example, a request for four sacks of chemical fertilizer (3 sacks of nitrogen + 1 sack of urea) indicates plans to farm a surface under cotton of one hectare. However, I observed that farmers’ declared intentions do not always match with the actual acreage they hope to farm. A number of other factors including their overall indebtedness, their attitude towards loans, and available options for alternative means of soil fertilization, such as manure and other organic fertilizers, also inform the needs they express.

Among the 262 households that comprise the population of Yabogane, only 180 households figured in the production records for the 2007 agricultural season. That is, based on the statistics in the records of the three cotton unions of the village, only 68.70 percent of households grew cotton in Yabogane that year. However, this conclusion soon proves misleading. Farmers whose names were in the records – those who declared production intentions – are only the ones who officially contracted credit inputs with SOFITEX. They may
have shared those inputs with other farmers later. This group of cotton growers usually requests larger quantity of fertilizer than needed for the actual intended surface under cotton. Besides, it is common for some farmers to request less chemical fertilizers than recommended, because they use this only as supplement for their large organic manure. All these hidden realities resulted in notable inconsistencies between the claims on the area put under cotton and the harvested production in Yabogane.

I will provide here one example when I looked through the village production records; I realized that some farmers seemed to harvest more than twice the national and regional average yield per hectare. I was first fascinated with this result, but started having doubts when I came across the records of one farmer who reportedly harvested 5 tons of seed cotton from less than 1.5 hectares. I contacted the farmer in person, talked to him, and arranged to visit his farm. After the visit, I realized the “gross deception” in the claim about the farm size and asked the farmer to unveil the “trick.”¹ He gave the following answer: “I asked for fertilizer for 1.5 hectares but my brothers and I produced on 4 hectares of cotton. We supplemented the chemical fertilizers we bought on credit with organic manure from our cattle pen” (Seolar, Yabogane 10/18/2007). This finding proved very useful and central in reshaping my overall sampling design in Yabogane, and it kept me alert to the relevance and importance of observation as the most useful methodological tool and a means to crosscheck declarations all along the research.

As Bernard observed, even when accounting for their own behavior, people tend to regularize it (Bernard 1994). For this reason, and for fear of missing crucial manifestations in the field, Koenig and others emphasize the need for anthropological studies to rely on observation to

¹ In the study area, the term “trick” is used to refer to any secret technique. It is not offensive. It rather suggests that the person asked to tell the trick has a knowledge or technique that escapes the understanding of the one asking.
a greater degree since “by observing actual behavior rather than relying on reported behavior, we would expect to find even more variation” (Koenig et al. 2000: 242). This applies to my experience in the field when it comes to farmers’ declaration of household productions and goods. As I have come to realize, farmers tended not to declare all of their belongings, because of the way they perceived me: “a son of the region who flew from America, the bountiful land, and provider of development aid.” Thus, most farmers were inclined to orient my attention towards “our sufferings” (a ti wuur), with the hope that America would take action when I reported back such sufferings faithfully.

Without denying that there are many cases of real suffering, I also highlight that the locals had a vested interest in “selling their poverty” to the rich West, through “their son of a researcher.” In addition, there is the fear appearing immodest, and another reason is the dread of a potential witchcraft attack by a jealous neighbor. In this case, I realized the relevance of the point made by Koenig et al., their recommendation to “look explicitly at the interconnections of ideology and behavior” (Koenig et al. 2000:242).

Therefore, I endeavored to visit the homes or/and farms of most farmers included in the study, and to even interact informally with some of them in various social contexts. I carefully noted the kind of farming equipment they possessed, the quality and size of the dwelling, whether they had livestock or cattle and other visible capital goods, as well as the number of household members or workers I observed. Later I used elements of these observations to compare with the declarations during our informal conversations. In addition to facilitating rapport, these home and farm visits or hangouts gave hints about the farmers’ socio-economic position in the community. The prioritization of observation as a core methodological device to crosscheck
people’s declarations allowed me to capture meanings that otherwise would have eluded me and weakened the analysis.

**Table 1:** Surface of cotton farms as declared by owner compared with my results after measurement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of farmer</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Farmer’s declaration of surface area under cotton (ha)</th>
<th>My estimation of cotton surface area under after measurement (ha)</th>
<th>Difference between my estimation &amp; Farmer’s declarations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achille</td>
<td>Mebar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchabo</td>
<td>Mebar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nab Dabire</td>
<td>Mebar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwame</td>
<td>Mebar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dar</td>
<td>Mebar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francois</td>
<td>Naoule</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sansuon</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanbassaor</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dabire Bajelè</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dabiré Manka</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hien Noel</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dabiré Lucien</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dabiré Seolar</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dabiré Armou</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hien Félicien</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somé Taoritar</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Winbon</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hien Maagou</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somé Jean M</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somé Deyiré</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dabiré Daoba</td>
<td>Yabogane</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total surface</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>40.50</strong></td>
<td><strong>52.50</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because I found the declared harvests excessive compared to national and local average yields per hectare, I undertook not only to visit the farms, but also to measure some 21 farms using a measuring tape. After measuring, the calculation of the surface areas of those randomly chosen plots brought to light many inconsistencies between farmers’ declared surfaces and the real surfaces farmed (See Table 1). Although 21 farms is not a representative sample, it has the merit of highlighting a methodological issue that can affect data quality if not considered. The
information recorded by the extension agents has this problem of under-reporting the real farmed surface area. It only records what the farmer declared. During a conversation with one agent I hinted at the problem. He seemed surprised at my finding, and said that he assumed that because of the large amount of manure available to many farmers in the village, they were achieving “outstanding results” in yields by combining it with fertilizer.

One also encounters farmers exaggerating their surface area, in order to get from the company more fertilizers than needed, for the purpose of selling the surplus quantity. Some farmers prefer to buy fertilizers from such over-declarers by paying cash rather than taking the risk of entering under a collective loan agreement with fellow villagers in a group. In addition, it is frequent to see members of segments of lineage or different domestic groups share the inputs that a designated team leader contracts in his name on credit with the cotton company. While at the end of the season the monetary equivalent of the fertilizer loan is withheld from the cotton sales’ returns of the official contractor, the other associates pay the team leader for their share of the cost. These associated farmers can in fact sell their cotton crop to any producers’ organization in the region, because they are not formally in contract with any of them.

For instance, according to the records, one farmers’ organization of Yabogane, included 40 member households, but on the day of the sales, I counted 59 households showing up with cotton in the sales’ arena. This implies that 19 farming households were omitted in the official records, which included only 67.79 percent of cotton producers. This inaccurate declaration of needs for fertilizers is recurrent among all three farmers’ organizations I worked with in Yabogane. As mentioned above, since a good number of farmers in Yabogane also practice cattle or livestock breeding, they supplement chemical fertilizers with compost. Farmers who now
engage in the mixed use of chemical and organic fertilizers also believe that it enriches the soil and maintain nutrients better than using solely chemical fertilizers.

After developing a clearer understanding of complexities, I became more alert over the concern about quality, accuracy, and reliability of the data I was collecting. I therefore reviewed my initially proposed sampling criteria, by now basing the stratification on high producers versus small producers in Yabogane. However, instead of considering surface area as the central measure, I shifted the weight to production harvested. For this, I relied on the production records of producers’ organizations and individual farmers’ sales receipts. A harvest-surface ratio for the three farmers’ organization of Yabogane for 2007 provided an average yield of 1.8 ton per hectare. While bearing in mind the inconsistency between surface declared and real surface under cultivation, I considered small, any producer whose harvested production was below two tons. Producers who harvested at least two tons were considered high. Since over two thirds of farmers officially harvested cotton below this average figure in Yabogane, I drew the small and high producers on a 3:2 ratio.

This snapshot on cotton production in Yabogane does not apply to Tambirkpere, the smallest cotton-producing village of the area, where only 28 of the 162 households put cotton under a total aggregate surface of 11 hectares. The highest producing household, here, cultivated cotton on a surface area of only 2 hectares. The main reason they stated for not growing cotton is constraint in access to land and work force, compounded by their lack of enthusiasm for the price paid for cotton.
The Dissertation and the Literature

Much research on commercial agriculture in developing economies has focused on its real or assumed negative effects. Many scholars have blamed export or cash farming for its potential to jeopardize household food production (Franke and Chasin 1982; Mikell 1992, Udry 1996; Pitcher 1996), perpetuate male authority and gender inequality and mar women’s prospects for economic autonomy (Boserup 1970; Bay 1982; Spring and Wilde 1989; Carney 1994; Escobar 1995; Allman et al. 2002). However, observations in cotton-producing households of Southwest Burkina Faso, as well as emerging evidence from other parts of Africa, challenge such assumptions (Raymond & Fok 1995; Tersiguel 1995; Schwartz 1996, 1997; Schroeder 1999; Koenig et al. 2000; Spring 2000; Bassett 2001). This research shifts from the conventional wisdom about commercial farming to investigating the motivations of smallholder farmers – men and women – to grow export cotton in Burkina Faso. It also examines the underlying constraints faced by these producers and the way this production impacts relations within the household. The overall objective of the project is to analyze household cotton production, with particular attention to intrahousehold dynamics that shape men’s and women’s decisions. The relevant
processes are the production of food crops for both household consumption and sale; the organization of labor; and the allocation of revenue either as physical output or after conversion to cash.

My ethnography is built around three threads of scholarship. First, it explores the basis of the implicit contract between members of cotton producing households, and the non-material benefits it provides women and other dependents, especially by strengthening their positions in household negotiations and bargaining. Much has been said on the separation of household budgets (Guyer 1980b; Oppong 1983), the relations of production, and the uneven access to and allocation of resources within the household in Africa, especially in the context of commercial farming (Meillassoux 1981; Mikell 1992). In such circumstances, one would expect women and dependents to work only for themselves after having completed household labor tasks, rather than investing much energy in the head of household’s cotton farm. Household heads negotiate skilfully in order to successfully extract labor from other household members (Koenig et al. 2000), as they constitute the main source of work provision in a context of scarce wage labor. I highlight these changing dynamics within farming households.

The second point revisits perspectives on the exploitative and disempowering potential of so-called “agriculture for development.” From these viewpoints, farmers are powerless victims lured into growing cash crops (Franke and Chasin 1980; Escobar 1995). Proponents of these views also assume that commercial farming is antonymous with food crop production. In Burkina Faso, however, growing commercial cotton is a primary way in which farmers access agricultural inputs, especially chemical fertilizers. Therefore, many farmers decide to grow cotton primarily because they hope to improve the quality of their food farms and increase food harvest yields. There is cash potential in any crop, including food, as long as it is used to this
end. Though farmers grow cotton specifically for the market, many of them also consider food crops a significant source of cash. Furthermore, even if farmers grow food crops primarily to satisfy household needs, this type of crops can be placed in commodity state by metamorphosis or even by destination, as Appadurai (1986:16) would put it. Bearing in mind the undeniable structural constraints in commercial agriculture, and Burkina cotton in particular, I examine farmers’ perceived benefits and their declared non-cash gains embedded in growing export cotton, as well as their agency in the growing process, and the way production influences socio-cultural change. I thus draw on ethnographic findings, farmers’ biographies, and emerging scholarship on farmers’ benefits from commercial agriculture (Terghisel 1995; Schwartz 1997; Spring 2000a; Finnis 2006) to challenge the approach that puts food and cash crop farming in binary opposition.

I also draw from personal observations, and supporting evidence in the scholarship (Guyer 1984b, 1991: 373; Bryceson 1995; Ekujiuba 1995) to revisit some naturalist and over-generalized views that attributed cash crop farming to men exclusively and food crops to women. Besides, four decades after Boserup’s categorization of African agriculture following gender lines (Boserup 1970), some substantial positive developments are occurring in many parts of Africa, as women produce crops previously labeled as “men’s” (Spring 2000a; Kevane 2000; Stone and Stone 2000). For example, women in southwest Burkina Faso and other parts of the country now grow cotton independently on small plots. This opens avenues to both improve their economic conditions and increase their bargaining power within and outside of the household. Therefore, I move beyond the timelessness that characterized some feminist scholarship by historicizing gender relations in agriculture in the developing nations.
Finally, the third set of scholarship, on which this research builds, focuses on labor organization and mobilization in and for the household. It builds on prior studies on rural labor production in Africa (Hill 1970; Meillassoux 1978; Saul 1983; Bassett 1988; Netting 1993), enlightens us on the way households strategize to face farm work demand. This scholarship has focused on the crucial role of household members in producing work. It has also presented extra-household work alternatives offered to farmers who are wealthy enough to hire wage work, or the mobilization of work through reciprocal participation in mutual workgroups. However, this literature has mostly failed to point out the role of social networks, beside money, in mobilizing outside sources of labor in more and more cash-oriented settings characterized by insufficient availability of labor for hire. My research, thus, draws on Bourdieu’s notion of social capital to examine the dynamics underlying the new process of labor mobilization to add to the scholarship.

The Research and my “Multiplex Identity”

The emergence of the “insiders”- those research objects formerly dubbed “indigenous” or “natives” - as active players in anthropological inquiry has highlighted a crucial paradigmatic shift in the history and tenets of the discipline. However, the emergence of the analyses of so-called insiders, also qualified as reflexive, has caused controversies since the 1980s. There are those who erect a “hierarchy of purity of field sites” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:12, 16), and question the ability of “natives” to maintain objectivity and distance in studying their own societies, and generating scientifically reliable and valid research findings (Tedlock 1991; Ryang 1997: 71). However, an emerging body of scholarship, mostly produced by people who study

2 I borrow this expression from the anthropologist Kirin Narayan’s description of the effects of the many layers of her identity in her fieldwork in Nasik, India (Narayan 1993: 673).
their own societies, shed light on the multiple layers of the “insider” researcher’s total identity in order to separate the benefits of their reflexive position on objectivity from the drawbacks in the process of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and constructing ethnographic texts (Narayan 1993; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Ranco 2006). Based on this emerging scholarship, so-called insiders enjoy a set of advantages, but they experience limiting factors related to their status in various ways as well, just as outsiders do.

I believe that the condition for “objective” ethnographic research is first and foremost inherent to the individual researcher’s mastery of the “art of fieldwork” (Walcott 2001). In addition, the attachment to anthropological ethics, the dedication to the rigor of scientific inquiry, and the commitment to “the legitimacy of science as a special way of knowing,” come into play; for a non-discerning and unmitigated emic perception can easily challenge the validity of knowledge (Harris 1999: 33). It is true that familiarity with the research language and cultural understanding of the research place usually represents a plus. However, these taken-for-granted advantages can also constitute a source of problem as the researched group can sometimes be less tolerant or open vis-à-vis one of their own doing researching on them (Jacobs-Huey 2002: 797). Therefore, assessing objectivity and legitimacy of ethnographic research based only on whether it is conducted “at home” or “abroad” sounds problematic in today’s general tendency to “decolonize methodologies” (Smith 2006). After all, and to echo Narayan (1993: 671), ‘how “native” is a native anthropologist? [And] how “foreign” is an anthropologist from abroad?’ Though research “objectivity” resides in the researcher’s awareness of the layers of his/her identity before and when entering the physical space of the research field, it also lies in the commonly shared heuristic tenets of the discipline into which the researcher has been moulded. This justifies Bunzl’s call for a neo-Boasian approach in rethinking anthropology’s “Self/Other
binary,” which would allow anthropological knowledge not to “emerge as a function of [our] reified difference but on the grounds of [our] analogous location” (Bunzl 2004: 439-40).

For my part, I conducted ethnographic research in a place that I call home, even if I discovered most of my research villages only as a scholar in anthropological theory and inquiry who left the rural area for about two decades, and lived in the “White Man’s Land” for about five years. However, I still enjoyed the privilege of understanding the cultural insights and gender subtleties of the local population, besides speaking the language, which cleared the way from possible “alternating sounds” that could result in miscommunication (Boas 1974: 76). This situated me in the relatively comfortable position of “sorting out the structures of significance” from the people’s established codes, and making contextually appropriate and meaningful interpretations (Geertz 1973: 4-5). This relative cultural familiarity also helped me focus on the substantially “intriguing” research phenomena rather than “exotic” and superficial appearances.

However, this very position proved to hinder access to useful information at times. I could not afford to do numerous things or ask about them; though doing or asking would have yielded insights into my research, had that been possible. For instance, I had wanted to check people’s claims on amount of food harvested by looking into the granaries. But as a “son of the area,” I know it is grossly inappropriate for a person to look into another household’s granary, except in rare and special ritual contexts. Conversely, this restriction does not apply to a visiting Westerner who can look into a person’s granary. The farmer will attribute the move to mere curiosity of a passing tourist who constitutes no danger at all. In my position, looking into a person’s granary would have been analogous, for instance, to sniffing into a person’s bank statement in the US. In an event the account is credited, the owner might still be mad but somewhat tolerate the faux pas; otherwise, the embarrassment would be felt more painfully.
Because of my “insider’s” identity, the villagers have deceived me at a couple of occasions by luring me away or giving me a wrong appointment on purpose to make me miss what I was interested in observing, usually sacrifices. In what follows, I narrate one of these events where I was unwelcome. I went to a cotton sales’ arena the day before purchase when the villagers had to carry their harvest out to the sales place. Normally before the sales day, or prior to the actual purchase, an agent of the cotton company shows up to inspect and grade the harvest of each farmer. The inspection is usually a very stressful test to farmers, because a grading of one’s production to the lower quality implies losing about 25 francs (about 5 cents) on each kilogram of seed cotton, and the possibility of facing indebtedness. When I stopped by the public sales’ place, I saw a teenager holding a rooster. When I asked what it was meant for, an adult man answered nicely that they intended to make a gift to the inspecting agent, as is commonly done, in an attempt to soothe his wrath to degrade the villagers’ cotton. I rode my way to another village where I had an appointment. On my way back in the afternoon, I stopped by the sales’ place, again, to inquire about the way the inspector appreciated the rooster and other business. The farmers I now told me that the rooster was actually meant for sacrifice, and was sacrificed to the ancestors to beg them to intercede before God so that He would keep the inspector from causing havoc on people’s cotton incomes with ruthless cotton downgrades. They “did not want me to know this because I would ask them difficult questions.”

I later learned that people referred to me as the “man who asks crazy questions,” and I understood why some of them were politely dodging me. They thought my questions were crazy because I “ask questions to which everybody knows the answer,” or so they thought. I did not want to put answers to anybody’s mouth, so I would not assume that I know the answer, and in many cases, I felt happy I asked such questions. Consequently, instead of taking offence for the
nickname, “the-man-who-asks-crazy-questions,” I rather used it as an entry point in later interviews or conversations. This usually created a humorous environment, which was propitious for interactions and further “crazy questions,” kontɔn-ir sooro. In fact, I realized that what participants labeled “crazy questions” where those likely to result in insightful answers that could lead to theoretical conclusions.

One afternoon, as I socialized with my host in a sorghum-beer tavern, I overheard a man allude to me as “Mwindar,” a crawling insect, which is locally famous for its grotesque appearance. This tiny insect collects so much dirt on its path that only its eyes are free from dirt, so that it can see and collect more dirt. The ridiculous appearance of Mwindar gives the impression of an overloaded truck. The villagers also associate Mwindar with some kind of mental retardation. When I laughingly tried to know more about the reason why he called me that new nickname, the man, who was embarrassed, vehemently denied referring to me. However, the laughter that his allusion and my question generated in the sorghum-beer tavern convinced me that my endless interest and questions on issues that I “was supposed to already know” had earned me that other unflattering nickname, which my host later confirmed.

I considered these labels, which could have caused hurtful feelings in other circumstances, as rather symptomatic of the acceptable methodological path of my research. Nevertheless, they still indicated, at least to the eyes of the villagers, that my departure from the cultural space for further training had turned me into a person with some sort of mild retardation and often-incomprehensible ways, a partial outsider. Surprisingly, as in Lobnibe’s ethnography on women in Northern Ghana (Lobnibe 2007: 22), my gender identity did not seem to constitute the slightest barrier during the research. On the contrary, after I broke the first contact ice, most women were very open and candid in their answers, as they seemed to have seen in me the only
male person who seemed to care about issues pertaining to women. At times, their candidness would give me the impression that they were rather talking to an envoy of a development agency that is close to their own experiences and attentive to their concerns.

Having presented the context of the research and the above preliminaries, I now move to the next chapter, where I examine the debates over the dominant development models, the way these debates evolved in time, and the impacts they had on the practice of development in Africa, and more specifically on what is dubbed “agriculture for development” in Africa.
CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE IN AFRICA:  
THEORY AND PRACTICE

Despite the widespread view to the effect that people practiced agriculture in pre-colonial Africa only for self-sustenance, the literature provides otherwise. Prior to the “Scramble for Africa,” which resulted in the occupation of the continent in the last decade of the 19th century, some sectors of production were already geared towards the foreign market, and controlled by men in power positions, especially in the forested and coastal areas (Hart 1982; Berry 1975, 1985, 1993). Oil palm, rubber, cocoa, peanuts figured among agricultural commodities that were then already exported to Europe; which kept Africa’s agriculture in the flow of globalization far before European colonization made it more visible. Cotton also proved to be an essential trade item. But it circulated widely as cloth, and was even used as currency in certain areas. This important local use-value of cotton, thus, circumscribed its distribution and primarily gave it less visibility in the foreign market (Bassett 1995: 247, 2001). Yet, it became a significant export commodity, mainly grown in the savannah areas, after it was given prominence in what is commonly dubbed today “agriculture for development.” In various places of the continent, the European colonial administrations undertook numerous projects that claimed to target the well-being of the colonized populations (Sarraut 1923:23; Isaacman 1996). Such projects included forced production of some types of crops, usually meant for export to industrial countries, and “modernized” technologies (Bassett 1988; Schwartz 1993; Isaacman 1996; Beusekom 2002).

“Agriculture for development,” as I understand it here, stands for any farming enterprise, in the global South, precisely market-oriented, which aims to boost output using advanced farming techniques and technologies. In the 1970s, some people put more emphasis on “self-sufficiency” in food as the condition for development. The professed ultimate aim of agriculture for development is to improve the living conditions of the rural populations through their
engagement in market-oriented farming, and subsequently, their increased opportunities for cash earning. By being oriented towards foreign markets, agriculture for development also aims to improve the macro-economy of the country of production through greater access to export-earned foreign currencies. For this reason, it has historically benefited from the special attention of the states – most often in partnership with transnational corporations (TNCs), and multilateral or bilateral agencies. For practical purposes, I will use “agriculture for development” interchangeably with “cash-cropping”, “export,” “commercial” or “commodity” agriculture throughout this dissertation, despite some semantic nuances between these terms.

Agriculture for development is one of the many chapters that constitute the practice of development in countries of the global South, also commonly known as the developing nations in allusion to their embryonic economic and technologic growth. Therefore, the ideology and policy of agriculture for development are no different from the principles and strategies of other broader development sectors. According to Gardner and Lewis (1996: 25), development “refers to processes of economic change which have been precipitated by economic growth, and/or specific policies and plans, whether at the level of the state, donor agencies or indigenous social movements.” Thus, the proclaimed objective of development is to provoke the well-being of the targeted populations, usually in less affluent material conditions, by creating technical and economic progress (Olivier de Sardan 1995: 59). Agriculture for development, accordingly, aims to create the conditions for improving the living conditions of rural populations through a “modernization” of their farming technologies and practices whose backwardness retains the peoples in poverty.

Its objectives thus understood, the inception of the practice of development, and mainly agriculture for development, goes back to the interwar period when European colonial powers
made concerted efforts to modernize their colonies, in the early 20th century (Beusekom 2002: xxii). There was also an effort to develop agriculture for local consumption. Local authorities and the metropolitan government had different priorities. Thus, the European colonial administrations engaged in agricultural development in diverse ways, and implemented farming of export crops, primarily meant to meet the industrial needs of the mother countries while laying the grounds for the economic take-off of the colonies (Sarraut 1923: 277; Isaacman and Roberts 1995; Likaka 1997; Beusekom 2002: xxi). This approach, which the French colonial authorities termed “mutual development,” seemed to have been shared by other colonial administrations. It suggested that “Africa’s development was inextricably linked to Europe’s. The production of the raw material that Europe required and the ever greater integration of Africans in the circuits of international trade would increase the income of the producers” (Beusekom 2002: xxii). In this respect, the French were very active in West Africa where, in the early 1920s, they created a department of agriculture in each colony and many agronomic and botanical research stations. They also made extension services and credit available to farmers.

During the post-Second World War era, which is the beginning of the development era in its current understanding, new actors of development came in to the scene. The international development agencies, as they are called, including bilateral and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and agencies of the United Nations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization entered the arena of development, in a more formalized way. During the post- independence era and especially in the 1970s, development assistance boomed in the “Third World” countries. The “boom” was related to the accumulation of a lot of capital because of huge profits from oil: the “petrodollars.” Many poor countries were given multi-million dollar loans for implementation of development
projects that inexorably turned out to be of no avail. The growth and standards of living of the countries, compounded by the oil crisis, kept crumbling. And because they could not pay back the loan, “structural adjustment” kicked in so they would pay it.

Thus, in the 1980s, highly indebted nations had to undergo economic reform in order to be eligible for development assistance with the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) spearheaded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Pearson & Jackson 1998: 3). One much-criticized impact of structural adjustment is that despite its professed focus on agriculture, it has deteriorated agricultural production and incomes in Sub-Saharan Africa by being overly driven towards macroeconomic issues, and failing to examine the reality of life at the microeconomic scale where many producers are women (Gladwin 1991:7). The gender neutrality of SAPs and their emphasis on exportables perpetuate the low statuses of women who usually have lesser access to agricultural credit and input. The post-structural adjustment period of the 1980s also gave room to non-profit or non-government organizations (NGOs) to walk in the development sphere, and take in charge many of the development functions previously performed by the states. They also claim altruistic agendas for the targeted populations and by the 1990s was their golden decade.

There have been numerous and sometimes-contradictory accounts of the benefits and limitations of production for export farming in the colonial and post-independence states of Africa and elsewhere (Franke & Chasin 1980; Mikell 1992; Berry 1993; Isaacman & Roberts 1995; Pitcher 1996; Gupta 1998; Bassett 2001, 2009; Beusekom 2002). Because of similarities to former colonial projects, agriculture for development has been often criticized for perpetuating colonialism or economic domination in the post-colonial era (Comité Sahel 1974; Haugerud et al. 2000: 2; Freiberg 2004), and for enacting agendas that generate little or no improvement for
the intended beneficiaries (Franke & Chasin 1980; Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1995; Isaacman 1996). Some critics also point out the uneven inclusion of women and their constraints in accessing land and production returns with the production of commercial agriculture (Boserup 1970; Escobar 1995; Allman et al. 2000, Allman & Tashjian 2002). There has been a recurrent criticism that agriculture for development lays the grounds for the growth of capitalist economy, farmers’ impoverishment, lower production of food crops, gender inequality, and unfair South-North trade relations. However, there is evidence that export agriculture did benefit some farmers, to various degrees, in some areas of the global South, either through access to technological packages, better food harvests, or income from sale (Berry 1993; McMillan 1995; Tersiguel 1995; Spring 2000; Finnis 2006; Bassett 2009).

This chapter argues that despite the undisputable global and endogenous structures governing agriculture for development in Africa and elsewhere, smallholder farmers and women strategize to derive material or non-material benefits from it. The chapter aims to disentangle the theory of development from its practice. It presents a broad framework of development with further emphasis on agriculture for development, in Africa, on which my work builds. First, I assess the principal threads that informed development. Then, I discuss the literature on the production of market-oriented agriculture, focusing on the impact of this enterprise on the rural economy, and the major problems that this entails. Finally, I briefly review major accounts on the effects of the increased commercialization of agriculture on gender relations, and the way it influenced the social and cultural landscape, mainly at the level of the household.

The Theories of Development

Development literally evokes a process that starts at the embryonic stage and grows into a mature state, that is, from a diminutive status to full-fledged condition. Development, as praxis
and theory, usually focuses on issues of countries, which are believed to be materially poor, technologically and economically backward, and culturally inferior in comparison to industrialized countries, which are generally in Europe and North America. The ideology and practice of development, thus, aim to engender improvement of the targeted communities “through a diffusion of Western traits” (Lewellen 1995: 50). The development ideology, in its current form, is generally viewed as originating in the post-World War II era, and mainly in the January 20th 1949 Inaugural speech of President Truman who characterized countries of Latin America as “underdeveloped,” and therefore in need of the altruistic assistance of the US (Lewellen 2002:62). However, in a broader sense, the development ideology can be traced farther back, at least, to the interwar era (Beusekom 2002: xxii), through various undertakings of the European colonial administrations in the rationalization of their “civilizing mission” in Africa and other parts of the world. The models that inform the theory of development are arranged into two dominant paradigms: modernization and underdevelopment.

The modernization theory of development grew from roots in the ideas of the Enlightenment era, and the classical evolutionist approaches of the 19th and early 20th century. In some versions, progress follows a uni-linear route that goes unavoidably through given stages that range from primitive life to industrialization. For instance, Durkheim uses his theory of division of labor in society to better present a dichotomous view of social evolution. In societies at the lower scale of development, according to this theory, everyone produces what they need, and depends less on their peers. Durkheim calls the bond between people in this social context mechanical solidarity. In contrast, labor specialization is the defining feature in industrialized societies, where individuals are more tightly interdependent of each other’s services; what binds them is organic solidarity.
These two poles of social advancement were epitomized, respectively, by the rest of the world, as the bottom, and the West as its pinnacle. In the post World War II period, scholars such as Rostow (1960) adamantly defended that the “Third World” had to walk through the same stages as the industrial nations in order to achieve development. He believed that relying on Western history, countries of the developing world could be sorted out into five categories of social and economic progress: “The traditional societies, the preconditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption” (Rostow 1960: 4). In these views, development is also usually “measured by growth of national GDP, industrialization, urbanization, and agricultural commercialization” (Koenig et al. 2000: 2). This explains the reason why most post-war mainstream developmentalist strategies have long aimed at urban centers, with the intent to provoke the sociocultural and economic changes that would lead to an emulation of the Western-style industrial societies (Horowitz and Painter 1986:2). In fact, the debate about this issue of development priority was polarized. While some people thought that the key to development was industrialization, others wanted to start with agriculture. In addition, there was a debate within the industry supporters whether to emphasize consumer goods or heavy industry.

The modernization model takes underdevelopment as the starting point of the developing nations. It has received much criticism for taking this ahistorical stand, for opposing traditional societies to “modern” values, for failing to link economic changes to sociocultural changes, and, more importantly, for ignoring external historical influences on local realities (Koenig et al. 2000: 2). Along with the pervasive ethnocentrism stigmatized in the model, the critics have also raised questions on considering growth as the only component of development. They also questioned the homogeneous view of society that ignores divisions of various sorts and
distribution dynamics at the scale of the entire society or within the smallest units (Gardner & Lewis 1996:15). Above all, the fundamental criticism of developmentalist views had been that it crucially fell short in understanding the causes of underdevelopment as the manifestation of global and historical inequalities.

The underdevelopment model, also referred to as dependency theory, stood in polar opposition to the modernization model. Its roots lie in the views developed in the early 1950s by a group of Latin American scholars working under the aegis of the Economic Commission of Latin America (ECLA), which the United Nations created in 1948. Another generation, influenced by Marxism, gave these ideas a sharper turn in the 1960s. With Andre Gunder Frank, arguably the most critical of all, this generation of theorists explained development in terms of political and historical structures, and pointed to capitalism and the world market itself as the cause of underdevelopment (Frank 1969; Gardner & Lewis 1996:16; Lewellen 1995: 61, 2002: 67). They shifted the focus of the analysis from the internal structure of the countries to their position in international exchanges. This paradigm, therefore, attributed external causes to underdevelopment. In stark opposition to the perspective of the modernization theory, the dependency paradigm did not view underdevelopment as a point of departure. On the contrary, it perceived this phenomenon as the result of a long historical connection with the countries in the west corner of Europe in a global process that transformed these countries into the “core,” guiding the change; and the rest of the world into a “periphery” following the vicissitudes of the economies at the core. The proponents of the theory advocated a shift to self-reliance, industrial development, equitable income distribution, a generally cautious attitude to international trade and financial transactions with advanced capitalist economies (Amin 1972; Wallerstein 1979).
The underdevelopment model led eventually to approaches that place the emphasis away from the production and productivity, in rhetoric. Recently, some anthropologists, inspired by Foucault have broken a new path in the paradigms of development study: “the discourse of development.” Despite their skepticism on the efficacy of development, the champions of the discourse of development believe in the good intent underlying the actions and objectives of many development practitioners. However, they also remain aware that the structure of knowledge that the dominant discourse of development produces blurs most problems and only highlights others, which developers are likely to tackle. In this vein, Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995), who are prominent pioneers of this approach, view the developmentalist enterprise primarily as a “discourse” that rationalizes hidden agendas rather than a feasible policy orientation meant to improve the plight of the poor, as proclaimed. Akhil Gupta, who also positions himself as an advocate of the discourse argument, thinks that, “development came to be instituted through colonialism and diverse modes of governance and domination in the postcolonial world” (Gupta 1998:36). Because the framing discourse of such structures is likely to blur the basic conceptions that guide the planning and implementation of development programs, the programs are likely to leave out some actors and create or enhance inequalities.

The theorists of the discourse approach to development, which some scholars label arguably as neo-Marxists (Gardner and Lewis 1996), have the merit of having signaled out the possible hidden agendas behind the development talk – either of donor capitalist countries or of the national or local elites – which may subvert avowed goals. However, they are currently also critiqued for their “we and them” framework, their homogenized view of the poor countries, their emphasis on the powerlessness of the developed and their more or less total dismissal of the potential for improvement or the efficacy of development strategies. Such a radical stance raises
legitimate questions, and ultimately sounds like a version of the naïve primitivist approach that advocates the noble savage, under new clothing. Ferguson’s recent defense of “alternative modernities” for Africa in his *Global Shadows* reveals this ambiguous position (Ferguson 2006).

A more legitimate criticism of underdevelopment theorists is that they focused only on external factors – that is, world capitalism – and failed to examine the internal conditions of non-European countries, which may determine how they articulated with the merchant and industrial capitalism, and the local dynamics at the micro level of the actors, beneficiaries, or victims of development within countries or communities. In recent decades, there had also been a virtual shift in the development approach also called the “third way.” It departs from “free-swinging ethnocentricity in development interventions to recognizing indigenous cultures […]” (Cernea 1991: 2). Thus, the “third way” to development advocates bottom-up and actor-centered strategies, and focuses on local knowledge or local participation as key methodological tools. For instance, in his research in the Montaro Valley of central Peru, Long (1977) demonstrated the limitations of the models of underdevelopment characterized by what he calls “macro-orientations.” He, instead, analyzed the dynamics at the micro-level, focused on “the differential responses to change” and discussed “the transactional and decision-making entrepreneurship developed by anthropologists [such as Barth (1966)]” (Long 1977: 7). His findings, which gave prominence to human agency and individual choice, de-emphasized the perceived chains that linked the local producers and the metropolis (Long & Long 1992). This is, then, an early rejection of the assumption of the dependency theorists that pauperism and stagnation are the only possible outcome of integration into global capitalism. The local actors at the lowest point of the chain can sometimes gain a share out of development projects through a varied set of strategies despite undeniable constraints.
The analysis of the development enterprise by scholars of the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development (APAD), spearheaded by Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, certainly fall in line with the “third way” and differ from previous approaches, including the discourse approach. They have been vocal in challenging the top-down practice of and approach to the study of development they call “a kind of naïve do-it-yourself sociology” (Olivier de Sardan 1988: 217). Though they view development assistance as an uncertain resource looked forward to in many African communities, the APAD scholars acknowledge the potential contribution of such assistance to the local economy when it materializes. As it “involves a number of social actors” with varying objectives, development as a social phenomenon derives brokers who mobilize and channel resources to countries, regions, or villages through high-stake competition. The development brokerage can cause frictions or generate political capital for various actors at local levels (Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan 2000; Engberg-Pedersen 2003).

Suffice it to note, however, that this departure from the former approaches suggests in no way their irrelevance in the analysis of today’s development practice. In the section that follows, I review the literature on the practice of development in Africa, and the way it is contextualized through the production of commercial or export-oriented farming, that is, agriculture for development.

Commercial Agriculture in Africa: Impacts on the Rural Economy

As we can say for much else, Africa’s agriculture is the outcome of local, global, and historical processes. European colonialism played a key role in laying the conditions for agrarian modernization and expansive commercial farming in Africa. In the colonial agricultural development ideology, traditional land tenure systems and “archaic” agricultural practices were
the major causes of low crop output and poverty. Consequently, the colonial administrations - Portuguese, British, and French - engaged in broad agrarian policies and agricultural development plans that were officially meant to “redeem” the African populations, even though such plans veiled obvious stakes. One characteristic commonality of colonial policies was that they arrogated the right to alienate land (Bassett 1993: 7; Berry 1993: 46-47). Though all “vacant lands” in the French colonies belonged to the state, actual land impounding was less real in French Africa than in the British colonies, especially when compared to southern and eastern Africa where in many cases land expropriations resulted in the locals’ inability to continue as independent farmers and their becoming part or full-time wageworkers.

In the post-World War II era, donor agencies and the new African elites embraced this colonial development ideology, and it emerged as a core principle in postcolonial agricultural developments. The rationale for engaging in export agriculture in colonial and postcolonial Africa was the potential for the enterprise to improve the living conditions of the “poor.” However, there is substantial evidence that beyond the philanthropic pronouncements, economic interests of the metropole were the real motivations. Actually, some essential objectives of the colonial economic development enterprise consisted in securing land and labor for capital investment of European entrepreneurs, at least in the British South and East African colonies. Colonial administrations also aimed to generate revenues for the mother country while simultaneously providing the conditions to meet the economic goals in the colonies, and to incite the social development of the colonized. In 1921, the French Minister of Colonies, Albert Sarraut, designed a master plan, which he presented to the Parliament. The document, called *la mise en valeur des colonies* (the development of the colonies), aimed to “develop” the French colonies by improving the livelihoods of populations, and to simultaneously extract raw
materials useful for the industries of the mother country. He published the book, which under the name of the plan, is now a classic and an invaluable source for studies that focus issues of agriculture for development in – colonial – Africa, mainly in French West Africa.

Export-oriented farming and agricultural development projects undertaken under colonial regimes, and pursued in postcolonial era in most of Africa, resulted in agrarian reforms that affected pre-existing land tenure systems, and caused numerous negative consequences. In this respect, many scholars support that commercial agriculture has not only strained availability, but also altered pre-existing modes of access to land. Reyna and Downs (1988: 12) observe that the consequences of agricultural commercialization have transformed land into a purchasable good, which has, in turn, restricted access to vulnerable social subgroups, mainly women, and is in the process of concentrating land in fewer hands.

In her study on commercial tree-farming in Western Nigeria and Ghana, Sara Berry brings to light the fact that with the spread of commercial agricultural “the methods of transferring rights to land become increasingly commercialized,” as well as “the cost of acquiring them has tended to rise over time” (Berry 1975: 104-105; 1993: 107). For instance, she shows that under cocoa cultivation, the value of ishakole, a formerly nominal payment that endowed the stranger with rights of exploitation of the land, had increased. She also warns that though the rising monetization of land access rights sharpened the distinction between property owners and tenants, it did not result in the emergence of distinct socio-economic classes. In plain terms, the processes, which gave no room to dispossession of the small farmers, made accumulation of large landholdings ultimately inconclusive (1993: 120). They did not erase the role of social identity and status in access to land either. More importantly, Berry underscores the relevance of what she calls “pervasive negotiability, ambiguity, and indeterminacy” in rights to
land. In fact, she stresses individual farmers’ strategies of negotiation as effective ingredients in attaining and maintaining useful resources such as land; which lead farmers to “keep options open” by “invest[ing] in social relations” and other networks (1993: 4). Sally Moore has also highlighted the theme of negotiability in landholding relations in her study on land tenure in colonial and postcolonial Tanzania. She documents the ways in which courts allow to reopen and renegotiate cases settled at an earlier period, and explains how people, operating at local social systems, often reconfigure the effect of national legislation over land access and tenure rules, and ensure that their land is “insulated from external interference” (Moore 1986: 319, 1998: 40).

While crediting Berry’s and Moore’s position on the ambiguity and negotiability in land access rights, Peters expresses reservation about the over-emphasis on agency in relations to land, and signals what she calls “the limits of negotiability” in land access (2002: 47, 2004: 270). In plain terms, she thinks that Berry’s and Moore’s portrayal of systems of landholding in Africa, under such flexible light, overshadows the pervasive competition and conflict that result in patterns of inequity, social inequalities, exclusion, and class formation (Peters 2002: 61, 2004: 270). Through a review of the extensive literature on land access and tenure systems on the continent, Peters concludes that despite the social embeddedness of relations to land, social researchers should not lose sight of the fact that such relations “are embedded in unequal social relationships” (2004: 304). Drawing on recent documentation on conflict and competition over land in many parts of Africa, she pinpoints the rising role of the rural and urban elite in securing large quantities of cultivable land as evidence of the limits of the negotiability argument. She therefore concludes that the “negotiability and ambiguity” approach to land is a “barrier to analyzing the social relations surrounding land” (2004: 305). The negotiability or flexibility of
land tenure arrangements in Africa is often the result or the cause of geographic mobility of the actors (Breusers 2000).

One of the merits of Peters’ observation is her ability in capturing the subtle processes, trends, and patterns that emerge in recent African systems of land tenure, because of agricultural development and increased farming for sale. A dominant trend is the progressive individualization of property rights to land and the emergence of a market for land rental and sales (Kevane 1997). In the same vein, Mathieu and others (2003) document new strategies for land access in western Burkina Faso, which translate into open cash renting. This pervasive development of monetized land access is a warning on possible future social inequalities in land access, accumulation, speculation, and class differentiation; especially with the rising role of a rural elite and, especially, the urban nouveaux-riches in accumulating large amounts of rural land. The emergence of land markets in many places of Africa set the conditions for some kind of rural capitalism, at least in the long run. In reaction to such recent developments, there has been evidence of resistance and actions on behalf of local groups in “reasserting and strengthening their rights to communal ownership of land” (Kevane 2004:57). Saul who observed this phenomenon in its embryonic stage two decades earlier warned us about development of a capitalistic farming subsector, which, however, did not alter the old regime of land tenure; and subsequently precluded the possibility of commoditization of farmland (1988: 274).

The alteration of old landholding rights, which followed from the increased agricultural commercialization in Africa, also affected women’s land rights in various ways. Sorensen (1996: 609) shows that increased commercialization of food crops, because of unfavorable market conditions for cotton, the former top cash crop, participated in redefining rules of land access for
women in Busoga, Uganda, and marring their access to land. In fact, after cotton, the former male cash crop has fallen into disgrace, food crops, which used to be the exclusive domain of women, have acquired more market value, and were appropriated by men. Because food crops were grown both for family consumption and sale, men overruled a women-friendly customary practice to land access that existed prior to the devaluation of cotton. Actually, men abided by the tacit customary principle that allocated part of the household farm to their wives, to grow crops for sale for their personal budget. Under current circumstances of commercialization of food crops, men applied the provision of customary law that defines land access rights following patrilineal descent; an option that subsequently put women at the fringe of economic empowerment and autonomy.

Judith Carney and Michael Watts (1991) provide an insightful account of gender relations to land in an irrigation project in the Gambia. They report that men “invaded” women’s land and simultaneously required more women’s labor in their maruo, the collective household farms, where control over proceeds devolves to men. In the same vein, and still in a Gambian context, Schroeder (1997) provides quite an original case of gender relations to land access. The author describes circumstances in which the manipulation and redefinition of meanings in land access shifted the pre-existing women-friendly balance of privileges in land access to the benefit of men. But in the process, the support of a development NGO allowed the women to turn the less productive swamp land into profitable rice and horticultural gardens. However, the implementation of a new agro-forestry development project gave the opportunity to men to counter the overwhelming economic power of women. The new “development” project did not certainly “develop” women. It allowed men to plant trees on the women’s swamplands. The tree
overshadowed the women’s gardens, and limited productivity. This conflict shows that women’s chances to access land are in jeopardy in the context of increased agricultural production for sale.

In addition to the changing rules in land tenure, the large-scale commercial farming in many Africa also altered pre-existing modes of production, especially labor power, means of production, and relations of production between members of production units. For instance, the collective mode of production that prevailed in the former “natural economy,” opened to individuation under the “new context” (Koenig et al. 2000). While previously rural producers used to engage in the farming enterprise for the sake of “securing their livelihood through the use of family labor on family land” (Bernstein 1979:2), people engage in agriculture now also with variables of the capitalist mode of production, including intensification and conditions of access to technology. Besides, the passage of crops from a household’s common product into money transformed property rights and rules of access to the product in many cases. In some cases, this affected the social structure and the rules of inheritance, and placed some members of the production unit in vulnerable power positions, as Gwendolyn Mikell shows with the rise of cocoa in matrilineal Akan societies of Ghana (Mikell 1992). Similarly, Meillassoux (1964: 28, 1971) showed how the passage from subsistence to market economy shook the social fabric of the Gouro of Cote d’Ivoire. As relative individuality supplanted former communitarian mode of production, it also dispelled power from the elders to the young. In fact, juniors, who became able to access the proceeds of their production in commercial farming, could do without the previously silent contract of submission that bound them to their seniors. However, women did not experience the same good fortune as the junior males because they have little leverage in making decisions over production and resource allocation. This is, perhaps, the reason why the
author concludes that in such a context, “woman disappears behind man: her father, brother or spouse” Meillassoux (1975: 116).

Agricultural development in Africa primarily aimed to boost production of high-value export farm commodities in the colonial or postcolonial states. Multilateral or bilateral Western donors implemented this objective through numerous integrated rural development schemes, which received top funding priority in many parts of the continent (Macmillan 1995; Bernal 1988; Beusekom 2002). Simultaneously, the “[s]ocial evolutionist justifications for development were accompanied by a growing body of scientific research that sought to define appropriate agricultural and land management policies for Africa” (Beusekom 2002: xxiii). The experimentations and implementations of these agricultural techniques, which were more notable in the French colonies, ultimately made qualitative difference in the lives of some farmers in a long run, despite instances of bitter experiences. By allowing farmers to acquire and transfer technology to non-export crops, including food crops, commercial farming favored general agricultural transformation in many cases (Tersiguel 1995; Schwartz 1997; Bassett 2001).

However, the leaders of the postcolonial states did not succeed to draw substantially from agricultural development, and transform the lives of the populations in a positive manner. Because postcolonial officials mostly aimed to “extract from a largely agricultural population a reliable income sufficient to support the regime’s expenditure needs” (Hart 1980: 83), they failed to reshape the original agricultural agendas of the colonial administration, which was farming for export. On the contrary, they seemed to have honed the original agendas to fit the framework of the neo-liberal global economy. Therefore, the social life of most commercial crops has remained quite unchanged, compared to the one they had during colonial era; and farmers still virtually grow most export crops for export to overseas markets and manufactures.
At the ecological level, some commentators have viewed agricultural commercialization and intensification as a catastrophe that made exacerbated the 1968-1974 droughts in the African Sahel and the concomitant food shortage and chronic hunger that entailed (Franke & Chasin 1980: 70; Dumont & Cohen 1980). The critics blame intensive agricultural commercialization as the root to ecological problems because the effects of the multiple crop enhancement inputs do not always contribute to a sustainable maintenance of the soils and the environment as a whole. The emergence of such problems, the critics hold, always calls for international financial sponsors to intervene in the name of altruism or for the sake of “development.” But as Dumont and Cohen frame it (1980), most developers enter the arena-to-develop with agendas that aim to perpetuate dependency. On this ground, they view “development” as the outcome of a political process that divides the world into two poles with an imbalance in the power relationships between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped”. From the perspective of the critics, the ecological disaster in the Sahel was foreseeable. They even believe that Western superpowers foresaw it, along with their “satellite agencies of development” such as the World Bank, the IMF, the USAID, and multinational corporations, which had vested interests in maintaining Africa in a structural state of dependency.

In the same line of thought, other authors influenced by Marxian thinking viewed or blamed commercial agriculture and export farming for food shortages in Africa and elsewhere in the “Third World” (Comité Sahel 1974: 24; Franke & Chasin 1980; Escobar 1995: 129). Gupta (1998: 52) and Dumont and Cohen (1980) went so far as to challenge the “good intention” of the Green Revolution in developing countries. They equated the Green Revolution project more with a discourse than an achievable program; and stigmatized it as an agenda for the USA and multinational corporations to implement neo-liberal policies in the “Third World,” with no real
intent to attain the professed food self-sufficiency. Dumont & Cohen unflatteringly qualify the effects of the Green Revolution as useless, and harmful at worse. They base the explanation of their stance on the damaging potential of the High Yielding Varieties (HYVs) and fertilizers such as nitrogen on the ecology, and the project’s potential to perpetuate structures of social injustice by producing or reproducing social and economic classes (1980: 166).

Another criticism of increased commercial agriculture and export farming focuses the role of the former international capital and industrial countries who entered commodity systems (Little & Dolan 2000: 61), and retained African countries in structures of domination (Freiberg 2004). However, questioning “development” and “agriculture for development” in these terms obscures the role of actors “at the bottom” and their ability to hybridize new agricultural technology with local knowledge. It does not seem accurate to think that the origins of the problems of Africa’s agriculture are totally exogenous to the continent. As Hart puts it,

The problem faced by all modern regimes – pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial – has been how to extract from a largely agricultural population a reliable income sufficient to support the regime’s expenditure needs. In this matter, the successor states are in disadvantage, because their standing in the world depends on levels and kinds of spending that were unthinkable twenty years ago, and they are able to take shortcuts in revenue that were available to their predecessors (Hart 1980: 83).

Hart’s argument brings to memory the perspectives of other scholars who viewed multiple centers of interests and responsibilities involved in the production and supply of export crops (Terray 1987; Ferguson 1990). These centers included the metropolitan state, the (post)colonial state, and trading companies that stand for intermediaries. The postcolonial state has a great deal of responsibilities in the production process and in the consequences that entail from it as well. Though these responsibilities might be certainly inherent to the structures of uneven power relations in the global economic system, it would be inaccurate to downplay the part that leaders
of the postcolonial states play. Most often and ironically, those national leaders, in attempts to advance their personal interests, operate as local agents of multinational corporations and neoliberal policies. In such conditions, they do not hesitate to play crucial roles in service as enablers of the structures that perpetuate uneven power relations between local producers and entities at higher levels of the global commodity chain.

**Export and Commercial Agriculture in Africa**

The production and commercialization of most agricultural export products from Africa and other developing countries generally operate within the framework of the policies of neoliberal globalization, which delineate the conditions for the market implicitly or explicitly. As mentioned above, the increased farming of nearly every major export or commercial crop in Africa has occurred in a special development program either by former colonial states or by multinational corporations, or other agencies of globalization such World Bank, IMF, USAID, and European Development Fund. The development agencies, which usually incite state and corporations to shirk costs on people “at the bottom,” funnel multi-million dollar investments, which also come along with the transfer of technical and technological packages that include agricultural methods and practices, fertilizers, and improved seeds.

The productivist objectives of the donors and their programs usually tend to intrude in redefining criteria for access to the factors of production including land, agricultural credit, and access to technical assistance; which ultimately affects various aspects of the social organization. In most cases, the gender bias about women’s assumed low potential for profitable exploitation of land resulted either in the decrease of their prerogatives to land access or, in some cases, in their being forced out of land. This alteration of women’s access to land became recurrent, even in instances where customary division of labor granted women the tasks of producing household food on plots of land attributed for that purpose (Bay 1980; Mikell 1992; Sorensen 1999; Allman
et al. 2002). Therefore, many scholars have observed that in the best conditions of production, men maximize their economic empowerment to the detriment of women’s. The resulting effect is a possible negative consequence on the household, especially as husband and wife usually keep separate budgets in most African households (Guyer 1983). In the worst circumstances, the side effects of “development” do not only affect the individual farmers, but also households, or the entire national economy.

Most states in the global South, including Africa, opt to produce commodity and export crops primarily as a means to generate foreign exchange in order to face part of their overburdened debts, or as a precondition and guarantee for eligibility for further bilateral or multilateral loans (Haguerud et al. 2000: 2). The consequences of such an option have proved to be disastrous to livelihoods and the national economy in many cases. Escobar’s analysis of a development project in Colombia in the 1980s and early 1990s concluded that “development” is itself an ethnocentric tool and a highly political project coined into a complex discourse (Escobar: 1995). In the process, the theorists know where and how to find “sufficient” statistical data to substantiate its significance and prove the need for its continuation. Although Escobar’s regional focus is Latin America, the cogency of the analysis provides the study a universal relevance. Ferguson’s Anti-Politics Machine (1990) echoes like the African version of Escobar’s book. Based on a case study of an agricultural development project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, it shows the emptiness and hegemonic character of “development” as a goal for economic progress and improvement of the lives of the ordinary people. Akhil Gupta’s dissection of India’s uneven agricultural development of the late 1960s and the 1970s, in his Postcolonial Developments (1998), perhaps epitomizes the Asian version of a critical analysis of developmentalist politics as it applies to agriculture. Gupta, who is overtly skeptical about the
miracles of the Green Revolution, explains how this project ends up hindering the food-sufficiency objectives of recipient countries, and the way the US subsequently subordinate such countries politically.

Other scholars have gone further to show how multinational corporations – such as French parastatal Textile Company (CFDT, now Geocoton) - wield the “development” discourse to pursue transnational economic goals, implement postcolonial strategies to maintain provision of raw materials, and continue uneven regimes of power (Comité Sahel 1974; Bassett 2002). For instance, the members of Comité Sahel, including Meillassoux, demonstrate that the low price of food crops in Africa is not just a lack of clear policy, but a conscious disincentive, and a hidden subsidy of export crops, especially, cotton (Comité Sahel 1974). They reach this conclusion after using comparative statistical data on labor and agricultural inputs for cotton and food crops, and comparing their outputs and prices. Finally, Comité Sahel also blames the 1969-1974 famine in the Sahel on the production of ecological side effects of cotton cultivation; and they equate so-called agriculture for development with exploitation. In a more recent study, Bassett (2002) brings to light the power relations, and possible fusion and fission of the forces of globalization, namely the World Bank and the French Cotton multinational, currently known as Geocoton, which seems to use cotton production as a political and economic means of control over the former colonies. He also proceeds from calculation of an average cost-benefit per hectare of cotton, based only on chemical fertilizers and inputs, to unveil the regimes of exploitation embedded in the cotton commodity chain, in which the farmer produces quite at a financial loss. This probably reminds why Escobar (1995) believes that most current development agendas are at odds with the agendas of the people for whom they design development.
Despite the many limits of agricultural development and increased commercialization of agriculture in Africa, there is also evidence that it did participate in some instances, to improve farmers’ earnings (Spring 2000), and to increase food harvests through agricultural transformation (Tersiguel 1995; Schwartz 1997; Bassett 2001; Beusekom 2002). Farmers strategize, in many cases, to draw their share of return amid the constraints of their engagement in commercial agriculture projects. But, these glimmers of hope cannot veil its major effects on gender relations.

**Gender and Agricultural Production in Africa**

In Africa, the articulation of modes of production perpetuated patriarchal control of labor, with women and “lower status kin” as support personnel at the service of seniors (Meillassoux 1964; 1981). In this context, Meillassoux noticed that the management of land, and its subsequent resources devolves to elderly men who allocate resources to what, they believe, is appropriate to the production needs of the household. Although, in these allocations, women do sometimes have their plots for specific small-scale production, they usually, though not exclusively, grow vegetables or products to supplement household food resources. Meillassoux also points to the ambivalent position of women in agricultural societies. As producers and reproducers, they are instruments of the instantiation of elder males’ authority over junior males. At the same time, they can serve as instruments of emancipation of juniors vis-à-vis elders. Moreover, he laments the lack of recognition of the vital importance and role of women within society; and the way men exploit them both in their patrilocal as well as virilocal residencies. In fact, Meillassoux thinks that men use their positions as ‘protectors’ of women to submit and exploit them. In these contexts, women are relegated to second class, and subsequently cannot access considerable resources, including land. Women receive consideration, usually after they
reach an age of seniority that confers them some kind of fictive male status. At any rate, when women access land resources, they are still subject to structures of domination, which constrain them from achieving significant agricultural production.

In some cases, there is a clear ‘division of labor’ in terms of household crop production as evidenced in the literature. Thus, men care for male crops, that is, crops involving a lot of physical effort and more economic and symbolic power (Boserup 1970; Palmer 1991). Conversely, women supposedly care for crops deemed relatively easy to produce, but of less cash value; which results inevitably to some economic imbalance within the household. Melissa Leach (1992:85) confirms, in the case of Sierra Leone, that women are not only food producers, but also meal providers, who must ensure staple while men produce coffee and cocoa for market. She also gives a glimpse of men’s roles in clearing their wives’ farming spaces, and their use of the returns of their crops to supplement family food. As she shows, gender roles can be complementary, though asymmetrical, rather than rigidly divided, in agricultural production, although colonial gender ideology framed unfavorable vistas for women’s participation.

A substantial body of literature has highlighted the consequence of European gender ideology in redefining participation of women of the colonial and postcolonial states in production of agriculture for sale (Boserup 1970; Bay 1982; Davidson 1988; Mikell 1992, Ekejiuba 1995; Allman et al. 2002). Colonial administrators transposed their ideology about gender and land access to Africa, and substituted pre-existing rules to new ones in most of their former colonies, though not always with the same degree of success. They built the new approach on the naturalistic pretence that women cannot farm the land efficiently; and this opened better structures of opportunities to men to the detriment of women. The objective of this colonial approach was to better capture farmers’ surplus labor while making it cost-effective.
After independence, the post-colonial successor state adopted and maintained that colonial strategy. Commercial agriculture and precisely export agriculture, which was socially constructed as a male activity, was transferred to men, along with collateral advantages such as right to access to land. The new approach, as it proved in most cases, overturned previous customary land rights of women, but also voided the substance of gender division of labor that shifted from complementary to typically assigning women the role of prime labor providers to agricultural activities (Carney & Watts 1991; Gadio & Rakowski 1999, Allman et al. 2002). This has constituted one recurrent criticism of commercial agriculture.

Boserup’s now classical Woman’s Role in Economic Development highlights the unfavorable effects of the “modernization” of agriculture on women, and the way it altered the sexual division of labor, mainly, in Africa. Boserup’s much cited work has been one of the most influential pieces of scholarship notwithstanding. However, critics have also criticized the work for overlooking the historical contingencies that conduced to women’s disempowerment. Some critics think that Boserup’s work has partly, and perhaps unwillingly, perpetuated women’s lower position, as her over-emphasis on the subsistence/cash or men’s/women’s crop divide rather drew development agencies to support men in production (Ekejiuba 1995: 50; Bryceson 1995). The work inspired the Women In Development (WID) approach in the mid-seventies, which has increased awareness and interest in the role of women in agriculture as a path to economic autonomy. In addition, her ideas further influenced the overall development approach that shifted from the focus on woman in the 1970s, to a more integrative focus on gender in the 1980s; a strategy that opened avenues for women in some parts of Africa to engage in commercial ventures and even export agriculture. The successes or failures of women’s
enterprises in commercial agriculture affected the sociocultural landscape in many cases, starting at the level of the household.

The scholarly perspectives on issues of gender and agriculture are as varied as the sociocultural and economic contexts of the studies (Bay 1982; Guyer 1980, 1984, 1989, 1991; Mikell 1992; Berry 1993; Carney 1994; Escobar 1995; Udry 1996; Schroeder 1999; Kevane 2000, 2004; Stone & Stone 2000; Koenig 2000; Bassett 2001, 2004; Traoré & Fourgeau 2005). Irrespective of their disciplinary parishes, the studies laid stress on the historical contingencies that conduced to the structural changes that affected gender relations as a consequence of production of commercial agriculture, in Africa and other developing economies. Thus, in her Cocoa and Chaos in Ghana, Mikell (1992) focuses more particularly on the way cocoa production marginalized women or decreased their statuses and, at a broader spectrum, altered Akan matrilineal principles in favor of a more patrilateral tendencies, which ultimately influenced the rule of inheritance (p. 109). As had been the case among Nigerian cocoa famers in Berry’s account (1985), Mikell recognizes the crucial role of cocoa revenue in farmers’ economic diversification, and their investment in their children’s future. She further elaborates on the consequences of the unbridled speed of the post-independent administration to industrialize the country. The administration undertook the process by paying a national official cocoa farm-gate price to a remarkably low rate compared to the international price, and by primarily overtaxing cocoa producers; a drive, which ultimately pushed the country’s economy into disarray.

Beside the constellation of cases on expropriation of woman’s land and revenue in commodity agriculture production, there are happy stories about women’s participation in agriculture in Africa. Jane Guyer’s account of women’s economic advantages from their crops, in her Family and Farm in Southern Cameroon (1980), stands out as one example of an early
dissonant tune to the heterogeneous account on the negative effects of agricultural production on women. She warns however, that the advantageous situation of women is not a gift from males, but rather the result of colonial opposition to massive wife marriage and acquisition of male clients.

Roos & Gladwin (2000) are not sure whether cash crop production takes land away from subsistence production. They hint that cash cropping can cause to the low production of subsistence crop if women, who feel generally more concerned about feeding the family, are involved in the process of commoditization. But, using a comparative case study in Cameroon, they also do not automatically rule out any correlation between subsistence and cash crop production, especially as the latter is often the vehicle of agricultural transformations with adoption of improved inputs and fertilizer use. Bassett (2009: 10) also presents the case of an organic cotton production in Burkina Faso that promises to improve women’s access to opportunities for cash crop. These examples bring new light to received wisdom about the untenable compatibility between subsistence and cash crop, and, to some degree, reiterate the interdependence and collaboration between women and men in both food and cash farming (Palmer 1991; Escobar 1995).

There are also scholars who focus the cognitive aspects of the effects of commodity crops on the cultural and social landscapes in their study sites. Kevane (2000) brought to light difference between extrahousehold norms and intrahousehold relations. Based on a case study of two groups of women from different ethnic groups, he argues that the exploitation of extrahousehold norms depends on the agency and personal choice of each woman; and that women who manage skillfully do pull their best share out of the system. In the same line of thought, Stone & Stone (2000), in their study of married women in Hausa land, Nigeria,
demonstrate how the interplay between agency and structure can articulate the life standards of women, and provide them with avenues for land access. In fact, in this social setting, married women have rights to land from their marital patrimony even if they estrange from their husbands, but do not formally divorce them. Many women use such tactics to accumulate wealth by growing cash crops independently from men’s and by, further, undertaking other lucrative activities. Because women create such unexpected benefits and niches of opportunities in the context of agricultural production for market, it becomes difficult only to highlight the limiting aspects of commercial agriculture on women, and silence women’s personal roles and enabling strategies.

Recapitulation

This chapter has attempted to extricate the intellectual models that inform development as theory from the practice of development as an endeavor to improve the living conditions of humans in given areas of the globe. Two major paradigms have made up the theories of development: the modernization model and the underdevelopment model, also known as the dependency paradigm. The modernization theory of development took roots in the ideas of the Enlightenment era, and the classical evolutionist approaches of the 19th and early 20th century. It takes underdevelopment as the starting point of the developing nations, and views progress as a uni-linear route that goes unavoidably from primitive life to industrialization. The underdevelopment model stood in opposition to the modernization paradigm. It is rooted in the views developed in the early 1950s by a group of Latin American scholars working under the aegis of the Economic Commission of Latin America (ECLA). This model shifted the focus of the analysis of underdevelopment from the internal structure of the countries to their position in international exchanges.
The application of the modernization approach to development has resulted in disastrous results in many cases (Cernea 1991: 2; Scudder 1991: 150). This approach, which has most often focused on the infrastructural achievement, and a total disregard for the sociocultural realities, has convinced project sponsors of its shortcomings in achieving the goals development programs. In recent decades, the integration of anthropological or sociological perspectives in the implementation of development has made way for consideration of local knowledge and better results in project design and implementation. However, the relevance of the underdevelopment approach is still persistent nowadays, as it probably also participates in improving conception of development goals and implementation on the ground.

In the past decade, some anthropologists have embraced a new path close to the underdevelopment paradigm; it is referred to as the “the discourse of development.” Despite their open skepticism about the development enterprise, the proponents of the discourse of development approach seem to believe the good intention of development practitioners. More recently, a group of theorists has also promoted the “third way” approach to the study and practice of development. It advocates actor-centeredness and local participation as key methodological tools to development study. However, the new approach does in no way suggest the irrelevance of major paradigms in the analysis of development, and more importantly, the underdevelopment approach.

The chapter has also revealed that besides the intellectual debates over development, the practice of development can affect the livelihoods of people in a more or less positive way on the ground in Africa. This kind of development is carried out through the production of agriculture for sale or for export. There can hardly be a unanimous agreement on debates about the impacts of agricultural development for human development in Africa, and other parts of the world.
However, it sounds realistic to believe that a useful debate on development runs the risk of missing the point if it fails to consider what Sen (1999) termed the freedom aspect of the development process. “Freedom”, he said “is central to the process of development,” in that a useful assessment of progress must consider whether the freedoms that the people have are enhanced, since “achievement of development is thoroughly dependent on the free agency of the people” (Sen 1999: 4). Our discussion about development and agriculture for development in Africa ultimately boils down to the basic question of freedom and agency of the actors involved. Despite structures of constraints that go along with the process of export or commercial farming, the literature shows differential stories about actors at the lower scale of the production chain. In fact, in spite of existing fettering policies governing most export/commercial agricultural productions in Africa, some rural men and women often evince degrees of agency and exploit the weaknesses of the system to their own advantage, at least, modestly. There are instances where women, who are usually viewed, rightly or wrongly, at the margin of cash farming, integrate in a more visible way.

It is also true that because of the lack of competitive markets for agricultural products, the exchange value of products keeps falling in the wake of the global economic crisis. However, farmers are conscious actors who control their decision-making power, at least, prior to production. In addition, most of them engage in production after a sound cost-benefits assessment and, especially, after anticipating some gains, however scanty they may be. The underlying pattern of the major export crop of Burkina Faso fits the development paradigms described in this chapter. Having laid the ground of the broader case of Africa’s agriculture for development, I now narrow the unit of analysis to Burkina Faso, where I examine the underlying dynamics of the production of cotton, the country’s major export crop.
CHAPTER 3: AN OVERVIEW OF EXPORT COTTON PRODUCTION IN BURKINA FASO

The trajectory of export cotton in Upper Volta - today’s Burkina Faso - is understood better within the framework of “agriculture for development,” which must be placed, in turn, within the larger theme of globalization and development. The growth of cotton production involved the intervention of external and internal forces, which aimed to transform local practices and make them capable of reaching a degree of productivity. The “development” goal and discourse, as shown in the preceding chapter, emerges at the point of encounter between low-income nations with more powerful economic and political actors of the global stage. The developmental cycle of Burkina Faso’s agriculture for development, and more precisely cotton production, can be charted in three main stages. The first stage starts in the early colonial period, at the inception of the enterprise in the early 1920s when the colonial administration introduced export cotton farming as a coercive activity. Inefficiency of that approach led to economic destitution of the colony, and ultimately resulted in the abolition of the coercion in 1930, and the dissolution of the colony in 1932.

The second stage begins with the resumption of export cotton promotion programs after the reconstitution of the colony in 1947, and the paradigmatic shift in the approach, focusing on incentives and respecting farmers’ choice to engage in production. The incentive schemes embraced by the colonial administration through the newly created French multinational textile company (CFDT) were maintained and enhanced by the national government after independence in 1960. In the post-independence era, the schemes were mainly characterized by improved organization and decentralization of the management system of the cotton sector. Moreover, bilateral and multi-lateral regional development agencies participated in sponsoring the cotton sector, which also benefited from agronomic research, technological equipment, and technical
support. Access to credit and agricultural equipment and inputs were also facilitated. This host of factors did contribute to produce constant boosts to the sector, decade after decade, until the early 1990s, when a parasite infection and farmers’ indebtedness drastically affected harvests, and became the cause of a notable slump.

The 1994 devaluation of Francophone Africa’s CFA currency can be viewed as the beginning of the third stage in the history of Burkina export cotton. It provided a watershed in production, as more attractive producer’s prices enticed many farmers into cotton farming and resulted in improving the lives of many rural people. The growing involvement of farmers in the production and their participation in the oversight, decision-making, and shareholding of the national cotton sector has led to impressive production results, making the country top African cotton-producing nation in 2005, for two years. But, plummeting producer’s price combined with uneven spatio-temporal distribution of rainfall brought down production in 2007, and ranked the country second.

The year 2004 is a defining moment for the national cotton sector. The marketing structure, which was previously controlled by one single company, was now liberalized after negotiations with bilateral and multilateral partners that included the World Bank and the European Union. The negotiations culminated in the participation of new shareholders and two new companies in the sector. The participation of the new companies was made possible with the partition of the national production space into three main zones, East, Center, West, with each zone exclusively managed by one company (see Map 2).

At the same time, new global actors entered the scene of the national cotton industry, with various objectives and production labels, including organic, genetically modified, and fair-trade cotton. Some of the new actors aim to offer opportunities to the gender landscape and the
cotton production sector of the country. They promote women’s active and independent engagement in a domain that was previously viewed as male.

**Map 2:** Burkina Faso cotton zones after liberalization in 2004.

A close reading of these main stages in the history of cotton in Burkina Faso and the role of the State and transnational companies and NGOs provides a useful background for understanding the relationship between globalization, development, and agriculture.

**Export Cotton Production in the Colonial Era (1920-1932)**

As mentioned in chapter 1, the crop that came to be known as the “white gold” in recent years in Burkina Faso had a stormy introduction as export crop in the early years of the colonial period. The French colonial administration selected cotton as potential export crop for the colony
of Upper Volta by the 1920s. At that time, the colonial administration primarily used and tried to develop the pre-existing knowledge that the local people possessed on cotton production. In fact, prior to colonization, farmers of certain communities, in the geographic area that was to become Upper Volta, were familiar with the production of some local varieties of *Gossypium* (*arboreum, barbadense, hirsutum, and punctatum*), the product of which they used for weaving by means of narrow treadle looms (Schwartz 1993). However, local cotton production was then differentiated. Some peoples, those that had the reputation of rejecting the wearing of clothes in daily life did not grow cotton. Others who had textile traditions or learnt it from outside did.

The colonial cotton development effort in Upper Volta was part of a larger project undertaken in the federation of France’s colonies of West Africa, the *Afrique Occidentale Française* (A.O.F), as clearly laid out in Minister of Colonies development plan, *Mise en valeur des colonies*. It was motivated by, at least, a twofold objective: making the tropical colonies cost-effective and reducing France’s cotton dependency on imports from the United States of America, then the world’s top cotton producer (Filipovich 2001: 242). In order to reach these economic objectives the metropolitan government, in a manner similar to the British and the Portuguese (Pitcher 1996; Isaacman 1996), resorted to draconian and coercive measures. However, the little efficiency of such measures, mainly due to more or less direct resistance of the farmers, probably helped by other motivations, led the colony to economic collapse in the early thirties, and a suppression of coerced export cotton production.

As in some other parts of West Africa, cotton had been produced and used in cultural and monetary transactions in the geographic area that came to be called Upper Volta, prior to colonization (Schwartz 1993: 208). In this relatively distant past, some local populations harvested cotton, intercropped with other plants to satisfy the consumption and some other
monetary needs. However, after the creation of the colony of the Upper Volta in 1919, then Lieutenant Governor and head of the administration, Frederic-Charles Hesling, recognized in cotton the crop that was most likely to generate the export resources capable to boost the weak economy of the new colony, as well as serve the metropolitan state. Therefore, he expressed his strong commitment to cotton production, for the interest of France, when he stated “general interest requires the production [of cotton] to be pushed to the extreme of possibilities. Cotton should be the top of all administrative priorities” (Sanon 1994:189). In response, specialists undertook research on the local *Gossypium*, and Lieutenant Governor Hesling adopted the policy of obligatory cotton production by instituting collective village mono-cropped cotton fields. In 1924, a law provided that each village should cultivate 4 hectares per 100 inhabitants (Schwartz 1993: 211).

This decision concurred with the creation of a department of textiles by the central administration, meant to coordinate all experimentations and technical assistance in cotton farming, and technological improvement of cotton in the whole of French colonies of West Africa. The creation of this department also coincided with the cotton development plans initiated by state-supported Colonial Cotton Association (ACC), a branch of the French general Syndicate of Cotton Industry. One of the objectives of the Syndicate was to free the French textile industry from the whims and speculations of businesspersons of the textile industry of the United States on whom people in France blamed a crisis that occurred in 1902 in the European cotton industry (Schwartz 1993; Sanon 1994; Bassett 2002: 47).

The cotton development initiatives aiming were rooted in an ambitious project of the French Minister of colonies Albert Sarraut. Sarraut’s master vision (1923), which was implemented in 1921, tried to foster the economic viability of the colonies by developing a
methodical division of labor between the colonies, assigned to each a specific set of export products in which to specialize. Different French colonies of West Africa were required, thus, to produce oilseeds, wood, cocoa, or cotton. Burkina Faso was to specialize in peanuts and mainly cotton production. It is then clear that the history of the development of export cotton in French West Africa was embedded in a mix of processes that combine global capitalism, colonial industrial development objectives, and the enlightenment mission of the French metropolitan state which aimed to substitute the “backward indigenous” agricultural techniques with more “advanced and efficient” ones. It can be inferred that France’s colonial cotton policy was linked to the development of industrial capitalism in a manner similar to that of other European powers (Isaacman & Roberts 1995:1).

In order to enhance the development goal of commodity production, the administration created pilot cotton farms in the western region of the colony (in Saria, Banakélèdaga and Poundou) in the manner of the ones then existing in the French Sudan (now Mali). The experimental cotton farms of Saria, started in 1924, and those of Banakélèdaga and Poundou were established in 1926. They aimed to develop agricultural seed selection technology and farming techniques. In this vein, in 1927, agricultural equipment, including plows and plow-oxen, was distributed free of charge to six village chiefs in the administrative district of Bobo-Dioulasso. The recipients of these awards were to become the pilot farmers, and were required to put under cotton 20 to 60 hectares as well as to follow exclusively the technical procedures prescribed by the agricultural officers (Sanon 1994:190). “By so doing, the Lieutenant-Governor was closely following the recommendations of the central colonial administration […]” (Banhoro 1991; Schwartz 1996a: 346). Initially, Lieutenant-Governor Hesling was able to obtain quick and impressive results. In the first years of trial, production of export cotton went
from 300 tons of seed cotton in 1923 to 3,528 tons in 1924. In the third year it reached the record production of 6,238 tons (Table 2). These results goaded Hesling’s ambitions and drove him to toughen the coercive measures.

Table 2: Seed cotton yield in Burkina Faso, 1923 to 1931, from Schwartz (1993: 214).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production Of seed cotton</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production Of seed cotton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>2,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>3,528</td>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>4,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>6,238</td>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>1,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>2,661</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The power granted to civil servants and local chiefs to implement forced cotton made this period an era of bitterness, frustrations and nightmares for most villagers. In addition to the labor constraint in obligatory cotton farms, local populations were also required to work on forced labor projects. For instance, Schwartz reports that 6,000 kilometers of roads were built using forced labor of the locals between 1919 and 1932. During supervision of the projects, it was common for zealous local chiefs and representatives of the colonial administration to resort to corporal punishments and other exactions. The combination of these labor demands drained labor supplies need for food crop fields, resulting in food shortage and frequent famines (Schwartz 1993: 211). Parallel to the wider application of coercive measures, farmers gained a resolve to make official objectives fail. People resisted, at least tacitly, by fleeing to the near-by British Gold Cost colony where colonial exploitation was deemed to bear a “human face” (Cordell & Gregory 1982), by selling the cotton they produced in local markets that offered better prices, or by weaving it themselves, and smuggling cotton to neighboring Gold Coast. There were also sabotage techniques that made the crop grown in forced collective cotton farms
fail. For instance, based on corroborating oral history recorded in the field, most farmers would boil the seeds before planting. Consequently, many newly opened farms under official supervision produced nothing despite proper tilling and planting.

There is the possibility that the local cotton production was not as small as some people thought. Schwartz (1993: 215) reproduces claims by certain French merchants that about 25,000 tons of seed cotton was secretly sold in local markets where prices were higher than in official markets. These claims may be exaggerated, but they may have the merit to point to the importance of the diverted production from export as a means of local resistance to the coercive cultivation. Bassett (2001) also discusses the issue, as much of the coerced cotton harvests were also uncaptured and sold in local markets in colonial Cote d’Ivoire. These accounts about covert local resistance to forced cotton production raise an interesting topic pointing to the problems of why colonial cotton development efforts failed. Because of tacit resistance pressures, production fell to 2,014 tons in 1926. The record harvest level of 1925-26 would only be attained again after independence, precisely in 1962- 63 (Tables 2 & 3).

This poor performance became a strong message to the developers of the economy of the colony. The devotion of best plots of land to coerced cotton farming, combined with the great amount of time that the villagers had to simultaneously devote to road and railroad construction added to a cycle of drought that spanned from 1925 to 1930 (Schwartz 1993: 215, 216), undermined farmers’ ability to produce sufficient food (Sanon 1994:190). In addition, farmers had to sell part of their diminished food production, or cattle, in order to pay poll-taxes Sanon 1994). As a result, extreme poverty, recurrent food scarcity and famines became the common lot for the majority of people who were not close to positions of power. In 1931, a mission led by administrator Bernard Sol, aiming to investigate the actions of the colonial administration of
Upper Volta brought to light all of these problems. It attributed the failure of the cotton experiment as “a policy of ‘bluff’ that lasted eight years and contributed predominantly to the ruin of the country” (Sol 1932, as cited in Schwartz 1993: 216).

Though the French colonial administration was aware of the difficulties of the local population prior to Sol’s findings, they failed to address the problem of recurring famine in the colony. On the contrary, they rationalized the problem with the ontological “improvidence and laziness” of the Africans (Sanon 1994: 190), as in the case of former Zaire portrayed by Likaka (1997), the colonial administration “repeatedly resorted to force in order to capture a larger share of peasant cotton,” as was the case in other colonies (Bassett 2001:51). Administrators held contrasting views of the policies during the coercive era. But they properly understood the irrelevance of the measures when they realized that the toughening of obligatory cotton farms and acreage increase did not lead to greater output, but led instead an acute economic disintegration of the colony. As a result, the coercive approach to cotton cultivation in the Upper Volta was abolished in 1930, leaving behind an economically weakened central administration and destitute peasantry.

In 1932, the economic non-viability of the colony of Upper Volta was declared. Implementing one recommendation of the Sol Mission, the colony was dissolved, and its territory partitioned among the neighboring colonies of Cote d’Ivoire, Sudan (current Mali), and Niger. Deft observers of the inner workings of the French administration rightly contend that the dissolution of the colony was already decided before the Sol Mission, when much-admired Lieutenant-Governor Hesling was recalled. In fact, Sol was sent to write a critical economic report in order to justify the political decision. A group of observers thinks that the dissolution of
the colony was a strategy for the colonizer to utilize the large populations\(^3\) of the Upper Volta as a labor reservoir in more cost-effective colonial economic projects (Cordell & Gregory 1982; Englebert 1996: 79; Filipovitch 2001: 248). Such projects were mainly in Cote d’Ivoire, which gained most of the territory and population from the partition, and Mali where the Office du Niger agricultural project was created also in 1932 (Speirs 1991: 92). The economic collapse of the colony – subsequent to coercive cotton farming, excessive poll taxes, forced labor, and climate hazards – provided the proximate reasons for partitioning it. Export cotton disappeared totally from “the list of products marketed by the districts making up the ex-Upper Volta” (Schwartz 1996: 347). However, the populations kept growing cotton for local consumption, if not for export.

Export cotton production only resumed 20 years later with a better organization and a supervisory body that resorted to inducements to win farmers’ commitment to this crop. When the production resumed in the 1950s, the experience of the failed coercive policy induced a paradigmatic shift in approach (Gervais 1984; Bassett 1988; Isaacman 1992; Schwartz 1993; Sanon 1994). Incentives replaced coercion. Nevertheless, the traumatic memories of the coercive era, added to the anti-cotton campaigns of the rising local educated elite, who saw in the enterprise a strategy for the colonial administration to attain their immediate goals and another instance of colonial domination, did not help cotton developers reach important yields immediately. The incentive initiatives produced positive results only in the mid-sixties.

**From CFDT to SOFITEX: The Enhancement of the Cotton Development Strategies, 1951-1994**

\(^3\) The 1921 census presented Upper Volta as the most populous French colony of the African continent with 2,973,442 inhabitants (Sarraut 1923: 129).
The colony of Upper Volta was reconstituted in 1947, approximately in its 1932 borders under the pressures of local elected representatives in the French Parliament and traditional chiefs. However, some observers saw in the reconstitution a political move of the colonial administration to weaken the anti-colonial political movement led by Houphouet-Boigny and his African Democratic Rally, RDA party (Saul 2006). After reconstitution, colonial authorities started again to search for export crops capable of boosting the economy of the colony. Four years later, they came up with cotton, again, as the solution. In 1951, a parastatal cotton company, Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles (CFDT) created in 1949 to promote cotton in French West Africa, was given responsibility to develop the crop in Upper Volta. It was backed by the metropolitan cotton research institute, the Institut de Recherches du Coton et des Textiles Exotiques (IRCT), created in 1946 (Schwartz 1996a). Subsequently, the IRCT played a major role in research for improving the local species of cotton plant, Gossypium arboreum, and also the Gossypium hirsutum and barbadense, which people believe to have been introduced from America around the 17th century. The peculiarity of CFDT at the resumption of export cotton growth in Burkina assumed a dramatic shift in approach. The previous ineffective coercive approaches gave way to offering incentive ones aimed at attracting farmers’ willing adhesion to the production of cotton, and to learn improved agricultural techniques, which could increase food production. The merits of CFDT also lay in its organization. In 1953, it defined four regions of the country as “cotton zones” based on climate conditions and soil potential. These zones were in turn subdivided into “cotton districts”. At the head of each zone and district, was a qualified agent. The first zone included the administrative district of Bobo-Dioulasso, and the subdivision of Diebugu, both in the west. The districts of Tougan and Dedugu constituted the second zone; the third zone included Ouagadougou,
Koudougou, and Ouahigouya, at the center of the colony; the fourth zone was made up of Tenkodogo and Kaya, in the east-center. Simultaneously, the CFDT engaged a public relation campaign with farmers, in order to promote the improved seed variety, the recommended cultivation techniques, and finally a coherent commercialization strategy. However, the CFDT had trouble reaching its production objectives until independence in 1960 (see Table 3). At that point, however, the leaders of the newly independent republic, who formerly had campaigned against cotton production, now promoted it without hesitation. They continued and enhanced the previous incentive policies for the production of cotton, which mirrored farmers’ objectives to derive cash from cotton and face expenses such as family head tax through cotton than by selling their food crops. As a result, in the 1960-1970 decade, cotton production increased tenfold, and was to reach a remarkable momentum in the 1990s with skyrocketing production and export figures.

One remarkable chapter in the agricultural development policy of Burkina Faso in the 1960-1970 decade is the rise of a plethora of foreign specialized rural development organizations beside CFDT, which intervened in specific regions of the country to foster local integrated agricultural production. These organizations acted in almost every part of the national territory, except in the less promising southeast, and the northeastern Sahel. They included SATEC (Société d’aide technique et de coopération), BDPA (Bureau pour le développement de la production agricole), CIDR (Compagnie internationale du développement rural), and SOTESA (Societa technica per lo sviluppo agricolo). Each of these organizations aimed at an integrated rural development and was attributed an intervention zone by the state. Though their primary focus was generally on food crops, and other minor money-making activities with mutual-type village cooperatives, the political leaders of the new nation-state encouraged them to develop
export and other cash cropping in order to meet the nation’s need for foreign exchange. The arrival of the new organizations obviously affected part of the area that was in CFDT’s initial intervention zone. Besides CFDT, the specialized organizations played a significant role in the agricultural transformation in Burkina Faso; for despite their focus was on food crop production, their impact on the modernization of agricultural techniques eventually had repercussions on cotton growing.

In the mid-1960s, the State proceeded to the creation of a rural development department (Direction du Developpement Rural, DDR). The mandate of the DDR was to coordinate the action of these several rural development organizations, as well as plan new rural development organizations. In the same period, the Matourkou Polyvalent Agricultural Center was created. It aimed to synthesize and improve the actions and results of the pilot integrated rural development program. The center played a central role, not only in training extension agents and farmers in practical agricultural methods, but also in facilitating access to farm material such as plow-carts and donkey-carts (Moreno 1975:). Matourkou has trained thousands of agricultural technicians; it still occupies a crucial position in Burkina Faso agriculture research and development. The organizations that started under DDR coordination later became the regional development organizations (Organismes Regionaux de Développement, ORD). The ORDs – eleven in total - also had an integrated agricultural development policy and cotton played a rather insignificant role in it. The ORDs benefited from technical support from the development organizations.

Nonetheless, during the 1960-1970 decade, cotton production increased tenfold from about 3,000 tons in 1960 to over 30,000 in 1970 (Table 3).

As Banhor (1991:44) inferred, this remarkable increase resulted from a combination of factors including the central role of government through the ORDs, which developed and
monitored mutual-type rural organizations, research on seed selection, agronomic and pest research, and the useful strategies introduced by CFDT and SOFITEX, such as a pledge to buy all of farmers’ harvested cotton. Though not specifically involved in cotton development, the

**Table 3:** Seed cotton production in Burkina Faso, 1951-2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production of seed cotton in tons</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production of seed cotton in tons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951-52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>59,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-53</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>77,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953-54</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>86,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-55</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>66,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-56</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>112,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-57</td>
<td>2,605</td>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>128,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957-58</td>
<td>3,490</td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>170,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-59</td>
<td>2,875</td>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>171,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959-60</td>
<td>1,018</td>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>179,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>2,772</td>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>216,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-63</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>172,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-64</td>
<td>8,048</td>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>114,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-65</td>
<td>8,769</td>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>177,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>7,463</td>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>150,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-67</td>
<td>16,297</td>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>202,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>17,275</td>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>337,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968-69</td>
<td>32,027</td>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>324,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969-70</td>
<td>36,248</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>257,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>32,051</td>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>275,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>29,217</td>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>378,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>36,561</td>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>404,419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>26,700</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>483,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>640,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>58,000</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>712,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>59,315</td>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>759,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>44,675</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>365,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>61,920</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>457,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>80,244</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>457,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>64,248</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>457,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ORDs, which, in 1988, changed their name to CRPA (Centre Regional de Production Agricole), modified farmers’ attitudes towards new cultivation techniques, and made them more receptive to cotton growing. In addition, the three ginning mills built by CFDT and a new textile complex, in Koudougou, for transforming part of the cotton into cloth, became signs of the vitality of CFDT and the success of the new approaches. However, in the 1970s, the cotton sector of Burkina Faso was still underdeveloped and waiting for a stronger impetus. This was eventually provided by a new interest of multilateral institutions and agencies focusing the agricultural sector.

The 1970s can be rightly referred to as the golden era of agricultural development projects in Burkina Faso. In 1971 the World Bank, which previously had shown little interest in the agricultural sector of Africa, became the main sponsor by generously funding the West Volta Cotton Project (PCOV). This project aimed to increase cotton production in the western regions of the country, an area that had shown earlier promise for cotton. The participation of the World Bank also coincided with the creation, in 1970, of a new entity in the organization of the country’s cotton sector, a mixed-economy company called Association en participation Republique de Haute-Volta-CFDT, which became SOFITEX (Société Burkinabè des Fibres Textiles) in 1979. SOFITEX, which officially took over from the CFDT, remained the single national cotton company until liberalization of the sector in 2004. The CFDT, now Geocoton, still had a large stake in this new company, holding 44 percent of its shares versus 55 percent held by the State and 1 percent held by local banks. In the mid-1970s, other important rural development projects emerged in the West Volta in the footsteps of the PCOV. Three major development projects emerged in the West Volta in the footsteps of the PCOV. Three major

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4 The ownership structure of SOFITEX had experienced changes many times. In 1981 the State’s participation went up from 63.36 percent to 65 percent; that of the CFDT down from 35.34 to 34 percent and the remaining 1 percent owned by local banks. Liberalization of the cotton sector in 2004 led to change of shareholding, as we will see in a later section of the chapter.
projects aimed at promoting food crop production: the Bougouriba integrated development project in 1975, the West Volta agricultural development Project in the 1977-1981 five-year plan period (Gervais 1984), and the West Volta food crop development project in 1979.

Another development during this decade was the well-funded multilateral sleeping sickness eradication program under the leadership of the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Program, and the Burkina state. It was predicted that as this program achieved its goal, the former sleeping-sickness infected areas in the valleys of the Volta rivers would be transformed into cultivable lands, and could be opened to planned settlement colonies for people drawn from the densely populated Moosé-inhabited areas (Gervais 1984; Tersiguel 1995). The Amenagement des Vallées des Volta (AVV, Volta Valley Authority) was created with multilateral funding and the mandate to settle national immigrants in that zone. The agricultural program designed for the settlers gave a prominent place to cotton, which was going to finance the relatively heavy expenditures in capital equipment that was imposed as a condition for participating in the settlement scheme. In the end the hopes placed in the AVV were frustrated, many fewer settlers were attracted to the scheme than anticipated, and when the multilateral aid dried up the AVV also folded, although the valleys did attract many farmers from outside who chose to strike on their own rather than participating in AVV settlements. Nonetheless, the AVV episode gave a great boost to cotton production (Macmillan 1995).

At the end of the 1970s, the officially marketed cotton production of Burkina increased more than 150 percent compared to the beginning of the decade (over 80,000 tons in 1979-1980). During that time, the SOFITEX could be described, at that point, as a local branch of CFDT. It pursued the same objectives as its parent company, and promoted the development of cotton through the establishment of village cooperatives. These were inherited from structures initiated
during colonial era that later proved central in the organizational success of cotton production up to now, despite some vicissitudes: the village cooperatives - Groupements Villageois (GV).

The farmers’ organizations that came to be referred to as the Village Groups (groupements villageois) in Africa emerged in the beginning of the 20th century because of the French colonial administration’s objectives for producing export commodities. Sanon (1994) gives ample information on the trajectory of the village groups. Starting in 1910, the colonial administration established the mutualist organizations on the continent, basing on the simplistic assumption that “Africa, being in itself a continent with strong communitarian traditions […], was predisposed to adopt models of the community cooperatives that operated in Western Europe” (Sanon 1994: 8). The ancestor “mutualist organization” that emerged was the Indigenous Organization for Providence that later became the Providence Organization, and to which adhesion was mandatory. The proclaimed goal of the organizations followed a modernist model. It aimed to “lessen the impact of the improvidence and the needs of farmers through: communitarian granaries, seeds, credit, collection and marketing of farm products, etc” (Sanon 1994: 8-9). These objectives tallied with the “humanitarian” claims laid in the statement of purpose of the colonial mission, expressed in the *Mise en valeur* by Albert Sarraut (1923: 19), but also of the ideology of the “improvident native,” even if they increased stress on farmers for growing more export crops - mainly cotton and peanuts - meant for metropolitan companies.

In 1955, the providence organizations emerged as the mutual organizations for rural development in West French Africa, including today’s Burkina Faso. They acted as the intermediaries between the colonial administration and what evolved into cooperatives proper. In 1974, the nascent nation-State, which advocated adaptation of the cooperatives to local mechanisms of cooperation a decade earlier, spots village associations as a model for mobilizing
famers’ participation to the national development objective. Yet, the village groups proper came
into existence only during the 1978-1979 agricultural season when the cotton company was
forced to create last resort relay structures because of a strike of the agents in charge of seed
cotton collection. The initiative proved financially advantageous to both the company and the
villagers, who cashed substantial premium marketing rebates (ristourne) which served for village
community investments. The village groups later spread in more villages of the cotton zones
with relative success. However, the limits of the village group structure became evident when
delinquency in credit payment became rampant. In the mid-1990s, Schwartz (1996b:3) estimated
that at least 20 percent of the loans extended to the farmers from funds provided by the banking
partner of the program - currently known as the Banque Agricole et Commerciale du Burkina
(BACB) – remained unpaid after one year. Drawing on the bitter experience of endemic
payment delinquency, the cotton company came up with new enhanced strategies for farmers’
participation, as we will see in the coming section.
In the meantime, a decline in production that happened in the early 1980s put in sharper focus the revolutionary character of the 1970s in terms of cotton production. The 1979-80 record production would be reached again and beaten only in the 1983-84 season with 86,000 tons. 1985 was another critical year for the take-off of production (Chart 1). The 112,000 tons of cotton marketed that year represented nearly the double the amount sold the previous year. By the end of the decade, this record achievement reached a new momentum with 179,185 tons, notwithstanding the increasing costs of inputs, due to the suppression of government subsidies in

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5 It seems relevant to mention that the production figures presented here represent the cotton sold to cotton companies or documented by the national agricultural statistics department. They do not represent the totality of the production, especially as some amount of cotton was kept out of the export circuit, and sold in local markets for weaving. Although such locally consumed quantities are difficult to estimate and may be of lesser importance in today’s cotton craze, it is important to bear these omissions in mind in order to make an approximate idea about the dimension of the production, especially during coercive era.
1987 required by a World Bank structural adjustment loan. Burkina Faso entered the 1990s with greater hopes in export crop production, which were mostly fulfilled after the 1994 CFA currency devaluation.

**Currency Devaluation and the Historic Boost in Production (1994 – 2008)**

A number of factors, including pest attacks and the fall of international cotton prices, seriously undermined production for two consecutive years, 1992-93 and 1993-94. The 1992-93 debacle caused subsequent loan defaults that threatened the stability of the sector (Schwartz 1995). In response, the SOFITEX, then the sole cotton company, enhanced the organization of the sector through a variety of means. This period also coincided with the enforcement of the Structural Adjustment Plan for the Agricultural Sector (PASA), adopted in 1992 and defining “a number of key objectives in the agricultural sector” (Speirs 1996:111), including liberalization.

The immediate effect of the PASA was the lowering of the cotton purchase price offered by the SOFITEX in 1992 and 1993 and much greater rigor in grading the cotton during the purchasing campaigns, the combined result of which was a drop in revenue for the farmers. Previously, the company had a two-level grading system; and it moved to a three-tier ranking, with rigorous criteria of classification, even if criticisms of farmers led the cotton companies to scale back to a two-level grading recently, but still with increased rigor. In the 1991-1992 campaign, a pest attack caused poor cotton yields and led to high rates of loan default, putting the entire sector at risk (Schwartz 1996a). However, in 1994 the 50 percent devaluation of the CFA Franc, the local currency, raised the CFA price the farmer received for cotton sales, making cotton profitable again and setting the cotton sector on a new track.

Simultaneously, SOFITEX improved the organization of the sector through a variety of means. First, it bailed out 50 percent of the insolvent farmers, all those who had been in arrears on their debt for two years and low production. It also restructured the Village Groups (GV),
which were large and manageable with difficulty, into smaller producers’ associations. The
denomination of the group changed from Village Group (GV) into Cotton Producers’ Group
(GPC). The cotton producers’ groups were formed taking into account the ties of affinity and
trust among the adherents, often enough people of the same or adjacent neighborhoods with
kinship or descent connections, and who provide collateral for each other. These new groups
include in theory only 10 to 30 voluntary farmers, but personal observations indicate that, in
practice, there are groups comprising from 10 to 48 members. The cotton group members
maintain close production interests, if they do not have kinship relations with each other. The
cotton company now extends credit to the producers’ group, which in turn, passes it on to the
individual member. However, within the larger GPC group, further sub-groups are conceived as
explained below, at least for recovering and managing credit effectively at a lower scale. Before
the start of the agricultural season, the group subdivides members either into segments of
lineages, compounds, or residential neighborhood. Each sub-group is responsible for ensuring
that the credit contracted by the other sub-group members is paid, which puts a lot of pressure on
members for meeting production objectives. This “lineage mode” of input credit management,
though not contradictory to the company’s approach, has even amazed cotton agents who never
dreamt of the practicality of the method. This approach makes group production goals and loan
recovery easier to meet.

The current internal organization of the producers’ groups now puts the cotton company
in little risk of loss or none. As they say, “the debt stays in the group and does not affect the
company.” With the cotton company’s collective security system and farmers’ adaptation of it to
local realities, Burkina cotton companies now boast a recovery rate of over 97 percent. This
departs extremely from the former less effective approach of the Village group that used to
contract credit to the individual member of the group, without any collateral responsibility of co-
members of the group. For instance, there are two types of payment arrears, external and internal
arrears, instead of the formerly much familiar external one. The external arrears is a deficient
loan payment that a group owes to the cotton company while the internal one is a payment that a
member or group of members owe to the members of their sub-group, because of poor cotton
harvest. However, in the event a sub-group defaults entirely, its overdue payment will be taken
care of by the larger group. The result of the past approach was that the cotton company had little
pressure or effective debt recovery strategies other than not giving credit to the defaulting
member the next season. Since the group members collectively shoulder the loan payments of
any defaulting producer among them, they have subsequently enhanced the internal organization
of the groups to prevent good producers from being cheated out of their revenue. Because the
cotton company previously paid directly to the farmer after deducting the loan amount, the group
could not collect from their defaulting members. Some farmers would even sell some or all of
their fertilizers in the ‘black market’ and, thus jeopardize the group’s production and potential to
pay loans.

As part of its new “loan” package, SOFITEX also reviewed the method by which the
short-term input loans were given to producers at the beginning of the farming season were
deducted from their cotton sale revenue after harvest. It divided producers into two basic
categories, an approach which is still valid in the reality of today’s cotton production. The
farmers who produce most constitute the first category. They no longer need to be part of a group
in order to take advantage of credit, for pragmatic reasons, most of them would rather operate in
a dual mode by producing as an independent farmer, yet choosing to adhere to a village
cooperative, be it for a symbolic purpose. SOFITEX agents extend loans to them individually,
weigh and purchase their cotton separately, and collect the amount of the loans before paying
them. These farmers are referred to as pilot producers. To be eligible for a first category, a
farmer needs to put at least 6 hectares under cotton, and strictly respect the “technical package”
for growing cotton that is offered by extension agents. An intermediary category of producers
includes farmers who plant between 2 and 6 hectares. They are also bound to respect the
technical package but receive no special treatment, except loan agreement. They constitute the
middle ground between the “pilot” farmers and the “other” producers. The large category of
“other producers” only needs to put between 0.5 to 2 hectares under cotton. These and the
intermediary producers provide collective security to each other for the short-term loans
SOFITEX extends to them. For this reason, they are expected to join a cotton production group.
This double structure prevails today. Most of those who have no choice but to remain in
cooperatives are medium and small cotton producers. However, a farmer’s status can change by
moving, and downward or upward mobility does occur in this scale from one year to the next. In
addition, since the 1993-94 agricultural season, some production information – such as a rise in
the price of fertilizer or insecticide, or changes in the grading system of the purchased cotton -
which used to be disclosed only sometime before the onset of the farming season are now
revealed earlier in the year.

With this new approach, the company has been aiming to encourage the reliable
producers, keep them in business, against the danger of being drowned under the flood of
defaults by weaker farmers, and protect the sector, which risked collapse in the early 1990s.
Though not every farmer in the top categories fulfilled his contract obligation of production,
Schwartz (1996a: 6) explains the benefits of the approach. It rendered SOFITEX’s debt recovery
tasks easier and more efficient. Conversations with a representative of the farmers’ union at Faso
Coton and a UNPCB management advisor of Dano support this conclusion. The farmers’ union representative estimated the rate of delinquency, in the year 2005, at about 3 percent (Field notes June 20, 2005), and the management advisor held that the system is now so efficient that the debt of the one hundred farmers’ unions under his dominion is recovered up from 99 to 100 percent (Field notes April 4, 2008). These organizational innovations gave farmers new incentives for engaging in cotton, and the government hopes of continued growth in cotton export. The hopes of growth started to materialize in 1994 when devaluation gave a short-lived boost to cotton farming. However, Burkina beat its 1991 production record only in 1997. Until 1998, village cotton producers did not have a national representation. Since then, a new national federating body of all village producers’ organizations, meant to represent cotton farmers’ interests, has come into existence under the name of the National Union for Burkina Cotton Producers (Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina, UNPCB).

By 1999, liberalization of the cotton sector allowed the national cotton producers’ union to acquire stakes in SOFITEX, and participate in managerial democracy by partaking in decision making through their representatives in the Board of Trustees. This participation of the producers’ union in the Board of Trustees of SOFITEX is a boost to cotton production in Burkina as they seem now to understand their shared interest in working for the stabilization and survival of the sector. Since the start of liberalization in 1999, the union holds 30 percent of SOFITEX’s shares, versus 35 for the State, 34 for DAGRIS (former CFDT), and 1 percent, as before, for local banks. Since 2004, UNPCB, the national cotton producers’ Union, acquired also 20 and 10 percent of shares respectively in newborn cotton companies Faso Coton, which operates in the central cotton zone and SOCOMA, which controls all aspects of production and marketing of cotton in the Eastern zone.
There are questions that arise as to how the UNPCB acquired so many resources as to buy such a considerable number of stakes only months after its existence. The organization’s obvious source of income had been the *ristournes*, premium rebates. Each cotton farmers’ organization receives 250 FCFA on every ton of cotton sold to the cotton company. Even so, granted that the *ristourne* is not retroactive, it will not make sense to support that they bought the stakes out of their *ristournes* in 1999. I have not received a clear answer to this question as to now. But there is a speculation that the UNPCB is a “ready-made organization” by the government who “hand-picked” its top leader and “pumped money” into an account for it to manage, as a means to still have control over the cotton sector, under then looming liberalization. Whether the allegation is true or not, the UNPCB has become a peasant organization of cotton producers that is seemingly very powerful in the cotton industry, even if some farmers believe that its officers do not manage the organization as transparently and democratically as it should be. The Union is represented at regional, provincial, departmental and village levels in all areas of the country where cotton is produced. The farmers who are members of UNPCB do not produce only cotton. They are producers of food crops as well, and often in large quantities. It is possible that the combination of the actions of UNPCB, the State, and SOFITEX has contributed to stabilize the cotton sector, and to maintain impressive increases. Since the 2000-01 campaign, growth in production has been maintained continuously despite a drop in producer prices, from over 275,000 in 2003 to 759,000 tons in 2006; and followed by an abrupt slump to 365,000 tons in 2007 and 457,000 in 2008 (see Chart 2; Table 3).

In 2004, the cotton *filière* in Burkina experienced a watershed with liberalization, which had been under way since 1999. Three companies now control the cotton industry: Société
Cotonnière du Gourma (SOCOMA), Faso Coton, and SOFITEX, the oldest and most experienced company. The three companies control the three cotton zones of the country respectively: East, Center and West, which remains the biggest zone with around 90 percent of national production (Table 3). The shareholders of Faso Coton are UNPCB with 10 percent of shares, fertilizer company Amerfert with 20 percent, Burkina private transportation company SOBA with 20 percent, International Promotion Services (IPS) with 21 percent and the major shareholder Paul Reinhart, a Swiss cotton trading company with 29 percent of shares. SOCOMA is controlled by Geocoton, former CFDT, with 55 percent of shares, and UNPCB which holds 20 percent of shares. An eight-year “period of exclusivity” and “harmonious collaboration” is granted to the three companies before they can engage in real “free market competition.” In practice, SOFITEX is still the most important buyer and exporter of cotton in Burkina with over 82 percent of the exportable cotton, and in many aspects of the cotton industry, it acts on behalf of the two other companies as well in a particularly unfavorable world market context.

**Sources:** *Rapports annuels* Enquete permanente agricole du Ministere de l’agriculture Burkina Faso, 1990-2004; [http://www.SOFITEX.bf](http://www.SOFITEX.bf); Field notes.
Falling Cotton Price: Global Contingencies and Local Repercussions

One major problem that boom-bust cotton growers of Africa, including those from Burkina Faso, face is the cyclical changes of world cotton prices. In 2001, the world price of a pound of cotton fiber lost 43 percent of its value, and had been slumping since then. Behind these changes lie the more permanent problem of the agricultural subsidies that governments of China, the European Union (EU), and most importantly the USA give to their cotton farmers. The US government, subsidizes its 25,000 cotton growers with a lump sum of about $3.2 billion a year (Yafa 2005: 306). These subsidies, which are at odds with the regulations of the Uruguay Round and World Trade Organization’s principles (OXFAM 2006:11), distort the cotton market for producers of countries in the Global South. In 2005-2006, the loss incurred by the cotton sector of Burkina Faso, partly because of these issues, was estimated to be $70 million dollars. The forecast that seemed no better for 2006-07 became worse in 2007-2008 when production fell to a bottom low of only 360, 000 tons. The depressed world economy offered no brighter prospect in 2009 when farmers of the 2008-09 season only received their payment only in July after waiting for at least seven months. The issue of the cotton subsidies reminds us that the dependency theory approach that scholars relied on in analyzing international commercial relations in the 1970s, and addressed in the preceding chapter, is still relevant in current reality though not as focused as then.

In a study of the cotton sectors of the three West African countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Cote d’Ivoire, Bassett (2008) suggests that African producers’ cotton prices could increase in

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6 Though official records suggest figures beyond 360,000 tons, I have relied on the claims of the SOFITEX Director and other cotton officials in their efforts to induce farmers to resume farming cotton during their 2008 forums in April 2008. The data reports during these forums support these figures, which seem realistic and closer to my personal estimation of the overall production based on productions of various village cooperatives. There is also a reliable report of the opening forums at the following website: http://www.fasopresse.net/article.php3?id_article=12706.
the event of the suppression of cotton subsidies by the United States and the European Union. In the Doha negotiations of 2003, the hopes were raised that these subsidies could be suppressed, but now these are dashed with the suspension of the negotiations. Ironically, the US Government initiated the West Africa Cotton Improvement Program (WACIP) instead. It is meant to support the productivity of cotton in the four countries that denounced the irregularities of cotton subsidies. A glance at the evolution of price of seed cotton per kilogram between 2004-2005 and 2007-2008 and area cultivated suggests that though farmers in Burkina Faso are increasing production to respond to low price, they also have a threat point under which they can either decrease production or even abstain from it.

Compared to 2004, the producer’s price of cotton for 2005 and 2006 fell from 16 to 27.5 percent respectively. However, harvests increased consecutively these two years. Although, this ‘reversed’ response curve of producers to price falls is not common, it is understandable in some circumstances. As will be elaborated later, farmers react accordingly as their prime objective is to maximize in their endeavors. One explanation can be that their reliance on cotton – stimulated by the 1994 devaluation - is so inelastic that increasing production presents itself as the only option, to reach target cash income and to cushion price falls. But in 2007, the blatant drop of the producer’s price to 31 percent paired with increase in input prices caused farmers to react negatively by decreasing production (see Chart 2a). The farmers’ reaction seemingly forced the cotton companies to increase price for the 2008-09 season while maintaining input prices. At the same time, new actors who promote differing cotton types and labels emerge in the cotton sector of Burkina Faso. In 2003, the year before the additional companies were created for the marketing of cotton, Burkina Faso started to experiment with genetically modified (GM) cotton. The America-based biotechnology company Monsanto, represented by Burkina Biotech
Association, the Swiss counterpart, Syngenta, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have principally supported the GM cotton initiative.

All of these actors sponsor, to some degree, the technical and scientific activities that the Burkina National Research and Agriculture Institute (INERA) carries out in the field. At the same time, going perhaps in the other direction, a pilot project of organic cotton production, targeting mainly women, started. The organic cotton project is supported by Swiss non-governmental organization Helvetas, which also relies on INERA’s expertise and maintains a close collaboration with the national cotton producers’ organization (UNPCB). The interest that such multinational companies and global agencies show in cotton farmers, and what appears to be their intent to “develop” a local agribusiness out of a sector that has so far been dominated by
smallholders provides an indication of how much vitality the Burkina Faso cotton industry possesses.

**The Transgenic Cotton Debate**

The agriculture research institute (INERA) conducted experiments on GM cotton in two research stations - Farakoba and Kouaré, located in Bobo-Dioulasso and Fada N’Gourma respectively – focusing on the biological effectiveness of the VIP (Vegetative Insecticidal Protein) gene. The objective was to assess the efficacy and resistance of the VIP against lepidopterous caterpillars (INERA 2005:3). The experiments concerned three varieties of cotton gene, Coker 312, VIP, and FK 37 in Farakoba, and STAM 59A in Kouaré. In 2005 the institute released “satisfactory results” (INERA 2005) that highlighted the economic and environmental advantages of the GM cotton referred to as *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). The findings have been interpreted as demonstration that producers would benefit significantly from GM cotton production. With Bt, the number of necessary pest treatments can be reduced from 7 or 8 times down to 2 times, while the yield per hectare will increase 33 to 40 percent compared to what is achieved with currently cultivated varieties of cotton. Besides, it is maintained that these changes will lead to a surplus financial return of about 33,000 to 35,000 CFAF per hectare compared to current return per hectare of conventional varieties (Field Notes, June 18th 2005). The FK37 and STAM 59A strains were already disseminated for cultivation in 2008 as the government of Burkina has implemented production of transgenic cotton in the west of the country (namely in the Boni area), where some 8,500 hectares were already under Bt cotton in 2008-09 (Korves 2008). With an aggressive campaign for transgenic cotton farming by SOFITEX, the major cotton company, more farmers have engaged in it in 2009, and put Bt cotton under 118,000 hectares. These developments are happening in the face of strong domestic opposition and the
open reservation to the move on the part of the European Union (Zida 2008), one central partner of Burkina Faso in its multilateral cooperation.

The vocal domestic opposition over production of GM cotton in Burkina Faso is led by a coalition of organizations (CV-OGM/Burkina), the vanguard GMO watchdog formed in 2005, and presided by the senior professor of genetics Didier Zongo of the University of Ouagadougou. In an interview I had with Dr Zongo (June 15, 2005), he admitted that he “had no issue with genetic engineering, because after all, it enriches science.” He is mostly concerned with the possible negative social impact of GM cotton production, especially what is suggested by the precedents in other parts of the world, especially in India, where GM cotton supposedly caused so much havoc to production that some desperate debt-ridden cotton growers chose to commit suicide (Stone 2002). This is, in part, the reason why CV-OGM and COPAGEN/Burkina, another organization, have been urging precaution, and a moratorium of five years before GM cotton seed is disseminated for farming and cultivation.

These civil organizations mainly criticize the rush to GM cotton farming in Burkina, while raising awareness of other related issues, such as the rights of local communities. In fact, the GM seeds contain so-called 'terminator-gene', which implies that any resulting crops cannot produce viable seeds of their own. This means that farmers might no longer have ownership of and control over the cotton seed, as is currently the case. Besides, the biotechnological companies have patent rights over the seed of the Bt cotton which farming communities will be growing while in current situation, the seed belongs to the farmers via the Burkina National Cotton Producers’ Union. This suggests that farmers will lose the benefits incurred from cotton seeds. Furthermore, the most problematical concern is the potential for and possibility of contamination of non-GM cotton through cross-pollination (Bouchie 2002:1). Cross-pollination
is the “fertilization by the transfer of pollen from an anther of one plant to a stigma of another.” In plain terms, the effects of the wind and insects can cause transmutation of the gene of non-GM varieties. Unfortunately, there are precedents that support this eventuality, the biotechnological companies will have the right to sue the farmers whose non-GM cotton has been transmuted without their will (Cullet 2005: 102; Gilbertson et al. 2004: 3). This has been a recurrent problem with many farmers in North America, and the most popular case is that of Canadian farmer of canola, Percy Schmeiser, whose non-GM canola farm crops were supposedly contaminated by the neighboring crop of a licensed GM-canola producer. Monsanto sued Mr. Schmeiser, who was eventually sentenced to pay $19,000 of damages, plus $153,000 of court fees to Monsanto, for producing GM canola without legal access to the seeds. The event of such a situation in Burkina Faso will be a total disaster in a country where over 90 percent of the farmers are non-literate and have little knowledge of the legal recourses and no money and property.

Beyond the potential economic and environmental advantages that the GM cotton research findings suggest, some observers think its adoption is motivated by two political considerations. First, some people believe that the uncritical move to the GM cotton was mostly a gesture of the Burkina government to enter again in the good graces of the USA after Burkina’s military role in the Liberian quagmire led to a freeze in the relations between the two countries. The second argument is that the Burkina government is trying to occupy a central geopolitical role situate itself as resource center as the first GM farming country in West Africa, betting that this kind of farming will spread in the region. As for the farmers, on the other hand, if the declarations that the chairman of the UNPCB made to the national press and news media speaks for the majority of Burkina cotton producers, it seems that so far they are welcoming GM cotton. In fact, from what I understood in the field, the major concerns of most producers, as of now,
seem to be about accessible cost of the cotton seeds for planting and immediate financial benefits than future hypothetical risks. This attitude of farmers is perhaps due to their lack of understanding in the difference between these many cotton labels, put aside the way of production and the producer’s price per kilogram. Nevertheless, the UNPCB President, Francois Traoré’s quasi total support of the GM cotton research findings and farming is somewhat puzzling, in view of the fact that the experience with GM cotton elsewhere in developing economies has involved serious human costs (Stone 2002).

Here, we run into the difficulty of making a clear assessment of UNPCB’s leadership. The UNPCB President led a task force including West African cotton growers that took the floor at the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Summit in Cancun in 2003 to criticize the subsidies to cotton growers in the countries of the European Union, China, and even at greater levels, the USA. Though this action did not result in a suppression of the subsidies, it did spur the WTO to make a statement that the subsidies are unfair, and later brought the USA to schedule their total suppression by 2013. But can one conclude that a representative of an outfit like UNPCB, which holds significant shares in the cotton marketing, will never speak out against the best interest of cotton growers? In other words, the ambivalent position of the president seems to reflect his dual identity as a cotton grower and a co-manager in the national cotton business. The Chairman of UNPCB holds a dual identity. He is a cotton grower and a co-manager in the national cotton marketing organization. This dual identity compels this official to make pronouncement from different vantage points. Many farmers and observers wonder whether the UNPCB has as its primary objective to defend the actions of government and cotton companies or the farmers’ interests, in case the two clash. This malaise about the position of UNPBB pervaded in 2008
during most of the cotton growers’ forums, which are spaces offered to farmers to exchange views on a variety of issues, including the management of their national and local organizations.

In the three different villages (Gningbama, Dano, Kpai) when I attended UNPCB forums in early May of 2008, I heard the charge that the UNPCB officials had little concerns for farmers’ interests. Some farmers even announced that they would have discontinued cotton growing were it not for the non-monetary benefits they obtain from it. The attitude of the government and cotton companies toward a new farmers’ union (SYNTAP) that was created in 2005 oddly contrasts with their friendly support of UNPCB, and this raises further questions as to whether there are not double standards towards farmers’ representation. The leaders of SYNTAP (Syndicat national des Travailleurs de l’Agropastoral) broke away from the UNPCB after they questioned its Chairman’s leadership skills and good will. This dissident union is not included in any way in the process of decision-making. It has openly been criticizing misdemeanors of top managers in the official cotton organization, namely the SOFITEX, and the government’s untimely decision to adopt transgenic cotton production. It is clear that mutual lack of trust characterizes the relations between SYNTAP and the UNPCB, on the one hand, and SYNTAP and state officials and cotton companies, on the other hand. For obvious reasons, all cotton producers adhere to UNPCB, which had initiated the cultivation of organic cotton in 2004, in partnership with Swiss NGO Helvetas.

“Coton-bio”: A “Women’s Cotton”

Many farmers embrace the organic cotton project enthusiastically partly because they are told that it is environment-friendly, that it will reduce the cost of inputs and, above all, it will give them better returns. The first organic export cotton was harvested and sold in the 2004 campaign, but that first year, the output was only 12.5 tons. But since 2005, the production
increased impressively to 150 tons. Burkina’s export of organic cotton harvest reached 600 tons in 2006, topped 996 tons in 2007, and reached another record of 2,000 tons in 2008.

**Table 4**: Harvests, price, gender of producer and surfaces of organic cotton in Burkina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Harvest in tons</th>
<th>Price per kilogram in CFAF paid to producer</th>
<th>Percentage of producers</th>
<th>Surfaces cultivated in hectares</th>
<th>Yield of kilogram of cotton per hectare</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>79.16</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>51.73</td>
<td>42.23</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>684.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>289.6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,809.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>nd</td>
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The organic farming program has the peculiarity of also clearly encouraging women’s independent engagement in cotton production. Women who, up to then, participated mostly as household dependents gained much more visibility as cotton farm managers in their own right, and represented up to 45 percent in the organic cotton program, although this rate has been decreasing and reached the bottom level of 38 percent in 2007-08, as presented in Table 4.

The producer’s price for organic cotton has been far higher than that of the conventional cotton. Recently, Victoria’s Secret, the US retailer of women’s clothing and lingerie, decided to participate in the organic cotton project of Burkina Faso. Victoria’s Secret deals directly with the UNPCB instead of buying the production through cotton companies. This direct and fair market approach allowed the UNPCB to increase the producer’s price to the level of about three times the price of conventional cotton. In response, many farmers vowed to grow organic cotton and fair-trade as an alternative or substitute for conventional cotton, the prices of which are falling. However, a less bright note is that UNPCB and Helvetas have not succeeded to market the totality of the 2008 organic production, because of the global economic crisis. A remaining 400
tons is still to be exported. Subsequently, the money was paid to farmers only in late May or early June, and the price per kilogram fell back to 272 FCFA.

Despite the promise and appeal of the high price of organic cotton, it comes along with some unsuspected consequences. For one thing and ironically, it seems to be putting women in a more vulnerable position. At the beginning of the project, organic cotton was locally referred to as “women’s cotton.” In current times, it has become “coton-bio”, that is, organic cotton. The shift in the local name indicates a change in the gender perception of the project between then and now. Between 2004 and 2005, fewer men accorded much attention to “women’s cotton.” But when heads of household started to realize that their wives were making a lot of money on the small personal plots made available to them, most of them started to transform the organic cotton production into a family concern by absorbing it into their own farm. As a result, the percentage of women producing this type of cotton has been decreasing year after year – down to 38 percent by 2008 (Table 4). Some women now sign up officially in their names but actually serve just as surrogate or proxy for their husband. Some of the objective of social fairness that Helvetas aims has been achieved only partially because it is not certain that the large number of women who started as autonomous small producers with organic cotton will be able to remain so once its profitability has been demonstrated.

The farm-gate price of conventional cotton fell to its lowest level in a long time in 2007 at the same time that the price of chemical inputs went up. Facing this situation, many farmers reduced the acreage under cotton drastically while others stopped growing it altogether. As a result, production fell from 760,000 tons in 2006 down to 360,000 tons the next year as shown in Table 3. This low production figure, which was partly also due to unfavorable and untimely rainfall, sent a strong signal to cotton companies that farmers are resolved to resist deteriorating
conditions. Moreover, with organic cotton project providing an alternative that started attracting many conventional cotton growers, at least in the southwest part of the country, the conventional cotton companies increased the price they offered to 165 FCFA; although the difference was small, the price of inputs remained unchanged. In addition, they also pledged an additional 10 francs per kilogram in the event the national production reaches at least 600,000 tons. From what I gathered from recent long-distance phone conversations with a few farmers and organic cotton extension agents, there seems to be a tacit, but growing, effort on behalf of the cotton companies to curtail the rising adhesion of farmers to organic cotton farming. For the 2009-10 farming season, for instance, the companies disseminated seeds of transgenic cotton in an unrestrained way, even in areas not figuring out of the zones initially identified for GM farming. There are legitimate concerns that this move will end up jeopardizing organic farming. The people who expressed such concerns seemed even more confused since it is the local officials of the UNPCB, the farmers’ union, who promote the Bt cotton at village levels.

Since the implementation of institutional reforms in the cotton sector, and because of the centrality of cotton to the country’s economic life, a Permanent Secretariat has been created in the government to monitor the implementation of the policy, and maintain the continuing growth of the macro economy. Compared to neighboring countries – Mali and Cote d’Ivoire - the government is more intrusive in Burkina in cotton farming. But this intrusion, which seems unavoidable, also seems to prevent misfortunes that producers in the other countries face. For instance, in Ivory Coast, a less tight role of the State in the cotton industry has led to some confusion as farmers would contract credit with one company and sell the harvest to another one, thus creating defaults, and causing losses to cotton companies (Bassett 2006). Despite liberalization, SOFITEX maintains most of its previous prerogatives, and acts as proxy for the
two other companies SOCOMA and Faso Cotton, especially in the importing and supply of inputs.

**A Note on Inputs**

Except for the seeds, which are extracted from the production following research by SOFITEX’s research partner, The Institute for Research in Environment and Agronomy (INERA), all other inputs such as fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, and spray materials are imported. Before liberalization, import of inputs was facilitated by a credit that SOFITEX contracted from a pool of banks. Importation of the inputs is ensured by four private international companies with local branches in Burkina Faso and SAPHYTO, the single national company specialized in pesticide formulation and conditioning. These companies that import the inputs are AGRIDIS, SAPHYTO, SCAB representing French companies HYDROCHEM, CALLIOPE, and STEP-SIVEX respectively; CALLIOPE, and STEP-SIVEX from Senegal; and SAPIN-B, the only national private company specialized in cotton input import. Among these, AGRIDIS controls about 80 percent of fertilizer imports, leaving the remaining 20 percent to SCAB, AMEFERT, and ECOMMER.

It is impossible for a farmer to grow cotton without these chemical inputs. Inputs are delivered on a one-year credit term, carrying an interest rate of 10 to 11 percent to the UNPCB, which forwards them down to village producers’ cooperatives (GPC), which, in turn, give them to individual farmers on credit, according to the amounts the latter requested in the beginning of the planting season. With liberalization, SOFITEX is now transferring the business of importing these chemicals to UNPCB. The process started in 2001, and is so far limited to the import fertilizers used for food crops (IFDC 2002:5). SAPHYTO controls the local supply of herbicides. Farmers access its products either through the cooperatives in a bulk order by means of credit, or
as individuals by making a cash payment to the company or to retail sellers (Resocot 2003:11). However, it has been observed that farmers do not trust the retail market to meet their needs for chemical inputs, since it is mostly supplied by cooperative’s members who trade their personal supplies for cash. This leads all smallholders to join a cooperative when they need a certain amount of inputs, be it to grow cotton or maize. The collective guarantee of the loan means that the price of the amounts delivered to the cooperative is deducted by the cotton company that does the purchasing from the total to be paid to the cooperative’s members for all the cotton they offered for sale. The company does not take account of which farmer received how much chemical input individually and what quantity of cotton he brought for sale.

**A Note on Commercialization of Cotton**

Though in theory, the marketing of cotton is no longer a monopsony, there is no real competition yet among the three companies that do the purchasing. An advisory body consisting of representatives of SOFITEX, SOCOMA, Faso Coton, and UNPCB - called the *Association Interprofessionelle Cotonnière du Burkina* (AICB) - coordinates the cotton purchasing activities. However, SOFITEX retains most of its privileges especially in terms of the transportation of the crop and research. Independent action by each company was supposed to start in 2008, but this has not happened yet. Each one of the three companies, SOFITEX, SOCOMA, and Faso Coton, buy cotton in the zones allocated to them exclusively from individual big producers, and through the cooperatives for smallholders. There is only one set of prices for purchasing cotton nationwide. It is determined jointly by the stakeholders of the sector, including the cotton farmers’ national union, on the basis of “components such as company and producer costs and the projected world market price (Cotlook A)” (Bassett 2008).
The producer price is agreed on in time for the producers to know it before the beginning of the planting season. At the end of the season, and after the sale of the cotton, each village producer’s union is entitled to a bonus of 3,500 FCFA per ton of seed cotton they sold. This bonus is referred to commonly as *ristourne* in the jargon of cotton farmers. However, as part of the conditions for the entitlement to the *ristourne*, the cooperative also must load the purchased cotton into trucks that the relevant cotton company supplies. The cotton companies also pay for the cotton crop to the producers’ union in aggregate after they subtract the amount of all short-term loans its members contracted for the inputs. This system, which was implemented in 1996, has allowed the cotton companies to minimize delinquencies. For instance, in 2005, the rate of payment delinquency on growing season loans was around 3 percent whereas before the adoption of collective guarantee system of loan, it was about 15 to 20 percent (Field Notes, June 20, 2005). This difference testifies the efficiency of the practice, at least in terms of loan recovery, for the cotton companies.

**Is the White Gold Losing Ground?**

Until 2005, the floor price, which SOFITEX previously pledged to offer producers for a kilogram of best quality cotton, was FCFA175. However, with falling world prices, the cotton companies have not been able to keep this level, and cotton price in Burkina has dropped dramatically since 2005 despite a modest rise in 2008. Continuous fall of the world price is now compounded by the declining value the US dollar compelled the companies to review the price it offers downwards for first grade cotton 165FCFA/kg in 2006 and FCFA145/kg in 2007. In good years when world prices are high, SOFITEX would redistribute a lump sum in the form of a

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7 Relative improvement of world price of cotton allowed the national cotton association to give farmers a 10francs CFA bonus per each kilogram of cotton produced in 2007-08 and initially sold at 145, which finally brought the price of the 2007-08 campaign to 155francs CFA/kilogram.
bonus. It is the individual farmer’s *ristourne*, and it differs from the cooperative’s *ristourne* which is paid to the group as a compensation of their efforts in organizing the farmers, selling the seed cotton and ensuring that the cotton company receive the cotton sold safely in its factory. The individual farmer’s *ristourne* is normally distributed to farmers on the floor price of 175 FCFA the year following actual production\(^8\), but in fact, the last time farmers ever received a bonus individually was in 2004-05. This price decline makes some commentators think that the cotton industry in Burkina is experiencing serious difficulties, especially when, in 2006, it underwent recapitalization of its assets from four to 38 billion FCFA (about US$8 to 77.6 million). However, SOFITEX and UNPCB officials, who found the speculation irrelevant, justified the increase by their concern to tally with the production growth and ambitions of the sector (Sanogo 2006).

The recapitalization of the three companies was finalized in December 2008 with financial support of the European Union. One strategy to manage risk was for the companies to establish a *fonds de lissage*, a kind of security fund meant to “help manage the risks of volatile world cotton prices and promote a more flexible response to changing world market conditions” (IMF 2006; AICB & Goreux 2006). But the difficulty that the purchasing companies experienced in absorbing and paying for all the producers offered for sale was evident in 2007-08. The farmers were only paid for their cotton in early April, for a harvest delivered in November-December. According to circulating stories, this delay was caused by the uncertainty of the financial partners of SOFITEX, who withheld the funds waiting to see if the SOFITEX was

\(^8\) This means that the *ristourne* of a year X is drawn from the production activities of year X – 1. It also suggests that a farmer who discontinues production of cotton misses the *ristourne* of the last year he produced it, if applicable. Similarly, a farmer who grows cotton the first time or who resumes growing it after discontinuation takes advantage of the resulting *ristourne* from the production of the previous year. Besides, there is no applicable *ristourne* for any year when the kilogram of cotton costs 175 CFAF or below.
solvent. In late December 2008, the African Development Bank sponsored the fiber-cotton sector development project, a $56-million program, which aims to develop the cotton sector of four West and central African countries including Burkina Faso. One target of the project is to transform 25 per cent of the seed cotton locally in order to improve surplus on the macro-economies of these countries.

The positive effect of cotton on the economy of Burkina is hardly deniable (Fortucci 2000; Goreux 2005). Apart from securing the much-needed foreign exchange, cotton also contributes to the national economy by supporting other industrial activities. Oil industries like SOFIB (Société de fabrication Industrielle Barro) and SHSB (Société des Huileries et savonneries du Burkina) transform part of the ginned cotton seeds into oil and soap. SOFITEX also contracts out to local transportation companies, such as SOBA (Société Barro) part of the trucking of seed cotton to the factories. Voltex, which was opened to produce textiles with part of the country’s ginned cotton, became Faso Fani during the Revolution era, but was closed in the early 2000; it reopened in 2005 under private management and a new name - FasoTex. Beside these important contributions, cotton production has provided an invaluable boost to food crop production (see chart 3). This observation provides a perspective to challenge the conventional opposition assumed to exist between food and ‘cash/export crops’ in developing economies.

**Cotton and Food Crop Production in Burkina**

At present, State policy offers little encouragements to food crop production by measures such as supplying fertilizers. It is impossible for farmers to access fertilizers from sources other than the structures of the cotton companies. Therefore, there are farmers who decide to grow cotton not because they find it profitable in itself, but especially for the other non-cash
advantages, it brings such as access to short and long term credit to purchase fertilizers, 
pesticides, or plow carts.

The farmers’ desire to use chemical fertilizer on food crops has remained unheeded for 
long, even if recently, UNPCB, the national union of cotton producers has been able to import 
fertilizers expressly for food crops. However, because quantities of this type of fertilizer are 
limited as of now, farmers only access it by committing to produce cotton, and those who cannot 
access the food crop fertilizers resort to the ones used for cotton as a makeshift. Some observers 
see collusion between the objectives of cotton companies and the State. The only role of the 
State is through the monitoring and implementation of the regulations for the industry via the 
newborn Permanent Secretariat for the Cotton Sector. Otherwise, it does not seem to do much in 
the cotton business. The cotton marketing companies provide the fertilizers, but no (State) 
organization exists to provide support for other crops. There has been much lobbying by the 
UNPCB who insistently attracted the attention of the government on the necessity to import 
fertilizers meant for food crops, which farmers have been requesting. With sponsorship of 
government, the farmers’ organization has been able to import some limited quantities of “maize 
fertilizers” for farmers. But few farmers, other than major cotton growers and smallholder 
farmers, who belong to village cooperatives, are eligible to acquire inputs from that source. It is 
also remarkable how farmers, even the ones who do not currently engage in cotton, have 
adopted, adapted, and even improved some elements of the extension package initially meant for 
cotton, to their food farming system. This is perhaps the reason why farmers in Southwest 
Burkina claim, “Cotton production is the springboard for food production.”

During the 2008 agricultural season, the government introduced and distributed 3,500 
tons of improved seeds of sorghum, millet, maize, beans, and rice in order to raise food
production. But there are critics who are skeptical about the efficiency of the decision and view it as another political gesture that will only benefit people who are already in privileged positions. The need for an institutional framework to provide fertilizers on credit for the production of maize and other cereals on credit is clear. Then farmers will not pretend that they will produce cotton to obtain fertilizers on credit.

At the middle of every agricultural season, the minister of agriculture tours the whole country to develop a sense of the promise of the agricultural production, and encourage farmers. There is also an annual national farmer’s Day celebrated with splendor and during which the head of State rewards some “exemplary” producers. However, though this celebration is about all agricultural and pastoral production, more emphasis seems to be put on export crops than food crops, which are not part of what is currently termed “agribusiness” in today’s rural economic jargon of Burkina Faso. Perhaps due to the country’s need for the exchange earnings that cotton generates, the state authorities give the impression that development will ultimately result from export crops, and more precisely cotton. Nevertheless, farmers appear to have successfully combined food crop and cotton production.

In fact, most cotton growers remain food farmers who try to produce the grains they will need, and some extra quantities for sale. There is even talk of transforming the cotton farmers’ union into a federation of cotton and maize farmers. If information from my sources is confirmed, the federation should be operational by the 2010-farming season. High cotton growers of Burkina Faso also produce sizeable acreage under food crops partly because of their ability to access improved production equipment, wage labor, and other production inputs. This observation supports prior claims about the impressive effect of cotton production on grain food crops in general, and namely on maize (yellow corn) in major cotton producing areas of the

Production data seem to indicate also that growth in cotton production does not negatively affect grain food growing (see Chart 3). On the contrary, there is an obvious tendency of growth in production even though food crop production is still below population needs and makes the country vulnerable in terms of food security, especially after seasons of untimely rainfall. This uncertain food sufficiency toughens the situation of most smallholder households during bottleneck periods (between May and late August).

Recapitulation

By examining the historical trajectory of the agricultural encounter between Africa and global forces, and the inherent dynamic local processes, this chapter sheds light on an important aspect of the development of Burkina cotton. It showed how the much begrudged export cotton crop forced upon the populations in the early 20th century ultimately emerged as the most important source of cash income for rural communities, and an extraordinary source of exchange revenue for the national economy. It also showed the interconnectedness between the responses
of farmers to the evolution of world cotton prices and to the cost of imported production factors, hence linking the local to the global. The development of cotton production has become the locomotive for other types of crops, and has helped diversify rural production. Farmers engage in its production not simply because they aim to get cash income. The majority produce cotton in order to boost food crop production, by maintaining/improving soil quality, having access to fertilizer on credit, to obtain agricultural loans and technical assistance from extension agents. The remarkable impact of cotton growing on agricultural transformation and food crop production is somewhat at variance with the pessimistic evaluations of risk factor of export crops on food production in the developing economies. Another wisdom that is contradicted in the cotton experience in Burkina is the active, though still embryonic, participation of women as independent producers.

At the local level, the growing number of cotton producers in the country seems to stand for a testimonial of farmers’ trust in and hopes for whatever advantage cotton entails. Despite the difficulties and constraints related to production, cotton has become today the most reliable and profitable on-farm activity in rural communities, and especially the cotton areas of Burkina. Moreover, even if some farmers are currently skeptical about cotton, many others simply find it impossible to do without the production of cotton. In Southwest Burkina for instance, cotton is viewed as a metaphor for the attainment of villagers’ social and economic goals. It is thanks to cotton that most farmers achieve food security and guarantee reliable cash incomes invest in the healthcare of family members, education of children, or improvement of houses and means of transportation. As a metaphor, ‘cotton’ refers to any economic enterprise in its abstract sense while representing the cultivation of the fiber and its related issues. In the next chapter, I focus on the concept of cotton and its cultivation to highlight how engrained the cotton activity is in
the social context. I track the adoption of the concept both in its material and in abstract acceptance by examining the biographies of farmers of various statuses and gender.
CHAPTER 4: GROWING COTTON: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MOBILITY AND HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS

Zanvier is a farmer of a village near Dano. He is the head of a farm household that used not to produce cotton. His household grows a few acres of maize, millet and peanuts. But Zanvier’s household relies, mostly, on the revenue from temporary construction contracts, which he and his two teen-age sons undertake at the end of the farming season. He uses the money from construction to supplement the food need of his domestic group. On Saturday 22nd of September 2007, he was rather happy in contrast to his usually gloomy mood I had been accustomed to. He looked elated, greeted me as he was riding his bike, and apologized for not stopping, because “I am rushing to my cotton farm and do not want to be late,” he shouted to me. Since Zanvier previously expressed his unrepentant opposition to growing cotton, I was a bit confused, and asked by-standers whether he was going to work in the cotton farm of somebody for a wage. “No. He has the construction deal for a three-bedroom house. Therefore, he will soon be as rich as a farmer who sold his cotton. The builder’s yard is what he calls the cotton farm.” This explanation echoed previous contexts in which I had heard yet failed to grasp the full and contextualized meaning of the expression. The immediate case on which my mind lingered was the buzzword “pòbò gom da’n” (women’s cotton sold well) – that one could hear repeatedly in nearly every social gathering in the Dano area during the third and fourth quarter of 2007. It referred to the wealth that rural women accumulated because of their then booming shea-nut sales. Because the wet season is generally the period of scarce resources, shea-nut money enriched most women as opposed to the men who could only expect to cash in from cotton, the main source of income for many, after sale during the dry season. “Cotton” stood for any windfall, especially one that brought in cash income. From then on, I became more alert to the local discourse and ended up realizing the patterned and metaphoric allusion to “cotton” (gom) in the area (Field Notes, October 22, 2007).

This chapter shifts from cotton as a historical artifact, as presented in the previous chapter, to cotton as a experiential reality. It has two main objectives. First, it attempts to explain the reason why smallholder farmers in Burkina Faso engage in the production of cotton despite unfavorable market conditions over the past years. Drawing on farmers’ perspectives about the direct and indirect benefits incurred from the production of this commodity, the chapter demonstrates why cotton cultivation is farmers’ preferred path to social achievement and a metaphor for upward mobility. The second major target here is to revisit the assumed incompatibility between
production of so-called cash and food crops, which have also been categorized as “men’s” versus “women’s” crop. Through an analysis of a few farmers’ biographies, the chapter highlights the villagers’ perception of success, and the intrahousehold dynamics emerging in the process of production, consumption, and allocation of proceeds of cotton. It notes that the strategies household members – mainly women – use in engaging household heads tend to alter gender relations while broadening the bargaining space of the actors involved. Moreover, the chapter discusses women’s changing role and position in the cotton areas of Burkina Faso, as well as the sociocultural change that results from cotton cultivation at the broader community level.

Revisiting the Binaries, Challenging the Divide

Two recurrent methodological problems mar the study of agricultural production in the developing economies and more particularly in Africa. The first is a tendency to conflate cash/commodity crops with export crops. While export crops are certainly cash crops, not all cash crops are exportable. Non-export commodity crops are produced and marketed by individual farmers, generally smallholders, for the domestic market. Cash/export crop and food crop production have often been seen in opposition to each other, mostly by commentators who criticize the exclusive emphasis on the production of export crops, partly because they consider it a continuation of the colonial legacy that increases farmers’ vulnerability. Proponents of “food” versus “cash” crops point to the incompatibility between the two orientations and the harmful effects of the single-minded promotion of cash/export nexus (Gervais 1984: 130; Carney & Watts 1989; Bohle 1992; Carney 1994).

Another critical perspective highlights that export crops are generally produced by men as opposed to women, and point to the gender inequity that follow from recent developments (Jaquette 1985, Cloud 1985; Mckenzie 1986; Goheen 1991, Lele 1991, Schoepf and Walu 1991,
Supporters of this perspective view commercial agriculture as an obstacle to food-crop production, and a contributor to women’s economic disempowerment (Boserup 1970, Carney and Watts 1989, Mikell 1992, Isaacman and Richards 1995, Isaacman 1996, Udry 1996, Pitcher 1996, Sorensen 1996). In contrast, other authors highlight the positive co-existence of both kinds of crops (Hill 1970, Roos and Gladwin 2000), and stress farmers’ resiliency to market instability (Berry 1985, 1993) or note the potential for commercial crop production to foster agricultural transformation and help increase food-crop productions (Schwartz 1996a, 1996b; Speirs 1996, Spring 2000b, Bassett 2002). Commercial agriculture may offer new economic opportunities and advantages to women despite lingering structural constraints including access to land (Spring 2000a, 2000b), and allow the convergence of individual strategies and intrahousehold dynamics in the struggle for control over women’s labor or proceeds in such contexts (Phillips 1989; Kevane and Gray 1999, Schroeder 1999, Kevane 2000). Currently exported crops yield greater overall cash incomes to households, but there is evidence that African farmers, at least in Burkina Faso, can also generate considerable money income from marketing part of their farm production of food stocks under favorable conditions (Saul 1981: 748). Some cash crops such as peanuts, beans, sesame, and soybean can be utilized to meet food needs of households if necessary. This is not the case with other cash crops, such as cotton, meant exclusively for the market.

Some evidence suggests that the opposition between cash/export and food crops and that between men’s and women’s crops may be exaggerated. In most parts of Africa, women and men collaborate in both types of crops (Stone et al. 1990, Berry 1993; Hamer and Hamer 1994; Koenig et al. 2000; Spring 2000). Besides, the growth of exportable crops had some positive effect on agriculture overall by benefitting food crop production and creating new options for
diversification (Berry 1993: 191; Tersiguel 1995; Schwartz 1993, 1996; Ellis 2000; Wilson 2000: 276; Bassett 2001; Saul et al. 2003: 135; Finnis 2006: 365). It may be true that the production of some commercial crops played havoc on the economies of some developing countries both at the macro and micro levels (Mikell 1992; Isaacman and Roberts 1995; Isaacman 1996; Pitcher 1996), but the case cannot be generalized without consideration of the socio-cultural, historical and political specificities of other places. Keith Hart (1982) reminds us that commodity agriculture is not a novel practice in traditional West Africa, but that farmers, especially those in the savannah, “cannot afford to treat subsistence food as a secondary consideration” (p71). In most cases, he thinks that commercial agriculture did not disrupt food production, because “[farmers] attend to their food needs first and to commodities afterwards” (p71). For him, it is rather the low market value of commodities, and other factors including labor and transportation, which prevented the large-scale production of commodities and resulted in an inclination towards self-sufficiency in food production. Hart, thus, characterizes “the transition from subsistence to commercial farming […] as a quantum jump, a shift in degree along the continuum from self-sufficiency to greater economic interdependence through the expansion of the market” (1982: 9).

In many places of Burkina Faso, there is now mounting evidence that a close relation exists between production of export cotton and food crops. When the production of different types of crops is so interdependent and further can fulfill economic functions that overlap, sorting out the positive and negative impact of each becomes difficult. In the section that follows, I draw from ethnography of agricultural production to provide the necessary context that can assist us to grasp the logic of the farmers involved in export/cash cropping. I analyze the impact of cotton on producers’ lives in order to provide insights into the debate on commercial
agriculture in developing countries. Finally, I explore relations of cotton production at the micro-
scale of the farming household using a framework for the analysis of gender, and intrahousehold
dynamics (Curry et al. 1996: 165). I ask questions such as who performs which tasks? Who
controls what resources? Who has access to and control over the production outputs (Feldstein
and Poats 1989: 16)? How do household members negotiate with each other to meet production
and consumption objectives? How does production impact relations among members of the farm
group, and between fellow cotton producers, and among villagers in a village or locality.

Why Grow Cotton: “A skinny elephant is yet heavier than a fat cow”

Investigating why farmers grow the cash crop tapioca manioc in the Kolli Hills of South
India, Finnis (2006: 365) found that the cultivation could be “understood in terms of strategy
based on a detailed understanding of environmental circumstances and crop needs.” In
Southwest Burkina Faso, smallholders\(^9\) grow cotton in order eventually to improve their
conditions based on a set of local values. In the Barthian sense, the villagers’ values\(^10\) consist of
the local standards for assessing quality of livelihoods. They include self-sufficiency in food,
improvement of soil fertility, acquisition of farming equipment, improved houses, motorized
means of transportation, and money for various projects. Although not all smallholder cotton
growers attain most of these objectives, the cultivation of the commodity in Burkina Faso has
improved lives unquestionably in many respects in rural communities of the cotton zones.

\(^9\) It is important to remind that production of cotton and production of food crops are not two mutually
exclusive activities. A farmer may do without cotton, but a cotton producer is first and foremost a producer
of food crops.

\(^10\) Barth (1981: 91) provides a definition, which extirpates any “ideas of rightness and morality” from the
term. For him, “[v]alues may refer to (i) standards or scales of evaluation; (ii) readings on such scales, i.e.
amounts of worth; (iii) the qualities or even objects that are positively evaluated, i.e. personal
characteristics and concrete valuables.”
The model adopted, among farmers, for investing returns of cotton towards improvement of life is processual, and generally starts with acquiring a draft-ox (or oxen), and then a ox-cart. In favorable conditions, the average farmer will take three to four years to acquire the draft-oxen and the plow set, the minimum equipment required to engage in farming in a relatively independent manner. Farmers without work materials rely on other kinds of capitals to reach their objectives. They generally show allegiance to close friends and collaborate with other farmers on higher scales of the social ladder. They assist the successful fellow villagers for some of their farm work. In a context where there is “no free” labor exchange, the person assisted understands the implication, and may even volunteer to plow the farm of the person helping him or let him utilize the plow cart and oxen, without even being requested. However, a successful farmer can take the lead to propose to plow the farm of a fellow who has no such improved equipment. In this case, the unequipped farmer may have other resources that attract the eventual “benefactor” of his labor. These resources may include a piece of land, or a capacity for other services, including labor. In fact, there is no transfer of gift without expectation of reciprocity (Hunt 2005:191) in this dynamic social setting.

Once a farmer has acquired the basic farm equipment – ox-cart and oxen and sometime a donkey and a donkey-cart – the next stair to climb on their ladder of mobility is an iron-roofed house, the villagers’ most important symbol of success, and later, a moped. The iron-roof house is such a token of upward mobility among cotton growers and villagers that, for instance, the first time visitor is startled by the panoramic view of the neighborhoods in the highest cotton producing village of Yabogane where there is, at least, one iron-roof house in each compound. This contrasts sharply with what one observes in Tambirkpere, the least cotton-producing village of the Dano cotton district. Normally, farmers will think of diversifying only after the house or
the motorbike, either by buying cattle as investment, or by investing into a small retail store that offers for sale essential items during the non-farm work hours.

Because the national agricultural policy and the market offer more incentives to cotton production than other crops, and because farmers have mostly responded to this opportunity, cotton has become unquestionably the assured means for achieving specific objectives in rural areas. As highlighted in chapter 3, the farm-gate prices have been falling since 2005. But because it is still more reliable to achieve one’s objectives growing cotton, some farmers emphasize the supremacy of cotton over the other crops using specific verbal images: “a skinny elephant is heavier than a fat cow,” in allusion to the weight of cotton in the farming household despite the fall in price over the years. Cotton as an export crop certainly has its supporters and its detractors among farmers. However, even some detractors engage in cotton cultivation. This compels the observer to go beyond the obvious yearn for cash, and scrutinize the intricate reasons that sustain such ambiguous attitudes vis-à-vis cotton; and to sort out the factors that influence smallholders to grow it, especially as “cotton” is now used as a metaphor for upward mobility in everyday discourse in Southwest Burkina Faso.

Cotton: A Metaphor of Social Mobility

As shown in my narration of the exchange with Zanvier at the opening of the chapter, in Southwest Burkina Faso, “cotton” (gom) refers to the material fiber and the plant that produces it. But on top of that, it points to a more abstract reality, which indicates any autonomous activity intended to improve the actor’s social and economic condition. Beneath this instrumental view of “cotton” as a redeeming activity, is suggested the labor needed to go about it. In plain terms, “cotton” (“gom”) in local social discourse alludes to social mobility, and to the labor mobilized to reach this objective. The fact that “cotton” (gom) has become such a metaphor of upward
mobility suggests that it plays – or has been playing – a central role in this social setting.

“Growing cotton” emerges as the villagers’ paradigmatic understanding of social mobility, which is achieved, in turn, within the larger framework of negotiation. Negotiation, the most important protocol for labor mobilization and production success, is performed first and foremost within the household though it is usually expandable beyond household bounds, depending on a host of complex factors that include farm-size, area under specific crop production, social and economic capitals, non-farm activities, socioeconomic status, and labor need and availability.

A short review of the trajectory of the adoption of the metaphor in local social discourse provides further insights. Tracking the rise of the cotton trope in social discourse, Yabogane and Mébar provide various stories that converge in the post-2000 era, a period that is also crucial in the development of Burkina Faso export cotton. In Yabogane, an informant in his 40s insightfully suggested two important periods - the early 1980s and the late 1990s – for the development of cotton production in the village to enhance our understanding of “cotton”, respectively in its material and abstract senses. For him, as later corroborated by other informants, cotton cultivation is relatively recent in Yabogane, although the village now boasts top production in the whole Dano area.

It is only around 1984 that Tèru and Dolkun initiated it [cotton cultivation] after seeing the benefits incurred by the Bwaba people of Fafo [a multi-ethnic village five miles north of Yabogane]. At that time, the road to our village was so poor that no truck could even access it. So these two people would grow their cotton here in the village, then, transport it to sell in Sorkon [a nearby village at 3 miles south]. After a couple of years of production, and good sales, Tèru started acquiring wealth. His achievements motivated the villagers who could not but accept his proposition to organize into a cotton production group (groupement villageois). But there was still the problem of access to the village due to poor road quality. Then, Tèru used his leadership qualities to mobilize volunteers for a community service which consisted in widening and repairing the road manually with hand-tools. As a result, the SOFITEX [cotton company] truck instead of stopping in Sorkon, could come to Yabogane to deliver chemical inputs as well as load harvested seed cotton. Now, in 2001/2002, the producer’s price for the kilogram of seed cotton was
very good. Cotton growers got much money. And as the price kept rising until 2004/2005 when it became 210f/kg, so were we seriously engaged in producing. By then, nobody was taking their cotton matter lightly. Cotton became all we have. As you see there is an iron-roof house nearly in every compound. But a farmer first buys a plow cart and two plow-oxen, then a house, and a motorbike if conditions are good. After acquiring all this, some will now think of investing in trading. […] But, since women could not grow cotton, they organized in wage labor groups. This was a moment when everybody was quite suddenly using “cotton” to mean everything that could produce money. Women started referring to their sorghum beer as their “cotton”, and weekly market butchers called their meat their “cotton.” But, you see, when a person starts labeling something as “cotton”, she/he means that you should treat it as a really serious business. So even if you are friends with the seller, you better forget about the friendship and engage in the market. Recently, women began referring to their shea nuts as ‘cotton’ (Bassaor, Yabogane 1/16, 2008).

In Mébar, the positive reference¹¹ to cotton as export commodity goes back to the mid—1960s when the village organized into a cooperative and, with the help of a government project, built a house and an office for extension agents to monitor production in the village and surroundings. The building is still there but currently serves as a community center. The existence of the cooperative, then, increased the villagers’ awareness of cotton cultivation. But it failed to trigger a sustained production effort, at least in the short and medium term. What can be called the village “scramble” for cotton started around 1994/1995 when the government doubled the farm-gate price of seed cotton because of the 1994 historic 100 percent devaluation of the CFA currency. The villagers’ engagement in cotton peaked in the early 2000s when some successful smallholder farmers who became “rich” in the process emulated the pattern. The following statement of Dira says it all about “cotton” as a notion:

³¹ There had been negative memories of cotton in the village as older people who still remember the stories told about the forced production of cotton under colonial administration from 1920 – 1932, many local people were beaten up, and many others faced hunger because of the forced cotton production and other forced labor projects.
I started growing cotton in 1992. And I realized it was a good source of income. After the mid-1980s when a generation of famous cotton growers of this village retired, there were not many people cultivating cotton. After the devaluation, many farmers started growing it, and it made some people wealthy around the year 2000. Since then, many people who did not - and still do not - grow cotton started expressing envy and jealousy, and would refuse to assist you [cotton growers] when you solicited them for non-wage work parties, unlike what used to be the case. They simply reply that ‘they are going to their cotton farm too’, although they grow no cotton. What is meant is that they are going to the site of their lucrative activity. This made that we could only depend on money anytime we deal with cotton, and even other non-profitable activities. In the past, a ‘thank you’ or a calabash of sorghum beer could be okay to compensate a favor in labor. Today if you simply ‘thank’ somebody who helps you, you won’t have anyone the next time you request assistance. Cotton is helping us, but it is also taking away some past advantages (Dira, Mebar December 12, 2007).

“Cotton” as a notion that pervades the villagers’ daily discourse and points to the desire to climb the social ladder, is of recent date. And it provokes a debate, a contestation among people who have been variably blessed by recent developments. Along with the metaphoric adoption, the notion also evokes contested views and narratives among farmers, at least in terms of benefits related to the period prior to the adoption of the concept and after it. Some supporters of the past express nostalgia for the time when everyone was not hurried all the time, and came to work for “free” whereas others embrace the opportunities of the new era encapsulated in “cotton.” Cotton is changing people’s life styles, and is undoing people’s understanding of “communal work participation.” All these ultimately hinge on social mobility, which is enabled and exercised only within a broader context of negotiation; starting at the household. But negotiation can also be carried out beyond the household, along social networks, when ambitious farmers need workforce for larger areas that cannot be covered by household members.

Another concomitant of the new development is the degree of change in social relations among villagers. Cotton production seems to have spurred economic ambitions beyond activities specifically aimed at growing cotton and, somehow, helped commoditize labor locally in a more
open manner. For example, I observed a traditional house-roofing activity in which the house owner hired two villagers to work for a wage. It is customary in the area for villagers to help out each other for such work freely. The idea underlying this practice is that any person could come and is welcome under any roof during a storm, therefore the entire community benefitted from the construction. In the same spirit, people passing by a house undergoing roof work are encouraged to join in, or at least, they say a few heartening words to the workers before moving on. To my amazement, the two men hired for the roof work in the above case rejected all the help that passers-by volunteered. The reason for this was, as one of them made clear in a joke, that “this is our cotton, and we want it to be ours.” They did not want to share the wage with anybody. The owner of the house could have launched a work party to roof the house, had he wanted to. In that case, he would have had to buy sorghum beer for the workers, and still be bound by an obligation to reciprocate in an unspecified future (Portes 1998: 7). By hiring the two men, the house owner avoided unnecessary future bonds and perhaps even spent less money and time than he might have, with a work party. Maybe he also intended to send a tactful message to others about what he thought of work parties. In other words, his attitude is a qualitative leap from the socially and economically costly “work party” world, to a more openly monetarized one sensitive to cost, a transition hastened by cotton farming, which also serves as its glyph. Therefore, it is erroneous to think that so-called “help” is free. As I show in chapter five, it is in fact sometimes more expensive than hiring workers (Saul 1987).

Because cotton farming establishes credit worthiness among villagers, and is the single most reliable means of economic betterment, villagers always “mean business” when they deal with it. No villager provides free labor in the cotton farm of another. Even the seemingly most benevolent workers – be they from the owner’s household or not – intend to reap some benefit in
the future, unless they are reciprocating a previous service rendered to them. As will be shown in chapter 5, cotton created opportunities for wage work to people (women and youth groups) who do not grow it for themselves. The period between September and November is the tightest labor bottleneck because “it is more difficult to harvest cotton than to grow it” (conversation with Manta, in Bafore, December 13th 2007), and also because its harvest overlaps with the harvest of food and other crops. At this period, all farmers want to harvest their cotton early in order to reach the highest quality and weight\(^{12}\) but not damage their food crops. In many villages, this leads women and youth to form work groups for hire, on the weekly rest day of the area’s six-day week. As one woman said, “everybody has a share in cotton, one way or another.”

In the next section, I draw on life stories of farmers for what they reveal of the dynamics within their households, that is, the way household negotiations are subtly embedded in such biographies. Cotton farming also exacerbated social stratification among villagers. I chose the life stories below to represent a fair sampling of the diverse categories and strata of cotton growers. I sort out the farmers in four categories according to their acreage under cotton, amount of cotton they harvest, their sufficiency in food crop production, their visible or declared (material) wealth, and the way they are perceived by peer villagers. The rubrics are: “low,” “average,” “high,” and “very high.” A “low” cotton grower produces only enough of his crop to be able to repay the seasonal farm credit he received to purchase chemical inputs. The “low” and “very high” cases are outlying points, but they add to our understanding, especially the former, of why people persist in keeping a cotton farm in the face of apparent signs of loss. The cotton

\(^{12}\) The cotton agents encourage farmers to harvest and store cotton indoors as soon as they can to maintain quality. Besides, there is unanimity among farmers that cotton harvested in October weighs more, and as a result, increases their financial gains.
parcels vary in size from 0.5 to 16 hectares. Generally, for the household this is less than what they have under food crops.

Biographies of Cotton Farmers

1- Tiera, the Never-do-well Cotton Grower who Vows never to Quit Growing

Tiera is a smallholder who first engaged in cotton growing in the late 1990s. He is an example of the farmer who does not do very well in cotton but earns indirect advantages from it. He heads a monogamous household of six, including his mother. Based on the values of the villagers, no external sign suggests that Tiera’s household is well off. He owns neither a plow-cart nor oxen. He relies only on hand-held hoes and equipment for farm work. He has a few chickens and 4 goats, raised specifically to meet the yearly sacrifices to the ancestors. He owns a bicycle, sent to him by his first son who immigrated to Cote d’Ivoire. He lives in a mud-house with a dilapidated fence-wall. Except in the year 2000, Tiera has always been as impayé13. In addition to his farm work, during the dry season he cuts laterite bricks for sale. This is how he earns money to reimburse his cotton-growers group for the money withheld on his account to repay his loan that was in excess of the value of his sale (see chapter 3).

Asked why he kept growing cotton when it did not seem to work out well for him, Tiera declared: “I do get returns in food and other things.” However, he would not tell me exactly what “other things” meant. I followed up the case with home visits, hangouts and informal conversations. The records of his cotton group, which he chairs, show that he contracted chemical fertilizer credit for 2 hectares under cotton. Even to the naked eye, however, his cotton plot looked smaller than that. My surprise increased when I measured it; it was barely half a

13 “Impayé” is the French for “overdue payment”. But the farmers extended the meaning to refer to those villagers whose cotton sale is insufficient to cover their input credit contracted with the cotton company. It is not a laudatory label among farmers.
hectare. It took time before Tiera confided that he uses part of the fertilizer to grow sorghum and maize. This made sense though it did not totally explain the pattern I observed, which consisted mainly in rotating crops on a yearly basis. My interaction with his wife, Tinny, gave me a hint that there were reasons beyond the ones her husband stated. Since 2005, she strategized to protect her household from the seasonal and cyclical shortfalls:

A few years after he started growing cotton, we were operating at a loss. Therefore, I refused to work on the cotton farm hoping to force him out of growing, but he was stubborn and kept growing and he worked with the children on the cotton farm. Then, I decided to change my strategy. So starting in 2003, I would systematically intercrop the cotton farm with beans. Besides eating the beans, we store part of the harvest and sell it at very high prices between April and May. With the same amount of plowing, weeding and fertilizer, we have the beans, and he has his cotton. But we earn more money in the beans than he does in the cotton. I know he would not give me fertilizer to grow beans separately, so I took advantage of the fertilized cotton farm. And it is working (Tinny, Mebar, October 8th, 2007).

Tinny’s perspective reveals strategy for farmers to benefit from cotton production, but this still did not answer my query about the way the fertilizer was used. Tiera certainly did not use all of the fertilizer input meant for 2 hectares on the less than a hectare surface. My doubts were only confirmed during a social function at my host’s house. I overheard a different farmer speaking about the money he owed to his own SOFITEX\textsuperscript{14}, which sounded incongruous. So I later followed up with my host to understand what personal SOFITEX was supposed to mean. Then, I learned that Tiera unofficially sub-contracts with farmers who are not members of the cotton organization, who are therefore not eligible for fertilizer purchase and growing season credit. In 2007-08, there were two “impayés” in Tiera’s group, including him. After the cotton companies paid farmers their money in April 2008, the larger group deducted the money owed

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{14} SOFITEX is the cotton company under whose dominion the farmers in my research area operate. There is one single SOFITEX, so the farmer said “my SOFITEX”. I understood there was something unfamiliar going on there.
\end{footnotesize}
by Tiera and the other farmer who came short from the earnings of the three members who belonged to Tiera’s collateral sub-group, as is the rule of collective guaranty. One of them publicly slammed Tiera’s “irresponsible attitudes,” and vowed to lobby against his eligibility to access input credit if he planted again less than he declared or if he owed more than he earned. This, of course would have jeopardized his wife’s beans production. Tiera reassured the angry and co-sponsor that he would reimburse the amount he owed the following Sunday; and he did.

Tiera’s example shows that some farmers became part of the cotton growers’ association not because they want to grow but because the cotton agency is the best source and the only way to obtain short-term credit. They grow a little bit of cotton for show, but they use the fertilizer accorded to the other crops, or even to sell for immediate cash. Then at the end of the season, they repay their debt with the proceeds of other activities. There is also a clear gender dimension in this arrangement. Tiera subsidizes the family beans production spearheaded by his wife. He does so in a tacit way through his dry season job.

2- **Kobin: the “kuɔra-fonksionnair”**

Kobin, aged forty, is a very successful and rich farmer in Baføre, Naoule. Cotton farming of cotton has made him a powerful person. Kobin heads a farming group of eleven members, which include his mother, his two wives, his 37-year old brother and his two wives, one foster-child aged twelve, and four children of the two conjugal groups aged eleven, seven, three, and two. The two brothers started growing cotton in 2000 in addition to the usual cereal crops, after

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15 This is a locally compounded Dagara-French word, which literally translates into “civil-servant farmer”. Kura is the Dagara for farmer. Fonctionnaire is the French for “civil servant”. The colonial and post-colonial experience has reconfigured the understanding of fonctionnaire in Burkina Faso, especially in the rural areas. Thus, “fonctionnaire” rightly or wrongly brings to mind middle-class life, “modernized style”, ability to solve financial problems, in short, above-average socio-economic status, prestige, and abilities. The “kuora-fonctionnaire” is, therefore, a farmer whose wealth, at least as perceived by his fellow villagers, allows him to lead a quality of life comparable to that of a “fonctionnaire.”

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Kobin’s unrewarding emigration adventure in Cote d’Ivoire. Following their initial successes in cotton, they now till larger surfaces and make a lot of money (see Table 5). He went to elementary school and can, therefore, read and write. His domestic group owns four pairs of draft-oxen and four sets of plows, a donkey-cart, and four bicycles. He also owns a motorbike, a prize that he won in 2005 when he was selected the best cotton producer in this region. He also uses a cellular phone. In 2008, the household owned 30 cows and 66 sheep. They also raise poultry in a major way, and counted at least 215 chickens in October 2007. The dung and droppings of the animals provide them with a large volume of manure, which they use to fertilize some of their plots. They married their second wives in 2005 and 2007, respectively, thanks to the proceeds of cotton and the other farm produce they sold. Kobin owns a bank account, and two houses in the Dano urban area.

Table 5: Kobin’s cotton success story in five consecutive years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Surfaces under cotton in hectares</th>
<th>Harvest of seed cotton in tons</th>
<th>Net Income in thousands of CFA francs*</th>
<th>Number of Active household members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3,075</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2,890</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,370</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures represent the amount cashed after deduction to repay the seasonal loan. The cost of compensation for paid or assisted labor is not deducted. But Kobin said that he generally rounds expenses and labor compensations to 400,000 francs, except in 2005-06 when he spent 200,000 francs extra to rent a tractor to plow his farm (1,000FCFA is about $2.00).

Winning the Best Cotton Producer Award in 2005 and 2006 made him famous in the area. Those who do not know him personally know him, at least, by fame. Even many civil servants know him, partly because two of them are lessees of his houses in Dano. Like others, his
farm group also had 7.5 hectares under cereal crops (maize, sorghum, and millet), 2 hectares under peanuts, and 0.5 hectare under soybeans in 2007-08. They planned to have substantial returns from the sale of these non-cotton crops. Although at this point Kobin is not competing for office in local politics, he weighs in indirectly in the making of some decisions. Weber’s view that economic acquisition and power can result in status honor is quite verified in Kobin’s case (Gerth and Mills 1958:192). In addition, his wealth seems to influence the development of his taste (Bourdieu 1984). It was reported that on New Year’s Day he “imported” canned beer, an unfamiliar commodity, to his village for his honorable guests. Distinction in taste is also displayed Kobin’s sole farming competitor in the cotton district. The latter even owns a battery-operated TV set, whose presence is indicated by the conspicuous display of a tall antenna on top of his iron-roofed house. Moreover, the successful production of cotton also offers prospects for economic diversification. For instance, while Kobin plans to open a commodity store in Dano, his competitor had already opened a ‘modern’ beer bar in the village, near the main road. He uses an electric generator to operate the fridges and illuminate the bar. McMillan (1995) observed similar diversification among cotton growers in other parts of Burkina Faso.

The production of cotton has a supporting effect on food cropping. For example, Kobin claimed that he always stores security food stocks, which can feed his farm-group for one year in an event of poor rainfall. He can state the farm area he farms precisely, not as an approximation. Because the cotton agents, who consider him a model farmer, they measure all of his plots every year before he starts planting. They confirmed the plot sizes when I wanted to crosscheck. Because he knows the size of his farm, he meticulously follows the technical instructions of extension agents and achieves very high yields. Kobin and his brother, who are the main
decision-makers of the farm-group, give a lump sum of 25,000 francs\textsuperscript{16} CFA to each adult member of the household to “encourage them for their hard work,” Kobin said. The women seem to appreciate this annual reward, in addition to the prestige of being Kobin’s wives or family, and pride themselves for not spending a penny of this for household expenses: “They [the men] take the grains to the mill and have it milled; and they pay for the condiments [an expense traditionally borne by wives]. We just cook.”

However, the women’s satisfaction hides relentless work stress during the farming season. My field-visit and observation of a typical day in Kobin’s farm suggests that there is no room for fun during the wet season. Everybody works; even the seven-year-old boy, who is now in elementary school, follows the draft-oxen to spur them to work. The boy, at times, cares for the two younger children. I charted one of their workdays, from 8am till 5pm. As they claimed to have started the day before 7 am, I concluded that each member of the group provided 10 hours of work in the farm that day. After an interview about their work habit in the bottleneck period, I gathered that my day of visit was illustrative of a typical workday, and that 10 hours of work/day could be an average. When I asked if the workload was not excessive, the youngest wife of the farm-group seemed satisfied: “the wet season is not meant for rest, but for work. We work, and we know that we will get our share after the sale [of the cotton], if the harvest is good. We suffer for ourselves.”

Despite the enthusiasm of the junior wife, other villagers, mainly non-cotton farmers and smaller cotton growers often make jokes at the expense of the wives of the big farmers. The expression “as dirty as the wife of a kiltivatair-fonksionaire (big farmer),” is now common in

\textsuperscript{16} This amounts approximately to $60.00. By local standards, this is a lot of money for a rural person whose other basic needs are cared for. The women use the money to buy personal items including clothing and other “women’s stuff” such as plates, cooking pans, washing bowls and large plastic pots.
some circles. The wife of the rich farmer is derided for being dirty, because she is busy overworking herself, and does not even have the time to take a shower, let alone launder her clothes. I did not observe that these women were dirtier than the workers of other farming households. The comment expressed perhaps a measure of envy.

3- Fini, a Proud Female Grower of Organic Cotton

Fini, is one of the few women who engage independently and successfully in organic cotton production, what the locals call “women’s cotton”. She uses deft negotiation skills to reach her production objectives. The domestic group that her husband heads has 9 members; including her 27-year old son, and wife; and their two sons aged between 15 and 17, and their two grand-children below five. Fini and her husband, who is in his late fifties, have produced conventional cotton for 27 years. However, Fini said that “the production had not improved their life quality whatsoever, other than the fact that her husband believes that the chemical fertilizers increase the fertility of their impoverished soils.” In 2005, Fini convinced her husband to concede her a plot to grow the recently introduced organic cotton.

While Fini engaged in the organic cotton, her husband still kept a plot under conventional cotton. All members of the household still worked together and pooled the returns. But each of them had more interest for their own choice of cotton crop. After two years of experience with the “women’s cotton,” their material achievement included acquiring iron-sheets to roof a house, credit to by draft-oxen, a plow set and a donkey-cart. Thereupon, Fini’s husband discontinued growing conventional cotton. Instead, he joined his wife in the organic cotton farm, which was expanded but which the wife continued to manage. Fini is very satisfied with her organic cotton farming and she does not hide it. The only major problem for her is the inability to find more acreage and the quality of the soils. But she thinks fertilization of the farms with compost should
solve the problem by intensification. Her cotton crop brought her 250,000FCFA (about $600.00) after deduction of the small input costs. By local standards, this is an important sum of money. Fini claims that her “husband never saw, even half, this much money in the past, when they were producing conventional cotton. She uses her skills to increase her access to the proceeds of the cotton crop. A kind of family democracy has become the rule in their household. The members of the farm-group, including children below ten, gather to make decisions on how to allocate the money. Only what they consider “priority” is adopted. Then they give an amount of money to each member, bearing in mind their age. The top priority of the family is to pay the yearly installment of their agricultural loan for the plow set and then the school fees of their two younger children. The oldest son, aged 27 also started a utility store that he manages in the village market. Fini also says that they keep an amount of money in a bank account, which they use to buy foodstuffs in the immediate post-harvest period.

Based on observations and information from interviews with women, the case of Fini stands out. Fini’s success is partly due to her personal skill as a deft negotiator within her household. She often wins what she wants in the household mainly because she is careful not to threaten her husband’s feelings of male worth and security. This is not to underrate the effectiveness of her approach: “dialoguing and showing him that he is the head of household, and making sure that everybody got a fair due out of it,” Fini confided. Most women who participate in the organic cotton project experience less fortunate outcomes. Because of women’s limited access to land for personal projects, most organic cotton farms belong, in reality, to the husbands who use their wife as proxy to be included in the program. In such arrangements, the women who are nominal recipients of the encouragement package have no control over the proceeds. This is not the case in Fini’s household.
4- Dera, the Faithful Cotton Grower

Dera is a successful farmer aged 48. He boasts 18 years of experience producing cotton. Thanks to his success in it, he accumulated a lot of material wealth and increased his social standing in his community. Moreover, various life experiences improved his take on the give-and-take in household dynamics. He heads a household of 12 members including his mother, his two wives, an 18-year old son, four children aged between seven and thirteen, and two children aged four and two. He usually puts 2 to 3 hectares under cotton, in addition to growing the food and many other cash crops. Though he does not flaunt it openly, Dera seems to be self-sufficient and materially well off (see Table 6). Because of the limited number of adults capable of producing work in his household (5 out of 12), he hires workers whenever available. He is now one of the resource people in the village who can give out small loans to others during hard times. For this reason, he is much respected.

After going on work migration in the early 1980s, Dera came back to his natal village and got seriously involved in producing tobacco and pepper for sale, while growing sorghum, peanuts, beans, maize and millet to feed his family, but whose surplus he also sold for cash. In 1988, he had enough money to buy a donkey cart and plow-oxen. Moreover, in 1989, he was the only person, in his village, to own a full set of plow, a donkey and a donkey-cart. Only five people then constituted his household including him, his mother, his two junior brothers, and his wife. In 1990 his production went up, partly thanks to his farm equipment, and also due to the fact that he could hire workers.

In 1991-1992 he planted cotton for the first time, and pleased with the outcome, did it again in the 1992-1993 farm season. He was particularly pleased with the effects of the chemical fertilizers. He then started rotating his field every year, following a cotton- maize-sorghum-
cotton cycle. The 1994 devaluation of the CFA currency doubled his sales’ income that year, and turned Dera into a constant grower. The sales of that year allowed him to marry a second wife, and extend the acreage under cotton to 3 hectares. Since then, he continued rotating the crops and “enjoying the benefits of cotton”: money, fertilizer, corn, and social prestige. In 1995, he built an iron-roofed house in the village, and then in 1997 a three-bedroom house in Dano in a surveyed zone; and his savings in his bank account went up. In 2000, the death of his first wife, followed by the death of the second in 2001 thwarted his plans to move on to commerce.

Table 6: A partial list of Dera’s possessions, and source and year of acquisition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation of the belonging</th>
<th>Source &amp; year of acquisition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Yamaha V80 Motorbike (second – hand)</td>
<td>Bought in 2007 with money from cotton &amp; maize sales Bought using money from pepper and maize sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2 bicycles</td>
<td>Built in 1995 using cotton money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 two-bedroom iron-roofed house in the village</td>
<td>Build in1998 using cotton money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 three-bedroom in a surveyed area in Dano rented 7500f/month</td>
<td>Bought in 2001 using cotton money, but currently out of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 mill (out of use) bought in 2001</td>
<td>Purchased in 1989 selling tobacco, pepper, beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 donkey-cart</td>
<td>1 pair initially bought in 1989 selling pepper, tobacco, beans, replaced in 1996, and a second pair in 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2 pairs of plow-oxen</td>
<td>Purchased in 1989-90 through sales of tobacco &amp; pepper, and regularly changes parts, Opened in 1986 to save money after crop sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 set of plow</td>
<td>Purchased in 2006, after sale of maize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Bank account</td>
<td>Born of a female one purchased in 1985 against peanuts and cash loaned from friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Cell-phone</td>
<td>Crop sales (cotton, maize, and maize)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 3 donkeys</td>
<td>Bought using money from production crop sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 4 head of cattle</td>
<td>Forgot source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 14 goats</td>
<td>Crop sales (cotton, maize, pepper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chikens (at least 30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Because Dera could not quantify the food in his granary, we decided not to mention it. However, he had more than enough food to feed the family plus some to sell during the scarcity period of the year.
But Dera survived the tragedy, leaning on his strong network of relations, his financial resources, and his social prestige, to mobilize farm labor. In 2002, he bought a grinding mill in 2002. He remarried in 2003. He finds a fundamental difference between his previous wives and the current one:

She is very industrious and resourceful. She brews beer, sells homemade liquor, market food, and many other things. She is also a very good manager. She uses her own money to have cereals ground for the family meals and buy condiments and other such items. I used to provide money for everything including soap, clothing and condiments for my late wives. This one is a real fighter. She has one big weakness: she only comes to work in the farm after 10 am and wants to leave around 4 pm. This leads to quarrel at times.

There seems to be a tacit rule of negotiations in Dera’s household. As his current wife does not spend as much time working on his farm as his two previous wives, he does not contribute to condiment and upkeep expenses, leaving his wife autonomy and greater freedom. However, he always rewards his wife and the other members of the household with money after the cotton sales, in order to “motivate them.” Dera’s wife understands the importance of time and does not seem to hesitate to use her personal financial resource as a trade-off. For instance, Dera hired a wage work group for a day to harvest his cotton. The contract day ran from 8am to 3pm. But Dera’s wife made a deal with the group to extend their work day consented for another three hours at her own expense. This allowed her to save some 33 hours of farm work, which she could then allocate to her autonomous activities. The elements of the contract between Dera and his present wife are quite explicit and readily understandable because much of what is negotiated is monetized. They reveal an appreciation of opportunity cost and alternative, without undermining the framework of solidarity between the spouses.

5- Chab, the farmer who grows much with less
Chab is a hard-working, farmer aged 37. He is a successful farmer who has learnt at his expense that he cannot make some decisions without first meeting the expectations of his household. He is head of a household of seven with only four reliable work providers. The household includes Chab, his bed-ridden mother, his wife, his seven-year old daughter, and his widowed sister and her two children, aged thirteen and six. In the village his farm-group is famous for being very hard-working. He was chosen the best cotton producer of his farmers’ group for three consecutive years, including 2008-2009. His cotton farm is about 4 hectares, and he harvested around 4 tons of it in 2007 and 2008. He usually relies on his extended network of relations to harvest the cotton. He already owns a bicycle, a pair of plow-oxen and a set of plow, and he built an iron-roofed house in 2008. He plans to buy a donkey and a donkey-cart in 2009, to carry his farm products. According to a secret plan he unveiled to me, he also wanted to buy himself a mobylette in 2010, “God willing.” Chab’s household counts 12 head of small stock, and because he uses the manure, he makes his sister’s 6-year old nephew herd them along with the draft-oxen. His farm-group has no food shortage, and he is much respected in the village. He is also a part-time registered butcher.

Chab owns the money from the cotton sales, but he shares it with his wife and the other farm-group members. But after the 2007-08 sales, he did not give cash present to his wife on New Year’s Day to spend it as she would have liked to do. He explained to her that since the cotton company had not yet made the payment, he could not afford to give anything to her and the kids. The woman did not appreciate that decision, but she seemed to understand. Now, on New Year’s Day, Chab took four fowls from his poultry, and bought two bottles of wine and other presents deemed of value by local standards, and he dressed up. He wanted to go to a nearby village on the opposite side of a local stream to reward four women who had convened
work parties to harvest his cotton, and carry it to the sales’ point. At this point, his wife expressed strong objection to his gifts to the other women, given that the farm-group was deprived. Chab tried his best to abate her objection, even threatened her, but nothing appeased her. On the contrary, his discussion led to a loud broil that attracted spectators and disturbed the secretive man.

In fact, people of the neighborhoods converged to their house because initially they took the noise to be that of New Year’s Day visitors who were enjoying the good life at the house of the successful farmer. I also rushed to the site, but felt embarrassed when I discovered the situation. I decided to make the best of it by taking mental notes of the incident as an illustration of tacit negotiation. In the end, Chab felt so bad that he decided not to go. Weeks later, I was joking with his wife on this incident. She said: “I respect him. But I don’t fear him. If there is no money for us, there should no money for gifts to other people. We ended up drinking the wine ourselves and using the soap,” and she laughed. Before this, Chab complained to me that his wife had made him spend twice as much on New Year’s Day, because after the forced celebration with his family he later bought bottles of wine and bars of soap again, and stealthily rushed across the stream to give the intended gifts. Because, otherwise, “these women will never come to assist me again,” he explained. On January 10, 2009, I had a long distance phone conversation with one of my acquaintances who allowed me to have a few words with Chab. I ventured to ask him how the farm went, and whether they had had a peaceful New Year’s Day. His answer was precise and concise: “Yes! I learnt from last year.”

6- Vinsil, the Disgraced Cotton Farmer

Vinsil is a farmer in his mid-fifties. Though he now holds rights over large surfaces of land transmitted to him by his deceased brothers and paternal cousins, in 2007 he farmed less
than 2 hectares sorghum and a tiny plot of maize. In 2005, during my preliminary research, Vinsil, who was included in my sample, was heading a household of four. Then he had declared 2 hectares under cotton and with some 6 hectares under sorghum and other crops, and was then the chairperson of his cotton group. A few farmers at that time voiced some concerns about the way he managed the business of the group, but he still had many supporters. In 2007, he was the sole member of his household. Asked about the others, Vinsil said that his two sons had “traveled to Ghana”, and that his wife had gone “to visit her parents.” It is uncommon for active household members - the main producers – to leave their household during labor bottleneck periods, so I found his statement odd. I recalled Vinsil being an energetic speaker who was eager to answer my questions in 2005. Though he had no draft-oxen, or cart, and or iron-roofed house – the criteria I had determined for successful farmer - he looked like a happy person. In contrast, in 2007 I had met a rather elusive Vinsil, who mostly strove to divert our conversation to the village’s upcoming initiation, in which he was expected to play a major role.

Eventually, I learnt more about Vinsil: he had fallen out of grace. His wife had separated from him sometime in late 2005, and his two sons had fled to Ghana the same year. And to make matters worse, he had lost his position as head of the cotton group that he had chaired for seven years, for “grave mismanagement and embezzlement of the group’s funds,” and was even excluded from the group. To the naked eye, Vinsil was now a poor person. His life quality seemed to have deteriorated considerably. A U-shape rattle of mud blocks indicated vaguely that his rundown house once had a fence around the now unweeded courtyard. His material poverty seemed to be worsened by his poverty in people: the household members who had left him, and the villagers who had stopped supporting him (Barber 1981: 740). He had to do everything – including fetching water and cooking, which are generally performed by women - by himself.
I gathered from villagers that Vinsil, had made a good harvest and sales in 2004-2005, but used the money in a way that his wife and children disapproved. Some villagers insisted that he kept all the money for himself. Others said that he gave the other household members a trifle amount. At any rate, the “children decided to punish him” by migrating to rural Southern Ghana where they are wage farmers on their own account. But Vinsil’s wife only left him when he reportedly beat her up for refusing to work in the cotton farm in retaliation for callowness with money. Some villagers even held that Vinsil spent the cotton money in an affair with a lover who ended up breaking up with him. Having lost the people to work on his farm, Vinsil’s production declined. Being thrown out of cotton group, he could not obtain fertilizer for cotton; and even if he could, he would not be able to manage it alone. Vinsil owns none of the improved farm material. They say that years ago, he had bought such material on credit but promptly sold it for cash. In 2007, others told me that he had already “sold his sorghum crop before harvesting it.” Although this claim was not confirmed, it represents a social sarcasm that translated the precarious situation of Vinsil.

The only thing left for Vinsil to do was to lease part of his extensive land silently to people who are willing to pay him money. Open sales or leasing are not admitted in these communities. One of the surreptitious lessees is his son-in law, who assists him with food. A second one that I got to know is a member of a segment of Vinsil’s patrilineage. According to that relative, Vinsil agreed to let him farm a plot of about 2 hectares. Since the plot had been let fallow for two years, “I immediately agreed. But he insinuated that I give some money. I gave him 5,000FCFA (about $12.00). However, he came to me many other times for money. I dare not say no because I make quite a bit of money on this plot. I grew cotton on it.” In ordinary
circumstances, a person would not ask for money from another member of the patrilineage who farms a piece of land, but in the cotton era, such a transaction did not seem to be shocking.

The reason of the downfall of Vinsil lies partly in his clumsy approach in his relations with his household dependents. In his observations on household relations among the Bobo of Burkina Faso, Saul (1989: 187) found that coercion could be a factor in conjugal relations. However, he warned about the double-edged effect of this tool when of the alternatives are available to the weaker party in the broader social field. In the case of Vinsil, his children fled to an assumed more rewarding haven while his wife initially chose to remain but not to work in the cotton farm, because of his “unfair” management of the cotton returns. Vinsil chose to resort to physical punishment to compel his wife to work; and the wife chose to relocate to her patrilocal residence, that is, to withhold not only labor in the cotton farm, but all labor (in the farm, in the house, and other services). Similar conflicts around the allocation of cotton proceeds were brought to my attention elsewhere, and I was able to observe many others myself.

For instance, I documented three cases in which the women went back to their paternal residence, and a dozen of other cases in which the woman decided to remain in the husband’s residence, but vowed to work only in “the farm that provides common resources,” as one woman of Yabogane put it, that is, the food farm. One estranged woman explained to me that she left her husband “to teach him a lesson about her usefulness,” but she plans to return to him after three years of separation. By the time she was telling her story, she already had spent two years at her parents’ residence, and was reveling at “how miserable” her husband was. Although these cases of conjugal estrangement may seem statistically negligible, from a qualitative point of view they signal a major shift in rural women’s agency, and the possibility for them to make decisions unlike the way they have been depicted as submissive and disempowered (Coquery-Vidrovitch
The fact that some women separate from their husband because they are unhappy about the way he uses the money he earns from cotton does not mean, however, that market production always fosters divorce or weakens family bonds. In other regards, the growth of money incomes has enhanced household members’ demand for fairness when it comes to consumption vis-à-vis household heads. Household heads who are sensitive to the issues of the dependents chart a successful course.

The production of cotton has made people aware of the importance of household labor, which generally is mostly contributed by women. Women and other dependents realize their power in this process and defend their point of view when necessary. The smallholder cotton producers who are successful allocate the proceeds in a manner that the weakest members deem “fair.” These sociocultural developments challenge previous analyses, which have viewed household relations as governed by socialization and unassailable patriarchal dominance in agricultural production. Recent anthropological and historical research have debunked such a static view of African women (Koenig et al. 2000; Cornwall 2001; Hogdson 2001; Allman and Tashjian 2000); they lay stress on personal agency and skill in negotiating within the household. Later in the chapter, I offer an analytical approach to this issue, drawing on lessons from the various illustrative examples presented here.

7- **Netti, the atypical farmer**

Netti is an unmarried farmer of Yabogane aged 25. He is an average cotton grower. He grows cotton beside his food crop farm. He owns a pair of draft-oxen; one plowing set, and had just built a new three-bedroom iron-roofed house in February 2008. He plans to marry a woman of his church in 2009. As a bachelor, and the only member of his household, Netti’s case is
atypical and intriguing because most farm work in these villages is provided by members of the household.

Netti’s success story is rooted, however, in the discrepancy between his problematic lineage identity and his place of residence. His paternal land is a nearby village, which his mother left to remarry in Yabogane after the death of his father. Growing up without a mother\(^\text{17}\), he was subjected to ill-treatments, and eventually fled to his mother’s new residence at age seven. Netti never returned to his village of origin, nor did he have any contact with his father’s relatives who did not attempt to take him back. He grew up in the house of his “step-father”\(^\text{18}\) as an outsider within. He felt like an orphan, probably not because he lacked affection from his “step-father,” but because from a customary point of view there are many things that his “step father” cannot do for him. Such things include payment of bride wealth, which is one of the most important paternal duties and filial rights. Moreover, his biological father’s kin will not easily accept to provide him with the means to marry, maybe for fear of potential spiritual punishment, or perhaps because Netti never worked for them. These biographical details loomed large in Netti’s life. He also fears customary faux pas and ancestral retribution; he delayed his marriage because an important sacrifice must be performed prior to sending the bride-wealth to the bride’s family.

Paralyzed with doubt and fear, Netti turned to the Protestant mission Church which had newly settled in the village. The Protestants talk of a Father who loves without discrimination or retribution. In addition, as Netti proclaimed proudly, “being a Protestant spares you the useless

\(^{17}\) Among traditional Dagara, a married woman who leaves her husband’s residence and lineage to remarry in a new place has no right to take with her the child for whom her in-laws had paid bridewealth. According to descent law, the lineage that paid the bridewealth prior to conception and birth of the child has rights to that child.

\(^{18}\) From Dagara standards, to call Netti’s mother’s husband his stepfather is crudely inappropriate. I am merely using the term here for easy communication with the reader.
sacrifices to ancestors and the potential pitfalls involved.” Another crucial comparative advantage for Netti in converting to the Protestant Christian religion, was their ethic of hard work (cf. Max Webber 2004:14), especially strictly abiding by the creed that “time is money,” in a setting where people do not always seem to use time in the most productive way. Along with seven other male “brothers in Christ”, they organized a mutual work group taking turns six days a week working in each other’s farms, from 7am to 2pm. The members of the small Protestant temple blame the other villagers for “wasting time in sorghum beer bars and unnecessary and ungodly funeral rituals (Interview with Netti, in Yabogane, March 17, 2008).” Most of them do not attend the funerals of non-church members in the community. In return, the villagers recognize the work ethic of the local Protestants, especially their achievement in growing cotton, yet consider them anti-social beings, for the very same two reasons the Protestants blame them. Because most church members do not show up at funerals, or skip aspects of the local protocol when they do show up, the villagers accuse them of not respecting the dead, which is a very serious charge among the Dagara. The Protestants are also denounced for abstaining from sorghum beer drinking. Drinking the beer is locally viewed as a way of socializing, and a proof of sociability. But Netti’s success is rooted in the experience of his broken childhood and his spiritual rebirth. Six years ago, his “step-father” gave him a plot to produce his own crops. There is no land shortage in Yabogane, and this helped Netti. In addition, not attending funerals where people waste two to three workdays, allows Netti to focus mainly on farm work.

Discussion

The above cases provide a broad range of farmers’ fortunes in cotton production. As indicated, cotton farming is the farmers’ favorite path to upward mobility. It offers smallholder households prospects for accessing seasonal credit to purchase fertilizer, and for self-
improvement. Self-improvement is achieved by acquiring capital goods, farming equipment, and means of transportation, and by assuring food security and health expenses and children’s education fees. The villagers assess their degree of achievement partly by reviewing what they have already achieved against a list of social success. Not all farmers succeed to the same degree, and not all of them succeed in the cotton enterprise. Some farmers fail to bring in good harvests, irrespective of often-erratic rains; the villagers call “lazy” unsuccessful farmers. The latter include many of those who do not grow cotton, focusing only on cereals. Although a few farmers who produce only food crops achieve substantial incomes, most such farmers are in the group of very low production.

The farmers’ biographies also reveal that a qualitative change is taking place in the role of women in cash production. They are now involved in growing cotton, not only as providers of labor in their husbands’ cotton farm but also as independent producers. Though women’s access to land still depends on the generosity of their male partners, my observations suggest that a woman who produces cotton independently of her husband can increase her degree of autonomy while widening her bargaining space within the household. Even as mere contributors of labor in their husbands’ cotton farm, many women now engage their head of households – tactfully or directly - for a fairer place in the process of consumption and allocation of proceeds. Because labor is the main secret to farming success, heads of households fear that their wives or dependents might uphold work from their farm projects and jeopardize production. Therefore, most husbands have become more careful and considerate towards their household members.

**Growing Cotton: Household Dynamics and Negotiations**

The literature on export cropping in developing economies has often focused on the dual power structures and on the vertical power relations that link export crop companies to farmers
(Mikell 1992; Carney 1994: 168), or on uneven gender relations at the micro level of the household (Palmer 1991; Traoré & Fourgeau 2006: 120). However, there is evidence from the cotton producing area of Southwest Burkina suggests that the farming household is a site is becoming of inclusion, collaboration and engagement *par excellence*. Because of the male-friendly system of land rights, and despite changing perspectives, men traditionally control export cotton. However, to perceive women and junior males as excluded in the process of cash cropping, and mainly of cotton farming is inaccurate. It may be true that in many African communities rules are largely unfavorable to women and junior males (Goody 1962; Meillassoux 1964, 1981: 75; Allman & Tashjian 2000: 133); but the ongoing reality, especially in Burkina Faso, is that the household members with “less power” can significantly influence practice, either by circumventing structures or by offering resistance to them.

The effects of rural patriarchy tend to put weaker household members in a position of invisibility, inclining the unperceptive observers to read local household relations in terms of marginalization in reading household relations in Southwest Burkina Faso. I am ambivalent about the notion of “marginalization.” It fails to acknowledge the actual internal dynamics in face-to-face relations, and individual agency within the household. In gender studies and beyond, marginalization as an analytical tool does not always capture social reality as it unfolds in the local stage. Even the most excluded outcasts are kept at the margin only some of the time. At other times, they are integrated for specific purposes. Taking inspiration from the dynamic outlook of transactionalism (Barth 1981: 78), but recognizing also the uneven power relations among household members, I suggest that the approach in observing and analyzing household relations be more dynamic. Selective inclusion seems operational and effective a tool in understanding what goes on among household members who live under the rule of a male head.
In the farming household, men and women toil together, but perhaps unequally, to meet the requirements of production and reproduction. But many women have fewer opportunities than their men in the access, control, allocation, and distribution of farm resources and output. This is an instance of what I call selective inclusion (Somé 2006). In plain terms, selective inclusion occurs in a situation of uneven relations, which allows the integration of one actor, or a group of actors, with lesser power in some circumstances, but leaves them out in other circumstances, especially when advantages emerge. Though the inclusion of the members in the process can be selective and depend on factors such as the stage of production, the collaboration and engagement of the actors are permanent and vital to the survival of the farming household. The production of cotton is clearly a site of hierarchical relations and of perpetuation of gender inequality; but the need for collaboration creates some balance of power - tiny though it may be - between the head of household and its dependent members. When household members are the primary source of labor, heads of household need the collaboration of wives and dependents for the success of their farming enterprise. Moreover, because budgets are separate, the household members who supply farm labor also engage with the head of household in order to receive a share of the benefits. The heads of household who controls the proceeds of the production generally share it with the other members, though not always benevolently. It seems clear then that wives and other dependents need to engage in negotiation with him in order to create or maintain inclusion in resource allocation, and they do so. A reversal of the inclusion parameters emerged when women-controlled shea-nuts sales rose remarkably in the last quarter of 2007. Shea-nut sales generated new gender dynamics at the household level. Women who negotiated dexterously in that instance won some power in the household while reaching their own material objectives. This episode helps us understand that most husbands are careful to avoid unnecessary
incidents with regard to their wives’ autonomous activities, beyond the customary principles that
give them certain advantages.

Despite the relative success engendered by cotton production, a group of villagers who
“swear never to grow cotton,” or simply think, “You can’t make porridge with cotton,” an
allusion to the fact that cotton may prove useless in unfavorable market conditions. The
intriguing point is that many who express such negative views on cotton are not the best
producers of food crops either. Besides, they do not abstain from using the cotton trope to refer
to social mobility. This group of critics is not limited to one gender only, but it includes a
significant number of women from unsuccessful households.

The Social Perception of Not Growing Cotton

As growing cotton is all about social mobility, villagers of cotton producing areas tend to
stick the refusal to grow cotton with label of “laziness” and lack of ambition. Indeed, farmers
who do not grow cotton are generally also those who perform below average in food production.
It is usually difficult for such farmers, who have fewer cash opportunities, to find credit with
fellow villagers. The small harvest farmers often start selling their food crops at an untimely
period, in the immediate post-harvest stage, at knockdown prices. The grains they sell may
include sorghum, maize, millet, rice and beans, but the first two cereals dominate the local
market. All post-harvest grain sellers are not branded “lazy.” Some sellers of the post-harvest
period simply liquidate their old stock from the previous year, but most early sellers belong
among the “desperate” for cash. The glut in the post-harvest period (October-December) drives
prices down. For the wise and capable, this is the time to buy and not to sell (as minor village
speculators and urban affluent do). Consequently, a person who sells food in this period needs to
sell a significant amount in order to meet the pressing cash need.
In fact, a local code of honor prohibits the selling of certain food grains before the onset of the wet season; except for unusual circumstances. This is also perhaps the reason why most men, who sell their sorghum, at this time, do so secretly. For example, they take money from a speculator or a woman of the village in the market, but deliver the agreed upon quantity of grain later, far from inquisitive eyes. “Grain-sellers”, as they are labeled, usually run out of food even before the start of the wet season and find hard times to make ends meet during hard work periods that follow. Poor farmers’ farms look diminutive and unkempt, not because of land shortage but mostly because of time shortage. During the farm season, they spend most of their time working in the farms of other more successful farmers to earn the money to provide for themselves and their families. As a result, they are in constant pressure for their own farm. The households of “grain-sellers” are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. In some cases, wives in such households take it upon themselves to engage in small autonomous activities in order to supplement the meager resources. In return, they have a higher hand in bargaining within the household. The untimely grain-sellers give up their grains to sorghum beer brewers, grain merchants, or some farmers of the higher hierarchy, who store grains on which they speculate when prices rise – from May to August. The farmers of the upper echelons only sell their grains beside purchased grains (self-produced and purchased), during periods of food scarcity or attractive prices.

**Cotton Production: Implications for Gender Analysis**

The foregoing analysis of cotton production suggests a positive impact on the household as a unit of production and consumption. However, the benefit to the different types of members is unequal. Younger male dependents benefit generally less than women. Women, in turn, benefit less than older male dependents such as a married adult son. The head of household
derives the greatest benefit depending on how active he remains in the production. Therefore, the
development of cotton does not improve the incomes of most women as directly as it does
men’s. Nevertheless, there is a direct empowerment effect both inside and outside of the
household, partly because growing cotton opens opportunities for more food production. A
woman who has food available for her children, all year long, is not only proud, she also feels
much fulfilled. During the difficult periods of the year (May-August) food is generally scarce in
many households, especially the year following a season of erratic or insufficient rainfall. Food
security allows a woman to focus on autonomous activities, and on-farm obligations do not eat
up a big chunk of her time. If on the contrary there is a food shortage, the woman spends her
time in attempts to find strategies to feed the family. They can include working for a better-off
farmer in exchange for food or a wage; or simply traveling to a distant place to beg for food from
some relatives. The woman of the food-deficient household will have to work for whomever has
the foodstuffs and is willing to give her a share. While the woman is fighting for food to feed her
family, the household head may work for a wage in the farm of a wealthier farmer. The efforts of
a poor household to secure food in the bottleneck period limit what it can harvest, and hence
affects the following year. Food shortage also limits the projects a woman can have on her own,
granted that women are the household members who usually undertake most autonomous
activities in villages. Lack of food can result in eroding the hypothetically slim returns that might
have resulted from a woman’s autonomous enterprise as she may use it to provide for foodstuffs.

In terms of household dynamics, the other side is that a woman who provides part the
family food in the rural setting “wears the pants”, to borrow a local expression. Such women
may be less inclined to go to her husband’s farm at the expense of her little enterprise. To her
benefit, she has more benefit over her husband as compensation in the (tacit or explicit) marital
bargain. In plain terms, such a woman has more bargaining power and space for maneuvering. Women of households, which cannot afford food all year long, have freer management of their time.

A food-secure woman of a male-headed household worthy of its salt, i.e. a productive and food-sufficient household, is too busy with on-farm tasks to take time for off-farm economic activities. Beside the effort required on food and other crops commonly produced, such households are also generally producers of cotton, which create a real stress in time management during the bottleneck periods. Saul (1989: 188) has observed similar dynamics between spouses among successful households among the Bobo of Burkina Faso. In return for the women’s inability to engage in autonomous activities because of their overtime in farm tasks, many husbands of cotton producing households distribute part of the returns of cotton in a way that their wives consider fair. This includes giving presents of clothing, shoes, and a gargantuan and splendid meal on Christmas Day; sartorial presentation and good meals matter very much on this special occasion.

Women’s views of production are as nuanced and diverse as their personal characteristics. One convergent claim is that self-sufficiency in food is a major plus. Beyond that, the views vary from woman to woman, and from household to household. Some women stress that they gain little or nothing other than food security. However, others stress the fact that cotton has brought along material wealth to the family (iron-roofed house, improved farm equipment, a donkey-cart, or a motorbike); and “thanks to cotton, [their] husband can go public,” a way to refer to the symbolic capital the men accumulate for having good harvests. Another group of women refer to the family cotton harvest as “his cotton,” to express their resentment to the exclusivist style of management of the husband. The interesting dynamic here is that the
women in this latter group feel freer to contribute work only in the common food crop farm. Further inquiry suggested that the women who resorted to that strategy did so in retaliation for what they considered an unfair distribution of the proceeds of the previous year. One of them told me that she was trying to teach her husband a lesson, and would work in the cotton farm only if he corrects his attitude. Unfair treatments induce some women to strategize to remind their husbands that they are not helpless victims but central partners of the household. In doing so, they draw on their unsuspected political assets to recapture respect and a fuller inclusion in the allocation and consumption of benefits incurred from the pooled labor of their household.

**Recapitulation**

Besides its important impact on internal household relations, cotton has emerged as the central factor in villagers’ upward mobility in the rural communities of Southwest Burkina Faso, as it did it in many other parts of the country. The major reason that drives farmers to grow cotton is the desire to achieve social and material improvement. Despite the disadvantages that most producers still face, there are palpable examples of positive impact of cotton cultivation on the livelihoods of villagers in Southwest Burkina. The production allows farmers to accumulate capitals – economic, social, and symbolic – and power within their communities. In addition, commodity production creates stratification and opens prospects for economic diversification among farmers. The benefits incurred from cotton in the rural areas makes Hart’s opinion, that “the key to the development of predominantly agrarian states lies in the countryside, not in the cities” (1982:3), more relevant. State officials of Burkina Faso take pride in citing the success of cotton growers. They also contrast the rural successes with increasing urban poverty. This position of cotton in the domestic and political economy has its roots in the constant upward
development of cotton export with the support of both the State and the cotton companies, especially through the mid-1990s.

The ethnography of agricultural production in Southwest Burkina provides tools to challenge the supposedly irreconcilable opposition between cash/export and food crops. The data show that the production of cotton does not cause food shortage necessarily or directly. If cotton production has anything to do with food shortages, it is perhaps because the money from the sales is paid to farmers too late, sometimes after four months and only a couple of weeks before the start of the next farming season. This situation compels some heads of household, who can rely on no other financial resources, to sell portions of their food production at low prices to face urgent needs for cash. If such farmers do not have stocks from the previous years, their action can put the family food security in jeopardy. Yet, the stronger correlation is between not growing cotton and food shortage, at the level of the household. Another constraint that cotton growers face is fluctuation and falling farm-gate price because of global factors on local reality. This contrasts ironically with sustained rising costs of inputs in the past five years, as shown in chapter 3. However, in 2007 the farmers reacted vehemently to negative trends, and received government subsidies in fertilizers to stabilize costs, and a slight raise in farm-gate price, though at a level still below the national floor price\(^{19}\) of 175 francs CFA.

Cotton production has provoked many changes in relations between villages too. There is one legitimate question is why the cultivation of cotton has entailed such a notable sociocultural change in the area now. There is a growing number of farmers who engage in cultivating cotton, which is notorious for being labor-intensive. Now, because the overlap of labor between cotton

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\(^{19}\) The floor price (175 CFA francs) is the price per kilogram of seed cotton below which cotton companies of Burkina Faso vowed never to pay to farmers. But due to acute fluctuations of world cotton price, the companies have not been able to keep that promise from 2005-2006 to 2008-2009.
and activities in the other crops, and cotton and non-farm activities cause bottlenecks in labor supply, and more particularly, because there are no landless laborers in this social setting, farmers usually face challenges supplying sufficient and timely labor relying on the immediate source of household labor, i.e. its members. Most cotton growers feel obliged to turn to other sources to mobilize labor, which is now openly commoditized but still insufficient for sale during the bottleneck times. In the next chapter, I examine farmers’ alternative sources of labor beside the household as a permanent site, the strategies for labor mobilization, and the social and financial costs that recruitment of labor incurs to farmers.
Photo 2: The Best Cotton Farmer of the research zone

1- One Big cotton grower sitting on his motorbike and holding an award certificate

2- The Award Certificate

Photo 3: Teenagers ridging the family cotton farm
CHAPTER 5: THE ORGANIZATION AND MOBILIZATION OF LABOR: STRATEGIES OF FARMING HOUSEHOLDS

Recent literature on production resources in commercial agriculture in Africa has focused on two inter-related strands of analysis: availability of and access to land and labor. As shown in chapter 2, African systems of land tenure have altered in many instances as a result of commercialization. Monetized access and restricted opportunities to land figure among the patterns observed in the recent past. Although Southwest Burkina Faso is no exception to these novel developments, land-poverty is still, by and large, distant to local realities. As observed in other studies, agricultural commercialization “is consistent with the relatively low incidence of landlessness in African social formations” (Swindell 1985: 3; Oya 2007: 459). Berry as well has observed a similar pattern in South-central Ghana and Southwestern Nigeria (1985, 1993: 135), and has insightfully described the process as “exploitation without dispossession.” Her point could be taken as a correction of the historical materialist-inspired view of the transformation of agricultural production in Africa as it becomes incorporated into the capitalist economy. Inspired by “the 'Lenin model' of concentration/dispossession of the means of production and formation of an agrarian bourgeoisie and proletariat,” these analyses have over-emphasized the centrality of land as the most important factor in the modes of production (Bernstein 1979: 14, 2004: 122). As in the cases analyzed by Berry, land is so far available in my research area and is, somehow, a free but restricted commodity. It is made available and accessed through patrilineal relations or loans and gifts through other social networks. Open monetization of land is making headway in Burkina but is so far irrelevant in the rural area under consideration, despite some existence of hidden transactions as illustrated in chapter 4. At any rate, people who tend to rent land are not land-poor farmers per se, but wealthy ones who intend to increase their acreage without increasing the distance between their homes and the farms. The expenses incurred from such
transactions, when they exist, are considered to compensate for transportation costs that could result from cultivation on a farm that could be obtained free but would be located far. The main issue concerning land is soil fertility, which perhaps explains why most farmers engage in cotton farming as a way of having access to chemical fertilizers for use on the other crops as well.

The major problem that farmers currently face in this multiple-cropping setting of Southwest Burkina is the availability and access to labor, especially for those households, which engage substantially in cotton farming besides traditionally grown crops. The household or domestic group remains the primary source of work needed in the farm. I will use the term “household” to refer to a farm-group made of one single house-hearth, usually composed of a man and his single wife, his children (and his mother). However, I will apply the term “domestic group” to a production unit that is made of, at least, two house-hearths, or two adult males farming together or dwelling with their elderly parents. In addition, members produce work under the supervision or guidance of a – male – head. Although evidence exists that heads of households may exploit subordinates’ labor, mostly women’s (Meillassoux 1981; Devison 1988: 3; Berry 1993: 136), my observations in Southwest Burkina Faso indicate that household heads navigate carefully in allocating and distributing farm proceeds with all members, and also with any non-kin contributor of work, in a way that the recipients deem fair. Household heads do so for the mere purpose of securing future labor. Villagers’ understanding of “cotton” as a trope of upward mobility has resulted in considerable changes in the social relations of production, mainly in terms of mobilization for farm work.

In southwest Burkina Faso, there are no landless laborers; and land-insufficient farmers still have options available to increase the size of their farming plots. They either rely on their social or economic capital, or simply ask for a loan of farmland with land-richer farmers. In
Yabogane, less than 2 percent of the households surveyed declared that they farmed on borrowed lands. Over 95 percent of household accessed land through family or as lineage patrimony (see Chart 4). The households, which identified themselves as land borrowers, did so because they settled in the village in the recent past.

Chart 4: Means of land acquisition in Yabogane

I believe their low profile is a tactful manner to show social subordination to their hosts and benefactors as also described by Berry (1993) in her ethnography of land tenure and commercial tree farming in Nigeria. It should not be supposed, however, that all farmers always meet their objectives totally when they try to increase their holdings. My argument is that despite the undeniable importance of access to good land, the ubiquitous cultivation of cotton in Southwest Burkina has increased demand for labor in the domestic group, limited its availability from non-domestic sources, and constrained access to work for hire.

This shortage of household labor and of labor for hire has forced the adoption of new strategies to secure farm-work in an area where the lack of landless farmers makes waged work a
scarce commodity, especially during bottleneck periods. Besides work consented by members of the farm group, there is in fact a considerable amount of work obtained from extra-household sources, either through direct payment, or some sort of deferred reciprocity. In fact, mobilization of non-household work in this social setting seems to involve people and involve social relationships that are not always made explicit. For this reason, it is unproductive to attempt an understanding of the production of cotton and the rural life without sorting out the types of constraints that bind non-household members who provide the workforce or who are mobilized for work in the process of production. In this chapter, I examine the organization of farm-work in the household or farm group, and the social relations that relate the members. I also throw light on the way this organization of farm labor affects household budgets. Finally, I analyze the underlying dynamics that mediate the mobilization of extra-household labor, with the help of Bourdieu’s notion of social capital (Bourdieu 1980:2; 2005: 195).

**Labor Needs, Family Farm, Individual Farms, and Household Budgets**

In the cotton producing area of Southwest Burkina Faso the most crucial productive resource in the farming household is labor. Its well-timed availability and accessibility is the prerequisite for successful farm and non-farm undertakings. This requires clear-sighted strategies in the allocation, but above all in the mobilization of work. As has been observed elsewhere in Africa, the mobilization of labor primarily revolves around basic kin ties or the household (Saul 1983: 77; Swindell 1985: 1; Siddle & Swindell 1990: 25; Bernal 1991: 160; Netting 1993: 59). The common factors that constrain households’ demand for labor include size of surfaces cultivated, location of farm-plot, and above all, the combination of crops, such as maize, sorghum, millet, cotton, rice, peanut, and soybean.
When demand for work on various crops overlaps, it is difficult for members of the farm group alone to meet it. To clear such bottlenecks, members engage in labor mobilization in the form of reciprocal work, hired work, or some kinds of deferred reciprocal work based on special relations between the parties engaged. One major type of labor, which tended to disappear around the late 1990s, is the diem-kuɔb (matrimonial compensation farm-work). It consists for a married man, who has not finished paying off the bride-wealth for his wife, to convene a work-party to the farm of his in-laws, at least three times during a farming season. However, in the past decade, “in-law farm cultivation,” as it is also called, is becoming an outdated or less enforced practice. Although only few people pay the bride-wealth all at once, most men who still owe payment for it send some money to their in-laws in compensation for the farm-work they cannot provide, in the best of circumstances. But a larger number of married young men tend to challenge this practice by rationalizing that they need to use that work to feed their wife and build a future.

In fact, the “matrimonial compensation farm-work” had proved in many cases to be a disastrous method of usury and a vicious circle of exploitation of married men who had no family wealth, that is, cattle. Besides the fowls, goats, or sheep, and the large amount of cowry shells (between 20,000 and 30,000) to pay, the son-in-law was supposed to divert their turn of the reciprocal farm labor (of the second shift) to the farm of the wife’s father until payment of two cows and a bull were completed. Though people were expected to pay off the bride-wealth after three years of marriage, husbands of poor backgrounds would spend up to ten or twelve years farming for the in-law before they could be liberated from their debt. This used to put most of them in a chronic state of production shortfalls, and reduce their chances for economic improvement. For this reason, relationships between a man and his wife’s (classificatory) father
have usually been unfriendly. With increased cotton farming, most son-in-laws vow not to “make a double payment” by paying the bride-wealth and producing work in the father-in-law’s farm. The tendency to grow cotton in farms close to home makes the distance between farm sites and homes less relevant of a problem. Besides, it allows many cotton growers to hire groups of young men in the afternoon. But, despite the proximity of the farms, crop transportation to the sales’ place can still be a serious challenge to people who own no animal drawn-cart.

It is crucial to keep in sight that joint household production takes place only for a particular set of activities, but not for others. In fact, among Dagara farmers of Southwest Burkina, the organization of household labor reflects the presence of the multiple household budgets. For instance, in all of the 156 households surveyed, every productive member owns what Saul (1989a: 349) called “a sphere of personal economic activity parallel to that of the household.” This is usually a personal plot of land. But even if it not an agricultural project, it is still conceptually assimilated to one, as long as it aims personal cash income. There are two types of budgets within the household or domestic group: the common family budget managed by the head, and the individual budgets, for every productive member.

The common budget includes the commonly produced goods. Conversely, the individual budget is separate from that and normally falls under the private ownership of the actor in question. Each budget type includes two components: in-kind goods and cash savings. The in-kind component of the common budget typically includes farm produce, the food resources normally grown by all the productive members of the domestic group on the common family farm and stored together. Mostly, these collective stocks are meant for the consumption of the members. They aim to secure the “reproduction of the producers and the unit of production (descriptively the household)” and “generat[e] a ‘replacement fund’ for means of production
which are used in the annual economic cycle (seeds, fertilizers), or become worn out after a longer period of use (hoes, axes, ploughs)” (Bernstein 1979: 6). The general management devolves to the head of household who may entrust his wife with practical periodic allocation duties for family consumption. However, there is a tacit understanding that in if there is a surplus, or whenever necessity emerges, the head should have stocks sold in order to acquire what is needed for the family, or solve a family problem. If there is no emergency, he keeps the money. The proceeds of the sale of the primarily not-for-the market crops can also supplement the cash component of the budget. In the case of cotton, which is specifically grown for the market, the head closely monitors every aspect, from production to sale through allocation and distribution of the returns. Meanwhile, since the mobilization and maximization of future production of household labor is conditional on a smart and “fair” allocation of the proceeds, heads of households normally manage sales income with pragmatic dexterity. In fact, the assumption of supremacy of the male head of household in rural Africa is not totally justified in my research area. This perceived male dominance, which operates in specific conditions of gender negotiation in which each actor abides by some minimal more or less explicit rules.

The patterns of cooperation between farm members have been shifting, and negotiations, understood as an “equitable” distribution of sales income, now define them. I have used “fair” and “equitable” in quotation marks to show that fairness or equity is in the eyes of the household member who receives a share of the production returns. In other words, the reader may find crude unfairness in what a member defends as fair or equitable. The cash component of household budgets, thus, consists of income derived from sales of farm products, and possibly other non-farm sources, such as income from family petty trade conducted by or on behest of the head. Products or returns from personal undertakings are usually kept separate from common
family goods, although the head of the household can “borrow” from dependent members for a specific purpose. Most dependents do not always consent to loans from their personal production in a good-hearted way. It is implicit that the head may choose to never pay back. Considering the uneven allocations of work in the various shifts for the common farm and the personal farms, we can understand the direct relationship between time budgeting and the small size of personal farms, as I show in the next section.

As the budget types are differentiated, so is the provision of labor regimented. Since income derived from private activities falls into the owner’s personal budget, the labor for them is provided from the owner’s “spare time,” that is whenever she or he is not required to work on the family’s main farm. There is a more or less explicit and elaborate rule that delineates the amount of work to be conducted on the family farm per day and per week. More precisely, labor is provided in the personal farm only after honoring tasks during the early work-shifts of the day in the common farm. Therefore, it is neither acceptable nor ethical for household members to spend time in personal plots or personal business during the period reserved for the common farm, except in some rare cases such as when a woman takes off three successive days to brew sorghum-beer for sale. The organization of labor and the social relations of production in Southwest Burkina Faso do recall, to some extent, Meillassoux’s observation in Cote d’Ivoire (1978: 167), with the difference that in the current case hired and non-kin sources are also used. Household members “have a vested interest in remaining together to benefit from their combined labour” (Meillassoux 1978: 161), except that in Southwest Burkina, members who find the group head too greedy do not hesitate to claim a greater share or threaten a split, if this benefits them.

Work, Work Shifts, and the Week
In the research area, during the agricultural season, the typical workday is divided into three shifts. The first shift starts by daybreak and can last until 10 or 11 am, depending on the intensity of the sun. The second shift follows from around 11am until about 2 or 3pm. The period from 2pm until 6pm makes up the third shift, which includes both time for work on the personal farm and recess time. However, a head of household can decide - though not very often – to encroach on the members’ third shift and capture more work for the family farm if necessary. Labor of the first and second shifts can be spent directly on the common farm, or indirectly by working on the farm of a member (kɔ-da) of a reciprocal work-group (kɔ-taa), who in return owes a turn to each participant in the very short term.

In addition to the small labor exchange-groups that come together for the first shifts, each household member can also affiliate with a larger group of reciprocal work, which works during the second shift locally called kɔsɔr. The household member can affiliate to the group of their choosing based on personal criteria including age and collegiality with group members. This larger group can include up to 20 members, mostly made up of males. The group members work collectively during the second shift in the farm of a fellow member making the rounds of all farms. When a reciprocal work-group member receives a turn of work party, it is hosted on the household’s common farm. However, it is not unusual to see a person use their turn to take the group for work in the farm of another farmer, either in return for a wage or for compensation in grains, or for another reason agreed upon by both parties. But people who take the labor of their first or second shift risk family retaliation if they made the decision without prior consultation of the household head, and the other members.

After the work of the labor exchange group of the second shift, most members typically return home to rest briefly and then move on to their third shift. Some farmers choose to stop at a
sorghum-beer tavern for a drink. The beer is believed to have the potential to energize the worker so that he can face the last work shift of the day, and more so if the person did not have lunch. In the third shift, people also take care of personal non-farm business. For example, I have observed that attendance of funerals, which are always public, reach their peak in the early evening during the third shift than in the morning or afternoon during the first and second shifts. Usually, only close kin and other relations of the deceased give work during the early shifts to attend the funerals.

In the case of direct family farm work, the members all meet in the farm early in the morning and may divide the space into smaller parcels to work on individually for the rest of the day, under the tacit leadership of the head of household or a designated team leader. The males usually arrive at the farm before women who take care of house-chores before joining the farm. Farm activities such as tilling, weeding, and sowing used to be gender-specific. But, with the increasing integration of plow-farming, the sexual division of farm labor is becoming irrelevant. It is now common to observe a mixed-gender performance of farming activities. Women, however, still maintain their traditional role as producers of cooked food. In some multiple-hearth farm-groups, women take daily turns cooking for the whole group, using grains from the group’s joint food-stocks. If the joint grain stock is exhausted, it is the onus of each woman to provide for the people in her hearth rather than for the whole group. In such a situation, most women will only “cook for their children,” and starve their husband, the head of household, whose prime responsibility is to ensure the availability of sufficient food. When food is available, the group consumes it for lunch, and uses the lunch break to relax briefly before entering the second work shift.
The cooking assignment of a woman comes along with its own internal logic. Actually, the farm work contribution of a woman who is on cooking duty only starts some time before or around the second shift. Most women take advantage of their cooking turn to engage in some other task and care for some personal business such as readying the yeast for the sorghum-beer they are preparing to brew, mixing the dough for cakes they will sell later, or taking the first steps for processing shea-butter. In monogamous households with only one able cook, the members may have leftovers of the previous night for lunch in labor-stressed periods. But they may also enjoy a warm meal, or alternatively have no lunch at all depending on the extent of pressure for work and food availability. When the workers show signs of exhaustion at the end of the second shift, which is generally the most challenging of the three, the head or leader of the team adjourns it, generally around 2 or 3pm. After that, the tired household workers rest in the shade or near their houses when the farm is too far away. After they have rested for a while, some members move immediately to their personal farm, where they start their third shift. In polygynous households where women take turns cooking, it may be difficult for the woman on cooking duty to devote much work to her personal plot unless she resigns herself from using the short rest time. But, as already explained, the trade-off is that most women take advantage of their cooking turns to perform some personal activities while they are cooking lunch.

As already mentioned, participation in reciprocal work-groups is a common and central aspect in the rural organization of labor. Younger people may organize in mutual farm work-groups, with which they take turns providing work in each other’s farm during the first or the second shift. The mutual farming group of the first shift (morning) can be composed of 3 to 5 people who are usually close and trustful of each other. The small number of members means that each member receives one turn of the group’s work every week.
In fact, the Dagara week\textsuperscript{20}, which is locally referred to as “market,” contains six days instead of seven days as in the Gregorian calendar. Each weekday, except the traditional holy day, has a name that is that of the village hosting the market that day, within a radius of 12 to 20 miles. Each market-day carries a special symbolic meaning for the locals, especially with regards to the performance of important sacrifices and ritual actions. Among the six days of the Dagara week, only five are work days. The sixth day, called kpanda, the holy day, is normally a rest day. Kpanda is a much-feared day among traditional Dagara. They believe that nothing good happens that day, which explains why life seems to slow down on kpanda. Villagers do not open their granaries that day; for fear that wicked spirits coming out of the bush steal away the substance of their food stocks, or even harm them. A child that is born on kpanda is viewed as “star-crossed,” and parents will consult diviners and seers to exorcize or, at least minimize, the bad spirit in such a child. For this dread of bad spirits, Dagara wisdom counsels people to stay away from the bush on this day. This is normally the day when people rest from ordinary toil. However, kpanda has lost its original function, which was to allowing household members to rest. Villagers reconceptualized the notion of farm work to circumvent the work interdiction on kpanda. They now rationalize that the meaning of work on kpanda is applicable only to “ancestral” crops (see chapter 6); that is, crops such as sorghum and millet which used to be farmed by the ancestors in the distant past. Export cotton, peanuts, rice, and even maize, which are usually known as ‘new crops,” are said not to fit the definition. Therefore, on kpanda days, people do work on “post-ancestral” plots. One factor that made the reinterpretation more concerning is probably that most

\textsuperscript{20} Since the Dagara week (market) is made of six days, a market that falls on a specific day of the standard calendar week, say Thursday, falls on Wednesday the next week, and on Tuesday the week after that. The market will fall on Thursday again in 42 days, and on the same local market day again in 36 days.
such crops, especially cotton, are currently farmed close to the compounds or at the very least within the village perimeter.

In so strategically categorizing the crops and redefining “work,” heads of household capture one additional work day, and surreptitiously rob members of a rest day. In his study of agricultural production in Northern Cote d’Ivoire, Bassett (2002: 191, 193) describes a similar manipulation, by males, of cultural prescriptions and work calendars to extract maximum labor contribution from women to family farms. Because kpanda has almost lost its initial meaning, many household dependents prefer to do their shopping on the Christian Sunday, which became undisputedly the biggest market day of the Dano area. It draws participants from distant places including urbanites of Burkina and merchants from neighboring Ghana. Conversations with elders of Dano threw light on the co-existence of traditional “markets” and the dominant Sunday market, which is now a major regional market, with the participation of merchants and clients from neighboring Ghana. According to the Octogenarian Saamen Naon, the Sunday market was initiated only in 1933 on request of the first Catholic missionary Père Germain Nadal. Père Nadal requested from the Dano customary chief the permission to host a market on the Dano customary market space on Sundays to allow the opportunity for new converts and Sunday churchgoers to buy food or snack during the weeks when the traditional market did not fall on a Sunday. Because of the good relations between Père Nadal and the Chief, the request was approved. The Sunday market, which was permanent and attracted more participants, appeared more practical to the colonial administration, and later the postcolonial state, for tax collection purpose than the traditional market. They also collected taxes both on the traditional market day and on Sunday, except when the two market days overlapped on Sunday.
Most villagers would go to Dano on Sunday, either to sell, buy, window-shop, or socialize with friends in a sorghum-beer tavern. This is also the day for women to sell and buy for the week, including condiments. Even if a household head asks his dependents to come to work on the joint farm on a Sunday, he makes sure they are released before 10am. Based on what a group of junior males to take off, dependents prefer the Christian Sunday to kpanda. They also relish when kpanda overlaps with a Sunday, which only happens once every seven weeks of the Gregorian calendar, and six Dagara market weeks.

One noteworthy observation is that although cotton is specifically grown for cash, labor needed in the cotton farm is collectively supplied by household members and outside sources when available. In theory, the earnings from cotton belong to the head of household who is its manager. Yet, in reality, cotton earnings fall neither in the personal budget of the head nor do they totally fall in the common budget. This puts the cotton proceeds in a kind of inferior combination of common and individual budgets. More importantly, while giving more leeway to the household head, this ambiguously hybrid budget category does not always seem to be a cause for consternation to household members. In their narratives about property, they refer to family cotton as “our cotton” not “his cotton,” or “my cotton.” As it is commonly said in the area, “mine is different from ours (man so’a ni tiin so’a ba i boen’ne).” Obviously, the proclaimed shared ownership may not always lay bare the uneven relations among household members, especially in terms of duties in the cotton farm, rights of access to the returns. But it does suggest ongoing dynamics and the need for the head to be careful in the allocation of the cotton money.

For members of the household, to keep separate budgets is not a new reality in Africa, and many scholars have already observed it in various cultural and geographical contexts inside the continent (Guyer 1984; Saul 1981, 1989c; Clark 1994; Koenig et al. 2000). However, the
relative successes and cohesion within households with such budgets is due perhaps to the existence of rules enforced by the household head. This is typically true in a household composed of a man, his wife or wives and their dependent children. I came across the instructive case of a domestic group of three full adult brothers with an uncommon way of pooling and separating labor and resources. Their inconsistent individual commitments ended up seriously damaging what could have been taken to be their idyllic common farm.

The Challenges of Mobilizing Labor in a Fragmented Domestic Group

Zumo, Leyi and Saal, are full brothers issued from a polygamous family; that is it was their father was polygamous. Though each of them is married with their own children, and dwell in separate sections of a common compound, they maintained a joint collective farm. The three households produced food and cash crops together on the common parcels. This was their way of expressing their strong bond in opposition to their half-brothers issuing from the other wives of their father. The experience worked well for about five years, for as long as they grew all the cash and food crops together, and split among themselves the sales’ income of each crop they grew for the market and any surplus food crop. But in 2004-2005, the brothers decided to change their ways: each household would grow the cash crops – cotton and peanuts – separately while they would keep a collective farm for food. The outcome soon turned out to be a catastrophe after an acceptable first year trial. At the beginning of the second agricultural season under the new regime of production, that is in 2005-06, the wife of Zumo, the oldest brother, “swore never to work in her husband’s cotton again.”

21 This was reported by Liie, one of the wives of the middle brother in the story (Yo, July 21st, 2005). I also saw the woman in question, as I was hosted within their domestic group for two weeks. For ethical reasons, I chose not to interview her. I rather observed the tense relations between her husband and her.
the common production rule. This left Zumo to work with only his fifteen-year-old daughter from a previous marriage on his two-hectare cotton farm and a quarter of a hectare under peanuts. In 2007, when I returned to the field, I was told that Zumo’s wife finally left him, but he had married another wife in the meantime. The teenage daughter also had married and left, which reduced Zumo’s household to two members only. Subsequently, Zumo decreased his acreage under cotton from two to 0.5 hectares.

Leyi, the middle brother, who has two wives and six children, two of whom had reached the age to assist in plowing (eight and twelve years), farmed a cotton parcel under 4 hectares, and 0.5 hectare of peanuts in 2005-06. Saal, the youngest brother, was then a monogamous husband with two children under six. He did not grow any cotton because he had had bad experience with this crop. Instead, he farmed 6 hectares of peanuts. Each of the three brothers considered their personal cash crop farm as their most important obligation. During the two weeks I spent with Leyi, I realized that none of the men ever set foot in their weed-infested common food farm. The women expressed concern about this neglect to their husbands, and eventually resolved collectively not to go to work in their husbands’ personal cash crop plots until the weeding was completed in the joint food farm. This example convinced me that the equation of dependent household members and cash crops, a misread theme in Africanist literature, was not relevant in this case. The problem was the result, in this case, of a lack of clear rules that situated a required amount of work time from each man in the common food farm. The men were shirking from work in the collective project.

I had a conversation with Zumo, when I participated in the work in his personal cotton parcel. I gathered from his insinuations that his reason he felt excused from personally contributing on the food farm was the feeling that other household members of his, and
especially his wife, already contributed enough work on it, but never came to help with his cotton parcel. Leyi, the polygynous brother, did not provide a clear answer to the question “why don’t you go to weed the food farm?” He simply chuckled before saying “I contracted too much credit for my cotton. I have to take care of it.” As for Saal, he only replied, “I will start weeding next week.” Each of the three men had their own way of rationalizing why they would not go to take care of the fully common farm. But clearly, the emerging pattern was a lack of enthusiasm to work in the common farm and a strong commitment to the individual personal parcels under cash crops.

After harvest of food from the uneven joint production, the brothers, decided that the production of the food farm was very low and it would be better to separate all the the way and have individual food farms as well. The decision led to changes that were totally unexpected to me. Leyi decreased his acreage under cotton from 4 to 1 hectare; he increased the maize and sorghum farm to 5 hectares; and he kept 1 hectare under peanuts. Zumo, whose estranged wife eventually divorced him, married a new wife but reduced his 2 hectares of cotton to 0.5 hectares as his daughter, a crucial source of work, got married. He also had 3 hectares under sorghum, and a half-hectare under peanuts. Saal maintained his 6 hectares of peanuts and increased his sorghum farm surface to 3 hectares. Now the domestic group has evolved into three separate households, related on a symbolic level rather than through economic endeavors (Goody 1958: 55). “Domestic transitions” that result in nucleation has also been observed in other parts of the

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22 Further inquiry over the variations in surfaces revealed various explanations. Saal who kept 6 hectares of peanuts and increased sorghum to 3 hectares said that work in these crops was not very demanding, especially as he joined a large work-group of the second shift. Leyi and Zumo explained their decision to decrease their acreage under cotton on the low farm-gate price. As for the increase of their sorghum and maize farms, the justifications varied. While Leyi said that “I have many mouths to feed,” Zumo explained that he increased the surface for sorghum because of his plan to participate in the initiation that their patrilineage had planned for late 2007. He did take part in the ceremony, and I was privileged to assist the ceremony on its final day, on January 16, 2008.
country, especially in the Mossé Plateau (West 2006: 49, 2009: 280). But the enabling factor there is usually lack of land that leads to migrations to land-rich areas, or separation from the larger group to build a new “house.” Ultimately, the separation between the three brothers in our case led to more food grain production. The logical conclusion one could reach is that under divergent personal objectives and interests, compounded by the absence of a real leader and the lack of rules governing the three related households, their initial objective of the three brothers failed. This failure contrasts with the general pattern of side-by-side common and personal farming within less complex households, a reminder of the crucial role of labor as a scarce resource. Well-organized households rely, in great part, on outside sources to satisfy their need for labor.

**Alternative Sources: Extra-household Labor Mobilization**

The farmer’s energetic pursuit of export cotton farming combined with continued engagement with traditionally grown food crops and other on-farm and off-farm activities strain labor supply in Southwest Burkina Faso, as in other parts of rural Africa (Bassett 1988; Berry 1993: 147). The household alone has proved insufficient as a source of labor in the multiple crop farming domestic groups, as has been observed in similar social contexts in Africa, and elsewhere in the developing economies (Saul 1983: 86; Siddle and Swindell 1990: 26; Netting 1993; Bassett 2002: 187). This leads most households to seek alternative sources of labor mobilization. The strategies include work parties of various sizes. There are two basic patterns of non-household work in Southwest Burkina Faso: wage labor and non-wage work party. However, the strong engagement of most households in cotton and the lack of landless laborers, in the area, who might have created a rural labor market make it hard for “recruiters” to find wage labor in the quantity needed and in a timely manner. Concurring with Saul’s observation in
Bentenga, Burkina Faso (Saul: 1983: 90), this lack of landless farmers has maintained a non-integrated labor market. Every worker first aims to meet the demand in his or her own farm before they can sell their work force to a buyer. This uncertain situation forces the farmers who need extra workers, generally richer-than-average farmers, to seek network-based labor. They usually target the category of small farm operators, likely to take time off from their own household farm. Having money is a necessary condition for finding extra-household workers, but not a sufficient one. The “big man” farmer also needs to maintain good relationships with potential workers or labor recruiters. One way major producers prepare the way for the labor recruitment is to create ties and maintain social networks, which they always end up mobilizing for larger work parties on their farms. In addition to making significant expenditures “incurred to convene the work parties” (Saul 1983: 82), the indebted “big man” host always has to reward the convener or conveners – in cash or in kind – at a deferred date. In case the host and convener are on the same socio-economic scale, he or she also incurs the debt of contributing reciprocal labor on the farm of the convener or some of the participants at a future date.

Table 7: Approximate time put to harvest one hectare of sorghum versus one hectare of cotton.

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<th>Total number of hours for harvesting 1 hectare of cotton</th>
<th>Number of work hours contributed by the farm-group to harvest 1 hectare of cotton</th>
<th>Number of work hours drawn from extra-household sources</th>
<th>Total number of hours for harvesting 1 hectare of sorghum</th>
<th>Number of work hours contributed by the farm-group to harvest 1 hectare of sorghum</th>
<th>Number of work hours drawn from extra-household sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work hours</strong></td>
<td>210</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50.95</td>
<td>49.05</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demand for labor, however, is crop-specific, and depends on factors such as the equipment used on the farm and work efficacy of the farm-group. For instance, a plot of one
hectare under maize will require less time than the same surface under peanuts, sorghum, beans, or cotton. I observed and charted time used by a farm-group to harvest 1 hectare of sorghum versus 1 hectare of cotton (see Table 7). They spent a total of about 59 hours to harvest the one hectare of sorghum as opposed to 210 hours to do the same surface under cotton. Members of the farm-group harvested the sorghum exclusively. However, out of the 210 hours spent to harvest the cotton, only about half were provided by the farm-group proper. The remaining 103 hours were contributed by extra-household sources. In fact, 48 of these hours consisted of assisted work, that is, work not paid for on the spot. However, the farm-group usually spends money to feed these workers, and is still indebted to the same people for reciprocal labor or some kind of reward. The remaining 65 hours were wage work. Since the demand for labor in these two crops overlaps, it is nearly impossible for most households that have both to meet their production objectives by relying solely on household labor. In addition, those who can afford to hire workers or host a labor party, do so. Though the case presented in Table 7 is not sufficient to generalize, it is illustrative of farm-groups who grow cotton in parcels beyond one hectare.

Chart 5: Source of farm labor, in Yabogane, higher cotton-producing village.
In addition, Chart 5 confirms the importance of extra-household work to overall household production, especially for families that farm large surfaces under cotton, besides universally grown staple crops. It presents the answers of 100 households of Yabogane to a question, that enquired on the sources of workforce they pooled to meet their labor demand on farms for the 2007-2008 agricultural seasons. These rough declarations did not, however, indicate the number of hours worked, since farmers do not usually keep track of these.

My observation builds on earlier discussion on the organization of labor in small-scale farmer without prevalent wage relation, where kinship and neighborhood ties provide most of the non-domestic force (Meillassoux 1975: 58; Swindell 1985: 1). But it places the locus on the transforming effect of commercial farming which has grown in recent years, and on the monetization of day-to-day relations. In this setting, most households combine labor from various sources, including wage work and network-based work parties. Because of the intricacy of the strategies for mobilizing labor, it is difficult to find a label that quickly describes the mode of production that prevails. Financial resources are certainly important, but they are not a sufficient condition to mobilize work force. In fact, access to wage work is enhanced when the farmer uses money to attract workers from his/her own social network (Bourdieu 1980: 2; Portes 1998: 12).

Similar to what Bassett observed in Northern Cote d’Ivoire (1988:163), labor bottlenecks, arise at peak periods of the production process, especially during harvest time. Except for maize, all other crops are ready for harvest nearly at the same time; approximately from late September through November. Household members very often manage to plow, sow, till, and weed the parcels under crops on their own or with the help of friends who come to help on the basis of strict reciprocity. But usually they have no choice but to seek extra-household workers from their
Wage labor, which is now very common, becomes scarce during the harvest bottlenecks. As most people are busy with their own farm, few are in search of a job at this period, for fear of jeopardizing their own farm production. This shortage encourages cotton growers to resort to subtle approaches to find the workers they need. A farmer who only goes around to tell others that he needs extra workers or to advertise his ability to pay for the service is very unlikely to meet his/her objectives - during the bottleneck period.

Two different patterns for people who do supply wage work in this tense period were revealed from my observations. Wage work is usually performed by members of non-cotton or low-cotton producing households, mainly their young men (teenagers or males in their twenties), and their women. The first pattern is for a worker from one of the households to show up individually in the potential employer’s farm during the third shift, or around the second shift at the earliest. These individual workers are usually women – generally widows or women from the non-cotton growing households that have less demand for work, and with fewer young children. In this case, the owner of the cotton field divides the plot into sections or rows of cotton for each individual worker to harvest. The wage is negotiated and each hired worker knows the amount of money she will be paid after the assigned task is completed. Because workers of this type can show up only after having completed the first shift in their own household’s farm, most cotton growers do not like to rely on them to break the bottlenecks.

The second pattern is for young people to create a work-group that meets once a week, usually on kanpda day, to sell their collective labor. They usually keep the money earned in a common fund and use it at the end of the season to organize a big party or another event agreed upon. Because these work-groups usually work during the first two shifts of the day, they look
more reliable to the cotton growers, and are much in demand. The paid work-group is made up of people – of mixed gender or not – and sells its labor to a farmer at a negotiated sum which is calculated per participant, but it is paid to the group’s treasurer, not to individual workers. This pattern has also been adapted by the administrators of the elementary schools in the region, to finance activities which cannot be paid from their existing budget. They may take the pupils as a group for harvest work on the cotton growers’ farm on a Thursday to establish a school fund. Money from the fund is usually utilized to sponsor school sport or cultural events.

Although this kind of hired work-group is common in other parts of Burkina Faso, it is a totally new development in the Dano area. In the 1980s, a person who worked for a wage was viewed in an unfavorable light in the area. And to treat a person as a “wage worker” was no compliment. The existence of such groups is now so common, however, that cotton farmers tacitly integrate them as a regular ancillary labor source. These wage work-groups emerged in the area as a result of intensified cotton production. Moreover, it is currently accepted that some people will go to work for a wage. Wage work group operates on a seasonal basis, at the early stage of cotton harvest (early October). Each work-group has its own rate per worker to be paid by the farm owner per worker. This rate is also subject to fluctuation according to supply and demand. During labor peak periods in a good cotton production year, work-groups show little patience with farm owners who try to haggle over the rate. As one farmer told me, “the good thing with the work-group is that since it is a contract, they come early to your farm, at 7 or 8 am, work hard, and leave only after eight hours of work. Since you [the farm owner] feed and pay them for the work, they are obliged to work well and efficiently. If someone misbehaves, you can draw the attention of the group leader to it.”

Male work-groups usually use their money to organize a party on New Year’s Day, or on Easter, or for another important event of their own choosing, and may also split whatever money is left after the amount spent for that activity. Members of some women’s groups divide their money in proportion to each member’s participation in the group’s work. Other women’s groups choose a special event to celebrate. I did not see that there were wage work-groups in Tambirkpere, perhaps because the cotton acreage is low, under 0.5 hectares in average. In Yabogane, there is no single male wage-labor group, but there are several made up of women, and even wives from large cotton producing household participate in these. Further inquiry suggested that men conceded their wives’ right to engage in work-groups, because otherwise they were afraid they would face reprisals from village women’s groups. The following statement from a women’s work-group leader summarizes the gender dynamics at play: “if you keep your wife at home, you should not ask the work-group consisting of other men’s wives to work for you, even if you are paying for it.”

It follows from this claim that women use their clout to win a domestic right as a group on the public arena. Beyond earning money with their work-groups, they also increase their bargaining power, at least during the harvest period. By brandishing the threat of withholding their much-needed services to husbands who may otherwise never have granted the kpanda off to their wives, the women recapture the kpanda and reconfigure its meaning thanks to the acute needs created by the cotton harvest.

There is also a non-wage type of extra-household labor: one a farmer by decision of a farmer consents to give voluntarily responding to a convener who has invited his acquaintances, or who turns over the reciprocal farm work group he was supposed to host, to relieve a friend under stress in the management of his farm. Occasionally, large work parties consist of workers

24 Caroline, Yabogane, February 18th, 2008
from various villages convened to a person’s farm by a third party, usually a very good friend, upon the request of the host. I decided to give less attention to the small work parties, which are common, and on which Saul (1983) and Swindell (1985: 36) have provided insightful commentary. I focus on the second type which is very large and less common, but which stands as a unique illustration of large-scale labor mobilization and offers the possibility of analyzing social network and relations.

“Muur”: The High Cost of “Free” Labor

From the various types of wage labor described above, it is already clear that solely the ability to buy work is unlikely to produce the desired results. The farmer who wants to have workers needs to develop symmetrical ties or ties by association. Because this is a place where every household has a farm, small or large, labor shortage is chronic, and the farmers who have most acreage under cotton, in addition to other means, convene large work parties. One form of non-domestic work force that prevails in high cotton zones of the Dano area such as Before, Bolembar, and Yo, is the large and multi-scaled labor mobilization locally referred to interchangeably as muur or kɔkpɛn. The two terms mean “stick of straw,” and “large work party,” respectively. While “large work party” evokes, rightly, the impressive size of these parties, “stick” does not suggest anything obvious at the first glance, even to people familiar with the local cultural intricacies. Further scrutiny reveals that muur, the “stick,” is a metonymic referent from past methods of convening hunting parties all over the cultural landscape of the region.

25 I used quotation marks here to render the villagers’ view as closely as possible, and to stress the irony of what the locals call free work. From their perspective, free work is work for which the receiver did not pay money to the work convener in return. However, the receiver of this type of work is infinitely indebted to the person who convened the work in addition to spending quantities of resources that could have sufficed to pay off the work, and if only it were agreed on to be wage work.
In the farming context, muur, refers to an enormous non-wage labor party convened through multiple layers of more or less unrelated networks of social relations for the benefit of one farmer. It is described as free because the workers who respond to the call are not paid for their effort, though the rule of deferred reciprocity compels the recipient to reciprocate through gift giving, in the short and middle term.

Muur reportedly originated from the practice of hunting, one formerly vital aspect of Dagara masculine ethos. It is held that the renown of a hunter used to be assessed by his popularity and the fact that his social network extended outside his immediate geographic area. He had to be able to gather many peer hunters from various horizons to a hunting party that he convened once a year. He did that by dispatching messengers with a stick of straw – probably symbolizing the tail of the Dagara arrow – to specific honored individual hunters in specific villages who were his friends. These people in turn came to the occasion with many other participants. The recipient of a straw demonstrated his worthiness by the number of people he would bring with him, which he could do by launching a secondary call in his own area. This snowballing, the enormous hunting party lasted three days and ended with the sharing out of the game killed. It was the opportunity for participants to make new acquaintances. This laid the basis for people to extend their own social network to mobilize potentially in other aspects of their life. There is another layer of meaning to the straw stick. In colonial period, colonial messengers were given a paper message to dispatch. The paper, the fear of losing or disfiguring it, caused headaches to the messenger. It is said that he would clip the letter to a stick of straw and hold it this way until the destination.

In its current understanding, muur is a pyramidal scheme of labor recruitment that seems to reveal the kind of relations necessary for large-scale labor mobilization in my study site. The
host (principal convener) can be called solicitor I. He works through a good friend who does most of the organizing and can be called solicitor II. This man first assesses the amount of work to be done by visiting the farm of Solicitor I. After this step Solicitor II sends a message to influential acquaintances in different villages, requesting them to mobilize workers on one given day for the farm of Solicitor I. These third level recruiters, whom I call Solicitor III, usually are not connected with Solicitor I, but they are the people who do the actual work of mobilization. Each third level solicitor recruits as many workers as possible. The actors in this base level of the pyramid do not have recruitment responsibility. They only come to the designated farm on the day of the party. A muur party gathers from 80 to over 200 participants and there have been exceptional cases with more impressive attendance. The workers are treated with lavish quantities of good food and drink during and after the work. The “big man,” Solicitor I, is also fighting for his prestige, which increases with the stories that circulate on how much he spent on food and drinks on that day. It can be seen as a case of redistribution motivated by the desire of reputation.

From an organizational point of view, this scheme is clearly a carefully scaled mobilization of labor, as shown in Chart 6. The actors at every scale engaged are in contact only with the person immediately above or below them. Special relations tie the actors at each level of the process. Solicitor II is close to the host, and acts as a labor contractor on behest of the “big man;” the individual workers have a relation with the “sub-contractors,” Solicitor III, who, in turn, maintain a special relation with Solicitor II. During my fieldwork, I tried to understand

26 The most narrated muur was convened in Kaspal’s farm in 2005. According to my interviews with the convener and the main solicitor, and conversations with farmers from various villages, the attendance was over 400 workers. I would not have trusted this figure if one local cotton agent did not support that that day more than 10 tons of seed cotton was harvested. Reportedly, the SOFITEX, the cotton company, reportedly drove a truck to the farm, which the workers loaded directly as they harvested. The truck was driven back straight to the factory, where the cotton was weighed and purchased.
the ties that create mutual obligations between Solicitor I, Solicitor II, and Solicitor III. The complexity of the muur work party lies in the fact that it gathers workers hailing from various villages, at least ten times as many as the number that usually attends an ordinary labor party. This complexity and the pyramidal nature of the networks call for a closer analysis. The notion of capital helps us understand what is revealed.

**Chart 6**: A Representation of the Pyramidal Scheme of Large-Scale Labor Mobilization (Each box of ‘Solicited’, at the fourth level, can represent, about a dozen of workers. The boxes in the first three levels represents single individuals).

Bourdieu defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu 1980: 2; Porter 1998: 3). The mobilization of labor for a muur party confirms that “a person’s family, friends, and associates
constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain” (Woolcock & Narayan 2000:226). Social capital is difficult to maintain without some degree of economic capital. The disposable money in the hands of the host is critical for the ability to convene and for receiving a sizeable attendance. Dabiré (1987: 3-4) perceptively defines the Dagara person as one having an essence only in relation to other persons. He views the Dagara person as being “‘condemned’ to be with, to live with, and to do things with others, in relation to and with others” who manifests his/her adhesion to the norms of sociability by actively taking part in all aspects of life, including rituals, work, funerals, and other celebrations. Dabire’s view concerning the spirit of interdependence of the Dagara person finds an illustration in labor contracting in the era of the cotton production, because only few households can go about the activity independent of external labor contributions. As one farmer put it, “it is easier to cultivate cotton than to harvest it.” In anticipation of this straights, farmers with a lot of money and large farms use the visits to social gatherings of the dry season to develop ties that are the condition for recruitment of supporters for labor mobilization in the future.

While work parties and mutual labor contribution is no new phenomenon in West Africa (Saul 1983; Bassett 1988, 2002), the conditions and the rules of such activities need great clarification. Swindell (1985) has observed several non-household types of labor mobilization that include reciprocal and hired labor in Gambia. Saul (1983) documented the monetary costs and the social relations that tie labor contributor and host in work parties in a Moosé village in East-Central Burkina Faso. Fiéloux (1980: 161) observed earlier that two main types of labor were mobilized side by side among the Lobi people of Southwest Burkina Faso. She describes one as generously compensated with food, and drinks, and the other one, as involving no food or
any other sort of compensation. She lauds the reciprocal labor one as an expression of village “forms of solidarity,” and seems to lament the disappearance of this, what she calls the free work party without compensation.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, any work provided is to be reciprocated at a deferred date when it is not being paid pack for a work contributed for by the convener. Therefore, it would be more accurate not to imply that people help each other simply out of solidarity, without economic calculation. This romantic idea veils the nature of the social relations of production between the actors who engage in labor exchange and the processes that enables such “free” labor. We probably need to further scrutinize what is meant by reciprocity. Is it limited to exchange of the same nature, or does it only characterize transactions that result in the exchange labor? Situating our analysis in the current socioeconomic context spurred by the “cotton mentality,” which encourages rewarding any kind of work contribution with some sort of return, may also enhance our understanding of the irrelevance, in the cotton era, of a vague notion of “solidarity” that may be entertained under the influence of older romantic notions. Obviously, the people who convene a labor party can successfully play on the solidarity string, if they use the notion interchangeably with friendship. In a context of labor scarcity, carrying out work in a friend’s farm may conceal special relations between the farm owner and the work contributor that go beyond general solidarity. In the next section, I argue that muur parties, which are very expensive, involve subtle economic interests that bind both the host and Solicitor II, and relations of reciprocity between actors at the adjacent levels of the scale.

**Muur: The Mode of Operation**

A powerful farmer, who is incapable of fulfilling the labor needs of his farm during harvest time, sends a call to a friend, generally a person with an extended network of relations.
Although the process is called “muur,” a straw stick, a reminder as explained of earlier mobilization for major hunting parties and a local method of colonial message dispatching, there is no actual stick involved when muur labor is invited. Currently, either written notes or mouth-to-mouth communications are used concurrently to convey the message. It is even assumed that the written note, which until a recent past would have brought colonial traumas to memory, provokes more adhesion because of its perceived formalism and prestige. It is now considered to be high status for a farmer, who is generally not literate, to receive a written note from a friend inviting him and others to participate in a work party.

I observed a muur party in October 2007 where I counted 125 participants from eight villages. The host calculated that his expenses for the occasion were 135,000 Francs (about $270). The 2007 daily rate per worker of a wage group for harvesting cotton in Dano was in the range of 625 to 750 CFA francs. Using the base of 625 Francs, the host could have used the same amount of money to hire 216 wageworkers, if they were upright available, and this would have relieved him from the need to reciprocate to Solicitor II. The discrepancy is even more evident in larger work parties. I investigated the circumstances of the most famous muur party in the area, where over 400 workers are said to have participated. My main aim was to understand why a person would mobilize bring over 400 workers to the farm of a friend, free of charge. In 2005, the rate per worker was 500 francs. Why would someone mobilize the equivalent of so much money – about 200,000FCFA, a real fortune for most villagers – just in the name of friendship while he is also hard pressed for workers? Is Solicitor II out of any economic sense? This impression looms large when one receives the brief answer “I did so out of respect for him.” However, further conversations with the protagonists, villagers, and people who participated in
the work party provided better clues to understand of the obligations that tie Solicitor I and II, that is, the “big man” and the main contractor, as I explain shortly.

One unanimous agreement about *muur* is its high cost, even if it is not paid for in money. The host who receives the labor contributions has to spend a large amount to show his high status. The underlying objective is mostly the display of wealth. For this reason, many people think that *muur* is not really a productive labor mobilization strategy, except in the production of reputation, which the participants help by exalting the image of the host once they return to their respective villages. Evaluating the costs of the host and the moral debt incurred by Solicitor II vis-à-vis the Solicitor III, another group of my interlocutors claimed that the host, the “big man,” actually slyly buys the labor “contractor,” Solicitor II, through some largesse that makes the latter feel so indebted that he can only say “yes” when solicited. The story below provides insight into the dynamics underlying the famous *muur* party already mentioned.

In 2005 Kaspal, who is one of the two top cotton producers of the region, sent a note to Boyion asking him to help organize a major *muur* party. Boyion traveled 18 kilometers to see Kaspal’s cotton farm in Bafou. The size of the farm was a startling 14 hectares. Boyion spent 16,000 francs CFA from his own money to buy gas in order to send out the message. He sent “sticks,” in the form of written notes, to reliable friends in 31 villages, asking them to recruit participants, to help him “clean his shame,” a trope that refers to the challenge ahead.

I had several conversations with the two main protagonists, the Solicitors I and II, but the conversation never went beyond the “he-respects- me” formulas to explain why one had asked and the other complied to mobilize several hundred workers. Finally, one farmer of Yabogane – a close friend of Boyion, Solicitor II – who himself participated as a volunteer in the work party, provided an insight in the relations involved. According to his explanation, Kaspal and Boyion
were friends until Kaspal offered Boyion a plot of land of about three hectares let fallow for a long time. Boyion was very grateful for Kaspal’s kindness, because new fallow increases greatly the prospects for a greater crop. At the beginning of the following farming season, a few days after the first rain of the agricultural season, Boyion went to his new farm to clear it. To his dismay, he discovered that an unknown person plowed the area. Very disturbed, he went to Kaspal’s for further inquiry. To his great surprise, Kaspal told him that he had a tractor plow the plot to ready it for Boyion, another gesture to express appreciation for his friendship. Boyion went home feeling over-indebted to his friend and benefactor. The fact of the matter is that Boyion is a very well connected and popular person in the Dano area. He even has personal connections with prominent politicians, including one former cabinet minister who is still a member of parliament (MP). When Boyion was convening workers to harvest Kaspal’s cotton farm, he also sent an invitation to the MP who reportedly came in person on the day of the work party, bringing with him bottles of liquor and cash to support the friend of his friend, and to encourage the workers 27.

When I went back to Boyion with these interesting bits of information, he confirmed their veracity, and provided further explanation: “The cost of plowing one hectare by tractor is 25,000 francs CFA. Kaspal, in addition to giving me the plot, also spent his own money to have it plowed for me. What would you have done if you were in my shoes?” In monetary terms, Kaspal had spent about 75,000 francs to have Boyion’s new farm plowed. When asked whether he also received other perks after Kaspal sold his cotton crop, Boyion was purposefully evasive, but there is no sign to suggest that the friendship between the two men had diminished; which 27 I suspect that the MP also found a fertile ground in the networks of his popular friend to connect with potential voters, especially as he was running in the mayoral elections that were to take place a few months later (June 2006), and rerun for Parliament a year later. He did run in both elections but failed at the ballot in both.
indicates that each player in the relationship was satisfied. Boyion is very much aware of the usefulness of the contribution he made to his friend’s farm and, perhaps, to his reputation. He even used a local metaphor to express this while explaining to me the process of muur: “I was the trunk of the tree for which Kaspal is the root. The people to whom I sent the ‘stick’ asking to them to bring workers are like the branches of the tree. The workers who came to the farm to work on that day are the twigs bearing the leaves whose shade prevented Kaspal’s work from sun-burn.” In a tropical country, the image of the tree shade suggests coolness, or about what the idea of the sun would inspire in the Northern Hemisphere. Boyion did show how important his large-scale work party had been to his friend. A reflection on this metaphor clarifies the relations between the various parties and the position of each actor involved in the work party. Some parts are related more directly to each other, just as the actors at each level of the muur. For one thing, the close friendship between Boyion and Kaspal is still a fact.

Kaspal seems to have gained in popularity since the muur in his farm. Most people, who do not know him physically, know him by fame; which suggests that his legendary muur party boosted his status in the local social, economic, and even political landscape. Kaspal could not give me an estimate of the expenses he incurred in this occasion, but he enumerated some items that he provided as he recalled. Others say that he slaughtered seven goats, had 200kg of rice cooked, bought 40 liters of locally distilled liquor, in addition to providing the large quantities of sorghum-beer made available both in the field and in his compound after the work party was over. The foods and liquor expenses alone could be roughly estimated at 127,000 francs. The seven barrels (of two-hundred-liter) of sorghum-beer that participants reported are worth about 140,000 francs. All of these add up to a total of 267,000 francs (about $600), only for expenses

of the work party, without considering the pre-work-party expenses and the unofficial rewards to Boyion.

It is now clear that muur is a costly work party that is beyond the means of the great majority of common farmers. It specifically reveals one kind of pyramidal relationships between farmers of different socio-economic positions. Solicitor II, who is closer to the big farmer, is acting in a way as a labor contractor, but many others are doing the same at a smaller scale down the line, up to the individual worker who actually comes as a volunteer to work. The ties that create mutual obligations between Solicitor I, II, and III, and the people at bottom of the pyramid seem to be rooted in social, economic or political indebtedness past or to come.

Most of what is locally referred to as free labor is not as free as in the usual sense. It seems that the word “free” here, which reflects only the perspective of one of the protagonists of the chain of transactions that of the main Solicitor II, gives expression to two purposes. First, it seeks to indicate a moral objective of social solidarity, which is an ideal more than a reality. The notion also serves to veil the underlying dynamics involved in the process, while simultaneously reminding the host of the muur his degree of indebtedness vis-à-vis the contractor, Solicitor II, who hypothetically could have turned this huge amount of mobilized labor to money.

**Recapitulation**

As in other parts of Africa and many other parts of the world, in Southwest Burkina Faso, the world, members of the household or of the domestic group are the primary providers of farm-work. They operate in a dual mode in the organization and production of labor, both working on the common family farm and keeping small individual personal farms. This dual organization of work is also reflected in the nature of household budgets: personal budgets and the common family one. Work on the family farm, which is of paramount importance, is provided during the
first and second shifts of the day, directly or indirectly by joining reciprocal work groups which
take turns in working in the farms of all members in rotation. Members usually use the time of
the third shift to perform personal activities or work on personal farms; and they keep the income
resulting from such activities for themselves. Harvests from the common farm belong to the
entire group, and are thus stored together under the management of the head, who can delegate
his power to another member, usually his senior wife or an adult son. Although the income
derived from the common farm conceptually belongs to the entire group, but the head has a
discretionary power that allows him to make decisions without prior consultation with or the
consent of the other members. However, most heads of household or farm-group are careful
about the use of such money and restrain from making risky decisions that could incur the
disobedience of their dependents. To minimize risks of retaliation from group members, most
heads of household try to treat subordinate members in ways that the latter deem “fair.” In fact,
household members can decide to withhold their work power – the most needed factor of
production in the site – from a miserly or heedless head.

Owing to the absence of landless laborers in the area, and intense engagement in cotton
and other crops, the major constraint for most households is finding labor in sufficient quantities
and in a timely manner. Very few households – usually non-cotton farming ones with limited
surfaces under crops – can meet the demand for farm labor without outside contributions. Most
households rely on extra-household sources intermittently, especially during harvest time, the
most critical period of labor bottlenecks. However, finding extra-household sources of work is
usually difficult, not always or only because of lack of money, but mainly because of the scarcity
of wageworkers. The pre-requisite for access to hired farm labor is not so much monetary
reserves but a farmer’s social connections and networks that can be made to yield mobilizable
labor. A wealthy farmer who is not well-connected to the less successful ones – who are more likely to supply wage work – runs the risk of labor shortage. Wealthy farmers also make friends with people who are famous and well-liked. They use their wealth to win the friendship of such potential recruiters of workers, and they put them under obligation sometimes with unsolicited hard-to-resist generosity. From the perspective of the villagers, this kind of work supplied not in return for payment, is “free” despite the fact that the host incurs a very high cost for it. A cotton farmer also needs social skills in negotiating with village wage work groups. Cotton farmers view the work performed by such groups as less expensive and high in quality. The downside is that it is not always available. In all of this, we are of course very far from the situation analyzed by Chayanov, which was such an inspiration to much agrarian analysis. Chayanov assumed a “peasant family farm,” with high flexibility in expanding or contracting the area under crops according to the needs, but which “normally employ[s] no hired wage labor – none whatsoever” (Chayanov 1966: xiii).

That cotton “cultivation creates bonds between people” (Meillassoux 1978: 161) in Southwest Burkina Faso is now a truism. However, the social relations of production, which Meillassoux described, were characterized by interdependence, kinship or marriage. The distinctive feature of the situation I observed in Southwest Burkina is that the social relations of production go beyond the boundaries of the domestic farm-group and include other actors who exercise power when they decide for whom to work, or, correlatively, how to transform a potential existing in the social relations into non-domestic labor. Another question is who benefits from increasing commercialization. The short answer is that everyone does; but whether all actors benefit to the same degree is a different question that can hardly find a positive answer. In activities that combine human, animal, and mechanized energy, such as plowing, tilling or
burrowing, the need for extra-household labor is felt less acutely. In contrast, the cotton growers, especially, the ones with large farms, are exceptionally dependent on external sources of labor during harvesting, because this is an exclusively manual task. For these reasons, it is not far-fetched to assert that the most important condition for successful cotton farming in Southwest Burkina Faso is what Bourdieu (1980:2, 2005: 195) termed social capital, harnessed here to raising non-domestic labor although the other economic resources needed to maintain this kind of intangible capital should also not be underestimated. In the next chapter, I give further attention to how women – wives and widows – negotiate through the structures of social norms in this setting that is transitioning to persistently towards a cash economy.

**Photo 4: A women’s wage workgroup**

1- Harvesting cotton for a wage

2- After their Easter Party
Photo 5: Youth wage workgroups
1- A youth wage workgroup and author harvesting cotton

2- A youth wage workgroup in their party uniform at a Baor Ceremony

Photo 6: Cotton on the sale’s place
1- A group of men conditioning cotton in bales

2- Cotton conditioned in bales and ready to weigh on a scales
CHAPTER 6: STRUCTURE, AGENCY, AND NEGOTIATION WITHIN THE FARMING HOUSEHOLD

The household, which is universally accepted as an important social unit for analysis, has been defined in both its functional and methodological understandings. Thus, Wilk and Netting view it as “a bounded unit defined by common residence or participation in vaguely defined domestic activities” in which “decisions emerge through negotiation, disagreement, conflict, and bargaining” (Wilk 1991:35; Netting and Wilk 1983: xxii). Smith and others (1984) who underline the economic nature of the household defined it as an “income-pooling, co-residential, and joint unit of production and consumption” in which “the reproduction of human labor or the individual is assured through the consumption of a collective fund of material goods” (Smith et al. 1984, as cited in Ekejiuba 1995: 48). The focus of the debate on the definition, boundaries, resource allocation, authority, and pattern of decision-making in the household indicate the serious analytical and definitional challenges that the concept has posed to social researchers.

A group of scholars understands the household as a corporate unit in which all members hold the same collective goal and invest themselves altruistically for the common interests. Conversely, another group views the notion as a setting in which each individual member works for their own interests, sometimes at cross-purposes with other members of the group. This has led some scholars to view the household as a “Black Box” whose inner workings are difficult to sort out (Whitehead 1981; Folbre 1986; Wilk 1989). Other researchers have maintained that taking the household as a unit of production, consumption, and distribution has been misleading, and even ethnocentric, when applied to non-Western settings, and especially in Africa where the spouses do not always merge all their interests, and where the conjugal unit does not always match with economic entity per se (Hill 1972). Therefore, in order to have an analytically productive and practically useful idea of the notion, Wilk (1989:27) suggests that researchers go
‘beyond the “Black Box” by re-defining the household as a social unit with differential interests, power dynamics, and unstable relations - where equilibrium is mediated through subtle negotiations between protagonists. In Wilk’s view, this social unit is made of a set of “social relations and practices that generate a number of functions and activities.” Such functions and activities, he suggests, should include production of labor, and allocation and consumption of resources. This refined definition of the concept, in addition to providing clearer boundaries, suggests that the household is a dynamic arena where the interests of married adults and children converge or diverge, with some degree of negotiation between the actors for the attainment of the objectives of the members taken individually and as a group.

The Household and the Negotiations within

The newer understanding of the household highlighted above transcends and ultimately challenges previous assumptions that overemphasize the authority of the male head of household over his dependents, including his wife/wives. It also hints at the underlying agency of dependents as well as the possible remapping of household relations because of ongoing cultural change. For instance, in her contribution to an edited volume, Ann Whitehead (1981) critically examined the relations between husband and wife, and coined the notion of “conjugal contract” to describe the terms on which husbands and wives exchange on various aspects of their conjugal lives in industrial and non-industrial contexts. Kandiyoti (1988) refers to bargaining within the patriarchy, and Sen (1999) uses the phrase “conflict and cooperation” to refer to dynamics which diverge or converge depending on the state of alteration of resources and relationships between male and female, as well as the goals pursued by the actors (Oppong 1983; Koenig et al. 2000). Saul (1989c) also observed negotiation strategies, in West Africa, which include some measured coercion, and which are often critical to the productive success of the head of household.
Relations of production, allocation of resources within the household, the nature of family budgets, and the importance of women’s economic autonomy also attracted considerable scholarly attention and interest (Meillassoux 1964, 1981; Hill 1969; Guyer 1980b; Donham 1985; Turritin 1988; Saul 1989a, b, c; Clark 1989, Leach 1992; David 1996; Schroeder 2001). In this perspective, Jane Guyer’s compelling work on separate and common household budget (1980b, 1984a) provided a clearer understanding and differentiation in the perception of the household between the west and the non-western context. Whitehead’s and Guyer’s pioneering theoretical frameworks were to be substantiated more expansively in Wilk’s edited volume (1989), *The Household Economy: Reconsidering the Domestic Mode of Production*, arguably, one of the most comprehensive theoretical and analytical approaches to the concept of the household and the embedded internal negotiations. Pooling from various geographical areas and ethnographic cases, the contributors to the volume provide an updated clarification of the concept that improves earlier perception of it as a unit of production underpinned by a moral economy. Revisiting this previous perception Beal (1989) claims the political economic nature of the household after looking at it as a setting in which members get involved not just for the interest of the whole group but also as individuals with vested economic interests. In the same line, Wilk reminds us of the internal rules of the household in which the authority of the patriarch, usually the male head of the production unit, is not ruled out. However, he cautions us that often the patriarch needs to resort to “sweetness” as a negotiation tool in activities that aim to produce surplus to the domestic group. Poats et al. (1989) also lay stress on the changing nature of traditional social relations in the household, which suggests that the patriarch also face necessary adjustments to the volition of the dependent members in order to execute household projects successfully.
The cases that display fluctuating dynamics within domestic groups challenge the assumption of the potential for tradition and culture to grant males and heads of household categorical rights of coercion on women and junior males in non-Western settings. Though the resort to coercion as a negotiation tool can be observed in West Africa, Saul (1989c) also warns us about the limitations of this means. In fact, it became apparent when looking at the alternatives the coerced person has in the wider social field that success often depends not on brute force but on the actors’ skills in “the manipulation of the politics of domesticity.” At the same time, Saul pinpoints the unfavorable effect of busy schedules of wives of prosperous farmers on their own autonomous economic undertakings, but, he suggests that the lack of such initiatives does not mean that they lack of autonomy. This point is reminiscent of Polly Hill’s (1969) and Longhurst’s (1982) ethnographies of secluded Muslim women in Hausa villages in Nigeria. These studies highlight the unsuspected advantages that secluded women draw from their confinements despite conventional wisdom to the contrary. Gender construction of space mediated by local ideology of gender division of labor burdens men with all outdoor activities - including farm work and fetching water – while keeping women close to the hearth. Women, then, draw benefits from seclusion by practicing small scale, yet profitable “hidden trade,” consisting of selling grains and processing food. In contrast, women out of seclusion are shown to be economically less successful, if not poor, in comparison to those secluded. These observations resonate with Saul’s in Burkina Faso (1981) where secluded Muslim women of the Tijani group seemed to derive advantages in similar circumstances. In these situations, it seems that when wives and husbands fulfill their obligations they receive some advantages that compensate for the restrictions imposed on them. We can say that secluded women barter their
inability to go outdoors with freedom from farming and other burdensome chores, doubled with improved opportunities for economic survival.

It is perhaps the same rationale that led economically unproductive Gambian men, in Schroeder’s “Gone to their Second Husbands” (2001), to be open to previously culturally unacceptable behavior of their wives and to keep a low profile vis-à-vis them when they make important contributions to the family economy and budget thanks to their booming small plot rice farming. The terms of negotiation here seem to be that since men cannot fulfill their expected social and bread-winning duties, women will take them over provided they can also deviate from their former roles. Similarly, in her ethnography of Ashanti market women, Gracia Clark (1989, 1994) provides fascinating detail on household budget separation by spouses; and shows the difference between individual and household initiative, and the way actors of the household implicitly negotiate with each other to meet the expected duties. For instance, she points out that it is improbable for market women to divert household labor in favor of her trade and that reciprocally it is impossible for her household to draw on her market proceeds. Clark (1994) also analyzes the intricacy of the duolocal pattern of residence that exists among the Ashanti, where the matrilineage has a stronger pull than the husband-wife or the father-child relations. Clark demonstrates that every single obligation of women towards their husbands and of men towards their wives, including sexual relations, is based on a tacit contract, a precision that is reminiscent of Malinowski’s interpretation of the gifts that the Tobriand Island man offers his wife a present (1984: 54). Thus, men are expected to provide “chop money”29 for women to cook for them and the women’s children (the hearth-hold). But when in a polygynous household the man provides less money to one wife than another, or when the woman cooks carelessly for

29 Grocery money.
her husband this is interpreted as a warning about a lack of sexual interest. If a man does not have appetite for his wife’s food this is also metaphorically interpreted the same way. On the other hand, if a man is unable to provide “chop money” due to retirement or some other reason, this also implies a termination of marriage, which Ashanti women perceive as a process rather than an event.

Though one may think that duolocal residence and matrilineal descent are the driving force that informs the negotiating and contracting abilities of Ashanti women, it is now clear that in many African contexts, culture and socialization alone are not sufficient ingredients to control and maintain dependents’ obedience to patriarchal authority. Hodgson and McCurdy (2001) give examples in which women – daughters or wives – go against unfair treatments in the least ‘socially acceptable’ way, even to the risk of being stigmatized as “wayward”, “wicked,” or worse. In Nigeria, there are cases where some women, to meet their objectives, have either gone so far as to divorce their “useless” husbands, or accepted to shift from “respectable ladies” to being branded as “wayward” ones (Parpart 2001).

Negotiation is not something that happens only between spouses in the household. It goes beyond gender boundaries, and involves other dependents. For example, it has been also noticed that fathers do not always have unlimited power over the utilization over the labor of their dependent sons. Hill (1972) earlier illustrated the terms of the gandu practice that allows sons to work in fathers’ farms for three days in a five-day week, in return for some privileges. A father will have to pay his sons if he wants them to provide more labor. Sara Berry (1985) explains why in Nigeria farming fathers work towards creating diverse opportunities for their sons through cocoa cultivation. The negotiation in this case revolves around the tacit contract that investing in their sons will care for their parents when they retire. The agency and negotiation skills displayed
in the literature resonate with reality observed in Southwest Burkina Faso, where women muddle effectively through a relatively rigid social organization.

**The Social Organization and land Access among the Dagara**

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the Dagara patrilineage, that is the *vir*, is constituted by males and females who trace their relationship of descent to the original male ancestor and founder of the “house.” The *vir* is usually famous for its unity and segmentation. It is unified spiritually by the *bɔwen*, the shrine of the major Dagara initiation, *Baɔr* (*Bagr*). In normal circumstances, the *Baɔr* convenes every three or four years and re-enacts the fusion of the many individual buildings and blocks of building that claim belonging to the larger *vir*. At a lower stratum, the various segments of lineage cohere around one lineage shrine called *nyiur* or *danyiur*, the root. The *nyiur*, supposedly represents the stump, the root of the segment of lineage, and is a central shrine for the lineage segment. It is believed to be the guarantor of fertility, productivity, and peace for the members.

Besides the *nyiur*, there are also other important shrines: the *kpiin*, (pl. *kpimƐ*), which is usually made of a small stone-topped block of mud on the ground at a corner of the shrine house. The basic *kpiin* can be reinforced numerically with wooden epitomes (*kpimƐ*) of dead adult males of the lineage segment. Each male member of the segment who builds a house away from the initial segment building can decide to build a *kpiin*, if he plays the role of father in the new unit, and if his father, the genitor, is dead. The physical proximity to the *kpiin* allows the person to access the spirit of his dead father easily for intercession near the founding ancestors and God, on his behalf. I leave out other possible individual shrines from this tentative enumeration because they bear less weight in understanding the current study of household relations. Each
lineage segment performs at least one collective sacrifice per year mainly after harvest, as a way to give thanks to the various shrines and divinities. Therefore, the bowed, which devolves to vir, the patrilineage, does not receive yearly thanks or collective type of sacrifice other than during the periodic three-or-four-year rounds. As I show later in the analysis, ancestral worship plays a major role in the economic life of the Dagara.

Another identity marker among the Dagara is balu (or belu), which each Dagara person bears necessarily from her/his mother who in turn received from her mother. Balu which is a subsidiary tag, is of lesser importance than vir and dɔwru. There is neither an internal structure nor a spiritual or geographic nucleus for balu, which makes it less important. However, whether it is emphasized depends often on the Dagara sub-group or geographical area in which it is contextualized. For instance, it is more visible than among the Dagara-Lobr than the Dagara-Wule group, which constitutes most of the people in the sample of this study. Balu has been wrongly used in Burkina-Faso since colonial time and until now to apply to the Dagara as a patronymic. Most Dagara intellectuals from Burkina Faso attribute this gross identity mistake to the will of the French colonial administrator and anthropologist Henri Labouret to make the case that the people of his so-called Lobi Branch are culturally homogenous.

As is the case in many other parts of Burkina, and West Africa, farmland is not for sale. It is originally attributed to the first settler of the lineage by the chief of the earth-shrine, tengan-sob, the male elder of the patrilineage holding custody of the land of what Goody called the “parish,” that is, the geographical zone under their spiritual control (Goody 1967:70). The tengan-sob only normally requests a few chickens and sorghum-beer to perform the settlement authorization ritual during a sacrifice. Once authorized to settle and farm in place, nobody can
expel or retract farming land from the grantees, except in extreme and repeated violations of the “parish” laws.

The male members of the patrilineage, claim collective rights over their given land domain as “our space” (ti zié), and senior males administer farmland to members. However, not all members of the patrilineage do access land for farming nor do they do so in an even way. Women, for instance, are clearly excluded. They are perceived as bound to marry out of the group and into another group eventually. Male members are entitled to land. Yet, ability to secure larger farms and fallows (mupla, pl. mupiel) depends on the strength of the individual male member of the lineage segments to clear new farmlands out of the woods (kie pire). After the males of the lineage segment have opened farms they refer to their holdings as “ti puo,” “our farm” instead “our space.” This clearly hints at the evolution in the relation from a largely collective resource to a more or less individualized one. In fact, once a farm-group clears a new farm for cultivation (kie pire), collective wisdom attributes its primary rights of exploitation to the farm-group or its descendants as long as group memory recollects that pioneering clearing role of the farm-group’s male ascendants. Then, later administration of a land plot let fallow devolves to the senior male of the segment, or the head of the farm-group, whichever is relevant. Many farm-groups also strategically clear large surfaces of land, and turn them into “our fallow” (ti mupla), in an attempt or with the intent to secure land for their progeny. However, this only works when all members of the lineage segment or sub-segments satisfy their needs for farmland with the existing patrimony.

Recently, a pervasive tendency for lineage members to challenge claims over land by other members of the same lineage has been observed. The narrative of “the father’s fallowed land,” that is, the fact of claiming a piece of land based on the argument that “my father was the
one who used to farm it last,” seems to be reconfiguring definitions of access to land. This narrows criteria for land access from the lineage to the domestic group, that is, the unit that is bound by common residence or production. In plain terms, it suggests that a member of a patrilineage, usually a male, has the right to farm a portion of the lineage’s farming space without much protocol, as long as another member from a different unit of production had not farmed that portion in recent memory. Consequently, if a fallow is let unfarmed for a long period of time, another member of the lineage can express need to farm it, and usually will win the case if it has to be decided by a council of elders. For this reason, people prefer to lend their fallows to friends outside the lineage; which allows them to claim it back at any time in the future. This suggests that land can also be acquired through personal network and strategies.

The Dagara typically practice subsistence agriculture and develop basic pastoralism, although many of them earn a living in the secondary or tertiary sector in urban areas, as they acquired education because of the European encounter. In the case of a household headed by an adult male, the produce of his main farm belongs to him, with the provision that he meet the requirements of his dependents. He may also delegate a senior wife for controlling a portion of it, especially if it is under staple crop. He is responsible, however, for taking decisions on expenditures. It is also common for heads of households to allocate some small plots of land to members for their small personal farms. The returns from such productions normally belong to the individual. The main farm managed by the head is priority, and labor schedules for that take precedence over the work that needs to be done on individual farms.

The rule of marriage among Dagara is exogamous to the patriclan with virilocal residence. It prohibits union with patrikin, kiŋkuta-dem, and parallel matrikin. Wives are

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30 Because the land law in Burkina Faso seems quite ambiguous, disputes about farmlands are usually not resolved by modern courts but by customary rules.
married by transferring goods from the groom’s group to the bride’s, after which the husband claims rights to his wife’s workforce, sexuality, and reproduction services. A married woman who had an adulterous relationship needs to be cleansed from the “soiling” caused on her by the illegitimate partner. The individual Dagara normally belongs to their patrilineage, yir, only if he/she was conceived after payment of, at least, the initial amount of the mother’s bridewealth. However, in the event that a child was born from a relation between a female descendant of the yir and a man whose yir did not transfer bridewealth, the child, who is stereotypically referred to as san-yir-bie (child procreated in the mother’s father’s house), normally remains in the mother’s father’s yir but is not considered as a member. The residence of such a child in his or her mother’s patrilineage does not falsify the predominance of the patrilineage, because there are internal factors beyond residence (Fortes 1953), such as access to ancestral shrine and other rituals from which the child is excluded because of his/her unconventional and complex identity.

The “domestic domains as well as the politico-jural, economic and religious domains are made up of relations of husband and wife, parent and child, sibling and sibling” (Fortes 1969), though it may be extended to include individuals affiliated in other ways (Saul 1989a: 350). Polygyny is widespread and practiced by men who can afford to pay multiple bridewealths. Married women are viewed in their husband’s group as outsiders within and pretty much so in their own patrilineage: they have no claims to privileges such as inheritance or land from either patrilineage. Most men below their thirties have one wife but they marry a second wife if their assets increase. Levirate – the practice that consists in inheriting the widow(s) of a patrilineal brother – is also common. However, a widow has the right to reject a leviratic union; and many

31 This kind of situation is perceived as an embarrassment to the members of the yir because of cultural and spiritual complexities surrounding children born in these conditions. Most members of the yir prefer not to live with a san-yir-bie, especially if it is a boy.
widows do so. A widow who chooses to reject the levirate option can still stay in her husband’s house, and farm as much of his land as her resources allow, as long as she does not remarry. But once she decides to remarry or to move from the marital residence, she loses her prerogative to the farm. Some widows leap to this rare prerogative and engage in the women-friendly organic cotton production if they have sufficient labor supplies.

The property of a man who died is inherited by their patrilineal kinsmen. Immovable goods, mostly land and buildings, are inherited by male members of the deceased’s farming household, generally his sons or brothers, who also claim the farm. Movable goods are also inherited within the patrilineage but devolve, in theory, to the closest senior with the status of father – to the deceased. However, in practice, adult males of the same farming household or domestic group inherit goods. Inheritance of movable goods, which Goody observed (1962; 1967) as transferring from a man to his sister’s son, sounds like a myth in the realities of the people of my research area. Even if the practice then existed during Goody’s ethnography or in a distant past, it does not prevail today. There is, however, some type of mythical extra-patrilineage movable property inheritance in the area referred to as gbandiru. It is literally equivalent to “gamble winning” and refers approximately to an inheritance of movables in a male person’s matrilineage or matriclan. In the absence of a concrete instance of gbandiru in collective memory, local narratives speculate that gbandiru only occurs when there is no one responding from the deceased man’s patrilineage or patriclan at large; a situation which is quite improbable, granted the extended nature of “family” and descent ties. It is also assumed that a person who dared to contract into gbandiru had the obligation to abide by the rules of the gamble. This means taking care of the dependent children of the deceased as well as his widow(s).
The oldest person with the status of “father” inherits cattle. But if the relationships between the deceased and the proclaimed inheritor were not that bright, a son of the deceased may challenge the legitimacy of the pretender, especially if the cattle were acquired with income from common household farm productions. However, that defiant son will make sure that he does not fall in some spiritual snares that can lead to his own death. But even in the event the heir had good relationships with his deceased (classificatory) brother or son, he is unlikely to show explicit interest in plow oxen or cart acquired by the deceased’s household through farm production, though he can request them for temporary usage from time to time. I have witnessed an intriguing situation of fission in a domestic group because of the death of the head and competition to inherit movable property.

Mike who emigrated in Cote d’Ivoire bought a plow, a decade ago, for his brother in the village. This brother had trained two oxen from the segment’s cattle pen – partly consisted of bridewealth payments for his daughters – as draft animal for this plow. After he passed away, his son continued to use the plow and the team of oxen. When Mike retired from his job in Cote d’Ivoire and came back home, a few years after his brother died, he decided to split the household and take his own animals away. In fact, the relationships between Mike and his deceased brother’s son deteriorated, especially, when he adamantly declined to pay the bridewealth of the nephew’s second wife. Mike justified his refusal by the fact that his own father had not paid two bridewealths for him. He said that if his nephew wanted to marry a second wife he should pay the bridewealth out of his personal savings. When their relationships became bitter, Mike declared he would take away the plow. However, he told his nephew that he could still use the oxen since these belonged to the patrilineal segment including both households. Obviously, this was a trick since his nephew was not in a position to buy a new
plow. By the time the nephew can afford to buy a plow, the oxen will probably be too old to be of such use. If they are sold, the proceeds will normally belong to Mike who is the manager of all the cattle, as the head of the patrilineal segment.

Unmarried women can have access to farming plots from their fathers or brothers. However, this piece of land is returned once the woman gets married. Married women may also have access to small plots through their husbands or friends for temporary exploitation. Such plots of friends, which are given following the consent of their husbands, are generally meant for growing small cash crops or garden produce to be used in cooking. Until recently, women’s main produce was peanuts or soybeans, meant to be sold to buy ingredients that enrich the woman’s ‘cooking-pot’. But thanks to the promotion of an organic cotton farming project spearheaded by the Swiss NGO, Helvetas, some women now successfully engage in growing organic cotton, also referred to as “women’s cotton,” on small plots. Men grow sorghum, millet, and maize primarily as family’s food. Their wives and children and other dependents also work on these farms. However, the food crops can be sold, normally if they are in excess of the needs of the household, but also depending on the head’s wishes or the household’s cash needs. Heads of household also produce other cash crops such as rice, pepper, or peanuts. However, the impact of these crops on farmers’ budget is small. Since the 1990s, the dominant cash crop is cotton. Cash income from a category of activities of household members fall under the seal of what is known locally as “hot money.” Before such money is spent it needs to be cooled by the head of household or the older male person of the segment. I elaborate on this in the next section.

**Hot Money and the Spheres of Hot Money**

In this community, money can be viewed as good, or bad, evil and risky, depending on factors that are well understood by most people. There are many terms to describe types of
income. Ethnographic accounts from Africa report the sensory modifiers, mainly gustative and olfactory, as local codes to convey such perceptions of money. Thus, Shipton (1989) reports that the Luo of Kenya use the expression “bitter money” while referring to some types of income. This includes money earned from the sale of land and some specific crops, or from activities considered immoral or illegal. Shipton notes that men and women have differential access to such commodities. Similarly, in his metaphoric title “Money has No Smell”, Paul Stoller (2002) borrows a catchword from one of his New York-based informants from Niger to show the internal conflict that pulls an immigrant between the religious prescription against selling art objects deemed idolatrous, and his honest struggle to survive and provide for his transnational family. Behind the modifiers used by the two authors is implied a moral view of money.

Fiéloux (1980) describes also the notion of bitter money from among the Lobi of Southwest Burkina Faso. However, there is no suggestion of immorality that underpins the concept in her account. She rather reveals how the Lobi view bitter money, as well as the exclusive conditions of production of bitter crops and the resulting prescribed spheres of exchange.

The Dagara of Southwest Burkina Faso have also a notion expressed with a modifier about a category of income similar to, but not identical with, Fiéloux’s bitter money: hot money. Hot money is an income the spending of which results in supernatural retribution, if not “cooled” ritually by the head of household or the male senior of the domestic group through pouring ashes on the ancestors’ shrine (kpiin) or sacrificing a chicken to it. Some economic activities produce hot money. Understanding the notion of hot money is central for a better comprehension of some structural constraints that bind women and junior dependents of the household.

Hot Money and the Notion of the ‘Hoe-Handle’
Hot money is understood better in the broader framework of the “hoe-handle,” on which Jack Goody (1962) provided an extended commentary. Traditional Dagara view the economy as rooted in agriculture, which is made possible by the farming hoe, the primordial tool for agricultural practice. Consequently, the Dagara see any sector of activity still as derived from the original farming hoe of the patrilineal segment. But if the actor is a married woman, her achievements fall under the hoe-handle of her husband’s.

From traditional Dagara perspective, the original hoe, which the founding ancestor of the lineage used, allowed agricultural production, and the survival and reproduction of the descent group. Since agricultural production used to provide the goods for any exchange as well, only through it – was it believed – could one diversify economically, for instance, by acquiring cattle. Part of the cattle or small stock could later be used in sacrifices to the ancestors and other divinities, or to marry more wives and increase the size of the family. This is the reason why farming and small-scale animal husbandry are so intertwined in the economic life of rural Dagara. Wealth in agricultural products and cattle, which used to be more of a source of symbolic capital is now invested in goods of prestige, and in other activities such as trading, building zinc-roofed houses (for rent), schooling, including paying for the advanced education of

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hot-money yielding</th>
<th>Cold-money yielding</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Crop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Black Animals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sorghum</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
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<td>Pepper</td>
<td>Guinea-fowl</td>
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*These crops are harvested from trees that grow naturally in the farm.
the children. As a result, any direct or indirect outcome of this investment is viewed as still rooted in the hoe-handle of the lineage. This understanding has also categorized crop income in hot versus non-hot (see Table 8).

Beyond the symbolism of production, the evocation of the hoe-handle also brings to memory the patrilineal ancestors. The hoe-handle is also referred to as the “father’s hoe,” as opposed to the maternal uncle’s. It suggests the potential for a quick retribution by the father and, by extension, the patrilineal ancestors in case the actor engages in deviant behavior. Linking hot money to the concept of the hoe-handle will improve our comprehension of people’s attitudes towards incomes that derive from a specific category of sources. Earnings derived from the sale of sorghum, millet, tobacco, pepper, cotton, cowpeas, cattle, and sheep are hot, and ideologically different from the other category that comprises non-hot activities such as the sale of yellow corn production, petty-trading, or marketing pigs, goats, chicken, peanuts, soybeans, shea-nuts, horticultural products, and sauce condiments grown in the farm. The infringer to the rule of cooling supposedly attracts, at the very least, bad luck in his/her later production. However, the repercussion of such negligence can go further. It is believed that the negligent person can experience a real misfortune, including death. The need for cooling hot incomes applies to all members of the household, including the head. The difference, however, is that since he is the person cooling his own money, there is no risk for him losing any portion of it. The fear of supernatural reprisals for engaging in hot-money-generating activities increases the authority of the household head, and guarantees relative subordination of dependents who engage in such an activity. Depending on the amount of the income, the head of household or the male senior of the domestic group cools the money by pouring ashes on the ancestors’ shrine (kpiin) or sacrificing a chicken to it.
One essential question that arises is why some farm produces are hot and others are not. Is it possible to generate a model that enhances our understanding of hot income? What are the general properties of the domain of dangerous income among the Dagara, if we want to reach an understanding comparable to what offered by Fiéloux (1980) among the Lobi and by Shipton (1989) among the Luo? At first sight, one is tempted to believe that hot incomes are derived from any produce of the land and returns from animal husbandry. But a more careful look at Table 8 indicates that hot farm products and non-hot ones share many characteristics. This complicates our attempt for a model that successfully explains the basis for the categorization of hot versus non-hot money. Thus, we build our explanation drawing on Dagara ideologies about the various crops and animals.

A scrutiny of Dagara symbolism provides that domestic animals can be divided in two categories: black animals and white animals. Black animals (cattle, sheep, and guinea fowls) have very high local symbolic and economic value. They serve in paramount sacrifices and payment of bridewealth. White animals (goats and chickens) are also important, but of lesser value compared to the former set. Pigs and ducks do not even figure in the classification because they are recent introductions. They do not have any symbolic value in the local ideology. Therefore, they are not used in sacrifices. Apart from the meat and sale income they provide, they are even scarcely referred to as animals when assessing a person’s wealth. Further inquiry revealed that this latter set of animals entered the breeding habits of the people at a relatively recent period. They are “post-ancestral animals” that were not labeled in the nomenclature.

Every economic achievement of the traditional Dagara is viewed literally as a “produce of the hoe” (kuur bo’on, pl. kuur bomo), that is, of farming; because production is conceived as rooted in that original ancestral resource, the hoe, which is believed to be their essential means of
production and reproduction of the economy. For this reason, it is recommended that income from any cold-money-yielding activity be presented to the ancestral shrine. However, cooling income derived from hot-money products is mandatory. In terms of farm produce, crops such as sorghum, millet, tobacco, white beans, cowpeas, and pepper are of paramount symbolic importance. (Note that cotton does not figure among them; and I give further explanation about it below). The edible crops in this category used to be exclusively grown for subsistence purpose. Let it be recalled, as I elaborated in chapter five, that it is not well viewed to sell certain food staples before a given period of the year, even in the present day.

Although peanuts, rice, maize and the other cold-money-yielding crops are farmed and edible as well, they are not viewed with the same earnestness as sorghum and white beans, can even fall in household members’ personal farm activities and budgets. It seems that these crops entered the local economy at a later period, just as pigs and ducks did. The adoption of these crops, clearly, coincided with the people’s voluntary or coerced engagement in farming for cash, as is the case of cotton; but certainly after the ancestral classification as well. In contemporary reality, a look at the hot-money-yielding crops, and especially the trajectory of cotton, suggests that these crops are commodities with high exchange value in the local and now the global context. Cotton has less symbolic value in the local belief system, but returns to its sale are considered as hot. In fact, a stark contradiction resides in the classification of cotton as a hot-money yielding crop. Interviews with village elders suggested that the Dagara of the region adopted cotton farming, at a recent period, after they discovered cotton-made cloth with Moosé peddlers traveling to the Gold Coast, current Ghana. Ester and Jack Goody’s comparison of the sartorial habits of the Dagara and the Gonja (1996: 86) seem to support the oral testimonies. Cotton production is said to have been, then, the exclusive prerogative of a selected number of
elders prior to its being transformed into a forced export cash crop in the early 1920s. If this claim about the penetration period of this crop in the agricultural practices of the area is verified, cotton would have entered the arena far later than maize and rice. This raises questions as to why income derived from it is hot while income from rice and maize is not. One could conjecture that labeling some activities as producing hot money seems consistent with senior males’ aim and ability to control income of juniors and women dependent. However, with the existence of new economic opportunities, dependents bypass the need to cool their incomes, by now engaging in activities that generate incomes that do not require cooling.

Once ritually cooled, the hot money is normally returned to its owner after the household head retains a nominal amount of it for him. Some greedy household heads retain an amount of money that dependents consider excessive. Such cupidity can spoil future relations between the dependent and the senior man. But heads of households are usually less covetous when they cool the money of male dependents than that of married women. For this reason, this section will focus more on women’s strategies rather than all dependent members of the household.

The reason why household heads act with more restraint with their sons and other male dependents is perhaps the fear of rebellion. Junior males can decide to migrate to urban places or secede from the household or domestic group, and build their own, which ultimately results in weakening labor for the senior or head of household. Married women are not in the same situation because they have comparatively limited options. Because of the bride-wealth that the husband or head of household pays for the marriage, there is the common and lingering – and perhaps unconscious - belief that marrying a wife is an economic investment that should yield returns, most importantly, in childbearing and labor. In this same line of reasoning, when women earn money with their own activity, the head of household feels entitled to part of it. However,
since the spouses keep separate budgets, husbands can rarely reach the goal of controlling their wife’s monetary incomes. But some women willingly share some of their personal earnings with their husband. Showing the money to the husband, and giving him some of it, is a strategy some married women use to pursue greater harmony in the household, and get some leeway in other respects. But in fact, no social norm compels a married woman to show her income to her husband. The case when the source of that money falls within the sphere of hot income is if a married woman sells cotton or beans, the only “hot crops” married women can be allowed to grow.

If a greedy head of household withholds too much of the money that a woman has to disclose to him so that he “cools” it, the woman would generally not resort to confrontation, though confrontation is not always excluded, when the woman feels she has enough support from her husband’s relatives, and her own relatives and acquaintances. Instead, the woman’s resistance would more frequently take the form of opting not to engage in hot-money-yielding activities, such as raising cattle and sheep. This is clearly seen in the response to organic cotton, which was promoted especially for women; most women hesitated to take it up. In addition, most women who did decide to farm it did so as a proxy for their husbands. The few women who do grow organic cotton and fully control the proceeds have enhanced household negotiation strategies that are not available to others. Most other women prefer not to engage in “risky activities” – as one woman I interviewed called it – and turn to safer personal projects such as small-scale chicken and pig-raising, selling fast-food, brewing sorghum-beer, distilling alcohol (zònzòn), and gathering shea-nuts and selling shea-butter when possible.

Circumventing the Hot Money
Pig breeding is now becoming the most popular non-farming activity for women in the Dano area. Since pigs are omnivorous animals, feeding them in the wet season is easy because of the abundance of fresh grass. It is also complementary to another common activity, sorghum-beer brewing, because women use the mash residue to feed the pigs. The pigs are kept in the pen only for five months (June to October) and are let free to stray in the open during the dry season. Each woman feeds her pigs twice a day whether they are in the pen or left to wander. Pork is consumed in significant quantity in the area. Around Christmas, women will normally sell many of the male pigs that they raise. Around Easter, they sell another set leaving only one boar and the females in the pen for raising. The sales provide women with money to care for personal needs or invest in other activities or acquire some equipment. When money from a cold-money-yielding activity is invested in a non-hot one, the derived returns remain non-hot, since the sphere of the activity is the same. But if a person invests their cold-money into a hot-money-generating activity, the returns now fall into the sphere of hot-money. Dependents are usually very careful to swap spheres, except when they aim to increase their own social capital and their status within their husband’s lineage.

A woman typically owns five pigs; and a woman who does not own a pigpen with pigs is looked down upon by villagers in current time. It is not an exaggeration to say that pig-raising has become the barometer for assessing a woman’s economic worth and symbolic capital in the area. Moreover, while not automatically related, pig-raising gives additional motive to women to brew sorghum-beer, and additional source of income (Saul 1981), sorghum-beer brewing yields residue mash that is given to the pigs. At Easter, a woman can sell her remaining pigs for, at least, 30,000 CFA francs, which is a considerable amount from local standards. A long distant
One may wonder whether in the event of a downturn men will not attempt to include these successful and rewarding activities of women into the hot category, as it happened in the similar situation of Gambian women’s swamp rice cultivation, where men, supported by development agencies, took advantage of women’s economic successes (Schroeder 1999). I speculate that such a recategorization of income is impossible as long as the activity does not involve land. Pig farming and other such activities only demand the personal investment of the person engaged in. Therefore, as long as a woman fulfills her normal requirement for daily labor in the common household farm, she should be able to keep her activity as a private concern. The non-hot activities that do not involve land are perceived as not only “post-ancestral,” they are also non-ancestral; and no spiritual basis exists for making such a case.

An important issue to be addressed now is the way women navigate to accomplish all these activities without causing disagreement in the household, for example by having difficulty

32 Telephone conversation with Dera, October 17, 2009.
as a result of not meeting the labor demands on the farm, as labor diversion is one nodal cause of
conflict during bottleneck periods. This is one domain where a woman’s personal negotiation
skills become crucial. A woman who shares some of her money with her husband sets a record
straight and compels the husband’s sympathy when for diverting some of her time to her own
personal activities. Depending on their position and wealth, some women will even hire one or
several laborers, when they are available, to do their share of the work on the common farm and
free them to devote more time to their lucrative personal activities.

Since most women normally join men on the farm in the mid-morning, after taking care
of house chores that include processing food they can also feed their pigs and finish other
personal business before leaving for the farm. It is now common to hear men complain that their
wives are more concerned about their pigs than their family members, a complaint whose
relevance a woman acknowledged partially by saying defensively: “our pigs are all we have, but
we don’t forget our family. The problem is that our family members don’t assist us in any
activity related to the pigs.” Pointing to a pigpen she was building, she added: “Look, is that a
woman’s work? They [the men] say we do not give them our money. How can you give your
money to somebody who won’t help you?”33 This point reminds us of labor organization within
the household and the way it affects the nature of household budgets.

In a cotton-producing household, the demand for a woman’s work is greater than in non-
cotton producing one. The greater labor demand in cotton-farming household is compensated,
however, by greater abundance of food because these farmers are also able to produce more food
grains. In this vein, it is locally observed that “he who grows cotton grows food.” Conversely,
most women in non-cotton households have more non-farm time for their personal activities. But

33 Bebe, a woman from Mébar, 3/14/08
the downside is that they often face the consequence of underproduction of food crops in their household, and therefore resort to gains from their autonomous activities to supplement any food deficiency. The advantage of surplus time they enjoy is diminished by their inability to spare the surplus income they make from their activities. The head of household who cannot provide enough food for the members keeps a low profile, and his wife can have more visibility, though she is normally careful not to overstep and be branded “the man of the house,” a stigma that very few women would want to carry in this social setting.

Women’s strategies for circumventing the hot money issue require a lot of personal planning and refined negotiation skills. Three factors can be singled out as a pattern among the women I observed as maneuvering with success: age, marital status, and personal capability. Women below their mid-forties particularly show a spirit of independence, and do not seem to have any problem dodging the hot money disadvantage. As highlighted earlier in the paper, widows who remain in their deceased husbands’ residence also use the produce of the farm on the land of their late husband to the best of their advantage, even if they refuse to enter a leviratic relation with a classificatory brother of their deceased husband. Married women with skills in marital negotiation also experience less pains about enjoying their cooled hot money. The following case of Rosine, though unique, is remarkable in demonstrating that despite the existence of structural constraints, the personal strategies of actors play a significant role in circumventing unfavorable prescriptions.

Rosine is a Dagara woman who married a Moaga man.34 Yet, Rosine and her husband and family live in the Dagara sociocultural and geographical space. She even redefined herself

34 Moaga is the singular for Moose’. The Moosé are the major ethnic group in Burkina Faso. Because of land constraints, and natural inclemency, many Moose from the Yatenga region have been practicing a westbound migration to places where the climate is more favorable for farming. However, recent research
with the ethnic identity of her husband. Though more common than previously, marrying out of the ethnic group is not always approved. Rosine did not only marry out, she also renounced her former Roman Catholic faith to embrace the Muslim religion of her husband, in a setting where over 80 percent of the population now belong themselves as Roman Catholic. Rosine’s decision cost her to lose some of her relations, but she is economically self-reliant and self-sufficient. She owns the biggest restaurant in the village. Her household also owns a farm, and Rosine is one of the first women who engaged in the pilot organic cotton production in the area. Prior to this, she was the only woman in the village to ever grow conventional cotton, a crop that has long been and remains exclusive to men.

One obvious motive for Rose being such a pioneer in women’s cotton production is the new structure in which she entered. Her Muslim marriage created for her a new regime of opportunities that she exploits to her own advantage and that of her household. It is true that her choice also brought along with it some constraints, but the advantages she incurred from it outweigh the disadvantages. She owns the returns to her cotton. When she received the payment from her cotton sale in 2005, she “handed all of it to [her] husband for consideration. And he only took 10,000 CFA Francs out of the total 70,000.” “I used 10,000 CFA Francs to buy corn for my family, and the rest I invested in other things,” Rosine said, pointing to the restaurant that she extended. Rosine’s single “major problem is land; not because I am a woman. But because I am married to a Moaga man.”

May it be recalled that land is not for sale in the village. Farmers have access to it through patrilineal group membership, or through individual networks. Being a woman, and on top of the bargain, being married - to a stranger - Rosine is not entitled to any

(Gray 2002, Peters 2004) indicates that land access is becoming difficult to Moosé migrants in the West and Southwest of Burkina-Faso.

plot of land. She borrows farming land. But the lenders “reclaim it only after one year of exploitation.”

I suspect two possible reasons that lead land lenders to retract their plots of land. First, Rosine pays teenage children to collect animal dung to make compost because she does not own cattle. She uses the compost during the wet season to improve the soil of her farm. Then, the lenders who see the success of her crop become envious and take the land back in order to take advantage of the residual effect of the compost. Another likely reason is that Rosine’s husband not being Dagara as the lenders, and therefore not being constrained by the local customs and understandings, the lenders fear that if they allow the borrower perennial use, Rosine and her husband may end up claiming rights over the plot of land. If such a claim ever materializes, the claimant is very likely to win the case, as non-traditional forces of resolution of land conflict, in the person of the State local representative, will be called in to make the ruling. The ruling is likely to favor Rosine and her husband, if they succeed in proving that they are land-short.

But in 2007, Rosine used her own networks to acquire a gift of a large portion of land (about 50 acres) as a gift in land-rich area of Fitengue, at about 17 miles north of her village, in a multi-ethnic area, under Pwi (Puguli) custodianship, to where new land-poor migrants are fleeing. She learnt about land availability in the area and inquired about the issue with a high-school student of Fitengue who rented an apartment in Kpai, Rosine’s hometown, as he attended high-school. That student was a also regular client at Rosine’s restaurant. He later reportedly put Rosine in contact with his parents, and after further exchange, they accepted to offer her the plot of land in appreciation for “her kindness to their son.” Rosine was required to provide a chicken, some millet flour, and sorghum-beer for the official traditional transfer protocol. Though nothing else was required, Rosine said she voluntarily gave his benefactor a gift in money, but would not
say how much. Rosine’s choice in marriage opened new doors for her while it closed a few others. She circumvented the relatively rigid structure wired with the fences of spiritual or social prescriptions by relying on personal choice, initiative, and skill. The next section presents situations of other household members, mainly widows, who muddle through the structure successfully. Their experiences also indicate the importance of negotiation skills and the relevance of personal choices.

Widows in the Cotton Production Era

The factors that ultimately influence the lives of widows are tightly linked to the sociocultural matrix of the place where they marry, such as the type of descent – patrilineality or matrilineality – and the consequent mode of access to land and control of others. However, there is converging empirical evidence that widows are very often victims of gender-based violence in situations leading to property-grabbing, eviction, and psychological abuse (White et al. 2002; Cattell 2003; Izumi 2007), added to the obvious economic vulnerability caused by the departure of the deceased husband, who, in most cases, was the main worker and manager of the family. Despite observation that widows in places with matrilineal institutions generally enjoy more favorable terms of widowhood, this is not a guarantee of continued access and the perpetrators of property grabbing are not always males (Izumi 2007:12). There is some variability in the situation of the widow, and this is not always correlated with the broader arrangements of the social organization of the community of the widow’s husband’s, but the result of her ability to exploit loopholes of such arrangements using favorable individual factors and her relations in the community.

Potash’s groundbreaking edited volume on widows (1986a) provides such a non-static and comprehensive portrait of the situation in Africa. She pointed out that in many situations the
economic self-reliance is characteristic of the widow (Potash 1986b). Although economic self-reliance does not automatically translate into economic success, the situation of most Dagara widows observed in Southwest Burkina Faso presents a picture of the widow in line with the discussion in Potash, but unlike the images of total disempowerment that we encounter frequently in the literature (Cattell 2003; Izumi 2007). A widow in the Dagara communities under discussion has the latitude to enter or reject a leviratic union with a brother of their deceased husband. Besides, irrespective of whether she chooses to enter such a union, and of whether she has children or not, she remains in control of her late husband’s land as long as she does not remarry and, more importantly, remains in the residence of the deceased husband. Despite the physical and psychological disadvantages of having to carry on without a husband, most widows manage their time more freely, and direct labor toward on and off-farm activities that they deem most rewarding. Moreover, they run no risk of losing their income or sharing it with a potentially covetous husband, nor will a senior man dare to withhold excessively from her income if it needs cooling. This allows many industrious widows to move out of economic vulnerability and even acquire a further degree of independence. It is thus relevant to echo Potash (1986) again, by acknowledging that in many situations African widows do have alternatives in spite of their many constraints, which mainly include access to labor, challenges to cater for the kids alone, financial resources, and male manpower for certain punctual activities. The degree of success depends often on how well the choices they make fit in the larger the larger social field and the woman’s deftness in circumventing the loopholes of customary and social norms.

During fieldwork, the situation of some widows drew my attention. Widows, mainly those with less economic security, provide a considerable amount of work during cotton harvest
time, as mentioned in chapter five. Widows are locally placed in two social categories, which the terms used in Cornwall (2001) properly fit: “wayward” and “respectable” widows. Widows who are perceived “wayward” if they do not enter a leviratic union which may be binding, and instead entertain frivolous relations with different men. In contradistinction, the “respectable” widow is the one who enters a leviratic relation, or, who refuses to do so but maintains an attitude socially viewed as dignified. A respectable widow holds high work ethics and undertakes many personal initiatives. The widows in this group are mostly those who do not grow cotton or grow “women’s cotton” – organic cotton. Widows who enter widowhood with adult sons form yet another category. As such, widows can enjoy the advantages of their status of mother or mother-in-law, and access male labor through their son or son-in-laws, their situation is very different from women entering widowhood with younger children. I narrate the cases of three widows to show how women improve in their favor the social dynamics.

Marta was a widow aged 44. She had been a widow since 1993 when her husband returned sick from work migration in Cote d’Ivoire and passed away, leaving her alone with her son and daughter, then aged 11 and 6. Both children are now adult, and married. The household that Marta headed in 2007 was composed of seven members (herself, her mother, her son, her son’s wife, her late brother’s wife and son aged about 12, and an 11-year old kinsman). Since the death of her husband, Marta and her children moved from her husband’s village and relocated to her paternal residence. The reason, she said, was that she refused to engage in a leviratic union, which is the case with many widows among the Dagara. A host of circumstances participated in framing Marta’s life. Once in her paternal household - and due to the premature death of her father and the absence of her full brother who had also migrated to the Cote d’Ivoire, she found herself under the obligation to engage in work deemed fit for males from the local perspective.
She toiled very hard for three years and only relented when her son was old enough to take over. These factors also allowed her to have easy access to land. Actually, she was using her mother’s portion of the land after her father’s death. Her hard work and the work ethics she taught her children soon proved rewarding. She is very industrious and has a social personality that wins her many friends. She did not go to school but is now attending literacy classes. She was the head of the village women’s organization and was in 2007 distinguished as a Leader Woman, a title granted to women by the FARF (Women Autonomous Activity Sponsoring Fund), a state-sponsored organism that promotes women’s income-generating activities, a kind of micro-credit agency. This distinction came along with responsibilities. She is the liaison of the FARF for her village’s women and takes part in all meetings and reports on the meeting deliberation to her base, work for which she receives a compensation of 6,500fcfa (about $18 per month). The Fund also gave her a loan for a bicycle, which she finished paying back.

Marta has grown cotton since 2006. Until 2007-08, she was the only Dagara woman of the area who totally controlled returns of her organic cotton. Many other women took up this activity, but after the first year when their husbands realized it was rewarding, they appropriated the cotton farm in practice and used their wives as mere proxy for growing organic fair cotton. Marta’s unique situation is undoubtedly linked to her independent use of her father’s farmland, and above all to the fact that her single brother died leaving the farm to no other male child of their mother. Access to farmland can therefore be said to be one of the keys to the success of women. The success story of Marta is also tightly linked to her skill in negotiating with her community of birth, including her 27-year old son and his wife. She is very open with her children and especially with her son. Because she looks young for her age, the first time visitor
easily takes her son for her partner. They are so close to each other and tease each other in a friendly manner. The same kind of relations ties her to her married daughter; they act like sisters.

Marta always shares the return of any of her money-making activities (sorghum-beer brewing, sale of a pig, sale of peanuts, fowls, beans) with the members of the household she heads, albeit unequally. She makes decisions in consultation with her son be it for agricultural production or on how and where to allocate the proceeds. Her son also never takes a decision without asking for her opinion. He had even postponed a plan of investment when his mother thought it was either untimely or counter-productive. This was the case when he came back from Ghana two years ago with 20 roofing sheets that he wanted to use to build a small store in the village market. Marta advised that as an “orphan” (so are children who lost either parent referred to), “he could not afford to build a metal roof house in the market while they did not have one in their own compound.”36 The son accepted her judgment and decided to build the house with the iron roof within the compound. “This has raised our honor in the village,” Marta said. Marta’s son is the main male labor provider. In addition, he practices a strategic seasonal migration. Every year, he leaves home in late October, either for Ghana or for Cote d’Ivoire. It is strategic because this prevents him from squandering food resources of the household. Abroad he looks for seasonal jobs and comes back when the farming season arrives. He has used this strategy to build the tin-roof house. Beside cotton, Marta and her household grow millet, corn, and beans. They also breed pigs, goats and chickens. She owns about 10 pigs, 8 goats, 38 guinea fowl and 46 chickens without counting the baby-chicks. As already mentioned, she owns a bicycle, and,

36 The corrugated metal roof house is an important display of a family’s symbolic capital. A swift poverty assessment can be made in a village by looking at the buildings. Nearly each farmer or resident of the village who can afford to do so builds a metal-roofed house, no matter how small. It is an indicator, though not always a reliable one, of acceptable living standards. Compounds where there is no such a house are locally viewed as poor or below poverty.
stands alone as a woman with a bike in Tambirkpere. Her household also owns improved farm equipment (a plow, a donkey-cart, and a pair of draft oxen). Marta’s deceased brother bought the first ox of the pair of draft oxen in 2004, and she and the household purchased a second ox using the proceeds of their cotton sale proceeds. Marta’s success and respectability are rooted in her refusal to enter a leviratic union and her further decision to relocate in her paternal residence. While this decision to relocate made her lose her claim on her late husband’s land, she gained the ability to use her father’s farm and became the “man of the house,” as she refers to herself.

The case of Mameh brings to play different factors. She has been a widow since 1998 and she is mother of three daughters. The farmland previously exploited by her husband— who was socially perceived as a lazy man during his lifetime— has been a central asset for her success. At the death of her “lazy” husband, she initially rejected all the pretenders who wanted to be her levir. Instead, she used a small portion of the land that was previously badly managed by her husband to grow corn and peanuts. In retaliation for her refusal to enter the levirate, one brother of her husband threatened to dispossess her from the land. She energetically stood against him, summoning her potential spoliator before an assembly of the elders of her husband’s lineage where the man was rebuked for irresponsible conduct. The spurned suitor justified his attitude that “Mameh does not have sons and may not be able to farm the plots efficiently.” But regardless, he was rebuked for taking such a sly punitive action against “that well-behaved widow.” Mameh remained on her own for over four years, supplementing her small-scale farming with weekly sorghum-beer brewing. As good beer brewing attracts fans and friends while increasing her own symbolic capital, she gained faithful customers, among whom another classificatory brother of her late husband, Wame. It is only in time that people realized that this wily pretender-turned-levir had a very effective strategy for “conquering” Mameh’s heart. He
displayed multiple identities to achieve his goal. First, he was the good customer and compassionate friend who assisted her in her farm work with his newly purchased plow oxen. In return, she would occasionally assist him in harvesting. The wife of the man did not appreciate his friendship with Mameh. Besides quarreling with her husband at home, she reportedly assaulted Mameh in the street. In that incident, Mameh tore the woman’s clothes to pieces, exposing partially her nudity, or so my interlocutors reported. It was also after that milestone that Mameh claimed: “I have no affair with your husband. I have never planned to, as I have nothing to do with another man. Now that you are accusing me unfairly, I will accept any proposal your husband makes to me.” This last sentence was perhaps the long aimed objective of the patient pretender. When he got home after the women’s fight, his wife vowed to kill him by poisoning his food. The man fled his house and started to live with Mameh. The man summoned his plaintiff wife before an elders’ assembly where he exposed his concern of being poisoned as the reason for fleeing home. He declared: “I dare not sleep at home again. I will go to the house of my deceased brother [Mameh’s deceased husband].” The plaintiff-turned-defendant wife lacked tact again in making her point. She reiterated her threats to kill her husband publicly. The elders rebuked her and called the meeting off, telling the man to do as he likes; and he settled permanently with Mameh.

Now Wame, which is the man’s name, started exploiting the farm over the wide space of Mameh's late husband. Since Mameh is economically very successful, the relationship between them seems egalitarian and balanced. One could also extrapolate that Wame behaves because he may be thrown out of the house if he alienates Mameh. Besides farming, Wame sells women's clothing; which allowed him to make and save enough money in order to buy himself a mobylette. He is also a father of five sons. It may not be far-fetched to believe that in addition to
enjoying the relation with Mameh, one of his major objectives is to secure land for his sons, as Mameh's daughters will eventually leave for marriage.

The situation of Mameh stands in sharp contrast to that of her husband’s sister, Soryan, who also became a widow about eight years ago, and relocated to her paternal residence with her three pre-teen children. Though she has access to a large area of her deceased brother’s land, she is visibly not a happy mother. She cannot feed herself and her three daughters properly. People in the village blame it on her attitude and her poor choices. They say that after the death of her husband, “instead of staying in husband’s village or joining her own paternal house immediately, she emmigrated to Cote d’Ivoire a year later, where she became pregnant.” Relatives from both her own and husband’s sides blamed her choice as wayward and irresponsible. Furthermore, when things went wrong and she returned from Cote d’Ivoire to her father’s compound, she made very few friends. Practically she receives no assistance from anybody, nor does she participate in much exchange with people. When she brews beer, people say that it is not well done. As a result, she cannot sell it well. As unfavorable ideas about her are widely circulated, she now also has the disadvantage of being the “victim” of gossip. Her poor social skills added to a bad press, caused by her emigration during the first year of her widowhood, stigmatized her within her community.

Recapitulation

The characterization of the domestic group in African societies as a religious, economic, and politico-jural domain is still relevant for rural Dagara. However, as shown in chapter four and elaborated above, the presence of hierarchical authority relationship between the senior elders or the head of household and the subordinate members does not always reduce the latter into total submissive subjects. Most women do not normally go against the existing structure in a
confrontational or rebellious manner, even though confrontation is not totally excluded. They often rely on their personal relations and tact to circumvent the constraints imposed by customs, and take advantage of loopholes without necessarily coming out against or destroying customary arrangements. Above all, maintaining a peaceful household environment is a social and pragmatic prerequisite for women to create new structures of opportunities that allow them to undertake autonomous activities successfully. The negotiations and bargaining involve all members of the domestic group in their struggle to meet their common and individual goals. Heads of households combine authority and strategy to achieve common household and their personal projects; similarly, women and dependents strategize with more or less skill to meet their own objectives. For instance, a smart sharing of the proceeds from individual activities with other household members in power position (power to provide or to summon work, and to make decisions) also guarantees future success. Sufficient production in the common projects of the household is often key to the success of the other mini and individual undertakings. Subordinate members of the household sometimes accept to scale down some of their autonomous activities in order to focus their effort on other activities they consider of greater benefit. They also give a share of the returns of individual activities to the powerful men of the households in order to increase their own chances of future success.

Among Dagara communities of Southwest Burkina Faso, the notion of hot money and its psychological effects on women is one useful tool for controlling or, at least, making inroads in incomes of dependents and women. Most women do not normally face the inequity in a confrontational way, though confrontation is not always totally excluded, depending on the options of the woman in the broader social field. More commonly, women rather make use of personal strategies to circumvent the structures of constraints by exploiting existing loopholes,
and subsequently creating new structures of opportunities that allow them to keep their incomes. Moreover, a good number of women involved in the process, endeavor to maintain a peaceful household environment, which is a social and pragmatic prerequisite for further success in autonomous activities. This echoes the compelling observation by Razavi that “[t]he question as to whether social structures of constraint limit women’s choices, or alternatively whether women are able to subvert gender-biased social norms finds different answers depending on the issue and context at hand” (2000: 421).

Understanding the concept of hot money and its implications on the everyday life of rural women provides theoretical insights into grasping the subtleties of gender equity and dynamics within the farming household in the area. Policy-wise, it provides a tool for more efficient choices in projects targeting women’s economic empowerment. Unless policy makers understand that some development programs targeting rural women in some areas of Arica yield “spiritually risky” income such as hot money that requires cooling by a male senior whose good faith cannot always be taken for granted, such endeavors are likely to show data that quantitatively suggest potential for women’s betterment, but that miss the point empirically. My experience with the organic cotton project in the Dano area supports this argument. This cotton was referred to in the area as “women’s cotton” at its start. A few years later, after the price showed promise compared to the falling price of the conventional cotton, the number of women producing it fell drastically from over 90 per cent in 2005 to 20 percent in 2007. Still, most of the 20 percent of female producers are mere proxy producers for their husbands. Even those who do own the cotton are bound to show the money to the husband who arranges for the cooling. Women who intend to control their incomes in totality do not engage in hot-money-yielding activities such as cotton, except when they hold a good end in negotiating and “bargaining within the patriarchy” (Kandiyoti 1988).
Photo 7: Women and their economic activities

1- A woman brewing sorghum beer

2- Marta feeding her pigs

Photo 8: Women and their economic activities

1- A woman selling shea-nuts in the Dano Market

2- A woman selling sorghum beer in the Dano Market
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I presented the trajectory of the adoption of export cotton as “agriculture for development” in Burkina Faso, and the various shifts that characterized the process from the early 1920s to now. I laid special emphasis on the attitudes of smallholder farmers and people in the rural communities and the pervasive sociocultural change that emerged as a result of growing cotton. The main argument of the work is that to better understand the reason why farmers engage in export cotton in Southwest Burkina despite falling farm-gate prices, one needs to look at it in a holistic way. Farmers grow cotton because they aim to make money. But they grow it also because growing allows them to access chemical fertilizers, which they use on their cotton and also on their food fields; and because growing allows one to increase or assess their social image, and gives them tools for negotiation within the household.

I examined various aspects of the production in three distinctive periods. The first period spans from 1920 to 1932, when the colonial administration introduced and forced export cotton farming onto the locals whose tacit resistance led the enterprise to a chaos. The second period spreads from 1951 to 1994. It describes the episode when a new colonial approach based on inducement was taken up and enhanced with many agricultural development projects that overlapped with the interests of the local farmers in the independent state. Finally, the third period started after 1994, when devaluation of the local currency opened opportunities for export products, and more so for cotton, which benefited from enhanced organization and close government support. In the post-independence era, the state undertook many agricultural development projects that aimed to increase food production, but some observers believe that the actual intent behind such food-oriented programs was ultimately to entice farmers to grow cotton, and improve the country’s foreign exchange revenues.
There was also the dominant modernist view that if cotton thrives, the other agricultural sectors will follow. The export opportunities that resulted from the 1994 CFA currency devaluation gave the national authorities further reason to collaborate closely with cotton companies in the aim to attract the maximum of smallholder households to engage in cotton. For instance, the farm-gate price per kilogram of cotton doubled overnight. These efforts coincided with farmers’ hopes to improve their economic conditions. Thus, they flock to cotton, and made the country top African producer a decade later, for two years, from 2004-05 to 2006-07. This development which can be rightly called a “cotton revolution” made Burkina a model in what is often referred to as the “success story” of Africa’s smallholder cotton production.

In this closing section, I recapitulate the main ideas developed in the early chapters. Furthermore, I provide a reflection on farmer’s views and understanding of development through cotton farming, the overall ripple effect of cotton farming in the rural communities, and the way the “cotton effect” affects household relations and the cultural landscape. I finally consider farmers’ anxieties as a result of a chronic crisis of the cotton industry, now accentuated by the current global economic crisis. In the first chapter, I situated the background and context of the study, the methods and activities undertaken, and my position as an anthropologist doing research “at home.” The use of participation and observation, formal and informal interviews, conversations, and life histories, combined with formal surveying methods gave me an array of options to generate information, and crosscheck and validate it. I believe that this comprehensive approach also enhanced the data quality and analysis.

In chapters two and three, I presented the general setting on which the later chapters build. Chapter two presented the models of development, the views about the practice of development in Africa, especially as it applies to commercial agriculture and gender. The
theoretical poles of the debates on development as it emerged in the 1960s and 1970s were the modernization and underdevelopment – called dependency – paradigms. By the 1980s, there has been a shift in the development approach. At the multilateral level, structural adjustment programs were introduced to reform the economies of highly indebted countries. At the level of practice and thought about development, there was an inclination for a “third way,” which advocates a bottom-up and actor-centered approach to the practice of development. Yet, a group of scholars influenced by Foucault, and James Ferguson (1994) and Arturo Escobar (1995), came up with the discourse approach of development in the 1990s.

In chapter three, I focused on the history of the production of export cotton in Burkina as a crop that aimed and still aims to engender “development.” Cotton, which is today’s top export product of Burkina Faso, was introduced in a violent context and manner, which left indelible negative memories about it in many areas of the country. However, the sustained focus of the Burkina government in organizing the sector, along with national and transnational corporations combined with Burkina farmers’ personal commitment and internal organization, culminated in strengthening it. This success even attracted further transnational corporations and nongovernment organizations to intervene in the national cotton sector with new types of cotton. For instance, the Swiss NGO, Helvetas, has been promoting organic cotton farming since 2004. Simultaneously, America-based biotechnology corporations has, in collaboration with the national institute for research in agriculture initiated experiments by 1999, which culminated in pilot production of transgenic cotton in 2008, and a production on a wider scale in 2009.

The transgenic cotton farming has generated passionate debates in the country. Conversely, the organic cotton that promotes women’s engagement in cotton farming as independent producers seems to be much welcome, especially because of its attractive prices and
low production cost. There is, however, a problem concerning the future of organic farming. Beyond the looming doubts that entail from the global economic crisis, the conventional cotton companies, which also promote the transgenic brand and are not associated with the attractive organic brand, have developed pernicious actions consisting of disseminating transgenic seeds in high bio producing areas. Such actions, if not addressed and corrected, are on the verge of stifling bio-cotton farming and the hopes it brings along for women. Therefore, the prospects for some women to produce a relatively easy-to-grow cotton independently in the country can wither, if the assault on organic cotton persists. This situation, if not addressed to the advantage of women and small farmers, recalls the Gambia in which women’s development was curtailed by a parallel male-oriented one (Schroeder 1999). Besides this apprehension, there has also been a concern that the attractive price offered per kilogram of the organic cotton might lead men to “kidnap” their wives access to farming plots, in an attempt to control the “women’s cotton” production. The shift in name of the organic cotton in the local discourse, from “women’s cotton” to “coton-bio” tends to legitimize this latter concern.

This third chapter shows that cotton production in Burkina Faso is embedded in the structures of global development framework and international and national capital. “State-controlled” SOFITEX and two other private companies that manage the cotton sector constitute, to some extent, the local relays of larger cartels, which are mostly in France. After decades of experimentation on how to better induce farmers into growing, and how to recover input credits, the national cotton companies, spearheaded by SOFITEX, eventually succeeded to achieve their golden objectives after the devaluation of the local currency opened prospects for smallholders to achieve their economic plans by growing cotton. Farmers’ attraction to this crop is shown
through the constant and remarkable increases that started in the late 1990s until 2005-06 and 2006-07, when production popped the country to the top rank of cotton production in Africa.

Simultaneously, while so many transnational actors enter the cotton sector to “develop” farmers, there are complaints about unfair cotton subsidies in wealthy nations including the US, China, and the European Union. Surprisingly, the European Union remains a crucial sponsor of the Burkina cotton sector. Similarly, the USAID had engaged in a three-year 20- million dollar renewable funding for the West African Cotton Improvement Initiative Program (WACIP). These contradictions in the “benevolent” sponsorship by the wealthy nations and the stark reality of the consequences of their subsidies on farm-gate price of cotton in the developing nations remind of some of the world systems approach to development and globalization discussed above, and more specifically the discourse of development approach. Viewed in this light, development can certainly be seen as a mere discourse that veils actual agendas of the “developers.”

However, based on farmers’ understanding and meanings of development, and their explanations of why they grow cotton, and how they negotiate in the household or strategize to raise the necessary labor, as I showed in last three chapters, it is difficult to downplay the benefits that resulted from cotton farming in Burkina, despite the undeniable problems. It is also fair to say that benefits from cotton are not accessed equally. Access is more or less enabled depending on the gender of the household member. Yet, household members are crucial for producing farm labor and aware of the power that this constitutes. Many household members, at lesser powerful positions, wield this power to their advantage. This leads heads of households to reward members in a “fair way” prior to doing seminal expenditures, in their attempt to secure future farm labor. Growing cotton is also a barometer of credit-worthiness and symbolic capital.
Thus, farmers invest in their social networks and exploit them to mobilize much-needed non-household labor.

Many farmers portray their commitment to grow cotton as their service to the nation’s development objective (teon maalu). But this official nationalistic justification does not tell the whole story; the ultimate goal being to improve one’s own life conditions. Smallholder farmers grow cotton for various reasons, at the top of which is to maintain soil quality by way of chemical fertilizers, and to improve food production through crop rotation. In addition, farmers also declare that they take care of their children’s education and family health problems thanks to cash derived from cotton. Some successful farmers even build houses for rent or/and open new stores to sell essential items. The use of the plow in farming improves household production in terms of both food and cotton. Cotton farmers are first of all food farmers, and they usually grow more food than non-cotton households do. Most successful farmers of this category store and sell food surpluses during the difficult periods of the rainy season when prices are inflated.

Through cotton, most villagers engage in a patterned process of wealth acquisition. They first start by acquiring farm equipment progressively, then build an iron-roofed house – locally viewed as the most visible indicator of success and symbolic capital. Later, they buy a motorbike, and even invest in petty trading. Growing cotton also resulted in increased farmers’ savings in rural communities, as many farmers now open savings accounts in community banks, where they put their money, or to receive farming loans. Concerning its potential to improve livelihoods in the rural communities, cotton is now a metaphor of social mobility, which is utilized in everyday discourse to refer to any lucrative activity in Southwest Burkina. However, a protracted crisis in the sector, which caused cotton companies to derail farmers’ plans with delayed payment, is now accentuated by the current global economic crisis. This situation is
raising a lot questions about the future of the activity among farmers, and is dampening their enthusiasm and hopes.

This study has also revealed that beyond the intellectual debates about development, the practice of development can affect the livelihoods of people in a more or less positive way on the ground in Africa. However a useful debate on development runs the risk of missing the point if it fails to consider what Sen (1999) termed the freedom aspect of the development process. Because “Freedom” is essential to the development process, a useful assessment of progress must consider whether the freedoms that the people are enhanced, since “achievement of development is thoroughly dependent on the free agency of the people” (Sen 1999: 4). The argument of this dissertation boils down to the basic question of freedom and agency of the actors involved. Despite the structures of constraints that govern the production of export cotton in Burkina Faso, my ethnography showed different stories about actors at the lower scale of the production chain. In fact, despite undeniable fettering policies that govern most export or commercial agricultural productions in Africa, some rural men and women evince degrees of agency and exploit the loopholes of the system to their own advantage, at least, modestly. Besides, women and widow who are usually viewed, rightly or wrongly, at the margin of cash farming, are now being integrated in cotton farming in a relatively visible way. Women who keep assisting their husbands in their cotton farms do so either because they think they are rewarded fairly, or simply because they increase their bargaining power within the household. My observations suggest that very few women still feel concerned with the quasi-outmoded cultural pressure of a “good wife,” at least, if being good means accepting all unfair actions from their male counterpart.

I do not intend to suggest that the cotton growers or members of cotton households do not find issues with the constraining effects of the collusion of local and international capital, or within the household; they do, and they voice their feelings whenever the opportunity is offered.
At all levels of the production, the conclusion to which one reaches is that the rural actors in cotton are more concerned with fairness rather than justice. They are aware of and usually stoic towards the injustices that characterize the production. However, once a farmer or a member of a cotton-household sees a crudely unfair action in the process, his or her reaction against the immediate upper moral or physical person usually follows straight away. This was the case, in May 2007, when many cotton unions, all over the country, turned their back to cotton in retaliation of an excessive increase in input cost compounded by a 17 percent decrease in the price per kilogram. The boycott led the companies to lower the cost of fertilizers, in an attempt to contain farmers’ anger; but the production fell down to over 40 percent of the previous year’s. In 2009, many villages also reportedly rejected the offer to put their surfaces under GM cotton, as they begrudged the high cost seeds. In this case, it can be expected that those who planted GM cotton this year will only repeat in 2010 only if the returns are appealing.

At the micro level of the household, heads of household negotiate strategically with members in order to meet their cotton production objectives. Whatever they do, they make sure that it is fair, at least from the dependents’ perspective. In fact, women and junior household members have options, and do use them in a situation they deem unfair. In response, some women decline to produce labor in the husband’s cotton farm, or worse, they decide to relocate to their paternal house temporarily, or simply divorce their greedy husband. Household heads fear particularly the wrath of junior males, who can emigrate, and weaken the household’s workforce.

From what precedes, it seems that growing cotton as a commercial agriculture aiming to develop the producers’ livelihoods has caused mixed results. For one thing, it opened the path to food production through improvement of farming technology and techniques. To many people of
the rural communities, accessing food all year long is a remarkable degree of achievement. This is now even more important as the price of food products has hiked in Burkina Faso since 2008. High food price allows some farmers to enrich themselves by selling their food surpluses, even if it causes more pains to less successful ones. In this respect, the position of Ferguson (1994) and Escobar (1995) who tend to reject in block the efficacy of development programs in the Global South seems extreme. In analyzing today’s development, it cannot be denied the persistent relevance of the analysis of the dependency theorists about the uneven global economic relations. However, to lump all development programs into the a single category that harboring agendas distant from the improvement of the target population neither seem to always be a fair assessment and do any good to the recipients; nor does it recognize the agency and decision-making ability of the actors at the lower scale.

In the case of Burkina cotton production, farmers choose to grow or not to grow; and many of those who choose to grow, strategize to gain benefits besides or other than earning cash. For instance, with the collaboration of America’s female lingerie retailer, Victoria's Secret, in organic cotton farming, and in response to the increase of the price of the kilogram of organic cotton in 2007-08, many farmers flocked to growing it in 2008-09, doubling the production of the previous year. The attitude of many farmers reflects in some way the position of Nanyèn, the woman in the opening vignette of this dissertation. There are undeniable constraints in the process, and the lethargy entailed from the current global economic crisis exacerbates such constraints. However, as long as the main actors think they benefit from it, at least indirectly, and deem it fair, the position and role of the anthropologist researcher becomes complicated. Does he or she take what the actors think and say, and perceive, especially in a context of unequal power relationship?
For my part, the farmers’ narratives, perceptions and meanings they attribute to cotton farming has humbled me, and changed my previously “haughty” view about their “unreasonable engagement in cotton,” prior to my contact with the field in 2005. I was totally against cotton farming, which I viewed as a crude exploitation of farmers by the government and cotton companies. But after I spoke with the farmers and understood their strategic choices behind growing cotton, my “anti-cotton” position, which many educated people of Burkina share, shifted overnight. The farmers do not condone the many instances of injustice in their relation with cotton companies. Whenever the cotton companies add an additional straw that is likely to break the camel’s back, farmers’ reaction is vehement and prompt. One condition that makes choice possible is the current availability of farming land, which allows farmers to grow cotton just as another path to bettering themselves.

I built my analysis of agricultural production in Southwest Burkina around four arguments. (1) Farmers who choose to produce cotton in Southwest Burkina Faso do so because they aim to increase their cash income, but there are also other non-cash gains - such as access to agricultural inputs, increased food crop yields, increased symbolic capital - that they obtain by growing cotton. Smallholders adopt cotton production as a solution to soil impoverishment without practicing fallows. As there is no government or independent entity so far that supplies credit and fertilizers for food crops, growing cotton is the only means to access agricultural credit and chemical fertilizers. Farmers, then, grow cotton to enhance their food crop production through a new crop rotation schedule. Instead of seeing cash-crop producers as powerless victims, who are unable to assess the choices they make because of their marginal positions, and whom the state or contract commodity companies lure or manipulate, we should also look at farmers’ economic environment, their intentions and the outcome of their decisions. (2) Male
cotton growers, in Southwest Burkina Faso, allow their wives to produce organic cotton on small plots, along with their own cotton farms and the joint household food crop farms, because this concession, which constitutes no major risk to the overall household labor, stands for an effective negotiation tool that provides them with higher bargaining power within the household; besides the possibility for them to benefit amply from the proceeds. In fact, there is a discrepancy between the empowerment objectives of women and their husbands’ silent intent to take advantage of the entire work potential of household members, and retain sufficient bargaining power. (3) Women and dependents of the cotton household accept to work in the cotton farm of the head even when they do not receive much cash from him because they obtain gains beyond the cotton cash distribution, such as assured yearlong food security, improved housing and living standards, increased symbolic capital, and wider bargaining space. Some women declare that their usually irascible husband becomes particularly mild prior to and during the farming season. Besides, to call a husband to order, some women use terse statements such as “we’ll see how all this turns out at the beginning of the [farming] season.” A husband who hears such a statement knows that he must change gears from his single-handed way of managing farm returns or an unfair sharing of proceeds with his wife. Finally, (4) the ubiquitous cultivation of cotton in Southwest Burkina has increased demand for labor in the domestic group, limited its availability from non-domestic sources, and constrained access to work for hire. As a result, successful cotton growers use their financial resources to harness their social networks to raise non-household work.

My project contributes to current anthropological and social scientific studies of three bodies of knowledge - household relations, gender and development in agriculture, and rural labor organization and mobilization. It draws from demographic data, observations, and farmers’
narratives and lived experiences, to challenge some of the scholarship either that perceives farmers involved in commercial agriculture as mere victims; or that fails to see the potential of export farming to improve livelihoods in the Global South. Moreover, by examining the internal processes that inform farmers’ decisions to grow cotton, households’ negotiation strategies, and their benefit assessment in growing, the research revisits, with a case study presenting novel issues, the anthropological discussions phrased in terms of agency and rationality in actions in farming households. Furthermore, by offering new approaches to more comprehensive interpretations of gain in rural economies, the research suggests the basis for farmers’ decisions and intrahousehold negotiation. It also transcends lingering assumptions that women’s and junior males’ cooperation with the head of household in Africa results from the “structuring structures” of their social environments. Finally, the dissertation concludes that in this increasingly monetarized rural economy, with no landless laborers, the major constraint for most households is finding labor for hire in sufficient quantities and in a timely manner. The situation here is therefore far from Chayanov’s observation that the “peasant family farm” is self-dependent in terms of labor need. Farm-households do hire work in Southwest Burkina, and though not openly expressed, the smooth functioning of the relations between head and members of the household is maintained by tacit economic relations. This indicates that traditional agriculture is in flux, characterized by a reconfiguration of the social relations of production as described elsewhere (Hill 1972; Meillassoux 1978, 1981; Netting 1993). However, money alone is not sufficient to mobilize extra-household labor. In fact, the most important condition for successful cotton farming, in this kind of social setting, is what Bourdieu called social capital (1980:2, 2005: 195), harnessed to raising non-domestic labor, although the farm-group needs other economic
resources to maintain this kind of intangible capital. This explains the types of bonds that cotton farming creates between people.
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APPENDIX A: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Village name: ……………….                      Household identification:…….

Enumerator’s name: ……………………….

1- Household information (check the answer that applies)

Household head’s name: …………………………………… sex : M        F

Marital Status: married  □  widow/-er  □  Single  □

Number of wives : ………        Number of children : (- de 17 ans) ……. (+ 17 ans)……

Taille du ménage : ………….  Number of married people in the household………

Compound ? :             □ yes             □ No

Number of houses within the compound : ………

Number of households within the household :………

House type:           □  mud walls and mud-roofed  □  mud walls and corrugated-iron-roofed

2- Socio-professional occupation: Write (1) in the box of the main occupation, (2) for the secondary occupation, and (3) for the third occupation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>farmer</th>
<th>horticulturalist</th>
<th>trader</th>
<th>Craftman/woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st wife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd wife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
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<tr>
<td>………</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3- Household’s average expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Expenses per week</th>
<th>Expenses per month</th>
<th>Expenses per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4- **Means of transportation** (write the number in the box that corresponds to the owner)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Head of household</th>
<th>1st wife</th>
<th>2nd wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motocycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5- **Household goods** (write number in the correct box)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bike</th>
<th>Moped</th>
<th>Moto-cycle</th>
<th>Iron-roofed house</th>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>Chickens</th>
<th>Guinea-fowls</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Source of acquisition</td>
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</table>

6- **Household Farm equipment and materials** (write number in the correct box)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hoes</th>
<th>Mattoc</th>
<th>Plow</th>
<th>Cart</th>
<th>Plow oxen</th>
<th>Donkey</th>
<th>Sprayer</th>
<th>Other (specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
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<td>Year of acquisition</td>
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<td>Source of acquisition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase Price</td>
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</table>

7- **Production in 2006-2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cotton</th>
<th>Maize</th>
<th>sorghum</th>
<th>Millet</th>
<th>Beans</th>
<th>pepper</th>
<th>Tobacco</th>
<th>Rice</th>
<th>Other (specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface in hectares</td>
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<td>Production in tons</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8- **Production in 2007-2008**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cotton</th>
<th>Maize</th>
<th>Sorghum</th>
<th>Millet</th>
<th>Beans</th>
<th>pepper</th>
<th>Tobacco</th>
<th>Rice</th>
<th>Other (specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Surface in hectares</td>
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<td>Production in tons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
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</table>

**9- Other source of income**

If head of household has another money-generating activity that was not mentioned,

- Returns from that activity: …………
- expenses to that activity: …………

Does the household receive money from other sources? : yes □ no □

If yes, number of times per year: …………
- amount: …………

Total year income: …………
APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE TO ADMINISTER TO WOMEN

Woman’s name: ….

Marital Status: Married  Divorced  Unmarried  Widow

1- What did you plant in your farm for this farming season? Maize  sorghum  millet  cotton  beans  sesame  peanuts  soybeans  other

2- Do you have a family cotton farm? Yes  No

2.1. Who manages proceeds from that farm? Me  My husband  the family

3- Besides farmwork, what other activities do you undertake? Sorghum-beer brewing, Selling cakes  Breeding pigs, chicken, goats  Other………………………………………………………………

4- What do you grow in the collective farm? ……………………………

5- Do you have a personal plot? Yes  No (if yes, what do you grow on it)?………

6- What other time-demanding activity do you undertake? ………………………

7- How do you manage to succeed in both the activities of your farm and the household’s?
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

8- How do you mobilize labor for your personal farm? Family  Wage-workers

Friends  Myself

8.1- What crops do you have on your personal farm? ……………………………

8.2- If you grow organic cotton, which season of production are you now? 1st

2nd  3rd  4th

8.3- How did you acquire the plot for farming? Husband’s land  gift from a friend

purchased  borrowed  Other

8.4- How do you make compost?…………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

8.5- (If married) Does your husband/head of household own a cotton farm? If no, skip to 8.6. If yes circle the correct answer:: a) bio  b) conventional  c) both

8.6- How do you juggle to face labor demand for both cotton types?
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

8.7- is bio-cotton rewarding? Yes  No

8.7.0. To which extent? ……………………………………………………………

8.8 – Compared to conventional cotton, which of the two types is more rewarding? Bio-
cotton  Conventional Cotton
8.9 – Who manages proceeds from the organic cotton?

8.10 – What do you do with the cotton revenue?

8.11 – (If married) Does your husband assist you in the cotton farm?


8.13 – What farm tools or equipment do you use in your farm? **Plow, donkey-cart, hoes**

8.14 – How do you access these materials? **Household property, loan, personal property**

8.15 – What challenges do you face in the production process?

8.16 – From your household’s perspective, is there any negative or positive impact of cotton farming on food crop farming?

9- Did you sell any things this year? If yes enumerate. ................

(Use the list below to help interviewee’s memory after she has finished citing her own list, then check what applies: Shea-nuts, rice, cotton, millet, sorghum-beer, peanuts, patasi, sheep, pig, goat),

10- did you buy any product this year? **Yes** No (if yes, enumerate. ................

(Use the list below to help interviewee’s memory after she has finished citing her own list, then check what applies: **Kitchen utensils** (plastic pot, tassa baa, bucket, cooking pot), **bicycle, clothing** (shoes, clothes), **food** (rice, millet, sumala, shea-nuts, shea-butter), **other** ................

11- How did you raise money for these above purchases? ................

12- Can you estimate how much money you spend per week on:

12.1 **Food** (millet, maize, rice) ...............  

12.2 **Milling grains** ...............  

12.3 **Condiments** ....
AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Btamaka Somé was born in Mebar-Pare/Dano, in rural Southwest Burkina Faso. He attended the Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where he earned a Licence in English in 1993, a Maîtrise in African Literature in 1994 before earning a Master’s degree in Secondary Education in 1996. After five years of teaching at the Lycée Departemental de Garango in the East Central side of the country, he was assigned to the College de Pabré in the vicinities of Ouagadougou, the Capital City. While in Ouagadougou, he lectured part-time, for two years, at the Institut Supérieur de Technologies and the School of Law of Université de Ouagadougou. In the fall of 2003, he started the PhD program at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and earned a Master’s degree in Anthropology and a Master’s certificate in Gender Studies. While at the University of Illinois, Dr Somé won several grants, awards, and fellowships, including the Wenner-Gren International Professional Development Fellowship, The Department of Anthropology/National Science Foundation ethnographic summer research grant, The Wadsworth International Fellowship, The National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant, the West African Research Center Travel Grant, and several minor grants from the University of Illinois Graduate College and Women and Gender in Global Perspectives’ Program. While completing his degree at Illinois, Dr Somé also performed teaching tasks as an instructor at the Center for African Studies and the Department of Linguistics, and as a teaching assistant at the Department of Anthropology, and won several teaching awards. He was also involved in numerous extra-curricular activities, and occupied leadership positions within the African Students’ Organization executive board. In the short-term, he will be moving to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Agricultural Development Program as an anthropologist and gender and agriculture specialist.