THE PERSONHOOD OF WOMEN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN A BURKINABÉ VILLAGE[1]

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Abstract: A community actualized development program aiming to assure women equal access to the benefits of development is examined in terms of impact on women's status. The interaction of the forms of organization envisaged in the village as leading to development and the indigenous structures often lead to conflict. This conflict can be seen as due to the lack of fit between extant forms of organization and those introduced by the development agency. However, it is shown that decisions in contradiction of the desired forms of social action are due to pragmatic choices on the part of the community in relation to realistic goals. It is concluded that such a form of development intervention does not assure equal access of women to the benefits of development.

Résumé: Dans cet article, on examine l'impact sur le statut des femmes d'un programme de développement réalisé par la communauté dans le but d'assurer aux femmes le même accès aux bénéfices du développement que les hommes. L'interaction entre les formes d'organisation, telles qu'envisagées pour conduire au développement, et les structures indigènes a souvent été conflicutelle. Ce conflit peut être perçu comme étant le résultat d'un manque de corrélation entre les formes d'organisation existantes et celles introduites par l'agence de développement. Cependant, il est mis en évidence que les décisions en contradiction avec les formes désirables de l'action sociale sont en fait dues aux décisions pragmatiques de la communauté par rapport à des buts réalistes. On en déduit qu'une telle forme d'intervention au niveau du développement n'assure pas aux femmes le même accès aux bénéfices du développement.

Introduction

It has often been documented, in a wide range of ethnographic areas and from a variety of analytic perspectives, that efforts at development have had a negative impact on women in Africa. Bay (1982:10) talks about "the delicate

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power balance'' between men and women which was upset by the colonial system and points out that this system promoted the interests of men over women in line with ''Western and Christian patriarchal conceptions of women's place.'' Frequently, the erosion of women's control over a product is pinpointed as the locus of the imposed disadvantage. Etienne (1980) studied Baule women displaced in the production of cotton thread by capitalist forms of production and introduced technology. Conti (1979) writes of the disadvantage suffered by women in the AVV resettlement scheme in the former Upper Volta, as development planners failed to provide for their particular economic contribution to a viable community. At issue in both these cases is the disruption of extant relations of production. It has frequently been suggested that these forms of intervention, for example, the development of the textile industry in Côte d'Ivoire or the institution of an ambitious, relatively large-scale agricultural development scheme (Reyna 1983:86) in present-day Burkina Faso, would have a profound impact on the economic positions of the sexes in relation to each other.

What is to be examined here is a different type of situation: an integrated community development program aimed at women as well as at men in a village in Burkina Faso. The goal of this program is not only to improve various aspects of village life, but also to assure to women equal access to the benefits of development. Like other programs in the area the project is carried out by local agents, male and female village animators, and a ''grass-roots'' approach is used. Unlike large-scale schemes, involving major displacement of people or disruption of extant social relations, such small-scale programs, ideally carried out with the full co-operation and agreement of all strata of the population, are seen as the desired method in some development thinking. It is argued by development planners that the scale and the responsiveness of the program design to the wishes of the targeted population ensures that neither the interests of women nor of specific groups of men will be disregarded.

It must, however, be recognized that any development initiative, no matter how responsive to the will of the community, institutes novel social relations clustering around the program intervention. Intervening agencies assume that certain forms of social action follow within the context of these instituted relations. Action, on the part of the villagers, in conformity with the underlying assumptions held by the development agency, is seen to constitute, at least in part, the desired goal—development. The failure of villagers to act in accordance with sometimes unstated premises of the introduced forms is often seen by project evaluators as a failure of the development program itself to promote change from traditionally defined relations to those more ''modern'' forms promoted by the development project. There is no question that the types of relations instituted by the program intervention may differ from extant relations of the subsistence community. However, it is not clear in the

case to be examined that villagers reject certain accommodation of introduced relations on the grounds of an immovable commitment to tradition. By examining the points of conflict between exogenous formulations underlying the execution of the development project and endogenous village structures, I will attempt to throw into relief a range of social interests, strategies and perceptions motivating both individual and village participation. In respect of women's interests, I hope to determine the degree to which such programs serve to improve women's economic position and to assess the impact of the development intervention on women as a socially constituted class of persons.

The concept of "person" has a long history in the discipline but has recently been used by feminist-inspired writers to more clearly formulate issues of gender and inequality (Atkinson 1982). If it is accepted that social persons can be defined as the locus of the intersection of a complex of social relations (Strathern 1988), it is possible to pinpoint social change in the constitution of the social relations which comprise a given class of persons. What is assumed in this line of analysis is that women in a given ethnographic setting may be distinguished as a class of person different from that of men in that specific constitutive social relations appear consistently associated with gender. In speaking of gender differences as located in specified constitutive social relations, the imprecision of often overstated, contrasting characterizations is avoided. Further, using this approach the question of gender inequality may be effectively explored, without undue ethnocentric or ideological distortion, in a situation resulting from conscious effort on the part of the development agency to overcome the so-called "traditional secondary status" of women.

The task is twofold. The analytic tool of the social person as a nexus of social relations will be applied to an understanding of the disparity between men and women within the largely traditional complex of subsistence relations. Then the impact of the development intervention upon these loci of relations will be assessed in light of the development organization's goal of ameliorating the status of women.

The discussion will begin with a general description of the village community itself and a detailed discussion of the personhood of women as opposed to that of men in this setting. An outline of the forms of organization introduced by the development intervention and its interaction with extant village structures will be presented. Points of conflict between endogenous and exogenous assumptions and strategies culminating, at times, in dramatic confrontations will be discussed with an eye to identifying the factors contributing to the conflict. Conclusions will be drawn as to whether this particular strategy for development intervention indeed safeguards women's interests better than the large-scale types of intervention conventionally found wanting.

Economic Conditions and Political Structures in the Village

The village in question is located in the Province of Bam, on the northern edge of the sudanic climatic zone, on the fringe of what is sometimes called the Great Mossi Plateau. The cultivation of millet and sorghum is the major subsistence activity. Fulbe, who make up slightly less than half of the village population, are also pastoralists who keep some cattle in the area year round. In recent years, most Fulbe village cattle have been sent to other regions of the country because of the local shortages of both water and pasture. The Mossi, the other major ethnic group of the village, tend to keep smaller ruminants, sheep and goats, in the village, but the ownership of cattle is seen as both prestigious and profitable. Mossi cattle are often entrusted to Fulbe herders. There frequently exists between men of the two populations an institutionalized form of friendship which centres on Fulbe tending Mossi cattle.

The agricultural and pastoral enterprise in the village is a difficult one. For example, the rainy season of 1984 yielded only 400 mm of rain as recorded in the administrative centre of the province, Kongoussi. This led to large-scale depletion of herds, both through sale for purchase of grain and through disease. The following season recorded over 700 mm of rain. Rainfall is both variable from year to year and highly localized. Cereal fields as little as a kilometre apart receive significantly different amounts of rain in the course of a season, which can determine the success or failure of the harvest. Broekhuyse (1980; Allen and Broekhuyse 1988) and others have documented the destructive practices inherent in Mossi farming systems. Along with unfavourable climatic conditions, such practices lead to soil degradation and erosion.

Not surprisingly about 30 percent, mostly male, of each of the ethnic groups is absent from the village at any one time. The majority of the Mossi are away at wage labour in Côte d'Ivoire, while the majority of the Fulbe are absent within the country, usually working in some capacity in animal husbandry. The earlier pattern of labour absenteeism among the Mossi involved mostly unmarried men who, after a few years spent abroad, returned to the village, married and took up agricultural pursuits. This seems to have changed in the last 10 years or so. A higher incidence of whole families residing away from the village is noted.

There are few opportunities to get money available in the area. Most village men practise some form of petty commodity production, but the income generated by the sale of mats, baskets, leather work or the weaving of cloth and the practice of butchery is minimal. Some men in the village work sporadically in the town as masons or other labourers. Women also participate in the local trade. The Mossi women prepare various foodstuffs to be sold in the village or at local markets, such as fried cakes, cooked rice or *ram*, beer made of sorghum. At various seasons of the year gathered fruits or vegetables grown in women's own plots of land are sold. Fulbe women sell milk

surplus to household requirements throughout most of the year. This practice is more profitable than the efforts of the Mossi women and also requires less input of labour.

The economic enterprise which seems to the villagers, both women and men, the most promising in ameliorating money and food shortages is irrigated dry-season market gardening on the shores of Lake Bam. This lake is the only year-round source of water, as water holes, traditional wells and even some bore holes dry up toward the end of the dry season. Irrigated gardening around the lake dates from the late 1920s. Under the sponsorship of the Catholic Mission, not far from Kongoussi, a few hectares were then irrigated, using hand pumps, to meet the needs of Mission personnel. In the intervening years, the land under irrigation has been considerably extended with the use of motor pumps. The majority of the population of all the villages around the lake, including a large segment of the town of Kongoussi, work under the auspices of two major co-operatives selling green beans to a national marketing board for export to Europe. However, villages such as the one under study, which is located eight kilometres from the lake, have no traditional rights to the land bordering the lake. Although these villagers can work plots under sharecropper or other disadvantageous conditions, they cannot become full members of a co-operative without placing new land under irrigation and contending with subsequent financial underwriting. Dry-season rights to an area of land could easily be negotiated, but it is impossible to enter extant co-operatives as a full member to the exclusion of the co-operants who have traditional claim to the land under irrigation.

Having outlined the general economic conditions of the area, it is now possible to focus on the village community itself. The village, historically part of the former kingdom of Tatenga, was founded about 400 years ago at the time of the Mossi conquest of the autochthonous Kibsi population. Informants claimed that the Kibsi were the ancestors of the Dogon of the Bandiagara Cliffs in Mali, a part of the population having fled in the face of the Mossi onslaught. The conqueror/autochthon division is central to village life. The conquerors, known as the Nakombse, form two quarters of the village, that of the chief of the village, the Naaba, as well as that of the former captives of the chief, the *rapuremba*. The autochthons, known as the Nyonyonsi, comprise two further quarters of the village. The quarter of the Tengsoba, Master of the Earth, is the most populous and is considered the founding or first quarter of the village. The last quarter, made up of the late-coming migrants, is spoken of as "little brother" to the Tengsoba's clan segment. Both Nyonyonsi and Nakombse are considered Mossi in opposition to the Fulbe population.

Mossi and Fulbe share a myth of the founding of the village which makes mention of the founder of the Kingdom of Tatenga, Chief Tansogo, and the

initial reluctance of the Mossi to accept the Fulbe on their land. The antagonism of 400 years ago was overcome through ritual sacrifice at the earth shrine of the village Tengsoba and this mechanism is still said to be resorted to when present-day conflicts seriously threaten peaceful co-existence. It is said that the Fulbe were allowed to settle only on the agreement that they remain outside of the Mossi village. Their impermanent looking huts are scattered in a semicircle on the sandy lowlands that surround the laterite outcrop on which the Mossi village is built. Mossi denigrate the Fulbe and marriage is not practised between them. In spite of this, administratively the two populations are considered one village, both by present-day and former governments and by development agencies. Further mention of the Fulbe will be made only in relation to political strategies on the part of both populations arising from the view of them as a unity. Otherwise the Mossi will be the focus of discussion.

In spite of the fact of the historic Mossi state there is no evidence in the present of traditional economic advantage accruing to the Naaba. After the French conquest of 1897, the power of the Naaba at the village and canton level was effectively subverted and undermined by the exigencies of the colonial government. Each subsequent independent government has campaigned to a lesser or greater degree against the "feudalism" of former times. The modern state has taken over most of what once was the basis of the Naaba's power. However, the village Naaba was observed to still hold authority, an authority shared with the Tengsoba. The Naaba is seen as the holder of *naam*, the mythical power which allows the successors to the office to rule over men. The Tengsoba is seen as the holder of *saad naam*, the power over fertility of both people and the earth enacted at the earth shrines. Perhaps due to the uses made of the village Naaba by the colonial regime as well as to Mossi hegemony in modern administrations, the Naaba does represent the village to the outside authorities and is capable of organizing village labour, as will be shown.

Several anthropologists working on the Mossi Plateau have documented what can be called the nucleation of the minimal lineage grouping in the face of severe ecological degradation of the region and high rates of labour absenteeism. Izard (1985) speaks of the shift of economic corporateness from the *yiri*, the lineage segment, to the *zaka*, the minimal lineage grouping in villages of the neighbouring historic Kingdom of Yatenga. Broekhuyse (1980; Allen and Broekhuyse 1988) suggest for the Mossi of the Kaya area, to the south and east of the Province of Bam, that the trend will result in individual household nucleation. The Mossi of Bam see the limits of the *buuduu*, the clan or clan segment, as defining the largest unit within which claims can be made to things or labour. Also, they tend to define the *buuduu* as the limits within which wives may be inherited. Ideally, one *buuduu* resides in one

quarter of the village. However, the most pervasive claims over labour and the product of that labour are contained within the *zaka* which can be defined as a grouping of male agnates and their wives and children resident within a single walled compound sharing one doorway to the outside world (*zaknore yembre*).

The *zaka* is not, however, co-terminous with the household, which can be defined as constituted by an alignment of males representing three successive generations or three stages of the life-cycle, pre-productive, productive and post-productive, and women of these three generations or stages (Rohatynskyj 1988). It is within the household that people work common ground and store the harvest in a common granary. A great variation was found in the composition of the *zakse* (pl.) in the village: in some cases the *zaka* contained only one household and in others several more. The occurrence of single-household *zakse* was most frequent in the least prestigious quarter of the village, that of the late-coming Nyonyonsi "little brothers." This quarter had a rate of labour absenteeism markedly higher than the village norm. It would appear that *zakse* in the quarter of the Naaba and especially in the quarter of the Tengsoba tend to more successfully resist factors working toward lower-order group nucleation.

In turning to the consideration of women in these groupings, saying that the Mossi are patrilineal and patrilocal only begins to address the question. Terms for a more detailed discussion may now be presented.

The Mossi Woman as Person

M. Strathern (1985), discussing in what sense kinship and economy can be said to constitute each other, traces the development within the anthropological literature of an approach aimed at investigating "the political economy of women." The development of such an approach was heralded by Gayle Rubin (1975). Rubin's paper addressed the question of the subordination of women partly in response to the controversy then surrounding women as objects of exchange in marriage systems, especially as discussed in Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Her initial formulation pointed out that a distinction should be made between systems where women are only exchangeable for one another and where "commodities" can be exchanged for women. Strathern (ibid.) discusses a body of recent writing that delineate bride-service systems where in marriage the exchange is that of labour as an attribute of the person, not of the person herself, drawing on the work of Collier and Rosaldo (1981) and others. In these systems things are never exchanged for persons, in opposition to bridewealth societies where they appear to be.

However, following Gregory's (1982) distinction between gift-based societies and commodity-based societies, it is doubtful if these things ex-

changed against bridewealth can be termed "commodities." For the logic of exchange of bridewealth renders them gifts even if in other settings these same things are exchanged as commodities. If the exchange of women against bridewealth may be seen as a gift exchange then it is impossible to view women as objects within the transactions of others. For as Gregory (ibid.:41) points out, "things and people assume the form of objects in a commodity economy while they assume the form of persons in a gift economy." Gift transactions produce social relations which allow for the reproduction of the community.

In the Mossi village, the rule of marriage is a negative one. One cannot marry someone of either the mother's or the father's *buuduu*. The vast majority, over 90 percent, of extant marriages, even in the present, are arranged by the parents. The father and lineage elders use affinal ties to reinforce ties of friendship. As in many bridewealth societies, the ideal marriage, and the one considered the most binding, is that of an exchange of women between two clans. Failing this, bridewealth is paid in the form of a set of ritual gifts, including salt, some millet, a small animal for sacrifice and so on. What is exchanged against bridewealth are rights to a woman's sexuality and the rituals surrounding the transfer are aimed at securing the approval of the ancestors. The sense then is not of persons being exchanged for things or "commodities," as Rubin would have it, but rather a transfer of an attribute of the person, her fertility, to the husband's kin group, with a countervailing prestation. In this sense, then, as noted by Strathern, the transfer of things as standing for attributes of persons are used to signal the formation of a new relationship between the bride and groom and their kin groups.

Women's disadvantage in this case cannot be seen as stemming from their status as "objects" of men's transactions. However, Strathern, following Goody's (1962) analysis, makes an interesting observation of the West African setting. It is Goody's statement that in particular West African societies certain kin roles may be thought of as miniature offices that is of key interest here. For in Strathern's terms this indicates a detachability of kin role from office and an adherence of things, as inheritance, not to the person, but to the office. And it is in such systems, Strathern notes, that "perhaps . . . we can speak of the 'second class citizen' syndrome for women—a political idiom that marks exclusion from office holding" (1985:200). This suggestion provides an important distinction between men and women in the village setting as well as an aid in understanding problems arising from the introduction of new offices by the development agency in the village. To appreciate the significance of this distinction fully, the question of disposability of labour must be considered for both men and women.

Both as daughters within the natal *zaka* and as wives in the *zaka* of the husband, women are evaluated as virtuous on the basis of their capacity to work

hard and in terms of their obedience to their seniors (Rohatynskyj 1988). This valuation of the woman as person emphasizes two attributes which are detachable from the person and whose disposability at the hands of others determine the relations within which women pursue their interests. Rights to a woman's reproductive capacity are handed over by the natal *zaka* to the *zaka* of the husband. However, rights to the disposal of a woman's labour on the part of others are a multiplex life-long matter. This situation may be seen to arise in the very structure of the household, as I have argued elsewhere.

For most of the early part of a man's life his labour must be made available to his male seniors, whether household head, minimal lineage elder or other. Although the claim on the male's labour may run a different course in the individual life-cycle, it is nonetheless a major component in defining the social context of a man's life up until the point of taking on the position of the lineage elder. All senior men have control of the labour of junior men as well as that of women. However, even though both men and women owe labour to others differentially throughout the life-cycle, the claim to their labour is not exclusive. Inasmuch as an adult man works to maintain the kinship grouping, he has the right to dispose of a certain proportion of the product of his labour according to his own desires. Similarly women cultivate their own plots of ground and have the right to dispose of the produce as they see fit. The millet, sorghum, various vegetables and condiments are used primarily for the sustenance of close kin, but they may also be sold or otherwise utilized. It must be emphasized that the proceeds of such sales are strictly under the control of the woman. Although it is possible to speak of men and women in the village as dissimilar and unequal on the basis of woman's exclusion from certain kin roles constituted as miniature offices, it is possible to speak of similarity in terms of which each owes labour to some other or others differentially in the course of the life-cycle, but reserves certain areas of production to personal ends.

The Village Development Program

The relationship between the development agency and the village will now be examined. It is important to note that the development organization is represented in the village by village-level agents, the *animateur* and the *animatrice*. These individuals work in a set number of villages and act as intermediaries between the larger bureaucratic structures of their own organization and the village population. It is their responsibility to assure that the organizational structures at the village level are in place and capable of carrying out determined projects. To the villagers these individuals appear to have great power. It is on their approval and, in a sense, through their good will, that material support necessary for project actualization is allocated to the village. They are the conduit into the village of scarce and often very valuable goods:

building material, water pumps, grain donations to the cereal bank and so on. The conditions that must be fulfilled for the continued entry into the village of these valued things are compliance with the organizational prerequisites for project implementation as laid down by the development agents and, most importantly, the availability of labour. The development agency then provides things, and the village provides labour, in the realization of projects for the benefit of the village as a whole.

The relationship between the village and the development agency is a novel one in the context of local economic life. The process of project implementation is indeed a co-operative one and there is not the sense that labour is being exchanged for things even though villagers are cognizant that continued labour availability is necessary for the further flow of things into the village. The end product of this process is ideologically for the benefit of everyone, and as a result a great deal of anxiety surrounds the possibility that any one person should be seen to benefit directly from this process to the exclusion of others. This is not saying that individuals do not gain material benefit in the course of this process or that goods are not subverted to personal use. The issue seems to be that such gain cannot be publicly recognized or approved without arousing deep resentments. For example, it was impossible for the village committee to agree on the form of remuneration appropriate to the village aid post orderly in recognition of the fact that he was kept from work in his fields as a result of his duties. Most members agreed that he should receive some remuneration for productive time lost while tending the ill, but refused to allocate money from the village fund for such a purpose. A further illustration of this attitude is that women who represented the various quarters of the village on the village health committee kept secret the little money they received *in honorarium* for attending training sessions at a village five kilometres away. The public acknowledgment of such remuneration as just due in the context of co-operative activities associated with development was prevented by the sense that one should not be seen to benefit from the labour of the many. It may be argued that for the same reason money in the village fund was allowed to build up, no person willing to risk responsibility for its investment or other use. There is a sense then that wealth created for the benefit of all, for the development of the village, is placed outside the normal flow of daily transactions as a result of its ambivalent status.

The main administrative structure set up in the village on the initiative of the development agency is the village committee. Comprised of a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, assistant treasurer and representatives of each of the quarters, the committee oversees all project actualization centred on the development of the cereal bank. Members of the committee are, not surprisingly, drawn from the immediate kin of the Naaba and the Tengsoba. Some of these men aged in their late thirties and early forties are functionally

literate in French and are considered worldly as a result of their experiences as wage labourers in Côte d'Ivoire. Their ability to mobilize labour from all the quarters of the village rests on the Naaba's authority as the only mechanism in place capable of providing a more inclusive focus for kin group interests.

The major interests excluded from this representative committee are those of the Fulbe. The Fulbe, eager to share in whatever benefits the development program brings, are systematically denied full access on a co-operative basis. The situation is that of two ethnic groups competing for access to scarce goods within the context of Mossi state hegemony, both traditional and modern. In response to pressure from the development agency, the son of the Fulbe village leader was formally named as the vice-president of the village committee. The insistence on this on the part of the development workers was based on the belief that if the Fulbe had representation on the committee then they would be assured of some share in the benefits accruing. Mossi compliance with this requirement stemmed from their recognition that accommodation was necessary on this point in order to avoid disruption of the program in general. However, the Fulbe holds office in name only. He is not advised of committee meetings, nor is he consulted on important decisions to be made in project implementation. Further, Mossi, in line with their evaluation of Fulbe as lazy and untrustworthy, deny Fulbe labour contributions in order to exclude Fulbe from project benefits. For example, the village committee attempted to deny Fulbe rights to the grain distribution from the cereal bank on the basis of allegations that the Fulbe had made their contributions after the deadline set at the previous year's harvest. They denigrate Fulbe contributions to other projects and attempt to limit the flow of services into the Fulbe community by, for example, designating the Fulbe population as one quarter in the face of the four Mossi quarters even though the two populations are roughly equivalent in number. In contrast to this, and in attempting to sidestep the context of this historical antagonism, the Fulbe make recourse to the democratic ideology of the development agency in an attempt to have their interests served. The conflict is a bitter one and cannot be fully documented here.

Inasmuch as the bestowal of office on the village comittee upon a Fulbe is seen by the development workers as an assurance of access to project benefits, a similar mechanism is seen as guaranteeing women equal access to development benefits. A women's committee exists parallel to that of the men, consisting of a president, vice-president, representatives responsible for various specific projects and representatives of each of the quarters. The president, vice-president and two other representatives sit on the village committee, theoretically taking decisions along with the men on important issues. The village committee structure, as constituted, is thus designed to assure that

autonomous representatives of both sexes have the right to pursue respective interests.

The reality of women's decision-making power is of course much different. The difference is due not just to the traditional deference of women to men growing out of the structure of the subsistence household, but may be found in the very organization of the projects the various offices are meant to administer. The division of project responsibility between the sexes makes assumptions about the spheres of activity proper to men and women. The cereal bank, building construction and production of cereal crops are the domain of men. General health, production of secondary crops and the water supply are the domain of women. One can fault this division as overlooking the fact that women contribute at least 50 percent of the labour in the production of millet and sorghum, as is typical of hoe agricultural systems. Conversely, the division belies the fact that it is the men, in the form of the *timsoba*, healing specialist, who have the greater knowledge of the traditional pharmacopoeia which is taught in the health education program for women. However, there is a deeper contradiction that may be identified here and it has to do with the assumptions inherent in the development program about social action as carried out by individuals. The organization of projects and their implementation into two separate spheres, one governed by men and the other by women, makes the statement that these spheres are to some extent autonomous. The insistence that both male and female persons form the general village committee, moreover, suggests that these officials are equal in light of intra-village and extra-village matters. These assumptions come into conflict, as will be shown, with both the logic of social relations of the subsistence sphere and with the economic reality of the region in general.

Finally, even though the spheres of action of the genders are assumed to be of equal importance, it is instructive to examine the content of the projects relegated to each. The men's project of the cereal bank, central to the program of integrated community development, is indeed the project in the village requiring the most extensive capital input. The construction of the bank building and the operation of the cereal bank over a four-year period required an outlay of about four million F CFA on the part of the development agency and the labour of all available men, women and children. It is also the project that could eventually yield the greatest amount of money, as stocks can be sold at favourable times and then purchased when the price of grain is low. In contrast, the capital input into women's projects was minimal and they had a less material focus. The program of health education, for example, involved the teaching of techniques of rendering water potable, treatment of various illnesses, maintenance of a balanced diet and so on. Generally all that was required for the realization of this project was the cost of instructional material. Clearly, the things that were placed in the hands of the men's committee had

the greater material value. In parallel fashion, the income generated by the repayment of credit for cattle distributed by the development agency to some nine men in the village in previous years entered the village fund under the control of the men's committee. Credit repayment on sheep distributed to a number of women belonged to the women's fund, along with proceeds of the sale of vegetables grown in the dry-season garden and income generated by other minor projects. This disparity in capital input into the projects designated for each sex belies equality in the distribution of benefits and undermines the purported equal importance of each sex's sphere of activity. This is especially so in the face of the larger commodity economy. Simply, such an agenda speaks to a complementarity of the sexes with a token recognition of the importance of women's concerns in the form of the representation by women office holders on the village committee.

Some Points of Conflict

In the course of the fieldwork period a number of conflicts arose centring on the realization of various projects within the framework imposed by the development agency. Two of them bore directly upon the constitution of the personhood of women, in that issues of the disposability of the products of women's labour and the question of the viability of offices bestowed upon women came into play.

Toward the end of the dry season a revolt took place against the president of the women's committee by the majority of the women involved in the dry-season vegetable garden project. The project itself consisted of growing a variety of European vegetables near the bore-hole. Training had been provided, as well as seed and fertilizer. For the bulk of the dry season labour necessary to realize this project involved daily watering and the control of bird pests. The village *animatrice* monitored the work on a weekly basis. These vegetables were meant to be sold at a minimal price to village women in order to improve the content of the dry-season diet. As the last plantings were being harvested an angry rumour erupted alleging that the president of the women's committee had sent two women to the market at Kongoussi with vegetables for sale. This was apparently done secretly, and the cash proceeds were said to have been retained by the president and not entered into the women's fund.

Meetings were held between groups of women and the president in the presence of the *animatrice*. None of the allegations could be substantiated. However, many women called for the removal of the president from office and her replacement by a more popular candidate. It was said by these women that the president had not participated in any of the work for the project and yet insisted on keeping control of the proceeds. The woman touted as her replacement had, on the contrary, been quite diligent in the care of the garden and was generally esteemed as a woman of great virtue, known for

her domestic skills. The problem here was more than a simple misappropriation of funds. The larger issue was about the nature of the office of president of the women's committee and the nature of the Mossi woman as person. The women could not tolerate the fact that the president, a kinswoman of the Naaba and appointed to the post by him, should define her contribution to the project in terms other than disposable labour. She saw herself as an administrator organizing the labour and keeping charge of the accounts and this comprehension of the role came into conflict with women's conception of themselves as proper persons. But it would be mistaken to reduce the conflict to a lack of fit between the model women held of themselves as providers of labour and the requirements of the new form of organization which envisaged some women office holders acting as overseers and organizers of other women's labour. Even though the president had been appointed by the Naaba, the method of her selection was not resented by the majority of women. It must be noted that in selecting a woman of his own quarter, the princely Ouedraogo lineage, the Naaba was acting upon the traditional right of his kin group to take positions of leadership in village affairs. Also in realizing her role as leader in these activities, the president herself was upholding the tradition of Nakombse women as non-workers. That is, Nakombse women traditionally did not work, depending on the people of the *rapuremba* quarter to look after the complement of what for commoner women was defined as women's work.

The understanding of the conflict in terms of the perceptions of women themselves as workers against the prerogatives of a traditionally defined class of non-working women, or against the introduced notion that some women must act as administrators, has some value, but assumes that the context of the conflict does not encompass other concerns. This larger context has to do with the commitment of people's labour to a co-operative undertaking that is designed to yield benefits for all, in the form of the development of the village. An appreciation of the concerns involved will become more clear in the consideration of the following sets of events.

In spite of the built-in disparity between the men's and the women's fund, the men's committee insisted on keeping control of the women's fund. This contravened the imposed structure of development activities in two ways. One, it denied the autonomy of the spheres with regard to gender projects and, two, it denied the equality of the women officials as capable of administering their own fund. Over a period of about two years, the *animatrice* working in the village approached the men's committee asking them to release the fund into the hands of the women. Her last appeal resulted in a fairly dramatic denunciation of her personally and the development organization in particular as trying to split the men and the women of the village apart. The question for the men was not that women were incapable of administering

their fund, as it was recognized that they along with the men received training in basic bookkeeping. The question was rather about the autonomous nature of the gender's activities. The problem could be phrased in terms of whether in the context of "development" the product generated by women's labour should fall beyond the control of men.

Again, it would be appealing to explain this occurrence by the lack of fit between the indigenous formulation of the personhood of women and the assumptions inherent in the structures imposed by the development agency. Further, one could question to what degree women holding offices introduced by the development agency are taken seriously by both men and women, given that they are excluded from holding offices within indigenous village structures. Both points are well taken, but are based on the assumption that relations that obtain in development activities undertaken by the entire village are in a sense relations of the subsistence household writ large. If this is accepted then the men's committee insistence on controlling the women's fund is problematic. For within the household women do enjoy a limited economic autonomy, trading with goods they have grown, gathered or manufactured and disposing of the income as they see fit. It is necessary to return to what has been described as the ambiguous status of the wealth generated in the process of development activities.

The anxiety generated by the idea that any one individual should benefit from the whole complex of activities, defined as having to do with development and involving the labour of the whole village, is due to a lack of an adequate mechanism for defining rights to that wealth. At the heart of the problem lie questions about the nature of these new offices, specifically in relation to indigenous village offices. Inasmuch as rights in terms of ancestral sacrae and patrimony are clearly seen as adhering to the role of, for example, the elder, and subject to clearly formulated terms of inheritance and rules of succession, conflicts exist in the minds of the villagers with regard to the new offices. As a result, the very simple question posed for the villagers is that, if these offices are constituted to represent village interests, to what extent is the relationship between persons and things rather than roles and things? That is, to what extent does the wealth adhere to the persons who are administering it rather than to their roles as duly defined?

This confusion does not arise out of backward looking traditionalist mentality. On the contrary, it arises from what villagers perceive as the goal of the process they have undertaken under the auspices of the development agency. However, the suspicion lurks that the promotion of cattle husbandry stands little chance of success in enhancing the organic content of the soil due to the critical shortage of forage and the long standing necessity of pasturing large herds away from the region. Pragmatic Mossi farmers have largely abandoned attempts at plow agriculture, having observed how the opening of

straight furrows increased erosion and acted to retard water penetration. The villagers are justifiably sceptical of Western-introduced schemes to re-establish the viability of the subsistence enterprise. Under conditions of extreme ecological degradation and chronic staple crop production shortfalls, villagers perceive both the short-term and the long-term solution to the poverty they experience as in the commodity sphere. For this reason it is the dry-season irrigated market gardening around Lake Bam which appears the most desired project and whose realization is within the power of the development agency.

The focus of the villagers, both women and men, is on those scarce things that the development process introduces into the village: things which may be converted into money and then again into things. Villagers, especially the men, have had extensive experience both in commoditizing their labour and in dealing with commodities. The wealth generated through communal labour for the benefit of all belies what they know of the relationship between people and things in the developed world. The development process for them is a potential move away from the subsistence enterprise to one where commodity relations prevail. By taking into account this understanding the anxiety that any one person should act with impunity in the appropriation of any part of this wealth may be seen as based on the fear that labour of the one is lost to the enrichment of the other.

The structure of relations posited by the development agency speaks neither to the set of relations inherent in the subsistence village setting nor to what is known of the relations of the commoditized sphere. The enactment of the required forms of social action and the participation in the full range of projects, in a sense, marks time until more clear-cut benefits can be gained. Here again the realization of the market gardening project must be underlined as the ultimate goal of such participation.

Perhaps more significantly, the enactment of the form of organization of gender relations entailed by the development program, which is seen by the villagers as leading to personal enrichment in the commodity sphere, forced the community to make a statement about gender relations outside the subsistence household. The refusal of the men's committee to allow the women's committee to control their own fund is a considered statement in the larger public arena where gender relations in future forms of production become a point of contention. Compliance with the requirements of the development agency would have indicated the acceptance of men and women as autonomous in the anticipated form of production. The villagers refused such compliance on the understanding that such a rupture of complementarity would work against the formation of the desired production units in the commodity sphere. The male-headed, commodity-producing household is, after all, the model of productive relations expected both by the co-operatives of Lake Bam and those farther afield (Conti 1979).

Finally, villagers see themselves as in an interstitial state between the failing subsistence enterprise and the promise of the commodity sphere. It is the activities structured by the development agency that will in their minds realize this promise. Although in the village committees they have been able to subvert a democratic form of decision making in line with what can be called political advantage, especially in respect of the exclusion of the Fulbe, the question of the fate of women finds its resolution in the requirements of the anticipated form of commodity production. The anxiety generated by the thought of individual advantage in terms of communally accumulated funds rests on the simple premise that one person's gain must be the other's loss. The rather token autonomy of women insisted upon by the division of projects into those to be administered by men and those to be administered by women contravenes the viability of the success of individual households in the form of commodity production accessible to the villagers in question. Efforts to promote or safeguard the interests of women as autonomous, equal actors cannot find success simply through the legal rational mechanism of the bestowal upon women of parallel offices. Such mechanisms become irrelevant in the context of the larger economic reality.

Some mention may be made here of a notion of "limited good." Foster's "Image of Limited Good" (1965) has been the subject of extensive discussion involving notions as diverse as a fundamental cultural premise of "closed" peasant societies to processes of transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist forms of production. In the present context, the belief that one person's gain necessitates loss for the other may be seen as a result of the incompatibility of strategies of perceived economic gain between a number of spheres specifically defined. On the one hand, a subsistence domain has been identified, governed by the organization of labour and persons within the confines of the household, the *zaka* and other kinship-based structures. On the other hand, villagers are seen to be striving to enter the commodity sphere in the form of the commodity-producing household. Each of these domains manifests, in the eyes of the villagers, a distinct configuration of relations between persons, labour and things. Intervening is the democratically organized unity of economic interests entailed by the development organization's imposed structures of co-operative labour for communal benefit. It may be said that the inability of villagers to take initiative in respect of the disposal of the wealth generated by this tentative form of organization lies not so much in the perception of this wealth as finite, but rather in the contradictions of right of disposal in relation to this wealth and the economic strategies of villagers in the pursuit of economic gain. In a very real sense, if communal labour is to result in communal benefit, individual advantage must diminish the gain of the whole.

It may also be argued that given these conditions the very plan of the development intervention is mistaken. Several alternate strategies come to mind. For example, given the lack of unity between the ethnic groups of the village, a village-based plan of action is probably not indicated. For that matter, perhaps a lower level of organization would be more suitable as the unit for the promotion of development efforts. Or, given women's equal participation in the raising of staple crops, their responsibility in the control of the cereal bank could be recognized. However, such issues deserve a separate treatment.

Conclusion

Given the case in question, it would appear that this small-scale development intervention designed to assure the equal access of women to the benefits of development meets with little success. As has been underlined, this failure is not due to a traditional patriarchy that insists on subjugating women to men, but rather is due to the requirements of those forms of production perceived by the community as promising ameliorization of economic life. If the personhood of women can be taken as circumscribed by the disposability of their labour and fertility by men organized into the subsistence household, it still allows, in this context, for limited economic autonomy similar to that of men. The transition of the constitutive relations of woman as person into the commodity sphere necessitates the loss of this autonomy as she enters that sphere in the commodity-producing household as unfree labour. If it is the exclusion of women from office holding that marks their inequality with men in the subsistence sphere, then it is clear that the bestowal of office upon her cannot guarantee equality in the commodity sphere.

At issue in this discussion has been the interplay between assumptions of autonomy and complementarity of individuals. The agenda of the development agency promotes both but leads to the questioning of whether in the context of the complementarity of male and female in production autonomy can be realized. The complementarity of the subsistence enterprise still dominated largely by the logic of the gift economy in relation to the status of women becomes transformed into inequality and diminution of the autonomy of women in the commodity sphere. If the promotion of women in development aims at the safeguarding of individual interests, under the specific conditions described, the compatibility of complementarity and the autonomous individual must be questioned. For what has been described can only be seen, unlike the more dramatic examples of major displacement of people and productive relations through large-scale development intervention, as a process which more subtly repositions the constitutive relations of persons, their labour and things and leads to a differing constitution of woman as person. The resulting person, in our eyes, must be seen as even less an individual in her

own right. It is this logical incompatibility between autonomy and complementarity which nags at the successful promotion of women in development under the type of conditions described. And it is perhaps for this reason, as a very general observation, that the more successful attempts in making the benefits of development directly available to African women take place under conditions where women have been freed from the social burden of husbands, in-laws and larger traditional structures, that is, the female-headed household. This is not to imply that such a configuration places women in a more favourable position in terms of realizing economic goals. Indeed, there is much evidence to the contrary (Staudt 1988). Rather, the application of the model of personal action, as propounded by the development program described, to the female-headed household, precludes the necessary acting out of "our" ideological contradictions against the backdrop of any given African setting.

Note

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