

# **Resource Access and Management as Historical Processes**

## **- Conceptual and Methodological issues**

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How does one study access to resources and resource management in economies and societies where "no condition is permanent"? The problem has preoccupied students of development for some time--although it has not always received explicit consideration in development research. Several years ago, for example, Simon Maxwell (1986:65) argued that, in seeking a "holistic" understanding of local agrarian systems, practitioners of Farming Systems Research risked producing results which were out of date before they were published:

Although targetting is a key element in FSR, neither the concepts nor the procedures take sufficient account of the fact that farming systems are in constant flux: the 'target' is not static, but continuously on the move.

He went on to recommend that studies of local farming systems adopt a longer time horizon, projecting likely changes in environmental and socio-economic conditions and projecting their likely impact on farm inputs and outputs over a 10-15 year time horizon. Others have urged students of contemporary farming systems to consult the work of colonial ecologists and agronomists, to see how conditions and practices have changed over time. (Fresco, 1986)

Time series data are valuable, but understanding the dynamics of agrarian change is more than a matter of making projections or collecting longitudinal evidence. Students of sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, often find that conceptual cate-

gories drawn from theoretical literature on economic and social change don't fully account for African experience. In a recent assessment of "African agriculture under structural adjustment," Peter Gibbon (1992:87) noted that

The World Bank's increasing emphasis on promotion of the private sector in African agricultural marketing, input supply and credit reflects the increasing frustration of its efforts to reform/commercialize agricultural parastatals. Just as its political theory rests on sharp distinctions between 'interest groups' defined according to unambiguous occupational, sectoral and sub-sectoral locations, so this emphasis rests upon a sharp distinction between the public and private. Both types of distinction have little empirical relevance in Africa, not only because of the ubiquitous presence of straddling, but because the public and private sectors are interwoven, intermeshed and even indistinguishable.

Indeed, much of the case for structural adjustment reforms in Africa rests on the widespread perception that governments and institutions don't work the way they're supposed to. As one economist put it, "perhaps the most important obstacle to private investment and growth in Africa is that everything is open to negotiation." (Lancaster, 1990:36)

In debates over development policy, negotiability is often held to be dysfunctional. Rules and regulations are frequently implemented by (African) government officials in an arbitrary and capricious fashion. Above all, investors require predictability on the part of their host governments. This is not present for them in much of Africa and so they go elsewhere. (Idem)

Even experienced statesmen who go to Africa for the express purpose of negotiating with its leaders may find themselves on slippery or unfamiliar terrain. The recent experience of Washington Okumu, who successfully persuaded Chief Buthelezi to participate in South Africa's first all-race elections, after Henry Kissinger had failed to mediate Buthelezi's dispute with the ANC, is a case in point.

In this essay, I would like to suggest that, for students of development, the negotiability of rules and relationships in Africa may be seen as an opportunity rather than an impasse. It

is always healthy to confront evidence which forces us to rethink accepted models and methods, and attempting to understand the intractabilities of African social realities may shed new light on development processes in general. In addition, there appears to be an interesting convergence between development studies and recent work by historians and anthropologists which portrays African cultures and institutions as fluid and ambiguous, subject to multiple interpretations and frequent redefinition in the course of daily practice. Institutions, such as law or marriage, are better understood as processes than events (see, e.g., Comaroff, ed., 1980; Parkin & Nyamwira, eds., 1987; Opong, ed., 1983; Mann & Roberts, 1991), and African cultures as fluid and dynamic constellations of social interaction and cultural practice, rather than "closed, corporate, consensual" communities. (Ranger, 1983) Ethnic identities have not persisted "from time immemorial," but were forged or "invented" at particular times and places and are subject to change over time. (See, e.g., Vail, ed., 1987) Similarly, while membership in descent groups or ancestral communities is often invoked in daily conversation or legal debate as derived from unchanging tradition, in practice both the boundaries and the structures of such institutions are subject to ambiguity and change.<sup>1</sup>

If, as recent historical and anthropological scholarship suggests, African cultures and institutions are fluid, ambiguous and negotiable, what does this imply for our understanding of socio-economic practices and processes in Africa, and for debates about development strategy? How can we study African economies and societies in motion, in order to gain insights into the dynamics of resource access and management? In the following pages, I will discuss some of the methodological issues raised by these questions, drawing on my own and others' research for examples of useful methodological strategies and considering their implications for the way we think about social and economic change.

## **Units of analysis**

In my own work, I have always found it useful to start with people documenting their activities, experiences and ideas, and the way they have changed over time, as a starting point for under-

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<sup>1</sup>When, for example, I followed Yoruba cocoa growers from their farms in the forest belt to their "home towns" on the edge of the savannah, I discovered that in most of the compounds I visited there, people claimed to have originated from somewhere else. Berry, 1985; see also Barber, 1991.

standing the social relations and processes in which they are involved. Such a statement may seem commonplace, but it is easily misunderstood. I am not, for example, arguing that one can satisfactorily account for social processes merely by counting and aggregating the acts and characteristics of individuals viewed in isolation. "Methodological individualism"--a somewhat misleading term since it refers not to a method of research but rather to a mode of explanation--has been quite rightly criticized for treating social processes as multiples or weighted sums of autonomous individual acts. Indeed, methods of research which presume that individuals may be studied in isolation preclude by definition any direct observation of the social relations and interactions we are attempting to understand.

In moving beyond methodological and analytical individualism, however, it is important not to lose sight of agency. People are, after all, our principal informants: their statements and actions not only provide researchers with much evidence about social practices, but they also play an active role in shaping our understanding of their circumstances. Though social researchers have not always recognized it, social research is itself an interactive process: what researchers learn about their "subjects" (and vice versa) is shaped by the process of interaction between them. Thus, part of the project of describing and analyzing social dynamics involves asking how individuals participate in institutions, networks and relationships; how their actions and encounters reinforce or redefine boundaries between networks and institutions; and how their understanding of their circumstances may contribute to our own.

The difference between surveying individuals and studying people may be illustrated by comparing two studies of an irrigated rice growing project in Gambia--one by a team of researchers from the International Food Policy Research Institute led by Joachim von Braun and Patrick Webb (1989), the other by Judith Carney and Michael Watts (1988, 1990), two geographers from the University of California. Efforts to promote irrigated double-cropping of rice in the Gambia River basin began in the colonial period, "initially under the auspices of the Colonial Development Corporation, and successively by missions from Taiwan, the People's Republic of China and the World Bank working in tandem with the Gambian government" (Carney & Watts, 1990:209).

In 1982, IFAD and the Gambian government launched a new project in Jahaly Pacharr. Though women play a major role in

local farming systems, previous schemes tended to ignore them. IFAD was determined to rectify this situation. "Learning from the mistakes of past schemes, the project management endeavored to ensure that plots of swamp land taken over and redeveloped for pump irrigation would be registered in the name of the head woman of each household...." (von Braun & Webb, 1989:515) Despite these precautions, both the IFPRI team and Carney and Watts concluded that the gains in output and income resulting from participation in the project accrued primarily to senior males. The differences between the two studies lie in the way they explain this outcome and assess the wider implications of the project for development and agrarian change in Jahaly Pachar. These differences arise directly from the different methodologies employed in the two studies.

The IFPRI team devoted considerable attention to identifying relevant units of analysis, in order to arrive at ethnographically accurate measurements of the impact of the project on the rural economy. Gambian households or "compounds" may contain up to 100 people and are subdivided into separate, sometimes overlapping groups with

- distinct spheres of responsibility and activity....

The decision-making units in both production and consumption are multi-faceted, which complicates, therefore, the application of a uniform production economics approach to the study of households. (von Braun & Webb, 1989:515)

In most compounds, all adult men and women contributed labor to cultivate one or more "communal" fields (*maruo*) under the direction of the compound head. Crops grown on *maruo* fields consisted primarily of food grains--millet, sorghum and maize on upland fields, rice on lowland fields. *Maruo* crops were retained in a common store, managed by the compound head, who allocated grain on a daily basis to the various cooking units within the compound. In addition, most adults had access to individual fields (*kamanyango*), on which they grew a variety of crops, including groundnuts and cotton in the uplands, and rice on low-lying land near the river. *Kamanyango* crops belonged to the individual who grew them and were often sold for cash. Plots within the project perimeter were designated as *maruo* and used entirely for rice.

To assess the differential impact of the project on men and women, the IFPRI team compared their allocations of labor time to "communal" and "private" fields in two groups of households, distinguished by the degree of their "access to new rice fields." (von Braun & Webb, 1989:528) <sup>2</sup>

In the group with "greater access", both men and women allocated more time to "communal" (project) fields than was the case in households with "limited access" to project fields, but "the relative increase in [labor on communal fields was] much larger for women than for men." (Ibid:527)

From these results, the IFPRI researchers drew a number of conclusions. Since output from compound fields is managed by the (usually male) compound head for the compound as a whole, they argued that the reallocation of labor from "private" to compound fields was tantamount to an increase in the rate of intra-household "taxation" and led to the "concentration of economic power in the hands of the compound head." (Ibid:531) Having translated their findings into the language of private versus collective property rights<sup>3</sup>, they go on to speculate that

[i]nefficiencies of intrahousehold resource allocation in the compound 'mini-state' similar to those resulting from rent seeking in economies with strong state control over scarce resources (titles) may thus develop.... (Ibid:531)

Although they do not say so explicitly, Von Braun and Webb's method of analysis rests heavily on rhetoric. By labeling senior men in Jahaly Pachar as heads of domestic "mini-states", *maruo* and *kamanyango* as "communal" and "private" forms of property, and labor allocated to communal fields as a "tax", von Braun & Webb translate the ethnographic specificities of Jahaly Pacharr into the abstract language of neoclassical

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<sup>2</sup>Participation was measured by the amount of land cultivated within the project perimeter. Households in the group with "greater access" cultivated .06 ha of project land per adult equivalent person, on average; those with "limited access" averaged .02 ha of project land per adult equivalent. Von Braun & Webb, 1989:528.

<sup>3</sup>They also state, however, that "less of the rice crop is marketed when it falls under male control, as a communal crop, than when it was under female control as an individual crop" (ibid:531) and that per capita grain consumption was slightly higher in households with greater access to project land. The implication is that compound heads in Jahaly Pacharr used at least some of the gains from participation in the project to provide collective benefits to household members, in the form of higher levels of food consumption.

economics, and then proceed to draw conclusions from the underlying theory. They assume that "communal" and "private" forms of property are distinct and mutually exclusive, and that each gives rise to a different system of resource management and income distribution. In effect, these theoretical constructs become their principal units of analysis: the effects of the project are explained in terms of a reallocation of land and labor from one category of property-rights-cum-resource-management to the other, and its implications for rural development inferred from presumed differences in the management of collective and private property. By reifying institutional and rural categories, their analysis also precludes investigation of ways in which the project might have led to the renegotiation of rights to land, labor and/or output within or between rural households, redefinitions of social and institutional boundaries, or the reformulation of local understandings of agrarian practices and possibilities<sup>4</sup>. Instead they reduce complex and varied patterns of interaction to predetermined categories-- portraying patriarchy as a kind of market imperfection and suggesting that the progressive aims of the project were subverted by the inflexibility of traditional institutions.

In contrast, Carney & Watts analyze the effects of the Jahaly Pacharr project by tracing sequences of action and interaction among individuals with varied and changing interests, and exploring multiple lines of causation. They argue, for example, that the project failed to hit its intended "target" (women farmers), in part, because of contradictions in the project managers' own objectives. The managers were undoubtedly sincere in wanting to benefit rural women, but they also knew that cultivation of high yielding varieties of rice on irrigated plots required more labor than was needed to grow traditional lowland rice, and that the success of the project would depend, therefore, on farmers' ability to mobilize family labor. Thus, while taking pains to lease many of the irrigated plots to women, project managers made no effort to interfere with the designation of these plots as *maruo* and, hence, to their *de facto* control by male compound heads. Moreover, women whose lowland (*kamanyango*) fields were incorporated into the pro-

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<sup>4</sup>Although they speculate, at the end of the article, that technological change may promote the dissolution of compounds, their method of presenting and analyzing data presumes that institutions are static. They also turn their analysis of gender to ideological ends, suggesting for example that, because women sell crops, they'll benefit from free trade.

ject's irrigated perimeters were effectively dispossessed by the project, becoming full-time workers on *maruo* fields controlled by the heads of their compounds.

Carney (1988:341) has also pointed out that, even if less rice was marketed, on average, from male-controlled *maruo* than from women's *kamanyango* fields, compound heads often sold part of the rice grown on project fields and kept the proceeds. Thus, not only did the women of their compounds spend more time working on compound fields, but part of the resulting output was appropriated by the compound head as a form of private income. In other words, part of the increased exploitation of women's labor within households occurred through a change in the management of output produced on household fields--a possibility which von Braun & Webb's method of analysis prevents them from envisioning.

Initially, as Carney and Watts demonstrate, the project led to increased exploitation of women's labor on compound fields. But that is not the end of their story. They go on to show that rural women did not simply acquiesce in increased exploitation, but contested both the loss of *kamanyango* fields to the project and pressures to work longer hours on *maruo* fields within it. Some, who retained access to upland *kamanyango* fields, withdrew their labor from compound fields and devoted more time to growing groundnuts and cotton, which they sold on their own account. Others demanded and received compensation for their labor on *maruo* fields, thus recapturing some of the gains from the project and redefining the terms on which labor was managed on compound fields. And some women, principally those who had lost their *kamanyango* rights altogether, took advantage of the growing market for agricultural labor, withdrawing their labor from the fields of their own compound heads and hiring themselves out to their neighbors. Still others turned to collective action, organizing labor gangs and seeking greater involvement in government institutions and the courts than they had enjoyed in the past. As one Mandinka woman explained to an interviewer from the BBC, "we [women] were asleep then. But now we are awake." (Quoted in Carney, 1988:340)

## Constructive Deconstruction

By studying sequences of action and interaction, Carney & Watts open up the possibility of deconstructing institutions--not to deny their importance, but rather to gain insight into their fluid

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and dynamic nature. By tracing patterns of Gambian women's resistance to exploitation, they also show how institutions were redefined or transformed through people's struggles over the division of labor and output.

Another effective study of institutional change is Graham Thiele's (1986) work on *ujamaa* villages in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania, in which he explores "Village Administration as a political field". (Thiele, 1986:540) Following villagization in the mid-1970s, the Tanzanian state constructed an elaborate system of local administrative and political institutions designed to promote development and rural democracy. In addition to the Party's extensive organization, which started at the grassroots level with Ten-House Cells, the government had instituted a multi-layered system of village administration, including Village Assemblies (in which everyone over the age of 17 could vote) and Village Councils, elected by the assemblies, which were organized into functional committees, responsible for "Planning, Production, Education, Defence and Building." (Thiele, 1986:543)

Participation in these various institutions was high, but did not necessarily determine the process of governance. Though Village Councils and Village Assemblies met regularly, "many decisions of policy were actually taken outside of the formally recognized loci for decision making, and some of the most important decisions were made by loosely bounded groups of individuals, or factions." (Ibid:544) In Matumbulu these included a group of "devout Christians" and a

Traditionalist faction...whose primary concern was ritual, but which retained the outward form of a state apparatus. The predominant characteristic of the Traditionalists' political practice was a tactful non-compliance with the orders of the District Administration.... (Ibid:544-4)

The Traditionalists also formed a "rain committee...apparently modelled on a Village Committee" to oversee the important business of rain-making, which was not provided for by the Village Council. During the drought of 1981, the rain committee decided to call in a ritual specialist and requested leaders of the Party's Ten-House Cells to collect the necessary contributions from homesteads in their cells. To the party cadres' objections, the committee patiently explained that

[i]t was no use for Cell leaders to carry out only duties concerned with collective work on the Village (Ibid:547).

Local opinion also played an active, if indirect role in the implementation of the central government's attempt to conserve grain during the drought by announcing a ban on beer brewing. On the enthusiastic advice of the pro-temperance Christian faction in Matumbulu, the Village Council decided to observe the ban and announced their decision to the Village Assembly. However,

in the neighboring village of Mphunguzi no banning order had been made. The result was an exodus of most adult men from Matumbulu to Mphunguzi on Friday and Saturday when beer was for sale (Ibid:552-3).

The women of Matumbulu, deprived of their principal source of income, protested eloquently: "Does Nyerere only rule in Matumbulu?" Within a week, the Chairman of the Party Branch announced a compromise: the banning order was to remain in effect, but Party leaders "would not enforce it." (Ibid:553) Politically, however, the damage was done. In the next local election, most of the Christian candidates were defeated. Democracy prevailed in spite, rather than because of, the state's efforts to mobilize the people.

As Thiele's study shows, tracing people's multiple, sometimes contradictory or ambivalent actions and experiences can lead to a clearer understanding not only of the dynamics of institutional structures, but also of the fluidity and complexity of institutionalized rules and practices. The much debated issue of property rights is a case in point. In recent years, international donors, led by the World Bank, have urged the importance of privatization as a precondition for efficient resource allocation and successful development throughout the developing world. "Land reform," in recent development literature, has come to mean legislation to establish freehold tenure, rather than redistribution of landholdings from the rich to the poor. Efforts to demonstrate the validity of this proposition for African economies have been hampered by the paucity of African countries with widespread systems of legal freehold tenure or reliable

data on agricultural productivity. To get around these problems, a recent set of studies carried out by the World Bank compared indices of "tenure security" (based on surveys of farmers' opinions) and agricultural innovation for selected rural areas in Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Burkina Faso. Finding little or no statistically significant relationships between their measurements, the authors concluded that, since land tenure could not be shown to have impeded agricultural progress in these countries, land rights must have "evolved" spontaneously in the direction of private ownership. Hence "land reform" was not needed. (Migot-Adholla, et al., 1991)

As in the IFPRI study of Jahaly Pacharr, these conclusions reflect the authors' theoretical presuppositions rather than any demonstrable social realities. Indeed, it may be argued that both the terms of their analysis and their methods of research ignore several key aspects of the way in which African farmers actually acquire and exercise claims on land. A growing body of literature argues that, in the past, Africans claimed various rights in land by virtue of their membership or status in various social groups, and renegotiated such claims in the process of changing political relations and social identities. (Mann & Roberts, 1991; Bassett & Crummey, 1993; Downs & Reyna, 1988) This situation did not change, fundamentally, under colonial rule. Indeed, by seeking to incorporate "customary" rules and structures of authority into the apparatus of colonial administration, officials tended, inadvertently, to promote the multiplication of claims and perpetuate their fluidity. (Berry, 1992) Since independence, African governments' efforts to rationalize property rights through statutory intervention often served to intensify rather than resolve debate and conflict over land rights, by multiplying the conceptual frameworks and procedures brought to bear on the definition of rights and the adjudication of disputes.

In recent years, for example, several African governments have nationalized land in an attempt to simplify the law, raise productivity, and promote conservation. (Downs & Reyna, 1988; Bassett & Crummey, 1993) In practice, however, such legislative initiatives have done little to suppress land speculation or exhaustive commercial exploitation of natural resources, and they have often intensified the multiplication of claims by incorporating conflicts over land into on-going struggles for power. Far from spontaneous evolution of de facto freehold tenure, property rights remain contested, multi-faceted and negotiable.

Even in Kenya, where privatization was initiated by the colonial government and carried on after independence, the process of registration invited assertions of multiple claims which remained stubbornly alive in the face of statutory extinction. (Okoth-Ogendo, 1981) Indeed, some scholars have argued that registration revitalized Kikuyu lineages (*mbari*), making it politically difficult for courts to ignore their claims to continued corporate interests in land which was legally owned by individuals. (Glazier, 1985; Mackenzie, 1988, 1993) In the event, one of the principal economic arguments for registration--that it would increase farmers' access to credit--is often belied in practice: given the legal and political uncertainties surrounding foreclosure, creditors are loath to accept land titles as collateral, without additional guarantees. (Migot-Adholla, et al., 1991)

Thus, in many African countries, "security of tenure" is not guaranteed by the passage of laws or the payment of money, but must be maintained through negotiation, adjudication and political manoeuver. To trace changes in actual conditions of access to land--and their effects on resource use--it is not sufficient to construct indices of "tenure security" from opinion surveys or compare them with measures of agricultural innovation or yields. [4] If rights in land are defined through on-going, open-ended debate over authority and obligation as well as rules and practices, the security of farmers' rights depends on the terms in which they participate in such debates and in the domestic, judicial and bureaucratic arenas in which they occur. To study these processes one must observe them.

## Methodological Processualism?

What kinds of methodologies help to illuminate the dynamic character of resource access and management in African societies? In the final section of this paper, I'll consider several possibilities. They include: chronicling people and resources in motion, restudies, and comparative analysis of dynamic patterns and conjunctures.

### a) People and Resources in Motion

In my own efforts to trace Yoruba farmers' uses of income from cocoa farming (Berry, 1985), I found it helpful to organize my inquiries around people's lifetime histories of movement--from savannah to forest to take up cocoa cultivation, from one area of the forest belt to another to establish additional farms, from

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farming village to town to diversify their income earning activities or launch their children in non-farming occupations, etc. For most people, such movements were easily remembered and formed a convenient reference point around which to reconstruct a chronology of major patterns of resource acquisition and use. For example, farmers often replied to direct questions about farm labor that they had used hired labor on their cocoa farms "from the start." However, when I pieced together evidence from farmers' own histories of migration, employment and cocoa planting, it became clear that for most farmers, the ability to draw on the unpaid labor of wives, children and junior kinsmen was a key condition for entry into cocoa growing and greatly facilitated the expansion of cocoa plantings over time. This finding, in turn, helped me to see that many apparently unrelated forms of expenditure on "consumption"--maintenance of junior kinsmen, outlays on children's education or vocational training, contributions to extended family projects, and the construction of houses in "home towns" which farmers rarely visited--also served as investments in social relationships which were important to farmers' access to and management of productive resources.

In addition, by literally following my informants as they travelled from one place to another, I gained additional insights not only into the way they organized diversified patterns of income generation, but also how they established and maintained social networks across space and over time, and the relationship between participation in social networks and processes of resource access and use.

Tracing people's movements, through interviews and observation, also helped me to understand the porousness and flexibility of social and spatial boundaries in western Nigeria, and hence to rethink the relevance of certain bounded analytical constructs (peasantization, urban bias, corporate descent groups) for understanding agrarian change there. Others are using similar methods to re-examine the significance of international boundaries for the way people acquire and deploy resources. Studies of people's movements and relationships across national borders offer a promising strategy for gaining new insights both into the social construction of markets and communities, and relationships between state and society<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of cross-border studies include Asiwaju, 1989; Pottier, 1988; and current dissertation research on the Nigeria/Benin and Ghana/Burkina Faso bor-

Another area in which it is revealing to observe people's activities over time is in the study of labor and the labor requirements of alternative techniques and productive activities. Research on farmers' reactions to new crop varieties or methods of cultivation has shown, for example, that for women and men with diversified sources of income and multiple social and domestic obligations, flexibility in the timing of labor inputs may be more important in determining the usefulness of a new technique than the overall ratio of output to inputs. (Haugerud & Collinson, 1990; Richards, 1987; Fresco, 1986)

#### b) Restudies

Revisiting a research site after a lapse of time can be a very rewarding experience. By returning in 1978/9 to a village in the Nigerian cocoa belt which I had studied in 1970/1, I was not only able to trace directly the impact of Nigeria's oil boom on a farming community, but also gained unexpected insights into processes of rural class formation. At the time, scholars were debating the issue of whether or not the growth of small-scale agricultural production for export had created peasantries in western Africa. (Post, 1973; Beer & Williams, 1975) When I returned to "Abulekeji" (a pseudonym) in 1978, I took a census of the village and compared it to one I had taken in 1971. While the total population had remained roughly constant during the interval, sixty percent of the individuals who lived in Abulekeji in 1971 had left and been replaced by other people. Moreover, the turnover occurred mainly within established households: very few households had either disappeared entirely or been established *de novo*. Clearly, the notion of a stable peasantry--rooted in the land, with families structured by demographic cycles--had little relevance for the Yoruba cocoa economy.

Other examples of insights to be gained from restudies include the classic work of Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder among the Gwembe Tonga of southern Zambia, which spans more than forty years; Mitzi Goheen's (1993) richly detailed analysis of the mutually constitutive relations between social identity and control over property in Nso, a small chiefdom in the Cameroon grassfields where Goheen has conducted research since 1979; and Jane Guyer's forthcoming book on agrarian change in Ibarapa, a Yoruba district on the edge of the savannah,

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ders, by graduate students in anthropology at Northwestern University and the University of Pennsylvania, respectively.

where she carried out dissertation research in 1968 and a follow-up study twenty years later.

In returning to a site of one's own earlier research, it is often possible to reinterview informants and observe directly changes in institutions and practices, thus generating longitudinal evidence as well as asking new questions. A more difficult undertaking is to carry out research in an area which was studied intensively in the past by someone else. Prins (1981), Pottier (1988) and Moore and Vaughan (1993), for example, each set out to build on earlier work by an eminent anthropologist. In every case, the authors encountered unforeseen difficulties in following up their predecessors' work. Not only had informants died or disappeared, and their own analytical perspectives changed from those which informed earlier generations of scholars, but even units of analysis which figured prominently in the work of their predecessors proved surprisingly problematic. In northeastern Zambia, Pottier found that Mambwe households and villages whose stability was central to Watson's (1958) finding of "tribal cohesion" in a rural labor reserve had a history of fission and relocation which predated labor migration. And Moore and Vaughan discovered far more variation, culturally and agriculturally, among the Bemba than Audrey Richards' extensive writings ever suggested.

Nonetheless, the results of these restudies have shed much light on processes of social and economic change, in part because of the authors' initial frustrations. Pottier's elucidation of the fluidity and mobility of Mambwe kin groups and communities stems in large part from his own inability to reconstruct Watson's key units of analysis. Moore and Vaughan attribute Richards' exaggeratedly uniform picture of "Bemba" culture and institutions to the fact that she derived much of her evidence from chiefs and their immediate neighbors. But they also discovered that it would be difficult for them to re-study a specific village because Richards

had not conducted the classic anthropologist's village study because she had clearly moved over very large areas of this sparsely populated and remote area, between villages that were sometimes more than 100 miles apart. (Moore & Vaughan, 1993:xii)

In other words, Richards' own research methods incorporated far more mobility than she emphasized in her writings--albeit

"mobility of a particular kind," with "points of reference...almost entirely determined by her interest, not in production and consumption, but in the Bemba political system." (Ibid:xiii) While this discovery may have frustrated some of Moore and Vaughan's original research plans, it sheds new light on the strengths as well as the limitations of Richards' own classic study of resource access and use in an African setting.

**c) Processes within processes**

A final challenge facing the student of African social dynamics is to sort out, from accounts and observations of many simultaneous activities and events, the multiple processes at work in any given social arena and their interrelations. Jane Guyer (1992 and forthcoming) has made important contributions to this project. Her patient attention to the many details of men's and women's daily domestic and productive routines in Ibarapa enables her to tease out multiple "rhythmic structures of social life" and trace subtle changes in temporal arrangements of social activity which, in turn, open new windows onto processes of change. Between 1968 and 1988, for example, as increasing numbers of people left Ibarapa to work or attend school in Ibadan (or other urban centers), traditional temporal cycles of agricultural, marketing and ceremonial activity gave way to a five day work week followed by a weekend when emigrant citizens could be present for meetings, ceremonies and recreation. The temporal rearrangement of productive and social routines has, in turn, affected a wide range of activities and institutions, from cropping patterns to periodic markets and local politics.

Similarly, my own interpretation of how changing conditions of access to productive resources shaped patterns of resource use in several rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa rests on an argument about the historical intersection of related, but separate dynamic processes. In a recent study (Berry, 1993), I compared patterns of agrarian change in four localities over the course of the twentieth century. The cases--which I chose to reflect different histories of incorporation into regional and global political economies--include two areas of expanding peasant production for export (the cocoa growing regions of southwestern Nigeria and south central Ghana), a settler economy (central Kenya), and a rural labor reserve (northeastern Zambia). In designing the study, I both sought to build on my previous investigations of processes of agrarian change in southwestern Nigeria, and to experiment with the insights to be gained from

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a detailed comparison of my research in Nigeria with a few other cases.

The results were somewhat unexpected. Although I chose the cases initially to illustrate different patterns of agricultural development and rural incorporation into regional and global networks of economic and political interaction, as I read<sup>6</sup>, I became increasingly interested in the similarities among them--particularly in the way farmers' access to productive resources had changed over the course of the twentieth century. The similarities lay, however, not in a process of convergence towards a common pattern of production or agrarian structure, but rather in the dynamics of resource access and control.

In all four areas, transactions in rights to productive resources became increasingly commercialized during the colonial and postcolonial periods, but access to resources also continued to turn on farmers' participation in a variety of social networks and institutions. However, changing conditions of access to land and to labor followed different trajectories over time. Before the colonial era, people gained access to land through a variety of social relationships, including marriage, kinship, and clientage, and they have continued to do so--although the social networks involved have both changed and proliferated. Even in Kenya, where most land has been registered in the name of individual owners, descent groups continue to exercise rights and transactions in titles often bear little relation to access and use on the ground. Elsewhere, the vesting of ultimate control over land in the state has simply added another layer of competing claims to those of individuals, families, communities and chiefs. Commercial transactions are as likely to take place within descent groups, communities, etc., as between them.

Access to labor is another matter. Labor hiring has certainly increased over time--more so in some areas than others--but most African farmers cannot afford to hire more than a fraction of the labor they need, so continue to rely primarily on family and friends (work groups, etc.) Over time, however, members of ru-

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<sup>6</sup>I did not do fieldwork in Ghana, Kenya or Zambia for this study, but relied instead on secondary sources and some archival material. My reasons were both personal and methodological. Recognizing the limited possibilities of generalizing about agrarian change in Africa from quantitative data, I wanted to explore the possibilities of building general arguments from qualitative studies of local societies which are often richer than quantitative analyses but do not lend themselves to easy aggregation. I have recently carried out some field research on land tenure in Ghana through which I hope to explore subtle differences in the cultural dynamics of resource access and control in Ghana and Nigeria which did not emerge from my examination of the secondary literature.

ral households have come to spend increasing amounts of time engaged in off-farm activities--attending school, trading, hiring out, etc.--and often travelling away from rural communities to do so. Thus, family and other forms of socially recruited labor has become increasingly difficult to get, and farmers who cannot afford to hire the labor they need, are often forced to fall back on their own efforts. In the long run, then, access to land has remained linked to membership in social networks, while access to agricultural labor has become increasingly individualized.

The effects of these divergent trajectories in conditions of access to land and labor on patterns of production and agrarian structure have varied from one locality to another--depending in part on how land and labor have been combined over time in agricultural production, as well as on changes in market conditions and the course of local debates over authority, obligation and the division of labor and output.

In the cocoa economies of Ghana and Nigeria, farmers relied heavily on the labor of wives, junior kin and other dependents to establish cocoa farms, but as their farms matured and became self-financing, they tended to substitute hired for family labor. Family laborers, in turn, advanced to self-employment, establishing cocoa farms of their own or moving into trade or other non-farm occupations. Both of these trends were reinforced by the fact that, apart from the international depression of the early 1930s and the second world war, market conditions for cocoa were relatively favorable for much of the colonial and early independence periods. Thus, the cocoa growing areas experienced a kind of contra-leninist pattern of socio-economic change, characterized by widespread use of hired labor and a high incidence of modest upward mobility among both farmers and farm workers.

Although the rural economy of central Kenya was much more commercialized than that of northeastern Zambia during and after the colonial period, in both areas farmers were primarily engaged in producing food crops, both for home consumption and for sale. Because returns to food crop production were often lower and much more volatile than returns to cocoa farming, agricultural employment remained less commercialized than in the cocoa economies. Evidence suggests, however, that in both central Kenya and northeastern Zambia, rural producers became more differentiated over time, in terms of both gender and class. Thus, the pattern of agrarian change in these economies also diverged from the standard leninist paradigm, but in the opposite

direction--commercialization of agricultural labor was more limited, while rural differentiation appears to have been more pronounced<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup>As cocoa production declined and farmers in southwestern Nigeria and south central Ghana shifted into food crop production, patterns of agricultural employment and rural differentiation moved closer to those of central Kenya and northeastern Kenya. Berry, 1993:197-9.

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