



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Royal African Society

Agrarian Change and the Revolution in Burkina Faso

Author(s): Mike Speirs

Source: *African Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 358 (Jan., 1991), pp. 89-110

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of [Royal African Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/722641>

Accessed: 05-12-2015 17:14 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/722641?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Royal African Society and Oxford University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *African Affairs*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

AGRARIAN CHANGE AND THE REVOLUTION IN BURKINA FASO

MIKE SPEIRS

WITH THE RECURRENCE of drought and famine in the Sahel during the 1980s, and in spite of official policies which have emphasized the objective of food self-sufficiency, the countries in this region of Africa are increasingly dependent on cereals imports and are recipients of large quantities of food aid both in 'good' and 'bad' harvest years. In the face of declining or stagnant per capita food output levels due to a combination of economic, ecological and political factors, and with the prospects of long term 'aid dependence'¹, steadily increasing debt repayment burdens and high rates of population growth and urbanization, a re-appraisal of agricultural development strategies in the region is underway. Efforts to devise and implement policies which could reverse these trends have led to the recognition that the agrarian crisis reflects a series of unresolved conflicts between the different groups which seek to influence the state, and that peasant communities have generally been the losers in this struggle.²

This paper concentrates on the political implications of the agricultural production and food supply crises, with reference to Burkina Faso, one of the 'least developed' countries in the Sahel region of West Africa.³ The political upheaval following the coup d'état in August 1983, which brought the *Conseil National de la Révolution* (CNR) to power, appeared to include elements of an alternative approach to the problem of improving the food security and livelihood of peasant farmers in Burkina Faso. This study emphasizes the difficulties and contradictions encountered in 'economic management' reforms through food price policies and agricultural marketing strategies. In exploring these issues, it is necessary not to confine the

Mike Speirs is a researcher at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Copenhagen. This work was conducted with colleagues at the *Centre d'Etudes, de Documentation, et de Recherche Economique et Sociale* (CEDRES), University of Ouagadougou.

1. This term is used in a comprehensive study of the economic, ecological, social, political and demographic problems which face the inhabitants of the Sahel by J. Giri *et al*, *The Sahel facing the future—increasing dependence or structural transformation*. (OECD, Paris, 1988).

2. A critical study of the 'agrarian crisis' in Africa concludes by noting that the dominant image is of 'misguided, incompetent, exploitative and corrupt states that are actually killing the peasantry from which they draw a living.' J. Platteau, *The food crisis in Africa—a comparative structural analysis*, Wider working papers 44, (World Institute for Development Economics Research, Helsinki, 1988), p. 99.

3. The issues outlined arise from research in Burkina Faso in 1988, which included discussions at the *Centre d'Etudes, de Documentation, et de Recherche Economique et Sociale* (CEDRES) of the University of Ouagadougou, meetings with representatives of agricultural agencies, extension services and NGOs, and interviews with villagers in several provinces of the country. I wish to thank my colleagues at the University, as well as Roger Leys in Copenhagen, for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

analysis 'to the textbook variables of supply and demand, and markets [but also to] investigate the institutional and political channels through which supply and demand are expressed'.⁴

Numerous threads have to be untangled in this exercise. Much of the interest in the policies introduced by the CNR focussed on the charismatic leadership of Thomas Sankara, who was killed in another coup d'état in 1987.⁵ The events of September 1989, in which two members of the present government were executed after a suspected coup attempt, suggest that the political situation in Burkina Faso remains highly unstable. In order to understand what has been happening since 1983, and to assess changes in the balance of power in relation to the peasant farmers who constitute over 80 per cent of the population, a complex of political, social and economic conflicts, constraints and paradoxes will be explored.

Firstly, the background to the revolution of August 1983 will be described, indicating the various factors and forces which have influenced the development of the post-colonial state in Burkina Faso. This is followed by an overview of the measures that have been introduced since independence to modernize the agricultural sector and to improve the marketing of food crops. The marginalization of rural communities from the power base of the state is one of the main issues emerging from this historical survey. In the third section of the paper, the implications of the revolution in 1983 are explored with particular reference to the conflicting and complementary interests of agricultural producers, merchants and traders, urban workers and the military and bureaucratic elites. The aim of this section is to analyse the power struggles which have taken place with an emphasis on the difficulties encountered as a result of government intervention in cereals markets to resolve the 'food price dilemma'.⁶ This leads to some brief concluding remarks about different conceptions of the role of the state and the organization of the peasantry in Africa, and on the limitations of liberalization reforms in the agricultural sector.

Colonization and independence in Burkina Faso

Upper Volta, as Burkina Faso was called until 1984, was colonized by the French through military campaigns in the 1890s. Prior to the incorporation of the territory into French West Africa, about sixty different ethnic groups inhabited Upper Volta, comprising two main 'families': the Voltaic

4. P. Streeten, *What price food?—agricultural price policies in developing countries* (Macmillan, London, 1987), p. 84.

5. The coup d'état of 4th August 1983 has become known as the *Révolution Démocratique et Populaire* (RDP). The *Front Populaire*, led by Blaise Compaoré who took over after the assassination of Sankara, calls the coup d'état of 15th October 1987 'La rectification' (see section 4, below).

6. Defined by Streeten, *What price food*, p. 1, as a conflict between high food prices to encourage agricultural production, and low prices 'to protect (at least in the short run) the poor buyers of food'.

and the Mandé peoples.⁷ Until the end of the sixteenth century the West African Sahel was dominated by the ancient empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. However the Voltaic Mossi maintained a distinct social and political identity throughout the rise and decline of these empires. Their kingdoms extended over the central and northern regions of Upper Volta, united by a common language, an ideology based on a hierarchical division of labour between farmers, craftsmen, warriors and chiefs, and a centralized system of power and authority. By contrast, the southern and western regions of Upper Volta have been inhabited by a diverse mosaic of ethnic groups including the Birifor, Bobo, Bwa, Dioula, Gourounsi, Lobi and Senoufo. Other important groups include the pastoral Peul in the north, and the Gourmantché in the sparsely populated eastern regions. Unlike the Mossi, these ethnic groups have been characterized by systems of social and political organization in which power is structured around lineage relations and village communities without a centralized authority in the form of a 'state'.

Throughout pre-colonial Upper Volta, as in other regions of the Sahel, subsistence food crop cultivation and livestock herding constituted the livelihood of the majority of the population:

Crops were rainfed and production relied solely on human labour. Land lay fallow for long periods to regain fertility. Transhumant livestock activities were practised over vast areas. This type of production system clearly depended on the availability of virtually unlimited space and was well adapted to the region. . . . Although productivity was low, the system did generate a surplus that supported a small, but not insignificant class of non-food producers . . . and certain categories of craftsmen and *griots* who worked part time in agriculture.⁸

The development of the trans-Saharan trade in gold, slaves and agricultural products (which dates back to before the tenth century) and the gradual penetration of Islam, were important factors that influenced West African economies. But the colonial conquest of the Sahel destroyed the traditional pattern of trade through restrictions imposed on local commercial activities and through the re-direction of agricultural production towards the cultivation of cash crops for export.⁹ Colonial rule also imposed severe constraints on the indigenous populations through the introduction of military

7. This section draws on the study by C. Savonnet-Guyot, *Etat et société au Burkina Faso—essai sur la politique Africaine* (Karthala, Paris, 1986), who also analyses the social organization of three ethnic groups in Burkina Faso; the Mossi, the Birifor and the Bwa, contrasting their political systems with the politics of the post-colonial state.

8. J. Giri *et al.*, *The Sahel facing the future*, p. 34.

9. See, *inter alia*: K. Hart, *The political economy of West African agriculture* (CUP, Cambridge, 1982) and A. Hopkins, *The economic history of West Africa* (Longman, London, 1973).

conscription and forced labour, as well as taxation. The development of plantation agriculture in Cote d'Ivoire encouraged migration from the Sahel (and Upper Volta in particular), leading to the emergence of what Amin called a 'labour reserve economy' in the region.¹⁰

The colonial history of Upper Volta was divided into five phases, during which the territory itself was partitioned and regrouped on several occasions. Between 1896 and 1904 military rule was imposed, followed by the incorporation of the region into the colony of *Haut-Sénégal-Niger* until 1919. The territory was then reconstituted as *Haute Volta* under the authority of the governor general of French West Africa until 1932 when it was again divided up. Different regions were placed under the jurisdiction of the colonies of Cote d'Ivoire, Soudan and Niger. This subdivision was designed to facilitate the movement of labour towards the coastal plantations and the irrigation schemes under the *Office du Niger*. It was particularly opposed by the Mossi, whose kingdoms were partitioned between the Cote d'Ivoire and the Soudan. Colonial rule had already undermined the authority of the Mossi chiefs, whose political unity under an emperor, the Mooga Naaba, was further threatened by this division of their territory.

Resistance to colonial taxation and to attempts to intensify agricultural production using imported technology were widespread. Meanwhile, the character of political struggles in West Africa was altered by the new 'actors' who gradually emerged during this period. Urban growth, coupled with the establishment of a trade union movement and a French educated civil service, gave rise to tensions between the traditional structures of authority and the new 'political class'. Elections to the French National Assembly in 1945 constituted the starting point for the activities of newly formed political parties in West Africa. Amongst the various groupings which developed in this period, the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA) was undoubtedly the most significant. Many of the political developments in Upper Volta from 1946 to 1980 were intertwined with the activities of this party.¹¹ The RDA derived much of its support from the union of plantation workers in Cote d'Ivoire, and was involved in organizing strikes and protests against colonial rule in the early 1950s.¹²

However the section of the RDA which was formed in Upper Volta was regarded with suspicion by the Mossi chiefs, because it was seen to represent an 'anti-unification' position. With the formation of the *Union Voltaïc*, and the suppression of the RDA by the French, reunification was rapidly

10. S. Amin, *Neo-colonialism in West Africa* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973), p. 124.

11. Felix Houphouët-Boigny ('le Vieux'), who is still president of Cote d'Ivoire, led the RDA from its radical origins, through compromises with the French which resulted in self-determination under the *Communauté* of French West African states (in 1956), to independence.

12. C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Afrique Noire—permanences et ruptures* (Payot, Paris, 1985), pp. 358–60.

enacted in 1947. Other political parties soon emerged in the colony, while the struggle for independence and the problems of regional differences began to dominate the agenda. However, following the introduction of the *Loi Cadre* in 1956 through which the self-administration of the French colonies was recognized with the creation of national parliamentary assemblies, the RDA gradually gained more support. The RDA emerged victorious from the election in 1959, and opposition to the president, Maurice Yameogo, was quickly suppressed. The republic of Upper Volta obtained independence in August 1960, under presidential rule with a single party government.

Nevertheless, the political and social instability which characterized the final phase of colonial domination continued during the six year rule of Yameogo. Financial austerity which particularly affected the salaries of civil servants and attempts to reduce the power and authority of traditional chiefs, alienated both the urban and rural populations. Against this background, the military takeover in 1966 under General Lamizana reflected growing popular discontent with the policies of the civilian government, as well as the increasing power of the trade unions. Two attempts were made to transfer power back to an elected parliament during the fourteen year rule of President Lamizana. But social unrest and economic disruption, particularly after the severe drought in the early 1970s, led to political stalemate on both occasions. Trade union protests against declining living standards and corruption, the polarization of the dominant political groupings in the parliament, and the increasing divergence between different tendencies within the army led to another coup d'état in 1980:

Colonel Saye Zerbo who seized power was a tough nationalist with no ideas for social change. He managed a token clean up of corruption before setting his regime on the same road of political alienation as Lamizana's. He barred political parties and unions in an attempt to restore order and depended even more than Lamizana on foreign aid as the *deus ex machina* which could hold the country together.¹³

It was in this period that radical groups within the army started to flex their muscles, and to initiate underground discussions with various small communist parties with a view to elaborating a common political programme. However, Zerbo's government encountered other difficulties including revived ethnic tensions between the Mossi and the minority groups in the west. Continued disputes with the trade unions led to a rapid deterioration in the political climate, which was only partially resolved when Zerbo was overthrown in 1982 by a group of young soldiers including Thomas Sankara

13. V. Brittain, 'Introduction to Sankara and Burkina Faso', *Review of African Political Economy*, 32, (1985), p. 41.

and Blaise Campaoré. A new military government was formed, called the *Comité de Salut Public* (CSP), but it was paralysed by the diverging ideological positions within the army. French intervention in the internal affairs of the country was suspected when Sankara, who had been given the post of prime minister in the CSP, was arrested in May 1983. But student protests led to his subsequent release, enabling the radical section of the army to continue their preparations for another coup d'état.

The *Conseil National de la Révolution* (CNR) led by Sankara, Campaoré and other officers, was established after the CSP was overthrown on 4 August 1983. Local revolutionary defence committees¹⁴ and popular courts were immediately set up to mobilize the population and to examine cases of corruption under the previous governments. At first, the revolutionary takeover was welcomed by many people who had suffered during the repression and instability of the early 1980s.¹⁵ But before examining the contradictions and difficulties which have arisen since this '*Révolution Démocratique et Populaire*' (RDP) it is useful to outline the post-colonial pattern of agricultural development and food security in Burkina Faso, indicating some of the institutional and political factors which have influenced efforts to transform supply and demand. In this predominantly rural country, the processes of agrarian change, though apparently marginal to the concerns of the successive civilian and military governments in the 1960s and 1970s, are central to an understanding of the struggles for power in the revolutionary period.

Agricultural modernization and cereals marketing

Retrospective assessments of the efficiency of the agricultural sector in Burkina Faso at independence in 1960 suggest that the colonial authorities had done little to encourage effectively output growth in both food and cash crop production. Low productivity, resulting from the insignificant use of non-traditional inputs and the underuse of both labour and land, as well as the neglect of commercial relations and infrastructure, characterized an agricultural system which was 'virtually autarchic'.¹⁶ However, population growth, labour migration and colonial taxation initiated a process of rural restructuring which has continued throughout the post-colonial period. It is also important to note that the civilian and military governments which have been in power since 1960, inherited, but did not fundamentally

14. *Comités de Défense de la Révolution*.

15. As Savonnet-Guyot, *Etat et sociétés au Burkina Faso*, noted: *Le capitaine Sankara s'employant à rassurer tout le monde, les commerçants se disent favorables à la Révolution si on respecte la libre entreprise, les hiérarchies religieuses si on reconnaît leur pouvoir spirituel, les chefferies coutumières si la tradition est maintenue, les syndicats si leur pouvoir est respecté par les CDRs*, p. 135.

16. J. Lecaillon, & C. Morrisson, *Economic policies and agricultural performance—the case of Burkina Faso* (OECD Development Centre, Paris, 1985), p. 21.

alter, the 'structures, mechanisms and traditions' of the colonial state.¹⁷ Independence did not involve a return to pre-colonial forms of political organization; thus building the nation on the basis of common laws and centralized authorities, together with the modernization of the economy (including the development of industry, transport, health and education) have characterized the programmes of all the independent governments in Burkina Faso and elsewhere in the Sahel.

Modernization necessitated investment strategies based on foreign aid and on the taxation of export crop production, the latter representing the only significant source of domestic revenue. Various parastatal institutions were set up to manage this process, since colonial restrictions had effectively undermined the development of a class of entrepreneurs and merchants. Thus it has been argued that a dualistic pattern of commercial activity has emerged in West Africa. On the one hand, parastatal and foreign owned companies have dominated the key sectors of export production and manufacturing, while on the other hand, an extensive 'parallel' market operated by indigenous traders has become increasingly significant.¹⁸ The implications of this pattern of trade in terms of cereals marketing will be explored after a brief survey of the main features of state intervention in agricultural production in Burkina Faso.

Since the 1960s, the state has intervened in agricultural markets in order to gain 'greater control over the resources to be extracted from the rural sector, and to ensure regular and sufficient supplies of food for the population in the towns and in regions with recurrent food shortages'.¹⁹ These two processes, extracting a revenue surplus from agricultural producers and ensuring food supplies for consumers, resulted in the introduction of a series of institutional and economic measures. In order to 'modernize the subsistence economy' of the rural communities in Burkina Faso, regional agricultural development organizations (ORDs²⁰) were set up in 1965. These institutions derived most of their operating resources from foreign aid programmes, and were responsible for 'training and visit' extension schemes, the provision of production inputs and assistance with product marketing. They have consistently suffered serious management deficiencies, including the fraudulent use of funds and lack of trained staff. An offshoot of the

17. Giri *et al*, *The Sahel facing the future*, p. 91.

18. See, *inter alia*: O. Igué, 'L'officiel, le parallèle et le clandestin—commerces et intégration en Afrique de l'Ouest', *Politique Africaine*, 9, (1983), and A. Lambert, 'La dynamique des réseaux marchands en Afrique de l'Ouest'. Document présenté au séminaire du Club du Sahel/CILSS sur les espaces céréalières régionaux en Afrique de l'Ouest, Lomé, 1989.

19. L. Filippi-Wilhelm, Traders and marketing boards in Upper Volta—ten years of state intervention in agricultural marketing. In K. Arhin *et al* (eds), *Marketing boards in tropical Africa* (KPI, London, 1985), p. 120.

20. The *Organismes Régionaux de Développement*, coordinated by the Ministry of Rural Development, were renamed *Centres Régionaux de Production Agro-Pastorale* (CRPAs) in 1988. See: B. Tallet, 'Le CNR face au monde rural—le discours à l'épreuve des faits', *Politique Africaine*, 33, (1989).

ORD system, the AVV²¹, established integrated rural development programmes along the valleys of the Volta rivers, with the objective of resettling families in order to produce irrigated cash crops. Other large scale irrigation schemes supported by parastatal authorities and designed to encourage rice cultivation have been set up in the valley of the river Kou and in the northern Sourou region.

The output of cotton in Burkina Faso has increased rapidly since independence. The provision of extensive technical support by the French CFDT²² contributed to expanding the production of this important cash crop, particularly in the south-western provinces of the country where average yields increased six fold between 1960 and 1982. Cotton is grown on land owned by the peasant farmers, while inputs are provided and the fibres are marketed through the ORDs according to prices and contracts agreed with SOFITEX (the parastatal cotton marketing board). The World Bank allocated funds for cotton production and processing projects in the 1970s.²³

In addition to cotton, groundnuts are grown as a cash crop in some areas, and shea nuts (a tree crop which is used in the manufacture of vegetable oils) are collected and exported. Another cash crop in Burkina Faso is green beans, grown on land owned by a state run cooperative and destined primarily for export. Sugar cane has also been grown in Burkina Faso since 1975 when 10,000 hectares of land in the Comoé province were acquired by SUSUCO. Many families were displaced by the transformation of this area into a huge sugar cane plantation with processing facilities again based on foreign investment.²⁴ Livestock production has also represented an important source of foreign exchange, although the number of cattle was drastically reduced during the drought in the 1970s, and competition in the export markets of the coastal states has affected earnings in the 1980s.²⁵

21. The appropriation of land by the *Autorité des Aménagements des Vallées des Volta*, and the integration of peasant producers into the monetary, cash crop market, are discussed in detail by M. Gervais, *Peasants and capital in Upper Volta*, In J. Barker (ed), *The politics of agriculture in tropical Africa* (Sage, Beverly Hills, 1984). See also: H. Kabore, 'L'aide et les priorités internes des politiques agricoles nationales—le cas du Burkina Faso', Paper presented at a seminar on the impact of bilateral and multilateral aid on African agriculture, CODESRIA, Dakar, 1987.

22. The activities of the *Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles* have significantly determined the structure of the West African cotton market, as described by T. Thiombiano, 'State policies and food and agricultural production—the case of Burkina Faso', In T. Mkandawire & N. Boureane (eds), *The state, food and agriculture in Africa* (CODESRIA, Dakar, 1987).

23. Cotton exports have accounted for about one third of the total export earnings in Burkina Faso during the 1980s. See: Burkina Faso, *Annuaire Statistique 1987* (Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie, Ouagadougou, 1987).

24. The establishment of the *Société Sucrière de la Comoé*, as an 'agro-industrial enclave' is documented by T. Thiombiano, *L'enclave industrielle—la Société Sucrière de Haute Volta* (CODESRIA, Dakar, 1984). The reactions of the sugar plantation workers and their union to the changes following the revolution in 1983 are described by B. Jaffré, *Burkina Faso, les années Sankara—de la révolution à la rectification* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989), pp. 65–69.

25. See, *inter alia*: H. Jossierand, 'Effets des importations de viandes extra-africaines sur les échanges de bovins entre les pays de l'Afrique de l'Ouest'. Document présenté au séminaire du Club du Sahel/CILSS sur les espaces céréaliers régionaux en Afrique de l'Ouest, Lomé, 1989.

With the establishment of agricultural credit schemes, peasant farmers have been encouraged to adopt cash crop cultivation and to become integrated within the monetary economy. But declining prices of agricultural commodities on world markets, combined with high costs of production and processing in the Sahel, have given rise to serious problems in these sectors in the 1980s. At the same time, few initiatives have been taken to promote food crop production, and the overall yield and output levels of the main staple grains (millet, sorghum, maize and rice) have only slightly increased.²⁶ The drought years in the 1970s and 1980s revealed the extent to which agricultural production increases are constrained by climatic factors, as well as by environmental degradation.²⁷ Thus, the cereals balance sheet for Burkina Faso shows that production is barely sufficient to meet demand even in 'good years' of adequate rainfall, and malnutrition remains widespread.

In contrast to the developments in the cash crop sector, the purchase, distribution and sale of cereals has remained largely in the hands of private traders, despite state intervention since the early 1970s.²⁸ The re-emergence of a network of indigenous merchants during the 1960s has had a considerable impact on the organization of the cereals market. Although a parastatal marketing board, OFNACER²⁹, was set up in 1971, it has only bought an average of about 10 per cent of the cereals available on the market, and its sales have rarely exceeded 10 per cent of total consumption. A large proportion of the cereals produced in Burkina Faso never enter the market, but remain in household stores for local consumption.³⁰

26. See: Lecaillon & Morrisson, *Economic policies and agricultural performance*, and Burkina Faso, *Plan céréaliier du Burkina Faso, Phase 1, diagnostique—bilan et annexes* (CILSS, Ouagadougou, 1988).

27. These phenomena are illustrated in the study of agricultural production and food security by T. Thiombiano, S. Soulama & C. Wetta, *Les systèmes alimentaires au Burkina Faso* (Centre d'Etudes, de Documentation et de Recherche Economique et Sociale, Ouagadougou, 1988), which describes the problems arising in the south-west as families migrate from the heavily eroded and deforested land of the central and northern 'Mossi plateau'. On the ecological constraints which affect cereals cultivation in the semi-arid zones of West Africa, see the article by P. Matlon, 'Potential and practice in food production technology development—the West African semiarid tropics', In J. Mellor, C. Delgado & M. Blackie (eds), *Accelerating food production in sub-Saharan Africa* (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 1987).

28. Studies of cereals marketing in Burkina Faso include: L. Filippi-Wilhelm, *Traders and marketing boards in Upper Volta*, J. Sherman, K. Shapiro & E. Gilbert, *The dynamics of grain marketing in Burkina Faso, Volume 1. An economic analysis of grain marketing* (Center for Research on Economic Development, University of Michigan, and International Agricultural Programs, University of Wisconsin, 1987), and H. Somé, P. Giniés & D. Coulibaly, 'Etudes sur les obstacles internes à la circulation des céréales au Burkina Faso', Document présenté au séminaire du Club du Sahel/CILSS sur les espaces céréaliers régionaux en Afrique de l'Ouest, Lomé, 1989.

29. Office National des Céréales.

30. Estimates indicate that village level storage capacity may be as much as 1,500,000 tonnes, while OFNACER manages a security stock of 30,000 tonnes, and private merchants are able to store approximately the same quantity (Burkina Faso, *Plan céréaliier*, pp. 1–49). With adequate rainfall, cereals output has increased since the severe drought in 1983–85, and a total of about 2 million tonnes of millet, sorghum, maize and rice were harvested in 1988/89.

In the private sector there is intense competition between intermediate level traders, particularly in the surplus producing areas of the south and west of the country. Nevertheless:

the merchants have great power in the market . . . , because of the large funds they control and the network of active buying agents, thanks to which they can exert oligopsonistic pressures on the prices paid to producers . . . [Similarly] the large stocks they hold in the cities also give them great power in the consumer market.³¹

OFNACER, which purchases and sells cereals at the official prices determined by a price commission, has struggled from crisis to crisis particularly in the drought years of the last decades. Despite access to working capital raised through counterpart funds from the sale of food aid, the narrow margin between official producer and consumer prices has meant that costs have exceeded revenue in most years. Due to these financial difficulties the marketing board has been unable to operate as an efficient purchasing agency in the rural areas where private traders have dominated the market. However, in the urban areas through the management of the national security stock of cereals and the administration, distribution and sale of food aid donations, OFNACER appears to have fulfilled its 'social mission' (supplying cheap food) in conjunction with the price control authorities. Nevertheless, neither the private merchants nor the marketing board control the cereals market in ways which are beneficial to the peasant producers. For the former, profit motives necessitate hard bargaining to keep prices low and margins high, although the smaller grain traders (especially women) are under increasing pressure as the market is increasingly dominated by 'major urban merchants (dealing) directly with their regional suppliers who have quasi-monopsonies in their respective regions'.³² As far as OFNACER is concerned, fixed price sales of domestic and imported cereals have reflected the importance attached to the provision of cheap food to specific groups, and to avoiding urban unrest. Although studies suggest that increases in official producer prices do not necessarily elicit significant output responses, given inadequate rural infrastructure and the limited market for consumer goods, there is little doubt that OFNACER has failed to stabilize the

31. M. Saul, 'The development of the grain market and merchants in Burkina Faso', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24-1, (1986) p. 143. Similarly, as noted by J. Sherman *et al*, *The dynamics of grain marketing*, pp. 190-191: 'While in many ways the marketing system is quite competitive, particularly at each individual level of trade, a large number of wealthy traders are an important force in the market because of the large amounts of capital they control.' On the private sector, see the study by P. Labazée, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du Burkina Faso* (Karthala, Paris, 1988).

32. Saul, *The development of the grain market and merchants*, p. 151.

producer side of the marketing equation.³³ Furthermore, the production of 'traditional' cereals in Burkina Faso has faced a rapidly changing demand pattern as the urban population consumes increasing quantities of imported wheat and rice.³⁴

Given the lack of investment in food crop production, low producer price levels, increasingly severe land degradation in many regions, and the emphasis on expanding the output of cash crops (especially cotton), the food security of the majority of peasant households has scarcely improved since independence. The adoption of intensive cash crop cultivation in the south-western provinces of Burkina Faso which has led to increasing differentiation between rich and poor peasant farmers and agricultural labourers, is in stark contrast to the precarious production conditions which prevail in the northern regions. Furthermore, state intervention in the agricultural sector and in the organization of the cereals market, reflects the converging interests of a powerful coalition of merchants and the bureaucratic and military elite.³⁵ The provision of cheap food supplies through low consumer prices together with the import of 'non-traditional' staple foods, has coincided with the concentration of purchasing power and political authority in the hands of a small (mostly urban) section of the population.

At various levels in the processes of production and marketing, peasant farmers have been faced with centralized and bureaucratic institutions whose authoritarian methods and 'ideology of modernization' have encouraged the persistence of a strategy of passive resistance which first emerged under colonial rule. Smallholder households have become marginalized as a result of the top down approach to rural development in Burkina Faso. The emergence of new alliances between the rural elite (including the chiefs and merchants) and the bureaucratic class, together with foreign aid agencies, has prevented many peasant farmers from controlling their means

33. See M. Lipton, 'Limits of price policy for agriculture—which way for the World Bank?', *Development Policy Review*, 5–2, (1987) and the studies by Platteau, *The food crisis in Africa*, and Streeben, *What price food?*, for critical assessments of the 'producer supply response' issue. This has been central to the World Bank approach to the liberalization of agricultural marketing in Africa, as outlined in: World Bank, *Accelerated development in sub-Saharan Africa* (World Bank, Washington, 1981) and World Bank, *World Development Report, 1986* (World Bank, Washington, 1986). A discussion of the effects of price changes on food crop output in Burkina Faso is presented by T. Thiombiano, *Le rôle des prix dans la décision paysanne de produire et de vendre les céréales traditionnelles au Burkina Faso*. Papier présenté au séminaire de l'Association Européenne des Economistes Agricoles, Montpellier, 1989.

34. See, T. Reardon, T. Thiombiano & C. Delgado, 'L'importance des céréales non-traditionnelles dans la consommation des riches et des pauvres à Ouagadougou', *Economie Rurale*, 190 (1989).

35. Both Filippi-Wilhelm, *Traders and marketing boards in Upper Volta*, and M. Saul, *The development of the grain market and merchants*, describe how OFNACER and the private traders cooperated during the 1970s, the latter noting that 'major merchants have often been favoured by government policies; indeed without public support and unofficial complicity the success of the most prominent figures in this group cannot be explained' p. 152.

of production and exchange.³⁶ The significance of these processes in terms of the conditions of access to productive resources has also been emphasized in a major study of agrarian change in Africa:

Arguments that African food deficits are attributable to inadequate investment in appropriate technology, to price policies which discourage agricultural expansion, or to the legacy of colonial domination and commercial exploitation are not so much wrong as incomplete—especially when they are limited to short term changes in relative returns to alternative production activities. What the cumulated record of local agrarian change in Africa suggests is that the effects of an increase in price of say, maize on maize production depend not only on the availability of inputs and rural infrastructure, but also on who controls the resulting increases in output and income, and how they are used over time. These effects depend, in turn, on the changing relations of power and legal practices as well as on available technology and market incentives.³⁷

The revolutionary military government which took over in 1983 explicitly aimed to change these 'relations of power' in Burkina Faso. But, as indicated in the next section of this paper, challenging the powerful forces which have combined to marginalize the rural communities has not proved to be an easy task.

The Popular and Democratic Revolution

The political strategy of the CNR government was defined in the '*Discours d'Orientation Politique*' (DOP) pronounced in a speech by Thomas Sankara on 2 October 1983. In addition to emphasizing that the aim of the 'popular and democratic revolution' (RDP) was to create an 'independent, self-reliant and planned economy' in Burkina Faso, the revolutionary government stressed its intention to mobilize the peasants and workers in a socialist transformation of the country. But numerous conflicts and tensions developed during the four year rule of the CNR, culminating in the coup d'état in October 1987 which brought the *Front Populaire* (FP) to power. Foreign political and economic relations have also been important factors in the domestic power struggles in Burkina Faso. Another cornerstone of the political analysis of neo-colonialism presented in the DOP was the anti-imperialist stance of the new government.

Following the creation of a network of revolutionary defence committees (CDRs) and popular tribunals (TPRs) which formed the institutional framework for the mobilization and political education of the population

36. As C. Savonnet-Guyot, *Etat et société au Burkina Faso*, p. 203, concludes: '*Dans le système étatique moderne, ce sont les paysanneries, dans leur totalité, qui restent en marge du politique.*'

37. S. Berry, 'The food crisis and agrarian change in Africa—a review essay', *African Studies Review*, 27–2, (1984), p. 95.

along the lines presented in the DOP, the CNR proceeded to draw up an economic development plan for the country.³⁸ This stressed the satisfaction of basic needs through improvements in the health and education services as well as increasing agricultural production with a view to achieving food self-sufficiency. Rural vaccination and literacy campaigns were launched through the CDRs in 1984, while plans to develop the agricultural sector focussed on the improved management of water resources, the implementation of large scale irrigation schemes and programmes to halt environmental degradation.³⁹

The popular development programmes also envisaged a major improvement in infrastructure, notably through the construction of a railway from Ouagadougou to the northern provinces and Tambao where deposits of manganese are located. But although these sectoral investment programmes were intended to mobilize indigenous labour and local resources, it is significant, and paradoxical, that 80 per cent of the finance was derived from external sources.⁴⁰ Agricultural development schemes in Burkina Faso, and elsewhere in the Sahel, remain dependent on the availability of project and programme aid channelled through numerous bilateral and multilateral agencies. However the flow of remittances from migrant labourers working in Cote d'Ivoire also continues to represent an important source of income for many rural communities.

The 'popular investment effort' promoted by the CNR was accompanied by a series of austerity measures designed to reduce the budgetary deficit of the state and to transfer resources into the development of the agricultural sector. But the real incomes of state employees, including civil servants and teachers, were drastically affected by wage restrictions and by the imposition of compulsory levies to raise funds for the development programmes.⁴¹ During the drought in 1984 and 1985, official agricultural producer prices were increased, adding to the financial squeeze faced by food consumers.⁴² On the other hand, although traders and the business class were denounced as 'enemies of the people' in the DOP, private investment in manufacturing industries, in construction and in agricultural input supply sectors was

38. This '*Programme Populaire de Développement*' from 1984 to 1985, was replaced by a five year plan covering the period from 1986 to 1990.

39. In addition to reforestation and anti-erosion schemes, the government started a campaign known as '*les trois luttes*' or the three struggles, against: (i) indiscriminate grazing of arable land, (ii) tree felling without permission, and (iii) deliberate burning of bush vegetation.

40. The scale and importance of foreign aid programmes in Burkina Faso are assessed by G. Martin, '*Idéologie et praxis au Burkina Faso*', *Geneve-Afrique*, 24-1 (1986), pp. 46-48. See also J.-J. Gabas, '*L'aide contre le développement—l'exemple du Sahel*' (Economica, Paris, 1988).

41. See: L. Konaté, & R. Matha Sant'Anna, '*Adjustement structurel et remuneration des fonctionnaires au Burkina Faso*', *CEDRES-Etudes*, 24 (1988).

42. '*Le relèvement des prix officiels d'achat, imposé par le CNR, est avant tout un acte politique majeur articulé d'ailleurs à un corps de mesures destinées à réduire le pouvoir d'achat des salariés urbains, base sociale des régimes qui se sont succédé depuis l'indépendance.*' P. Labazée, '*Reorganisation économique et résistances sociales*', *Politique Africaine*, 20 (1985).

encouraged by the CNR.⁴³ It is also paradoxical that the economic policies initiated by the CNR under Sankara resembled the approach advocated by the World Bank in terms of regulating the public sector:

Drastic budget reductions, cuts in pay and number employed in public administration, a general reduction of deficits, an upward shift in agricultural producer prices, tight control upon parastatal operations—and the demand that they meet financial equilibrium—and an appeal to private sector investors to engage in new productive investment are examples of such public policy reforms. Roughly speaking, something like three-quarters of the World Bank's recommendations were met by Sankara without any World Bank intervention.⁴⁴

In distinguishing between the pro- and counter-revolutionary forces and groups in the political programme outlined in the DOP, the CNR also aimed to control political expression in the 'civil society'. As described above, in the period prior to the RDP a number of different organizations and groupings (including the military) had struggled for political influence in Burkina Faso. By relocating the focus of debate and activity within the framework of the CDRs, the CNR attempted to challenge the power of the trade unions as well as political parties and the traditional figures of authority in the rural areas. This led to increasingly divisive conflicts, both within the CNR itself and in relation to the various alliances of classes and groups in the towns and the countryside.⁴⁵ The emphasis which was given by Sankara to the emancipation of women, including a campaign against prostitution and the drafting of a new 'family code' which would outlaw polygamy, was perhaps one of the most contentious issues in the attempt to transform society in Burkina Faso.⁴⁶

The trade unions, and particularly the teachers' union, having been severely repressed under the previous military governments adopted a cautious attitude to the CNR right from the first days of the revolution. Declining living standards of urban workers and civil servants as a result of wage controls and price increases led to a rapid deterioration in the relations between the government and the representatives of the state employees. At

43. See P. Labazée, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du Burkina Faso*, pp. 219–225.

44. J. Fontaine, 'Evolving economic policies and disinvolved states—notes in an African context', *IDS Bulletin*, 18–4 (1987), p. 17.

45. This process was thoroughly analyzed by P. Labazée, 'Reorganisation économique et résistances sociales', who concluded on a prophetic note: 'la question essentielle semble celle des alliances sociales que le régime sera à même de générer; l'élimination progressive des partis politiques et organisations syndicales des organes de décision et l'anesthésie des débats contradictoires qui en résulte, risquent d'isoler l'équipe au pouvoir et de réduire la participation des travailleurs urbains et ruraux à l'élaboration des orientations économiques, alors que celle-ci conditionne leur degré de mobilisation' (p. 28).

46. See, *inter alia*: B. Jaffré, *Burkina Faso—Les années Sankara*, pp. 107–111, M. Monimart, *Femmes du Sahel—la désertification au quotidien* (Karthala, Paris, 1989), and J. Ziegler, *La victoire des vaincus—oppression et résistance culturelle* (Seuil, Paris, 1988), pp. 193–214.

the same time, the concentration of power in the hands of the CDRs which had been set up in all workplaces, threatened to undermine the negotiating strength of the traditional workers' organizations. Strikes and protests by the teachers' union in 1984, linked to a suspected attempt to overthrow the CNR, resulted in the dismissal of a large number of teachers.⁴⁷ Despite differences of opinion within the CNR, which in addition to the military comprised representatives of several small communist parties, restrictions on the activities of the trade unions were imposed.⁴⁸

Radical restructuring of the relations of production in the agricultural sector and in the rural communities was also high on the agenda of the CNR. However the introduction of an agrarian reform, through which all land in Burkina Faso became the property of the state and the formation of CDRs in the villages, also presented the government with serious difficulties focussing on the transfer of power away from the traditional chiefs. As young people in the rural areas became organized in the CDRs which assumed responsibility for allocating land, the authority of the chiefs was weakened. Traditional systems of land management and labour organization were condemned as feudal practices in the rhetoric of the DOP.⁴⁹ At the same time, the CDRs attempted to gain control over the extensive network of *groupements villageois* which had developed throughout the country during the 1970s.⁵⁰ Furthermore, increasing economic inequality in the cash crop producing regions, and the emergence of a group of richer 'innovative' farmers using modern production techniques, accentuated the conflicts with the CDRs in the villages. The extent to which rural development programmes should be organized on a 'collective' basis was also a contentious issue.

As far as food security was concerned, the government was also anxious to restrict the speculative activities of the private merchants who controlled the distribution of cereals. Although producer prices for food crops were raised in 1984, an enforcement of the regulations was difficult due to the operational inefficiency of OFNACER. Numerous employees of this and other parastatals were also accused of corruption and tried by the popular tribunals. Strengthening the network of cooperative cereals banks which had been set up throughout the country since the mid 1970s was seen by the CNR as a means of improving the bargaining position of peasant producers

47. The reinstatement of these teachers in 1988 is one of the reasons for the present budgetary difficulties, which led the government (FP) to open negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in order to obtain a structural adjustment loan.

48. As outlined by C. Kabeya-Muase, 'Un pouvoir de travailleurs peut-il être contre les syndicats?', *Politique Africaine*, 33 (1989).

49. See: G. Martin, 'Ideologie et praxis au Burkina Faso' and B. Tallet, 'Le CNR face au monde rural'.

50. These 'GVs' or village associations are well established in Burkina Faso, and coordinate many small scale development activities, as described in: Graap, *Nouvelles paroles de brousse—expériences villageoises au Burkina Faso* (Karthala, Paris, 1988).

in the cereals market. The cereals banks, particularly in the northern deficit producing regions of the country, provide an important 'insurance scheme' for many villagers who have become dependent on supplies from other regions or on food aid from abroad.⁵¹ However attempts to negotiate purchasing agreements between OFNACER and the cereals bank groups floundered on the inability of the parastatal marketing board to meet its commitments for payment and collection of the harvest. At the same time, the private merchants mounted opposition to government intervention in the cereals market, and negotiations on delivery prices for cereals supplies to OFNACER collapsed on several occasions. The merchants were particularly hostile to the creation of a series of 'GIEs', which were intended to regulate and control commercial activities and raise revenue through taxation.⁵²

The production of large cereals surpluses, following increased rainfall in 1986, combined with the late arrival of food aid shipments after the drought in 1984 and 1985, led to a rapid fall in prices, which further weakened efforts to stabilize the cereals market. OFNACER, which managed the security stocks constituted largely on the basis of food aid consignments, was unable to purchase grain at official prices, and the producers were forced to sell to the private merchants at lower prices. This failure to develop efficient modes of state intervention in the cereals market, linked to the problems arising as the production of cereals surpluses became increasingly concentrated in the south-western regions of the country while ensuring adequate food supplies in the deficit regions of the north remained difficult, represented a major setback for the government.

But the rhetoric of food self-sufficiency in Burkina Faso was also compromised by the growing urban demand for imported wheat and rice, as well as the failure to increase domestic output of the latter product. Restrictions on imports of fruit and vegetables from Cote d'Ivoire and an increase in the price of beer, added to the dissatisfaction amongst the urban population whose purchasing power had been steadily eroded. Declining standards of living also encouraged the merchants and 'entrepreneurs' to seek opportunities for profit outside the country.⁵³ It is significant that the *Front*

51. The potential and the weaknesses of the cereals bank system have been thoroughly examined by G. Ledoux, '*Inventaire et evaluation des Banques de céréales au Burkina Faso*', Rapport de mission, (FAO, Rome, 1986) and by P. Woodrow, 'Cereals banks in Burkina Faso—food security, drought and development', In M. Anderson & P. Woodrow (eds), *Rising from the ashes—development strategies in times of disaster* (Westview/UNESCO, Boulder & Paris, 1989). See also the paper by A. Pecquer, *Autonomie paysanne et autosuffisance alimentaire—l'exemple de la Haute Volta*, In Haubert, M. et al (eds), *Politiques alimentaires et structures sociales en Afrique noire* (PUF, Paris, 1985), who argued that exchanges between these village based cooperatives in Burkina Faso represented an opportunity to improve food security in the deficit areas, and to support the establishment of autonomous peasant organizations.

52. The problems of these '*Groupements d'Intérêt Economiques*' are described by P. Labazée, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du Burkina Faso*, p. 233.

53. See: P. Labazée, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du Burkina Faso*, p. 226.

Populaire, well aware of the increasing economic hardship faced by the urban workers, included wage increases, price reductions and the lifting of import restrictions amongst the first measures introduced after the coup d'état in October 1987.

The alienation of merchants, state employees and urban workers under conditions of severe financial austerity was accentuated by the degeneration of the CDRs into instruments of coercion. Internal disagreements between the members of the CNR, and increasing international pressures also contributed to the isolation of Sankara.⁵⁴ Although the '*rectification*' under the leadership of Campaoré and the FP has not entailed a complete rejection of the revolutionary programme put forward in the DOP, the new government has abandoned the previous strategy of confrontation with the major institutions of 'civil society'. In recognizing the strength of the trade union movement and the private sector in the towns, as well as the traditional political authorities in the rural areas, the FP has shifted towards an emphasis on the need to generate renewed economic activity based on the consolidation of an 'entrepreneurial middle class' and the introduction of 'state capitalism'.⁵⁵

But, although the reorganization of the CDRs and the abolition of restrictions on the activities of the trade unions, combined with a renewed effort to encourage private investment, have created the basis for a 'democratic opening', the military still remains in power. The legalization of political parties, as well as the inclusion of various political groupings in the coordination of the FP, are also frequently discussed. But, as the execution of suspected opponents of the present political and economic strategy suggests, a stable coalition around the government no longer exists. In this sense it seems that the cycle of alternating waves of democratization and militarization which have characterized Burkina Faso since independence, is set to continue.⁵⁶

54. Relations with the neighbouring countries, notably with Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Togo, deteriorated from 1983 to 1987. The USA, which was critical of the links established between Burkina Faso and Libya under Sankara, reduced foreign aid, although French commitments were generally maintained. These, and other factors which led to the increasing instability of the government in 1987, are examined by R. Otayek, '*Burkina Faso—Quand le tambour change de rythme, il est indispensable que les danseurs changent de pas*', *Politique Africaine*, 28 (1988) and by E. Skinner, 'Sankara and the Burkinabé revolution—charisma and power, local and external dimensions', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26–3 (1988).

55. The '*rectification*' thus marks a significant change in the orientation of the RDP, as pointed out by R. Otayek, 'Rectification', *Politique Africaine*, 33 (1989): '*l'heure de la paysannerie est passée au Burkina . . . une recomposition des alliances de classes re-déplaçant le centre de gravité politique du pays des campagnes vers les villes (si tant est, bien sûr, que celles-ci en aient jamais été privées, autrement qu'au plan symbolique . . .)*'. See also: B. Jaffré *Burkina Faso—les années Sankara*, pp 261–277.

56. C. Savonnet-Guyot, *Etat et Sociétés au Burkina Faso*, p. 166. For a further, highly critical, assessment of the balance of power after the 'Rectification' in Burkina Faso, see the survey by J. Baxter & K. Somerville, 'Burkina Faso' in B. Szajkowski (ed), *Marxist Regimes series—Economics, Politics and Society* (Pinter, London, 1989).

Concluding remarks

This survey of agrarian change and political conflict in Burkina Faso raises a number of issues which have been examined in the extensive literature on the agricultural production and food supply crises in Africa. Although there is no simple, all-embracing explanation of the economic crisis of African agriculture, it has frequently been attributed to 'mis-management' by governments whose policies are thought to have discouraged or inhibited productivity and output increases. Consequently, revitalizing the agricultural sector by 'getting crop prices right' has been encouraged, based on the privatization of agricultural marketing and the liberalization of trade.⁵⁷ However, the limitations of this approach have been thoroughly explored, pointing out that structural problems, such as deficient research, transport, input supply and credit systems have had significant effects on agricultural productivity in Africa. Given the need to increase the output of food and cash crops and to improve levels of food security, income and employment in rural communities, it has been argued that development strategies should be based on enhanced rural investment combined with improvements in production techniques, credit systems and marketing arrangements.⁵⁸

Furthermore, since many African countries derive much of their foreign exchange earnings from export crop production, declining levels of commodity prices on world markets have accentuated balance of payments deficits. This shift in the terms of trade, together with increasing debt repayment burdens, has forced many governments to introduce austerity measures, often through stabilization and structural adjustment programmes agreed with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But as Berry and Copans have observed, many of the policy reforms which have been introduced in Africa since the end of the 1970s have dealt with the effects rather than the causes of the agrarian crisis.⁵⁹ This becomes all the more apparent when the international or 'external' constraints on African agricultural development are taken into account.⁶⁰

One of the major contentious issues in studies of the relations between post-colonial states and peasant farmers in Africa is the role of government intervention in agriculture markets. An influential model developed by

57. Thus, during the 1980s, the World Bank has encouraged the adoption of strategies in which the emphasis is on 'increasing producer price incentives through higher food prices, and diminishing the size of government, particularly parastatals.' C. Delgado & J. Mellor, 'A structural view of policy issues in African agricultural development', *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 66-5 (1984), p. 665.

58. See, *inter alia*: J. Platteau, *The food crisis in Africa*.

59. See: Berry, 'The food crisis in agrarian change in Africa' and J. Copans, 'Une crise conceptuelle opportune', *Politique Africaine*, 26 (1987).

60. See for example: V. Jamal, 'Getting the crisis right—missing perspectives on Africa', *ILO Review*, 127-6 (1988), and the study by P. Raikes, *Modernising hunger—famine, food surplus and farm policy in the EEC and Africa* (CIIR/James Currey/Heinemann, London, 1988).

Bates to explain the political basis of economic policy making in Africa, suggests that a powerful alliance of urban based industrial and bureaucratic interest groups have exploited politically marginalized rural producers by distorting prices, exchange rates and resource allocation.⁶¹ According to this theory, market distortions which discriminate against the agricultural sector are the logical consequences of an 'urban bias' in development strategies emphasizing industrialization through import substitution. The solution proposed, which has initiated a lively debate on the politics of state intervention in African agriculture, rests on the assumption that removing price distortions by reducing government control and regulation of agricultural marketing will generate the conditions required for improvements in production and living standards in the rural areas. But paradoxically:

the liberal, market orientated policies being pressed upon most African countries by their aid donors and international bankers, frequently require strong (authoritative) governments to sack public officials or increase consumer food prices without incurring equivalent off-setting expenditure on the military or on repairing riot damage.⁶²

A central proposition arising from the 'urban bias' analysis is that economic mismanagement in Africa is due to the concentration of power in hands on an urban elite. But the effects of external constraints and increasing differentiation between classes and groups in both the urban and rural areas are significant processes which cannot be dealt with by an explanation which reduces political conflict to a simple dichotomy between the interests of the urban (rich) and the rural (poor).⁶³ The economic policies introduced by governments in Africa are determined by complex sets of political forces and alliances as well as class relations which go beyond the urban-rural divide. Thus explanations of the agrarian crisis have begun to focus on the struggles which have taken place between post-colonial states and peasant farmers, revolving around access to resources and political power.

There are a number of important elements which have been identified in the analysis of these processes. One argument is that government schemes

61. R. Bates, *Markets and states in tropical Africa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981).

62. M. Moore, 'Interpreting Africa's crisis—political science versus political economy', *IDS Bulletin*, 18-4 (1987), p. 9.

63. See also M. Bienefeld, 'Analysing the politics of African state policy—some thoughts on Robert Bates' work', *IDS Bulletin*, 17-1 (1986) for a critical analysis of the weaknesses of the 'rational choice' model in explaining the supposed 'urban bias' of economic development strategies in Africa. Streeten, *What price food?* has also examined this issue, concluding that: 'Governments do sometimes transcend their individual and group interests and act in the common interest or in the interest of the poor and weak. The picture of the state painted by Robert Bates as an instrument of ruthlessly amassing wealth and power by those in office, and those on whose support they depend, without regard to either efficiency or the public interest, is surely limited' (p. 78-79).

to transform agricultural production and parastatal intervention in agricultural markets have failed to 'capture the peasantry', since African farmers maintain a 'relatively high degree of autonomy from other groups and institutions in society'.⁶⁴ According to this theory, production and exchange are based on an 'economy of affection', and peasants have resisted the incursions of a bureaucratic state apparatus with its foreign ideology of modernization. But, while Hyden suggests that 'networks of support, communication and interaction between structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community or other affinities such as religion'⁶⁵ are powerful factors in the functioning of the economy, this 'ahistorical' approach has been criticized for its failure to account for the incorporation of peasant producers in monetary, market exchanges and their domination by other classes as well as by the state.⁶⁶

In contrast, it has been argued that economic stagnation and the agrarian crisis reflect a pattern of accumulation of wealth in African societies which is characterized by efforts to exert control over resources rather than increasing productivity.⁶⁷ Privileged access to the resources of the expanding public sector in post-colonial African countries developed through patronage and kinship relations associated with the emergence of black markets, smuggling, corruption and tax-evasion. In order to 'govern and hold together unintegrated peasant societies in the absence of legitimate authority',⁶⁸ systems of personal rule, political patronage and military domination have evolved. However further paradoxes arise:

The state is simultaneously strong in the sense that the state sector comprises a large proportion of the national economy, weak in the sense that the political leadership lacks legitimacy (i.e. a capacity to command obedience) among its citizens, strong in the sense that the public sector bureaucracy is the only cohesive and organized group in national politics, and weak in the sense that certain regional groups are disaffected and secessionist because excluded from this bureaucracy.⁶⁹

Gradually, there is a resurgence of interest in the conditions for the emergence of democratic systems of government in Africa.⁷⁰ But the idea that 'less state means better government', which has been forcefully promoted by

64. G. Hyden, African social structure and economic development, In R. Berg & J. Whitaker (eds), *Strategies for African development* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986), p. 55.

65. Hyden, African social structure and economic development, p. 58.

66. See, *inter alia*: J. Copans, *Une crise conceptuelle opportune*, and N. Kasfir, 'Are African peasants self-sufficient?', *Development and Change*, 17-2 (1986).

67. Berry, 'The food crisis and agrarian change in Africa'.

68. R. Sandbrook, 'The state and economic stagnation in tropical Africa', *World Development*, 14-3 (1986), p. 321.

69. Moore, 'Interpreting Africa's crisis', p. 8.

70. See, for example: P. Anyang Nyong'o, 'Political instability and the prospects for democracy in Africa', *Africa Development*, 13-1 (1988).

the international financial institutions during the 1980s, detracts from, and conceals, the fundamental debate about the role and functions of state agencies and institutions in economic development.⁷¹ As the 'structuralists' have emphasized, increases in agricultural producer prices and reductions in parastatal intervention in markets ('*libéralisation et privatisation*') are not sufficient responses to the agrarian crisis. It has also been pointed out that the privatization of parastatal marketing boards in Africa may simply replace a public monopoly with private trading networks which do little to improve the bargaining power of the peasant producers, or to improve the food security of the poorest farmers whose needs are not backed by 'effective demand' in the form of purchasing power.⁷²

On the other hand, Richards suggests that the debt problems and resource constraints faced by African states may offer an opening for 'populist' strategies to encourage 'peoples science' in agricultural production rather than enforced modernization.⁷³ This in direct contrast to the approach advocated by Hart who argued that the modernization of West African agriculture should be based on the rapid commercial integration of peasant producers and on the development of capital intensive production systems.⁷⁴ However, raising food production:

cannot be achieved by state direction of peasant producers, but only by encouraging peasant initiative based on their own experience and improving their own material well-being, and defending their own gains against the demands even of the revolutionary state.⁷⁵

In attempting to restructure the 'relations of power' in Burkina Faso, to 'take the part of peasants', the CNR government under Thomas Sankara inevitably encountered numerous contradictions which ultimately led to the 'rectification' of the revolutionary strategy. Simultaneous attacks on the power and privileges of the urban workers, civil servants, merchants and the embryonic commercial classes, as well as efforts to subvert the traditional

71. P. Jacquemot, '*La désétatisation en Afrique subsaharienne*', *Revue Tiers-Monde*, 114 (1988). The problems of 'structural adjustment', and the need for a 'political renewal' which would strengthen the capacity of African public institutions in order to contribute to a stable investment environment, have recently been examined by the World Bank itself, *Sub-Saharan Africa—from crisis to sustainable growth*. (World Bank, Washington, 1989).

72. See Raikes, *Modernising hunger*. In criticizing the limitations of economic reform programmes in the Sahel, Giri *et al*, *The Sahel facing the future*, note that: 'Action taken on a specific part of the system—cereals prices yesterday, tomorrow perhaps exchange rates—creates a disturbance that will very soon be absorbed by the system, which is very resilient, and will not ultimately change the internal structure of that system. Structural adjustment programmes themselves, despite their name, do not really affect the structures of Sahelian societies. They modify the distribution of wealth, and may help create conditions for subsequent changes in the internal structure, although this is far from certain', p. 252.

73. P. Richards, *Indigenous agricultural revolution* (Hutchinson, London, 1985).

74. Hart, *The political economy of West African agriculture*.

75. G. Williams, 'Taking the part of peasants'. In J. Harriss, (ed), *Rural development—theories of peasant economy and agrarian change* (Hutchinson, London, 1982), p. 395.

hierarchy in the rural communities gradually destroyed the initial support for the revolution. Dissatisfaction amongst these powerful groups was reinforced by growing resentment towards the controls and restrictions imposed through the network of CDRs and popular tribunals in the villages, workplaces and urban districts. Furthermore, although the CNR government emphasized the intention to reduce dependence on foreign aid and imports, insufficient financial and technical resources as well as continued recourse to food imports increasingly compromised the rhetoric of self-reliance. Nevertheless, it is ironic to note that in terms of output (GDP) growth and agricultural production, the economy of Burkina Faso performed remarkably well during the 1980s.

By abandoning the 'populist' strategy, the FP government has reverted to a modernization approach relying on the transformation of production and exchange through strengthening the commercial classes. In this process the familiar practices of patronage and corruption have resurfaced, together with a realignment of forces in favour of negotiations with the international financial institutions and aid donors in order to reschedule debt repayments and obtain new grants and loans.⁷⁶ But although the new policies appear to have encouraged private sector investment, continuing political instability, as well as severe environmental degradation and food insecurity in many rural areas, threaten to undermine the long term development potential.

The problem of 'generating an alternative dynamic of agricultural access, accumulation and production'⁷⁷ remains unsolved, in Burkina Faso and elsewhere in Africa. Despite the emergence of peasant associations (such as the cereals bank cooperatives in Burkina Faso), and the reorganization of state intervention in the agricultural sector through programmes of adjustment and liberalization, 'the peasantry as such is unlikely to form the basis for a major change in political structure'.⁷⁸ But as long as states are dominated by military, bureaucratic and commercial elites, the exclusion of smallholder peasant farmers from political power and influence represents a major obstacle to effective agrarian change.

76. See: Otayek, 'Rectification', and Baxter & Somerville 'Burkina Faso.'

77. Berry, 'The food crisis and agrarian change in Africa', p. 97.

78. Raikes, *Modernising hunger*, p. 261.