

Rationality in Equality

– Rural Development and Social Response in the Congo (Brazzaville)

Shinichi TAKEUCHI

(Institute of Developing Economies)

As I have shown in the “introduction”, many rural development projects in Africa have been judged as a “failure”. Many researchers have pointed out, as the main reason for such a ‘failure’, the gap between the intention of policy makers and that of peasants targeted in the project; it has been argued that projects could not succeed because they were not congruent with the logic of rural societies.

Although there could be no doubt that this perspective is basically correct, the meaning of the “logic of rural societies” should be examined in detail. What kind of logic has in fact had a strong influence in African rural society? This point has not so far been made clear. Such logic has often been identified with tradition. But what is tradition? Although African rural societies have often been described as an unchangeable and static world, such an image is clearly wrong: African rural societies have experienced a great transformation in these past decades, and African peasants have apparently an active and market-oriented aspect.

This paper attempts to consider such logic in the Republic of Congo (hereafter the Congo), by examining the responses of rural societies to rural development projects and the rapid capitalistic transformation. As for the Congo, Desjeux [1987] has presented excellent research discussing the response of rural societies facing a rural development program. Applying anthropological methodology, this research examined how the Soundi people (inhabitants of Pool Region¹ in the Southern Congo) reacted to a rural development project. He argued that the policy could not achieve the expected goals because the Soundi peasants had interpreted all

¹ “Region” is the biggest local administrative unit in the Congo. This unit is divided into several “Districts” which each include one or several “Poste du Contrôle Administratif (P.C.A.)”.

practices of the project according to the logic of kinship, the dominant logic of Soundi society. He thus insisted that the dominant logic of Soundi society overwhelmed the rationality in the project management.

This is an important argument; because it is certain that the kinship principal is still dominant in rural Congo, where indigenous communities play a decisive role in resource allocation. However, his explanation emphasizing mainly the influence of the kinship principle, namely the “traditional” aspect, of Soundi society seems rather one-sided, as the society must have other “modern” aspects. For example, we know that many peasants enthusiastically produce and sell agricultural products to earn money in rural Congo. Their behavior is rational in the economic sense. The problem here is how we can integrate these two different aspects in the rapidly changing rural society of the Congo. This paper seeks such synthesis by examining the peasants’ reaction to rural development projects and their behavior in recent rural society.

The paper is composed of four sections. As information on rural Congo is scarce, the characteristics of Congolese agriculture and its rural areas will be roughly explained in section I. The history (or pre-history) of Congolese rural policy will be described in Section II. Starting from the colonial period, the continuity of the policy will be shown. The most important Congolese rural development project (Projet de Développement Rural du Pool) is examined in Section III. The contents and problems of the project will be explained. Section IV deals with the capitalistic transformation of a village. The logic of the peasant will be examined according to the findings of this research.

I. Basic Conditions of the Rural Congo

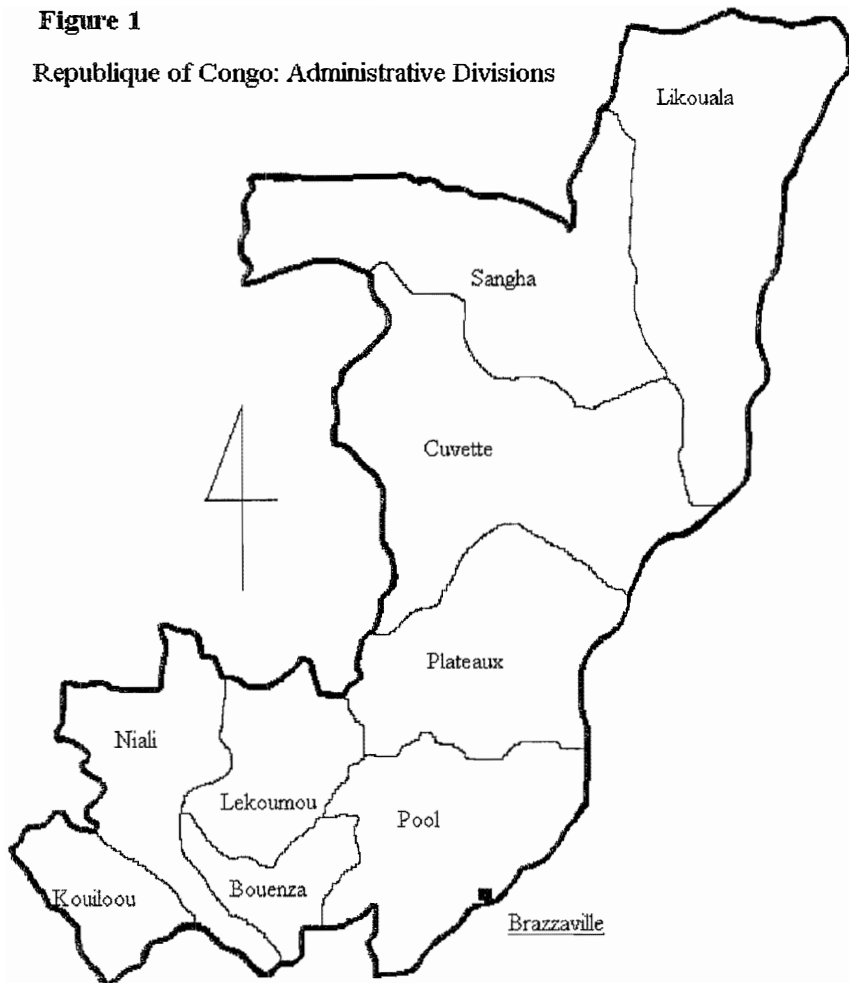
The Republic of Congo is a sparsely populated country: according to the data of 1988, the total population of about 2 million live in a territory of 342,400 square kilometers (République du Congo [1988: 7]). The population is concentrated in particular areas of the territory: Brazzaville, the capital with 660 thousand, and Pointe-Noire, a port city with 330 thousand, comprise around half of the total population. The proportion of urban population in the country at that time was 53%, the highest level in Africa. The population is also concentrated in the southern provinces of the country. The five Regions of Pool, Lékoumou, Bouenza, Niari and Kwilu comprise more than 80% of the total population (see Figure 1). The population of Pool Region, which we will discuss later, was estimated to be around 200 thousand in 1988. The area of the Region is 35 thousand square kilometer, so its population density is only about 6

inhabitants per square kilometer.

As for the climate, precipitation is around 1,200 mm – 2,200 mm in the country. The southern Congo belongs to the Savanna climate zone having a clear distinction between the dry and rainy seasons, while such a distinction is not clear in the northern provinces. The average temperature is about 25 degree all the year round, but a little bit cooler in the dry season. As for vegetation, the northern Congo is included in the vast Central African rainforest of broad-leaved trees, and the northeastern part of the country in particular forms the great swamp forest. Rainforest can be found in parts of Niari and Lékoumou Regions, but most of Pool Region is savanna.

Figure 1

Republique of Congo: Administrative Divisions



Under such environmental condition, peasants are the main actors in Congolese agriculture. Stratification of rural society is not acute in general: almost all farmers hold their land, and tenants or the landless are rare. According to the Agricultural census in 1990, 89.6% of agricultural management units have less than 1 ha (République du Congo [1992: 16]). In rural communities, the lineage generally has a right to the land, and their heads allocate portions of land to the members. As a peasant can choose the crops to be planted in his fields, there is no enforcement or guidance by the community in what to plant. Farmers have a right to bequeath the land to their family (in many case, to their sons), but generally they do not sell the land to outsiders of the community.

Table 1 Agricultural Production in the Congo

	(tons)							
	Niari	Lekoumou	Bouenza	Pool	Plateaux	Cuvette	Sangha	Total
Cassava	49,997	24,884	134,167	220,072	45,176	52,705	10,683	537,684
Groundnuts	2,734	2,736	9,855	2,147	2,805	64	1,520	21,861
Maize	307	n.d.	290	628	337	1,151	590	3,303
Banana	10,516	5,440	2,484	1,440	540	2,640	6,420	29,480
Rice	131	408	9	n.d.	n.d.	385	n.d.	933
Haricot	263	68	231	n.d.	68	n.d.	n.d.	630
Coffee	n.d.	599	1	n.d.	170	95	n.d.	865

Source: République du Congo [1992: 74]

* No data is mentioned about Kouilou and Lekoumou Regions in the original table.

As for agricultural production, cassava is the dominant food crop. Cassava is the most important staple food all over the Congolese territory, thus being of overwhelming importance in agriculture. Table 1 shows the agricultural production of each Region, and it is clear that cassava is significant in every Region. While export crops such as coffee are trivial, cassava plays a major role for farmers not only as a food crop, but also as an important cash crop, because it is sold in the market.² The weight of livestock in farmers' agricultural management is generally low, as cattle-raising has traditionally been impossible in the Congo because of tse-tse fly. Fishery is limited for self-consumption, except for some villages along the Congo River.

² See Takeuchi [1996].

II. Rural Policies in the Congo – A Prehistory³

Although the notion of ‘rural development,’ connected with such ideas as fairness, basic human needs and alleviation of poverty, appeared in the 1970s,⁴ policies targeting rural areas have been implemented for a long time. In the Congo too, the rural modernization policy had already been carried out in the colonial period.⁵ In particular, the “Civil Service (Service civique)” policy, which was implemented in 1959, the year before independence, is important in order to consider continuity with the post-colonial era. In this policy, the youngsters who emigrated from rural areas were the target to be trained, in order to resettle them as modern farmers in their home villages. The government, facing a rapid rural exodus, aimed to alleviate the pressure of unemployed urban youth, and at the same time to modernize the rural areas. Nevertheless, this policy did not succeed because of the indifference of urban inhabitants, and of the political turmoil after independence such as the downfall of first President Youlou in 1963.

The “Civil Service” policy was superseded by “Action for Rural Renovation” (Action de Rénovation Rural), hereafter ARR policy that was implemented by the decree of May 25th 1965. The purpose of ARR was similar to that of “Civil Service”: the resettlement of urban unemployed in the rural areas and their modernization through the activities of cooperatives organized by them. Unemployed youth, which had been increasing drastically in parallel with the rapid urbanization, played an important role on the occasion of the urban disturbances in 1963 that brought about the downfall of Youlou. In fact, ARR was one of the main countermeasures against the increase of unemployed in urban areas. On the other hand, ARR was linked strongly with the activity of the “Youth of the National Movement for Revolution (Jeunesse du Mouvement national de la révolution, hereafter JMNR), a radical group of youngsters in the “National Movement for Revolution” (Mouvement national de la révolution, hereafter MNR), the ruling left-wing party created by the incoming president

³ The description in this section is based principally on N’kaloulou [1984] and Desjeux [1987].

⁴ See my “Introduction.”

⁵ The creation of “Société Africaines de Prévoyance” in 1937 is worth noting as a policy concerning rural area. This was a fund established to promote the introduction of new technologies to rural areas. A poll tax of 3 francs, being imposed to provide the funds, caused the indignation of Congolese and brought the “Three Francs War (Guerre de trois francs)” against the colonial government from 1938 to 1942.

Massamba-Debat, the successor of Youlou.

As JMNR considered Congolese rural areas as a “feudal” society dominated by elders, its modernization for them meant the downfall of such a regime. It was decided that youngsters settling in a rural area should create their “village of cooperatives,” and guide “technically, politically, economically and socially” (N’kaloulou [1984: 143]) those who lived within a 25-kilometer radius from the village. Those youngsters were expected to distribute not only new technologies for agriculture, but also the avant-garde philosophy. However, ARR could not attain its goal like “Civil Service;” although the Congolese government dispensed 30 million CFA Francs⁶ for the resettlement of urban unemployed, and 150 million CFA Francs for rural modernization, only 15 “villages of cooperatives” were created in 1968, three years after the beginning of the program.

Despite the demands of the Congolese government to international organizations in order to raise funds, specialists in ILO and FAO were generally indifferent to the ARR policy. They judged that the project was too politically oriented and thus too risky. The rural policies carried out so far in the Congo, including ARR, can be summarized as modernization policies through the resettlement of urban inhabitants. Specialists in international organizations thought, however, that a development program based on the Congolese peasants’ needs should be planned.

Taking over from ARR, the “Rural Development Project of Pool” (Projet de Développement Rural de Pool, hereafter PDR) became the central issue of Congolese rural development policies in the 1970s. By selecting Pool Region as the main site of operation,⁷ PDR considered peasants as the target group. Planned mainly by ILO and funded by UNDP, the PDR agreement was established by the Congolese government in September 1970.⁸

⁶ CFA Franc is a monetary unit in the Congo (and ancient French Colonies in Africa). The average exchange rate in 1968 was 247.68 CFAFrancs against one dollar.

⁷ Project sites for PDR covered the whole Pool Region (except three districts) and Koukouya plateau in Lékana District of Plateau Region.

⁸ Here, it is reasonable to consider that PDR was influenced by the development ideology in those days: attaching importance to the improvement of peasants’ living standards. As for the ideological change in development thought, see my introduction. Although the establishment of PDR (1970) was earlier than the “Nairobi Speech” (1973), this is not strange, since PDR was planned by ILO, the organization taking the initiative to the “basic needs” approach.

III. Goal and Result of PDR

When the Congolese government demanded financial support for ARR, it gave priority to an agricultural modernization program such as large-scale mechanization. However, this policy was renounced because of the negative response from international institutions. Instead, the government came to emphasize the necessity to ameliorate the technology and working conditions of the peasants.

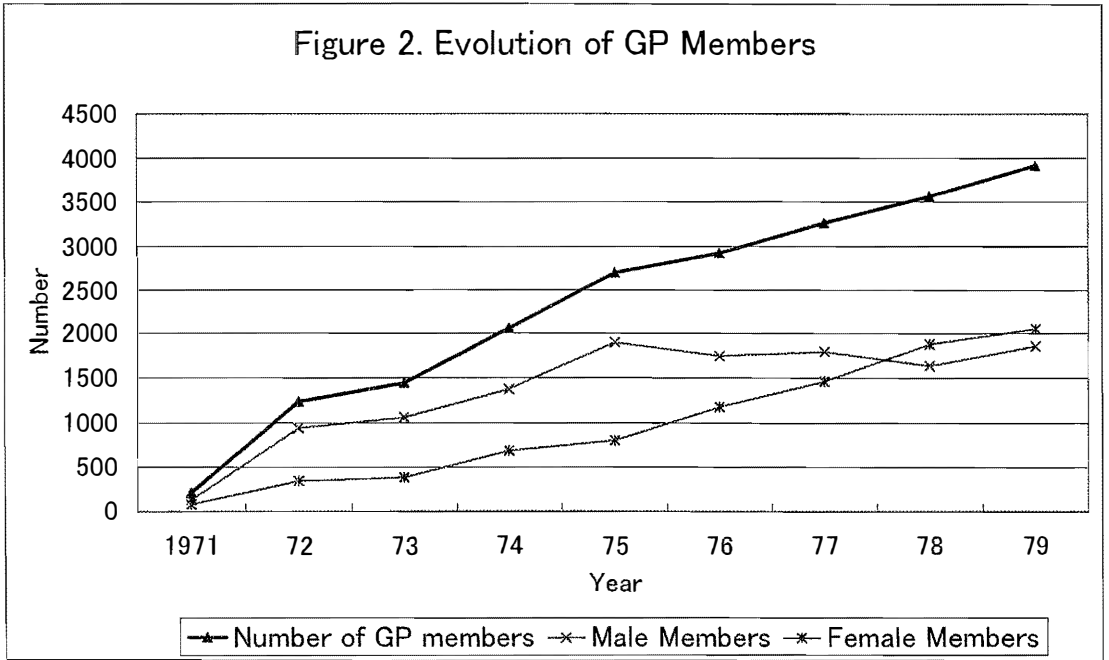
According to the agreement in 1970, PDR laid stress on activities promoting the income-generating capacity of peasants: cash crop production such as vegetables, rice and tobacco; feed production such as maize and sorghum; small livestock such as poultry, pigs, goats and sheep; and fishery using raising ponds. For this purpose, the amelioration of peasants' skill was considered as the most important issue.

In order to tackle this problem, the "Pre-cooperative group" (Groupement précoopératif, hereafter GP) was established. Composed of more than seven members, GP carried out communal works once or twice a week. Although the government explained that GP was the pre-stage of a cooperative, it could be regarded as a cooperative. Important was the fact that it was not each peasant but GP that received the support from PDR. Such support was in the form of skill training, seminars, visiting other GPs, basic education for children and women, and micro finance for peasants.

At first, PDR aimed at agricultural development by the diffusion of modern technology for peasants through GP. As long as evaluated by the number of GPs and their members, the organization of peasants developed rapidly. Figure 2 indicates the evolution of GP members between 1971 and 1979. The number of GP members grew steadily during ten years. The number of GPs itself also increased from 9 in 1971 to 168 in 1979. Especially, female membership grew remarkably, although there were many more male members than female members at the beginning, the latter increased considerably in the late 1970s and got ahead in 1979.⁹ As the total population of Pool Region was less than 200,000, it is pertinent to consider that GPs were organized in the whole Region.

Why did GP spread so rapidly? Certainly, one of the reasons was that the

⁹ N'kaloulou [1984: 181]. These figures were quoted from the paper presented to the seminar held on 18 – 22th December 1979 in Kinkala. Nguyen Tien Hung [1987: 155] indicated, from the document of FAO/UNDP/Government of Congo, the evolution of GPs and their members. Although the numbers shown in the two documents were slightly different, characteristics such as the number of GPs growing steadily and female members increasing remarkably in the late 1970s were the same.



Source: N'kaloulou [1984: 181].

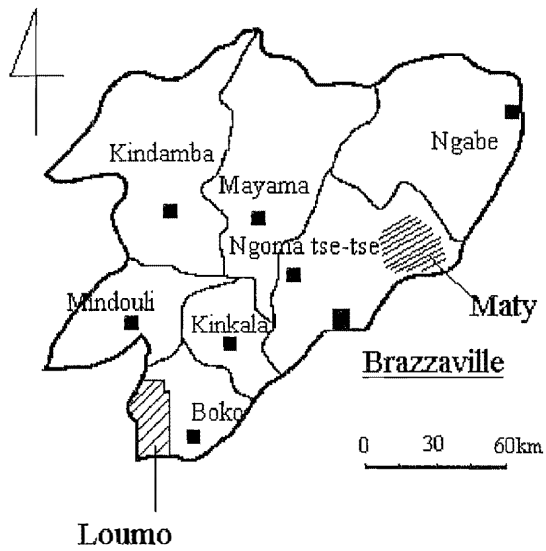


Figure 3 Pool Region

Congolese government, claiming “Scientific Socialism,” has been an ardent supporter of this movement from the ideological point of view. But more important would be the nature of Congolese society, making it capable of accepting the organization. Peasants accepted rather easily the main activity of GP, communal work, as it was similar to other communal work practiced generally in Pool Region. Ethnic groups in the Region have in general several patterns of communal work.¹⁰ This was an important reason that the peasants in Pool Region could rapidly accept the organization of GP.

The number of GPs thus increased rapidly, but how did they work? N’kaloulou [1984] has shown the activities of two GPs at Loumo in Pool Region. The location of Loumo is indicated in Figure 3. Let us at first summarize the example of N’kengue village. 25 farmers (11 men and 14 women) were members of GP in this village with a total population of 54. The average age of the member was 50 years. The communal labor of GP was carried out every Thursday.¹¹ Those who wanted to be members had to pay 2,000 Francs as a common charge and for making a membership card. A member often absent from communal works could be fined 400 Francs. Members used their own farming tools (a hoe and a machete) for the labor for GP. When GP was established in 1975 in N’kenge, members hoped to increase vegetable production. However, their wish was not fulfilled because of the problem of transportation: they could not transport vegetables to the market. Eventually, GP activity was confined to cassava production: they treated cassava for a long preservation¹² and sold them to merchants coming to the village once every two weeks.

¹⁰ According to Desjeux [1987:130-132], Soundi, the inhabitants of Pool, distinguished between three types of communal labor: *ntsala sani*, *luyalu*, and *dibundu* (or *zola*). *Ntsala sani* is the exchange of labor among members of a group. These groups tend to be formed on the basis of friend relationship rather than kinship. *Luyalu* means “power”. Originally signifying forced labor in the colonial period, it indicates in these days the labor supply by order of the government. For example, work for road rehabilitation or agriculture ordered by the party or government are recognized as *luyalu*. *Dibundu* (*zola*) is a communal labor to earn money for management of a church. Christianity is so popular in rural Congo that many villages have one or several churches, even if the building is shabby. Construction and management of churches is covered by the fund raised by such communal labor.

¹¹ Work during a week was fixed as follows: Monday, Friday and Saturday for individual work, Tuesday for *dibundu*, Wednesday for *luyalu*, Thursday for GP, and Sunday for a rest.

¹² They soaked cassava to preserve it. Soaked cassava, *bikedi*, can be preserved several months. This product is used as a material to make *chikwangués*, one of the edible forms of cassava.

According to N'kaloulou, GP members in N'kenge generally thought that they had not received enough support from PDR. On the one hand, although they continued to demand, since the creation of GP, assistance for modernizing livestock raising, no answer came from PDR. On the other hand, PDR sent them, without any consultation, 8 machetes, 8 hoes, 3 axes, 2 forks and one wheelbarrow, and notified that the charge should be paid by a three-year loan with an annual interest rate of 8 %. They claimed with some anger that they already possessed such tools. As for the skill-training program, one of the members was invited to the headquarters of PDR and received brief instruction for one week. He thus became an "instructor" (encadreur), but his knowledge on agriculture was no different from that of the other members. Moreover, GP income was not spent, as expected at first, on investment for agricultural development. It was used to fund loans for living expenses, or common recreation such as the New Year festival.

Next is the summary of a case study on the GP of N'saka. This is a village with a population of 133, in which 25 farmers (11 men and 14 women) were GP members. Their average age was 44 years. This village had similar problems to N'kenge. At the time of creation in 1977, the members considered that the main activity of GP should be vegetable production. However, they renounced it the following year and decided to produce soaked cassava because of the vegetable marketing problem. In remote areas such as Loumo, the major constraint has always been the problem of commercialization. The N'saka GP also continued to demand a loan for hog raising, but they did not receive any reply. In 1979, PDR abruptly sent them 5 axes, 5 hoes, 10 machetes, 3 forks and 2 wheelbarrows. They were at first happy, but their joy quickly turned to disappointment, because PDR later asked them to pay for these tools by a three-year loan. The revenue from selling the soaked cassava was expended, not on investment for agricultural development, but on living expenditure as with the N'kenge case.

These two examples show that, although the organization of peasants developed quantitatively, the GP activity contained many problems and often deviated from the expected objectives. Vegetables, at the first stage, were regarded as the targeted product to earn money and to modernize the agricultural system, but this was renounced particularly because of the marketing problem. Activities such as rice, feed production, animal raising and fishery did not develop at all. Case studies indicate that the PDR headquarters could not react well to the needs of the peasants. This could be considered as a problem of project management. PDR thus had many difficulties and wound up in the late 1980s because the government of the Congo, in serious economic

crisis, could not continue with funding. As the support from PDR came to an end, GPs also generally stopped their activity.¹³ It is thus possible to conclude that PDR could not attain its goals, or more simply, PDR had failed.

The next question is why PDR could not attain its goals. On the one hand, the most important reason that two GPs renounced vegetables was the marketing problem. While they could produce vegetables, they could not sell the products in the market because they did not have any means to transport them. Although rapid transportation is indispensable for marketing perishables like vegetables, neither PDR nor the government could take care of it. The government established in 1977 a “Food Marketing Office” (Office de cultures vivrières, hereafter OCV), but this organization did not work because of mismanagement and especially for lack of trucks to collect produce. As rural transportation depended totally on the private sector, remote areas like Loumo could not expect to see frequent visits by trucks. In this situation, vegetable production could not be promoted. It was rational that the GPs in Loumo renounced vegetables and chose soaked cassava to earn money.¹⁴

On the other hand, Desjeux [1987: 138] has argued that the crucial reason preventing cooperative activity was the traditional land tenure system. In Soundi society, it is generally considered that traditional communities hold final rights on their land and chiefs have the right to its allocation. GP activities such as planting perennials or constructing pounds for fish raising caused complicated problems under such a land tenure system, because someone who planted perennials or carried out large-scale construction work could claim his right to the land. When GP tried to undertake such activity, usufruct holders of the land would be afraid that GP could take away their rights. On the contrary, GP was afraid that such usufruct holders would claim their rights to the fruit of activities (for example, perennials or fish in raising pounds). The

¹³ As mentioned later for village B, the cooperative functioned until the mid 1980s, but ceased activity after there were financial scandals concerning its management.

¹⁴ Desjeux [1987: 136-137] has pointed out that such a change in the activity (from a cash crop to food crop) occurred in many areas. This fact is shown, although indirectly, in Figure 2 by the change of sex ratio in GP members: when PDR started in 1970, the number of male members exceeded that of female members, but this was later reversed. In the Congo, where sexual division of labor exists, men normally cultivate vegetables, typical cash crops. In the early 1970s, as many GPs tried to produce vegetables, the number of male members was much greater than female members. On the contrary, cassava is a typical food crop and cultivated mainly by women. It is likely that the increase in female members reflected the importance of cassava production in GP activity.

accomplishment of GP activity was thus often obstructed by such a possibility and thus discredit between each other.

Under such a land tenure system, those who had the right to allocate the land tended to become leaders of GPs, because it made the acquisition of land for GP activities much easier. This meant that those who had the power in traditional communities tended also to take the leadership in this rural development project. As the high average age of GP members suggests, the management of GP was often monopolized by elders, who are the traditional power holders. They generally managed GPs to reproduce existing social order. This may be the main reason why the money earned by GP activity was not spent on investment for development, but on consumption such as festivals.

Previous researchers have thus emphasized, as important reasons for the failure of PDR, the marketing bottleneck and the traditional social order represented by the land tenure system. It is interesting to note that these two reasons have opposing characteristics. The first reason suggests a lack of rationality in the project. Farmers were rational when they renounced vegetable production. The goal could not be attained as a result of the economically rational behavior of the farmers. The second reason, on the contrary, suggests that, even if a project were economically rational, its goal would not be attained unless it took social factors inherent in the project site into account. According to this observation, the land tenure system has different characteristics from “modern” logic or economic rationality. Although the first reason stresses the image of a rational peasant, the second one concerns traditional social logic. How can we integrate these contradictory images of the Congolese peasant?

IV. Logic of Rural Society

Concerning the logic in Congolese rural society, two different characteristics were abstracted from the discussion in the previous section: economic rationality and the logic used in the traditional land tenure system. We must answer other questions: what is in fact the logic of traditional land tenure, if it is not “economic rationality”? How do these two characteristics interrelate in recent rural societies? In this section, the results of my own research in Congo will be summarized in order to examine these questions. My research, carried out between 1992 and 1994, concerned the Congolese food economy. Consumption, commercialization and production of the most important staple food in the Congo, cassava, were studied (Takeuchi [1996;1997;1998]). We focus here especially on the commercialization of cassava and the situation in cassava

production areas.

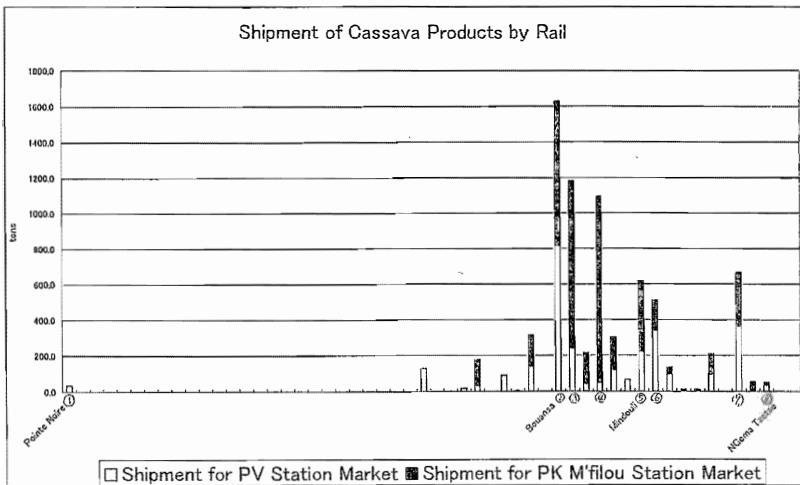
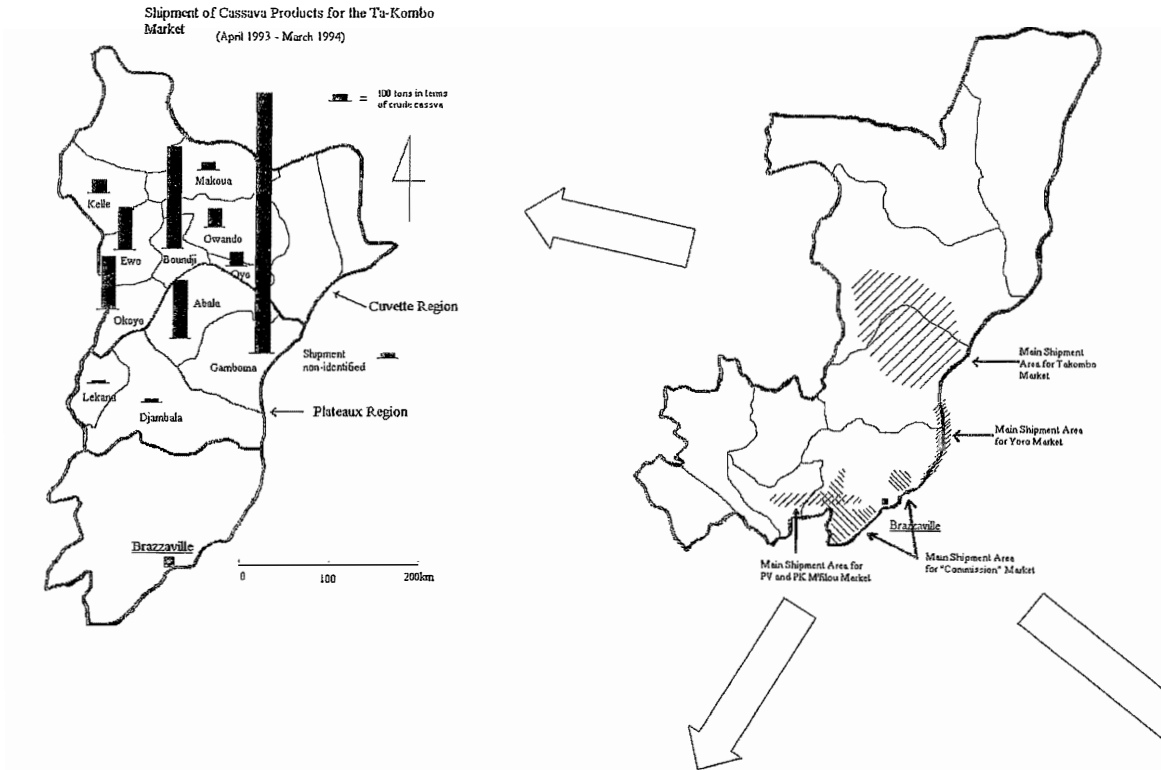
As rapid urbanization created tremendous demand for food in the city, cassava production increased remarkably in wide areas during a relatively short period. Figure 4 shows the quantity of cassava products (*chikwangue*, *foufou* and *bikedi*)¹⁵ transported to the five main markets in the capital of Brazzaville: two markets collecting shipments by truck (“Ta-Kombo” and “Commission” Markets), two collecting shipments by rail (“PK-M’filou” and “PV” Station Markets), and one collecting shipments by boat (“Yoro” Market). Figure 4 clearly indicates that a great quantity of products was transported from remote areas. Three quarters of the total shipments was transported by truck.¹⁶ A vast area was thus involved in the commercialization process for cassava, which is produced totally by peasants.

Merchants involved in cassava marketing could be categorized to 4 groups. The first group is those who possess their own trucks and purchase products by themselves. They visit the villages in a large truck loading more than ten tons, and buy the bulk of the cassava products. In general, these merchants visited the northern Regions, and purchased mainly *chikwangues*. Secondly, there are the merchants borrowing trucks and purchasing products by themselves. They must pay for the rent of the trucks. As the rent is generally very expensive, their benefits are, in many cases, low. Many of them also visit the northern area, but their number and purchasing quantity are much less than those in the first category. The third group is merchants who do not possess or borrow trucks, but pay fares to get on trucks and visit several villages. The amount of their dealing and benefit was generally trivial. This category includes peasants riding on trucks and visiting Brazzaville to sell their own products. Lastly, there are those who possess trucks but do not purchase products. Although these

¹⁵ These are the three main forms of the cassava product. Crude cassava is so perishable that the peasants must process it before shipment. As we have already explained, *bikedi* is soaked cassava, and is used for producing *Chikwangue*. *Chikwangue* is often called “cassava bread” made from its starch. *Foufou* is dried cassava chips. After being broken down to powder and mixed with hot water, *foufou* is cooked like hard porridge.

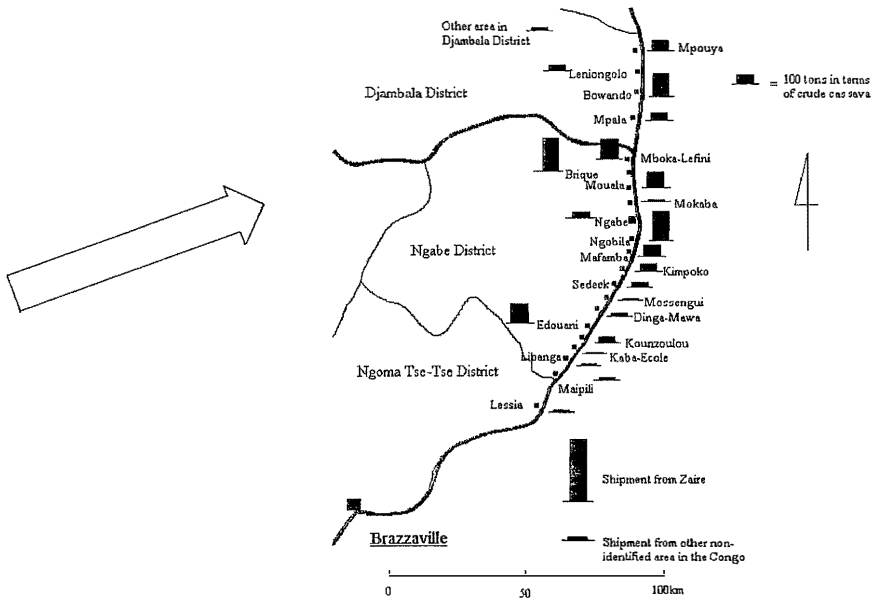
¹⁶ In this research, the shipment quantity by rail was calculated from shipment slips systematically inspected at two railroad stations. As for the shipments by boat and by truck, we calculated them on the basis of inquiries, carried out during one week per month about every boat or truck that arrived at the three markets. As the shipment quantities by boat and by truck indicated in Figure 4 are simple additions from the result of this inquiry, the total shipment during the period should be estimated as about 52/12 times greater than the quantity shown in Figure 4, because we made the inquiry for one week 12 times in a year (of 52 weeks).

Figure 4. Main Shipment Areas for Cassava Products to Brazzaville

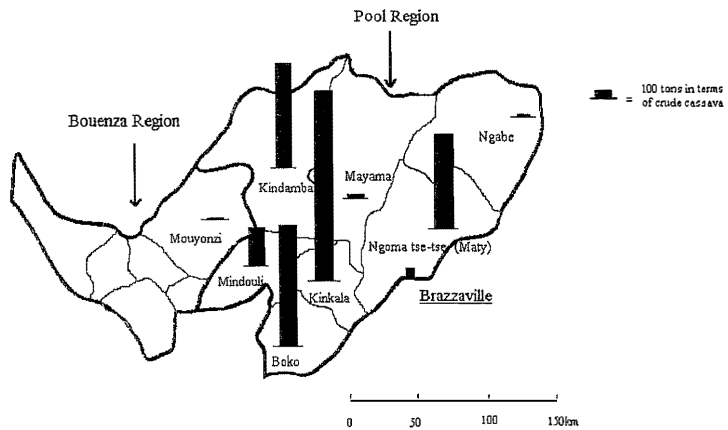


- ① Pointe-Noire
- ② Bouansa
- ③ Loutete
- ④ Loulombo
- ⑤ Mindouli
- ⑥ Missafou
- ⑦ Kibouende
- ⑧ Ngoma Tse-Tse

Shipment of Cassava Products for the Yoro Market
(April 1993 - March 1994)



Shipment of Cassava Products for the "Commission" Market
(April 1993 - March 1994)



specialize in the transportation activities, they should also be taken into account. Almost all the truck owners visiting Pool Region do not purchase products by themselves. They gain a great profit by charging passengers who use the trucks as a means of transportation.

Merchants in the first, second and fourth categories visited villages in their trucks. What is interesting is the fact that each merchant generally had his specialized area to visit regularly, as if each had his “territory”.¹⁷ Such behavior was common, especially, among merchants of the first and fourth categories: the two most important groups concerning the dealing quantity. In many cases, they visit some particular villages on a certain day of the week. This enables the villagers to anticipate the merchant’s arrival, thus making it much easier to prepare the cassava product to sell. Transport from the capital is not frequent to each local area, but these merchants have tried to reduce the uncertainty by fixing the day of a visit and making the shipment easier. Such a network for shipment, covering a vast area of rural Congo, supports the huge demand for food in Brazzaville and encouraged the commercialization of food crops.

How have Congolese rural societies realized such rapid commercialization (the increase in production) of food crops? Has such capitalistic transformation affected the social order of society? Let us examine next what happened in a rural society. I carried out research on an agricultural production system by staying in a village (hereafter mentioned as village B) in an area called Maty,¹⁸ located about 100 km north of Brazzaville (See Figure 3). Maty played an important role in the shipment of cassava products for Brazzaville: the shipment from this area constitutes 17% of the total quantity of cassava products (50% of *foufou*) transported to “Commission” Market, one of the two main markets reached by trucks. The supply of cassava products (especially *foufou*) from this area is indispensable for the food needs in the capital.

In spite of such quantitative importance, it was only about twenty years ago when people launched cassava production in Maty, because almost no people lived there until that time. Cassava production increased drastically when the citizens of Brazzaville started to migrate to this area and produce cassava by employing Zairians¹⁹

¹⁷ Even merchants in the third category tended to visit regularly certain villages by traveling in the truck of another merchant.

¹⁸ As nobody lived there until recently, the area did not have, when I carried out the research, any official name granted by the Administration.

¹⁹ Zaire changed its name in 1997 to Democratic Republic of Congo. In this paper, however, I use the name Zaire in order not to confuse with Congo (Brazzaville).

as agricultural workers. In Maty, therefore, there were a number of villages which many Zairian workers inhabited; village B was one of the biggest. According to my research in October 1993, two thirds of the total population (347 inhabitants) were Zairians and many of them were short-term immigrants. Those who had land (almost all were Congolese) employed these Zairians immigrants to produce cassava products for selling. As the water was difficult to obtain in Maty, *foufou* (dried cassava chips) was the only cassava product for shipment.²⁰

Two factors are important as reasons for the citizens' influx to Maty: the population growth of Brazzaville and the development of a marketing network. Table 2 shows the population growth of Brazzaville. The table clearly indicates that the population has increased rapidly, especially since independence (1960). In this situation of aggravating the unemployment problem of urban youth, the government launched a series of resettlement programs to rural areas. These "rural" policies have failed consecutively, as we mentioned in previous sections.²¹ The rapid growth of the urban population, on the other hand, has drastically increased the food demand in the capital. This situation has meant that peasants found a great chance for marketing their agricultural products. It is not technically difficult to increase the production of cassava, if there is abundant land. As there were only a few inhabitants in Maty until the 1970s, the land was abundant there. Moreover, the development of a marketing network by truck operators alleviated the bottleneck for selling. In 1993, the truck of a certain merchant came regularly on Tuesday and Friday so that the peasants could sell their products easily.²² The number of trucks visiting Maty has increased in parallel with the number of settlers and the growth of cassava production.²³ It has therefore enabled a rapid increase in cassava production by extensive agricultural method depending on

²⁰ The water is always in short supply in Maty, which is located on a plateau. As *chikwangue* and *bikedi* need a lot of water to produce, the production of *foufou* is preferred. *Foufou* production does not demand a skill (whereas a certain skill is necessary for the production of *chikwangue*), and its added value is higher than that of *bikedi*.

²¹ According to my interview, nobody in village B took such governmental programs into account. Everyone answered that they went to the village by their own decision.

²² As the truck specialized in transportation only, the owner of the truck did not purchase agricultural products. Instead, they always brought the same merchants to purchase products, and peasants could go with the truck to sell their own products in Brazzaville.

²³ According to villagers settled in village B in the late 1970s, it was only once a month at that time that a truck came to this area.

Table 2. Evolution of the Population of Brazzaville

Year	Population	Urban Area (ha)
1901	4,250	
1911	5,400	
1925	15,000	
1945	50,000	
1947	60,000	
1950	76,000	1,800
1953	86,769	1,950
1957	95,000	2,100
1960	99,000	
1961	122,000	
1970	200,000	
1974	299,000	6,500
1978	380,000	7,000
1983	501,000	7,200
1984	595,102	
1988	659,835	

Source: Guichaoua [1989: 104] up to 1984.
République Congolaise [1988: 7] for 1988.

Zairian immigrant workers.²⁴ In summary, Congolese settlers have chosen to go to Maty and to produce cassava by exploiting these conditions; their behavior can mainly be explained from the viewpoint of economic rationality.²⁵

Let us next examine how the land tenure system has worked in such remarkable commercialization of food the crop. The Congolese settlers in Maty are composed mainly of the Lali, an ethnic group living next to the Soundi. In village B, the number of Lali is overwhelming among the Congolese, and the village chief is also a Lali. The land tenure system in this village is peculiar, because a wide range of social groups has a right to the land: in spite of the Lali's overwhelming importance in the village, not only Lali, but also Congolese of other ethnic groups, and even some Zairians, are permitted to have their fields. The Lali's traditional land tenure system has similar characteristic to that of the Soundi: an indigenous unit such as lineage and clan holds a right to the land. In normal practice, chiefs or elders exercise this right and allocate the land to members of the unit. In this case, it would be unusual to allocate land to members of other ethnic groups or much less to foreigners. The land tenure system of village B is thus different from the normal Lali's principle.

Nevertheless, the peculiar system of village B should not be considered as a radical change of the Lali's traditional land tenure system; its logic has been maintained even in this new village. As village B is composed of migrants, the power of lineage is not as important. The chief of village B is a Lali man who settled there in the earliest days. This village chief has the power to allocate the land to member of village community. In other words, it is necessary to be recognized as a member of the village community in order to get land. Those who have been allocated land were therefore

²⁴ The wage level of Zairian workers was much lower than that of Congolese. The main reason for this was the difference in currency. CFA francs, the currency of the Congo, was relatively stable because of its link with French francs, while the value of the zaire, the currency of Zaire, continued to fall because of long political turmoil. The demand for CFA francs was therefore strong among Zairians, thus making a lot of Zairians work in Maty, near to the border between the two countries: the Congo River.

²⁵ Is it possible to understand the transformation process in Maty as rural development? This is a difficult question. Although there was no political intervention, people have made great effort to increase the production and ameliorate their living standards. In addition, villagers demanded actively of the Administration to provide them with some infrastructure such as schools. They thus struggled to improve their life in the village. The social change caused by such activities might be categorized as rural development. But at the same time, the extensive method for producing cassava did not change. It is therefore doubtful if such growth of production could be sustainable. We need more time to answer this question.

recognized as members of the community. Despite some special characteristics of village B, its land allocation system maintained the same traditional principles.

Next, the content of the village community should be clarified. It is at first important to note that the Lali dominate politically village B. For example, it is impossible for a non-Lali Congolese to become the village chief. Moreover, Zairians' land rights are apparently more vulnerable than the Congolese's.

Some incidents clearly show this point. Although the Lali dominate village B, Maty is located in an area where the Teke, another ethnic group, originally had rights to the land. Thus, the early settlers of village B, the Lalis, had to pay a rent of 26,000 francs for several years to the "landowner" of Teke living in a town. They paid the rent through two GPs working at that time in village B: each of them paid 15,000 francs and 11,000 francs, respectively. But afterwards, the villagers refused the payment, claiming that such rent was illegal because their GPs were officially recognized by the State and, according to the Congolese constitution, all land was stipulated as belonging to the State.²⁶ Recently, the village chief has started to ask some of the Zairian landholders to pay 26,000 francs to him as the rent. He insisted that the Zairians have free-riden on the effort of early settlers to get the land. This episode indicates that Congolese villagers came to consider that the land became short and that Zairians were responsible for it, as they were latecomers and outsiders.

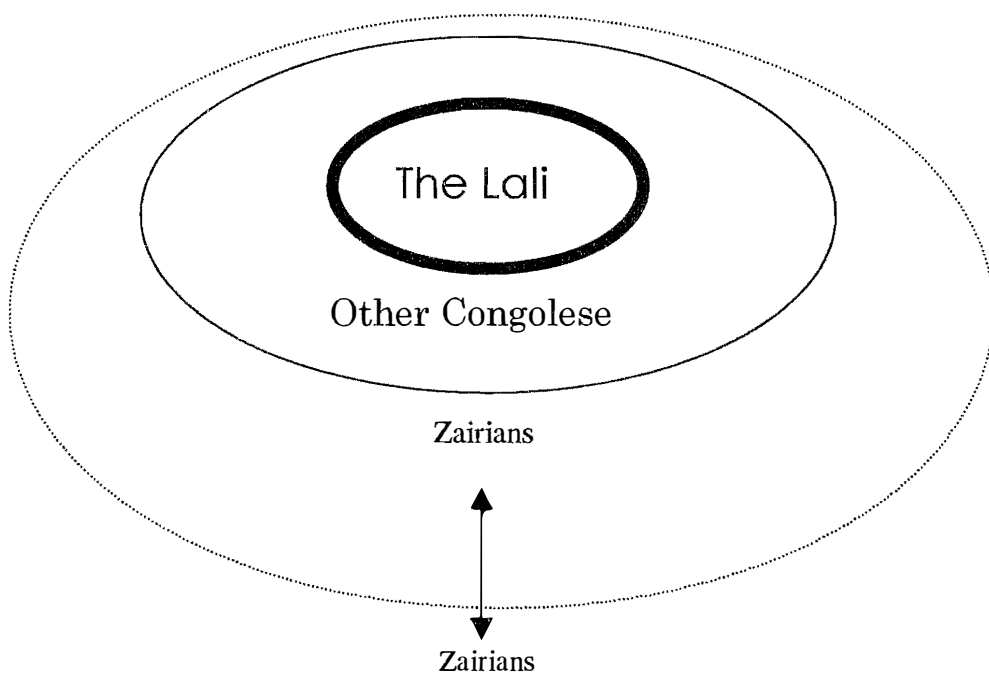
Before, Zairians could get land rather easily in village B. The village chief used to give them land if they had worked well for about five years. Now, however, it has become much more difficult for Zairians to get land. Moreover, some Zairians having been permitted the right were recently refused by the chief a new allocation of land because of the land shortage.

These changes shed light on the structure of village community. Villagers responded to the land shortage, not by transforming their land tenure system, but by redefining and restricting the members of their community. This means that the limit of the community was flexible: it widened when the land was abundant, but it narrowed when the resource became short. The community in village B can be represented by Figure 5. The Lali, especially the families that settled in the early days, occupy the core of this community. The community then includes some Congolese of other ethnic groups and Zairians, as they are permitted to have a land right. As members of the community, all of them are allowed to have a right to land. However, the political

²⁶ They therefore succeeded in manipulating the authority and menace of the State to stop the payment.

power of each member is not the same in the community: the status of Zairians (and to a lesser extent Congolese of other ethnic groups) is more vulnerable than that of the Lali. In short, the community is politically stratified. When available resources became short, the core of the community tried to protect their interests by reducing the number of beneficiaries, namely by excluding members with vulnerable status.

Figure 5 Community of Village B



Conclusion

Examples of Congolese rural policies in the early stage such as “Civil Service” and ARR clearly show that they were launched not for the peasants but for unemployed urban youth. As these policies were established without understanding the rural society, they could not achieve their goals at all. As for PDR, which was intended for peasants, the project did not work well mainly because of the bottleneck in commercialization and obstacles in the traditional land tenure system. With any of these

policies, the nature of rural societies had not been sufficiently examined before their implementation.

My research on newly appearing cassava-producing areas has verified several facts about the character of rural societies: villagers' behavior, having settled in Maty and increased production by their own decision, could be explained by economic rationality; the village community controlled the allocation of land, the most important means of production in rural society; despite several particular characteristics in this new village, the core of the land tenure system was the same as that of the Lali's traditional system. The structure of the village community being politically stratified, the power to allocate the land was occupied by some Lali families; as membership of the village community was changeable, the community responded to the recent land shortage by excluding these member with vulnerable status.

On the basis of these facts, let us consider the character of Congolese rural society. On the one hand, the rapid development in agricultural production clearly shows the economic rationality of the Congolese peasants. They have chosen to provide more agricultural products by responding to market opportunity.

On the other hand, such considerable growth of production has been achieved by maintaining extensive agricultural method, and consequently their land tenure system. In other words, the way to allocate the most important means of production has not change, in spite of the considerable commercialization of the staple food. In this sense, the most important resource, the land, was not commercialized, and thus has been allocated according to the cultural value of the community. Although such a cultural value differs from community to community in the Congo, its most important character must be the economic equality. As the main purpose of the community has been its existence or survival, it is obliged to provide its entire membership with sufficient means of production to survive. If the great amount of agricultural products were commercialized, strong ideology of equality persists in Congolese rural communities for allocation of the means of production. Rationality about the marketing of cassava is therefore conditioned by equality about the allocation of land.

The case of village B shows that the ideology of equality paradoxically caused the exclusion of some Zairians. Because of this ideology, all community members were equally able to claim land. That is why the power holder of the community tried to limit the number of beneficiaries by excluding the most vulnerable group when the land resource became short. This case indicates that political hierarchy was used to protect the interest of the community, or more precisely the interest of the power holders.

The community in Africa is generally politically stratified, not only by nationality or ethnicity, but also by lineage, age, gender, etc. (Dupré & Rey [1969]) If the quantity of available resources changes in a short period, it often strengthens the existent political hierarchy. In such a situation, creating friction against the ideology of economic equality, gives power holders many more opportunities for political intervention. In this sense, the implementation of a rural development project has the same effect on rural societies, as it causes a drastic increase of available resources. At least, we should be aware of this causal relationship.

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