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"Exchange-Labor and Credit Interventions
in Two Malian Villages

I have taken as the focus of this paper the contradiction between the individualized credit assistance offered by one rural development scheme and the importance of cooperative and exchange labor for the agricultural success of the Malian peasants in question. The use of exchange-labor to minimize the constraints of the weeding labor bottleneck means that the peasant will not easily risk a change which could undermine the contractual basis of this institution. In analyzing this contradiction I hope to illustrate how the practical constraints of a development-oriented anthropology force the ethnographer to take a more diachronic and processual view of peasant production systems.

Briefly, the problem is this: in two villages with which I have some familiarity southeast of Segou, (exchange-) labor (dama baara) was an important device for overcoming the labor bottleneck during the weeding phase of the farming cycle. Yet credit assistance being offered in conjunction with a livestock Development Project in the area proved popular in only one of the villages, Nianiwere, while it was distained by all but four compounds in the other, Dukolomba. ^{1/} Thoughtful approaches to the role of exchange-labor in peasant production systems, such as

those of Erasmus (1956) and Moore (1975), do not provide leads to an explanation of this discrepancy. Their emphasis is upon labor as a quantifiable entity, to which the peasant can maximize his access by reshuffling various forms of direct reciprocity or compensation.

Unfortunately, in Dukolomba and Nianiwere, even though dama baara means "only work", "limited to work", or "enumerated work", laborers in an exchange-labor situation can never be simply just that. Even in Nianiwere where, as we shall see, many farmers would like it to be simply "limited to work", the exchange-labor relationship develops an extraneous patron-client character. This is merely because partners avoid kinsmen and social equals in the course of exchanging labor, in an effort to keep the relationship on a strictly short-term, directly reciprocal footing. This informal and unsought patron-client relationship effects the developing role of exchange-labor on the total production system in this village.

A more substantivist approach to labor, such as Neale's (1964), avoids a synchronic and transactional view of the laborer. But to do so he departs from an analysis of production to consider extraneous social and cultural values. The constraint of looking at this Malian case with a specific development practice in mind forced me to see that value orientations need not be given separate treatment in the analysis. That Neale and others do this stems from a synchronic conception of production, in this sense not unlike that of the formalists.

To explain the impact of labor organization on the future development of Dukolomba and Nianiwere I have had to look at the process of production beyond the time frame of the immediate labor transaction. In Kalibar's terms: (pp 270-271) "The necessity of the social relations is simply the work of the former production activity, which necessarily leaves to the succeeding one determinate conditions of production". For the purposes of this analysis I have had to consider the production of laborers through their kinship and affinity in order to understand the implications of their use in crop production. The impact of this first production activity upon the second will become clear as I review the networks used in exchange-labor in these two villages in the 1975 weeding season. But first I must describe the role of both kin groups and exchange-labor groups in the context of peasant agriculture southeast of Segu.

FROM COMPOUND TO VILLAGE

The peasants' first line of agricultural cooperation is the patrilocal compound (du) or hearth (gwa). The corporate estate of this unit is named after its most important component: Big Field (foroba). French ethnographers have celebrated the communal character of this Mande compound arrangement: Monteil (1929:20) (c.f. 1924 for details) talks of the "communisme familial"; Labouret (1934:50) speaks of a "communaute taisible". This communalism, however, can end abruptly at the compound walls, particularly where bonds of common patrilineal descent do not unite compounds. Success in commerce almost requires the removal of one's compound from such a patrilineal context.

However, a market orientation to the outside invariably pervades relations within the compound, at least as far as agriculture is concerned. As we shall see in the case of Nianiwere, such a market orientation will influence subordinate men in the compound to cultivate their own individual "night" or "slave" fields, (suro foro) as they are called, leaving the compound field in the late afternoon in order to do so. Furthermore, as a commercial orientation generally favors a commitment to Islam, women in Nianiwere are forbidden to go out to the bush to work in the compound field. Married women, then, spend much of their time in their own personal fields (musoforo), aided by their daughters. This fragmentation of the compound's field space can hurt the overall yield, since certain economies of scale both in group labor and in field guarding are lost. However if this loss makes possible a greater commercial orientation, some compounds will risk it.

The compound is set in a ward (kinda, sokala), which is usually organized around a core founding-lineage segment. To this founding segment are attached allied compounds which entered the community through stranger (dunan) - host (jatigi) relations at some point in their history. Religious differences, particularly those associated with degree of Islamization, provide a pretext for escaping the ward of one's close agnates. Likewise, the village (dugu) is organized around a core lineage (or clan, depending upon its size and the antiquity of its original settlement - or takeover - of the area). The oldest member of the

oldest generation of this "founding" lineage or clan will be, barring outside government interference, the village chief (dugutigi).

Every member of the village will be born into a specified age-set. After circumcision the male members of these age-sets participate in a cooperative work association called the ton. The ton will be organized on a ward or village basis, depending on whichever can provide it with a minimum of 30 laborers. While these ton were formalized for purposes of military conscription by the Segu rulers of the 1700's (and also for the purposes of state labor - a function they still perform), it is important to realize that they had already existed under the name of je as a prominent force in peasant agriculture.

The leaders of the ton (tontigiw) are the members of the oldest age-set still within the association. ^{2/} The age at which this age-set graduates from the ton and thus stages its festival (ton nyenaje) varies from village to village, depending upon the community's demographic structure and its interest in having a sizeable ton. The ton leaders can call out the ton members (tondenw) by flute calls on any Monday or Friday, and the compound heads are powerless to object. Within its own community the ton will do a morning's work for a goat or a sheep. When hired in another village, (usually in a more commercially-oriented village which consequently has a weaker ton of its own), ton members will expect better food, some money, and kola nuts, as treats in addition.

While the ton can assist a late farmer in clearing his field before the rains, and the ton's organizing principle is

used to mobilize the threshing-force for all compounds, still it cannot help the majority of compounds through the weeding bottleneck. As we shall see, during this part of the season the ton is either mobilized less frequently or only hired out to compounds who have no laborers with which to gain access to an exchange-labor group.

For this reason I have chosen to focus on exchange-labor as a more direct organizational constraint upon the commercial autonomy of the individual compound.

THE 1975 WEEDING SEASON

First I will review the deployment of exchange-labor for weeding in 1975 in Dukolomba. On July 29, when the first exchange-labor group of the season went weeding, 286mm of rain had fallen since July 9 when the sorghum field in question had last been labored. During this 20-day interval, this abundant rainfall gave the weeds a strong headstart over the sorghum which had been planted at the same time. In 1974 only 120mm and in 1973 only 162mm of rain had fallen in this same 20-day period. Consequently, the initial weed threat of those earlier years had been correspondingly less. (1972 of course was one of the serious drought years with only 38.5mm falling during this germinating period). ^{3/} Thus, in 1975 the millet and sorghum sprouts were threatened by weeds as they never had been in this decade. A maximally effective use of weeding labor was more necessary than ever.

This July 29th exchange labor group was seven strong, comprising half the members of three adjacent village-wide age-sets spanning the ages of 22 to 25 (E₁ F₁ G₄). ^{4/} This group was centered on two close agnates who were joined by two age-mates from another ward, each of whom was a fiance to one of the agnate's sisters. One of these agnates older sister's son, and brother's wife's brother were in the group. In the latter case, the laborer was three years from being an age-mate, but particularly close affinal relations obscured this lack of strict reciprocity. (For the purposes of exchange-labor organization laborers were only compared according to age, never according to ability). Finally, from a third ward came the son of the sister of one of these agnates' lineage's elder's wives. This group remained together for two weeks, thus reappearing twice in the compound field of each in the course of their rotations.

By August 15, when it had completed its second rotation the ton mobilized during its Friday slot to weed the fields of two village compounds which had hired it. One of these compounds was affluent and paid the ton. One was destitute and did not.

On August 3 two sons of sisters who had married into Dukolomba from a neighboring village were joined by the sons of two paternal aunts of one of them to form a 4-man exchange-labor group. Two of these were the remaining members of the G age-set, who had not joined the first exchange-labor group. The other two were from the H and I age-sets respectively. On

August 9 this group was joined by three members of the F age-set, who had been left out of the July 29 exchange labor group; it was also joined by one more member of the H age-set. This youth was disqualified from joining three of his age-mates - he and they were all from a different ward - who had started up a group on the same day. (See No. 2 below).

The day after the ton had seeded their fields for the last time, also on August 9, three new exchange-labor groups were formed:

(1) Two tontigiw, in age set A by definition, from different wards (and therefore different ton in this case) began to exchange their labor on a one-to-one basis.

(2) Three members of the H age set from the same ward were joined by three younger weeders from the same ward. Three of these six were close agnates at the same time; one was the daughter's son of an elder agnate without other heirs, and one had been hired for the season by another childless agnate. Only one of the co-ward residents in this group was unconnected with the ward's core lineage.

(3) This same exclusivistic ward provided members, all of them agnates to an even younger exchange-labor group of eight, half of whom were uncircumsized. A seventh member was also a close agnate but this compound had moved out of the ward for religious reasons. The family of the eighth member had close affinal ties with the members of this lineage and therefore with their ward, even though it lived in another one.

On August 11 all members of the age-sets B, C and D who were not in one of the village's four largest compounds banded together to form a five-man exchange-labor group. On the 12th they were joined by an older ward neighbor of three of them.

The four larger compounds in Dukolomba eshewed the exchange-labor groups not so much because they had less need of them as because they had to make relatively less of a sacrifice to gain access to one. Under these circumstances, if they attempted to line up several exchange-labor groups for themselves, they would be accused of taking advantage of the other villagers. (This was not the case in Nianiwere, as we shall see.) So that only when a member of one of these large compounds saw all of his age-mates engaged in exchange-labor would he participate himself.

Thus all the members of age-sets F and H participated in exchange-labor, including two youths from two of the larger compounds. A final exception to this rule came on August 14 when a larger compound released a young laborer to form an exchange-labor group with the son of the most unpopular man in the village and another young clan mate (age-set J), who had prematurely, as a result of several deaths, succeeded to the headship of his compound.

By August 22, the exchange-labor groups had run their course, the ton was up for hire on both Mondays and Fridays, and that sourghum and millet which was not saved from the

early flush of weeds was already dead.

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Now, in Nianiwere, only 5 kilometers to the North, the weeds were no less of a problem. Even though there were 21 plows to Dukolomba's 11, only two of them were "multi-culteurs", which could be used for weeding. 5/ Of these only one was actually used for weeding; this by a Foroba Fula, or "Bambarized Fulani, who lived in a separate enclosure on the outskirts of the village, from which position he was not likely to share this apparatus. Thus in spite of the abundance of cattle and equipment in this village, when faced with the weeding bottleneck most of the farmers faced the same technological constraints as in Dukolomba.

Exchange-labor started a little later in Nianiwere. On August 8, one of the many sons (No. 1A) of the chief and Koranic teacher, (a Traore Maraka, 6/ who had led the resettlement of this area and was therefore its village chief) was joined by two age-mates. One of these, No. 1B, was also a Traore Maraka but not an agnatic kinsmen of the chief. While his paternal aunt had married one of the chief's sons (No. 3A), a paternal uncle (No. 1D), had just married a Sonrai woman from the Sixth Region, toward Timbuktu. (Some considered such a marriage advantageous since the drought had forced residents of the northerly Sixth Region to settle for very low bride-wealth for their daughters.).

This uncle (No. 1D) and the weeder's father (No. 1C) had split into separate compounds leaving them both much smaller than the Chief's. The compound of each of these owned cattle, but the member of the Blacksmith's cast who joined them owned none. By August 7 these three were leaving the compound fields to work in each others individual fields. Interestingly these "night" or "slave" fields, ubiquitous in Nianiwere, were only found in one large Traore Maraka compound in Dokolomba.

Also by the 7th the Chief's wife, (No. 2A) her daughter (No. 2B), who had married in the village, and the wives of two Blacksmiths' brothers whose sister had married in the natal village of the Chief's wife, were weeding in each others' women's fields where they usually spent the better part of the day.

On the 8th the sole ton in this village weeded the compound fields of the two other parties to the Chief's exchange labor group (No. 1). On the same day the Chief's dead brother's son (No. 3A), who lived by himself in a separate compound, began an exchange-labor relationship with the Chief's sisters' son (No. 3B), who was from a relatively larger compound. It is significant that the isolated agnate of the Chief's is aided by a sororal nephew (No. 3B) instead of by another agnate. By the 10th these two were spending more time in the nephew's individual field than in the field of his compound; the nephew's wife (No. 2C), who came from the non-chiefly Traore Maraka

descent-line party to the Chief's exchange-labor group (No. 1), joined the woman's group of the Chief's wife (No. 2), and the nephew's poorer FMB (No. 4A), who was married to another of the Chief's sisters, joined a core collateral agnate of the Chief (No. 4B) in the field of the affluent Foroba Fula who weeded with the multi-culteur. Except for the 11th and the 15th all of these exchange labor groups continued to operate through the 16th.

On Monday, the 11th, the youth of the village went off to work in the fields of a prospective in-law of the same Maraka (No. 1B) who had just married the Sonrai woman. On Friday the 15th the ton weeded the field of the Chief's affine (No. 4A) mentioned above and of a collateral agnate (No. 12A) of the Chief's, who had cows but few sons and thus did not participate in any exchange-labor. Thus, as they had on the 8th, the ton weeded the field of one wealthy and one poor villager on the same day.

By the 20th the isolated son (No. 3A) of the Chief's deceased brother was replaced, in his exchange-labor relationship with the Chief's sororal nephew (No. 3B), by all of the members of the Chief's real sons' (No. 1A) exchange group (No. 1). This coalition continued through the 27th, with extra siblings added on occasion to square accounts when necessary. After this date the Chief's son (No. 1A) and his two age-mates separated themselves out again and rotated among themselves giving increasing attention to each of their

individual fields, through September 3rd.

Also on the 27th a poorer Foroba Fula received a wealthy pair of Kone agnates (one of whom had also married a Sonrai woman during the drought) and a poor neighbor in his field. On September 1st and 2nd when this group rotated into the field of the two wealthy agnates, they were put to weeding a peanut cash crop. This would be an impermissible use of exchange-labor in Dukolomba.

On August 28 a wedding was permitted to interrupt the weeding work, and on the 29th the ton weeded the fields of: the Chief's sister's insolvent husband (No. 4C), the wealthy Kone agnate who was not married to a Sonrai woman, and of two women, one of whom was married to the Chief's sister (No. 4A). By September 4th groups of neighbors were cooperating in groups of five to eight in harvesting Fonio.

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INTERPRETATION

I have presented the data on exchange-labor networks in this narrative form in order to illustrate the complex of factors which go into their formation. It is the combination of these factors which determines whether the novel social relations required in making good on credit assistance are consistent with those utilized in getting a field crop through the weeding season.

Therefore, let us return to those factors. In Dukolomba, so many exchange-labor groups could be solidified through the

relationship of kinship and affinity that residual stranger members of certain age-sets were swept into cooperation by the sheer incentive of these dense networks. Why were these kin and affinal networks so vital in this context? They involve an important component of the overall production process in this village. Throughout the last 200 years of its history, Dukolomba has sought economic security through the stable control of the maximum amount of laborers. This involved a proliferation of descent groups without their segmentation. This segmentation could not be completely contained by a cross-cutting network of inter-marriages between allied lineage segments in a circumscribed area. Stability of settlement could only be further assured by a flexible land tenure system and the involvement of all villages in such residentially-based institutions as the age-set system, the ton and other initiation societies. If these institutions were to stabilize the volatile politics inherent in the build-up of dense kinship and affinal networks in the production of laborers, they had to serve more than a political function. The production of food grains remains one focus of interest which unites in purpose the village stranger with the lineage elder. In Dukolomba, farming is both an economic and political act. A food surplus is a help, but only temporarily. It is produced not so much to ensure direct subsistence but to give content to those relationships through which subsistence production will continue to be organized for the benefit of as many people as possible.

In producing food for their own and each others granaries, even a stranger in the village binds his purpose with the lineage elder seeking marriage alliances for the stable production of laborers. Thus in Dukolomba exchange-labor for weeding helps to produce a maximum amount of that grain at the same time as it serves to break down the factionalism which arises out of their commitment to kinship and affinity as a source of security. Were this village labor to be used for the private accumulation of capital rather than food crops, it would cease to secure stable kinship and affinal relations. These relations would in turn fail to provide the labor assistance needed as the demography of any one farmer's compound fluctuates over the generations.

In Nianiwere, exchange-labor serves only half of this purpose: the production of crops. This is why this labor drifts into being used in individual fields and cash crops, both of which are destined for sale. The goal is solely to raise yields, not to solidify the reciprocity of kinship and affinal bonds, where the successful proliferation of the latter would be seen as the key to the future. Thus marriage in Nianiwere is more opportunistic, keyed on a low bridewealth, such as with the Sonrai wives, or on patronage, as with the marriage with the Chief's sisters (No. 4A, No. 4C and No. 2B), in cases when he did not marry the client's sisters in return. The destitute and isolated son of the Chief (No. 3A) was the only member of the descent group willing to marry into the village.

Exchange relations between agnates are avoided since it is particularly hard to maintain direct or "negative" reciprocity with such individuals. None of the members of the largest descent group in the village, the Chief's were willing to risk an exchange-labor relationship except the Chief himself, who had many clients, and his isolated "son", who had no sons. Even if any of them had been willing to take the risk, poorer agnates and affines could use this route to lay claims on them.

Where agnates were obliged to cooperate, as with the Kone, negative reciprocity had to be given special emphasis by the exchange-labor being directly deployed in the field of a cash crop.

Rather, inequalities of wealth more often marked the exchange-labor partnership. For the wealthier partner such a source of exchange-labor was advantageous because it could be abandoned with impunity should its marginal value change with market conditions. ^{1/} Such flexibility would be more difficult if the partner was more equal in wealth or had lingering agnatic claims upon the other's estate. For medium-sized compounds in Nianiwere the labor advantages of meeting labor claims of their poorer neighbors could not be matched by their ability to meet them. Thus, it was only the larger wealthier compounds (the Chief, the multiculteur owner (No. 3C), one of the Kone, who accepted association with the poorer ones. The cost of such flexibility was loss of access to any exchange-

labo: Only the women were willing to construct an exchange-labor relationship out of kinship bonds.

It should be clear that production using exchange-labor in Dukolumba represents a different historical outcome than it does in Nianiwere. In neither case can the full impact of the exchange-labor be assessed through the analysis of short term strategies. Admittedly, the Nianiwere farmer seems to be maximizing his immediate market advantage in his social relation with his neighbors. But by scrupulously avoiding kinship entanglement, because in part of the example of their importance in neighboring villages, he inadvertently finds himself with unwanted responsibility for client compounds.

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CONCLUSION

There are complicated historical reasons why Dukolumba produces reciprocal relations and Nianiwere produces for the market. But in general I would argue that this is less a question of cognitive orientation and more a function of the density of networks used in the reproduction of laborers. The need to maintain a source of reliable wives can be as much of an influence upon the farmer's decision-making as changing market conditions. What is significant about the diachronically-viewed production process in Dukolumba is that the majority of the villages in the area are engaged in a similar system. It should be clear why such villages have a greater survival potential than the newer more stratified villages like Nianiwere.

Poorer members, whether related or not, are given greater support for their troubles and are therefore inclined to stay around waiting for better days. Furthermore Dukolomba produced more grain per capita than Nianiwere, at least while I was in the field.

Even though they are in the minority, there are enough villages like Nianiwere to absorb the credit which is being offered. The richer members of these villages, who are most likely to assume the credit risk, will expand their cattle herds and gain greater dominance over poorer clients in their own villages as well as over the less commercial villages in the area. The latter would only suffer a loss of their remarkable productivity if the project succeeded.

Thus as far as Dukolomba and similar villages are concerned, their grain productive strength would only be sapped by the acceptance of credit assistance, into their village, as the assistance is presently designed. While the credit would improve a farmer's immediate financial situation, the effort to repay it would invariably draw his labor away from the channels through which it flowed to kinsmen, affines and neighbors. Thus the group on which he depended for the production of long term security would shrink in both size and reliability.

FOOTNOTES

- 1/ The credit was part of the l'Embouche Paysanne component of the Mali Livestock I Project developed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and L'office Malien du Betail et de la Vianda (L'ONBEVI). I am grateful to both of these institutions for sponsoring my research in a somewhat removed section of the Segu countryside. The funds for the research were granted me by the Research Foundation of the State University of New York (RFSUNY). I would like to thank in particular Michael M. Horowitz of SUNY, Dr. Boubacar Sy of L'OMBEVI, Dr. David Shear and Dr. David Weisenborn of the Regional Economic Development Services Organization/USAID for their support and encouragement during many phases of the research. I am grateful to Ronald Levin of USAID/Bamako for these details, which came as no surprise in any case, on the acceptance of the credit program. The credit was not offered until some months after I had left the field in 1975. A report on its results in the first year 1975-1976 has not yet been released to me.
- 2/ More complete descriptions of ton structures can be found in DeGanay 1956 and Leynaud 1966.
- 3/ For these rainfall statistics, as for so much else, I am grateful to Brihima Coulibaly of the Service des Eaux et Forets at Douna (18 kilometers due east of Dukolomba) where they were collected.
- 4/ I label age-sets with capital letters, A signifying the age-set of the tontigiw. For those male age-sets which have graduated from the ton, a smaller case letter, is used. Thus the oldest male members of the village are in the age-set labeled small a.
- 5/ The "multiculteur" or Misidaba Bilen (red plow) is a tool bar which in addition to a plow can have attachments for weeding, harrowing, and lifting peanuts.
- 6/ Bazin's 1972 discussion of the Maraka/Bambara ethnic difference holds true even for this area of the Segu hinterland. I have chosen not to emphasize this aspect of rural differentiation, since ethnic boundaries are so fluid. The chiefly lineage in Dukolomba, the Buare, are also said to have been Maraka in origin. But now they consider themselves the most typical of Bambara, referring to the settlers in Nianiwere as tonjon - descendants of the direct subjects of the Segu state - and therefore unqualified as true Bombara however confident they may be as farmers.

7/ For the Nianiwere farmer such significant market changes involve the price of peanuts, which has been rising since the slump of 1967, the export possibilities for cattle, and a more local trade in sheep and goats. If the market looks good for all these at once, the commercially-oriented farmer may be forced to be less attentive to his grain crop in order to attend the proper market. Only older men in Nianiwere devote much time to the Kola nut trade.

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BRIDGED GENEALOGY OF THE CHIEFLY LINEAGE IN NIANIWÈRÈ



