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GOURMANTCHE AGRICULTURE

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Part I

| | | |
|-------|--|---------|
| 0.0 | Introduction | 1 |
| 1.0 | Traditional Agriculture | 9 |
| 1.1 | Shifting Cultivation and the Rights to Land | 11 |
| 1.2 | Categories of Exploitable Land | 12 |
| 1.2.1 | <u>Tinjali</u> /(Unclaimed, Free Land) | 13 |
| 1.2.2 | <u>Kuawaagu</u> /(Fallow Land) | 15 |
| 1.2.3 | <u>Kuanu</u> /(Sorghum or Millet Field) | 19 |
| 1.2.4 | <u>Liloli</u> /(Small Land Plot) | 25 |
| 1.3 | Shifting Cultivation and Population Pressure | 30 |
| 1.3.1 | Small or Young Villages | 30 |
| 1.3.2 | Land Within Well-Established Villages | 30 |
| 1.3.3 | Land Outside Old or Well-Established Villages | 31 3 |
| 1.3.4 | Abandonment of Old Village | 32 |
| 1.3.5 | Establishment of a New Community | 33 |
| 1.4 | The Subsistence Unit | 35 |
| 1.5 | Chains of Authority & Respect and the Obtaining of Community Land | 37 |
| 1.6 | Usufructory Access to Land | 41 |
| 1.7 | Current Problems: <u>Ti ban ke gitinga pia mayuli hali boncianla</u> /(We know the great value of land.) | 44 |

FIGURES

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Figure 1: | Disposition of Land | 12 |
| Figure 2: | Stages of a <u>Kuanu</u> /(Grain Field) | 21 |
| Figure 3: | Sorghum-Millet Field Transition | 23 |
| Figure 4: | Plot Cultivation | 26 |
| Figure 5: | Chains of Command | 38 |
| Figure 6: | Creation of New Compound | 40 |

Gourmantché Agriculture

0.0 Introduction

Ideally, rural development is based on the participation of rural populations in the planning as well as execution of such development. A well-known obstacle to rural development is the difficulty in establishing meaningful communication between local/rural groups and representatives of national and international agencies. Understanding of local knowledge systems, often neglected in development programs in the past, is increasingly seen as essential if successful communication and innovation is to result.

Because life in general is so complex and human beings and their societies particularly so, every one of us tends to generalize. Such generalizing, particularly in the field of national and international development, can be at times disadvantageous to and misrepresentative of the human beings and societies about whom such generalization takes place. Economic surveys represent a popular form of generalization by modern societies. Such studies, often extremely expensive, rarely attempt to take account of the dynamic human factors involved in development and change. Large and elaborate sampling techniques, using questionnaires, generate impressive outflows of data in the form of tables, percentages, and statistics. The sheer weight of this information tends to convince a reader of its reliability. Yet the validity of all this must begin in the formation of relevant questions posed to individuals in their own

language. Answers given must be understood from the cultural context of those giving them - not those posing the questions. Few 'socio-economic' studies carried out in cross-cultural situations qualify very successfully in this first and basic step. The basic problem is one of communication and translation. The fact that there are no exact correspondences between related words in different languages should produce caution when reporting about cross-cultural situations.

A basic premise of development anthropology is that there are no absolute or universal solutions to problems encountered in different cultures or subcultures. A good or right course of action for the Mossi might not be good or right (done in exactly the same way) for the Gourmantché. The anthropologist attempts to make explicit for one group the implicit presuppositions and assumptions of another group. Rural development agents are often removed from their rural kinsmen by years of education and thinking in a foreign language. They frequently possess different values, social obligations, and perspectives as a result. At times they even represent a different ethnic group. These agents represent one kind of group which frequently can benefit by having explicitly defined for them some of the implicit, non-verbalized ways of organizing perception possessed by their non-educated rural kinsmen and village neighbors.

An illiterate farmer will not come and tell an agent that he views all cultivated land in two major classes (which the agent, because of his French orientation, generally sees as one class). The farmer certainly has never thought specifically of counting how many classes there are. It would be of no particular importance to him. It should be important to the extension agent. A rural development

agent would not learn that there are six classes of land or that such classes are based on land tenure by simply listening to normal conversation. Culturally precise questions based on an understanding of the categories of perception within the culture must be asked in order to elicit precise information of this kind.

This study may be seen as an elaborate means of demonstrating why development agents and organizations can not afford to exclude a social/cultural component or input at design, implementation, as well as evaluation and analysis stages of a program of development. What may often, to a development agent, appear on the surface as a simple problem lending itself to straightforward solutions is rarely this at all. As long as the subjects or beneficiaries of some program are human beings, it must be realized that consideration of the human dimension is not only desirable but essential.

Increasing farmer yields and incomes do not simply depend on adequate rainfall, increased field size and use of fertilizer, improvement of production practices (which might include animal traction), and improved seed varieties. These are possibly important material improvements. No one can predict or control where or when rain will or will not fall. There are cultural reasons why fields are a certain size and plots another, why one should plant a certain amount of grain and not too much cash crop. High costs and risk of fertilizer use poses social problems not the least of which is security in what is known and at least proven (ie. no fertilizer, no debt) to be adequate. How much is actually known about traditional production practices or how these systems compare to the supposed benefits of something like animal traction? Increasing farmer yields assumes the farmer wants to go to the trouble to do this. What would the farmer consider as adequate compensation for his endeavor in this regard? If a farmer

-4-

is to accept innovation for increased food production, he must first be attracted to doing it. Produce price increases to farmers might be a necessary incentive. If prices are unexpectedly reduced however, then farmers should not be expected to continue with the same enthusiasm the cultivation of that crop.*

An efficient extension system does not simply depend on good salaries, adequate mobility, intelligent and healthy agents. The human dimension is equally important. How do they relate to farmers? Are they interested in their work? What kind of people do they need to be and what do they need to know to effectively work and communicate with rural people?

A rational Western orientated approach to problems of agricultural development does not necessarily mean a valid or successful approach to such problems in non-Western rural societies. Consider a few differences in agriculture as examples of the types of problems one can expect when cultural differences are ignored or overlooked.

(1) Fertilizers are generally placed on poor soils, usually for the cultivation of cash crops - this is done because of the technical advice of the extension agent. However, the Gourmantché reserve their best soils for the most important staple food crops. Upon the richest

* Soybeans were highly promoted in the Eastern ORD during the past few years, last year selling for 100 CFA/Kg., a price above the world market price. Farmers were very enthusiastic and many village group organizations were formed around its cultivation. This year's (1977-78) crop was very large but the price was dropped considerably to 50 CFA/Kg. Though merchants have bought up some of the crop for about 70 CFA/Kg. for processing of soumbala, many farmers are having difficulty finding a buyer. This situation will result in a definite drop in production during the coming season and will make extension work of extension agents much harder. Though it was inevitable that prices should drop, farmers were not forewarned of this.

Best Available Document

soils, located generally around the home compounds, is cultivated corn. Sorghum is cultivated on the next richest soils. When these soils begin to yield poor sorghum crops, millet production takes over. Cash crops often follow on former millet fields, though some are cultivated in rotation with millet. The point is that farmers do not 'waste' good soils on the production of less important crops.*

Fertilizers should perhaps be placed upon those soils which would increase the production of those crops most valued by the people themselves. If increased production of cereals could be achieved without increasing field size, farmers would benefit by the security of a solid food base and would have increased time and confidence for cultivation of other crops which might increase their cash incomes.

(2) Collective fields represent the major activity of village groups at the present time. The formation of village groups has been a major activity of the Eastern Rural Development Organization (ORD) extension service. Agents concentrate their services to members of these groups. Members of such groups are the recipients of outside loans.

Cultivated fields or plots, however, are individually owned by the Gourmantché. Ownership of land is differentiated from ownership of the standing crop on that land. The owner of the crops under cultivation is expected to compensate those who help him on the land, whether these are members of his own family or persons called in from outside the immediate family group. The nature of the

* Tobacco often is planted in the rich soils in front of some compounds. In such cases however, it follows corn or an early sorghum on the same soil and therefore does not compete with those crops for the farmer's time or fertile soils.

6

compensation is different for these two groups. Cash is not a traditional form of compensation.

The formation of village groups who work upon collective fields fits into this pattern well. The extension agent or the ORD as a whole is often seen as the one in actual charge of these fields. The extension agent is clearly not in a position to meet the burden of obligations placed on him by members of a village group he has formed or is in charge of.

(3) The Eastern ORD has great resources of unclaimed, fertile soils. It is easy to draw the conclusion that farmers would have no problem obtaining good lands upon which to farm and practice crop rotation schemes. This is not true unfortunately. On a practical basis, future and permanent access and cultivation rights to land is a real problem for numerous Gourmantché farmers. It is becoming more serious.

(4) Poor soil, lack of fertilizers, labor bottlenecks, lack of capital, poor rains and health problems are commonly considered reasons for lack of economic development. However, using even traditional means at their disposal, many Gourmantché farmers could produce more than they in fact do. They do not do this because of certain cultural constraints. Among these is the concept of what is 'enough', the concept of social equality (not appearing too much more prosperous or successful than your neighbor or relative), and the problem/obligation of giving 'freely' one's hard-earned produce and capital to needy kinsmen (for food, funeral obligations, weddings, initiation ceremonies, etc.). It might seem that the farmer would have to learn to be less generous with friends and relatives if he is to himself become a better producer and to more

quickly gain a higher standard of living. Doing so however makes him more vulnerable when the bad times come. An alternative would be to exploit these so-called constraints.*

(5) Innovations are adapted more rapidly for commercial crops than a farmer's subsistence food crops. The reason for this might not be what a development agent would at first expect. A less significant amount of a farmer's total labor and land resources are allotted to such crops (20% - 25%). As a result, these are lower risk, lower priority crops. Innovation can be risked. For this same reason, most Eastern ORD group activities for village peoples have had to do with the cultivation of cash crops (peanuts, soybeans, cotton, rice). On the other hand, 75% - 80% of this same farmer's total labor and land resources must be allocated for the production of subsistence crops (sorghum and millet). Such constraints pose serious problems in setting up field rotation schemes.

(6) Even as the Mossi of Upper Volta might be said to be a collectively minded people, the Gourmantché could be said to be more individualistically orientated. Organizations or groupings of these people need to take account of this proclivity. Collective goals and obligations should be well understood and agreed upon. Individual benefits should be well designed into these activities.

*Rather than seeing extended family obligations as a drain to individual initiative and advancement, this family group could perhaps be organized and collectively helped through aid to certain influential members of the group. One could expect the establishment of extended family enterprises. Partners for Productivity projects in the Eastern ORD should exploit this possibility.

8

One further, though related, objective of the following report is to describe agricultural knowledge, practices, and related problems from, as much as possible, the perspective of the Gourmantché farmer himself. I have tried to be sensitive to differences within the region.* There seem to be enough parallels and similarities between the Gourmantché and neighboring ethnic groups to make this study of relevance to persons interested in such groups.

* There is considerable variation in rainfall patterns and soils in the Eastern ORD. Rainfall varies from 500-600 mm. in the north-west to 900-1000 mm. in the south-east. I have noted as much as one month difference in the growing seasons between these areas. Specific trees, grasses, and crops bloom or ripen a good month earlier in the south-east.

The dominant ethnic group of the Eastern ORD, the Gourmantché, possesses some variation in cultural practices. This is particularly true of the north-east (Bogande/Piala/Bilanga). Farming communities of Mossi, Fulani, Bariba, and Zaoussé may also be found in this region.

The following code is used to distinguish various Gourmantché regions in the Eastern ORD: (F) for Fada/Macakoali; (J) for Jakpaga/Maadaga; (P) for Pamma; (B) for Bogande/Piala/Bilanga.

Material for this study comes from observations and interviews over a period of a year with scores of farmers throughout the ORD. Contact was also made with the members of three subsistence units in each of the following villages: Nasugu, Ugalu, Bulimoanga, Buajaga, Tindaangu, Nagili, Duayaana, Kpentuangu, Kpenpienbiga. Eighteen years residence and versatility in the Gurma language give added depth to this study.

1.0 Traditional Agriculture

Crop production in Upper Volta and especially in the Eastern region among the Gourmantché is almost entirely based on traditional agriculture. Over 90% of approximately 420,000 people in the Eastern ORD meet their food requirement needs growing staple food crops (sorghum & millet) under shifting cultivation. Population density for this region is about 10 persons/km².

Gourmantché 'traditional' agriculture is characterized by a constant process of re-evaluation and change. It is orientated to real life issues: poor or changing soil fertility, the seemingly general shortening of the rainy season during the past several decades, irregularity of the rain that does come, complete dependence on hand labor linked with the shortage of investment capital for equipment, parts, fertilizer, etc., the ever present reality of hunger. If a 'traditional' farmer tends to be conservative and pragmatic, it is because survival in this region has always demanded this.

The September/October 1977 issue of the international agriculture and livestock journal World Crops (p.220) had an article on Improved Technology Replaces Traditional Agriculture in which Drs. Terman and Hart stated:

"When the subsistence farmer considers an innovation, he has two main questions:

(1) Will the new method, considering costs, produce an expected yield appreciably higher than his old method?

(2) Is it likely that something might go wrong and result in a net yield below his subsistence level?

Even though the answer to (1) is 'Yes', he will not change his method unless the answer to (2) is 'No'. Thus the closer that his current out-

put comes to his minimum subsistence level (which according to the authors represents a farmer family which consumes about 80% of its production in an average year), the more conservative he is likely to be. The more unfamiliar he is with the proposed innovation, the more cautious he will be. The problem of extension is to obtain the facts and to convince the subsistence farmer an innovation is better, and reliably so."

This statement is relevant to the situation in the Eastern ORD. There are, unquestionably, numerous possible innovations which are better than current practices of Gourmantché farmers. Whether or not such innovations can be depended upon to be reliably better (under the present social conditions and even in bad years) for these subsistence farmers is another question altogether. The risks involved could be much higher. If widespread acceptance of innovations is to be expected, such innovations will have to build on both the physical and cultural realities which exist. The present document attempts to highlight aspects of both such realities as perceived by the Gourmantché, in hope that with such knowledge will come greater sensitivity and respect for the human resources of the region.

1.1 Shifting Cultivation and the Rights to Land

Shifting cultivation has probably been the dominant agricultural pattern of Gourmanché farmers for centuries. * In this system of cultivation, a farmer will cultivate a plot of land temporarily and then, for one reason or another, abandon it to fallow and move on to clear a new plot.

Low population density, combined with the practice of shifting cultivation, has not resulted in an orientation in which farmers retain little interest in upholding personal rights to land. The low population density figure obscures the fact that personal and family land rights represent a sensitive issue which is going to become a major problem area in the development of this region. Ever increasing population pressure around established communities results in disputes over land. This is combined with the need for increased yields and more efficient use of cultivated land. Great portions of yet unclaimed cultivatable land exist within this region. Such land is rarely, however, within easy access of established villages. The present agricultural situation is characterized by the seasonal migration of large segments of the population to bush fields and villages. When harvests are in, most of these people return home.

* From this predictable pattern in their lives has developed one of the common means for calculating one's child's age: that is to recall what field was under cultivation at the time of birth. A farmer might say something like this: "I had cultivated Field A for 3 years when my son was born. I remained there for 4 years until I left and cleared field B. I was there 6 years before I left for Field C, where I remained for 8 years. I have now been cultivating Field D for 2 years which makes my son 20 years old".

The major means of locomotion is by foot, or, at best, by bicycle. Even under unfavorable conditions, members of established compounds are reluctant to pull up roots completely from their village to migrate to new areas.*

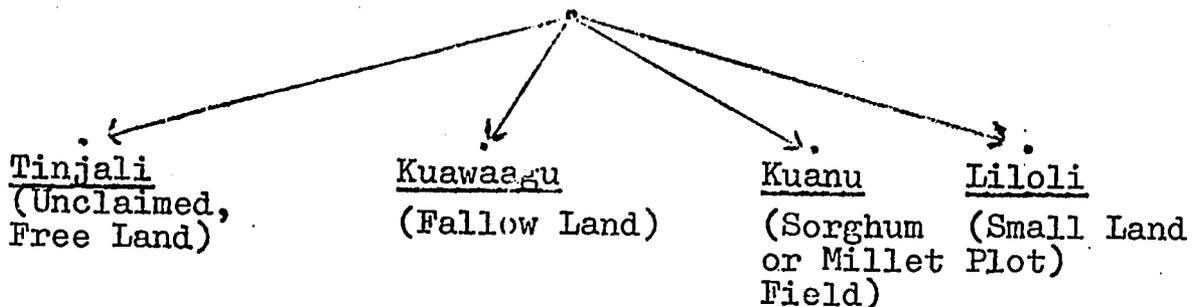
1.2 Categories of Exploitable Land

All cultivated or potentially cultivatable land can be sub-divided into four major categories. The element which contrasts these categories at one taxonomic level is land use combined with the nature of land ownership.

FIGURE I

Disposition of Land

Ya kanin ba fidii tuoo buli
bonbuli-kaala / (Places that
will support cultivation)



* Circumstances eventually do force family units within a compound to move out of the village. There are, in fact, quite a few villages which, within the living memory of older people today, have moved as a unit to more favorable agricultural locations.

1.2.1 Tinjali/(Unclaimed, Free Land)

This is land which no one recalls ever having been cultivated. As far as anyone knows, no known person's ancestors cultivated it either. It therefore belongs to no one. Anyone can establish personal and permanent rights to such land by simply putting it, for the first time, under cultivation. The chief in the closest village to such land has no concern over it.*

It is possible that the ruins of villages (digbena) or compounds (digbengu) may be found in the bush. If this land and the land cultivated by the original inhabitants is once again good for cultivation, and there exist no living descendants who can claim the land, then it too is tinjali/(unclaimed, free land).

It is only within the past few years that rainy season flooded low lands (baagu) have been put into the cultivation of rice and the establishment of gardens (sardinga). The increase in the use of such bas fonds land for these purposes has been dramatic. This, in part, can be explained in the fact that traditionally, with the exception of a few isolated areas such as behind the Gobinangu chair, the Gourmantché did not view bas fonds land as cultivatable land. This meant that, up to quite recently, almost all such land was categorized as tinjali/(unclaimed, free land).

The Voltaic government is presently making a concerted effort to make use of rainy season flooded lands. Realization of the value and potential of such land by ambitious and informed individuals has resulted in their laying claims to it, and cultivating it. Because of the tinjali/(unclaimed, free land) status of most bas fonds land, no one can come up to such a person later and tell him that this land was the fallow or former field of some past kinsman and that, therefore, it can

* This contrasts from the Mossi. Each Mossi village, as a

not be claimed.*

This is exactly what has happened when bas fonds are created by the construction of dams. Flooded lands often do belong to some person, extended family, or lineage. This is especially true if the lands are located anywhere near a village.

Land owners rarely permanently give up their land rights. Land is never sold.** It is only loaned out. A case in point is the dam located near Ugalu. Only one farmer and his family are exploiting the rice and garden lands created by the dam. These lands belonged to the farmer's father; they were his fallow fields. When asked why they did not exploit yet available lands around this dam, other non-related villagers (members of the ORD village group there) said that maybe they would ask the farmer permission to borrow some of it. This was told me before the beginning of the 1976-1977 rainy season and nothing was done that year to initiate such exploitation. Nothing is happening this year either. A similar situation exists at the PK-2 dam outside Fada N'Gourma towards Pamma. Not all the participants of this self-help project today have rights to cultivate land around the now existing dam.

corporate group, possesses a territory of bush land which includes all four categories of land outlined in Figure I above. A chief or chef de terre holds this land in trust for the village and arbitrates its use.

* Some farmers today, despite the fact that they have never cultivated bas fonds land, are attempting to lay claim to such land by demonstrating that their cultivated fields lie (or once lay) adjacent to and perhaps surround a bas fonds and that therefore this land represents part of their property. Such a farmer does not necessarily plan to begin cultivating the land he now claims in this way.

** The exception occurs among traders and functionaries in large communities such as Fada N'Gourma who can use their influence and wealth to secure for themselves

The complications raised by already existing rights to land are a fairly common reason for the present under-exploitation of potentially productive land in and around villages and newly created dams or bas fonds. Only official action may make change of land ownership legal through the creation of a written title of ownership. This should be done before any kind of improvements are made to the land.

1.2.2 Kuawaagu/(Fallow Land)

A second category of exploitable land resides in the kuawaadi/(fallow lands). The term refers to the practice in shifting cultivation of leaving once cultivated lands to a long period of fallow. The land is usually reclaimed by the bush. With the passing of years the soils regain slowly their fertility. Such land is still possessed by the original farmer or his descendants. Land which once was 'fallow land' but is at present once again under cultivation may also be called kuawaagu/(fallow land).*

There are five classes of 'fallow land' which a specific Gourmantché farmer might encounter or possess.

valuable property. Bas fonds lands or lands with year-round water near the surface can be purchased for high prices. Within a town, 150,000 to 300,000 CFA would not be too much to pay for a small parcel of land (1 ha.) upon which an orchard could be placed.

* The obviously inadequate translation of 'fallow land' for kuawaagu serves to demonstrate the problem in cross-cultural communication of this kind where no one-to-one correspondance exists.

It should be noted that in the discussion to follow, no lands are owned by the 'village' or 'chief' as such. Land is owned by individuals or larger and larger groupings of blood-linked individuals.

(1) n kuawaadi/(my own fallow fields)

These are the fields that a farmer has himself cultivated from tinjali/(unclaimed, free land) and subsequently left as the fertility of the soil drops too low. He may have left the land for other reasons as well. Whatever the reason for its abandonment, such land remains the inalienable right of that farmer and his male offspring. Within his lifetime, it is quite possible for this farmer to recultivate this land a number of times.

(2) n ba kuawaadi/(my father's fallow fields)

These are the fields that a farmer's own father originally exploited upon tinjali/(unclaimed, free land). This farmer shares the rights of access to this land with his father's other sons. The oldest son arbitrates if the father no longer lives.

In the case that one of the farmer's 'mothers' (all father's wives) cultivated her own parcel on unclaimed, free land, such land also becomes 'my father's fallow lands'. Daughters do not inherit the rights to their father's lands. Nor do their mother's ever own their own land.

(3) n yaja kuawaadi/(my grandfather's fallow fields)

These are the fields that a farmer's grandfather exploited upon tinjali/(unclaimed, free land). All male descendants hold equal rights to this land; the oldest male arbitrates.

(4) n danba kuawaadi/(my kinsmen's fallow fields)

These are the fields that a farmer's great-grandfather and his offspring (with the exception of the farmer's grandfather's line) are believed to have cultivated upon 'unclaimed, free land'. This includes all people referred to as baanba/(fathers)(all male kinsmen of father's generation) and yajaanba/(grandfathers)(all known male kinsmen of grandfather's generation and above). This includes the fallow fields of the children and children's children of such people as well..

(5) nitua ya kuawaagu/(someone else's fallow land)

This is a field which was originally cultivated by someone not considered related in any manner by blood (another clan or lineage) or in any sufficient manner (any grouping above the cuuli or badiegu level, ie. great-grandfather's generation and beyond)(see Taxonomy II, Document No.5, pp. 7,8,11 at levels 9 through 13.). To cultivate such land, one must mia/(ask) the owner(s) permission for temporary use. Use of such land does not involve any kind of payment to the landowners.

A woman will refer to the parcels of land she works upon as n caalo kuawaadi/(my husband's fallow lands) or n caalo-kpiiba kuawaadi/(my husband's kinsmen's fallow lands). She may also use any of the five categories of land outlined above.

It is the opinion of many Gourmantché farmers with whom I have spoken that most farmers today cultivate land which would be classified as kuawaadi/(fallow lands).*

* This assertion remains to be verified through a farm level survey now in progress by the Eastern ORD's B.A.E.P. (Bureau of Economic Analysis and Planning). It is certainly most true of farmers in larger towns.

Of this land, the majority cultivate land borrowed from someone of a different clan or lineage. That is to say, land which fits under (5) above. Three major explanations given for this situation are:

- (a) Population has greatly increased. There are more people living today than the fallow lands of close kinsmen categories (1) through (4) can now handle. Land must be borrowed from others.
- (b) Migration. People are more mobile now than in years past. People leave bush villages for larger towns. There, they borrow land from its residents.
- (c) Land owners may loan out their land, thus giving cultivation rights to others. It can happen that land owners may use up their own lands in this way and end up borrowing from someone themselves (rather than expelling others from his lands).

These explanations suggest land problems around larger communities. Approximately 60% of the people of the Eastern ORD live in villages with populations of over 1000. Yet the explanations also imply that most people can at least find land to freely borrow. This is true if we understand that such land is not necessarily especially close to certain larger villages. Rainy season bush residence is required. It is furthermore quite possible that such generosity will end in the foreseeable future.* Who is it then that has land to loan out if it is true that most farmers cultivate land that is not their own or family land? This subject will be briefly explored below (1.3.5).

* This is already the case for some farmers around Fada N'Gourma who must pay a tax of 3 to 4 tins of grain for use of crop land. Some must purchase the land to gain possession and cultivation rights. Yet other farmers refuse access to their fallow lands, giving as their reason their own expected need in the near future.

1.2.3 Kuanu/(Sorghum or Millet Field)

A kuanu/(sorghum or millet field) is the term used to designate land under actual cultivation upon which the major production of sorghum and millet takes place. When a Gourmantché says that n ca n kuanu po, he is saying that he is going to his field of sorghum (or millet). He would not be speaking of any other type of crop. It is quite possible, even likely, that at this field (or in it) there is a parcel of corn or peanuts. He would say n tiin-loli ye n kuanu po/(my peanut plot is at my grain field).

Any specific grain field under cultivation is the exclusive property of an individual. How that individual may choose or feel obligated to dispose of the produce of this field will depend on a number of factors to be discussed later. With the exception of some ORD collective fields, fields are not collectively owned.*

One may differentiate two types of kuani/(grain fields).

(1) A family head will have a large field upon which members of the subsistence unit (wives, sons, possibly others) may also labor during the first half of the day (from about 7 a.m. to 1 or 2 p.m.). The family head will say this is n kuanu/(my grain field), something

* The idea that the Gourmantché collectively 'own' and labor on a collective field is an importation from the Mossi region. Because the Mossi possess a term (puug) which can designate any type of cultivated area of land (and is therefore closer to what we in English mean by a cultivated field), there is a tendency among expatriates and extension agents alike to assume the Gourmantché do too. They often make the mistake of calling everything a kuanu of something (a kuanu of corn, a kuanu of peanuts, etc.) The term kuanu in Gourmantché is much more restricted in its meaning. The five classes of 'fallow land' discussed earlier can not be adequately translated into Moré. Their conception of land is different.

the other members of the subsistence unit can not do. For them it is either 'our field' or 'my father's field' or 'my husband's field'.

If a brother or father or other kinsman is living with this subsistence group, such a person can also have his own kuanu/(grain field). In such a case he will not be obligated to spend his mornings on the subsistence unit's leader's field. In this situation, a good portion of the crop from these fields will be used at the discretion of the subsistence unit's leader. This is an obligation incurred by being a part of this household.

(2) The type of kuanu/(grain field) described above must be differentiated from what is called the suali-kuanu/(the 'extra' personal sorghum and/or millet field). The term suali implies afternoon work. Such grain fields are generally smaller than that of the head of the household and are individually owned and labored upon by the other members of the household (wives, sons, daughters) who have the incentive and time to do so. Such fields are worked in the early morning (daybreak to 7 a.m.) and afternoons (3.00 p.m. until nightfall). The crop from these fields can be an important insurance crop for the household should the season be poor and the harvest of the major field(s) be insufficient. The produce belongs to the individual. Whereas a wife or son can make some extra money selling the grain from his or her suali-kuanu/'extra', personal grain field), the head of the household will make his extra money through the surplus of his large field.

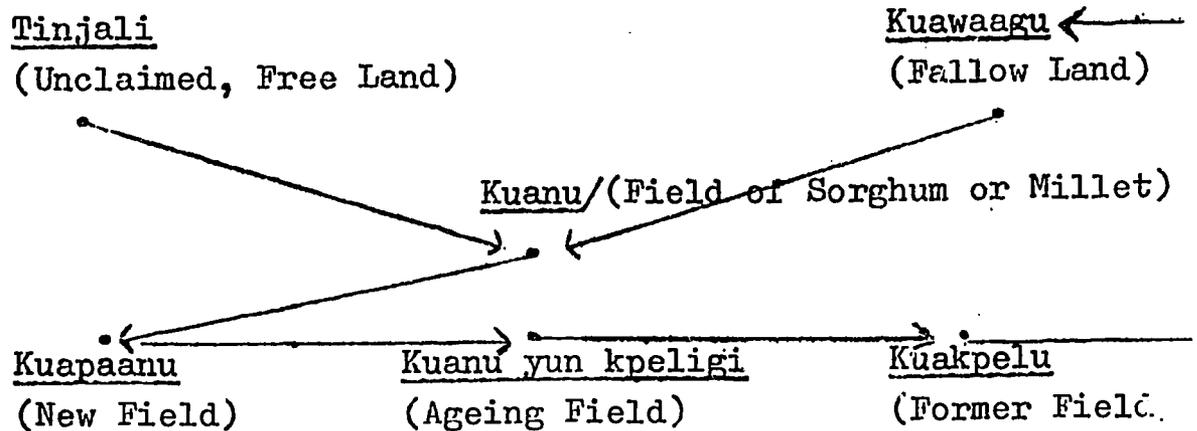
The survey of Stuart Gaudin, FAO expert in the Bureau for Community Development of the Eastern ORD, among 28 subsistence groups in this region, has provided

some useful statistical material. He notes, for instance, that the average amount of land under cultivation for sorghum and millet for the heads of the subsistence groups is 3.9 ha. as compared to the average 1.2 ha. cultivated by the other members of the subsistence unit combined.* The difference he has noted here is the difference between the two types of kuani/(grain fields) just presented.

A farmer may distinguish three stages through which his field may pass before it is abandoned to its period of fallow. The attributes of each stage will later prove important in farmer decision making processes governing cultivation.

FIGURE II

Stages of a Kuanu/(Grain Field)



* Document de Travail No.2/78, Bureau des Productions Agricoles, Programme Experimental de Gestion des Exploitations Agricoles, juin 1978.

(1) Kuapaanu/(New Field)

A new field may be established either:

- (a) from land classified as tinjali/(unclaimed, free, land) or
- (b) from land classified as kuawaagu/(fallow or one time cultivated plot of land)

(a) Cultivation of 'unclaimed, free land' establishes the ownership of that land by the farmer and his descendants. It is an inalienable possession and right. When the farmer dies, all his land rights pass on to his male offspring. Women do not possess the right to own land. Should a man die without leaving a male heir, his brothers will be able to claim it. If the man's father left no living heir, then ownership will pass up to the next closest link in the lineage, this is the father's brothers. The land will always remain in the corporate possession of the kinsmen.

(b) Ideally, cultivation of fallow lands should be upon soils which have been fallow for enough years to resume sorghum cultivation. Realistically, the period of fallow or lack of use of a once cultivated piece of land depends on the state of the land when abandoned as well as the needs of an ever increasing population. Because of rising populations around well established villages, land is increasingly being put back into production before soil fertility has been restored under fallow. Often, millet is the only type of cereal crop that can produce adequately. The result is that there presently is a net increase in the number of fields a farmer may expect to have to clear and cultivate during his productive lifetime. There is increasing deterioration of soil and declining yields as well.

(2) Kuanu yun kpeligi/(Ageing Field)

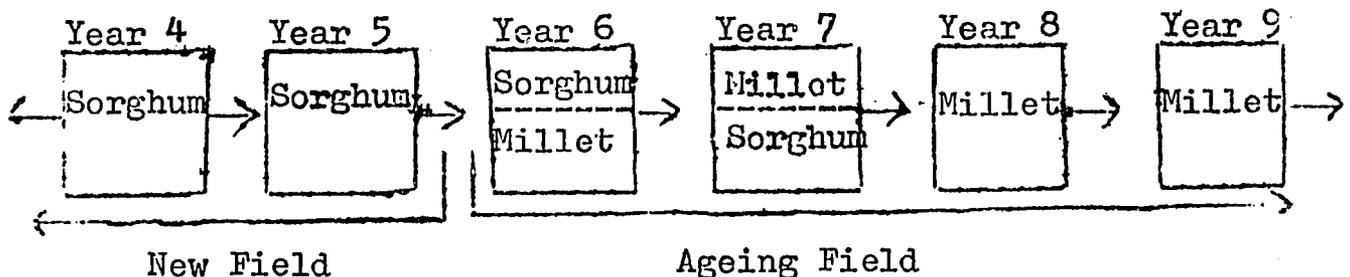
A new field on unclaimed, free land, will, after four to six years, begin to become a kuanu yun kpeligi (ageing field). In certain regions, such as behind the Gobinangu chain, the soils are so rich (and the rainfall so abundant) that this period can be up to twenty years and more. A field will retain the title of 'ageing field' until it is eventually abandoned as^a sorghum or millet field - sometimes eight to fifteen years later. It may be abandoned to fallow earlier by those farmers who have access to better soils and have a preference to sorghum as a food.

Recultivation of a fallow field has only two to four years before the change begins leading it to become an 'ageing field'. Some six to ten years later it will have to be abandoned.

The readily visible changes between stage (1) and (2) fields is that while the former are excellent for the preferred sorghums, the latter only support adequate millet production. An evidence of this change in the soil is seen in the appearance of new varieties of vegetation (e.g. various Striga species). Farmers retain their best soils for sorghum cultivation. The transition on a field might be illustrated in the following manner.

FIGURE III

Sorghum-Millet Field Transition



During the transition years, sorghum and millet are alternated on different halves of the field. Farmers explain this by noting the fact that millet temporarily seems to restrict the growth of the semi-parasitic weed Striga of sorghum. The second year after the appearance of these weeds, sorghum production will be seriously reduced unless millet is cultivated for a year upon this soil. Such rotation makes possible two and possibly three extra years of sorghum production.

When the switch over to millet becomes absolutely necessary (e.g. at Year 8 above), many farmers start to clear a new field so that they may retain sorghum production. This is, of course, not possible in all those areas of the Eastern ORD where soil fertility is already low.

(3) Kuakpelu/(Former Field)

The possession of a 'former field' assumes that the farmer has a kuapaanu/(new field) somewhere. A 'former field' is not necessarily an 'abandoned or fallow field', for parts of it may be retained for use as alola/(small land plots). When finally left to fallow, the field becomes a kuawaagu/(fallow land) whose general boundaries and existence will be well remembered for a number of generations even if it should revert back to bush.

The persistent downward trend in the fertility of soil is seen as inevitable to Gourmantché farmers. The system of naming fields above reflects this. The idea of checking or even reversing this downward trend through fertilizers, proper crop rotation and fallow periods is difficult to grasp. The possibility of such a system might excite farmer imagination if the problem on how to successfully implement such a system could be

solved. Traditional orientations to agriculture and land use pose constraints. Gardin has suggested that a rotation scheme for each of the major classes of cultivated fields might be part of the solution.* A rotation schedule would be set up for the plots and small fields inside the village around the compound. Another schedule would be concerned with bas fonds management, another with the bush fields where land is more plentiful. Such schedules would vary for any one of these classes of land depending on the actual conditions of the soil. Sorghum soils should not be permitted to deteriorate to millet soils. The most obvious immediate step is to retain present levels of soil fertility by proper controls on wind and water erosion.

1.2.4 Liloli/(Small Land Plot)

A fourth category of exploitable land is to be found in the many smaller plots of land upon which are grown the commercial crops and produce which provides a supplement to the farmer's basic subsistence crops of sorghum and millet. Such crops include rice, corn, earth peas, peanuts, tobacco, cotton, and soybeans. Okra, red peppers, cow-peas, gourds, squash, various small plants whose leaves are used for sauce, sweet potatoes, and manioc also supplement the household diet and income. It is very easy to under-enumerate these plots for a subsistence unit. Each individual must be asked if he or she possesses a specific plot of corn, for example, as well as how many plots of corn. It is also easy to under-estimate the importance of the accumulated effect of all the plots of a subsistence unit on this group's well-being.

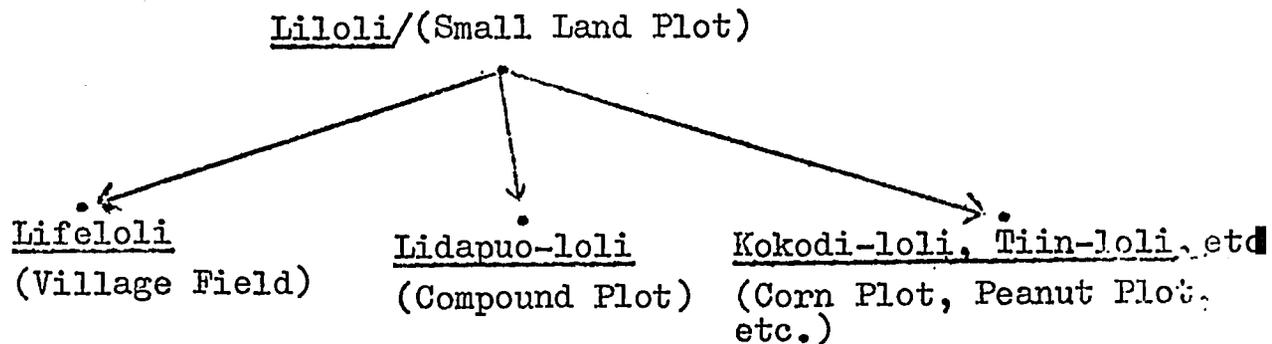
* Gardin, Document de Travail No.2 of the Bureau des Productions Agricoles, O.R.D. de l'Est, p. 18.

Land used for a liloli/(small land plot) may occasionally be unclaimed, free land. This is often the case for rice lands. More often, plot cultivation is either on a kuakpelu/(former field) whose soils remain adequate for this purpose, or on land classified as a kuawaagu/(fallow land). Major plot cultivation takes place within a village around the various compounds. Soils here often benefit from both human and animal wastes and as a result are cultivated year after year without a fallow period.

There are three major types of 'small land plots'.

FIGURE IV

Plot Cultivation



(1) Lifeloli/(Village Field)

These plots represent the small fields within the village upon which corn, sorghum, millet, tobacco, squash, and rows of kenaf and roselle are cultivated. These are often the first fields planted at the beginning of a new rainy season. They are also known as sankagu (F), kuankuagidi (P), and daye-kuani (B).

(2) Lidapuo-loli/(Compound Plot)

Outside a compound, behind each hut, is a plot of land which belongs to the resident of that hut. Crops most commonly cultivated here are corn, squash, gourds, kenaf, and okra, the latter two usually planted in rows to mark off the boundaries of each plot from the one next to it. These plots are sometimes also called dapuona or dapuoli-kuani (B) meaning literally 'behind' or 'behind field'. N be cuagi akokoda n dapuol po./(I planted corn on my 'behind' plot).

In addition to the plot behind his own hut, a compound head (diedaano) has the right to the plot directly in front of his compound called the cancanli or tapagili. Here one often sees intercropped corn with early millet and later tobacco. Sorghum is less frequently cultivated here.

(3) Kokodi-loli, Tiin-loli, etc./(Corn Plot, Peanut Plot, etc.)

Various crop specific plots can be located throughout a village or in the bush upon which individuals cultivate one or more of the numerous cash and garden crops.* The plot bears the name of that which it contains. Such plots are not to be confused with the other two classes of plots mentioned above which may also have the same crops cultivated in them. A farmer may have a number of such plots located around the borders (or even inside) of his kuanu/(sorghum or millet field).

Any one person may be able to say he possesses one or more of the following plots.

* It should be noted that the Gourmantché do not make the conceptual distinction of cash crops vs. subsistence food crops made by English or French speakers. In the above framework, peanuts, soybeans, rice and cotton

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| mu-loli | rice plot |
| kanbi-loli | red pepper plot |
| kan-loli | eggplant plot |
| nyia-loli | sesame plot |
| tabi-loli | tobacco plot |
| tangun-loli | manioc plot |
| tiin-namaga-loli | peanut plot |
| tiin-moan-loli | earth pea plot |
| kokodi-loli | corn plot |
| kpankpan-loli | variety of sauce plant plot |
| Qalifa-loli | variety of sauce plant plot |
| goan-loli | roselle plot |
| paal-loli | bush-potato plot |
| juon-loli | soybean plot |
| beli-loli | fish poison plant plot |
| sie-loli | indigo plot |
| sasiin-loli | peanut-like plant plot |
| kunkun-loli | cotton plot |
| man-loli | okra plot |
| sogu | yam plot |
| tuun-nyiaga | cowpea plot |
| bali-nyiaga | kenaf plot |
| moabi-loli | fonio plot |

Some of these crop specific plots are distinctive in the nature of their cultivation. Because of this distinction, special terms have evolved. Yam cultivators, who use rather unusual looking mounds for their yams, will call such a plot a sogu. One may occasionally hear non-yam Gourmantché cultivators call such a plot a nugi-loli/(literally 'yam plot) or nugi-kuanu/(literally 'yam field). Farmers usually cultivate cowpeas in association with their millet and sorghum crops on a kuanu/(grain field). If, however, a farmer, after planting his crops, has a little extra time, he will begin clearing off a section of land for the expansion of his field next year. The time for

are contrasted with sorghum, millet, corn, cowpeas, earth peas, potatoes, garden produce, etc. For Gourmantché farmers, sorghum and millet are contrasted as primary foods with everything else. Evidence of such contrast is best seen in the distinction between kuanu and liloli.

grain planting has past, but the farmer can still plant cowpeas. When planted as a single crop (ie. not inter-mixed with other crops) in this manner, this plot is called the taun-nyiaga/(cowpea plot) or tuu-bagili (F) or tuu-paangu (B).

Kenaf plants are usually planted in lines (ijasani) as divisions of various crops or boundaries between plots. When planted as a crop filling up an entire plot, the plot will be called a bali-nyiaga/(kenaf plot) or bali-bagili (F).

In most cases, land upon which a specific cash crop is cultivated is called a liloli/(small land plot) only when such a crop is upon that land. A tiin-loli/(peanut plot) ceases to be a peanut plot when the harvest is over. Next year something else might be planted there or the plot may be abandoned entirely. An exception to this is the mu-loli/(rice plot) which, even after a farmer has ceased to use it, will continue to be called a rice plot. The reason for this is that the land is still good for growing rice. It in fact can grow nothing else. Unlike 'small land plot' cultivation a kuanu/(grain field) continues to be called a grain field after the harvest because it will someday again be used as such.

In this discussion of the categories of exploited land, it has been noted that there are two major sub-divisions of cultivated land -- the kuanu/(grain field) and the liloli/(small land plot). The values placed upon the crops found in each of these types of cultivated land are different. More time is spent with the grain crops. This time represents the best working hours of the day. If for some reason some crop would need to be neglected or abandoned, it will always be the crops of the 'small land plots'. The labor time used by ORD village group members upon their collective fields often comes from time once used upon the 'small land plots'.

1.3 Shifting Cultivation and Population Pressure

Gourmantché communities are overwhelmingly agriculture orientated. To be a farmer is to be above all else a cultivator of sorghum and millet. Such crops represent, as one farmer told me, ti soama/(our blood). Except for a few traders and functionaries, every physically capable person is expected to cultivate land. The attempt by family groups to meet their subsistence needs can perhaps be discussed within the context of land use as it relates to the establishment of new villages.

1.3.1 Young or Small Villages

Most of the physically able farmers of young or small villages (up to about 35 compounds) commute by foot or bicycle to their fields located around their village or nearby in the bush. Such fields are a mixture of kuawaadi/(fallow lands) under recultivation and unclaimed, free land being cultivated for the first time. The former predominates. Only at certain critical times of the season will a farmer spend the night in his kua-dieli/(field hut). Older people will cultivate the felola/(village fields) or possible fields adjacent to the village.

1.3.2 Land Within Well-Established Villages

Within a well-established village, the older and weaker members of a compound (diegu) tend to cultivate the unexhausted soils remaining in or immediately surrounding the village. Such lands are kuawaadi/(fallow lands) recultivated and kuakpela/(former fields) of earlier settlers. Though it is possible to have real kuani/(grain fields) on the outskirts of a village (as in 1.2.1 above), this land is usually greatly subdivided among various members of different compounds of the

village. Such land therefore represents one form or another of the 'small land plots'

1.3.3 Land Outside Old or Well-Established Villages

Large villages such as Fada, Bogande, Jakpaga, Pamma, Kaañcaali, Piala, represent a different problem from younger and smaller villages. For many people, good land, even to borrow, is scarce within walking distance. A farmer will find that he can not make a living for his family on the land available to them. He will therefore search farther and farther from the village for suitable bush land.

Whether he is a long-time resident of the nearby village or a newcomer, upon finding land, he will seek to learn its disposition. Is it tinjali/ (unclaimed, free land)? If not, to whom does it belong?

Knowing the owners, he will ask permission to use it. This is not a matter for the chief or the village to arbitrate, even if the farmer happens to be a stranger to that village. If the owners do not have immediate plans for it, they will allow the farmer to cultivate it --- usually for as long as he wishes. It is taken for granted that the farmer will eventually leave for a new site. It is, however, within the rights of the owners to reclaim this land anytime they choose. They usually would never do so unless real discord arose. In such an event, the owner would tell the farmer to leave before the next planting season. Except in such cases, the owners would rather themselves borrow someone else's land to cultivate (if they no longer have any of their own or family lands ready for cultivation) than make the farmer leave. They themselves might be in a similar situation someday.

It is clear that a farmer will establish himself on unclaimed, free land if at all possible. Whether or not he can do so, however, he will clear his new land and build a kuadiegu/(field compound) nearby where he, his wife or wives, children, and livestock will spend the rainy season. When the harvest is in, the family will return to their compound in the village. A bush compound which is inhabited during the rainy season is known as a kuadiegu or kuadabili (B).

1.3.4 Abandonment of Old Village

If the land now put to cultivation is unclaimed and free, and water is available year-round, the farmer may after a year or two decide to set up year-long residence (kuabindi-muadi or kuadabili (B)). With his decision will come some improvement to his kuadiegu/(field compound). Rather than grass mats for walls, he may build with clay. Clay storage silos will be constructed.

The decision to settle may also be encouraged by the arrival of other kinsmen and/or friends with their own compounds. The formation of a cluster of fields in the bush, each with their respective compound, is called a kuajaali and is given a distinctive name. This name often later becomes the name of the new village.

When the soils of the first fields in the newly established area begin to wear down, new land will be sought. If none is within easy access, the farmer will have to move away and the community will eventually disappear. If cultivatable lands can be found, new fields are established, time passes, and the community grows. In this way, compounds or subsistence units from within compounds of old villages relocate into

more rural areas and establish new communities.

1.3.5 Establishment of a New Community

What now happens is that over a number of generations, if such a site proves advantageous, more and more people move to the settlements and establish compounds in-between and around the original settlers -- almost always on land formally cultivated by those original settlers. Newcomers are given a site for a compound and are loaned some land around it for their village field and compound plots. All the land within the community and nearly all cultivatable or fallow land anywhere near the new village belongs to the living descendants of the first compounds established in this area. Within the village, personal and family lands are sometimes separated from that of others by the placing of stone markers. In terms of the total population of a medium sized village (400-600 persons), the 'owners' of land represent a minority. The larger the village, the greater the ratio between land holders and land borrowers.*

* In theory, all these 'borrowers of land' should somewhere in the Eastern region have land which they could claim by inherited right. This is not necessarily true. Many people have been in a position of borrowing land over several generations and no longer know where their 'ancestral' or 'family' lands are. Even if they did know, the chances are good that most or all such land is already being used by someone in their extended family; that is, someone who has the same rights to the land. A person, furthermore, might not wish to return to the original home land because of his present ties.

With the passing of one generation in the new community, come the presence of elders. It used to be that the oldest elder became the leader of the community by right of age. He would retain this position until the regional chief and his elders selected a kuanbado/(farm chief) for the community. This farm chief might or might not have been the eldest person depending on his attributes as a leader.

It is impossible to say definitively at what point a farm community became a dogu/(village), but a community could not have a bado/(chief) or kuanbado/(farm chief) without its being a village or town. Because chiefs no longer hold the authority they once had, the creation of new sub-chiefs, which was characteristic of the creation formally of new villages, no longer takes place.

There are many communities today within the Eastern ORD which in earlier times would have had their own chiefs and thus be considered legitimate villages (instead of farm communities as they are now considered). Not having a chief does not seem to have any negative results for the farm communities however. A practical problem has been created though. In the past it was possible, when taking a government census, to go to all chiefs and from them and the older members of the established community, obtain the names of those families who have moved away to a farm community. Such people were still considered a part of the village as long as the community did not have its own chief. Today however, many such farm communities are far bigger than the villages from which the inhabitants came. These 'farm communities' are responsible to towns often smaller than themselves for the payment of taxes for instance. The names of many of these communities have never been recorded on any official documents.

At this point, we have completed the cycle and returned to the young or small village.

1.4 The Subsistence Unit

The diedaano/(compound head) is that individual who 'ownes' (gi die) an entire compound (diegu) by right of seniority. He does not have to have a wife or children to hold this position of leadership.

The dansan-daano/(head of family) is the head of the basic household unit in Gourmantché society. He has one or more wives and children. A compound may have one or more 'heads of family', one of which is usually also the head of the compound.

Three concepts in the Gurma language serve to clearly identify the subsistence unit of this society.

(1) The dansan-daano/(head of family) is the head of the dansanu. This term refers to the basic units of space into which a diegu/(compound) can be subdivided. All members of this unit are members of one 'family'. The first requirement of the subsistence unit is that members live together.

(2) Members of a subsistence unit also taan sabobi-yenli, that is, they eat together from the 'same' cooking pot. The wife who prepared the evening meal will take all the food from her large cooking pot and divide it up into different containers. Men do not eat with women. Young children do not generally eat with the working men. But their food comes from the same place.

(3) The third requirement of a subsistence unit is that its members share responsibility of living together as a unit. This concept is expressed in that members ta sanfa-yendo, that is, they share 'one cooking place'. A man may have several wives, each of whom will have her own cooking place in front of her hut. But wives

will share responsibility of preparing the meals by alternating cooking days. They will share one wood pile which they might have collected together. They will obtain the necessary grain from the husband's grainery. A woman will find the spices and leaves she needs herself for her meal days.

In some regions, this concept is also expressed by saying bi ta kuan-yendo, that is, they partake of 'one field'. This refers to the field or fields of the head of the household which basically support the family.

Being married and having children does not mean that one is automatically the head of a subsistence unit. This man and his family may share the above requirements with an older brother or father (which make them part of this brother's or father's subsistence unit). Nor does possession of one's own field mean that one is the head of a subsistence unit if he partakes of the benefits of the three membership requirements listed above.

If the head of a subsistence unit is physically unable to cultivate (too old, illness, leper, blindness, cripple) but his wife or wives and children obtain the necessary food, then this man is still considered the head of one subsistence unit. If, however, a brother supports him and his family (by giving his wives grain with which to prepare food), then this man and his family are part of the brother's subsistence unit.

Members of a subsistence unit are almost always related either by blood or through marriage. The few who do not fit this category might be temporary laborers 'employed' by the family head. It might be a young man living in with the family who will one day marry a daughter of that family (in these cases it is usually because this family does not have a son of their own or one old enough to help them). The Gourmantché name employed for such persons is nacemo.

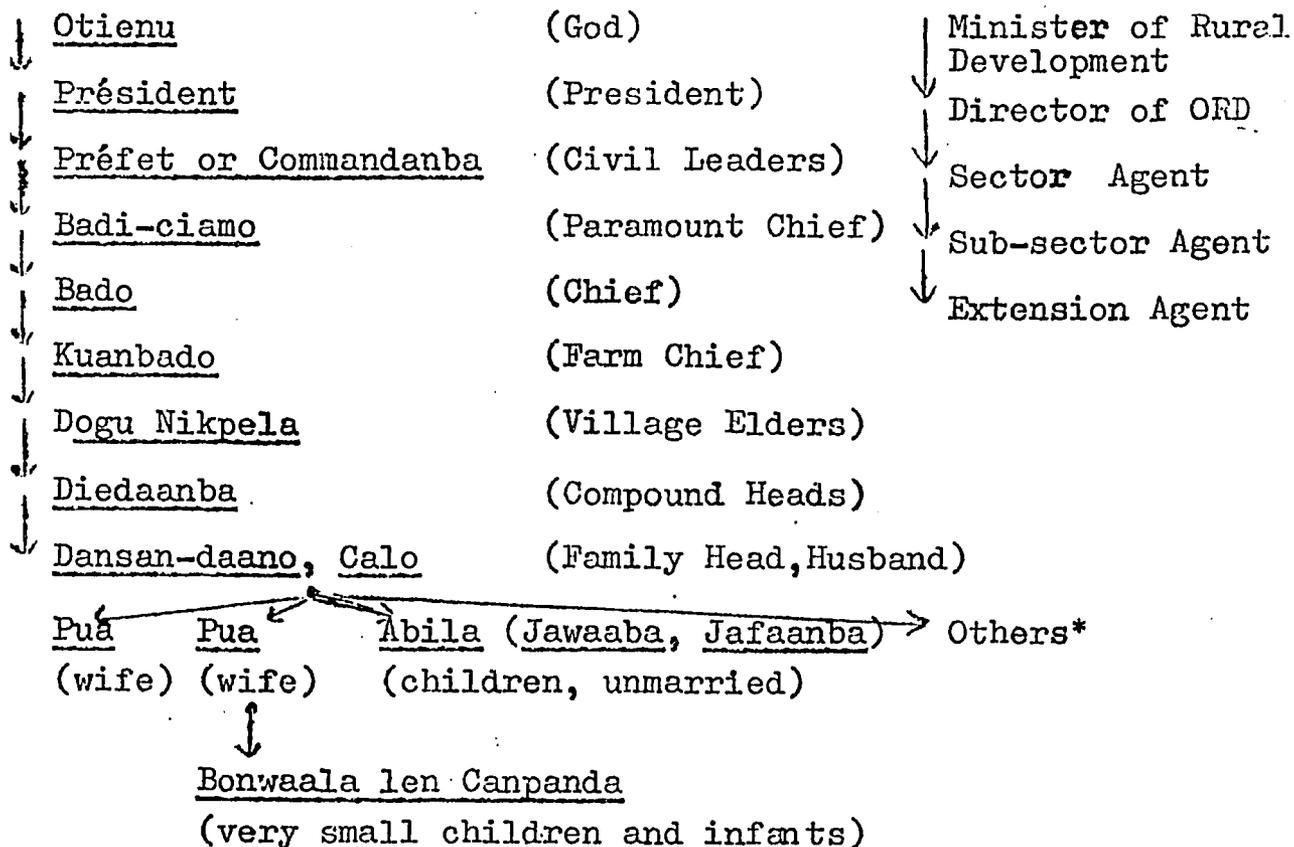
1.5 Chains of Authority & Respect and the Obtaining of Community Land

The Gourmantché will say Yua kuli pia yua yen o or Yua kuli pia yua die o, which is to say "everyone has someone to whom he is responsible through obedience, acceptance of authority, and showing respect". Traditionally, within any specific village, the chief was the last link in this chain of command, authority, and respect, extending from extended family elders to compound heads to husbands to wives and children. Above a small village chief (kuanbado) was the regional chief (bado) who was himself responsible to the paramount chief (badi-ciamo). The latter was himself responsible to Otienu or Oyenu/(God), and was called the Yenbiga/(child of God). Modern government has put some changes into the chain of command as shown in Figure V below.

Within Gourmantché society, as in all societies, authority and direction rarely work from the bottom of the system up. Wives are not supposed to tell their husbands what to do any more than sons tell their fathers what must be done. A family head does not take first place over a compound head on issues in which the latter has the right of leadership. When these kinds of things happen, they are usually in the context of rapid social change. All of this is not to say that lower categories of people do not influence the action or decisions of those 'above' them in responsibility. Each person at his station in life has the obligations inherent to that station. There are certain things expected of a married man that are not expected of an unmarried man for example. An old woman has certain privileges and rights that younger women do not have. One earns these rights as one gets older and becomes a responsible member of one's community.

The central government has replaced most of the civil authority of the chiefs. This has in some cases diminished their religious and moral authority as well. Greatest traditional solidarity seems to remain in the chain of command from village elders on down. Figure V below illustrates some chains of command. Note that an extension agent represents a system of authority, obligations, and objectives different from that of the traditional society. An agent's problem is to discover how he can be most effective in the region or village in which he has responsibility. With whom should he work in order to achieve the best results?

FIGURE V
Chains of Command



* Others: father, mother, brother, sister, uncle and aunts, of the head of the household could potentially be members of one subsistence unit. Unrelated persons occasionally are members too.

A village chief has remained, however, not only a leading citizen of his community, but the formal arbitrator of land owned by his own and other family groups within the village. He, himself, only has rights to land owned by himself and his family (like everyone else). Though the Gourmantché will say that a bado die odogu tinga kuli/(a chief 'owns' all the land in the village), this does not mean he can do whatever he wants with it. He only has the power to permit a newcomer to seek and possess land upon which a compound may be constructed.

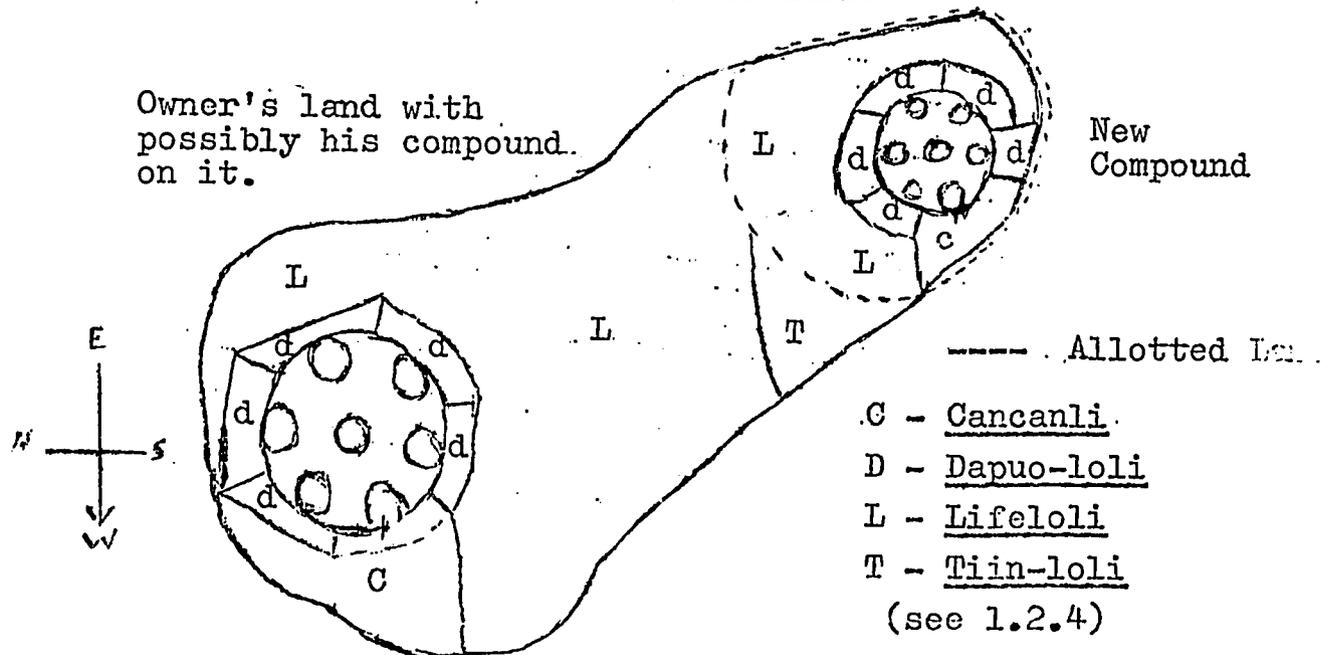
Compounds can get too big. Disputes and tensions sometimes make it prudent for some family unit to leave and establish their own compound. Residents of a village have the right to settle anywhere they want within the community. No one, including the chief, need be averted of the decision to move. The farmer who intends to relocate will begin by looking around the village for several suitable sites. A pinch of soil or a few pebbles from each spot will be taken to the tanpualo/(diviner) who will consult the oracle. He will learn which site fits in with the destiny of the farmer. Armed with his answer, the farmer will return home and prepare his roofing grass and mats. When ready, he will announce to the village diedaanba/(compound head), through perhaps a son, that tomorrow he will need some hut posts and ceiling poles. The next day, those who desire to help will then send out someone from their compound into the bush to cut a few. That evening, the farmer will again send word around asking the village compound leaders to pa o osuangu/(give him shade) tomorrow.

That night at midnight or at the first cockcrow, the husband with his first wife will take their beds or mats out and sleep upon the new site. The next morning

they will be seen there; no one will have known of the location beforehand. This precaution is taken for fear some enemy will bury fetish medicine of some kind on the site which will bring harm, and perhaps death to the newcomers. The entire compound will be completed that first day with the help of village people. About the fourth day after completion, the new compound head will seek out the owner of the land. The owner will trace out how much of his land he will permit the new compound for a feloli (village field) and dapuo-lola (compound plots) (see 1.2.4). The owner may take back any part or all of this land when he has need of it --- up to the very walls of the compound. No one can ever be forced to leave this site. The site of the compound itself becomes their land.

FIGURE VI

Creation of New Compound



Strangers can gain rights to compound land within a village by first going to the chief. He will, after due consideration, either invite the newcomer to look for a site or inform him that he can not settle. Given clearance, the stranger will follow the procedure outlined above.

1.6 Usufructory Access to Land

Certain, usually implicit, agreements exist between an owner of land, and the farmer who wishes to gain access to such land. People who have permanent rights to land generally know very well where such land is, what the boundaries are, and guard it carefully from improper encroachment by outsiders.

(1) The farmer can never own the land he borrows for cultivation. Even if the owner, out of friendship, should say he permanently gives this land to the farmer, it is quite possible that subsequent years will find that same owner or his children re-establishing their rights. In past years, when land was more abundant, this was not a problem. Today, unless the farmer has the foresight to gain legal Voltaic documents stating the original transfer of ownership transaction, he can be forced to leave. In a recent communication with Yentangu, the Gourmantché paramount chief of Fada N'Gourma, on this problem, I was told that farmers should be encouraged to obtain titles to their land. The problem is that few realize the possible importance of such a step or how they might go about doing this if they did.

(2) Ownership of land is seen as separate from ownership of the standing crop on this land. Because trees remain longer on land than a cultivation season or the period a farmer might use a tract of land, special restrictions are made. Farmers are not usually permitted to plant trees on borrowed land. To plant trees is to establish ownership of those trees and, in a sense, the land shaded by those trees. Up to 15 or 20 years ago, the principal reason Gourmantché farmers gave for refusing outsiders (non-kinsmen) permission to plant trees on their

loaned out land was that trees use up space that could (and implicitly should) be used for the cultivation of sorghum and millet.

(3) Should a farmer gain permission to plant trees, he was permitted to ownership of those trees (and his children after him) but not the land. For most Gourmantché today, the mango tree (especially grafted) is still the only tree considered worth planting and caring for. Furthermore, it is believed that trees should be purchased. Freely given trees can be expected to die.

In many parts of the Eastern ORD, the locust bean (nééré) tree continues to be the only non-cultivated tree whose produce belongs permanently to the owner upon whose land it was found. They are never purposely planted. New trees which might come up during the period of someone else's borrowing the land remain the owner's property. He will come at the appropriate season to pick the produce or will allow the farmer to pick it with the understanding that about half will go to the owner. The importance of this tree is not declining despite the importance of soybeans as a substitute to the seeds of the locust bean tree.*

Other non-cultivated produce bearing trees are gaining importance in populated areas. Shea (kariké), fig, tamarind, ronier palm, and certain baobab trees have, in some places, become considered the exclusive property of certain landholders (because they are found on their fields or family lands). This is becoming a cause for increasing discord as demand increases. In most areas the produce of these and other 'bush' trees

* Processed seeds form an important ingredient of daily meals (gijonga, soumbala).

are still considered available to whoever wishes to pick the produce.

Rural disputes over land often arise over owner attempts to reclaim land loaned to a farmer under the conditions stated above (but which the farmer wishes to ignore). In self protection, land owners are even more insistent that farmers not plant any kind of trees on their land. They will go so far as to pull out the young trees someone may have started without permission.

(4) Because it is a basic right of every person to have a means of feeding himself, land is generously loaned out to those who request it for cultivation. A farmer may very easily loan out all his land to various kinsmen or non-kinsmen and in a few years need to himself borrow land from other kinsmen or non-kinsmen. The farmer will rarely make those borrowing his own land leave. He will expect that his lands will be, sooner or later, abandoned to fallow. After a number of years either he or his children can once again cultivate it (or once again loan it out to someone whose need for land arises first).

The existing disparity between the Gourmantché and official Voltaic orientations to land acquisition and ownership does appear to present obstacles to the development of the region. Individual farmers do not have clear access to long-term future use of the land under present cultivation. Crop rotation and fallow systems, which might prove beneficial in sustaining or even improving soil fertility, will not be easily adapted. Thousands of farmers are restricted from developing the gardens and fruit orchards they might otherwise want to

have. Much of the incentive for substantially improving one's fields through fertilizers or other means is lost because the owner may step in and repossess his land.

1.7 Current Problems: Ti ban ke gitinga pia mayuli hali boncianla/ (We know the great value of land)

A number of examples are given below to illustrate more clearly some of the specific problems encountered in the present state of change in widely held traditional principles of land tenure. Since any farmer wishes to avoid land disputes, many today simply state, at the beginning of another person's request for land, that absolutely no trees or permanent improvement is to be made upon the land. Farmers still feel obligated to let other people use their land if they ask for it. The time has already come, however, that some landowners will not loan out their land for cultivation - even if that landowner has no intention of ever using it himself. He is afraid of losing his land in some way to the newcomer.

- (1) A Gourmantché farmer from Nagili (Nagili is an old village of about 2,500 people.) I quote the farmer.

"We hear on the radio that it is everyone's responsibility to plant trees on their land, for this will bring profit to them in the future and will also cause rains to return as we used to know them. Everybody now knows that if you give a person your land upon which to live (ie. a compound) or farm, he will attempt to plant trees (implied mango) so that his children will reap profits in the future. Yet this will leave the original

owner with nothing. And worse, you, who gave the land, and your children, will end up having to buy the fruit from him to whom you gave the land. This causes some people to refuse tree planting on their land."

"If you give a person your land and you permit him to plant trees, then even if later you get your land back (ie. farmer moves elsewhere), he will still own those trees. You can not get your land back along with the trees. It won't work. There are many large mango trees today in Nagili which were planted by people who did so on borrowed land. Today they live elsewhere, but they still own those trees and their produce."

It is interesting to note that in this as well as in other texts to be presented, the farmer is more concerned about the expected benefits another (non-kinsmen) farmer will reap than in his own lack of endeavor to reap such benefits himself. He himself does not necessarily want to develop his own land; yet he certainly does not want to see someone else profit in something in which he himself might have profited. He continues:

"It is for this reason that my older brother and he who 'gave' him some land had a dispute. My brother had small mango trees on this land. One night someone (we did not know at the time, but it was the owner) came and pulled up all the trees and stuck them back into the soil. They all died. My brother then went and bought some more mango trees and told the owner he was going to plant them on the borrowed land. The owner said he would not permit it, so my brother took his trees and planted them out in the bush farm where we own the land completely."

This farmer was fortunate to have someplace else to plant his mango trees. Many are not so fortunate.

(2) Another Gourmantché from Nagili

"A young man went and asked an old man for a part of his feloli/(village field). It was close to the baagu/(bas fonds) and there he could make a garden. The old man gave his permission. The young man made his sardinga/(garden). However, he also went and bought mango trees and planted them around outside the garden. Seeing this, the old man took fire and went and made as if to burn off his 'village field'. He managed to include the mango trees, killing them.

The old man did all this because he saw that if this continued, it would not be long before there would be no place left on which to grow sorghum or millet. Nor was his permission asked about tree planting. Well, the young man made a real fuss with the old man, asking him why he hadn't been told he was going to burn the field. This angered the old man who then told the young man he could now leave his garden as well if this was his attitude. The young man left."

The young man made several mistakes. He was not content with what had been given to him but, by planting outside his garden, clearly was showing expansionist intentions. Planting trees was also a clear signal that he intended to keep this land in the future, even when he knew very well that the old man had not given him this land permanently. For the old man, the land was clearly more valuable in the grain it could and would produce than the season fruit the trees might eventually produce.

(3) Yet Another Gourmantché from Nagili

"Now, (as things have changed) people hear and have also seen that if you offer a person your land and he plants trees on it, that when you decide you want that land back, you will not

get it back. Nowadays, when you possess your land, you also possess your trees (and vice-versa)(the government policy). For this reason the people of Lantago came to blows."

"A long time ago, their fathers were close friends. One of them gave his good friend some land, permanently, because he didn't possess a 'village field' upon which to cultivate. It came to pass that when their children had grown up, the two now old men did not get along so well any longer. During the years since he had received his land from his friend, the one farmer had planted numerous mango trees, many of which were now bearing fruit. The previous owner and his children became envious. These children told their father that they would reposses the land. The father said to let it be. But they refused and started up a big dispute."

"The children of the old man who had been given the land said they would not return the land because their trees now stood upon it. A fight issued in which one person was seriously injured. Because of this injury (and not the tree dispute), a court case issued. The reason for the fight came out."

"Well, the court said that anyone, anywhere, who possesses (fruit) trees also owns the land on which those trees are found. The tin-danba/(land owners) seeing that they were going to lose the case, gave a gift to the judge. This swung the decision in their favor. This in turn caused the ti-danba/(tree owners) to offer their own gift. Not knowing what to do now, the court decided that the 'tree owners' must pull out all small trees and give back the land to the 'land owners'. The large trees would remain with the land under them the property of the 'tree owners'. Here the case settled."

In this text, the speaker made a clear differentiation between 'tree owners' and 'land owners'. It is implied that, were it not for those trees, the land owners would

have had their land back. Without trees, what justification could the other party have had to keep the land? The moral of this account was clearly that one must be careful about letting someone else cultivate your land --- especially if you know that person intends to plant trees. Clearly, any other kind of improvements which a 'land borrower' might make to borrowed land which would tend to keep that land in the possession of the 'borrower' for longer than normal, would present complications with the 'land owner'.

(4) Cakpaaga farmer (This is a small village near Bilanga)

"My (Gourmantché) father gave some Mossi farmers the right to plant mango trees on his fuanu/(sloping land), thinking it would benefit him as well some day (he'd get some of the fruit). We heard that those who gave their land to others to plant trees would not get the land back. The tree owners would own it. Therefore, I told my father something had to be done. He, after much angry exchange, managed to repossess his land, forcing the Mossi farmers to pull up the mango trees and take them elsewhere. We did this because we did not want to lose our land."

"What then happened was the Mossi replanted these same trees around their compound not far away. This compound and the land around it was borrowed from some other Gourmantché farmer. This landowner does not realize that he is risking losing the land around the compound to the Mossi by permitting them to plant their trees."

Here again, the farmer 'gave' the land to someone else, intending all along to be the owner of that land. When he knew the danger that could result from his traditional generosity, he acted to save his land. It is interesting that he did not warn the owner of the land upon which the

Mossi were not living and planting their trees. As it turned out, these Mossi farmers have their own fields in the bush on tinjali/(unclaimed, free land) and could have planted, if they had wished, their trees there without causing any present or future dispute with anyone.

(5) Another Cakpaaga farmer

"A farmer took possession of a kuawaagu/(fallow field) without informing the owner. He had completely cut and cleared the land when the owner showed up and asked him who owned the land. The farmer said he did not know. The owner asked 'Who did you ask?'. The farmer replied 'Are you angry with me?' (knowing very well this was the owner of the land). 'You know very well I am angry' replied the owner. Because he had not asked permission first to use the land, he repossessed it. Dme ba ped olielo kuawaagu gi naa mia o? (Who would clear someone else's fallow land without first asking his permission?)."

To a Gourmantché, the answer is no one. He would not get away with it. In another case in Cakpaaga, a man left his old field for a new location. Several women came along and wanted to use part of it for their peanut plots. The farmer refused to grant his permission to cultivate because, he said, this land was his, that if he permitted them to cultivate it, the soil's fertility would not be restored quickly enough. He would need it someday again. The women had to look elsewhere.

The following rather long account illustrates rather clearly some of the hidden struggles often involved in the search for land - simply for cultivation.

"Last year I realized that the land I was cultivating was not much good any longer and I saw some land that was really good (eleven kilometers from Fada). So I planted some rice in the bas fonds that was part of this new land. I was not able to plant too much and the water flowed much too forcefully last year so that I only got 10 tins of rice."

"Someone from the village of Cigideni saw this rice plot and said, "My, that is nice. You know, this next year, you and I will divide up this land." I asked him how we were going to divide this rice area, seeing that it already was quite small. "No," he said, "even so we will divide it".

"A few days later, another farmer (X) came up. I had heard from others that he had planned to cultivate rice on the plot in the past, that he had even chopped a few trees down around the spot. I told him that this year I planned to make my farm here but that there had been someone along who said he was going to take half my plot over. "Oh, who was it?" asked farmer X. I told him it was a Cigideni land owner. "Well," he said, "let me tell you no one owns this land". So I told him that I had heard someone tell me he had once cut some trees down around here. "No," said farmer X, "I do not own this land"."

"Later, I saw another Cigideni man who told me, "Hey, you are cutting down the trees on my land I hear." "Yes," I said, "but I am only a stranger here, I do not come from Fada but from Jakpaga." I asked him if he owns that land and he said he did. I asked if I could cultivate there and he said I could. "But," he said, "I do not want you to pick the fruit off my locust bean tree there. I also ask you not to plant any trees on this land. Someday I may wish to do something with it."

"Now when I learned of this man, I thought I would ask around Cigideni among the other older people to see if this man really did own the land. If he did, then I wanted to ask him if he really intended to use the land someday and if I could not in fact have it permanently. Then I could plant trees too if I wished to do so. The land

was a long ways from where the old man lived and it was certainly too far for him to use himself."

"Well, last year, when my rice was growing nicely, farmer X was in the area and saw it, that my rice was nice. He came by my home later and told me, "Oh, you were right about that land. I do own the land there. I you do not want alot of trouble and 'words', you and I will divide that plot next year". I asked him how it was that when I told him that a supposed landowner had told me to divide up the land before, that he had told me no one owned the land - including himself. "How is it that you now tell me we have to divide up the land" I asked him. He warned me not to make trouble with him or else he would cause real trouble for me. I told him I already had asked permission from the real landowner to use the land -- that he did not own it. I told farmer X he had no say at all over the land. I then went ahead and cleared the land for my field this coming rainy season. Last month (December), after having burnt off some of the now dried shrubbery, I went on a trip to Macakoali and was there for six days. The second day after I left, farmer X came and gave my wife a letter in which he wrote, "If you want things to work out between you and I, do not ever again set foot on the new field. I have owned that place for a long time and everyone knows this"."

"When I returned home and read this, I went to his home to confront him about it. He wasn't there. I decided to go once again to Cigideni to try to learn once and for all who owned the land. I talked again to the old man previously encountered, who claimed to own the land and who had given permission to use it. I told him about farmer X who wished to remove me from this land - even writing me a letter never to set foot on it again. "Yes," he said to me, "I do own that land. Farmer X came to me some time ago and told me that there was someone planning to cultivate my land (see how Farmer X now speaks), but that if the old man wished, he, farmer X, would get that man off my land".

"The old landowner told farmer X, "No, I gave him the right to cultivate that land when he asked me. I can't have you do anything against him now". This is what the old man told me when I went to Cigideni that day."

"The old man was getting disturbed by all the fuss by this time. He said that if this is the trouble the land was going to cause him, then he didn't want anyone to cultivate it. Another old man, sitting there and hearing this, advised him that to follow this course of action would be only to judge 'this besieged and innocent farmer' who had already gone to so much work in clearing the land for the coming year's crops. "He should be permitted to cultivate on the land as formally agreed upon." So I was permitted to go ahead as planned."

(The old man was afraid that all this would end up by coming to serious fighting and that a court case would result in which he would also become involved. He also feared farmer X who was known and feared in that area as having powerful fetish medicine that could bring harm and even death to those whom he wanted.)

"So the old man told me to give a piece of land to farmer X. I did this. I asked farmer X to show me what portion of the land I had already cleared he wanted to take. He could take what he wanted. So farmer X showed me what he wanted to take that was in the rice plot. Yet even today, farmer X isn't happy about the outcome. He is angry. He slanders me everywhere saying I want to steal his possession. There will be more problems."

There were. Since I recorded this interview, farmer X was able to make this farmer leave this already cleared field and return to his old field of the year before. The unfortunate farmer is afraid to go to court about it. He is a stranger in Fada N'Gourma. He has only lived there for seven years.