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Agri-Food Transformation Actors in Ouagadougou Trapped in the Survival Economy

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Résumé

Cet article s’appuie sur les données collectées au cours de ma recherche postdoctorale au sujet de microactivités de la transformation agroalimentaire en milieu urbain ouagalais et de leur rôle potentiel dans la transition vers un développement et une sécurité alimentaire durables. Il s’agira, dans un premier temps, de reconstruire le contexte général de l’aide internationale et des théories du développement où ces microactivités de transformation ont pu se consolider et se diffuser. Ensuite, sur la base des données ethnographiques, nous passerons à une description fine des caractéristiques principales de ces mini-unités de transformation. À travers la méthode comparative, nous verrons que ces activités ne peuvent pas être assimilées ni aux entreprises de type capitaliste ni à de simples activités du secteur « informel ». En revanche, sur la base des connaissances anthropologiques, on fera l’hypothèse que ces unités de production, malgré leur déplacement en ville, continuent à fonctionner selon des « modes de production domestique ». Néanmoins, les données du terrain, la reconstruction des relations sociales et de pouvoir et, donc, de légitimité, l’analyse des conditions matérielles d’existence de ces unités montreront que il ne s’agit nulle part, ni des « survivances » ni de quelque sorte de vestiges du passé, mais d’un système contemporain, entretenu par les acteurs de l’aide internationale. Ce système, calqué sur les caractéristiques de mode de production traditionnelles, a cristallisé le secteur informel en un véritable système économique parallèle : l’économie de la survie. Par économie de la survie, il faut entendre, les activités génératrices de revenus, les pluriactivités domestiques, les formes d’auto-emploi qui permettent de subvenir aux besoins fondamentaux d’une famille ou d’un ménage (nutrition, santé) pour en assurer uniquement sa survivance. Comme le marché informel, ces économies fonctionnent au-delà de l’État. Néanmoins, l’économie de la survie se différencie du secteur informel et de toutes les autres formes spontanées d’art de la débrouille, puisqu’elles se structurent et se multiplient dans un environnement socioculturel bien précis qui est celui de l’aide internationale. Raison pour laquelle, dans cet article, on utilisera l’« économie humanitaire » comme synonyme d’« économie de la survie ».

Mots-clés : Agroalimentaire, économie, Burkina Faso

Summary

This article draws on data collected during my postdoctoral research on agri-food processing micro-activities in Ouagadougou and their potential role in the transition to sustainable food development and security. First of all, it will be necessary to reconstruct the general context of international aid and development theories in which these micro-activities of transformation have been able to consolidate and spread. Then, based on the ethnographic data, we will proceed to a detailed description of the main characteristics of these mini-processing units. Using the comparative method, we will see that these activities cannot be assimilated either to capitalist-type businesses or to mere activities of the "informal" sector. On the other hand, based on anthropological knowledge, it will be assumed that these production units, despite their move to the city, continue to operate according to "domestic modes of production". Nevertheless, the data from the field, the reconstruction of social and power relations and, therefore, of legitimacy, and the analysis of the material conditions of existence of these units will show that these are not “relics", nor somehow remnants of the past, but of a contemporary system, maintained by the actors of international aid. This system, modelled on characteristics of the traditional mode of production, has crystallised the informal sector into a veritable parallel economic system: the survival economy. Survival economics means income-generating activities, domestic activities, and forms of self-employment that provide for the basic needs of a family or a household (nutrition, health). Like the informal market, these economies operate beyond the state. Nevertheless, the survival economy differs from the informal sector and all other spontaneous forms of coping, since it is structured and multiplied in a very precise socio-cultural environment: that of international aid. This article therefore uses "humanitarian economics" as synonymous with "the survival economy".

Keywords: Agribusiness, economy, Burkina Faso

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Introduction

How can the private sector work in favour of development? How can civil society gain support from the private sector in order to develop its independence and move towards autonomy?

There is nothing new or original in these questions which made up the basis of this research (in response to the expectations of those who supported it), unless it is the person asking.

Indeed, these questions underlie an apparent consensus arond the fact that yes, private actors have a very important role to play in the process of development.

Nevertheless, whilst no doubt remains regarding the object of the question, one can call into question the subject, that is, one’s own way of thinking about the categories of “private sector”, “businesses”, “economy”, “society”, “individuals”, and “development”.

Humanitarian workers are currently raising the issue of the private sector’s role in development with a view to organising a transition towards autonomous, sustainable development. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the question of the role of the private sector as a “lever” for development is as old as the concept of development itself.

Hence, in order to understand the current configuration of the specific part of the private sector which is that of agri-food transformation in urban Ouagadougou, it is necessary to take a brief historical tour through different conceptions of the private sector and its involvement in the process of development.

The private sector in the service of development: from neoliberal policies to the recognition of the informal sector

It is important to note that, in the recent history of some African countries, businesses were recognised as essential vectors in solid and lasting economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, the international community was imposing liberalising policies on Africa by means of structural adjustment plans, which strongly limited the State’s management of the economic sphere, thereby celebrating the private sector and the opening of the free market as the real motors of development.

In Burkina Faso, structural adjustment came relatively late compared to other African states, taking place in 1991[1]. From this date on, there was a certain revival of interest in national entrepreneurs which came to embody the hopes and expectations of governments, development organisations and sponsors.

Nevertheless, initiatives aiming to support private businesses in the subregion are numerous and, generally speaking, badly coordinated. The research carried out during these years by the economist Pascal Labazée on support organisations and business services clearly show the uncontrolled and limited effects created by these interventions' lack of harmony and regulation.

The studies carried out by Labazée are valuable as historical documents, since they reveal a picture of the Burkinabe private sector during this period. In 1988, Labazée published « Entreprises et entrepreneurs du Burkina Faso »[2], which contained a typology of Burkinabe entrepreneurs: the important merchant, the civil servant who had gone into business, the young management graduate, the professional with field experience[3]. We will see how these categories have evolved below.

Labazée's research reveals the gap between, on the one hand, the scale of the liberal opening of the market, and on the other, the response capacities of private operators to measures designed to encourage their growth. In Burkina Faso, as in other countries in Africa, the transition towards adjustment merely revealed the weakness of the productive activities around natural resources, the modest opportunities for return on investments, and the fragility of local business networks[4].

Structural adjustment plans had violent consequences for Burkinabe society. The reduction of employment in the civil service and the end of the systematic hiring of administration graduates led to a steep increase in unemployment.

And yet, adjustment was not limited to the payroll reductions or to the restructuring of budgets and payment balances, nor to the reform of public accounts. It was accompanied, more generally, by measures aiming to replace state regulation of activities with an equilibrium determined by the market price, which quickly led to fluctuating prices of basic goods.

The impact of adjustments on the lives of households was therefore significant and tragic. The reduction in real incomes in the public sector, the decrease in company employees, and the rising prices of consumer products all led to a spike in poverty rates, whose consequences on the private sector included, on the one hand, a loss of dynamism in internal markets following the decline in solvable demand, and on the other, a proliferation of micro-activities for survival.

The increase in poverty and the growth of inequalities called the credibility of the World Bank into question. The latter decided to change tack by making "the fight against poverty", a consensual subject, the centre of its action[5].

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[1] **Fauré Y.A., Labazée P., 2000, *Petits patrons africains. Entre l'assistance et le marché*. Karthala, Paris.**

[2] **Labazée P. 1998, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du Burkina Faso*, Karthala, Paris.**

[3] ***Ibidem* p. 15**

[4] **Fauré Y.A., Labazée P., 2000, *Petits patrons africains. Entre l'assistance et le marché*. Karthala, Paris, p. 17**

[5] **Cling J.P. *et al.*, « Processus participatifs et lutte contre la pauvreté : vers de nouvelles relations entre les acteurs ? », *L'Économie politique* 2002/4 (n° 16), p. 32-54**

In 1990, for the first time, the World Bank explicitly devoted its Report on World Development to this issue[6]. Poverty then became a recurrent theme within international development organisations. Nevertheless, the World Bank and the UNDP[7], in their reports on poverty, persisted with the idea that the adoption of reforms that were favourable to the market remained the only possible strategy to generate growth and improve opportunities for poor people[8].

On the other hand, faced with the clear failure of the liberal opening of the markets and the enormity of the social cost, critical voices arose against internal institutions and suggested alternatives which, in reality, differed only in their appearance.

The idea emerged, first amongst development theorists, and then amongst aid practitioners, that development in Africa could not be pursued according to the Western model.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the anthropologist Hart Katy, using a simple pleonasm, drew attention to the existence in Africa of an "informal economy". What for the anthropologist was a mere tautology became a successful term amongst economists and all those who had never imagined that sociocultural factors might play a role in the management of economic activities[9].

The great success of this concept transformed the expression into a portmanteau to house all the behaviours which did not fit into an economic rationality based solely on the calculation of costs and benefits, and all the activities which escaped the control of the state and its taxes, from an ethnocentric perspective,

Whilst international organisations expected the informal sector to disappear with industrial development, others saw the informal economy as a kind of symbol of an "African specificity" which needed to be preserved and supported. Certain development specialists argued that informal businesses were amongst the few economic actors who offered a way out of the employment crisis, and of the limits of an exhausted formal sector. The informal sector was described as a space of creativity, innovation, ingenuity and social inventiveness in the lower strata of society and ended up embodying an ideal alternative to Western-style modernist development.

In 1998, Serge Latouche published « L'Autre Afrique: entre don et marché ». It was one of the most important critiques of development as the "Westernisation of the world": a gradual process of destruction of traditional societies by a Western model which was neither reproducible nor generalisable, but merely a means of dominating the world[10]. Serge Latouche did not suggest an alternative development, but an alternative *to* development, implying entirely different concepts of progress, life, wealth, and time, which he conceptualised with the idea of degrowth.

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[6] **Banque mondiale, 2001, *Rapport sur le développement dans le monde 2000-2001 : combattre la pauvreté*, éd. Eska, Paris (English version published in 2000 by Oxford University Press, New York)**

[7] **Programme des Nations unies pour le développement (PNUD) — 1997, Rapport mondial sur le développement humain. — 1999, La lutte contre la pauvreté en Afrique subsaharienne. Paris, Economica. — 2000a, Vaincre la pauvreté humaine. — 2000b, Rapport mondial sur le développement humain.**

[8] **Bénicourt E. « La pauvreté selon le PNUD et la Banque mondiale », *Études rurales*, 2001/3 (n° 159-160), p. 35-53. URL : https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-rurales-2001-3-page-35.htm**

[9] **Hart K., 1995, « L'entreprise africaine et l'économie informelle. Réflexions autobiographiques. » p.115-125 in Ellis S. Et Fauré Y. 1995, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs africains*. Ed. Kartala-Orstom, Paris.**

[10] **Latouche S., 1998, L'autre Afrique entre don et marché. Paris, Albin Michel.**

At the same time, fair trade was developing, along with other forms of solidarity economies.

The one thing that all these theories of counter-development and social and solidarity economies have in common is not the rejection of the idea of economy, or of the market, as a matrix of development, but simply the idea of "re-embedding" them in the social and cultural fabric, as if culture, economy and society were spare parts to be assembled at will.

Beyond the questionable foundations of the social and solidarity economy[11], it is important to note that the idea of development as an "economic process" is not rejected. In fact, the dominant paradigm of development as an "economic" issue is not called into question. What these "alternative" voices want is only to include the least fortunate in this economic process. They offer a change of scale and of target, but they do not suggest a different model.

On the contrary. By demanding its "democratisation", the alternatives merely reinforce the dominant paradigm and remain trapped in the ideology that sees the economy as the only motor of development.

Some years before, in 1973, a book came out which was to subsequently strongly influence practices of international aid. It was "Small is Beautiful", by the economist Ernest Friedrich Schumacher, in which the author draws attention to the problem of mass production and its dangers[12]. In its place, he suggests adopting an intermediary technology used in the context of small, decentralised work units. The book became a major reference for certain NGOs who focused their activities on the support of small production units.

The myth of the poor entrepreneur and the emergence of the survival economy

This context, characterised by greater monetarisation, growing financial intermediation of transactions and a general financialisation of societies favoured the development of microfinance[13]. In 1976, the first Grameen Bank opened in Bangladesh, and its model was soon replicated throughout the developing world.

This particular configuration stems from the idea that credit is the foremost financial need for poor populations, and that credit will enable them to efficiently increase their incomes.

Because they share the same economic matrix, microfinance and the idealisation of the informal economy as the African road to development converge around the myth of the "poor entrepreneur" [14] (Fouillet et al. 2007). By supposedly fighting poverty by means of income-generating productive activity, the myth of the "poor entrepreneur" resides in the idea that if only the poor were doted with capital, their entrepreneurial potential would develop. In spite of a number of studies which warned against confusing poverty with financial exclusion and monetary incomes, the myth of the "poor entrepreneur" spread

[11] **Rubino R., 2015, *La production du coton biologique et équitable au Mali. Au-delà du don et du marché*. Paris, L'Harmattan.**

[12] **Schumacher E.F., 1973, *Small is beautiful. Une société à mesure d'homme*. Paris, Points Éditions.**

[13] **Servet J.M. 2006, Banquiers aux pieds nus, Paris, Odile Jacob.**

[14] **Fouillet C., Guérin I., Morvant-Roux S., Roesch M., Servet J.M., 2007, *Le microcrédit au péril du néolibéralisme et de marchands d'illusions. Manifeste pour une inclusion financière socialement responsable*, Revue du MAUSS 2007/1 n° 29, pp. 329-350 , Paris , La Decouverte**

transversally throughout most development organisations, thanks to its implicit message which transforms the poor into "the active" [15].

The priority given to the development of income-generating activities, enabling the diversification and securing of income whilst minimising risks, affected all areas of development, including those concerning food security. In fact, at the end of the 1990s, decision-makers and experts "came to consider that by fighting against poverty, we are contributing to the fight against food insecurity" [16]. As Pierre Janin notes, at the same time, the concepts of "food autonomy" and "food poverty" emerged and expressed an individual's capacity or incapacity to buy basic foodstuffs using monetary resources, when they were not produced.

From this point on, methods of aid action evolved and went from more or less disinterested support for different types of activity to an "economisation" of need and a "financialisation" of aid[17]. It was in this context that the number of small "informal" businesses exploded, as IGAs: Income-Generating Activities.

The public authorities (central state, decentralised collectives), for their part, observed a certain ambiguity in the face of the emerging informal sector. Their position has always oscillated between *laissez-faire*, so as not to compromise the survival of certain social groups, and the imposition of more extensive taxes. In 1992, the "contribution of the informal sector" (CIS) was instituted as a simplified, unified form of taxing small businesses, excluding all other forms[18].

So, based on these considerations, it seems possible to advance the hypothesis that the valorisation of IGAs (income-generating activities) by international aid and institutionalisation with the CIS regime transforms and crystallises the informal market into a veritable parallel economic system: the survival economy.

By survival economy we mean income-generating activities, multiple domestic activities, forms of self-employment allowing families and households to meet their fundamental needs (nutrition, health), purely for their survival. The survival economy can be distinguished from the informal sector and all other spontaneous forms of coping, since it structures itself and multiplies within a specific sociocultural environment: that of international aid. For this reason, in this article, "the humanitarian economy" will be used synonymously with "the survival economy".

Methodology

This article is based on an ethnographic enquiry carried out around local initiatives in the field of agri-food supply and transformation, in the city of Ouagadougou. The aim was to study the roles, capacities for action, and interests of these socioeconomic actors in a real transition towards autonomous development and sustainable food security.

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[15] ***Ibidem***

[16] **Janin P., 2018, *Une géographie de l'insécurité alimentaire en Afrique de l'Ouest. Temporalités et spatialité du risque et de la décision*. Volume 2 : L'insécurité alimentaire: entre géographie du risque et géopolitique du développement. Habilitation thesis presented by Pierre Janin on May 27th 2016.**

[17] **Fauré Y.A., Labazée P., 2000, *Petits patrons africains. Entre l'assistance et le marché*. Karthala, Paris, p. 542.**

[18] **Ibidem pag. 149**

This research is part of the specific scientific field of anthropology. Hence, the methods used were the classic ones that characterise the discipline: participant observation and qualitative interviews carried out amongst selected individuals or groups. Nevertheless, the approach by way of material culture (objects, technical equipment, technical know-how) was favoured as the main method of enquiry. Material culture was the basis for the reconstruction and, subsequently, the analysis of the meanings and imaginaries projected by the actors onto these objects[19].

With regard to the study of micro-units of artisanal transformation and semi-industrial microbusinesses, we favoured the "pathway method" [20]. This ethnographic, microsocial method, which aims to retrace the life pathways of agri-food microbusinesses, allowed us to observe the actors in detail, to list and describe the obstacles and facilities of their activities and to examine all kinds of material, social and symbolic constraints. Studying local agri-food transformation actors by means of the pathway method consisted in reconstructing the stages which organised their practices: 1) the initial stage of supplying, stocking and storing raw materials, 2) the moments of transformation with the mobilisation of particular know-how and machines, 3) the sale stage with the fixing of prices and access to the market.

At the same time, objects enabled us to move on to an enquiry into know-how and therefore the description of the "technical milieu", which is to say the sum of technical knowledge of a society in which its members find ways to meet their needs[21].

At this point, attention was focused on the introduction of innovative techniques or on the reasons for their absence. Furthermore, whilst following the contributions of studies in economic anthropology, the object was the material basis from which I was able to question the social organisation of its production: social relationships of production, the question of property, hierarchy, redistribution practices, and therefore the articulation of these relationships in the wider framework of other relationships of power that are socially and culturally shared by the group[22].

Moreover, the study of each unit of transformation involved a parallel study on its supporting structure. From the beginning, this method was considered with the aim of circumventing any risk of essentialising these microbusinesses or succumbing to an "ethnicisation" or "culturisation" of the specific category of the "Burkinabe microentrepreneur" [23].

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[19] Haudricourt A.G. 1964, La technologie culturelle, in *Ethnologie générale*, Encyclopédie La Pléiade, Paris, Gallimard; Leroi-Gourhan A., 1943, (1971), L'homme et la matière - Évolution et techniques, vol. 1, Paris, Albin Michel.;Creswell R., 1983, Transfert de techniques et chaînes opératoires, in revue Techniques et culture, n° 2; Warnier J.P. 1999, Construire la culture matérielle – L'homme qui pensait avec ses doigts, Paris, PUF.

[20] Alami S., Desjeux D., Garabuau-Moussaoui I., 2008, *Les méthodes qualitatives*, PUF, que sais- je ? collection

[21] Leroi-Gourhan A. 1964, Le geste et la parole, 2 vol., Paris, Albin Michel.

[22] Godelier M., 1966, *Rationalité et irrationalité en économie*. Ed. Maspero, Paris; Meillassoux C., 1975, Femmes, greniers et capitaux. Paris, Édition Maspero; Terray E., 1969, Le marxisme devant les sociétés « primitives », Maspero, Paris.

[23] Althabe G., Selim M., 1991, « Désacraliser l'entreprise : un terrain ethnologique banal », in *Journal des anthropologues* n. 43-44.

Agri-food days and building the research sample

Agri-food days were a kind of food fair that took place at the Maison du Peuple in Ouagadougou, from November 28th to December 3rd, 2017, and they perfectly symbolise the "survival economy". The theme of this year's event was "The emergence and development of SMEs/SMIs in Burkinabe agri-food: challenges, issues and perspectives". The days marked the beginning of my fieldwork in Ouagadougou and it was here that I was able to identify most of the transformation activities which I then selected for my sample.

Participants in the agri-food days are; for the most part, groups of women selected in the context of a specific NGO or association project, according to ethnic, geographic and sexual criteria ("Fulani women", "women of Koudougou", etc). Less often, there are micro-units of individual transformation, which also benefit from the support of NGOs who, in both cases, cover the cost of the stand which is between 50 000 and 125 000 francs CFA.

The products on display were, for the most part, products that had been transformed in an artisanal manner. The limited variety was made up of ingredients that are typical of traditional food from Ouagadougou.

Over the course of the event, I was able to talk with certain transformers. This was an opportunity for me to start asking the questions that were at the heart of my project: the organisation of these transformation units, the structuring of work, supply methods for raw materials and the distribution of finished products.

Whilst following my hypothesis, I build my sample on the basis of two kinds of products: cereal-based products and dairy products. The aim was to identify two broad categories to allow me to make internal comparisons according to the product specificities, but also transversal comparisons to grasp what was characteristic of a category: that of microentrepreneurs.

Secondly, within each category, I identified two different levels: artisanal micro-units and semi-industrial ones.

The first important observation was not only the presence of NGOs as actors or promoters of mini-units of agri-food transformation, but rather the determining influence which they had on the design and construction of their particular model. Hence, the data collected showed that, regardless of other possible partners, the relationship with an NGO or the experience of its participation in a project were the real structuring elements of a mini-unit of transformation, according to their life pathways. In practice, NGO support takes the form of a series of training sessions, fairs, meetings and, especially, a vast typology of financial aid or subsidies. In this complex web of relationships involving micro-units, other partnerships take on a completely secondary role.

Over the course of the enquiry, it became clear that, in the domain of cereal transformation, Afrique Verte was the main NGO supporting artisanal microactivities, whilst the GRET (a French NGO) supported semi-industrial businesses.

On the other hand, when it comes to dairy, for more than a decade Oxfam (and more recently, GRET) have supported mini-dairies. But semi-industrial dairies are often the result of public partnerships (as in the case of the Cissin dairy), or an international organisation such as the UNDP, in the case of the LMP dairy (Laiterie Moderne et Professionelle).

Artisanal micro-units for transformation

Artisanal micro-units for transformation are foremost characterised by the fact that the place of production coincides with the family dwelling. Sometimes, a room is used as a storeroom, or to keep equipment, but some stages of the transformation take place outside.

Another characteristic of these units is the sex and the age of their promoters. Food transformation is a "gendered" sector almost entirely reserved for women, in the continuation and crystallisation of a tradition where men are producers or pastoralists, and women transformers.

This situation is not, in fact, "spontaneous". It is even less a result of an enduring tradition. The configuration should be read as a result of international aid programmes around transformation which explicitly target "women".

In truth, in their attempt to respect "tradition", these programmes are merely reproducing it.

In the same way, the advanced age of the women reflects another principle that is firmly anchored in NGO action: relying on "experienced" women, who in their eyes are more "legitimate" to manage the sector.

Hence, in my sample, the women owners of these microactivities are all between 50 and 60, with the exception of two, who are 40 years old. Most are married, but often (in two out of three cases, for cereal production), the transformation unit is the only income source for the family, the husbands being unemployed.

Hence, the money earned from the unit is not used as capital, but as income to meet the families' basic needs: children's schooling, health, clothes, ceremonies, and often, the emigration of one or several members of the family. Sometimes, the transformers are widows who lost everything after the death of their husbands and the inheriting of his goods by members of his family. Sometimes, also, the women are former civil servants who, once retired, see transformation activities as a way of supplementing their income. We will see below the extent to which this situation represents an obstacle for innovation.

Following the customary norms, the money earned from the activity is redistributed amongst the family in two directions, ascending and descending, which must be interpreted not only as a means of sharing, but also as a kind of insurance, a way of guaranteeing a safety net around activities which are always seen as fragile.

None of the women inherited the job or the transformation units. What they say they have inherited is just the "know-how", that is, the techniques of preparing certain food products. Sometimes, the choice of job was made opportunistically after training by an NGO, or after having expressed the desire to participate in a project, especially in the dairy field. In other cases, the women were able to reinvest money in the unit that they earned in the market as salespeople.

Nevertheless, the fundamental financial contribution which enabled them to begin and continue their activity came from NGOs. In my sample, these NGOs were Afrique Verte for cereals and Oxfam for dairy. We will see the extent to which these NGOs' contributions are a condition for the functioning of these transformation units.

There is a significant difference between the contributions of Oxfam and Afrique Verte. Oxfam's support takes the form of extended donations, whereas Afrique Verte is the only NGO to enable individuals to get credit from banks, since it acts as a guarantor. Afrique Verte contributes on several levels to the existence of cereal transformation units. Having gathered all of its members into a network (RTCF: Réseau des Transformatrices de Céréales

du Faso), the NGO finances their travel and pays for stands at fairs. If we consider the fact that most of the unit's turnover takes place during these fairs, and taking into account the prohibitive prices of their stands, the importance of its support becomes clear.

For its part, Afrique Verte arranges for regular training to be given to members of the network by the best transformers, in order to "keep them at the same level". For the same reason, the NGO invites its members to share their "market", but also their "innovation". The aim is for "a unit to be able to rely on help from others to respond to consequential orders" [24].

This strange way of working shows that NGOs are not the best placed to encourage entrepreneurial spirit. This is for two reasons: the social vocation of the organisations, but also the community filter through which they continue to see Africa in a stereotyped way.

During an interview, the head of GRET admitted that individual businesses work a lot better than grouped ones. In spite of this, the biggest difficulty for the NGO is to obtain funding for businesses from sponsors. In fact, NGOs have made aid for the most disadvantaged their motto. Founded on affect[25], they have often, and still convey a miserable image of Africa in order to "raise awareness" amongst the public. Now, although NGOs are starting to see their activities with a more critical eye, changing their narrative in favour of entrepreneurs is turning out to be a difficult exercise.

Concerning the organisation of production, the micro-units do not have specific means of production. In the sector of cereal transformation, apart from a few driers, there are only rather rudimentary tools which can be found in every household, like pans or plastic basins, etc.

Most of the work is done by hand.

For dairy transformation, there is more equipment.

Far from being the result of heterogenous strategies on behalf of the promoters, this difference is, once again, the reflection of the diverse support which they receive from the two NGOs. As we said earlier, Oxfam's support takes the form of free supplies of equipment, whereas Afrique Verte supports and encouragers its transformers to ask for credit by acting as a guarantor.

Hence, the equipment in mini-dairies was not bought with capital from the activity, but donated by Oxfam throughout its action plans. When this is equipment no longer works, the managers are not in a position to buy new equipment or to repair the old. Often, this equipment is not even used, since women lack the technical skills to operate it.

In the same way, what little equipment there is in cereal transformation units are donations from NGOs which the units have acquired throughout their lifetime. In fact, the promoters prefer to use their credit (which they can request thanks to Afrique Verte) to buy raw materials. For these women, credit is as desired as it is feared, out of concern for not being able to pay it back and also of the "shame" that would result from this. Hence, buying raw materials is more reassuring for them, because once they are transformed, they are sure to be able to honour their credit.

The production rhythm is discontinuous. In cereal transformation units, but also in dairies, production happens intermittently. Dependence on cycles of nature is a common constraint for both kinds of unit. Hence, transformation activities must be adapted to

[24] **Interview with the head of the programme for Afrique Verte**

[25] **Boltanski L. 1993, *La souffrance à distance. Morale humanitaire, media et politique*. Paris, Éditions Métaillé; Rubino R., 2015, *Dans les engrenages d'une ONG internationale de développement. Gouverner les ingouvernables*. Paris, L'Harmattan.**

production. When production decreases, with the advent of the dry season, they have to suspend their activities.

In reality, it must be recognised that this is true both ways. In fact, the low transformation capacities of this artisanal units are not able to absorb production when it increases too much. And, in this case, it is transformation that limits production.

Nevertheless, supply problems are also accompanied by problems of space to stock the raw materials. Space is often a constraint, whether the production area is within the home, or in a courtyard next door.

There is another significant difficulty regarding the finished products: that of packaging. These are often low-quality and end up damaging the products. The mediocrity of the packaging is therefore another factor limiting the rhythm of production. So as not to leave the products for too long in the packaging, the women prefer to exhaust their stocks before producing more. In spite of this, the promoters are not willing to invest more to improve the quality, since the price of packaging remains too high and ends up having an excessive incidence on the cost of the finished product.

However, the main reason that leads the promoters to wait until the stock is exhausted before starting production again is the need for liquidity. In these kinds of units, where the lack of liquidity is rather important, production does not follow the capitalist system’s cycle of Capital – Merchandise – Capital, but rather that of Merchandise – Capital – Merchandise. In this cycle, money from sales serves only to buy new raw materials. In fact, these units do not produce capital, but only margins which correspond to the difference between the price of raw materials and that of the transformed products that are sold.

The discontinuous rhythm of production implies strong variation in the number of employees, which changes according to the workload. Often, the workers are paid by the task or in relation to the quantity of products that are sold.

There is no real division of labour in these production units, except that established by sex, and, sometimes, a difference between educated women and illiterates, when it comes to carrying out specific tasks involving putting labels on the products.

In fact, the determining factor in the allocation of tasks to employees is trust. Trust is not only linked to the proper execution of tasks, but also, and especially, to the ability to keep the secret of the recipe for producing the products.

As for the products, they had another common characteristic: each label displayed the name of the producer, a telephone number, and sometimes a photograph of the group taken during the transformation work. This way of linking the product to its producer, and the need to mark one’s identity in the object, prevented us from classifying these products as mere “merchandise”, but rather as “human objects”, free from any process of alienation or detachment from the object that is produced. This kind of personification and identification with the products suggests a mistrust of distribution circuits. The transformers prefer not only to sell their own products in the family courtyard, but they also travel with them, for example, to the fairs. In this way, the products do not take on surplus value in the distribution and their price remains fixed in relation to the production price. Whilst on first glance, this behaviour can be positively interpreted and identified with the advantages of the “short-circuit”, in truth, it only adds to the promoters’ tasks, who end up wanting to manage another link in the chain – that of distribution. We will see below how this multiplication of

tasks and desire to manage all of the stages of production can become a significant limiting factor for these units.

Nevertheless, behind this attachment to the product lies the fear of being copied, which was a recurrent subject during the interviews. This issue, which resonated loudly in all of the conversations, has very precise causes. These do not stem from unfair competition, but from low levels of education, and therefore a simplicity of knowledge and technology used to produce the foodstuffs.

As we have seen, most of these promoters are older women who are using traditional, domestic know-how to create their products. In the case of dairy transformers, this knowledge was learnt during NGO training. In both cases, these are "common" skills, which are rather "fixed", and do not leave much room for invention. Above all, these production processes do not require any knowledge of "exclusive" tools.

In the cereal sector, traditional knowledge, passed down from mother to daughter, and based on the use of local products, is nevertheless accessible to everyone. In the same way, the knowledge imparted by NGO training, for example the pasteurisation of milk which, in fact, requires only a saucepan and a source of heat, does not seem to encourage individual initiatives.

In fact, the women's low levels of education and the low-level technology, which are, in theory, the conditions for transforming the poor into "entrepreneurs", inevitably become factors that limit innovation.

What is called "innovation" for this kind of survival activity is not, in fact, innovation at all. It is, rather, a kind of "culinary creativity" where new kinds of mixes are experimented with, using raw materials which are easily identifiable in the markets.

In my opinion, this is how we should read the "experiments" of M. Traore, who was rewarded by Afrique Verte with a series of "innovation bonuses": rice noodles, cereal-based spaghetti (sorghum, fonio), soja skewers, or "magic" couscous made of young white maize, to be eaten with milk or yoghurt. These recipes, which are easily reproducible, were then taken up by other producers, to the extent that M. Traore stopped producing them.

Indeed, once the ingredients are identified, the "secret" (a very important concept in the business world) is soon revealed due to the simplicity of the production techniques used and free access to raw materials.

The most significant consequence of this lack of real innovation is the exponential multiplication of these activities, which are reproduced following a kind of cellular mitosis. The simplicity of the technical know-how allows for their rapid multiplication. It often happens that an employee, having learnt the basic techniques, decides to open their own transformation unit having received the support of Afrique Verte, which, for its part, encourages such initiatives.

However, a segmentation of supply leads to a segmentation of demand. Indeed, the production of homogenous products encourages the fragmentation of markets and the dispersal of consumers. In the future, it will be physical proximity to clients that will make the difference between these identical units, because "if you want to sell, you have to be in the street" [26]. In Ouagadougou, the producers seek out the consumers, and not the other way around.

[26] **Interview with a promoter**

This multiplication of the supply results in a loss of income for these small units that are not economically autonomous.

The questions that arose from this observation were twofold: how, in spite of their low rate of return, can these units continue to exist on the market, even intermittently? And secondly, why are they unable to evolve towards a semi-industrial stage?

The reason can again be found in the practices of NGOs, which enable the units to survive in a way that is completely disconnected from the laws of the market, by means of a system which organises credit or equipment subsidies in the form of donations.

In fact, the NGOs’ aid model, which aims to keep these mini-units “at the same level”, prevents all process of selection. On the contrary, it fixes these activities in a common mediocrity. Hence, these production units remain in a proto-industrial stage where there is neither progression nor regression.

There is a lack of any kind of “organic” solidarity between the units, or of division of labour which might lead them to work together or to undertake a process of synthesis. On the contrary, we can observe a kind of “mechanical” solidarity where these units are identical to each other, but function independently of each other, turned inward like monads.

Indeed, the low rate of return of their activities and the lack of an organised industry (hence the problems of supply, but also of waste disposal), trap these units in a loop. Hence, for example, in the absence of a regular supply of raw materials, the women decide to cultivate the raw materials they need in small plots. In other cases, the producers decide to collect the waste from production to feed animals, and they start to practice animal husbandry. This strategy comes from a widespread behaviour amongst women in the villages. In the bush, animals represent a kind of “bank” for women, which enables them to hoard their incomes. In the towns, this proves that whilst women have assimilated the banking system for credit, they have not done so for deposits. This is not without its consequences, since, if the credit mechanism continues to be used independently of the complementary deposit mechanism, there will never be autonomy from financial systems.

This multiplication of economic activities affects all of the units in my sample in a transversal way, be they artisanal or semi-industrial, since none of them are profitable. In fact, there is no business that is devoted to the production of a single product or a single productive activity. They constantly manage several economic activities in parallel. Pascal Labazée and others after him saw this multiplication of activities as a strategy linked to the “diversification of risk”.

Nevertheless, the impressive homogeneity of this behaviour led me to go beyond this rather ethnocentric reading, and to classify this phenomenon as a constraint rather than a choice. Because of the absolute conformity of the behaviour generated, I have reason to believe that it is not a chosen “strategy”, but an unavoidable necessity derived from the unprofitable nature of the main activity, or in any case, related to the strong irregularity of its production.

Given all of these considerations, it is possible to advance the hypothesis that this extremely segmented and fragmented system of production, where there is no division of labour except sexual division, where the production units are not economically autonomous, where property of the means of production does not exist, where there is no fixed wage system or regular production, where products function more as human objects than as merchandise, where there is no capital or profit generated, but only margins used as revenue, this system of production therefore cannot be classified in a capitalist-type system.

So, according to my own interpretation, these mini-units of production cannot in any way be seen as small businesses.

On the other hand, the elements that were discussed, interpreted on the basis of anthropological knowledge, lead one to believe that these production units, despite their move into town, continue to function according to "domestic modes of production". By DMP we mean the traditional modes of production which regulates the functioning of households in the villages and which has been extensively described by anthropologists[27].

Nevertheless, the field data, the reconstruction of social relationships and relationships of power and therefore of legitimacy, and finally the analysis of the material conditions of existence of these units show that they are not "relics" or vestiges of the past, but a contemporary system, maintained by the actors of international aid. This system, based on the characteristics of traditional or "informal" modes of production, has ended up producing "survival economies" which function outside of the capitalist system.

Like the informal market, these economies function beyond the reach of the state. And yet, they are structured, organised and legitimated, not by traditional powers, but by NGOs and actors of aid. For this reason, from here on, I will suggest abandoning the use of the term "informal sector" to designate these survival microactivities. It seems clear to me that they no longer display any elements of cultural or social behaviour relating to specific groups of individuals. Their content is only "traditional" in appearance. In truth, it is impossible to include these practices in community spheres because their *raison d'être*, and therefore their legitimacy, is rooted in recent configurations of international aid.

Above all, the term "informal market" seems obsolete with regard to the implicit description of the relationships between these microactivities and the state. Firstly, because the CIS system (contribution of the informal sector) has enabled the state to include the informal market in its regulations. Secondly, because, as we will see, even when these microactivities take place beyond the reach of the state, they no longer place themselves in a complementary dimension in relation to the latter's economic activities, since they clearly operate according to a different economic system.

Unlike the informal market, which can be interpreted as a sector whose *raison d'être* can be found in relation to the formal activities of the state, whilst participating in its economic system, the fundamental particularity of survival economies is that they belong to another economic and political system.

This system, which was born in the context of actions in the fight against poverty with the aim of generating monetary revenue, has developed disproportionately and continues to proliferate. At the very beginning of the 2000s, in one of his last contributions on the subject[28], Labazée warned against the risk of confusing these survival microactivities with small businesses, of confusing their needs and therefore, of the danger of producing support systems for microbusinesses which were not adapted to their requirements.

Eighteen years later, we can see that not only has the dividing line between microbusinesses and survival activities been erased, but there has been an exponential

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[27] **Balandier G., 1963, *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*, Bibliothèque de Sociologie contemporaine, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris; Meillassoux C., 1975, Femmes, greniers et capitaux. Paris, Édition Maspero; Sahalins M., 1976, *Âge de pierre, âge d'abondance. L'économie des sociétés primitives*. Paris, Gallimard ; Terray E., 1969, Le marxisme devant les sociétés « primitives », Maspero, Paris.**

[28] **Fauré Y.A., Labazée P., 2000, *Petits patrons africains. Entre l'assistance et le marché*. Karthala, Paris.**

multiplication of survival activities which have ended up taking the place of the private sector, thanks to the strong support mechanisms offered by NGOs.

In fact, it is possible to observe that the expansion of survival activities has been accompanied by the contraction of industrial or semi-industrial activities which, in the absence of specific support, end up either entering the survival economy or disappearing.

In this system, the promotion/protection of tradition, the respect for ancestral social identities, and the encouragement to consume local products made according to customary rules, must be interpreted as the mechanisms of an ideological apparatus designed to justify and legitimate "survival economies". These neo-traditionalist narratives, as well as their ritual manifestations such as the Koudougou in Faso[29] or the agri-food days, aim to trap those who are still denied access to modernity in an "apparent" tradition.

Broken ladders and other limits of the "humanitarian economy"

Since they belong to two different systems, respectively the survival economy and the capitalist economy, we can observe no continuity between artisanal activities and semi-industrial businesses. In fact, the mini-units of production never evolve to the next level.

There are only broken ladders between the artisanal and semi-industrial units.

The only case of progress which I encountered was that of the FasoRiibo business, which was created in 1994 and developed into a mechanised, semi-artisanal business. However, by looking at the pathway of the business, we can see that this change of level was not due to the accumulation of business capital. In fact, the development of the business was only possible thanks to a series of awards won by its promoter, and especially a World Bank prize, awarded in 2002. At the time, the World Bank had asked them to choose between a cash prize and a material investment consisting of a semi-mechanised production unit. It opted for the second possibility.

The semi-industrial businesses in my sample were selected on the basis of a list of cereal-transforming businesses, provided by the Maison des Entreprises.

In this list, the only active local businesses were those that currently collaborate with GRET. The rest were businesses that had closed or that were not in production. Incidentally, the GRET businesses were not in production when I arrived in Ouagadougou.

The situation of the semi-industrial businesses was even worse than that of the artisanal businesses. Compared with the latter, they register significant losses when they are not in production, due to their fixed costs (equipment and employees).

Most of these businesses seized upon a collaboration with GRET as a "survival" strategy. However, this strategy did not prove to be fruitful, except at the beginning. At present, the absence of markets prevents them from producing continuously. On the one hand, their

[29] **The Koudougou of Faso, which took place between October 27th and 29th 201, is a vast market of national food products organised by the NGO Oxfam. This big food fair, currently in its fourth edition, took place at the Maison du Peuple in Ouagadougou. It was led by women who had been invited to cook and to offer the public food based on local products like maize, national rice, local milk, niébé, fonio, soya, moringa, etc. A cooking competition involving local food and drink was also organised on October 18th, with a jury and a prize awarded to the winner of each category. The fair had three main goals: 1) to show the know-how of men and women in the restaurant business, by means of the variety of dishes using local products, 2) to promote the consumption of national products, 3) to enable Burkinabe consumers to buy directly from producers and women-transformers during the exhibition-sale.**

main clients, NGOs, order less and less products and seem to be moving towards partnerships that are already consolidated. On the other hand, the local market is not able to absorb their production either. They are therefore in a real bind. Moreover, the partnership with GRET has revealed itself to be a double-edged sword. Whilst it has enabled them to ensure at least part of their sales, the rigidity of the certification norms for infant flours has prevented all forms of innovation.

In reality, the real factor blocking innovation comes; once again, from a lack of skills and knowledge of the sector.

These businesses do not have sufficient mastery of the technical know-how to advance and produce innovation. This is because the knowledge has been "given" to them by NGOs. This gift was given without being "alienated" since the businesses are far from having acquired control over it. It is therefore a "gift" without "appropriation" which merely consolidates their dependence on NGOs, whether for the composition of the flour, or the vitamins supplied by GRET.

In this "gift of knowledge", we can once again identify all of the particularities of this form of exchange which "obligates as it gives", and which has been well analysed by anthropologists[30].

Hence, the businesses which were supposed to increase their profits thanks to GRET remain trapped in the humanitarian economy as well.

However, unlike the artisanal businesses, the semi-industrial businesses are not exclusive to one gender. Amongst these promoters, there are men as well as women. Their background is completely different to that of the artisanal businesses. It calls to mind the categories which Labazée spoke of a few years ago: civil servants who have gone into business, professionals with field experience, or foreign investors[31].

Apart from GRET for cereal businesses, the semi-industrial units benefit from another kind of support where "governmental" structures such as the UNIDO, the UNDP and the state make their appearance. Nevertheless, these businesses still struggle to survive. They are also forced to multiply their domains of productive activity. In this case, the promoters retrain, often as consultants or trainers.

The analysis of the milk industry clearly shows the causal link between the low profitability of semi-industrial businesses and the rapid expansion of humanitarian or survival economies.

The exponential growth of mini-dairies, which numbered 85 in 2005 and 430 in 2018, has had a significant effect on the activity of semi-industrial dairy transformation units. In Burkina, local milk remains a scarce resource, due to the complexity of the industry and its complete disorganisation. In the absence of regular supplies, semi-industrial dairies operate below capacity and they are often forced to use imported, powdered milk in order to survive.

The boom in mini-dairies has only exacerbated the dispersion of the raw material and further reduced its availability. This is the case of the Faada dairy (a semi-industrial, state-owned dairy that only transforms local milk), whose supply problems began following the arrival of mini-dairies in the region, set up by an NGO. Currently, the implementation of the PDL-ZPO private-public partnership, which aims to build a large factory in Ouagadougou

[30] **Mauss M., 1924, *Essai sur le don* Paris, PUF Éditions ; Godelier M. 2008, L'énigme du don, Editions Champs.**

[31] **Labazée P. 1998, *Entreprises et entrepreneurs du Burkina Faso*, Karthala, Paris.**

capable of transforming 30 000 litres of milk per day, reveals, once again, the contradictions between this kind of industrial, modernist model and that of the mini-dairies. The two models, far from being complementary, limit each other, since they are in contradiction with each other.

The main problem is the “contemporaneity” of these two economic models, the humanitarian economy and the industrial economy, since they take place in the same temporality which is the present.

In Europe, social and solidarity economies were developed as compensatory systems, following the growth of industrial and capitalist economies. In Burkina Faso, where industrial development has not yet seen the light of day, the relationship that develops between humanitarian and industrial economies is not one of complementarity, but one of competition which implies mutual exclusion. If one compares the number of projects and NGOs encouraging humanitarian economies with the support structures intended to support microbusinesses, it is clear that this competition is completely unequal.

Moreover, it has been observed that mini-dairies can have a negative effect on the market of consumption of local milk which is struggling to become assimilated into dietary habits. In fact, often due to basic transformation techniques and non-respect of elementary hygiene norms, these artisanal units make bad-quality products which end up further alienating consumers from local milk.

Because one of the worst consequences of these survival economies in Burkinabe society is the fragmentation of the market, I have reason to believe that this inversely proportionate relationship between the activities of the humanitarian economy and semi-industrial businesses also concerns the market of cereal transformation.

The second consequence, which is no less significant, is the complete disconnection between the price of products and their production cost. As we know, the mini-units for transformation are not profitable and this does not constitute a problem for

Nevertheless, the result is prices on the market that correspond to nothing at all, unless it is to exacerbated competition with imported products.

In fact, these prices do not seem to respond to anything other than the “social function” of the humanitarian economy, since they allow food products to remain accessible to everybody, given the country’s extremely limited purchasing power.

This shows, once again, that we are dealing with an economic system that functions according to laws and logics that are completely different from those which we have become accustomed to under capitalism.

The main problem with this completely artificial system is that, because it unable to absorb production, it ends up limiting it. For example, even if the mini-dairies multiply, they will never be able to transform all of the milk produced over the winter. Hence, they constrain producers to either produce less milk or to transform it themselves, distancing them from any process of specialisation. In reality, mini-activities conceived of in the framework of the humanitarian economy destroy industries, as well as all the employment opportunities that they offer.

In fact, they are real “poverty traps”.

My conclusions diverge completely from those suggested by the study “Agri-food and the Fight against Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: the role of micro and small businesses”,

conducted in 2006 by two agronomists from GRET and Cirad, Cécile Brutin and Nicolas Bricas[32].

First of all, as indicated by the title of the study, the authors persist in mistakenly assimilating these activities of artisanal transformation to micro and small businesses, feeding the confusion surrounding these structures which belong to two different economic systems. Yet in the study, they themselves highlight the fact that these activities generate "revenue", but this contradiction between 'business" and "revenue" is given no critical examination.

Secondly, the authors positively interpret what has been described in this article as a limit of humanitarian economies, namely the extremely low cost of these products, a price that is completely disconnected from the real economy and its production costs. The argument put forward is that of "social function". For the same reason, the two agronomists consider the illegal status of these activities to be an asset, since it enables products to be sold for low prices because the transformers do not need to pay taxes.

In their study, the two agronomists claim that by ensuring the stabilisation of perishable products, these micro and small businesses allow their sale to be spread out.

On the basis of the data collected over the course of my research, the impossibility of these modest activities to absorb production, or to conserve it, was noted many times. Whether for stocks of raw materials or finished products, the lack of space was a constraint that affected most of these artisanal activities where the production unit was located in the place of residence. Moreover, issues of hygiene and low-quality packaging preclude the involvement of these businesses in the conservation of agricultural products.

However, the most questionable point in the study is the alleged ability of these activities to increase female empowerment by increasing their mobility. First of all, my field observations showed the absence of any improvement concerning the socio-political status of the women and even less an increase in power due to their mobility. In fact, any specialist of West Africa knows that, by tradition, not only have African women always been "mobile", but especially that this mobility was the basis on which their subordination to men was built. The rule of exogamous, virilocal marriage obliges women to leave their homes to go and live with their husband. For this reason, not only are they excluded from any form of inheritance within their own family, but they are also deprived of any possibility of property in the new home.

Women's mobility is therefore not the most relevant criterion with which to measure female empowerment.

In the same way, my conclusions also diverge from interpretations that tend to read these "informal mini-businesses" as a "particularity of the African tradition" [33]. In fact, not only does this kind of research neglect any description of the context of international aid that is a determining factor of these activities, but it also makes inappropriate use of concepts such as "tradition", "culture", and "identity" which make up the core around which anthropology has built up its most critical reflections[34].

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[32] **Broutin C., Bricas N., 2006** ***Agroalimentaire et lutte contre la pauvreté en Afrique subsaharienne. Le rôle des micros et petites entreprises*****. Imprimerie Chirat.**

[33] **Chaze C., Traoré F., 2000,** ***Les défis de la petite entreprise en Afrique*****. Édition-Diffusion Charles Léopold Mayer. Paris**

[34] **Amselle J.L. et M-Bokolo E., 2005, (sous la direction de)** ***Au cœur de l'ethnie. Ethnies, tribalisme et États en Afrique,*** **Paris, La Découverte.**

Most importantly, these kinds of studies ignore the importance of the "mode of production". As we will see below, the issue is not with the products that are produced, but rather their mode of production and the socio-political structures it implies. In fact, as certain anthropologists have brilliantly demonstrated, the economy is not a "domain of specific activities which can be isolated from other social relationships, but rather a specific aspect of all human activity" [35]. Economic systems are not isolated structures, but sets of activities embedded in a complex network of socio-political relationships which mutually influence each other.

The inability of the humanitarian economy to ensure food security in cities: an economic and political question

To go back to the question at the origin of this research, these mini-units of transformation are far from capable of meeting the food requirements of a city and of ensuring urban food "security".

Mini-dairies have a transformation capacity of 80-100 litres, and artisanal units of cereal transformation, as we have seen, also have very modest and irregular production capacities. However, the issue is not merely one of size. The problem concerns the very organisation of these units, their lack of financial autonomy and therefore viability, their pricing system which is completely disconnected from the real economy, the impossibility of innovation due to the lack of instruction or the lack of knowledge appropriation, and especially the lack of surplus.

In spite of their expansion, these mini-units' activities will never be able to meet the food requirements of a city.

They were developed to ensure the food security of households and to guarantee monetary revenue for families, but they are completely ill-adapted to respond to the demands of a city. In fact, there is no automatic passage to be sought between the food "security" of a household and that of a city. In this context, there will never be a spontaneous scaling up from the family to wider society.

Thanks to ethnographic studies, we know that what best characterises the domestic mode of production (which is reiterated by the humanitarian economy) is its inability to produce surplus, that is, to produce more than the needs of the household.

In fact, the system of lower taxes, developed for semi-industrial transformation units and the complete fiscal irregularity of artisanal activities, does not make these activities regular contributors to the wealth of the country.

This incapacity is not only economic, but also political, since these mini-units of transformation are incapable of producing and supporting social structures (schools, hospitals) beyond the family unit.

The economic problem therefore becomes socio-political, for reasons that anthropology can help us to understand.

Based on anthropological knowledge, we know that nowhere is the family the basis of society[36]. On the contrary, the family is a place where social laws are already enacted and regulate its functioning. This is why there are as many family models as there are societies.

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[35] **Godelier M. 1965, « Objet et méthodes de l'anthropologie économique. » L'Economique et les Sciences Humaines Paris, Ed. Dunod.**

[36] **Godelier M. 2007, *Au fondement des sociétés humaines*, Paris, Albin Michel.**

Anthropology also teaches us that each mode of production corresponds to a particular social and political order, and that both influence each other. Hence, when the humanitarian economy reproduces domestic modes of production, it ends up reinforcing the socio-political order which corresponds to these modes. In this way, the survival economy also reinforces traditional forms of household organisation which reflect different socio-political structures to those of the state.

In fact, within these units we can observe traditional behaviours are reiterated in the humanitarian economy: the sexual division of domestic tasks (and not of labour), vertical transmission of knowledge, which remains the preserve of the elders and maintains their power, money redistribution practices, and especially the absence of surplus production.

This is why no social change is registered, including with regard to the condition of women. Their economic autonomy is not accompanied by social or political emancipation. Women promoters remain embedded with their money in a network of traditional social relationships which continue to act in their disfavour. Although some of them have been able to create small spaces of autonomy through their activities (for example M. Sawadogo who refused levirate marriage, or Madame Traore who was able to defend her marital choices), these spaces remain limited to the individual sphere which never becomes collective, due to a lack of real socio-political change.

As Marshall Sahlins brilliantly demonstrated, the household is a political unit as much as it is an economic one[37]. Between the household and the state, there is no relationship of continuity since the household and the state belong to two different political structures.

In fact, everything functions as if, despite their move into cities, the production activities continue to function like those in the village, from both economic and socio-political points of view.

The only difference is that now, the governing and legitimating political structure is no longer the lineage system, but the system of international aid, and especially that of NGOs.

The reasons for this confusion between household, city, and individuals is perhaps to be sought in the latest elaboration of food security, which I suggest a more critical reading of.

In 1996, the World Food Conference defined food security as: "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" [38].

It seems to me that what is problematic in this concept stems not only from the generic "all people", but also from its practical interpretation which ends up identifying them to individuals, in a completely a-critical and ethnocentric way.

In Ouagadougou, I did not meet "individuals". The reason for this was the fact that the element at the origin of the individual, as a social form, is not the city but the state. In fact, the configuration assumed by a social group is a political question, not a geographical one, and it depends on the kinds of socio-political relationships that structure the relations between its members. Hence; there mere fact of moving from the village to the town is not sufficient to create individuals. Even when they cross borders, migrants do not become "individuals", but rather bring with them the complex network of social relations with which

[37] **Sahlins M., 1976, *Âge de pierre, âge d'abondance. L'économie des sociétés primitives*. Paris, Gallimard.**

[38] **FAO, 1996, *Rapport du Sommet mondial de l'alimentation*, Rome, http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3548f/w3548f00.htm**

they came into the world. The children of my actresses who chose immigration continue to interact regularly with their families in ways not limited to transfers of money.

The universalist formula chosen by the World Conference reflects the language and logic that is proper to sustainable development, in which all social, cultural and geographic differences between men disappear in favour of their common human nature. However, whilst we can accept universalism in speeches, we must never forget in practice that human beings only exist within complex networks of socio-political relations which generate different social configurations.

The identification and understanding of these social structures are essential stages in the implementation of action. As we have seen, guaranteeing food security for a household, a family or a city is not the same thing. We must therefore first take into consideration the particular social form of the social groups we are trying to guarantee food security for, study their functioning, and only then translate it into action.

The question therefore arises: who do we want to ensure food security for, and at what level: households, urban populations?

The collected data clearly shows that humanitarian economies cannot meet the needs of a city because they are not economically viable, and their functioning is based on the domestic mode of production with all the political and economic limits that implies. Moreover, there will be no spontaneous scaling up from households to citizens, because they are two different economic and socio-political structures.

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