

The Nature of Land: Tenure in an Uncertain Environment

CHAPTER SEVEN

Patriarchal Control

An understanding of customary land tenure would be incomplete if it did not situate risk and reciprocity within the context of social structure. Without a discussion of the role of the patrilineage and patriarchal control in the study villages, one would be left wondering which levels of social organization are fundamental in the production of subsistence and the reproduction of the household.¹ Patriarchal organization, the patrilineage and power relations are critical in defining certain aspects of customary tenure.

Table 7.1. Indicators and Evidence for Patriarchal Control as a Key Variable Affecting Customary Land Tenure

variable	indicator(s)	supporting evidence
patriarchal control	labor allocation	management practices --control of labor for communal grain production by household head;
	control of land	land use -- <i>sokofeforow</i> (valuable fields ringing village, controlled exclusively by household heads); tenure --transfer rights (via patrilineal descent); security (ultimate control of fallow by household heads); social practices --villagers reportedly seeking title to increase sons' inheritance;
	power relations	gender conflict --reported frequent evictions, refusal to grant clearing rights to affinal women;

The household head has broad control over a household's customary fallow claims, labor and equipment. Of particular importance is control of labor over communal grain production. While only in the smallest of households did affinal women report participating in communal grain cultivation, sons and tenant farmers will usually spend four days per week, or work every morning, in the communal fields (sometimes referred to as *foroba*, or big field). Other times may be devoted to an individual's fields.

The risk management driven by environmental uncertainties takes on another level of meaning in light of patriarchal control. It is the household head who must provide the grain, and who is most averse to commercialization or production strategies that optimize profit in good years, but risk household food supplies in drought years. Sons within the household will often farm cotton or peanuts for market sale, unburdened as they are with the yoke of providing for household members.² The few household heads who stress commercial production reported owning a full complement of farm equipment (pulled by draft

¹ The household refers to the nuclear family (often polygynous), which normally serves as the social group around which agricultural production is organized. Patrilineage refers to descent and inheritance through the male line. The former is usually headed by the eldest male. In some cases a household's customary fallow may be controlled by the eldest male but include his younger brothers and their households as well. In others fallow may be divided among them.

² However, several male household members reported that, if the rains do not produce adequate *foroba* crops, much of the harvest on their individual fields may be expropriated by the household head to supplement yields on communal fields.

animals), allowing them to "overproduce" (i.e., they still farm the *foroba*, but can devote a greater surplus of land and labor to commercial crops).

The emphasis placed on food production is consistent with the subsistence ethic. As the Bambara proverb says, *saya ka fisa malo ye* (death is better than shame). The importance attached to providing for one's family, and the shame associated with failing to do so, reinforce the notion that millet should not be sold, lest one run short of food (here not necessarily because of drought, but rather poor management practices).

Household heads enjoy ultimate control of virtually all bush fallow lands within village territorial claims.³ They are the gatekeepers through which prospective tenants must pass if they seek permission to clear others' fallow. Household heads control the *sokofeforow* (the fields directly behind family compounds) as well. These fields are valued both because of their convenient location and the benefit they derive from the volume of stock manure dropped by animals on their way to and from grazing areas. It is interesting, however, that despite the privileged social position of the household head, he has no greater proximate control over his landholdings. It is difficult to evict a tenant farming one's customary claims, and likewise household heads report they must farm annually the *sokofeforow* to retain control of them and pre-empt others from seeking access.

Household heads can acquire customary claims either through patrilineal transfer or clearing of forestland. Their claims to the former are supported by the chief's extensive knowledge of fallow claims, and also usually by *tagamasere*, or hidden markers buried in a secret location known only to the household head (and perhaps his sons) that signify one's claims. Clearing forestland usually requires seeking the permission of the chief, to make sure indeed that one is clearing unclaimed land.

Tenure and Power Relations

Perhaps the most notable aspect of patriarchal control is the way that it shapes power relations, which are reflected in customary tenure. If environmental uncertainty and the subsistence ethic lay the foundation for an internal logic underlying tenure, the role of the patriarchy provides the social structure through which that logic is expressed. Using Lukes' (1974) and Mann's (1986) frameworks as guides,⁴ I will attempt to identify relations based on power, and to offer a sociological explanation. I'll begin by examining evidence of overt conflict related to land. For, despite the role of *musalaha* in suppressing or reducing the overall level of conflict in the village, there are still reported disputes involving land.

The most prominent examples of conflict could be categorized as gender-based. They were commonly manifested as a refusal (by men) to lend customary fallow (to women), or an eviction by the (male) claimant. The former was reported by ten of fourteen female respondents in Cekorobawkunda to be a common occurrence. Several women said that eviction and refusal of access for their rainy season vegetable gardening occurred on an *annual* basis. There were four reasons given for this. The first was that a shortage of fertile, fully-recovered fallow relegates women to worn-out parcels. Customary claimants will evict them if they're farming it or refuse them if they seek access (to fertile, recovered fallow). The second reason is spatial--women prefer to farm together, reportedly to distribute risks of crop damage or illness (labor shortage). This requires a large space that many customary claimants seem unwilling to grant. Three women also said that they have occasionally been evicted because the

³ Occasionally an affinal woman will report ultimate control over a small fenced garden area.

⁴ See chapter two for a discussion of these authors' ideas and their relevance to the study.

customary claimant (sometimes their husband) wanted to expand his field area. A third source in Cekorobawkunda was attributed to the chief, who has evicted women quite often for, according to him, farming in a livestock corridor (although this often turned out not to be the case), which alludes to the fourth reason given--overt gender conflict. Three women in Cekorobawkunda expressed the opinion that many men were just plain mean-spirited, or envious of wives' economic successes.⁵

Female respondents in Benbaliyabugu reported less frequent refusal and eviction. This may be attributable to the uniqueness of tenure in the draw where many women in Benbaliyabugu farm their vegetables. They reported a degree of proximate control that was absent in Cekorobawkunda, perhaps because of the fertility-maintaining properties of low-lying areas that occasionally flood (depositing silt as flood waters slow and recede), combined with women's efforts to retain control by manuring (thus allowing them to farm every year). Few places outside the draw have the natural properties that both improve soil fertility and provide incentives to haul manure such a long distance. The sheer number of women may be more intimidating to a customary claimant who would evict them as well. In addition, the draw's distance from the village (five kilometers) precludes greater pressure that might have led to women's eviction.

However, some women in Benbaliyabugu have been evicted from the draw, and thus the possibility exists. Grounds for eviction usually invoke the need to grow food for the household. Yet the more overt form conflict assumes among women in Benbaliyabugu is between the women themselves, attempting to gain or control access to spots in the draw. This is most likely to occur where a woman has left a plot in fallow, to which another women attempts to gain access without first seeking permission.

Women in Cekorobawkunda are keenly aware of the draw issue. They were evicted from the draw--the only place where available moisture permitted farming rice--several years ago, *en masse*. They were essentially the victims in a rush by the patriarchs of Cekorobawkunda to occupy the draw before villagers in nearby Dakacabugu could stake claims there. The timing suggests that the land registration initiative was a catalyst. If villagers in Dakacabugu could make no customary fallow claims, and Cekorobawkunda was occupying it, they couldn't apply for title. However, once the households of Cekorobawkunda had occupied it, it was no longer accessible to women outside of the occupying households, who might have wished to cultivate rice there. Thus while the women's eviction may have been a by-product of intervillage rivalry, underlying it were the gender inequalities that characterize patriarchal control of land. Affinal women have no rights to make customary claims to fallow, and could not have fended off a challenge by men from Dakacabugu seeking to occupy parts of the draw.

However, the area of the draw the women were farming in Cekorobawkunda is less than a kilometer from the village. Benbaliyabugu's women, while they report more secure proximate control, might have suffered the same fate as the women in Cekorobawkunda had the draw they are farming been located so close to the village.

As mentioned previously, the draw has become a focal point for conflict related to land, in this case conflict manifesting itself along gender lines. Using observable conflict as an indicator of power suggests that power is being exercised by men over women with respect to access and control of vegetable garden plots (this is especially the case in Cekorobawkunda),⁶ by women over women where those with proxi-

⁵ In fact, the village pseudonym *Cekorobawkunda* is a play on the elder village patriarchs' reputation among adjacent villages as stern traditionalists.

⁶ Women usually farm their field crops (e.g., peanuts, millet) in the same area their husbands have cleared for household cultivation.

mate control in the draw seek to refuse access to those without access. Even where there is conflict between women, it is in large part a function of their lack of clearing rights as affines. They are not able to claim parts of the draw for themselves, and to retain proximate control (or to even hold out hope of retaining proximate control), they must farm their plots every year. This practice relates to the subsistence ethic, and the notion of putting land to productive use. If land is being farmed, evicting the tenant violates the spirit of a subsistence ethic (this is not to say that it is never done, however). This is no doubt why when a customary claimant *does* evict tenants, he invokes his intention to farm *balo* ("*kabaforo*," or maize field)--i.e., the land will be put to a "higher" productive use--the cultivation of grain for the patriarchal household. What wasn't clear was whether with women this was done to placate the female tenants, or their husbands, who might subsequently be enlisted to help find another spot, or from one of whom might be sought clearing rights for new garden plots (by those evicted).

That the basis of male authority derives from a social structure reflecting patriarchy and patrilineal descent is self-evident. Yet one is left to ponder the mechanisms by which that power is exercised. The frameworks of Lukes and Mann offer themselves as likely candidates for a structural explanation. Lukes' third face is an appealing concept because it suggests that power can be exercised even in the absence of overt conflict. In fact, A may exercise power over B without the latter's cognizance, but in a manner that is necessarily antagonistic to B's *real* interests (which in this case would imply that the affinal women are not aware of their real interests). An argument for this application might be made for the draw in Cekorobawkunda. There is presently no overt conflict there--the women have not made a public issue of their eviction and subsequent denial of access. Yet it is a subject of which the women in Cekorobawkunda are keenly aware, as one respondent makes clear:

U y'an gen. Ko misiw be temen yen fe. An te yen soro olu bolow tuguni. An musow b'a kalama, bari an be to delen (They [the men] evicted us. Said the cattle would be passing through the draw. We won't get the draw to farm from them again. We're aware of what's going on, but nobody says anything, not even to each other).

The fact that a few respondents do seem aware of their powerlessness argues against third face manipulation. If they had the opportunity, they would no doubt return to the draw. The resignation of the women to their marginal status with respect to customary land tenure should not be mistaken for patriarchal hegemony (in the sense of ideological manipulation).

Perhaps a stronger argument for the third face can be made concerning the concept of *balo* as a justification for eviction or refusal of access. It is clear that men are not the only household members whose productive contributions sustain the household. Women farm both field and vegetable crops, which are used either for food or sold for income to purchase food or other household essentials. They do virtually all processing of food, most of it being very labor-intensive and time-consuming. Women bear and rear the children who eventually provide the household with agricultural labor. Several women in Cekorobawkunda said sarcastically that, with respect to household division of labor, *cew be nyo bo* (the men provide the millet), implying that women do everything else.

Women's contributions to agriculture are often referred to as *fen misenw* ("little stuff"). One respondent's description of an eviction notice paraphrases a common sentiment among the women in Benbaliyabugu with respect to how eviction from the draw is justified: *aw be fen misenw doron de no fe. Anw de be balo nyini* (You women are just farming little stuff. We're looking to farm the household's food). Men farm the bulk of the grain, yes (as well as most of the peanuts). But women do all of the processing, and a household would not long survive on a diet of millet stalks. However, *balo* is associated

with grain production, which is associated with patriarchal control. I'm not suggesting this as a conscious effort on the part of men, however, the result appears to be the manipulation of the meaning of subsistence to emphasize the role of patrilineal males in the production process, at the expense of affinal women. Women might complain about being last in line for land, labor or equipment, but none expressed any reservations over the meaning of *balo* and the way in which it minimizes the importance and substantial contributions of women to rural production.

Lukes' third face seems applicable in the case of how the meaning of *balo* seems to reinforce patriarchal authority by invoking the subsistence ethic, however Mann's concept of organizational outflanking offers a more parsimonious alternative for understanding how structural power is exercised. The social organization of patriarchal culture, patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence leaves affinal women on the margins with respect to land tenure. They cannot claim customary fallow--that moves through the patriline. They cannot transfer land--that is the right of the household head. Thus women are outflanked from several vantage points: "ideologically" (as Mann employs the term), the importance of grain production and the central role of men in that process places greater emphasis on women's reproductive roles in increasing the size of the household labor force, relegating their productive roles to a secondary status. This can be seen, for example, with the mass eviction of women from the draw in Benbaliyabugu, the reason given that the customary claimant was growing the household's food supply, women were "just farming vegetables." Division of labor also places greater needs for income on women (although much of their income goes to purchase food).

Economically, the women are clearly outflanked. As several said, with respect to access to land, labor and capital, "*musow be laban*" (women come last). Their access to land is marginal, the household controls labor allocation, and they are the last within the household to have their crop fields worked by machine. According to many women, by the time they have access to plows or seeders, if they have not already worked their vegetable gardens, they will likely be harvesting when the market is glutted with produce, and prices depressed. Women's domestic obligations (especially time and labor-consuming tasks such as drawing water, pounding grain, and caring for children) leave them less time to engage in non-agricultural income-generating activities, or even to frequent the local markets with their produce.

Mann thus offers a way to identify power through structural relations, as well as a mechanism by which it is exercised--in this case "outflanking" by the social organization of patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence and patriarchal culture. Thus it has advantages over first and second-face notions of power. The third dimension broaches structural power, but is encumbered by the need to identify "real" interests, most likely rooted in the mode of production, and the insistence that these interests are antagonistic (a zero-sum approach). It is not a stretch to identify greater access to land with women's *real* interests--women are well aware of this. Mann's structural approach does not heavily emphasize the manipulation of the powerless. They are likely aware of their structurally subordinate position (which in this case they seem to be). A woman in Benbaliyabugu, facing eviction by a man from a field she had been forming for several years and had already cleared, had this to say:

A tigi nana, a ko nka wuli. Awa, komi fanga be e la, fanga te nde la, a b'i bolo. Note, ala yoro te (he came and said I should find someplace else to farm. Since he had power and I didn't, it was his field to take from me).

Patriarchal control over production also provides a context for understanding division of labor by gender which, though evidence suggests is not rigid and unchanging over time, still places women in a subordinate productive role within the household. Mann refers to such ideological organization as

manifesting "immanent morale," the reinforcing of existing power relationships. The more "transcendent" development ideology that advocates a redressing of gender bias has provided women with project support (e.g., the gardens in the two villages) and anecdotal successes, but has not changed the institution of the patriarchy in any substantive way.

Mann's theory also permits that relationships are not necessarily antagonistic. In a village practicing subsistence agriculture, it makes sense to talk about social power as performing collective functions of survival within an environment (or "mastery over" this environment) whose uncertainties necessitate a certain character of collective (and often reciprocal) organization. Collective millet culture controlled by the patrilineage would certainly seem to be a case in which "persons in cooperation can enhance their joint power over third parties or over nature (Parsons 1960)." This can be contrasted with Lukes' antagonistic criterion: at least in a patrilineal society, even if women are denied inheritance of property, they are part of a system of organization that, more often than not, allows them to "survive." It seems intuitive that people eking out a subsistence existence within such intimate and often environmentally hostile confines share more than an antagonistic relation of real "interests." However, women's contribution to the collective exercise of power over an often uncooperative environment also helps reproduce distributive power relations.

The rational actor models suggest that greater security will follow commercial opportunities or more intensive cultivation practices that reflect land's increased value. However, in the study villages, the assertion of household rights, though it may have been prompted by overplowing and a perceived scarcity of fallow, does not appear to be associated with either commercialization or intensification, but rather with an effort to secure patriarchal household control over fallow claims. In other words, the change in tenure is more persuasively explained as a reflection of village power structures than as a process of individual decision makers responding to changing demographic or economic conditions. If there is a trend toward individualized tenure rights, it will have a decidedly patriarchal flavor. This gendered nature of change seems more fundamentally important than a concentration of rights in the hands of fewer individuals. The increasing difficulty women report in acquiring access to a large enough area to allow adjacent farming, in acquiring fertile fallow for vegetable gardening (especially in Cekorobawkunda), and in being evicted, in some cases on an annual basis and for dubious reasons, suggest an increasing assertion of patriarchal authority with respect to customary tenure.

Comparing Alternative Perspectives

It is time for a more thorough comparison of perspectives. I have waited until the end of this characterization of customary tenure, because the framework I have developed derives much of its explanatory power from the combination of the three variables. Rather than perceiving this as a disadvantage (when compared with the emphasis by rational choice perspectives on showing causation), it can be viewed as further evidence of the embedded nature of land tenure. Rational choice contends that outcomes are caused by an individual's decision making process. Yet what factors constrain their options? Diners in an eating establishment can only order from items on the menu. We may make inferences based on whether they chose hamburgers and fries, spaghetti, or chow mein, when clearly the restaurant they chose considerably narrowed their options. The rational choice theorist may argue that individuals can choose their restaurants. Given choices, villagers might choose to eat something besides leaf sauce in a bed of steamed millet. They may even be able to choose from three or four different courses of millet, have the option of cooking or steaming it, and choose between a peanut-based, dried fish *or* leaf sauce. However, it would be more illuminating to understand what factors limit them to a diet of millet dishes than to know which particular millet dish they've decided on for the evening meal.

The idea of embeddedness renders tenure a messier, but more interesting concept. Geertz (1973:408) describes culture in a way that reflects the same kind of messiness that the analysis of customary tenure exhibits. It is, he notes, like

an octopus, whose tentacles are in large part separately integrated, neurally quite poorly connected with one another and with what in the octopus passes for a brain, and yet who nonetheless manages both to get around and to preserve himself, for a while anyway, as a viable if somewhat ungainly entity.

I will contrast the framework developed in this study with the rational actor perspectives on their home turf—i.e., with respect to intensification, commercialization and individualization of tenure. The appropriate vehicles for this comparison are the anomalies of customary tenure in the study area—the draw and the *sokofeforow*, where control over access is more secure, and where some intensification is taking place. Boserup contends that the assertion of more individual rights to land will occur where resources are becoming most scarce (a process that, by fixing occupancy, leads to the adoption of intensive management practices and even greater tenure restrictions). The draw and *sokofeforow* represent scarce resources--the former's moisture-retaining properties make it highly valued, especially during drought years. There has been a steady occupation of draw space in both study villages. The draw is completely occupied in Benbaliyabugu, and is controlled (and access to it somewhat restricted) in Cekorobawkunda. The *sokofeforow* are valuable both because of their convenient location (that saves costs of commuting, transporting animals, equipment, meals, etc.) and the presence of stock pastures that increase the volume of manure left in the area.

However, occupation of the draw has not led to greater individualization of tenure rights, as Boserup's model might suggest. Women have only gained *proximate* control of their garden space in the draw. They'll likely be evicted as cultivation in the draw becomes more appealing to the customary claimants.⁷ The emphasis placed on subsistence makes it difficult to evict women who are putting draw space to productive use (i.e., farming annually), which they are. They do this to retain proximate control and fend off other women seeking access to garden space in the draw. The fact that many of the women in the village farm together, in large numbers on adjacent plots, also makes it more difficult for a customary claimant to evict.⁸ Yet despite their best efforts to retain control, a mass eviction occurred in one portion of the draw a few years earlier. Thus *intensification by women may strengthen tenancy, but not tenure security* (a fact that Boserup would no doubt acknowledge, even if her model is ill-equipped to address it). In the instance where women were evicted from the draw, the claimant made reference to the fact that he was responsible for farming his household's *balo*; the women are "only farming vegetables."

⁷ One might ask why, if draw space is scarce, the women have yet to be evicted. There are a few possible reasons. First, the draws are areas where stock damage is reportedly high. Women prefer these areas because of the added moisture requirements (versus field crops) of their vegetable crops, and farm adjacent to each other to address the risks. However, others may perceive the potential costs of cultivation in the draw as too high. Second, the draw is not necessarily suited to millet or peanut cultivation (the principal preoccupation of household heads). The former can do well on poorer, drier soils, and the latter is cultivated mostly on sandy soils, because it facilitates the crop's harvest. The draw is a preferred spot for growing maize, however (another household food crop), whose moisture requirements are higher than those of millet or peanuts. Third, the draw in Benbaliyabugu is five kilometers from the village, and many prefer to clear fields and cultivate closer to home.

⁸ They do this reportedly to minimize and distribute the risks posed by grazing livestock.

Why didn't women gain access to the draw in similar fashion in Cekorobawkunda? Is it because the draw is less valued there? Probably not. It is more likely because the area of the draw where the women used to farm is much closer to the village. Intervillage rivalry with neighboring Dakacabugu also led to the women's eviction. Because affinal women have no control over access, they could have been evicted by men from Dakacabugu seeking to cultivate in the draw. The Cekorobawkunda patriarchs evicted the women and pre-empted a potential overt conflict over cultivation rights in the draw.

The *sokofeforow* are cultivated annually, as are the women's vegetable gardens in the draw. However, there are no efforts to enhance soil fertility. Those with cattle can apply manure in a systematic way, but the other claimants of *sokofeforow* do not apply manure to their fields (yet still cultivate them annually). This can be explained in part because of pressure to cultivate and reduce fuel loads near the village, reducing the uncertainties posed by dry season wildfires. The *sokofeforow* suggest just how strong the subsistence ethic is in the villages. Even patriarchal household heads have difficulty restricting access to their fields without cultivating them annually. Informants in both villages said that claimants of *sokofeforow* will farm them even in the face of declining soil fertility, merely to retain proximate control. Two important insights can be gleaned from the contrast between tenure in the draw and tenure in *sokofeforow*: Patriarchal authority and topographic variation explain differential access to land (especially in the draw) along gender lines, and; the subsistence ethic helps to explain how access to land is negotiated between patriarchal households--in essence, *why customary land tenure may reflect gender differences, but not power differentials based on wealth*.

Boserup's thesis is also rather technologically optimistic. With respect to intensification, she suggests that it will occur on the most economically valuable lands, which makes sense. But why are certain lands more valuable? The draw is valuable because the extra moisture may be enough to prevail over drought. Women occupy the draw for this advantage. They improve the soil to increase their security (i.e., proximate control). Topographic variation explains why they are still there (whereas the women in Cekorobawkunda have been evicted from the draw much closer to the village), and risk management (of stock damage and threat of eviction) why they farm adjacent to one another. At best, one could offer up resource pressure or scarcity of the most valued lands as variables, but population density offers an insufficient explanation. The *sokofeforow* are also a valued and scarce resource, however there is little or no intensification occurring there. Household heads still farm these fields annually to retain proximate control, but no one reported having adopted labor-intensive soil improvement techniques. In other words, the adoption of intensive cultivation practices is predicated upon the extent to which they address the key limiting factor, which in this case is perceived to be not soil fertility, but rather rainfall. The need to farm these fields every year to fend off requests also suggests the pervasive influence of the subsistence ethic (as well as the pressure from other cultivators to reduce dry season fuel loads close to the village, and thus risk of spreading wildfire, by cropping annually).

The rational actor models focus their arguments of tenure change on commercialization (production for the market) rather than intensification (increasing output per area). However, there is even less evidence for increasing commercialization in the study villages than there is for intensification. The framework developed in this study attributes this to environmental uncertainties that place a premium on productive strategies that reduce risk, versus those that increase production. The cash crops are more variable than the food crops, and the role of the patriarchal household head in producing the household grain, combined with his control over labor devoted to household grain production and his aversion to selling household food supplies, makes only a "surplus" of labor and land available for cash cropping (by those household members who have fulfilled their obligations to communal grain production).

However, the rational choice theorist, averse to an explanation of tenure that emphasizes environment, culture and social structure, can always claim that farmers are acting rationally and that their resistance to commercialization reflects market price distortions (that SAL is designed to address). Yet how to explain those instances where commercialization *is* taking place? Most of the young unmarried men reported farming some cotton (in Cekorobawkunda). Some of the wealthier households as well were expressly farming commercial crops (cotton or peanuts). Peanuts were actually a fairly popular commercial crop among both men and women. First, the young men are as yet unburdened by the weight of producing the grain stores for their household. Thus they are risking less by farming cotton (they also were responding to a reported increase in the bridewealth price that increased their need for income). Wealthier households, with full complements of animal-drawn equipment, were still farming their food crops first (devoting "surplus" space to commercial crops). Peanuts, while more variable than millet, can be either consumed in the household or marketed, giving farmers more flexibility in their disposal (versus a pure commodity crop such as cotton). Farmers can also store peanuts for sale at some later date, because of thriving local demand, which doesn't exist for cotton.

Perhaps even more damaging to the softened rational actor version is the evidence from the study that, although commercial cultivation does take place, it has been integrated into bush fallow agriculture, rather than displacing it with more permanent cultivation (via intensive practices). Neither is commercialization associated with more individualized rights to land. It takes its place alongside the other field crops cultivated by villagers.

Boserup considers bush fallow as a transitional stage in the process of agricultural intensification (given increases in population density). The evidence from this study does not support this contention. Commercial cropping of cotton and peanuts occurs alongside or in rotation with household food production. Chemical intensification (now associated with cotton cultivation) has not led to permanent cropping. Mechanization has also been incorporated into land-extensive production, and seems to be leading to overcultivation (in the absence of techniques that reduce the need for fallow). The only adoption of labor-intensive technologies is by women in the draw, and the power of the patriarchy suggests that women's current "permanent" cropping of vegetable gardens is a passing phase that will be reabsorbed by land-extensive techniques as draw space becomes more economically valuable. Essentially, there is little evidence that bush fallow is a "transitional" land use that will be replaced by more intensive land uses. Richards (1985) contends that Boserup's "stage" approach subordinates bush fallow to a more technologically primitive status than more intensive land uses. He suggests that a "systems" approach is more technologically neutral (as far as attributing progress and development). However, Richards' argument doesn't really respond to Boserup's thesis of labor intensification in the face of resource scarcity, nor to her contention that "de-intensification" should be expected where population density changes (e.g., due to migration to a sparsely populated area). Yet he insists that more intensive cultivation methods are built upon the knowledge acquired and passed down with respect to extensive methods such as bush fallow. The neglect of this by development planners, he contends, is one reason why attempts at intensification characterized by top-down technology transfers have often failed, either through non-adoption or involution.

As for individualization, one might argue that the assertion of household claims has led to more individualized tenure rights. There has been a concentration of rights at the household level, but not because of market policies or price signals, but because of a perceived scarcity of good fallow caused by the expansion of farming operations via adoption of draft animal technology. Yet it is the character of individualization that is interesting. It hasn't led to more agricultural commercialization. The fact that the

process seems to be controlled by patriarchal household heads, responsible for household food production, virtually assures that commercialization will be of secondary importance.

Summarizing Customary Tenure

The last three chapters illustrate how environmental uncertainty, a subsistence ethic and patriarchal control over production shape customary land tenure. The key limiting factors to agricultural production come from environmental sources--drought, fire and animals--to which practices, land use and tenure arrangements that serve to minimize or distribute risk are well-suited. Productive strategies that reduce risk are consistent with a strong subsistence ethic. The subsistence ethic places an emphasis on reciprocal and redistributive mechanisms, which in turn discourage individual or household accumulation of property, land and the resources it produces in favor of relatively communal access,⁹ based on the notion that property should be put to productive use (regardless of its claimant). This tends to suppress the exercise of power through wealth differentials, affording greater control over food production and the reproduction of household labor vested in the patriarchal household and patrilineage, respectively. Rational actor models fail to account for the importance of multiple levels of analysis that include structural forces.

I have presented a framework for understanding customary tenure that draws upon insights from cultural ecology, and have used it to critique rational actor models and their claims regarding tenure change. Now it is time to present the case for a more embedded notion of tenure dynamics that is situated within historical changes taking place in West Africa, some of which may be unprecedented in both their scope and pace.

⁹ Within limits, of course. The study's examination of reciprocity focuses primarily on productive factors and inputs.