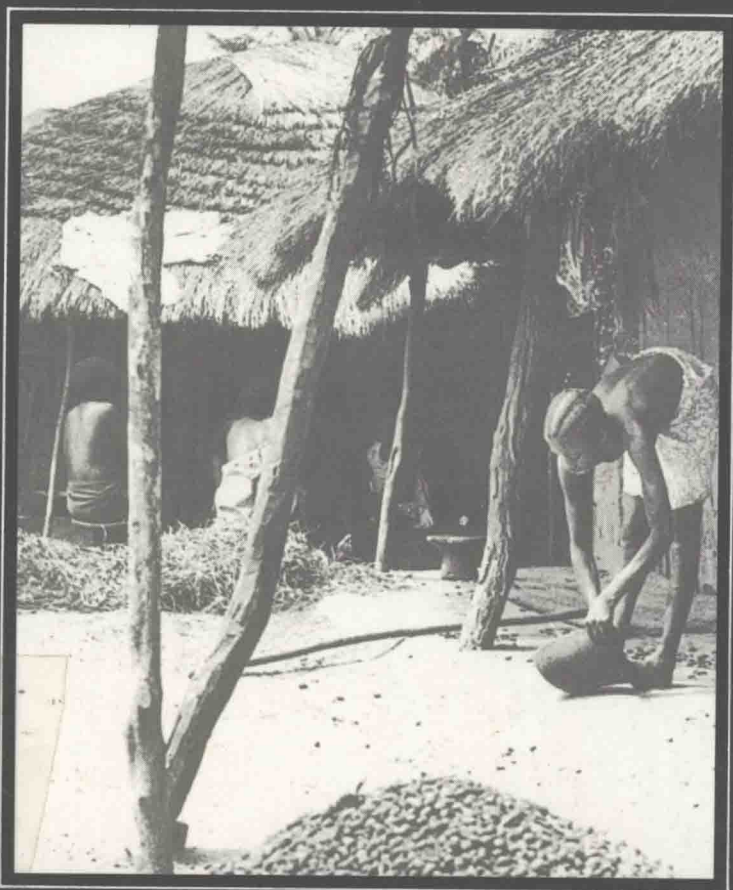


Maureen Mackintosh  
**GENDER, CLASS**  
**A N D**  
**RURAL TRANSITION**

*Agribusiness and the Food  
Crisis in Senegal*



# **Gender, Class and Rural Transition**

## **Agribusiness and the Food Crisis in Senegal**

Maureen Mackintosh



**Zed Books Ltd**  
London and New Jersey

*Gender, Class and Rural Transition* was first published  
by Zed Books Ltd, 57 Caledonian Road, London N1 9BU, UK, and  
171 First Avenue, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey 07716, USA,  
in 1989.

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Cover designed by Andrew Corbett  
Typeset by EMS Photosetters, Rochford, Essex  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Mackintosh, Maureen

Gender, class and rural transition:  
agribusiness and the food crisis in Senegal.

1. West Africa. Agricultural industries.

Economic development.

I. Title.

338.1'0966

ISBN 0-86232-840-3

ISBN 0-86232-841-1 pbk

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Mackintosh, Maureen.

Gender, class, and rural transition: agribusiness  
and the food crisis in Senegal/Maureen Mackintosh.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-86232-840-3. ISBN 0-86232-841-1 (pbk.)

1. Agricultural industries - Senegal. 2. Agricultural  
laborers - Senegal. 3. Farm tenancy - Senegal.

4. Food supply - Senegal. 5. Poor - Senegal.

I. Title.

HD9017.S42M33

1989

89-5836

338.1'09663-dc20

CIP

# Preface and Acknowledgements

The core of this book is a study of the agricultural, economic and social consequences of the arrival in two rural areas of Senegal of a large American 'agribusiness' enterprise called Bud Senegal. The book also draws on earlier fieldwork – a year in Senegal studying industrial relations issues – and on research in Europe on agro-industrial and commercial capital operating in the production and marketing of fruit and vegetables. The book attempts to use the case study of this rather notorious but not otherwise well-documented project to illuminate a whole slice of agrarian change in Senegal in the 1970s, and its determinants: the international forces shaping agricultural change, the local agricultural and economic crisis, state responses to the crisis, the nature of the agrarian system and agrarian transition in the areas studied, wage work and the labour market, gender relations and their influence on class formation.

With a sweep of interests of this kind, my debts are naturally very wide. This book is an attempt to repay, very belatedly, the worst debt. I remember all too vividly a Senegalese friend fulminating to me in the mid-1970s about foreign researchers who leave with their research 'under the arm' after drawing so heavily on local support and goodwill. Swearing I would never perpetrate this crime, I nevertheless fell victim to the pressures which create it: academic, economic, social. While I offer no excuse, here at last are the results of the study so many Senegalese people urged me to undertake. My deep apologies for the delay.

The field research in Senegal and Europe in 1975–1977 was financed by a generous grant from the British Overseas Development Administration. The ODA is in no way responsible, however, for the present reworking of the material on which my final report to them was based; responsibility for this version rests entirely with the author. In Senegal the research was undertaken with the kind permission of the *Délégation Générale à la Recherche Scientifique et Technique*.

In Senegal my debts are too many to enumerate. Above all I am indebted to the inhabitants of the three villages studied, and to the numerous other estate workers who answered my questions with such patience and friendliness. I learned a great deal about hospitality and humanity in these villages, and also in Sebikotane, where I lived for fifteen months. In particular, the research owes most to M. Boubacar Soumaré who worked as my research assistant and

colleague throughout the years I spent in Senegal, and without whose skills this study would have been impossible. I also owe a very great deal to M. Issa Diop and his family (especially Mme Mariama Diedhou) for the hospitality of their household and for their kindness, friendship and support; and to Mlle Ndeye Diop, of the same family, who also acted as my research assistant for two months. I owe an even greater debt of gratitude to Aladji Sow, a colleague and friend throughout this work, after encouraging me to undertake it, and to the friendship of his wife Sophie. I would also like to thank, inadequately, M. Pape Kane, M. Abdoulaye Sow and M. Michel Parsy of the *Ecole Nationale d'Economie Appliquée* in Dakar: the teaching and field studies undertaken by this institution under the direction of M. Kane were an inspiration and a guide for this study. None of these people are responsible in any way for what I have made of their guidance.

My thanks also to the following: in Kirene, M. Sene, the village head, and his family, especially M. Boubacar Sene, M. Mbaye Ciss and Mme Madjiguene Ciss; in Bambilor, M. Ndoeye, the village head, and M. Mamadou Gueye; in Ponty, M. Ba, and Christina Gomis and her household. At the Ministry of Rural Development in Dakar, my thanks to M. Paye and M. Sagna. At Bud Senegal the Managing Director, M. Marshall, allowed me free access to the estates, and provided a great deal of information and documentation on the firm's operations; M. Bathor Diop, M. Zee, M. Mazide Ndiaye, M. Steiner, George Trappan and Sam Armstrong were also very helpful. Many other staff and managers on the estates and the extension projects made a great deal of time to talk to me. Again, none of these people are in any way responsible for the conclusions I have drawn in this book. The same disclaimer applies to those cited elsewhere in the footnotes as having provided advice and assistance.

In Senegal, I also owe thanks to George Scharffenberger, Pat McAleer and François and Brigitte Barbier for friendship and support; in England, my thanks to Biplab Dasgupta and Manfred Bienefeld at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex for supervision and argumentation, and to Margaret Haswell, a most encouraging examiner; to Henry Lucas for help with programming; to Jo Foster who typed the thesis, and Trisha O'Doherty who typed the book manuscript; to Hilary Standing and Ben Crow who read and commented on the thesis and the book manuscript respectively; and to my friends at the Open University Development Policy and Practice Research Group for stimulation and support, financial and intellectual; to Ann Whitehead for inspiration and friendship, and to all the members of the Subordination of Women Group and the participants in the 1978 Conference at Sussex on the Subordination of Women in the Development Process, for information and inspiration on the subject of gender relations; at Zed Press, to John Daniel for enthusiasm and support for this book; and to Carole Furnivall, Gaby Charing and Mandy Cook for help, caring, patience and encouragement.

# Introduction:

## Food Crises and Development Projects

This is a book about the way in which large-scale agricultural development projects can breed food crisis. Since the 1960s food crisis and famine in Africa have helped to open that continent to successive waves of agricultural development initiatives. The farmers and herders of the ecologically fragile West African savannah and Sahelian desert fringe have faced greatly increased pressures from foreign-financed interventions in their economic lives: large-scale commercial farming, large-scale irrigated agricultural development projects, 'small farmer' contracting schemes, other projects to organize and transform the technology of low productivity farming, changes in economic incentives and pressures directed at 'smallholders': all these have been generated in good part by foreign pressures and organized with foreign finance.<sup>1</sup> Each new drought has provided motive and opportunity for further foreign resources and foreign initiatives to 'solve' the food crisis. And each fashion in rural development has stimulated further fears, locally and abroad, that many of these initiatives may actually be making things worse: in particular, that the projects may be competing with local food production.<sup>2</sup>

This book demonstrates how large-scale farming projects *can* indeed make food crisis worse by undermining local food farming systems and creating a dependence on dubiously viable wage work. It contains a detailed study of the impact of one big commercial farming project on small-scale integrated farming systems in the Senegalese rural areas. The book argues, on the basis of this study, that long-run changes induced in the social and economic organization of rural life and work are the most important effect of such projects, outweighing the immediate competition for land and labour with local farming, on which most studies have focused. Accounts which concentrate on the immediate income effects of projects, as economic assessment typically does,<sup>3</sup> without an eye to the organization of the existing farming system as it changes under severe pressure, may seriously underestimate effects on food production and local access to food. Stepping back from the point of view of the project organizers, and trying to grasp the effects from the point of view of farmers and wage workers, is the essential starting point for trying to correct this bias.

Characteristic of many of the development projects in the Sahel have been ambitious scale, a mixture of private investment and foreign and local public

funding, and a remarkably sketchy knowledge of or respect for the existing farming and economic systems of the areas where they were implanted.<sup>4</sup> Some of the consequences of this last feature for the financial viability of the projects themselves are now widely acknowledged, but the detailed consequences for the local populations are taking longer to emerge.<sup>5</sup>

The project whose effects are studied here – a foreign private venture backed by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the arm of the World Bank set up to encourage private investment in the Third World – was a characteristic if somewhat extreme example of this 1970s wave of ‘agribusiness’ interest in one of Africa’s most fragile agricultural areas. The firm was a subsidiary, via a European holding company, of a US agribusiness company, Bud Antle – lettuce growers on a huge scale – and it proposed to grow fruit and vegetables on big estates for the European off-season market. Senegal was to become ‘Africa’s California’, as the managers put it (though ‘Europe’s Mexico’ would have been more exact).<sup>6</sup> Arriving in the worst drought year of the early 1970s, the project was at first hailed by the Senegalese government as a source of economic salvation: a new irrigated export crop, not subject to drought, which could supplement declining groundnut revenues. Four years later the project was on the verge of bankruptcy, the target of furious government and public criticism. In 1980, *Le Monde Diplomatique* devoted a whole page to its final demise. In its wake, several thousand unemployed workers marched in protest through Dakar.

The extent to which the project, called Bud Senegal, contributed to unemployment through its impact on surrounding rural areas emerges as a central theme of this book. The management of Bud (as I shall henceforth call the Senegal-registered company except where I need to distinguish it from the European holding company of the same name), initially argued that the estates would cause no detriment in rural areas, since they operated only in the Senegalese dry season, while local farming was chiefly rain-fed. It was the contrary opinion of farmers and some government employees working in the Senegalese rural areas which first led me to study the local impact of the estates.

This book is the result of fifteen months living in, and trying to understand, the villages surrounding the two Bud estates, and of subsequent reflection on the information collected. The core material is a study of agricultural organization and change in three of these villages. This is integrated with a study of labour force formation, patterns of change in domestic work and domestic relations, and associated patterns of change in the aims and self-perceptions of villagers and migrant labourers.

To understand what was happening in these villages, I was forced first to dispose of a number of erroneous preconceptions about ‘peasant’ agriculture and economy. Economists still tend, despite decades of argument to the contrary from anthropologists, to characterize African agriculture in terms of atomized ‘smallholdings’ using ‘family’ labour.<sup>7</sup> This concept of individual household farming is so misleading when applied to West African farming systems that it impedes an understanding of the direction of economic change at village level. I had therefore to replace it with categories and questions which

allowed analysis of the web of domestic and wider social relations which held together the complex farming and economic systems. The crucial elements of this change in perspective were the attention I now paid to the pattern of economic relations between individuals within as well as across households; the dropping of the assumptions of a sharp break in social relations at the household boundary and of a household head with unproblematic access to the labour of other household members; the construction of the 'household' as a variable, changing in form and content as class definitions and social relations shifted; and the investigation of the changes in social relations between men and women as a major indicator of economic transition.

The complex farming systems which this approach allows us to analyse can break down in a variety of directions under pressure. One possible outcome is a system based more explicitly on households. In the circumstances analysed here, a frequent and more likely outcome of the disintegration of complex co-operation in farming was the emergence of an impoverished form of individual farming – its poverty was economic, technical and social – which produced little or no food, and rapidly ceased to be viable. It was this agricultural disintegration which helped to create a dependence on wage work at Bud, reinforcing the existing rural migration patterns on which the estates drew;<sup>8</sup> hence Bud had begun to develop a rather stable labour force who saw themselves primarily as wage workers.

The development of this labour force alarmed the Bud management, who had hoped to avoid 'Cesar Chavez and all those problems in Senegal'.<sup>9</sup> The management, faced with labour organization and resistance, and having looked in vain for the 'outside agitators', began to turn instead to mechanization – thus replicating the experience of the US parent company, Bud Antle.<sup>10</sup> Later, with the agreement of the Senegalese government, which was also worried about the social and economic implications of rural proletarianization, they started to look instead towards the increasingly promoted contract farming schemes: managed 'household farming' to tie people to the land, transform the social organization of small-scale farming, reduce labour solidarity, and incidentally increase the share of risk borne by the local producers.<sup>11</sup>

And in the end the question of risk, and who bears it, becomes the central issue. The Bud ventures were high-risk, trying to bring export horticulture, with its stringent marketing and quality demands, into the ecologically fragile and drought-threatened Sahel. The risks were borne chiefly by the workers and the farmers, most obviously through the precariousness of their employment, and most significantly through a further decrease in the productive capacity of their farming systems.

The question of risk and who bears it has been raised sharply in recent years, with the growth of the literature on food security and food crisis.<sup>12</sup> But while it is now accepted by writers on farming systems and by some economists that small-scale African farmers try to minimize risk,<sup>13</sup> there has been less discussion of the implications of agricultural interventions for the distribution of risk, and of ways of developing rural economic systems which reduce

farmers' risk. As work on the causes of famine (Sen, 1981) has demonstrated, people in the Third World face a particularly precarious time when older solidarity systems have broken down in the face of the market, yet wage workers and other individuals have no state-based social security system to provide a safety net. Michael Watts (1983) has made a similar point about farmers' vulnerability to famine in northern Nigeria, arguing that it was increased by colonial policy and market development which weakened an earlier 'moral economy' centred on the reduction of individual risk. This book explores this territory further, examining changes in the economic organization of both farming and domestic life which can weaken food production permanently while steering social relations and expectations irreversibly towards an individualized dependence on the market: a slow but cumulative shift in the class composition of the society.

Many millions of African rural people are caught in a pattern of life half-way between integration into small-scale, partially monetized farming systems and individual dependence on the market. The latest wave of prescriptions for African rural development – centred on the freeing of markets (IBRD, 1981) – still does no justice to the complexity and precariousness of the farmers' situation, nor to their own responses to increased risk. *How* the market develops is as important as *whether* it develops: if it undermines non-monetary economic solidarity without raising productivity, then it may make the farmers' situation markedly worse. This book is an attempt to understand one major intervention in farmers' lives – which certainly widened the scope of the market – from the perspective of those most at risk.

The Bud estates, which for a few years (including one of the worst Sahelian droughts) offered an extraordinary spectacle of hundreds of hectares of green amid the brown of the Senegalese dry season, also offer a near caricature of the way in which international capital can shift its risks and benefit from its bankruptcies. The European holding company lost some of its small invested capital but emerged from the wreckage having built up a new European broking firm on the basis of handling the Bud Senegal produce, and ready to seek new African sites to begin again.<sup>14</sup> The Senegalese government lost large quantities of finance it could ill afford. But the people who adapted their lives to try to survive on the basis of the Bud work lost most. Their arguments and explanations as to why, if Bud left, they would find themselves worse off than before formed the starting point for the research in this book.

## Notes

1. Dinham and Hines (1983) catalogue commercial schemes in Africa; Swainson (1980) discusses corporate agricultural projects in Kenya; irrigated agricultural schemes in Sudan, Nigeria and northern Senegal are discussed in Heyer *et al.* (1981); the expansion of contracting schemes in Africa is discussed in Watts (1986); investment by international institutions in the search for the African 'Green

Revolution' is outlined in Eicher and Baker (1982); the 'Berg Report' (IBRD, 1981) began a series of World Bank papers promoting market-oriented solutions for African agriculture; Comité Information Sahel (1974) catalogued the rush of private overseas investment into agricultural and ranching schemes during the Sahel drought of the early 1970s.

2. Critiques of the impact of rural development initiatives in Africa include Heyer *et al.* (1981), Richards (1985); popular concern over their effects on local food production was stimulated by Lappé and Collins (1977), Burbach and Flynn (1980), George (1976), Dinham and Hines (1983), Comité Information Sahel (1974). See Chapter 1.

3. For example, Price Gittinger (1982); for a critique of the narrowness of such assessment, see Gentil and Dufumier (1984). See Chapter 2.

4. This was true for example of the project studied here, of many of the farming and ranching projects put forward in Senegal in the mid-1970s, and of a number of large farming projects in Nigeria (Wallace, 1981).

5. Pioneers in analysing interventions from the farmers' side in West Africa include Adams (1981), Richards (1986).

6. Feder (1977) describes horticultural production in Mexico for the US market. The quotations are from the author's discussions with Bud management, 1975-77.

7. Recent examples include Low (1986), and Eicher and Baker (1982:47). Anthropological attacks include Gastellu (1978), Richards (1986). See Chapter 2.

8. West African migration has a huge literature (Amin 1978, Colvin 1981, Lindsay 1985); for Senegal see Chapter 7; for a recent analysis of the effects of migration in Niger see Painter (1987).

9. Discussion with Bud management, 1975.

10. Bud Antle resisted unionization by the UFW and was a pioneer of harvest mechanization. See Friedland *et al.* (1978), Fredericks (1978), and Chapters 1 and 9 of this book.

11. For contracting in fruit and vegetable production see Mackintosh (1977) and Watts (1986). See also Chapter 9.

12. For example, Eicher (1984), IBRD (1986), Sen (1981), Lawrence (1986); see Chapter 1.

13. Lipton (1968) was an early theorist of risk minimization by peasants; Richards (1985) has analysed risk spreading by African farmers and its implications for the adoption of technology; see also Richards (1986), Chambers (1983).

14. The reappearance of Bud in Nigeria is discussed in Jackson (1979) and Horton (1986); see Chapter 9.

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# 1. Commercial Agriculture and West African Farming: Profiting from Crisis

## **Commercial Agriculture before Independence**

There was nothing new, for Senegalese farmers in the 1970s, in external commercial pressures, nor in production or labour for cash. West African farmers were accustomed to produce for exchange and to travel in search of land and work. The big agricultural projects of the 1970s, of which the firm studied in this book is an example, formed merely a new phase in the development, under external pressure, of commercial agriculture in West Africa. This book examines, through a case study, the extent to which the pressures of the 1970s created new problems and insecurities for West Africa's rural producers.

A brief background will set the discussion which follows in context.<sup>1</sup> Elaborate trading networks existed in West Africa long before European colonialism. Short distance trade allowed the exchange of crops, animal products and fish between different West African societies before the eighteenth century. In long distance trade across the Sahara and the Atlantic, the agricultural goods which circulated before the nineteenth century were limited to costly, non-perishable goods such as kola nuts, cloth, leather goods, gum, and later palm oil. Most trade was non-agricultural: in gold, weapons, ivory and people (slaves). It was the European-run Atlantic slave trade which transformed the balance of power between West Africa and those who traded with it.

The devastating effects of the slave trade, which undermined the viability of some West African economies while strengthening the centralization of power within other West African states, were followed in the nineteenth century by the rapid spread of commercial agriculture. In most of West Africa, unlike large parts of central, eastern and southern Africa, this did not take the primary form of European settler colonization, but depended rather on the rapid spread of small-scale indigenous production of cash crops. Pushed along by a mixture of force, taxation and commercial incentives, this cash cropping transformed the relation between African farmers and the market, and provided the profits exacted by European commercial and political domination.

Enormous changes in economic and social organization resulted. As transport improved, and the new crops spread, large-scale migrations began

from the interior of the subcontinent to the coastal areas: the migrants provided labour for local farmers, and grew their own crops as 'strange farmers'. The groundnut, palm, and cocoa exports from the Senegambia, Ghana and Nigeria all drew on these migratory labour flows.

Before the establishment of colonial government in West Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, these local crops were bought, processed and resold by European merchant companies operating in West African coastal trading centres. After the imposition of colonial rule at the end of the century, exports of groundnuts, palm products, coffee and cocoa grew rapidly, dominating the export income of most West African states, including Senegal, up to Independence and beyond.

As well as providing sources of raw materials and profits for European firms, these export crops supported through customs revenues and taxes the costs of colonial government, including some investment, especially in transport, to open up new areas for cash cropping. Following these transport links inland, the expatriate trading firms turned themselves through expansion and amalgamation into huge limited companies – of which the most famous is the United Africa Company – and expanded into the inland trading centres, often wielding as much political and more economic power than the colonial administrations. As towns grew, farmers specialized more, the scale and range of food crops as well as local artisanal work declined, and local market networks developed.

At each major economic recession in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as crop prices and supply fell, the Europeans began to consider settler plantations on the subcontinent. In West Africa however, these were rarely viable – Liberia is the only major exception – and were quite rapidly abandoned. In Sierra Leone, Senegal and even the Ivory Coast expatriate plantations were generally short-lived; major irrigation schemes promoted by colonial governments, such as the *Office du Niger* and the Volta River project, showed themselves to be badly planned and unprofitable.<sup>2</sup>

### Senegal before Independence

The agricultural history of Senegal before Independence followed the pattern just described.<sup>3</sup> Senegal is a small country on the far western tip of Africa. Most of the country's land area, north of The Gambia, is semi-arid; the single wet season brings a rainfall which varies from 200mm in the far north to about 1000mm near the border with The Gambia; the southern Casamance area is much wetter. The far north is the true Sahel, with an economy based until the coming of cash crops on millet, sorghum, and transhumant<sup>4</sup> cattle keeping; the south supports rice paddies and forests. In the central, sandy savannah area – much more wooded and with more ground water than is now to be seen – and in the south, small-scale farmers working with hand implements developed, like their counterparts in Ghana and Nigeria, a major export crop.

Map 1 Senegal  
Regions and Main Towns

