

1989

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African Studies Center

1989

**Working Papers in
African Studies
No. 139**

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THE OUTLOOK FOR LIBERALIZATION IN ZAIRE: EVIDENCE FROM KISANGAN'S RICE TRADE

By Diane Russell

1983 was a watershed year for structural reforms in Zaire. It was after several sweeping policy changes made in this year that many in the international donor community came to believe that President Mobutu had finally gotten serious about reforming Zaire's corrupt and inefficient economy. A year after these reforms were announced, a new stand-by agreement was reached with the IMF for \$160 million and Zaire's creditors once again were held at bay (Africa News 1985). Despite some retrenchment in 1986 and 1988, this support has generally been continued, and suggestions are now being made that Zaire should receive more aid to ease the strain of structural adjustment.

For agriculture, the most important of these reforms was a law which states that "the sale price of products and services are freely fixed by those who make the offer" (Ordonnance-Loi No. 83/026, 12 September 1983; translation by author). This law represented a significant departure from agricultural marketing policies inherited from the Belgian era.

Liberalization of agricultural prices and markets is seen to be the key to turning the Zairian economy around by channeling the energies of the Zairian entrepreneur from the "underground economy" into official channels and increasing incentive to agricultural production. Yet some major questions remain unanswered. First, to what extent have liberalization measures in themselves significantly reshaped Zaire's economic system? Second, how much change can be expected given that the Mobutu regime, so aptly characterized as patrimonial, parasitic, and authoritarian (Callaghy 1984), has been entrenched for over twenty-five years and continues to receive the support of major Western powers? Can this state articulate and enforce any kind of consistent strategy of economic reform? What can liberalization mean in a country where the state cannot and will not take responsibility for maintaining even the most basic services? Finally, what other forces within the Zairian economy reinforce or counter liberalization policies and how significant are these forces in comparison with government policy? (See also Nzongola 1983, Callaghy 1984, and Turner 1988 for further assessment of economic reforms in Zaire).

These questions will be addressed in examining the impact of liberalization on the rice trade around Kisangani, Haut Zaire. The study from which this paper derives involved twelve months of fieldwork in and around Kisangani, from October 1986 to October 1987, interviewing rice traders, producers, and government officials. The rice trade was also observed in action at various locations and settings in the city and in the Zones of Isangi, Banalia, Yahuma and Opala within the sub-region of Tshopo which surrounds the city. This area accounts for 31 percent of Zaire's rice production (Conde 1981). Further information on agricultural policy and the history of agricultural marketing in the region was collected in Belgium in 1985 and in Kinshasa in 1987-88. Observations on issues related to this paper have also been made in the course of other research in Bandundu, Shaba, and Bas-Zaire regions.

One goal of the study was to observe and describe rural-urban linkages, specifically, to trace the evolution of the rice trade from both the farmers' and traders' points of view and to look at the impact of government actions and policies on both groups. This goal was set in order to make a unique contribution to the study of Zaire's

political economy, which has hitherto been viewed mainly from the vantage point of either urban-based elites or disenfranchised rural dwellers.

The models of the Zairian political economy fashioned by Callaghy (1984, 1986) and MacGaffey (1987) have inspired this study. Callaghy's detailed description of the patrimonial authoritarian Zairian state and MacGaffey's findings on the emerging Zairian bourgeoisie in Kisangani suggest differing views about the role and mobility of entrepreneurs in Zaire. MacGaffey's work emphasizes the dynamism of Zairian merchants and their relative independence from the state, while Callaghy stresses the state's pervasive presence and corrosive effects.

It is hoped that by concentrating on the rice trade as a system involving actors from different sectors of the political economy, some of the tension between these two models can be resolved. We come to see how both the constraints and opportunities facing Zairian businesses are linked to the reproduction of the parasitic state in a cycle of decline, despite the individual gains made by some. Liberalization, as policy, has paradoxically added to the control of the state in some instances. Yet the efforts of large- and small-scale entrepreneurs and the largely unremunerated labor of small producers, continue to keep the nation from starving to death despite official policy, and officials' actions.

This paper will first briefly discuss the rationale for and background to liberalization in Zaire. Second, it will trace the evolution of the rice trade system within the context of overall economic change. Third, it will present the viewpoints and strategies of the major actors: farmers, traders, and government officials. Finally, it will describe the current configuration of the rice trade and show how struggle within it reflects fundamental contradictions within the Zairian political economy.

Liberalization: Theory and Practice

Liberalization is part of the package of structural adjustment policies which is promoted and, in many cases, rendered mandatory by the IMF/World Bank conditions for further loans and development assistance. The goal of structural adjustment is, ultimately, to open up the economy to investment by showing good faith on debt payments, dropping tariff barriers, and "rationalizing" the economy.

This paper concentrates on one element of "rationalizing" the economy: the implementation of liberalization measures which eliminate or modify internal economic structures inhibiting access to and growth in agricultural marketing and production, including state marketing boards and parastatal monopsonies, and controls on prices and market access. These measures are attempts to create "budgetary and pricing policies . . . that will switch the internal terms of trade toward agriculture" (IBRD 1984: 2).

In a talk on structural adjustment at the American Cultural Center in Kinshasa in July 1988, Elliot Berg described the success of liberalization of the rice market in Madagascar, claiming that production had increased three-fold, and that farmers, not traders, had benefitted. This increase had been accomplished simply by raising the farmgate price.

Arguments for liberalization have in fact had a very long history, which goes beyond the current debate about how to "fix" African economies. From Adam Smith to Milton Friedman, theorists of political economy have claimed that liberalized markets promote more democratic political institutions by giving a greater number of people more opportunity to participate in the economy and by loosening government controls. This

trend may indeed show itself in Zaire in the long term. For now, however, Africanist anthropologists, historians, and some economists are calling for a more sophisticated analysis of African political economies in their own right and less simplistic "cures" for complex and long-standing problems.

Sara Berry (1987) argues, for example, that "getting the price right" may not always be simple or effective in increasing agricultural production, and Bates (1981) cautions that eliminating marketing boards and other structures which capture agricultural surplus often runs counter to the interests of elites and urban consumers. Recent events in China demonstrate that taking steps toward economic liberalization does not guarantee that democracy will triumph.

Thus, in analyzing the impact of attempts at liberalization, it is necessary to look beyond abstract models of economic development and change to the history and structure of local economies, including factors such as the means and resources available to actors in the system and the ways in which power relations function to limit and control access to resources.

In Zaire, several agricultural marketing parastatals were created in the aftermath of Zairianization in 1972-73, the transfer of ownership of many expatriate-owned enterprises and plantations. Seven out of eleven of these were eliminated in the late 1970s, including marketing parastatals for cereals, coffee and cotton, and the others' roles were sharply reduced. The gold and diamond trade was liberalized in 1983--with implications for investment in agriculture--as well as, in theory, the markets for rice and corn which were formerly under monopoly control. Yet price fixing and limits to market access are still very much features of the local economy.

Liberalization of Zaire's agricultural marketing system presents difficulties beyond the issues of price and marketing boards, however. As will be seen, the very structure of the economy--the marketing system, credit, production and investment--are distorted around the "kleptocracy" (Nzongola 1983), soaring inflation rates, scarce foreign exchange, and uneven application of trade regulations. This is why the "liberalization" that has taken place has not lead to development, and how implementation of a "liberalization policy" can actually increase the control of non-productive local bureaucrats in the same way the laws for creation of agricultural "cooperatives" have become new means for controlling the peasantry.

Background to Liberalization

Many of the "inefficiencies" in Zaire's economy stem from the colonial era. Whites were subsidized as investors and plantation owners, petty commerce and transport was given over to the secondary sector (Asian, West African, Greek, and Portuguese merchants), and the tertiary sector of African laborers, farmers, and petty traders was very restricted in its movement and activities until almost the end of the colonial era. The Belgian Congo's food supply system functioned on a coercive basis to an extent paralleled only by Portuguese Mozambique. Northrup (1988:18) writes that "The institution of compulsory cultivation of rice for military use during the war [World War I] was the beginning of what would become a major and perennial feature of Belgian rule." It is an institution which persists in post-colonial Zaire as well.

Zairianization, in 1973, was touted as an attempt to open up the first two spheres to indigenous participation, but in reality it provided the ruling clique the means to buy off political opposition and accumulate wealth. Parastatals such as Air Zaire and ONATRA

(river transport) also began to siphon off revenue toward bureaucrats and away from productive investment at this time.

MacGaffey (1987) has drawn our attention to the fact that Zairianization did open up business opportunities for some Zairians, and not all Zairianized businesses collapsed. Nevertheless, structurally, Zairianization contributed heavily to the decay of the economy, especially as credit and external investment dried up. More significantly, informants in Kisangani noted that Zairianization was the beginning of extreme corruption and the consolidation of power of Mobutu's one-party state, called the "party-state" (*parti-état*) Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution, or MPR.

Zairianization also generated a great deal of resentment on the part of non-beneficiaries toward Zairian business owners, regardless of whether they directly benefitted or not from Zairianization. Mistrust, jealousy, frustration and an "I'll get mine" mentality characterized employees' attitudes in many Zairian enterprises studied, exacerbated by salaries below a living wage which are mandated by national regulations and IMF restrictions. With Zairianization and the resultant burgeoning of the "acquirers" (*acquéreurs*), who benefitted from transfer of ownership, the gap widened between the ordinary worker and the business owner.

By the 1980s, this gap was a chasm. In 1987, prominent merchants rode around Kisangani in Mercedes and sent their children to Europe while their workers were paid \$20 a month, and managers, many of them university graduates, earned \$60 a month. Whether *acquéreur* or not, the Zairian business owner "benefits" from very low labor costs and the semi-feudal relations which persist between the "patron" and his workers, many of whom may be family members (Tshilemalema 1987). Employees try to redress this situation through theft, poor job performance, and doing personal business on the job. The turnover rate is very high. The poor treatment of workers, endemically low wages, and the lack of opportunity for training and advancement have tremendously weakened Zairian businesses.

In 1986-87, a gap also continued to exist between those merchants who were politically well-connected and able to get large loans from the development bank, and those who could not, no matter how hard-working and enterprising they were. In several cases, the politically well-connected received substantial loans for agricultural purposes, specifically for the rice trade, and did not engage in the rice trade at all.¹ At the same time, the most successful rice trader in Kisangani (as described by other traders and by observation), did not qualify for a loan to purchase trucks, despite a long career in business in Kisangani and ownership of six other businesses.

Devaluation wiped out many people's savings, and very high rates of inflation, brought about by a number of factors, have further weakened the economy.² The resulting system is characterized by a rapid turnover of investment and reluctance to invest in the long-term. Expatriate investors were burned by Zairianization and are

¹Out of 12 merchants' dossiers (19 total--not all could be found) at SOFIDE, the development bank, for credit for agricultural marketing (paddy) in Haut Zaire (trucks, rice mills) from 1983-1987, 5 merchants were not active in the rice trade in 1987 and were reported to have dropped out of or never participated in the rice trade. One of these merchants received credit twice, in 1983 and 1985, for a rice project never implemented. Another, one of the most influential men in Zaire, recently closed down his vast plantations in Haut Zaire and is never known to have been in the rice trade.

²Other factors contributing to the decline included declining copper prices, wasteful spending of borrowed money (Inga-Shaba project, Maluka oil refinery), and the fuel crisis.

continually scalded by other measures to tax and harass them.³ Zairian businesspeople strive to attain hard currency placed in foreign banks or commodities. Tangible business assets are a liability as they are vulnerable to extreme taxation; machinery breaks down and cannot be replaced or repaired, yet these assets are what count when it comes to applying for official credit. The "second economy" which deals in illegal or "unofficial" trade is a means to accumulation but is inseparable from the "official" economy, as people use their jobs and political positions to obtain access to resources and to prohibit others from gaining access to lucrative markets (cf. MacGaffey 1986).

Despite Zairianization, expatriate-owned or controlled businesses in Kisangani have greater access than Zairian businesses to resources such as credit, as they have headquarters in Kinshasa where credit decisions are made, and ties overseas. It is these businesses, for example, that import rice from the U.S. and Thailand to Kisangani, to the outrage of local rice merchants, who claim that imports suppress the price of local rice.

Rice in the Local Economy

Though most Zairians do not live on rice, it is an important food crop and an integral part of the local economy. Cassava is by far the most important staple in Zaire but rice is not as perishable as cassava; it is also an investment and a feast food. Rice merchants in Kisangani reported that all rice collected was sold in Kisangani, and home consumption in producing areas around Kisangani is as high as 30 percent (Conde 1981 estimate). On only one occasion were there many sellers and no buyers in the central market and this was when a large shipment of U.S. rice had arrived. A group of market women specialize in rice and women also sell small quantities in front of their homes. Rice merchants felt that they were doing their region a service by buying rice and that, despite the many obstacles, the rice trade was a good investment because "people need to eat."

In Haut Zaire, upland rice is grown by individual farmers on fields averaging one hectare. It is sown once a year in cleared forest fields and is intercropped with cassava, maize, plantains and squash. Peanuts are grown in rotation and, in some areas, cotton and coffee are also grown. Haut Zaire continues to lead all other regions in total rice production in Zaire despite drastically declining yields resulting from degenerated seed and lack of farmer incentive.

Rice was introduced into Haut Zaire by the "Arabs": Swahili-speaking Zanzibaris who controlled the region in the late 1800s, and whose major activity was trading in ivory and slaves. It became a very important commercial and food crop in the colonial era, as new varieties were created and multiplied at the research center at Yangambi, 95 km west of Kisangani.

Many of the villages in Haut Zaire which cultivated rice during the colonial era were isolated during the 1964 "Simba" Rebellion or later, during the deterioration of the rural areas that resulted from the Zairianization of plantations. Because of the lack of reliable markets and the low farmgate prices for their rice, farmers in these areas prefer to cultivate cassava or plantains, which can be consumed at home or more readily marketed in the petty trade channel (Mbaya 1980).

³A "Presidential tax" of Z100,000(1987) discourages expatriates from investing in small businesses. In 1987 also all expatriates had to get new visas at Z70,000 per visa regardless of whether or not they already had permanent residency. Ironically, however, expatriate businessmen and managers interviewed in Kinshasa felt that, while the business climate was very difficult, it was worse for Zairians than for them because they had some protection against harassment.

The History of Rice Marketing and Production

Liberalization measures were designed to eliminate some of the most glaring inefficiencies in marketing systems and stem the disastrous production declines of the 1970s and early 1980s. For example, the assigning of monopoly buying zones to traders was seen to depress producer prices and hence incentive and often left the more remote areas unserved. These inefficiencies were based on models forged in the colonial era, models which created and perpetuated a stagnant and passive peasant sector.

From the early colonial days to the present, cities, towns, plantations and mines have been provisioned by both petty traders using the riverways and larger concerns which were licensed by the state to buy in a certain area. Trade in smoked fish, forest meat, caterpillars, plantains, fruit, sugar cane, cassava leaves, and other cassava products was largely the province of indigenous traders, though markets were officially organized by the colonial government and even today market prices are still strictly controlled.

In contrast, large traders and concerns have dominated the trade in corn and rice since the 1930s. Trading companies with exclusive contracts, parastatals, and plantations purchased within specific buying zones to sell in the urban areas or to their workers and were responsible for provisioning these zones in merchandise as well as maintaining roads and other services.⁴ Farmers would often be paid on credit, sometimes months after the sale, or with merchandise and at a price or value equivalent well below market value of the crop.

The cultivation of rice in Haut Zaire, like corn in Shaba and cassava in Bandundu has been obligatory since the early colonial period. Extension agents are an arm of the state who impose fines and jail sentences for non-cultivation. Producers are also heavily taxed and required to carry out unpaid labor for local officials (Mokonda 1980). Failure to obey results in fines, beatings, and jail sentences.⁵ Very high rates of taxation and labor service, and corporal punishment are also legacies of the colonial era (Northrup 1989).

For Shaba (Katanga), Jewsiewicki writes that "Thanks to the policy of compulsory cultivation in conjunction with fixed prices, as well as the trading monopoly which was greatly intensified during the Depression," extensive rural areas were subjugated to "the interests of private industry by compelling them by administrative and political measures to engage in poorly rewarded agricultural production."

In a conclusion that mirrors current development issues, he finds that "This model, which ensured cheap labour and food supplies for the economy and particularly for capitalist industry, rapidly imposed severe constraints on the internal market. Despite numerous attempts, starting from 1948-1950, to modify the situation, the commercialization of African agriculture was not possible within a framework which involved placing the African farmer out of reach of the market" (Jewsiewicki 1977: 33).

Thus the model for grain production and marketing inherited from the colonial era was characterized by controls on trade, as the state issued licenses for buying in certain areas, and compulsory cultivation with corresponding low farmgate prices. Until

⁴This system was modified in Kivu (Conde 1981), where licensed traders were always permitted to buy in any Zone. Kivu has a more active rice trade, and farmgate prices are higher than Haut Zaire, especially on the Rwandan border. Nevertheless, traders and farmers smuggle rice across the border when possible as it fetches up to three times more there (after "border costs").

⁵These punishments were reported in Haut Zaire and Bandundu, less so in Shaba. Many residents of these two regions feel that they are still being punished for having been centers of the Simba and Mulelist rebellions in 1964.

the 1970s, all licensed rice traders in Haut Zaire were expatriates who owned a rice mill and truck(s) for collecting rice, or agents of plantations and concessions such as PLZ (Lever Plantations) and Busira-Lomami who had exclusive rights to buy in their concession areas.

This system was separate from trade in other food crops which was dominated by the Lokele, a fishing and trading people. The food trade was one of the only avenues open to African entrepreneurs and the Lokele came to play a key role in Kisangani's economy and political life (Pons 1959; Lokomba 1972). Not surprisingly, the Lokele are now heavily represented in the category of official licensed rice trader in Kisangani (5 out of 18 surveyed).

Beginning in the late 1970s, petty traders, dubbed Lolema or "bat" in Swahili, proliferated around Kisangani, buying paddy and rice which had been manually decorticated by farmers in defiance of the law against this practice. These traders were tolerated, as they paid fines when caught trading without a license, and they could go into areas not covered by the "official" rice traders and evacuate crops which were rotting there for lack of buyers. High rates of unemployment swelled the ranks of these "pirates," many of whom were unemployed teachers.

At the same time, a few Zairians entered the rice trade as licensed traders, either through Zairianization of an expatriate-owned business or through their own efforts. One Kisangani merchant bought his first rice mill in 1971 and has been buying rice in his zone of origin since that time.

Responding to the problem of unsold rice, Agricultural Department officials in Haut Zaire sought to modify the monopoly system early in the 1980s by opening up the rice trade in a given buying zone to any licensed trader when the trader assigned to that zone had bought as much as he could for the season. This concession was designed to strengthen the licensed traders in their fight with the Lolema, who by 1980 were identified as a major perturbation in the rice marketing system (ANEZA 1980).

In Kisangani, the rise of the Lolema coincided with the move of rice mills from the interior to the city. This move was brought about by a number of factors, primary of which was the fuel crisis, which made electric mills much cheaper to run than diesel mills. Other factors included the deterioration of agricultural feeder roads and the inability of the Zairian merchants, by now the majority of licensed rice traders, to keep competent and honest managers in the countryside to safeguard their assets (cf. Tshilemalema 1987). As described above, the rapid "class formation" resulting from Zairianization had created a gap between Zairian business owners and their workers which caused mistrust and resulted in widespread theft and shirking of work.

The displacement of rice mills into the city further isolated rural areas for whom the rice mills represented a source of employment and contact with the outside world.⁶ The rice mills did, however, represent a new economic niche in a city plagued by high unemployment (Balwisha 1986).

⁶Cf. Timmer 1975 on the role of rural rice mills in Indonesia in generating rural development.

The Farmers' View of Rice Production and Marketing

In Kisangani and Tshopo, strategies open to rice producers to maximize revenue and minimize uncompensated labor are very limited. Men relegate most of the work in the fields to women and concentrate mainly on more lucrative activities such as hunting and fishing. Some women in Banalia Zone complained that they even have to cut and burn the forest field. This division of labor was illustrated in studies carried out by Tollens' students at Yalibua, in Isangi Zone (Kaseko 1975; Tshibaka-Mukendi 1975-76; Tshiunza 1983).

They found that the major constraint to rice production was male labor in cutting and burning fields. A man will invest in bridewealth for a second or subsequent wives if possible in order to increase household labor input without increasing the obligatory area to be cultivated--calculation of which is based on the Belgian system that only labeled men as "cultivators." A second strategy open to farmers is to resist further demands of extension agents, beyond the bare minimum of cultivating the area specified.

Mbaya's (1982) study of Turumbu (Isangi Zone) rice farmers' resistance to planting in lines and other "new," more intensive techniques, illustrates this point. These farmers also clearly expressed their feelings of being duped and even enslaved by the "Cooperative" charged to buy their rice. Though called the Turumbu Cooperative, this organization has never been managed by farmers, who in fact have had no input in its formation or policy. It is primarily a rice-buying monopoly, managed by a Kisangani-based trader who, still in 1986-87, had the exclusive license to buy in Turumbu Collectivity. This area, only 90 km from Kisangani, was formerly the most productive rice zone in Zaire, but due to the poor management of the "cooperative" and very low farmgate prices, Turumbu rice production has declined dramatically (Lokomba 1987).

A third set of strategies open to the farmer to increase revenue is to sell to Lolema, at night, at prices higher than the "official" price, or after having manually decorticated the rice. The farmer may also refuse weighing the paddy during the sale and insist on selling by the sack. On the surface, this may seem to work to the farmer's disadvantage. In reality, the farmers know full well that traders use rigged scales.⁷ Farmers, in their turn, will try to trick the traders by filling the sacks with quantities of chaff and dust.

Finally, a few farmers may sell their own rice in Kisangani. This usually involves transport by bicycle or headload and canoe. Only the most educated and/or affluent farmers make this trip, as one runs the risk of theft, spoilage from water, harassment by the military, and roadblocks.

Divisions at the village level between MPR officials, traders, educated people, and farmers reflect the relatively low status and low income of the cultivator (cf. Roberts 1986). At a meeting of women in Banalia, the Zone capital north of Kisangani, this division between traders and wives of officials on the one hand, and farm women (*mamans paysannes*) on the other, was observed. Farm women were requested to fetch and carry items by the other women, they did not sit in chairs and stood off by themselves. One Maman Paysanne highlighted the difference between the two "classes" when she remarked that all women are not alike in that "some of us eat twice a day, while the rest only eat once a day."

⁷This practice was confirmed by direct observation.

Fortunately, land is not yet a scarce factor in production in the Tshopo sub-region except around the largest towns, as it has become in more populous areas.⁸ Farmers at Turumbu, west of Kisangani, however, told a researcher that they had been informed that the land did not belong to them, and was the property of the state (Mbaya 1981; see also MacGaffey 1980).⁹

Though rural dwellers are not yet alienated from the land in Tshopo, there is little in the way of amenities. "Dispensaries, maternity clinics and schools . . . often exist only in administrative reports" (Mokonda 1978; translation by present author). Several villages visited in the outlying areas of Yahuma Zone, within the sphere of influence of the giant Lever Plantations (PLZ), were lacking schools and clinics altogether, but the villagers' chief complaint was that they had no way to buy merchandise.

With the advent of a few traders menacing their long-held monopoly, PLZ no longer maintains the roads or stocks the canteens. The director of plantations for PLZ expressed a wish to cultivate rice now on large fields with tractors rather than continue to buy from local farmers (Dodd 1988). The possibility of financing traders to buy rice or palm nuts from smallholders was not entertained.

It is impossible to get reliable production figures, but observers have noted over the last twenty years that farmers moved out of rice when no buyers were forthcoming or coercion power was low (Mbaya 1981; Conde 1981). One calculation made in 1982 found that, to become profitable, farmgate prices for rice would have to exceed 13.3 Zaires per kilogram (Tshiunza 1982). This price was not achieved until 1987, and then only in some areas. Thus profitable rice production has not been even a remote possibility.

In Kisangani, the price of cloth, perhaps the most important trade item, tripled from November 1986 to November 1987, while farmgate prices for rice doubled only in the most active zones and in many areas increased only 50-60 percent. Increases in the price of manufactured goods were given as a reason by several traders for not provisioning farmers. With higher prices it takes too long to sell the goods and traders, racing against inflation, must make quick trips to turn over their funds.

From the research of Northrup (1988), Jewsiewicki (1977), and Peemans (1987), we see that this lack of investment and faith in African farmers, as well as the low status of the cultivator, are long-standing and, as such, represent a fundamental part of the nation's value system. Hence, it is not price alone which discourages farmers. There is little respect for the endeavor and no feeling that improvements in living conditions can be made which could be passed on to the next generation.

⁸Reports and observations of land tenure problems resulting from conflicts between clan tenure holders and "outsiders" buying land for coffee or cattle raising, or clan tenure holders and plantations have come from Kivu (Newbury 1984), Southern Shaba (Schoepf and Schoepf 1984), and Bandundu (personal observation).

⁹A 1973 law converted all land in Zaire to state ownership. The issue of traditional land tenure has not yet been resolved (see MacGaffey 1980) and has potential to be an explosive issue in the years to come. These land tenure struggles seem to indicate that investment is being made in rural areas and, indeed, in areas where easy evacuation of crops is possible, this investment is visible. The issues however, are road maintenance and other investments in the rural economy.

In Bandundu, for example, stretches of road are maintained by PLZ and other palm oil companies. In these areas, the indigenous manufacture of palm oil is forbidden and punished and palm nut cutting is extremely poorly paid. Locals who are able to purchase cattle become discouraged by excessive taxation and many end up selling their assets. When the palm oil companies pull out, however, the villagers become isolated and have very little way to get revenue.

We have seen then that rice farming is not profitable, nor was it ever designed to be. In addition, the farmer is a "second-class citizen" whose milieu lacks even the barest amenities, whose movements are strictly controlled, and who lacks even legal rights to the land she or he farms. Liberalization has raised farmgate prices in some areas, but the farmers are now unable to get, and afford, merchandise coming from the city. Their seeds and tools are worn out and farm women are disastrously overworked. "Cooperatives" formed in their name are designed without their input and with the purpose of maintaining monopoly control and keeping prices low.

In Bandundu, the farmers' situation is perhaps more difficult and may be a harbinger for Haut Zaire. Here the forest is rapidly being destroyed, burned in frantic efforts to smoke out a few rats and snakes to sell or eat. Men's income-earning potential is even more restricted because there is virtually no game left. Good land is hard to come by and is being bought up by urban elites in collusion with local authorities. Since many of these sales involve absentee owners, the land is often not used productively.

MacGaffey (1980: 103) cautions that if the situation of rural people in Zaire "is one of malnutrition rather than starvation, [it] is partly a tribute to the survival of customary land tenure." Development planners who see individual ownership of land as a prerequisite for productive investment might do well to study the use of and control over other resources in the "private sector" in the last twenty years, as well as the--often horrifying--history of Zaire's concession areas (Northrup 1988, see also Berry 1988 on land tenure).

The Traders' Survival Strategies

Rice traders have their own strategies for survival in the tumultuous Zairian economy. The risks are great, but the profit can also be substantial for a successful trader. For smaller traders, it is a way to scratch out a living and keep up with inflation. The successful rice professional, defined as a licensed trader with a rice mill and, in some cases a truck or trucks, goes on the rice campaign himself or sends a close and trusted relative. He pays workers subsistence wages and provides food and alcohol. Thus, labor costs are kept low. With up to 72 percent unemployment in Kisangani, if some workers leave, others can always be found (Huybrechts and Van der Steen, cited in MacGaffey 1987).

The trader will personally survey the filling of the sacks and each sale. He may try to get the approval of local authorities by repairing a stretch of road or a bridge, by selling merchandise at discount prices or, as in one case observed, by threatening and bribing them to restrict other traders.

If the rice professional buys rice and owns a rice mill in Kisangani, he tries to keep milling prices high, to shut out Lolema. If he does not have a truck or is not doing the rice campaign, but owns a rice mill, he keeps milling prices low, or finds other ways to attract Lolema, such as paying for transportation and meals (which must later be reimbursed by the Lolema after sale of the rice).

Thus, the rice professionals are pitted against one another in the sense that some only have rice mills and must attract Lolema, whereas others are in direct competition with Lolema in the buying campaigns and, as discussed above, by the fact that some have received substantial credit and others have not (Elanga 1986).

The failure to procure credit has caused the virtual dissolution of the Committee of Rice Professionals, representing rice mill owners, which is grouped under ANEZA, the Chamber of Commerce. Another committee of merchants, CICA, was similarly

disaffected when they discovered that most of the credit available for the year (1988) went to non-CICA members (Yuma 1988).

These committees were set up by the government under various agricultural development programs in order to provide information to food crop merchants about credit programs and other activities such as road maintenance. They were also supposed to provide a forum for these merchants to discuss their problems and possible solutions. Since no concrete benefits have been forthcoming, the membership in these organizations has declined drastically and few meetings ever take place. Thus, rice merchants have learned that it is "every man for himself." In theory this kind of "competition" should serve as a stimulus in the economy, but in reality the fact that Zairian merchants cannot act together as a group makes them more vulnerable to bureaucratic moves to siphon off their profits (new taxes, licenses, fines, and so on).

As described above, the Lolema are petty traders, coming from both the traditional food trade sector and the ranks of the unemployed, who have entered the rice trade in the last decade. A Lolema may use family ties in the area to get clients (50 percent of 20 Lolema randomly surveyed in rice mills in October 1987) or have regular clients from whom rice is bought (80 percent surveyed). One strategy for increasing revenue is to try to stuff the sacks with more paddy than paid for (the reverse of the farmers' strategy). Thus, the trader gets a greater quantity of white rice per sack after milling. He or she sells a bit more rice every trip than the trip before and has a bit more to invest on the next trip--or at least keeps up with inflation. These traders are constantly in motion, and the majority surveyed claimed that they do not have time to sell merchandise in the rural areas. By mid-October, the Lolema surveyed had already made an average of 2.75 trips, and the rice campaign had only officially begun one month before.

One rice mill manager said that a few Lolema are able steadily to increase the number of sacks bought with each trip. With the profits, one-third of those surveyed planned to stay in the rice or peanut trade while others wished to move on to trade in palm oil, coffee, salted fish, or petrol, or to take up other occupations. Precisely what makes a Lolema able to increase her or his revenue with each trip is unknown. A rice mill manager and our survey both suggest that women are less successful than men, in the sense that they purchase fewer sacks of rice. Other possible determinants of success are education and family support.

The Lolema are a diverse group which has many activities other than the rice trade. They lack the capital to invest in production, in terms of seed or tool distribution, and those interviewed did not have credit associations or pooling of resources (with the possible exception of some Lokele families). The rice professionals are also involved in many other activities, most of them non-agricultural, and have failed as a group to get access to credit for agricultural campaigns, funds for feeder road maintenance, tools, seeds, or foreign exchange for spare parts and trucks. Thus, though Zairians are now the main actors in the rice trade, no development has taken place. In fact, to an observer, it seems almost a miracle that the system functions at all.

The State's Role

The government officials involved in the rice trade at the local level include the zone commissioner, Department of Agriculture officials and agricultural extension agents (*monagris*), local chiefs, and, in the background, the military.¹⁰ It is through these officials that national agricultural policy must be implemented. Because of the predatory and corrupt nature of the ruling party, however, these officials do not have the respect of farmers and traders. In areas controlled by large plantations, they may actually have little power. For example, in Lokutu, the headquarters of Lever Plantations in Haut Zaire, the zone commissioner lives in a house owned by the company and informs the company of activities of traders in the zone.

Many local officials are hardworking and competent but their effectiveness on the job is also severely limited by lack of funds and the unstable political climate. Banalia Zone, north of Kisangani, had seven zone commissioners in seven years. Under the patrimonial system described by Callaghy (1986), they are accountable only to Kinshasa. The Department of Agriculture is desperately poor and its agents, like the military, must prey on the farmers to survive. Only the regional inspector in Kisangani has a vehicle for "inspecting" an area the size of France, but often no funds for fuel. The building which houses the Department in Kisangani has no light fixtures in all but the inspector's office, and monthly zone reports often complain that lateness is due to lack of a typewriter or paper.

Before 1983, agricultural price setting and licensing were carried out at the level of the sub-region for all seven zones in the sub-region. The system was quite straightforward: a licensed trader was assigned to a given area and it was his responsibility to get out the rice.

Zone officials now have more control over the process and there is more room to "negotiate" on licenses, taxes, access, and opening the season. Some local officials have tried to implement liberalization policies to the extent that they permit discussion of the official price at the start of the campaign, but this practice does not imply that prices and market access in their zones are liberalized.

In one zone, Catholic missionaries privately accused the zone commissioner of colluding with a large trader to restrict other traders from buying rice. At the opening of the rice buying season, this commissioner was nowhere to be found and the long-awaited collective bargaining session never took place. In another zone, roadblocks were set up to catch "illegal" (non-licensed) traders.

Officials often expressed the impossibility of implementing full liberalization. Echoing colonial sentiments about the need to tutor and organize (*encadrer*) farmers, both large traders and officials rarely if ever see the farmer as an active agent. In discussing the Lolema, both these groups agree that their presence injects unwanted "anarchy" into the system.

¹⁰One study estimated that 58 percent of the population in Haut Zaire depended on the revenue earned by military personnel (SICAI 1971). Since these troops' actual salaries are very low, they must scavenge for other ways to earn revenue. As an arrested person is obligated to pay for his arrest, including the soldier's fee, frequent arrests help to finance the military and its dependents. Villagers can be arrested for a wide range of offenses, including cutting palm trees, public drunkenness, "vagabondage," leaving the village without written authority, and "superstitious practice" (Annual Report, Haut Zaire 1978).

This conception was reinforced at the Second Annual Regional Agricultural Conference in Kisangani in November 1986 whose theme was "Towards a Better Organization of the Peasantry for Increased Production." One of only two women invited to the conference, both MPR officials, remarked during the proceedings that the theme was a bit ironic since no "peasants" had been invited (and of course no petty traders as well).

There is, of course, a self-serving element to the concepts of peasant passivity and the need to control trade in that the local officials' revenue is substantially derived from taxes, fines, and licenses resulting from laws that restrict trade and farmers' activities or from the bribes of large concerns. Yet the conception is also deeply embedded in peoples' consciousnesses. One clan chief from Isangi Zone described how his people are instilled with fear of leaving their villages by agents of a large trading concern which has the monopoly for palm oil, and how they feel powerless vis-a-vis traders and officials.

The Domestic Economy as a Factor in Rice Production and Trade

The political economy as sketched out above in relation to the rice trade both shapes and is shaped by relations in the domestic economy--within the (extended) family and between men and women. Tshilemalema (1987) has pointed out that relations in the Zairian family are not "traditional" but are a result of poverty and dependence. In this domestic economy, a salary-earner, merchant, or small business owner is the nexus of myriad dependent relationships.

At the household level, men and women are often at odds with each other, torn apart by competing demands for labor and money needed to survive. Women's needs and responsibilities differ from men's, and women are kept in line with beatings and witchcraft accusations, as well as by laws which restrict their access to banking and jobs.

Women do most of the work in rice production. Men sell the rice and decide how much of the revenue goes to women. Work on rice fields often conflicts with work on cassava, the women's crop. Around the town of Banalia, women reported walking up to fourteen kilometers to rice fields on treacherous forest paths inundated with water. Produce is carried home on the back, in packs of up to 50 kilos.

In the cities, prostitution and concubinage are often the only avenues open to women to make a living and this is how many women get initial capital for trading. One long-time rice merchant said that 60 percent of the Lolema women were prostitutes. When a woman marries, however, it is expected that she will turn over her earnings to her husband, a practice that often leaves both women and children's financial needs unmet. Thus it is more difficult for women traders to control their own incomes and less likely that pooled income will be used for women's businesses.

On the other hand, women are less "visible" than men, and may be able to carry out small-scale trade with less harassment than men. Lokele women are particularly noted for their role in food supply around Kisangani, both as market sellers and petty traders. Lokomba (1972) attributes much of this success to family solidarity and strong bonds between husband and wife.

Another successful trading people, the BaNande of Kivu, who supply Kisangani in vegetables and smoked fish, are also noted for their family and ethnic solidarity. According to Streiffler and Mbaya's study, however, this solidarity does not extend to BaNande cultivators who complained that they had no idea how their crops were being

sold and were living in abject poverty (Streiffler and Mbaya 1987). Thus ethnic and family ties are very limited as bases for productive investment. Few farmers reported working the fields in groups or helping out family members, which may indicate weak clan and lineage ties or concerns about exploitation by family members.

The Rice Trade System Today

The current rice trade system reflects fundamental contradictions in the Zairian economy. On the one hand, there is already substantial "liberalization" in the form of the Lolema and Zairian participation as rice professionals. In some cases, revenue from smuggling and liberalization of the diamond, gold and coffee markets has also been invested in the rice trade. There is indeed a whole lot of trading going on. How the profits from trading are invested is another issue, however, which relates to the structure of the economy, including availability of credit, maintenance of infrastructure, training of workers, and clearly defined regulations. Investment in production requires some confidence in the economy and resolution of the factors described above. This confidence is justifiably lacking.

On the other hand, the implementation of the liberalization policy, per se, has taken control out of the hands of merchants who had formerly run their buying zones, and put it more in the hands of local officials who control licensing, taxation, and access, often in collusion with large traders and concession holders. This tendency is illustrated by the creation of the new rice campaign regulations after liberalization, and the actual way these regulations are put into practice, as discussed below. The colonial model, in effect until 1983, gave responsibility to the licensed trader, not only for buying the rice but for distributing seed, provisioning the rural areas and maintaining the roads. This was certainly an unfree market but it did have certain benefits in that traders were motivated to invest in rural areas. Though in a paternalistic way, they were at least expected to take some responsibility for their areas.

Theoretically, liberalization should offset these paternalistic benefits by increasing competition and hence raising farmgate prices. Though there is some movement in that direction, in Banalia, for example, evidence points to the likelihood that local officials, not farmers, are capturing the increases in farmgate prices through taxes, fines, and fees.

The cost of a license to trade in rice was increased five-fold from 1986 to 1987 and *primes* or cuts to local authorities are substantial (as much as 10 percent of the farmgate price). In addition there is an "evacuation tax" that even farmers must pay to sell their own rice, and often gifts must be given to officials. In Isangi Zone, Chinese from a nearby sugar factory started purchasing local rice at a higher than usual price but didn't pay these *primes*. The next year they were prevented by zone authorities from buying rice.

In theory, rice prices and access are determined in collective bargaining sessions at the beginning of the rice "campaign." Setting this date is in itself a tool to be manipulated, as those traders who buy "early" are subject to fines and confiscation of their rice. In practice, if and when this bargaining session does occur, only a few large traders and collectivity chiefs are present.

The licensed traders, those rice professionals who buy rice, want to eliminate the Lolema competition and often discuss ways to squeeze out these smaller traders. The collectivity chiefs, for their part, usually do not and cannot represent the producers' interests. This post, which represents a grouping of up to fifty villages, is often filled by

an MPR official who is not a recognized clan leader. Formerly, this was the chiefly position imposed by the Belgians to extract labor and crops from the population (Northrup 1988).

The colonial system is also reflected in the continuing use of the term *capita*, or work-boss, to describe certain village leaders who get a prime from the rice sales, along with the chief. The prime is based not on price per sack or kilogram but on number of sacks sold. Thus, the chiefs have no real incentive to bargain for higher prices, since cultivation is obligatory.

Now there is also no incentive or means for licensed traders to maintain the roads or to provision the rural areas. As noted above, licensed traders, or rice professionals, were not able to benefit from being part of a group, either in terms of access to credit or funds for road maintenance. Many remarked that political ties, especially in Kinshasa, determined access to credit, not ability as a trader or membership in a professional group.

In observing the overall structure of the rice trade, one sees a constantly shifting pattern of production and investment. Since rice farming has rarely been profitable, it is cultivated under obligation and other activities have taken priority. Both Lolema and rice professionals have many other, often conflicting, activities. It was often difficult to locate rice merchants for interviews, as they were taking care of other business or personal matters outside of the city.

The communication system is also very weak. Information is limited as to where rice to be sold is available and how much is available. Arriving in a village, a trader must send out "scouts" to dig out pockets of unsold rice. Often, rice is unsold for months or forever. In addition, one is never completely informed about the state of roads and bridges. Roads can be cut off for months or years. Similarly, in Shaba, after months of concerted effort on the part of an agricultural development project to increase corn production, the railroads ceased to function during the peak buying season and corn piled up at the railheads.

Like the buying of rice, the rice mill business is also highly uncertain. In surveying rice mills in Kisangani, it was discovered that, from 1985 to 1987, only 10 out of 24 rice mills were still in operation--and only one from 1982 (Balwisha 1986). Many registered rice mills in Kisangani were closed when visited during the rice season; others had opened which were not registered. Many were closed periodically during the year of observation.

Investment in the rice trade is by no means a sure thing. Two investors were interviewed whose initial capital had been made in the diamond and gold trade. One initiated a failed rice campaign venture, while the other decided not to invest after seeing the difficulties involved. The most successful rice trader in Kisangani, active in the rice trade since 1982, sold his truck and rice mill in December 1987 and went to Nigeria for an extended trip. With the profits from these sales, he opened up a store for building materials.

The rice trade has thus been an avenue of accumulation for some, but profits are often not put back into the trade. There were very few instances observed of any

investment made in rice production or in improvements of rice producing areas.¹¹ Tools are rudimentary, seeds degenerated, and seed distribution programs very scanty and sporadic, fertilizer and pesticide use nonexistent, and labor inputs, as discussed above, are severely limited by farmers' other activities.

Many rice merchants, however, including the president of ANEZA and the president of the Rice Professionals Committee feel that rice production and marketing could be the engines of development for the region, given research on new rice varieties, credit, and investment in infrastructure. As befitting their positions, the officials were optimistic about the future. Other rice traders said that the rice trade could be very lucrative, but few felt that any viable solutions had been tried, or even found, to the problems of infrastructure maintenance, credit availability, excessive taxation, or providing farmers with inputs.

The Outlook for Liberalization

Liberalization policies in themselves cannot remove the "constraints" outlined above, because these constraints reflect fundamental contradictions in the Zairian economy, especially with respect to food supply. Founded on the principles of compulsion and restricted trade, models of agricultural production and marketing were reproduced from the colonial model but without the investments made in that time.

Today liberalization of the rice trade is severely restricted in areas where no investment is made in infrastructure or where concessions and plantations dominate, as is the case on the left bank of the Zaire River in the zones of Isangi and Yahuma. In Banalia Zone, to the north, there is a great deal more "free trade" but this is due to gold prospecting and smuggling activities, not to liberalization policies. Liberalization there has not led to noticeable investment in the area in terms of infrastructure, research, tools, seed distribution, or in noticeable improvements in farmers' living conditions. Further research is planned, however, to track developments in farming areas more systematically.

The lack of development in Banalia can be attributed to the fact that local officials capture much of the farmgate price increases, and that the mass of small traders with little or no capital have no way to attract credit or investment to the zone. In Banalia larger traders sought to contain the drainage of paddy by Lolema. They were not very successful, as witnessed by articles in the local paper decrying the anarchy in the rice trade (Elanga 1986) and by the steady rise in farmgate prices in the zone. Yet as traders' margins got smaller, the larger traders refused to buy in the area. When they do not buy, the smaller traders have few opportunities for transporting their paddy except bicycle and pirogue.

¹¹In terms of investment in production, the following can describe efforts being made:

Seed distribution projects around Kisangani were very meager: Project Etime Banalia started in 1987; 2 ha for multiplication; INERA Turumbu, Isangi Zone affects a few surrounding villages, many too poor to hang on to seeds after harvest, according to the manager of Turumbu Cooperative; CODIS, a "Cooperative" in Isangi Zone (run by Kisangani-based elites), distributed seeds in five villages around Isangi town, in areas not suited to rice production; significant crop failures resulted.

Roads: Sporadic maintenance of major roads. Nevertheless some remain almost impassible in rainy season (Isangi road, Opala road after 75 km). No repair of feeder roads.

Tools and other inputs: Manufactured tools are not available. Artisanally made tools are often very poorly made, break within a year, and are inappropriate for women. No fertilizers or pesticides are available for smallholders. Functioning rice mills left in interior: Banalia Zone 1, Isangi Zone 3, Opala Zone 2, Yahuma Zone 2 (?).

When farmgate prices approached Z1800 per sack in the 1987 campaign, many large traders interviewed refused to buy in Banalia. In 1988, a Banalia-based trader reported that no large trader bought that year and that Banalia was "totally infested with Lolema" (Yuma 1988). While this trend indicates the success of the small trader, it does not necessarily bring benefit to the farmer, for reasons discussed above, nor does it mean that individual petty traders benefit, in that their margins are cut with greater competition. With continued high unemployment and few other opportunities, petty trade remains the only activity open to many people. Traders also face competition from imported rice. At the end of July 1987, in the slack period for local rice, one rice merchant remarked that the price for rice in Kisangani declined drastically with an influx of imported rice (Z4100 to Z2800).

Ironically, Isangi town (the capital of the zone), which is largely under the control of one influential merchant, has benefitted from the installation of electricity, a water system, and even a small telephone linkage. Construction of a new hospital is underway. Yet it was reported that farmers there were blocked from selling their own rice in the market, and the powerful merchant's "cooperative" wants to return to the system of exchanging goods or credit in the company store for rice.

In response to previous research on the rice trade, an FAO study recommended a return to the old monopoly system for rice (Mueller 1987), while others want to widen liberalization further through stricter enforcement, or wait for liberalization to work. Meanwhile, the Kinshasa daily, *Elima*, reported in March 1989 that tons of "green gold," as coffee is called in Haut Zaire, remains uncollected in the 1989 season due to neglected roads and lack of credit for traders.

Fundamental economic change requires structural investment such as roads and agricultural extension, which are now primarily the province of private voluntary organizations and donors. At both the national and local level, these organizations often find themselves working at cross-purposes to the state. Thus any kind of meaningful change, which would involve putting money into the hands of those involved in primary production and transformation, stimulating conditions under which these individuals could operate without constant harassment, or raising urban consumers' purchasing power so that higher farmgate prices could be tolerated, is unlikely.

Conclusions

Hitherto, the debate about liberalization has been centered around its efficacy in increasing production and the possible negative effects of structural adjustment, such as higher consumer prices and wage freezes. This paper argues that one must look first at the structure of trade and production and concomitant social relations within both the political economy and the domestic economy. It is contended that policies will be shaped to fit those existing structures unless fundamental transformations take place in the allocation of resources, means of coercion or access to power.

The paper has attempted to reveal the links between the structure of the Zairian political economy and individuals' strategies in participating in the rice trade. Studying the rice trade illustrates the struggles facing individuals, families, and businesses in and around Kisangani. Many of the structures and conflicts described here have been

observed and reported on in other areas of Zaire.¹² Zaire is a vast country, however, and micro-economies spring up quickly around areas of intense exploitation and on the borders (Newbury 1986). This activity does not, however, fundamentally alter the overarching structure of Zaire's dependent political economy, which is characterized, above all, by the fact that its rulers do not need to look after the welfare of the ordinary citizen in order to survive.

Those who wish to change the rules are ultimately forced to play by the rules or get out. Such was the case of the most successful rice trader in Kisangani discussed above. This man was willing to invest in bridge and road repair and also paid cash immediately for paddy in an area formerly under the domination of large concerns such as PLZ and Busira-Lomami. On his last rice buying trip to Isangi Zone, he heard reports about elephant poachers who had killed a merchant and wounded the zone commissioner. He understood quickly that he was being "discouraged" to buy in the zone, and he immediately sold his truck. At the last report, he is still in Nigeria.

¹²Similar conflicts and structures pertaining to market structures and class divisions in rural areas can be found in Roberts (1987), Lemarchand (1979), Newbury (1987), and were observed in my own trips, during 1988, to Shaba, Bandundu, and Bas Zaire.

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