CHANGING ROLES OF WOMEN IN RURAL SENEGAL:

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LEBOU-WOLOF WOMEN OF THIEDEM

A Thesis

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By

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To My Grandmother Khoudia
Who Died While I Was Writing This Thesis,
My Parents Momar Mar and Nene Guisse, Husband Tidiane Gadio
and Children Bouba and Khadi
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH STATEMENT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. OBJECTIVES</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of African Women’s Roles in the Past</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African’s Women’s Contemporary Roles in Agriculture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegalese Rural Women</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Setting</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. FINDINGS</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, Land and Production</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Organizations and Control Over Income</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Roles in Farming</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Constraints in Farming</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

Introduction: Research Statement

Senegalese women are central to the development process of their country. They play crucial roles in agriculture, which is Senegal’s most important sector of production. The importance of their roles is now gaining more recognition in the rhetoric of development. Little, however, has been done to improve their actual working conditions, increase their access to resources or qualitatively enhance their productivity. This thesis examines the changing roles of three generations of women involved in market gardening in Thiedem, a small agricultural village of Senegal. It will show how the changing economy and cultural values affect the sexual division of labor over time. Moreover, it will demonstrate how women -through their multiples roles- have been participating fully in market gardening and trade in Thiedem. It draws heavily on interviews with the women farmers of Thiedem.

Women’s farming is primarily devoted to subsistence production and marketing, increasingly market gardening. In
general, the produce from their farms is mainly used for family consumption and for marketing locally. In contrast, men’s farming focuses on cash crops for export. Consequently, men’s farming is given more attention and support since it provides the country with opportunities to participate in international trade and therefore to increase its economic abilities. This has resulted in a lack of knowledge about women’s farming, thus ignoring their contributions to farming which are crucial to the Senegalese economy.

In rural areas, development planners, policy makers and government extension services agents view women most of the time as mothers and not as farmers. These agents usually deal with the head of the household who, according to local and colonial notions, is a man. Consequently, women’s work is overlooked, devalued, and their crucial roles both as producers and reproducers are not given the importance and attention they deserve.

As a result, rural women are discriminated against in getting access to critical resources such as land, extension services, credit, and basic training. In this time of economic crisis and structural adjustment, such critical resources are crucial to the economic development of their communities and of their country. They also are critical to women’s well being and that of their families.

As shown by Lewis (1984), Rogers (1980), and Njoku
(1980), cash cropping, usually identified with men, has received the attention of researchers and extension agents, yet there is little evidence of research on production or marketing for local consumption. Some attention has been paid to women farmers in Senegal, but there are few studies which focus on women who produce and market specific crops for a local market. Studies of women farmers also tend to focus on issues important to development planning, technical aspects of production, and farmers’ organizations. Very few studies focus on women’s perception of their reality as farmers, traders, women, wives, mothers or citizens. There are not many studies of women farmers and traders where women themselves define the issues of importance and assess the changes which occurred in their roles over time. The main concern of the present study is to address such issues.

This study looks at how women in Thiedem, involved in market gardening activities, cope with and perceive their socioeconomic roles. In my research I interviewed fifteen women and I encouraged them to discuss how they value and structure their work as farmers and how they meet the challenges of their economic niche, cultural milieu and the sexual division of labor in their village. In particular, the study focuses on the impact of women’s marketing activities since the Lebou-Wolof women of Thiedem are centrally involved in marketing their considerable quantity of produce. This may make a significant difference in their
lives. Does their marketing empower them? For instance: are they involved in decision making in the household and in their community? Do they have control over their income? Do they have access to productive resources? What difference does marketing make in their roles and status in agriculture? The findings of this study will also help clarify women’s socioeconomic roles by addressing other issues such as women’s perceptions of the changes in their roles as farmers and traders over time, the factors they perceive as obstacles to their participation in the rural economy, and how men in general, and agricultural agents in particular, interact with these women. The study also looks at how women perceive and respond to men’s attitudes and behavior toward them as farmers and traders.

In Chapter II, I describe the objectives of the study. Also, I present an overview of the literature on the changing roles of women in agriculture in Africa in general and in Senegal specifically. Moreover, I describe the characteristics of the setting and the methodology. Chapter III analyzes the findings of the research. Finally, Chapter IV presents the general conclusions.
Chapter II

2a. Objectives

The main hypothesis of this study can be stated as follows: the multi-faceted changes in the lives of women in Thiedem (a village in Senegal) do not always fit some patterns described in the literature as common internationally. For that reason, those changes need in some way to be presented and conceptualized differently. I will describe and analyze how the changes connected to the developing capitalist economy combine with the worsening Senegalese economic crisis to increase poverty and create a weakening of local patriarchal values mainly in the domain of power-relationships within the household.

In order to prove the hypothesis, the objectives of the proposed study of women farmers in Thiedem are:

1) To analyze women’s access to land and control over production, since in Senegal the land tenure system seems to be in favor of the head of the household (usually a man considered as the owner) in terms of getting inputs and making important decisions such as distribution of plots and control over production.

2) To evaluate the sources of changes in women farmers’ roles over time, because in Senegal many factors such as
desertification, drought, the changes of the global economy and its repercussions in the Senegalese economy have certainly brought social changes and transformed the roles of women in many important sectors such as agriculture.

3) To determine the constraints and problems women face in their roles as farmers and traders. In Senegal, many constraints have been described (Rice and Gustavo, 1989; Seck, 1989) as being obstacles to increasing women’s productivity and in finding viable marketing systems. It is crucial to be specific about those constraints in order to provide efficient alternatives aimed at improving the women’s lives.

2b. Literature Review

Abundant literature documents the theme of the changing roles of women in agriculture in Africa. In many different disciplines, including sociology, history, economics, political science, and anthropology (Hay and Stichter, 1986; Tadesse, 1984), one finds a disparate but interesting literature. Regarding the specific Senegalese case, most of the literature on women’s roles in agriculture comes from studies done by institutions such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Societe D’aménagement et D’exploitation des Terres du Delta (SAED), the Agricultural Development Office (ADO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the
Programme des Nations Unies Pour Le Developpement (PNUD), (1981, 1990), and individuals (Savane, 1983; Isern, 1990; Mackintosh, 1989; Rice and Gustavo, 1989; Monimart, 1989; Bloch, 1987) who describe and evaluate the contributions of rural women in the economy.

The roles of women in the rural economy are both as reproducers and producers. The existence of a close relationship between these two different roles has been argued by Davison (1988:8):

> African women do not view themselves as relegated to one or the other sphere and often operate in both. Production (usually included in the public sphere) [by Western feminists] and procreation (included in the domestic sphere) are interwoven in the daily lives of African women.

The following literature review discusses the contributions and approaches of different authors who have addressed the issue of changing roles of rural women in African economies from the precolonial period to the present.

**Overview of African women’s roles in the past**

Exploring the changing roles of African women in rural society requires an examination of the social and economic changes which have shaped their social structure over time since "the sexual division of labor is constantly being transformed and re-created as social and economic changes take place" (Moore, 1988: 73).
Understanding the precolonial sexual division of labor and how major events, such as colonialism and imperialism, affected the former sexual division of labor, shaped local economies, and therefore dramatically impacted upon the lives and roles of women in their society, is necessary to any analysis of current roles and changes in those roles. Tadesse recognizes the necessity of addressing these components when she says,

The different phases of African history - the slave trade, colonialism and the ongoing processes of export promotion and import substitution represent the various ways in which Africa was "integrated" into the world economy (1984:65).

By the same token, Guyer emphasizes, "In order to understand [African] women’s present position, one therefore must understand the way in which the demands of the wider economy and the possibilities and constraints of local systems interact" (1984: 19). Specifically addressing the issues of rural women, Tadesse adds, "An exclusive focus on women’s role without analyzing the overall determinants of agricultural transformation and the resultant changes and/or continuity of the pre-existing divisions of labor would only lead to faulty conclusions" (1984: 65).

However, one should not limit the analysis of rural women’s changing roles only in relation to historical events such as colonialism and slavery, because as rightly defined by Harper, "Social change is also the story of individuals and of differences between generations in families" (1989:
2). Thus, the analysis of changing roles must consider micro- and macro-level historical change.

Previous research (Henn 1984; Boserup 1970; Rogers 1984) reveals that in precolonial Africa the predominant farming system was an extensive "system of shifting hoe culture" in which women performed most of the agricultural work. Boserup (1970) defines it as a "female farming system par excellence. In many African tribes, nearly all the tasks connected with food production continue to be left to women" (16). Following the same line, Henn states, "Women usually carried out most of the major farming tasks—breaking up the soil, planting, weeding, harvesting and carrying the harvest home" (Henn p.2). From this perspective, it is clear that women's roles in agricultural production were and are highly significant in terms of their contributions to the economy.

Family structure was also affected by the colonial experience. Etienne and Leacock (1980) state that the social structure of African families was more stable before colonization. Robertson, in her study "Social Change in Contemporary Africa," confirms this view and argues, "in precolonial societies power and status were primarily determined by age, family position, and ability, and secondarily by gender" (1986:250). The system of values was based on reciprocity and complementarity between women and men despite the general prevalence of patriarchal rules keeping women in the domestic sphere and justifying their
activities. Henn (1984:4) notes, "Care of children and the sick, and a wide range of domestic and personal services for children and for men especially for their husbands" was done by women. However, Kandiyoti argued (1985:34) that there is an "ambiguity that surrounds the whole question of complementarity versus dominance in the treatment of precapitalist gender relations in Africa" Moreover she proposed an alternative by stating that

The fact of the matter is that the transformation from a lineage-based subsistence mode to a capitalist mode fuelled by colonial expansion does not require the assumption of a sexually egalitarian pre-capitalist past but simply an awareness of the different forms that women’s subordination may take in each instance.

Regarding the impact of colonialism, many scholars agree that there was a strong impact on indigenous economies, the sexual division of labor, and the economic activities of women. However, there is still disagreement about the consequences of changes in these three parameters on the status of women.

One trend (Van Allen, 1976; Okonjo, 1976; Mullings, 1976; Rogers, 1984) argues that realities imposed during the colonial period, such as the male-dominated western vision, the introduction of a cash economy, the imposition of cash crop cultivation, the obligation of tax payments, and the migration of men to colonial factories and plantations,
profoundly affected the sexual division of labor and deprived women of important economic roles and rights. African women’s rights to land were dramatically affected by the colonial economy since, before the introduction of changes such as colonialism and private land tenure policies, "In many African societies individual and communal rights to land have concurrently existed" (Davison, 1988).

These imposed changes destabilized the relationship, based on reciprocity and cooperation, which existed between African women and men and deprived women of fundamental rights such as land tenure. Rogers states, "With the trend towards Western-style ownership of land rather than customary and communal rights, it was women’s rights to land which suffered most" (1984:38). In addition

The advent of European colonial capitalism drastically altered former patterns of land use and occupancy in many places...agricultural land held by Africans was gradually restricted, in many areas, by government policies that favored the consolidation of scattered tracts in the hands of male owners (Davison, 1988:14).

The loss of power and property rights experienced by women has been approached differently by scholars in their analysis. This diversity in approaches is illustrated in Davison’s study (1988) on "Land and Women’s Agricultural Production" when she states that " Leacock and Friedl focus on changes in the control of property to explain women’s loss of power in productive relations. Karen Sacks (1979),
instead, examines shifts in the mode of production in Central and Southern Africa as a mean of determining what led to women’s loss of power here". [In addition] Boserup emphasizes, "the introduction of cash cropping with its attendant emphasis upon male-controlled agricultural intensification as a primary determinant of women’s loss of status and power" (1970: 7). Therefore, colonialism had a negative impact on women’s status and roles. As Mullings put it, colonialism accelerated the dissolution of the village economy and the development of class society. It appears, then, that the development of stratification by class, particularly as accelerated by colonial relationships, has resulted in the decline of women’s status relative to that of men (Mullings, 1976: 255).

Moreover, women were discriminated against in getting access to formal education because of the colonial ideology (Rogers, 1984; Robertson, 1986; Boserup, 1970).

The second trend is rather ambivalent about the non-antagonistic nature of gender relations in pre-colonial Africa, and also about the impact of colonialism as being only negative on African women. According to Henn, the partisans of that view (Huntington, 1970; de The, 1970) point out that in many societies colonial intervention gradually weakened traditional patriarchal control over women, lessened the possibility of torture, slavery or death as punishment for female rebellion, and for the first time made divorce available to women... (1984: 11).
Moreover, scholars sharing the same ideas (Afonja, 1986; Okali, 1983) added that women, particularly in West Africa, benefitted from the introduction of cash crop production and privatization of land. An alternative point of view emphasized that,

where capitalism has intruded on subsistence forms of production, its impact is experienced differentially depending upon pre-existing and changing forms of production and exchange, kinship patterns of inheritance and land use practices. Although capitalism has been viewed as a major determinant in changing gender relations of production and exchange, it is not the only determinant (Davison, 1988:7).

Disagreement continues, however, about what the impact of colonialism on women’s roles in rural Africa has been.

**African women’s contemporary roles in agriculture**

In analyzing the roles of women in the contemporary context of imperialistic reorganization of the world economy, it is relevant to acknowledge, "With the increased penetration of capital, the sexual division of labor is usually transmuted by the continuance of sexist ideology into a ghettoization of women into unskilled or semi-skilled jobs" (Robertson, 1984: 249).

Given the close relationship between level of technology (of Africa) and mode of production on one hand, and the interaction of local and imported sexist beliefs on women on the other hand, one can agree with Robertson that
It is not an accident, then, that women often remain in a labor intensive mode of production while men assume control, or participate in capital-intensive activities...Ideology controls the dissemination of technological knowledge" (Robertson, 1984:249).

Most women in Sub-Saharan Africa are farmers (Henn 1984). Over 90% of women work in agricultural production (Boyle 1988; Lele 1990). Moreover, they are involved in the rural economy both as producers and reproducers and perform the bulk of the subsistence production. The concept of "reproducers" is derived from both "biological reproduction" and "physical reproduction" which "involves the daily regeneration of the wage labour force through cooking, cleaning, washing and so on..." (Brydon and Chant, 1989:10).

Women’s rural activities in many parts of Africa include agricultural production, food processing and production, produce marketing, craft making, and caring for children, elders and husbands. Rural African women contribute at least 70% of the subsistence labor in most areas (Robertson 1984; Bryson 1981; ILO 1984; Boyle 1988). Furthermore, according to Blumberg (1982) and Lewis (1984), women contribute 70% of all the time spent on food production, 100% of the time spent on food processing, 50% of that spent on food storage and animal husbandry, 60% of all the marketing, and 90% of the time spent obtaining firewood and water.

Despite its centrality, African women’s critical role
in agriculture and marketing has not been valued. They remain poor and do not get recognition for their massive and vital contribution to African societies (Guyer, Henn, Robertson 1984). In addition, they have been discriminated against and denied access to critical resources which would enable them to increase productivity, resources such as land, credit, extension services, technology (Rogers 1980; Lewis, 1984; Guyer, 1984; Monimart, 1989; Njoku, 1980). Scholars at the African Regional Seminar on Women held in Dakar in June 1981 argued that

National plans and agricultural policies perceive women only as housewives and mothers, and not as farmers. As a result, most women are denied access to land, credit, extension services, technology... (ILO, 1984).

Overall, one can say that, despite the existence of different views on the roles of African women in the past and in present times, the dominant trend argues that the sexual division of labor was not very sharp in precolonial period. For instance, colonialism and imperialism are to be blamed because of their negative impacts such as the devaluation and increase of women’s work in agriculture which occurred with the imposition of a certain Western model involving privatization of land and cash crop production. However, there is a need to take into account the interaction of capitalism and the nature of previous and contemporary gender relations in exploring the roles of
African women in agriculture. Women in Africa played and continue to play vital economic and social roles in African societies.

**Senegalese Rural Women**

In Senegal, agriculture is the most important sector of production since it provides approximately 70% of total national employment (Rice and Gustavo 1989:1; USAID\Senegal\ADO, 1990; De Wilde, 1984). In addition it provides both "subsistence and income through cash crops" (Isern 1990:22). While cash cropping for export (e.g., peanuts) tends to be dominated by men, Senegalese women are the main actors in agriculture, growing food crops for local consumption and sale, and providing labor for cash crops. According to Marie A. Savané "women comprise 25% of the formal labor force and perform approximately 60-80% of all agricultural labor" (quoted in Isern, 1990:1, 23).

Despite women’s essential contributions to agricultural production,

> agricultural statistics reflect only the portion of the cereal, cash crops, and livestock brought to market. The cereal, condiments, vegetable, fish, oil and crafts produced by women for household consumption are not included in these statistics" (Rice and Gustavo, 1989:2)

According to many studies (SAED/FAO/PNUD 1981; Rice and Gustavo, 1989; Rice, et.al. 1990; ISERN, 1990), Senegalese women face two main constraints in increasing their
production: heavy work loads and limited access to crucial incentives such as inputs and technology. Women are supposed to work in collective fields managed by men or in their husband’s fields as well as in their own. They are in charge of specific tasks in each specific field. Moreover, it has been argued that women’s subsistence production is of great importance since the produce from their field brings in up to 20% of the food consumed by the family.

Long workdays are part of women’s burden in rural areas. Particularly during the rainy season they work 13 to 15 hours a day. Even during the dry season, the work day is about 10 to 12 hours (Gustavo, 1990). Other problems of Senegalese rural women are lack of access to credit, technology, extension services, and land. At the village level, decision making structures exclude women from important decisions regarding the distribution of crucial resources such as land and agricultural inputs (Isern 1990). Another study done by SAED, FAO, and PNUD (1981) found that in all areas of Senegal women are left out regarding perimeters distribution except in the Bakel region where 60% of women got their share of irrigated perimeters. Women are also excluded from extension services which focus on providing assistance for cash crops production.

From Wolof areas in the "Bassin", to Fulani Zones in the "Vallee" to Diola villages in the Casamance, women’s agricultural activities differ from place to place.
Because of Senegal's ethnic diversity (Wolof, Fulani, Serer, etc.), it is important to avoid generalizations and to take into account the differences related to the specific sexual division of labor characterizing each ethnic group.

Diola women in Casamance are responsible for rice production; they produce, market and manage their money themselves. On the contrary, Wolof women in the Bassin Arachidier are expected by their community to work simultaneously in the community field, their husbands' fields and their own. In the same region, Serer women grow their own subsistence crops in addition to growing their husbands' cash crops of millet and peanuts (Isern, 1990; Rice, and al. 1990; SAED\FAO\PNUD, 1981).

As this discussion has shown, there is a necessity to link changes in women's roles to changes in the world economy and in the nature of gender relations in analyzing the changing roles of African women in agriculture. Capitalism, even though a main determinant in the changing roles of women in agriculture, should not be looked at alone. Other factors such as local and imported patriarchal beliefs and cultural norms should be included in the analysis of these roles.

I will structure my analysis in this study according to the model used by Guyer (1984) which argues for the need to take into account the relationship between the "demands of the wider economy and the possibilities and constraints of
the local system" in assessing the changes which happened in women's roles in farming.

2c. Methodology

This study provided the Lebou-Wolof women of Thiedem with an opportunity to voice and give meaning to their work as farmers and marketers. Data was gathered using multiple methods such as semi-structured in-depth interviews, life histories of the women farmers, archival data and personal observations. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher some control over the topics, but also allowed respondents to move spontaneously into issues relevant to them which may not have been anticipated by the interviewer. This research methodology stressed spontaneous discourse of real women on their real life struggles as opposed to standard survey techniques in which the researcher - not the "respondent" - determines the content of interviews according to the rules of intellectual and/or ideological discourse. I used a semi-structured interview guide because I intended to be flexible and not do much 'preordering'. My questions were written in English and translated into Wolof (the local language).

As explained by Sarah Mirza and Margaret Strobel (1989:1), "Life histories offer the opportunity to observe a particular society through the lens of individual lives..."
A life history comes about as the collaboration between two individuals, often an insider speaking about herself and her society and an outsider asking questions from her own frame of reference. As such, a life history from the start embodies more than one person’s agenda, purpose, and interests." Life histories of women, as stressed by Bloom, "can provide an invaluable re-creation of our collective past, and provide meaningful ways to cope with our present and our future" (1977:1).

Moreover, women’s oral history can be empowering to women’s lives and experiences as shown by various studies (Gluck, 1977/1991; Minister, 1991; Personal Narrative Group, 1989). "It is the validation of women’s experiences; it is the communication among women of different generations" (Gluck 1977:5). Davison (1989) emphasizes the powerful roles of women’s oral history in explaining changes in general and particularly women’s perceptions of the changes occurred in their lives over time.

In addition to interviews, time was devoted to gathering data from the Ministry of Rural Development in Senegal. Official documents and studies available in that institution and in others such as the Center for the Development of Horticulture also provided supplementary information on background variables (such as population composition) and on farm production, soil and organization of farming. Information in the section related to the
setting was mostly borrowed from a study by Abdoulaye Seck (1989) and an official document of the Executif Secretary of Rural Communities (1986).

Hence, a combination of pursuing answers to my listed questions and personal observations allowed these women to express their comprehensive experiences, and offered me the opportunity to try and assess the changes occurring in their lives. Such an approach was aimed at replacing "the search for a single, objective, rationally derived ‘right answer’ that stands outside the historical source or producer of that answer. Instead, it aims for the construction of knowledge from multiple perspectives through cooperative problem-solving" (Maher 1978). The research was in line with the tradition of critical and qualitative methodology that has already done so much to advance feminist studies. Although archival data was used, priority was given to the discourse of women on women’s issues.

**Research Design**

The field research for this study was undertaken between the 9th of December 1992 and the 5th of January 1993. The first obstacle after arrival at the village of Thiedem was the absence of the chief of village for health reasons. I had expected him, as planned before the study, to introduce me to women and provide me with information about the setting. Consequently, a quick decision had to be made. A female relative in Thiedem was informed of the project and
was willing to help arrange meetings with women from
different age groups and socioeconomic background. Together
we figured out a sample of fifteen women according to age
and class variables. Then, I arranged with them for fifteen
interviews of about one hour each. Five women were in their
60 to 70's, five women in their 40 to 50's, and five women
in their 20 to 30's. The selection of three different
generations of women can be relevant in accessing the
economic changes that have occurred in their lives. All the
women involved in the study were married with at least four
children and none had attended school. They all speak Wolof
and Lebou, and half of them considered themselves as being
originally from the Lebou ethnic group. Most were poor,
although some had high social status due to their caste or
ranking in the social hierarchy. Poverty is a generalized
and commonly endured phenomenon in Thiedem. None of them had
savings or were able to purchase what they needed to improve
their farming or increase their productivity. This was not
a random sample; all of my informants were selected because
they were involved in farming and trading activities.

Some interviews, especially with older women (60's to
70's), were done at their houses because they were not
active in farming anymore. Interviews with younger women
(20's to 50's) were conducted in the fields. Some
difficulties were met in the fields while trying to
interview women individually. Since everybody was present,
other respondents could not wait to provide a response to the questions. However, the experience was positive overall in the sense that it allowed me to observe simultaneously what the informants were describing while making personal notes. There were sometimes problems in the interviews with the older women, since they got tired after fifteen minutes of interview and started giving short answers to the questions. Overall, they seemed to favor and enjoy more group interviews.

While collecting the data, the similarities between the information given by the generation of women in their 40’s to 50’s and the women in their 20’s to 30’s as compared to the older generation (60’s to 70’s) were noticeable, which affected the three level comparison the study planned to accomplish. This difference between generations might be related to the fact that market gardening was not very developed and as popular as it is today when the women in the older generations were active in farming.

In addition to the interviews and to personal observations, I gathered data from the Ministry of Rural Development, and in institutions such as the Senegalese Statistics Bureau, the Center for the Development of Horticulture (CDH), and ENEA (Center for Applied Research) where I met the people in charge of agricultural activities development, and policy research and evaluation.

After returning from the field, I transcribed and
translated the interviews into English from Wolof. This translation was a difficult and complex process in which I was not sure that I had respected both the spirit and the letter of the texts. However, I did take great care and time in this translation process to try to minimize the probable errors.

2d. The Setting

Senegal is located in extreme tropical West Africa. It is 196,722 square kilometers in area. Dakar is its capital city. Senegal’s climate is tropical with a rainy season from July to October and a dry season from November to June. Senegal has a border with Mauritania (north), Mali (east), Guinée-Conakry and Guinée Bissau (south) and 500 kilometers of coastline on the Atlantic Ocean.

The country has ten regions: Dakar, Thiès, Kaolack, Louga, Tambacounda, Ziguinchor, Kolda, Fatick, St-Louis and Diourbel. Senegal’s population was estimated at 7.33 million in 1991. Seventy five percent of its active population work in the primary sector, 5% work in the secondary sector and 20% in the tertiary. Ethnic groups are the Wolof (36% of the population), Serer (19%), Fulani (13%), Tukolor (9%), Diola (8%), Malinke (6%) and Soninke (2%).

The Niayes Region.

The Niayes area is located between Dakar and St.Louis on the coastal area and includes six sectors: Dakar, Sakal, Ndande, Meouane, Pambil Pout and Rao. The Dakar sector which
is the focus of this study is the pioneer in market
gardening activities in Senegal.

In 1946 the Mission Catholique des cotes occidentales
created in Dakar a structure aimed at providing agricultural
training to the indigenous people living in the Dakar
region. It was only in 1962 that, the Societe de mise en
valeur des Niayes was created. It went out of business after
six years of existence. This background seems relevant to
this study in that it gives an idea about the recent history
of market gardening which is an important parameter in the
analysis of change between generations over time.

The Niayes region is surrounded by different kinds of
dunes composed of ferruginous soils. This explained the
different types of soil which exist in the Niayes. Its water
table is shallow (5 to 10 meters) during the rainy season
(according to national standards in Fouta and Ferlo, for
example, the water table is 20-25 meters). Four types of
seasons are described by Seck in his study of the region:
Navet (Rainy season) from July to October, Lolli from
October to December, Nor from January to May, and Thioron
from May to June, in which productivity of vegetables is low.
Nor is the best time to grow the so-called European
vegetables (Seck, 1989:98).

Most women are engaged in farming and marketing
vegetables for local consumption in the Niayes region. This
region is part of the horticultural zone of Senegal which
contributes 71% of the country’s total production of vegetables, between 120 and 125 thousand metric tons per year. That same zone provides more than 60% of total vegetable production. In fact, the largest portion of individual vegetables is yielded in that area (USAID\SENEGAL\ADO 1990).

Thiedem

Thiedem is located in the rural communities of Diender about 50 kilometers from Dakar; the capital city of Senegal. The population of Thiedem village (a mixture of Wolof and Lebou ethnicities) is about 1337 inhabitants of which 659 are female and 678 are male. In 1988 the village had a total of 57 households and 138 couples (National Census, 1988). The population of Thiedem has grown tremendously since Thiedem had only 187 inhabitants thirty years ago (Senegal National Census, 1958). In a study by the Executive Secretary of Rural Communities in 1986, 43% of the population of the area was described as being under 18 years old, and more than three out of four inhabitants were active in agriculture. The annual income of the small holder farmer (man and woman) was estimated at around 400,000CFA (roughly US $1,600). Each farmer has around one to one and a half hectares of land divided into small gardens.

The population originally was composed of the Lebou who migrated from the Delta River Valley of Senegal (called
Walɔ) along the coastal region of the country before settling in Thiedem. The Diender zone was part of the former Cayor province in the Lebou Republic. The Lebou Republic, which existed in the eighteenth century, as described by Cheikh Anta Diop (1960) was different from a modern republic since power was held by the same family and transmitted from father to son. It has always been a traditional and parallel power to the official government (before and after independence). The Lebou Republic has its own organizational structures. Nowadays, the population of the area is composed of 90% Lebou-Wolof and 10% Peuhl (Executive Secretary of Rural Communities, 1986).

There is a lack of basic infrastructure such as schools, health care facilities, and roads. For the whole village, there is only one elementary school in Thiedem shared with the villages around, which has only six classrooms and one small health center. This helps to explain the low level of education prevalent in Thiedem (all the informants were illiterate). In addition, Thiedem suffers from isolation in the sense that it is located far away from the main road existing in the area. This creates transportation problems which make the marketing of produce by the farmers in exterior markets difficult. Even though Thiedem is equipped with public running water facilities, there is no electricity available in the village.

Another particularity of Thiedem compared to other
agricultural regions of Senegal are the particular agricultural practices and marketing systems developed by the Lebou-Wolof women farmers. Most Thiedem women are engaged both in farming, providing for the subsistence needs of their families, and in marketing the vegetables and fruits consumed throughout the Dakar/Niayes region. These Lebou-Wolof market women not only sell at the village level, but also travel long distances to urban markets to market agricultural produce.
Chapter III

Findings

This data analysis focuses on problems faced by African women in agriculture presented in the first chapter of this study and the objectives described earlier. Some of my main objectives are:
- first, to identify women’s access to land and control over production;
- second, to evaluate the sources of changes in women farmers’ roles, especially in relation to their involvement in trading their produce;
- and third, to determine the constraints women face in their roles as farmers and traders.

In the past different factors such as colonialism and the introduction of a cash economy combined with local values regarding women’s farming shaped the prevailing sexual division of labor. In contrast, in recent periods the consequences of the drought, desertification, economic crisis and the social impact of structural adjustment policies introduced a different set of changes in the roles of women farmers.
3a. Women, Land and Production

In Thiedem, women farmers from different generations have a different perception of land ownership. The meaning of land ownership tends to bear the marks and the realities of the experiences of an age group. In accordance with the archival data on the law and women’s right to land in Senegal, and with the literature on colonialism and women’s right to land in Africa, the study found that, despite the wishes of women vis-a-vis land ownership, they generally do not have the same rights to ownership and facilities as men have. Even though they have access to it for farming purposes, they usually cannot make decisions related to allocation or distribution of land. Therefore, one can make the observation that they are facing traditional and modern forms of discrimination in getting access to such an important resource.

Informant A, who is in her 60’s, defines the ownership of land as follows:

Some women owned land because of their family’s status. They owned it just because they are from a "noble" family. Such a social status automatically gives them the right to have land. I am part of that category of women, and what happened is that land used to be family property and whenever I needed a piece I got it even though it was not in my name. If a woman got land from her mother’s side it was her land. But if she got it from her father’s side it was not her own land but she could get a piece. "Danu kay doggal tool" (she was just given the usage of a portion of a bigger land). As you know, the land of a woman is always under her husband’s control. Therefore, I can
easily say that women do not formally own land in this village.

The concept of "noble" referred to by informant A means the higher level in the hierarchy of the "caste system" which divides Senegalese society into two groups: "free men" and "slaves". The free men are the Ger and Neno. The ger represent the nobles and the neno are the artisans (Diop, 1960). The division of castes in Senegal is done of both men and women, with women's caste assigned according to their fathers' caste status. Marriage is usually done within the same caste.

Along the same lines, informant B (from the same generation) answered the same question by stating

My grandmother did not own land, nor my mother; they were farming on their family's land. They got land allocated to them. I do not have land myself; my husband allocated a piece of land to me.

This older generation of women refers to family status and position in defining who can be a land owner. This perception of land ownership can be understood in relation to the previous traditional communal laws on land in Senegal in general and in the Lebou-Wolof ethnic group specifically.

The women in the two younger generations, on the other hand, put more emphasis on the relationship between a husband's ownership of land and a woman's ownership of land. They consider themselves as having land because their
husbands own it. The cultural norm in Thiedem is for a husband to allocate a piece of land to his wife as soon as she joins his household. Thus, the women have usufruct rights and can farm on that piece of land, generate and control whatever income they can make out of it. All of the women in their 20s to 40s perceived the piece of land allocated by their husbands as being theirs even though it was not formalized on legal paper. Informant C added, "I farm on my husband's land. He allocated a piece to me. It is his land but I can farm on it without having any problems. I am in charge of whatever is happening on my land, so, I see it as mine." Moreover, two of my informants from this generation confirmed that they have powerful ways of getting land because, as one describes it:

Nowadays, we can rent or borrow land from a male owner who is facing financial difficulties. What is happening is that because of poverty he will allow us to give him money (for example 50,000 CFA - roughly $200) and to use part of his land. The rule is that whenever he reimburses me the money we have to give back the land. But, since he will never be able to give back the money because of the worsening of the economy, he will most of the time renegotiate with us. Thus, we give him more money and together do the legal procedures [These procedures are done at the rural community level in order to get use right to land]. This phenomenon is becoming more frequent nowadays. That is why I think that we have new, powerful and innovative ways of owning land.

This testifies to an increase in opportunities and alternatives for some women generated by the economic crisis
to get use right or rent land if they have the means.

Still, access to land is very limited for women because of the land tenure policies which are set by national law in Senegal. These laws stipulate that

The basis for the State managed organization of the rural sector was, and remains, the 1964 land law, which reserves virtually all land to the State and the July 2, 1976 law (76-66) which specified two forms of lease from the state... Allocation of land and transfer between generations is left to the rural communities (USAID\Senegal\ADO 1990:91).

Therefore, much power is left to rural communities in which local officials decide on land allocation. Women are usually not represented in rural community government offices. Consequently, their access to land is limited because the head of each household (called borom Keur), who in Senegal is usually a male, gains the share of land from rural communities. This explains the dependence of wives on husbands for access to land. One can understand in relation to this land tenure policy why these women see this new form of access to land as powerful.

Despite the different understandings and methods of acquiring land by women of different generations, the field study suggests that there are some changes in ways of gaining access to land from generation to generation related to structural changes in traditional and cultural norms. Women have lost inherited land rights (because of manipulations of their customary rights by rural communities officials) and gained in monetary land rights. In addition
to these factors, a capitalist economy introduced by colonialism, recent state land tenure laws, and the pressure on land in relation to a rapid growing population increase the obstacles faced by the younger women in securing access to land. However, the younger women have more powerful alternatives (according to them) than the older women and will get access to land, whatever their family’s class status is, provided they are married and their husbands have land. Land ownership is not even legally possible for unmarried young women. The issue is, however, more complex for divorced women and widows. In case of divorce or death of a husband women usually go back to their original villages, at which point they lose access to land. If they find another husband in the same village, they still can manage to have access to land.

**Other critical resources**

In respect to other critical resources, such as access to agricultural credit, extension services and technology from the government, the field study shows that, in contrast to the discrimination against women highlighted in the literature on African women in agriculture, it is difficult in Thiedem to talk about discrimination only against women in access to viable resources. Rural men and women in Thiedem both do not get assistance from the government. There were no development projects from the government or
any other development institutions involving Thiedem farmers at the time this research was done. These farmers are left out on their own. Many men farmers in Thiedem insistently wanted to be interviewed even though I clearly explained that the study was aimed at women farmers. In their mind, studies like mine might herald the arrival of financed projects or positive reforms; therefore, men farmers wanted to make their concerns known. As one young man in his late 20s put it:

We have nothing compared to our fathers. During their time they had no drought, no major difficulties. We are tired as young people, we are hungry and thirsty, please tell to your school to rescue us with irrigation machines. The job is hard and a human being is not able to do it, we need machines. The development projects located in the areas are giving us a terrible time. They have big fields, many machines and they produce more than we do. They cut the prices down and therefore we are unable to sell. Women are tired, they do as much as we do in the field and, in addition, they care for the house. They are more tired than we are. Women focus mostly on watering, they are doing a great job.

From my interviews and field observations, it appears obvious that both men and women, regardless of caste or generation, are neglected by the government and not provided with adequate assistance from the state despite their critical contributions to the national economy. One factor which can explain the neglect of these farmers and which can devalue their work might be the fact that the cash crops they produce are not destined for export but instead are
aimed at feeding people living in Dakar and its suburbs, Thies, Kaolack, and Thiaroye. Government extension projects, most of the time, assist agriculture for export rather than subsistence.

3b. Women’s Organizations And Control Over Income

The study suggests that changes have happened in production, decision making, women’s organizations and savings patterns. These changes, as the data will demonstrate, are related to the roles that women perform in agriculture in Thiedem.

Control Over Income

In terms of income, older women explained that when they were active in agriculture the cash economy was not as important as it is today. They were farming mainly for family consumption; only the surplus crops were sold to nearby markets by men. Women were chiefly active in producing millet, beans, sweet potatoes and maize, which represented the subsistence crops for family consumption, and, to a smaller extent, peanuts. Peanuts were grown and marketed by the Borom Keur, who was usually the husband. The surplus of crops that women got from their fields was marketed for them in local markets and to rural cooperatives (secco) by men. Most of the time, women did not want to spend their extra money after buying a few things such as cloth and helping their close relatives. Instead, extra money was used to buy cattle and valuable items to be saved
in case of the family's urgent needs.

In contrast, younger women are more active in marketing their own produce. Moreover, they spend more on personal needs such as clothing, jewelry and furniture. They invest most of their money in their self-help organizations. Participating by paying the dues in their self-help organizations is one of the important reasons the younger women need cash. This type of organization provides women with assistance in case of emergency and family ceremonies such as weddings or death. On such an occasion, the self-help organization gives the pool of money to the member who is in need.

Another important reason for women to have cash is related to their daily responsibilities in relation to feeding their families. In fact, the rule in Senegal is for a man to feed his family by providing basic staples and cash to his family. This is the so called dépense, which is usually far from being enough to sustain the family. In order for the family to eat, women have to make the ends meet by completing the dépense.

Organizations

Women's self-help organizations were not as popular when the older women were young as they are today in Thiedem, probably because of the greater need for cash experienced by younger women nowadays in Thiedem. A common way for women to get together in the past was for women from
different villages to meet, particularly after harvesting and for family ceremonies, just to have fun, cook, and eat, but no exchange of money was involved in that type of activity. Usually, women from the first generation were able to save money compared to the two younger generations who justify this fact by referring to the increase in women's needs, alternatives, and ambitions for life such as cash, jewelry feeding the family. Another factor preventing younger women from having savings may be the development of a capitalist agricultural economy introduced during colonialism. Cash crops were introduced which require the availability and constant use of cash in most types of exchanges. Women in the first generation saved money gotten from the crops their husbands marketed for them, but their husbands kept it for them. Whenever they needed it they could get it back. Along the same lines, Informant D added:

Nowadays, the marketing system is different, these young women go themselves to the markets and sell their products [because with the economic crisis peanuts which was the main cash crop lost its market value while the vegetables considered as being women's crops are getting more popular and marketable] nowadays what is considered as women's crops are getting popular in the market. We sold only peanuts, and saved millet for our consumption. The money we made from marketing was used to buy clothing and some things for the family and for the rest we asked our husbands to keep it for us. We did not need to use it because our husbands were in charge of feeding us and the family and they were able to do it, so what to do with the extra money? Whenever we need our money back we will get it, those men were very honest and loyal. For example, at that time when
a woman asked her husband to keep money for her, he asked her to tie the money into a piece of cloth belonging to her. So, he would never touch the money and whenever she needed money she went to her piece of cloth and got what she desired.

Women in their 60's and 70's saved in order to pay for big family events which require money and goods and also to pass on as inheritance. They saved some money, but mostly they saved valuable items such as pieces of gold, silver, cattle and expensive traditional cloth that they acquired through barter. In case they needed money, they taylé (pawned) those valuable savings items as an asset to get a loan, however these women always paid off the loan and got their savings back.

According to the older women, the practice of husbands keeping their money for them did not mean that they put their money and their husbands' money together. Younger women do not pool their money with their husbands either; this is not common in Thiedem, and all women interviewed had a similar shocked reaction when I posed questions about pooling money with their husbands and about decision making regarding their income. Pooling money together with their husbands is not part of their traditions, and they always had the power to decide on their income.

In contrast, younger women do not have individual savings because of their heavy involvement in their self-help organizations commonly call masses. These masses represent a nearly universal phenomenon in Thiedem. All the
women from the two younger generations take part in those organizations which they define as of importance in their lives. The view of informant C demonstrates that point:

In this area, the self help organizations are very important to women, each of us participates in them. The dues can go up to 500 CFA daily [equivalent to $2 US dollars]. The money, which rotates among members, is used to buy seeds, cloth, jewelry, to sustain the children and for family ceremonies such as wedding, funerals, and birth ceremonies. It is important for us to have the money. This is the only way we can make it because we usually farm up to three small fields at the same time. It rotates, when we harvest one field, another one is started, we farm all year around and this requires a lot of work and money to buy seeds, fertilizers and pesticides.

Therefore, this new way of organizing among women can be seen as not only a way of getting credits, but also as a way for these women to save their money. Instead of accumulating wealth, they try to increase their buying power and spending. One popular way of doing it is to invest in tontines or masses in order to fulfill their needs such as furniture, gold, or a house. They are not able to buy valuable goods relying only on their meager incomes.

In order to understand the changes which occurred between the generations of women in respect to saving, it is important to analyze the situation not only in relation to the development of a capitalist economy and its demands, but also in the rationale about saving given by these women as time passes which is increasing their spending on such items
as fertilizer to improve their yields.

**Decision making**

Even though there are changes in relation to the crops, tools and roles, all three generations of women confirm their involvement in decision-making processes over production. Out of the fifteen women interviewed, only one (who is in her 20's) declared that she relies on her husband for decision-making about production and income management. The point of view of women from the first generations (60's to 70's) is well introduced by Informant D: "We [women] used to make decisions about what and how much to plant according to our family size. We made decisions on harvesting and seeding. We used to sell peanuts, but marketing and transportation were done by the husbands."

The choice of crop to grow was not difficult to make for old women (first generation) because they were mainly growing millet, beans, sweet potatoes and providing labor to men for peanut cultivation. Also, men were usually in charge of peanuts the main cash crop and women took care of millet destined for family consumption.

Younger women (in their 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's) seem to have more power over production since, in addition to their decision-making capacity, they are also involved as much as men are in cash crop production, in marketing what they produce, and finally, in controlling their income. As an illustration, they like to stress that they retain their
income and manage it themselves. This confirms the point of view regarding the centrality of these women’s roles in market gardening and of their heavy involvement in cash crop production and in marketing. Informant E, whose husband was farming in Thiedem, and who was in her early forties describes the situation as follows:

I am the one who decides what to grow. I make decisions according to what is more beneficial to me, I mean profitable. Sometimes my son helps me in making decisions: he can tell me, "Mom, onions or cabbage are more marketable this time," or he can make other suggestions regarding my farming, but the last word always belongs to me. I also decide on when to harvest. After spraying my fertilizer and pesticide, I wait for a while and I make the decision on a day for harvesting and ask my son to be ready for that day.

Moreover, informant C from the same generation pointed out:

Even though my husband suggests to me what to do with my money I always make my own decisions on how to spend it. I know that if I have to pay my dues to the self help organization, whatever my husband suggests, I will pay those dues first because it is beneficial to me and to my association. I will pay it because otherwise I will pay fines. If I do not have money to pay my dues, he will not give it to me, that is why when I have money I manage it myself. I have the power to decide how to spend my money because I perform hard work to make it.

Even though their husbands are around doing their own farming, these younger women similar to their mothers and grandmothers have autonomy regarding decision
making and management of their fields and income which has resulted someways to cultural reasons (women make decisions regarding their own fields) and to the recent crisis which has increased women's decision making power.

3c. Women's Roles In Farming

This leads us to the second main objective of the research exploring the changes in women's roles in agriculture in Thiedem. The study found that many changes have occurred in women's roles as farmers and traders. The types of roles women play today in agriculture in Thiedem have changed compared to those of their mothers and grandmothers who used to seed, weed, cultivate and harvest while men were clearing the land, in addition to sharing the previous tasks with women.

Sexual Division Of Labor

One assumption not confirmed by this study is the existence of a sharper sexual division of labor in agriculture today which has been reported by many studies. The division of labor in the field is less rigid today because of the differences in crops, tools and farming techniques prevailing in Thiedem. Also, because of women's involvement in cash crop production they do the same activities as men in agriculture. Another cause is the
changes introduced by a capitalist economy which does not value the crops grown for local consumption compared to the ones grown for exportation which generate money for the state. This point is of primary importance in the analysis of gender relations among the farmers of Thiedem.

As farmers the sexual division of labor (in the field) seems to be less rigid for the younger generations than for the older one. Both women and men perform the same activities in the field; the only differences noted are in the amount of time spent on particular activities. For example, women spend more time watering their own field than men do. Men, contrary to women farmers, have a bigger share in the gab (clearing and digging) processes. All the younger women interviewed confirmed that gab is very hard physically and they usually get help from their husbands. If they do not get help from their husbands, those who can afford it hire a soce (seasonal migrant wage agricultural worker) to assist them in that preliminary step.

Tools

The agricultural activities now in Thiedem consist of clearing and digging (Wolof=gab), making the soil even and smooth (Wolof=jimbi), starting the nursing bed or growing seedling (Wolof=plan), transplanting (Wolof=jembet), weeding and cultivating (Wolof=baye), spraying fertilizers (Wolof=poroduit), spraying pesticides (Wolof=pomp), watering (Wolof=rosse), harvesting (Wolof=wite) and marketing (jaay).
The changes in roles detected by the study go in line with changes in tools (the same tools are used by both men and women).

Each activity has its own matching tool. One informant describes it clearly:

I use a hoe [Wolof=gabkaay] to turn the soil, a pitchfork [Wolof=jimbikaay or furset or Dibon] to mix up the soil, a rake (Wolof=rato) and a shovel (Wolof=peele) to start the nursing beds, a spade [Wolof=hiler] for weeding and cultivating, a sprinkling can [Wolof=rosoir], and buckets [Wolof=soo] for watering. Each activity has an appropriate tool. These are new tools which were not used by our grandmothers and mothers.

In fact, women in their 60’s and 70’s did not use that many tools. Younger women use more tools because of the kind of crops they grow, which require more tools compared to those grown by the older women. According to all categories of informants they had spade (Wolof=hiler), hoe (Wolof=daba or larmet) and cutlass (Wolof=diaasi).

Crops

Logically, the crops and the farming systems too have changed over time. The crops grown by the first generation of women, as stated earlier, were primarily millet and peanuts (providing labor for their husbands) and secondarily beans, maize and sweet potatoes. Farming used to be done in that area only during the rainy season (wolof= nawet) from July to October.
In contrast, the two younger age groups of women are now growing vegetables such as carrots, turnips, cabbage, eggplant, green beans, tomatoes, onions, a sour variety of eggplant (Wolof = Jaxatu), and hot peppers. Among these vegetable crops, cabbage is highly praised by the women farmers. It appears in most of the interviews and direct observations that cabbage is the most popular crop in Thiedem in terms of labor input and profitability. Informant C clarifies the reasons cabbage is so popular,

Growing tomatoes takes a lot of time and energy. It involves watering for three months and we only can harvest it at the fourth month. Right now I am growing onions and cabbage. Growing cabbage will take overall two months and ten days. Then we can market the harvest and help ourselves with the money. Growing cabbage is faster, more profitable and easier. That is why we focus the biggest part of our farming on it.

Many reasons account for these changes of crops. First of all there were changes in the Senegalese diet. The introduction of new crops and food by colonialism created new needs and increased the consumption of new types of vegetables by the population. Before, the Senegalese diet was composed of traditional dishes such as thiere (a kind of couscous made out of millet and maize), lakh (porridge made out of millet and maize) accompanied with sweet peanut cream, nieleng (beans) to mention a few and was mostly based on the use of locally produced vegetables and cereals. This is not the case any more since people eat Europeanized
dishes such as thiebou dieun (rice, fish and vegetables) which has become the national dish, vegetable salad, french fries. Secondly, following those changes it has become much easier to market vegetables which are consumed daily, rather than cereal crops or peanuts, particularly in urban areas.

**Farming Systems**

In addition to changes in crops and tools, transformations in the farming system are affected by climate and soil conditions. Drought and soil deterioration play important roles in the process of adoption of new techniques and attitudes towards farming. When they were young, the women farmers in their 60’s and 70’s did not need to water their fields themselves, and they did not need to use fertilizers or pesticides to increase production either. Instead, they relied on rainfall which was sufficient. In extreme cases, they used natural fertilizers such as cow manure. With the changes in the environment, the drought, and impoverishment of the quality of the soil, women farmers today practice intensive watering. They fetch the water needed for watering out of artificial wells commonly called beun (these wells do not have to be very deep because the water table is very close to the surface). Thus, the women farmers, holding a bucket in each hand, walk down to the wells where they fetch what they need for watering their gardens.
This physically exhausting watering system adopted in Thiedem has been used by younger women in explaining why the size of their fields is smaller than their grandmother’s and mother’s fields. Their grandmothers and mothers used to have what they call Tolli Dior, meaning very large farms in the local farming jargon. The grandmothers’ and mothers’ farms were about one to three hectares. Women’s farms today are smaller, they measure around 20 by 20 meters to one hectare. This probably is due to a rapidly growing population and its pressure on the land. In addition, the burden of watering, the costs of inputs, the time needed for marketing and organizing help to explain the smaller size of their fields.

There is also heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to enhance productivity. These inputs are purchased by the women themselves with the money they make selling their produce or through the self-help organizations. Only one privately owned store located in Rufisque carried those inputs they can buy, for cash if possible, or on credit until they sell their harvest. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides combined with use of new tools and smaller fields explains the decreased amount of time spent on their fields by the younger women in this study. Their mothers and grandmothers, whose departure time for the field was between 4 to 5 a.m. and who came back after 5 p.m., spent considerably more time in their fields.
The younger women spend less time farming since they go to the field between 8 and 9 o’clock in the morning and come back after 3 p.m. The research found no significant changes in the household chores women still perform, in addition to farming activities.

Workload

In terms of increased workload, this research supports the literature which argues that colonialism and capitalism increase the workload of women in farming. There is a controversy around that issue reflected in the interviews of women from different generations. One woman in her 60’s describes the situation as follows:

We [old women] used to farm like men. We carried our babies on our backs, and then started with the larmet, we seeded, and weeded. The tools we used are the gop and hiler. We also harvested, gathered the harvest and then men were supposed to bacc (separate the peanuts and the weeds). We did a lot in farming and also we use to fetch water from long distances for the house. Nowadays these women are luckier; they have running water and also they work less. Farming has changed a lot: it is much easier nowadays, they have all kinds of machines available for all kinds of farming duties and steps. They do nothing now in farming compared to us. Moreover peanut farming is not practiced anymore in this area and as you may know it is hard. We used to wake up early, pound a big quantity of millet, cook breakfast, fetch water before going to the field. We were overworked.

In opposition to these views, the younger women
describe the situation differently:

My grandmother did not water her field; they were not farming like us all year around, they farmed only during the rainy season. Now, because of the drought, we have to water everything we plant. Our grandmothers used to plant but not to water, they were not also involved in marketing as we do today.

Women’s increased and men’s decreased marketing activities may relate to the type of crops marketed; the new food crops may be seen as an extension of women’s responsibilities for old food crops, while their need for intensive watering also falls naturally into the female sphere in the conventional division of labor. This is merely speculative, however.

Despite the fact that new time-saving devices have been introduced in farming (such as tools, technology and fertilizers, which in fact can reduce time spent in the field), one can still argue that younger Thiedem women involved in market gardening have more responsibilities in farming. This view can be justified by the different nature of their farming systems (farming all year around), the introduction and intensification of a cash economy in farming, their different participation in all processes of farming in relation to the transformation of the sexual division of labor in the field (women participate in all processes of farming and do even more in watering), and finally their active participation in transporting and marketing their crops in urban markets which was not the
case for their grandmothers and mothers.

As argued in the literature, and confirmed by this study, the introduction of cash cropping combined with the multiple responsibilities and roles of women both in production and reproduction increased the workload of young Thiedem women compared to their mothers and grandmothers.

**Status**

The decrease in the status of African women farmers suggested by several studies (Van Allen, 1976; Okonjo, 1976; Mullings, 1976; Rogers, 1984) does not seem to apply to Thiedem where the younger women involved in agriculture claim to have a higher status in comparison to the older generation of women. Their higher status seems to be in relation to access to cash and to decision-making power over production and income. Moreover, these younger women tend to be more autonomous and less attached to certain patriarchal cultural values which would lessen their decision-making power (for example the value that a woman has always to do what her husband wants her to do) vis-a-vis their spouses. The system of sexist values is breaking down because village women as well as men have to find alternative, survival strategies to fulfill their responsibilities. Thus, women's work in Thiedem today is very much appreciated by men as well as by their whole community; therefore, they get more respect, status, and power (not only economically but also
in terms of decision-making over their lives and over the functioning of their households and communities). However, the gender division of labor has broken down in production but not in reproduction.

These important changes should be analyzed not only in relation to a greater consciousness of women about their situation and the importance of their work for their family and community, but to a greater extent to the economic crisis, involving increasing poverty, and especially the tremendous increase in their economic responsibilities. All these factors affect men’s economic power and deprive them of their ability to provide support to their families. Therefore, husbands are more conscious about the importance of women’s access to all processes of production and decision-making regarding the family. Without women’s contribution in sustaining the family survival would not be possible. Poverty is salient for both men and women, however; both sexes are diminished and deprived of basic resources such as credits, and extension services, factors which are critical to their farming activities. Women do have less access than men to critical resources.

Roles In Marketing

Two main circuits have been discovered by the study. Women sell their produce in the field to customers from nearby villages, such as Cayar, who retail those vegetables
in their area market. The second alternative is to transport the harvest over long distances to local markets such as Thiaroye, Dakar, Rufisque and Kaolack. Transportation to those city markets is done in privately owned trucks. The price for each bag transported is around 150 CFA (60 cents). When the women reach the market, they wholesale their produce with the help of a coxeur (a young male intermediary who negotiates wholesale transactions between customers and farmers. Coxeur is identified as a man’s job). The coxeur, under the women farmers’ supervision, bargains with the retailers in the market. The coxeur gets paid 150 to 200 CFA for each bag of vegetables sold. The help of the coxeur is very much appreciated by the women farmers since they assist the women who cannot watch many bags of produce, and at the same time go around and look for potential clients. The coxeur knows when to lower or raise prices, and can tell what is needed, what produce is scarce.

Marketing, according to my informants is complicated because of many problems they face. One informant describes the situation:

Farming now generates more money, but this money is not meaningful. We have problems marketing the produce because the market is saturated. One of the main problems is the competition with the development project involved in market gardening, they have more equipment than we do; therefore, they grow and sell more produce than we do. We only use our two hands to work. The prices vary a lot in the market. Right now the bag of cabbage is sold at 1500 CFA ($6) because right now the market is saturated with
cabbage, we all harvested at the same time and we have no good storage or ways of processing the produce. Some other times, like in the rainy season, cabbage is very expensive, we can sell the bag at 10,000 CFA ($40).

In the village there is a market gardening development project set up with government support by few men with college degrees. The chief allocated land to them; thus there is pressure and profit for chiefs to do such land allocation.

The importance of marketing in these women’s lives is crucial since, despite their multiple problems, they make money out of this activity and support their families by using their own money to supplement the depense (amount of money and crops given by the husband that is supposed to maintain the family). The depense is often not enough in itself to support the family, buy seeds and some ingredients for their fields, and thus enhance their well being. Without their marketing activities and the women’s involvement in self-help organizations, life would have been much harder since they would not be able to generate money, contribute fully to sustaining the family, participate in organizing, and feel powerful in all decision making processes on the farm as well as at the household level.

3d. Women and Constraints In Farming

Many constraints to women’s farming have been revealed by the study. The most consistently brought up by women was the lack of the masinu rosse (water pump), modern deep wells
made out of cement where they can hook a hose or a pump and make their intensive watering activities much easier. Secondly, they raised the lack of credits, sufficient tools, fertilizer, pesticides and seeds as being another major constraint in increasing their productivity. As discussed previously, extension services which might provide crucial knowledge, training, technical and financial assistance are not available to Thiedem farmers. This study also shows that, in addition to the need for official development projects aimed at improving the women farmers’ work, there is a need for the women’s organizations to expand their activities. These include such things as improving their farming, providing seeds, or money aimed at farming and not only using the masse money for ceremonies as is the case presently in Thiedem. Ceremonies have contradictory aspects since they both maintain face and depress the participants’ economic situation at the same time. To change this pattern would, however, require a lot of consciousness raising.

One important question, again related to the lack of extension services and information, is how to create better storage facilities and improve processing techniques so that women can do better planning in their rotating farming system without fearing loss of their harvest.

Even though the women did not feel that access of land was a major issue, one can argue that having more control over land ownership and decision-making over distribution
would give more opportunities to the women farmers to increase their productivity and consequently their income and buying power.
Chapter IV

Conclusion

In comparing the roles of women farmers in the past and in the present in Thiedem, it appears that many changes have occurred. Historical and processual changes have taken place not only in productive roles but also in the ways in which these women farmers organize themselves at the community level. These socioeconomic changes can be related to many factors such as the changing nature of their local economy in relation to a demanding global economy.

For instance, the growing capitalist system and its cash economy, which has led into the Senegalese economic crisis, worsened by the implementation of structural adjustment policies, have had an impact upon the lives of the poor and particularly of poor women. For instance, poverty is increasing; public health care is lacking for rural families; essential food stuffs are getting scarce; and there are a job crisis and general inflation on prices for basic produce such as sugar, rice, milk and oil. Another important factor is the increased responsibilities (an outcome of the economic crisis) of women at the household
and community levels which has accelerated the changes in the roles of women in farming. Husbands cannot provide enough support anymore for the family and they do understand the need to let their wives access all processes of production. This, will give women access to cash and more decision making power in order for the household to survive. For the reasons cited above (economic crisis, growing capitalist system, structural adjustment) women’s involvement in marketing increased tremendously and the sexual division of labor became less sharp in agriculture, although still pronounced in domestic work. Because of the increase in poverty and of the immediate survival needs to satisfy, women became involved in all production processes in Thiedem to fulfill their family responsibilities.

For my first research objective, the findings can be summarized as follows: in Thiedem women do not have the legal right to own land; however, the access to land is not difficult since all married women I interviewed were allocated land through their husbands. In the past the older women had the possibility through their family’s position and status in the social hierarchy to have easy access to land since it was their family property. Moreover, they had the opportunity to inherit land through their mothers or fathers. However, inheritance through the mother’s line was more significant for the women because it gave them more control of that land. Overall, as they said, both ways
(inheritance and family position or class) of access to land existed, but the problem was a lack of control over their land; the dominant sexist ideology gave control to husbands over wives regarding important matters such as land.

Regarding younger women and the issue of land, historical changes have taken place. Instead of inheritance, the most common way of gaining access to land is through their husbands. The women directly linked their husbands’ ownership of land to their access to it. For instance, if a woman is married to a man who owns land this gives her automatic access to a piece of land. But women who get divorced are vulnerable putting a lot of pressure on women to stay in marriage. Moreover, changes have been noted in more complex ways of accessing and gaining use right to land for younger women such as renting land from men farmers.

Regarding control over production, the same older women seemed to have decision-making power even though men were in charge of cash cropping. The older women were active in subsistence production aimed at feeding their families. They decided on all steps of production such as the choice of crops, the time to harvest. However, they were less involved in marketing their own produce and self-managing their income. Most of their produce was consumed at the household level (millet), and the cash economy was not very developed.

Processual changes happened in terms of decision-making. Younger women have more visible power in terms of
choosing the kind of crops they want to grow; they make their own decisions on when to harvest and what to buy for their farming. Most of all, they have control over their income. The study also reveals that many processual changes occurred in women’s roles as farmers and traders: the sexual division of labor seems to be less rigid in the sense that women farmers now, contrary to their mothers and grandmothers, perform almost the same activities on the farm, and grow the same crops as their male counterparts. This change of crop is related to a loss of export market value that peanuts, the formerly dominant cash crop, have been experiencing and also changing tastes among the growing urban population, whose diet now includes more green vegetables. This can be understood in line with changes in the nature of the crops and farming systems. Nowadays women grow vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, onions, cabbage and lettuce, which require intensive watering and the use of fertilizers and pesticides in these times of drought and soil deterioration.

As a consequence, the tools have also changed; they are more sophisticated and varied now and cost money. There is now a shift from the simple hoe and cutlass towards more varied tools such as pitchforks, buckets, shovels, rakes and spades, which the new crops require. This move towards modern imported tools is a sign not only of dependence on imported goods but also at a global level it can be analyzed
as being an indicator of spreading capitalism.

Nowadays, women are very much involved in marketing their own products. They take what they harvest to local and urban markets and have developed interesting marketing systems. Even though younger women spend less time in the field, their workload has increased since they are involved in many more productive activities such as watering and marketing. Today younger women participate in self-help organizations at the village level, those types of groups did not exist before.

Finally, for the last research objective, the constraints they meet as farmers are a lack of control over land because (land being very scarce, and their land rights limited, women can be pushed out over the long term), efficient wells, water pumps, and hoses. One should note how crucial those constraints are since the job of market gardening requires a lot of watering. They also raised the issue of getting fertilizers and pesticides and adequate tools, seeds, and, most of all, extension services from the government. Neither women nor men are currently getting extension services from official authorities.

Even though the case of Thiedem women farmers may look somewhat similar to the situation described by the literature in general, there are important differences noticed by the study. Differences were noticed regarding crucial issues such as the sexual division of labor in
agriculture found by the study as being less sharp between genders since women in Thiedem are involved in all processes of production, just like their male counterparts. Such an unrestricted involvement explains also the unusual presence of women in cash crop production for their own profit very noticeable in Thiedem today.

Differences were also found concerning the issue of women’s limited access to viable resources. Interestingly enough, in Thiedem women as well as men farmers are discriminated against in getting assistance and extension services from local officials for improving their farming. This is due to the kind of crops they grow which are not export crops like peanuts and therefore are not given a high value since they do not provide the country with hard currencies.

Another major difference from the literature is regarding women’s status which does not seem to decrease in Thiedem. Younger generations of women farmers in Thiedem seem on the contrary to have gained a higher status in some ways due to their access to cash and to decision-making power. However, their access to land now is more dependent upon marriage rather than upon inheritance.

One may argue that all these changes which are taking place in women’s lives are related to a growing capitalist system which often destabilizes the traditional economy and status quo of local communities. More specifically, an
important factor which accelerates the changes in women’s roles and lives is the ongoing transformation of the capitalist economy of Senegal related to the structural adjustment policy which amplified the poverty level of all Senegalese.

In the last two decades, natural causes such as drought and desertification intensified the economic crisis particularly in the agricultural sector and created phenomena such as a less rigid sexual division of labor in the field (men and women farmers perform the same activities on the farm) and an increase of women’s workloads and responsibilities toward their families.

Paradoxically, the crisis which generated the increased responsibilities of women forced many husband farmers to allow their wives access to all levels of production and crops and therefore this created a weakening of patriarchal power. Men farmers themselves lost a great deal of their economic power and realized that without a re-equilibration of power with the women farmers, families and communities will not survive. The loss of economic power, experienced by men farmers can explain the development of new forms of land rental to women farmers.

Women understand that husbands cannot earn sufficient income to feed their families anymore, thus women make decisions on production and income management. To the contrary, women are gaining more consciousness about the
importance of their roles and the need for them to take active roles in production particularly in marketing their produce in order to meet the exigencies of the capitalist economy. The need to face the new challenges explain the development of survival strategies such as the creation of women’s self-help organizations which greatly assist in meeting their cash needs in order to feed their families and to take care of their emergency matters such as illnesses, ceremonies, and clothing for the young children.

In terms of recommendations, I would advocate the improvement of the working conditions of these women farmers in order to increase their productivity, and to alleviate the constraints they face in marketing their products. In order to reach these goals I suggest:

1- To review and reformulate the national law on land tenure policies in order to give to women farmers the right to own land legally. Also, for the short term there is a need to look at how land is allocated to people;

2- To provide the women farmers with sufficient wells and water pumps;

3- To create credit facilities so that they can buy seeds, fertilizers and all basic tools and equipment needed for their farming;

4- To start technical assistance and training in order to improve farming and conservation conditions;

5- To develop efficient transportation systems and marketing
networks and cooperatives so that women farmers could supervise the whole trading process themselves without intermediaries;

6- To support and fund more research about
   a) gender relations in the whole Niayas region,
   b) the heavy involvement of women in cash crop production and marketing,
   c) the mechanisms of women's new monetary land rights.

All these recommendations are aimed at improving women's farming conditions, and at lifting the constraints to women making their agriculture and marketing profitable. Removing the constraints to farming would improve their role in socioeconomic development and the family welfare of these women. Consciousness-raising among both female and male farmers, aimed at providing them with a clear understanding of these constraints might also accelerate the development process, but it cannot take them out of the limitations imposed by their situation within the global economy.
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