

Introduction

Though others may have seen it coming, it felt to me that finding my vocation as a farmer was a big departure from my trajectory up until that point. I (along with my husband, Mike, and dear friend John) now own and operate Fifth Crow Farm, a mid-sized organic market farm south of San Francisco. Though I've always had an interest in Ag issues, I had dismissed farming as not important enough, thinking that my place was in research and policy work related to agricultural issues.

Though farming has meant that my work as a visual ethnographer has stalled, I have found at the same time it has provided me with opportunities to tackle the very same issues I studied in much more tangible ways. My background in sociology and documentary has served me well and I now see the farm as a continuation of my academic work in praxis. As a farmer I make daily choices that effect farm labor rights and social justice, the ecology and health of the land upon which I depend on for my livelihood, the growth and development of potential future farmers, and more.

At Fifth Crow we raise about 30 acres of vegetables, berries, and heirloom apples. We also have a 650 hen pastured egg operation. This year the farm supported three owners as well as 8 full time employees and another 10 part-timers. We fed 116 CSA members and their families, sold to 10+ restaurants and grocery stores, and supplied produce to 4 Bay area Farmers' Markets. The little farm means quite a lot to the people who eat its bounty, and whose livelihood depends upon it.

The work I hope we can explore and discuss takes place in Sub-Saharan West Africa. As the farm has left me very little time to prepare for this colloquium, I appreciate your understanding in relation to the hodge-podge materials I am providing for you to look at. I had hoped that I might be able to set aside time to subtitle some of my video work that is in progress, but unfortunately that is not to be. Instead I have given a quick re-edit to some old writing to give you background, and would like for you to watch two short video pieces for which I've provided URL's and descriptions below.

To help provide context to the work you should know that I was born in Ferkessedougou, Côte d'Ivoire. From 1980-85 my family lived in Ouagadougou, in what is now Burkina Faso. We left during the fervor of the Sankara Revolution and moved to neighboring Côte d'Ivoire. Don't know who Sankara was? I won't be surprised. This is part of what my work explores. Côte d'Ivoire, allied itself closely with its former colonizer, France. 21 years after independence, my school day still began with the French National anthem and the raising of both French and Ivorian flags. In 1990 we moved to the US, where my entomologist parents became farmers. Working hard to support us on a 120-acre ranch. West Africa influenced me in ways that even my family may not fully grasp. There I am at home, yet remain a permanent outsider. Here, I am never fully myself.

Even though I have made my life here, I still struggles with the internal conflict I feel over not returning to Côte d'Ivoire. Africa remains the fabric upon which the rest of my life is sketched. The frustrations and issues facing African farmers, as I experience what it is to be a farmer myself, have become more salient for me. I feel that it is critical to add my voice to many who contest the Western imaginary of Africa: the starving child with hand outstretched for food. This iconic imagery over-simplifies the problems as well as solutions, which are so much more complex and nuanced. It also distorts, and marginalizes a wealth of African agricultural heritage, African voices, and African solutions.

In preparing for this colloquium, I read some more of Dr. James Scott's work. The term *metis*, which he defines as, "the knowledge that can come only from practical experience" means more to me know than it would have 6 years ago. As a farmer, I am struck by how culturally we pay lip service to this notion, yet often it seems nothing more than that: the questions are being

asked, but the answers are not always heeded unless they fit in with pre-determined goals. This echoes the frustrations voiced by West African Farmers and food system stakeholders I spoke with during my graduate research. I commend you for striving to bring those types of perspectives into the academic arena and in honor of your efforts, I would like to focus our discussion on some opinions, histories, and voices that get easily drowned out by the much more alluring Western imaginary of West Africa.

Hope you enjoy the video pieces and that they stimulate some questions, as I am very much looking forward to discussing my work with all of you.

Sincerely,

Teresa Kurtak
Fifth Crow Farm
PO Box 527
Pescadero, CA 94060
Teresa@fifthcrowfarm.com

Treatments

Video Episodes:

Each video short ranges from 6-8 minutes

“Bien Manger Mieux Vivre” (Eat Well Live Better) takes you to a summer cooking camp for kids run by Flore Yameogo, the former director and hostess of Burkina Faso’s only TV cooking show. By pairing interview with Mrs. Yameogo and footage from the camp itself, the piece subtly shows the tensions between traditional cuisine versus modernizing influences and how they affect health and food consumption.

To watch, go to the following url: <http://vimeo.com/4828842>

“Bene Wende: the Old Burkinabe” is about a small restaurant and catering business that specializes in traditional Mossi dishes. The business is over 30 years old and employs some 15 women, all relatives. As Miriam Raparaminaba, who runs it with her sister, introduces the various dishes they prepare, we are again confronted with how modern life is influencing diet in a negative way.

To watch, go to the following url: <http://vimeo.com/4889344>

The Cartel of Good Intentions

and the absence of African food in discussions of African food security



Teresa Kurtak, 2014

"When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land."

-Bishop Desmond Tutu

Although widely consumed, Africa's native foods are virtually unknown elsewhere. Un-named outside African languages and obscure botany texts, they are largely absent from literature, research, policy, and food security analyses. Despite there being no shortage of local expertise on African food and food security, African voices are also largely absent in Western discourse on African food security. These are significant omissions. As Robert Proctor argues, "ignorance is often more than just an absence of knowledge: it has a history... a political geography laden with political and cultural struggle." Despite concerted efforts to alter this trend, Western policy analysts, journalists, and academics are still regularly deferred to as experts on African issues.

In 2008, I returned to Ouagadougou, where I had lived as a young child. There were lots of buildings under construction, the markets were bustling, and the airport was having its first renovation in some 30 years. This seemed to conflict with the international news that said that Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in the world, was on the brink of food crisis and had begun to experience food riots. When I asked my interviewees about the food crisis and riots people looked puzzled and started to talk about the higher cost of living and increases in diet related illnesses like diabetes and heart disease. The "riots" it turned out were actually a student protest related to higher fuel prices and lack of University funding in which a couple students had set a stoplight on fire.

To my surprise I learned that all the new buildings were being built by Burkinabes. "What are they for?" I asked. "To lease to NGO's," was the reply.

In the 23 years since I had lived in Ouaga some things had changed, but much had not. While most of the AID organizations in the 80's employed large numbers of Europeans and Americans, now the offices were filled with African employees. But, although the offices were filled with Africans, the big decisions were and still are dictated by foreign interests and it seemed that the most successful economy was the economy of the NGO's themselves. As I interviewed people, I asked them what they wanted to tell the American public. The answer was consistently the same: "Leave us alone." This message is no different than what Thomas Sankara¹ said in the early 80's, before he was assassinated, or what Kwame Nkrumah was saying in the late 50's.



"Leave us alone... We need to be free to make our own policies and politics"
-Dr. Jean Didier Zongo, plant geneticist U. of Ouagadougou

¹ Thomas Sankara is Africa's Che. In 1983 he led a revolutionary take-over of Upper Volta, which he re-named Burkina Faso. His administration fought corruption, launched literacy and vaccination campaigns, and fought for food sovereignty. In 4 years they

This paper echoes the assertions of African voices of note that say that African food insecurity is not an innately African problem, but rather a legacy of the complex interactions of global race politics, colonialism, development discourse, and trade policy. These forces are largely ignorant of West Africa's agricultural heritage and the foodways that accompany it. The images of dramatic and tragic poverty that permeate the Western consciousness in regards to Africa (what some refer to as afro-pessimism) almost ubiquitously tie food to famine, hunger, and food crisis. But this highly marketable and surprisingly ubiquitous imagery, belies much more complex, vibrant, and often ignored issues. Changing food insecurity means changing the way we in The West think about Africa, and that means de-constructing the inaccurate media imaginary.

Historical and Political Context:

" A stereotype is tenacious in its hold over rational thinking. Once implanted in popular lore, an image attached to a group, an issue, or event tends to pervade in the deepest sense and profoundly affects behavioral action." – Joseph Boskins

I had applied to UCSC's program in Social Documentary for the purpose of doing research on West African food crops and exploring the complex reasons why, despite their positive attributes, their production was either stagnant or declining. My original intent had been to produce work for an African audience- a piece I hoped to enter in the Ouagadougou Film Festival. My cohort and advisors kept pushing me to produce something different. My video footage and interviews did not match their imaginary of the region and they were concerned I was glossing over or making things seem better than they

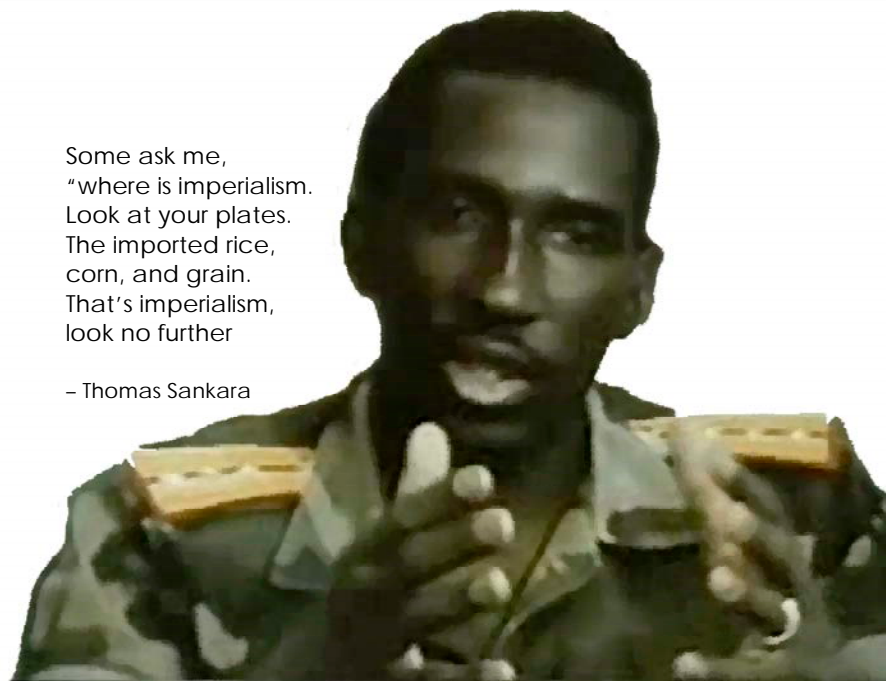
were. Though I still hope to be able to finish the work I initially set out to produce, my colleagues led me to what is perhaps more poignant and critical in this historical moment: the need to point out and dissect the incongruities in the way that the Western media presents Africa as a whole.

Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta, is a landlocked country in West Africa. It is comprised of the former Mossi Empire and parts and pieces of a number of other African cultural groups. In 1896 it was invaded and became a colony of the French, who saw it primarily as a source of labor for the production of cacao, coffee, oil palms and cotton in neighboring countries. Burkina Faso gained independence in 1960 as part of a move that also gave independence to a number of then French colonies. Its economy relies almost completely on raw cotton exports, a commodity system set up by the French during the colonial era. In 1983, Thomas Sankara seized power in a military coup. He set out to instigate wide-

ranging reforms that centered on eliminating food aid and promoting domestic food sovereignty though also included banning female

Some ask me,
"where is imperialism.
Look at your plates.
The imported rice,
corn, and grain.
That's imperialism,
look no further

- Thomas Sankara



genital mutilation and championing women's rights. In just 4 years the country attained self-sufficiency in grain production. In 1987 he was assassinated by a French backed coup.

What today is known as Mali was formerly part of the Ghana Empire, Mali Empire, Songhai Empire, and just prior to European invasion, the Bambara Empire. In 1892 it became a French Colony. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal all gained independence in 1960 as "the Federation de Mali", but this dissolved within months. Mali is endowed with great agricultural resources (both the Niger and Senegal rivers flow through it). In addition it has gold, uranium, and salt. Long part of trans-Saharan trading routes, Mali has a long history of international trade. Today its major exports are cotton, gold, and livestock.

Though my research focused on Burkina Faso and Mali, it is important to note that the stories of these two countries are representative of much of post-colonial Africa. A critical impediment to food security is the way global inequalities of power can efface and perhaps unknowingly marginalize certain solutions, while expending huge energies inventing strategies that continue to fail.²

The importance of food:

"All feel strongly about what they do eat and don't eat, and about the ways they do so... Food preferences are close to the center of ... self definition." -Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power

Food is an absolutely critical resource, not only can we not live without it, but it is central to culture and social organization. While the need to eat

² One example, provided by Judy Carney, involves the colonial effort to overcome the technological "gap" perceived between Asian and African rice growing systems. Colonizers forced irrigation programs and double cropping. The projects failed repeatedly. Rather than recognize that the plans were at fault the instigators of the programs saw this as affirmation that African farmers weren't able to comprehend their "sophisticated" systems. pp. 49

connects all human beings, much like language, food also distinguishes one community from another, and as Sydney Mintz says above, food is at the center of cultural definition. "What constitutes 'good food,' like what constitutes good weather, a good spouse, or a fulfilling life, is a social not a biological matter" (Mintz 3-4; 8). The marginalization of African native crops is not only an issue of food security, but has deep social and cultural implications. During the colonial era, as part of the French "civilizing" project, the French imposed their foods on their subjects via forced agricultural projects. Fear of death related to illness as well as a sense of cultural superiority led the French and British to proclaim that many African foods were "primitive" or only suitable for animal feed (Freidberg 68)

As a result of this perception of their non-utility or inherent inferiority, many endemic crops have been largely ignored in food security discourse, by local governments, and by agents of



"Our restaurant has prepared traditional dishes for 30 years. But tastes are changing: today, people only want white cornmeal instead of millet or sorghum. It's less nutritious, but people want it because it's white and smooth unlike the traditional types. We also used soumbala in every dish [fermented seasoning] now we have to ask the clients first."

-Mariam Maraparaminaba, owner of "Bene Wende" restaurant, specializing in traditional dishes for special occasions.

development. Their invisibility is a result of hundreds of years of devaluation and marginalization- structural, cultural, economic, and institutional. The Colonial powers defined the food that once sustained the region as “low value”, “under-productive”, “poor people’s food”, “not modern”, and “inefficient” (Carney 200). This logic (now easily recognizable as biased) has been the foundation upon which were built many of the structures that today present the greatest obstacles to food security: local government projects that focus on major export commodities versus a healthy regional food system, food aid that undermines regional food production by undercutting local producers, massive efforts to encourage the production of European crops in sedentary mono-cropping systems, and local perceptions that traditional foods are inferior, to name a few.

As one Ghanaian proverb says, “Even if you do not like the taste in your mouth, that is where you will always lick.” While historic power dynamics cannot be re-written or changed overnight, analyzing misleading narratives is one step in that direction.

African Agriculture:

Though the African Continent is largely accepted as the birthplace of humanity, its legacy as one of the several birthplaces of agriculture is lesser known. A food exporter since the middle of the 14th century, the region was colonized to secure agricultural resources for Europe. The area from Senegal to Liberia, was referred to as the “Grain Coast” and well known as a rich agricultural region. Merchants and slave traders headed to the Americas would restock their ships with African rice, millet, and sorghum as well as fruits and

vegetables. This trade expanded with the slave trade and early accounts mention African chiefs and kings employing large numbers of slaves in plantation-like systems to produce crops for export (Carney 69). Associations with hunger and famine, which began during the colonial era, have now overshadowed thousands of years³ of agricultural traditions developed to deal with the unique challenges to food production in the region (Carney 5).

Research indicates that the numbers of plants that were part of Africa's agricultural and culinary heritage numbered in the thousands (National Research Council, *Lost Crops*, Vol I xiii). While some of the aforementioned crops have gained international acclaim, (coffee, eggplant, melons, tamarind, yam, millet, sorghum, okra), the majority remain largely unknown to the rest of the world. The African continent supported numerous carefully adapted systems of agriculture that addressed a diversity of climates and soil conditions. From dry land rice farming and rain fed irrigation, to agro forestry, West Africa's many forms of agriculture were dependent on working within natural cycles and available resources. The region's agriculture has evolved to deal with a climate that has been drought prone and regionally subject to desertification, for 1,000's of years and tropical soils are nitrogen and organic matter poor, though mineral rich.

Integral to these systems of agriculture were and are specific crops that are well adjusted to the challenges of tropical soils, rains, and extremes of climate. For example, while Asian rice can be more productive per acre, it cannot survive the drought, salinated soils, nutrient deficiencies, and toxic levels of iron that Africa's endemic rice varieties have been selected to grow in

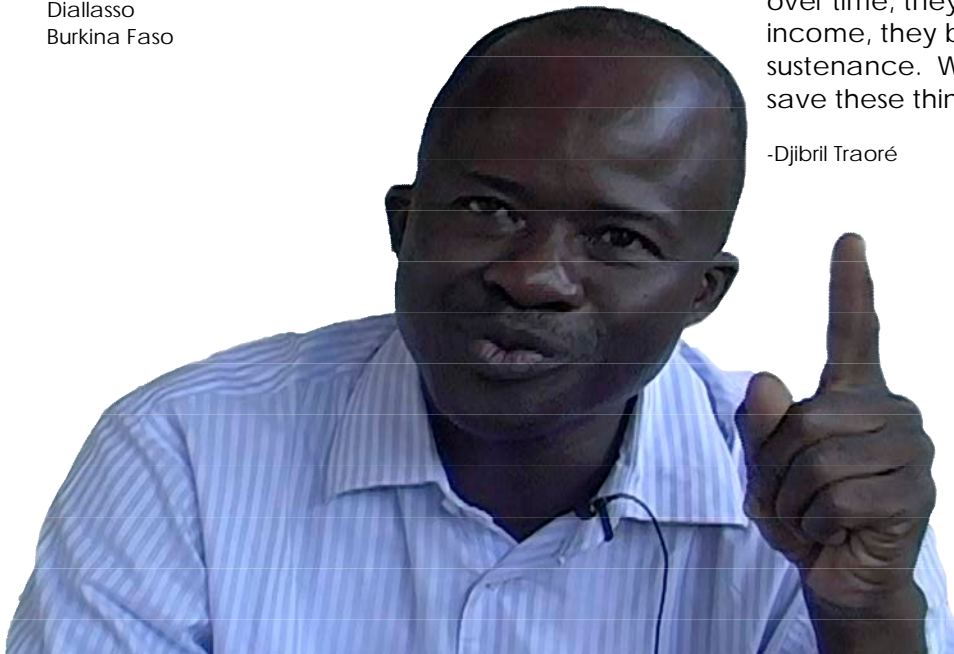
(Carney 50). Many West African endemic crops are also nutritionally quite remarkable. Cowpeas have just as much protein as soy, can be eaten at all stages, will perennialize, are more drought tolerant, and are relatively free of the metabolites that suppress soy's nutritional value (Lost Crops, Vol II 109). The fact that cowpeas are virtually unknown here in the US has little to do with inherent inferiorities of the crop. It has much more to do with the comparative lack of capital and research that has gone into making these endemic crops commercially viable.

"We have many trained experts: engineers, agronomists. ... It is not us who should be helping you to fix our problems, but you who should be helping us to fix our problems."

-Djibril Traoré, agronomist, Bobo Diallasso
Burkina Faso

"If we, academics that we are, would put our efforts into improving and re-valueing traditional foods, we could avoid many of the vitamins and nutritional supplements sent to us by the West. These foods, that have proven themselves over time, they bring income, they bring sustenance. We need to save these things."

-Djibril Traoré



"The cultivation of vegetables in hot countries is indispensable for the hygiene of Europeans who are called to live in them. If, in certain intertropical regions, the native is content to use the plants that he finds at his door ... one of our biggest preoccupations when we move to the colonies, it is to introduce and grow at least some of the many excellent vegetables that we possess in our temperate country.

This responds to a true need. It is necessary, from the point of view of health in the hot countries, to give great priority to vegetables in the diet..." (qtd in Freidberg 68)

While export of food crops began with the slave trade, colonization drastically changed West African agricultural systems. Pressure increased to produce more temperate crops for export and to feed French nationals and troops living in Africa. The French did not colonize West Africa in the way the British colonized the Americas- by moving in and establishing settlements and large plantation agriculture. Rather, they forced small peasant farmers to grow food with European agricultural technologies and then commandeered the food for their own use. Via forced labor they built infrastructure (roads, railroads, ports) that allowed for easy transport inland to the coast and from the coast to Europe (Cohen 86). The colonies' economies and infrastructures were carefully constructed to produce commodities desired by European markets. Native crops, which were unfamiliar to Western markets or perceived of as inferior, were excluded from these efforts (Altieri 86). Early French agricultural projects forced quotas of export crops on small farmers and established systems for the mass production of cacao, coffee, cotton, sugar, and more. By the 1920's, forced cash cropping and the strain on rural populations for forced labor had resulted in drastic decreases in the food supply resulting in widespread hunger and famine. They referred to Africans as the "de-evoluée" or "un-evolved", and blamed West

Africa's "backward" and "primitive" need to be modernized as the problem (Freidberg 46,67).

Susan Freidberg does a good job of summarizing the influence of colonialism on food security: "National foodways were among the many conceits carried to colonial Africa and planted there... in that they never described how a nation really ate. Another great conceit was the premise that the European civilizing mission would improve the African food supply. The failure of this mission (and its post colonial rendition as "development") in Africa are by now well documented in the histories of famines..." (Freidberg 37-38)

Development:

"More than half the people of the world," he claimed, were living in misery. "Their food is inadequate... Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas... Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And key to greater production is wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge." (qtd in Escobar 3)

Harry Truman's 1949 speech, quoted above, is considered by many to be the historic beginning of the "Development Era". It quite articulately sums up the paradigm that guided and still guides Development work. In the name of alleviating poverty and hunger, programs were implemented, studies launched, and policies enacted to further make West African economies like those of the West. This included and still includes a Western perspective on agricultural growth. Development did nothing more than re-frame the colonial enterprise, hence the term "neo-colonialism", coined by Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah⁴.

⁴ Kwame Nkrumah is viewed all over Africa as a symbol of freedom from colonial rule. He was instrumental in the independence of Ghana and served as it's President for many years until a coup ousted him in 1966.

Why is certain food “inadequate”? Why are some systems “primitive”?

Arturo Escobar, in his book Encountering Development, argues for the need to deconstruct development itself. The discourse of development, he asserts, has “produced” the “developed” and “underdeveloped” worlds because it is based in an acceptance of Western cultural superiority (4). Many other critics don’t feel the need to go so far, but rather point to the unequal power relations within development as the problem.⁵

Either way, the discourse and efforts of Development have had a very significant impact on Sub-Saharan Food Systems. Though Development efforts have responded to criticism by shifting goals and methodology, the enterprise has been largely unsuccessful in achieving its “fair deal” for the “rest of the world” (qtd Escobar 3).

“I’m worried. I wake up with a gnawing in my belly, because I see a new set of aid entrepreneurs... and they aren’t really talking to Africans... 10 year from now we will have the same story, and we will be repeating the same things. ... ”

-Ngozi Okonjoweala, former finance minister, Nigeria



⁵ This critique is often referred to as the political economy or political ecology critique of development. (Greenberg & Park, 1994).

For West African farmers and eaters this has meant privileging Western systems and a continued marginalizing of endemic crops and agricultural knowledge.

Both the French and the British have remained heavily engaged in the affairs of their former colonies as some of the biggest contributors to Development programs. They have continued to push for more exports, are the biggest trading partners of their former colonies, and are hugely involved in the implementation, funding, and trajectory of new industry, social programs, and infrastructure development. In short, neo-colonialism is far from a historic period of the past. It is alive and well.

The Green Revolution:

"The green revolution... bears witness to the fact that careful evaluation, sound scientific and economic planning, and sustained effort can overcome the pathology of chronic under-production and gradually bring about rapidly increasing economic advance. A formula for success can be designed for any area that has available the new adopted plant varieties and the other inputs and accelerators that must be applied in logical fashion" -Lester Brown of the World Watch Institute (qtd in Escobar 159)

The Green Revolution, largely funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, began at the end of WWII under the shadow of fear of the expanding power of the Soviet Union and Communist China. There was great concern on the part of Western governments that a poor and hungry Third World proletariat could lead to revolutions... but if they could just be fed, socialist uprisings might be staved off. The Green Revolution set scientists and industry to the task of figuring out how to produce more food to feed the poor (the irony is that the US itself had a chronic overproduction problem which had resulted in the Great Depression just a couple decades earlier). The biggest project of the

Green Revolution was the development of varieties of plants that would be more productive. Whether knowingly or not, the architects of the Green Revolution neglected to take into account that hunger was not directly related to an absolute scarcity of food, but rather to economic inequalities and political instability that left people unable to buy the food that there was. (Patel 119-126)

For the most part, the Green Revolution is still heralded as a great success and it did indeed lead to the development of more productive varieties. Unfortunately, it did so at a price for farmers, the environment, and consumers. The new crops were more productive... if grown with chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides that now had to be purchased along with the seed (which had up until that point been produced by farmers). In addition the Green Revolution also depended on a set of technologies that required huge capital investment (tractors, combines, etc..) and practices that are not universally applicable and have proven to have huge environmental consequences (mono-cropping, intensive tillage, and irrigation). While in Francophone West Africa smallholder farmers remained the more dominant model, mono-cropping, intensive tillage, and input dependency are still the goal, just on a smaller scale.

Green Revolution principles have guided the trajectory of development programs and government policy that largely focus on export crops grown in monoculture via intensive tillage and lots of inputs. Although there are certainly many small-scale projects that try to encourage low input agriculture, they have not been given the same research and funding attention. The discourse of

sustainable agriculture and agro-ecology saturate journals and academic circles- but on the ground they operate in the margins.

Neo-liberal Trade Policy/ Structural Adjustment Programs:

"When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." –African proverb, quoted from "The Price of Aid"

In spite of the widespread use of Green Revolution technologies by colonial governments, hunger, famine, and poverty did not go away. In the 1960's and 70's, with no wealthy class to tax and no industry save the trade relations with their former colonizers, new African nations continued to invest in export commodity agriculture based on the same Green Revolution theories. The World Bank and the IMF encouraged and forced African countries into expensive development projects (rural electrifications, irrigation schemes...) With huge amounts of debt that they could not pay, many African nations were forced into "Structural Adjustment Programs" that liberalized their economies and removed trade barriers. While this move was supposed to reduce poverty, benefit producers, and stimulate economic growth, it in many cases had the opposite effects (International Center for Economic Growth 2008). The corruption, inefficiency, and instability of African governments were blamed- maybe the wrong people had been hired to do the job. If the structures of governments couldn't do it, then private industry should be given a chance.

This philosophy and associated policy measures are very generally referred to as the "neo-liberal" paradigm. During the last couple decades this view has driven legislation and policy that has privatized many formerly public programs in the region. Though the idea is to allow personal entrepreneurialism,

existing power inequalities have led to less control in the hands of local, albeit corrupt government, and a huge increase in the power of NGO's and private industry- much of which is European or American. The reins are in new hands, but the teleology is the same: increase production of export cash crops. As a result, export commodities still receive the largest part of research budgets and the greatest policy attention. (Lost Crops xi)

The institutions of Development have continued to show little to no interest in endemic crops or agricultural systems as part of the strategy for addressing food insecurity. It is for these reasons that the National Academy of Sciences refers to many African crops as "lost". The use of the word "lost" is not literal, as many of these crops are widely grown and consumed. Rather, it refers to the way in which social and political forces have led to the general absence or ignorance of these foods in history, policy, research, and commerce.

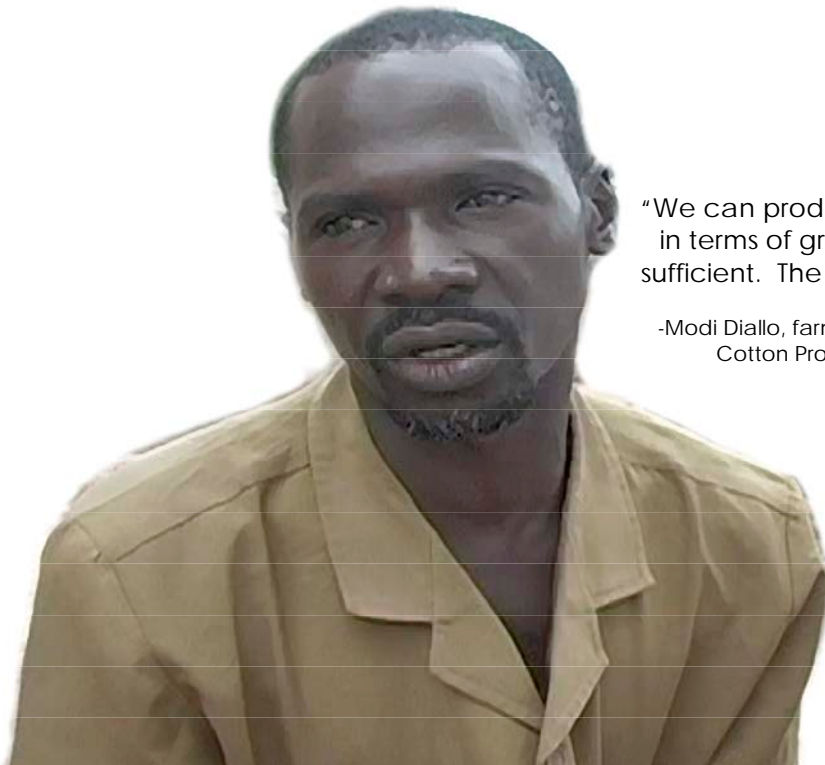
Food Aid:

Another hugely influential factor that has shaped West African food systems and further marginalized native crops is US Food Aid. The program began right after WWII amid a war ravaged Europe (who were the first recipients) and fears of the rise of Soviet Power. PL480, also known as the "food for peace" program seemed like a win-win from the American perspective. The US had huge grain surpluses that it had to get rid of, there were hungry people, and we needed to make alliances and find new trading partners for our rapidly expanding economy. The program provides grains for distribution to those in need, but is also intended to provide economic benefits in the US. Every part of

the process is legally required to benefit the American economy: the shipping, packaging, processing, storing, labeling... must be American.

In the 1980's, amid the greatly circulated images of Nigeria's civil war induced famine, the Western world raised funds for "African Hunger". The tragedies of specific political disasters were generalized to the entire African continent, and used to mobilize support for continued involvement in African politics. While Americans were euphorically humming "We Are the World", oblivious to irony of the lyrics, African leaders, were trying to halt that very same destructive "aid" which undermined their economies. By flooding the market with free or low-priced food, food aid discourages local farmers from producing, trapping countries in dependency on imports.

Food Aid is now a big industry and directly employs over 1 million



"We can produce a lot more food, and in terms of grains, we are largely self-sufficient. The problem is organization."

-Modi Diallo, farmer and president of Koutouni Cotton Producers Association, Mali

Americans. The food comes whether there is a crisis or not and it has to be distributed for the whole machine to keep running. The result is that the definition of the words "crisis", "hunger", and "famine" have become flexible depending on the needs of the Food Aid apparatus as well as the numerous NGO's that only get funding in times of "crisis".

Niger and Zambia are just two recent examples of "famines" that were largely invented by aid agencies and the media. Zambia's 2002 "famine" was only in one prefecture, but once the Food Aid train is on the way it becomes almost impossible to stop. When the Zambian government turned away the aid because it was GMO corn (which they didn't want due to environmental, health, and economic concerns) it created an international scandal. Zambia did manage to turn it away, but not without significant international pressure to accept it and threats to cut off other types of aid. The corn itself had already arrived and was just shifted to a neighboring country. ("The Price of Aid")

Food aid is often a sort of "Trojan horse". By flooding the markets with extremely cheap cooking oil, wheat, and corn, it discourages local production of native equivalent commodities. If you can't sell it above cost of production, most farmers are smart enough to stop producing at a loss. (Patel 88-95)

Conclusions:

While in the US and Europe, Africa and hunger are presented as synonymous, in West Africa the conversations are completely different: what's healthy and what's not, the modernization of diet, food prices going up, whether to use MSG or not... and how to regain food sovereignty are a few of the hot

topics on the table. I heard some of the same conversations in West African food security circles as I do here: how to educate the public and policy makers, the need for access to nutritional food that is culturally appropriate, improving and securing the greater food system, and how to support local small farmers.

Hunger is not a simple problem of lack of food. It is a result of global race politics, colonialism, development discourse, and trade policy. The problem is generally not that there isn't enough food, but that people can't afford it or can't access it. As a farmer, I believe that long-term food security comes from a healthy local food economy that keeps food prices high enough that farmers can make a living producing it.

For decades progressive African leaders have been calling for a shift in resource allocation from exports to local food production infrastructures like better transportation, regulation of produce markets, subsidies, and support services for food producers. These policies have been largely ignored or outright blocked. While climatic conditions can be harsh, African farmers can produce enough food for domestic consumption. Chronic hunger and food insecurity are not a result of the region's inability to produce enough food. They are a by-product of colonial histories and continued economic exploitation that encourages export production over domestic food production and makes it difficult for local farmers to earn a living.

Built on ignorance and bias produced by a history of racism and power inequity, it is no wonder that the Green Revolution and its sister projects of Development and Neo-liberalism have not worked as intended. By misidentifying or misunderstanding the problems, they have often not provided

viable solutions. Though it seems the tide may be turning, the Western imaginary has not changed. African experts continue to work on developing African solutions often in spite of versus with the support of government, and foreign aid.

Diet related illnesses like diabetes and heart disease are on the rise. The modernization of diet is leading to greater consumption of meat, salt, and fats. As Dr. Jean Didier Zongo, of the University of Ouagadougou says, “The modern diet has become monotone... it has almost no diversity and is nutritionally deficient.” In addition, nutritious local foods have been de-valued. Imported foods, often more expensive, have exotic appeal and have been equated with status while local foods are equated with poverty. Although people often know of the superior nutritional value of local foods, just because it’s good for you doesn’t mean you’ll eat it.

Things are changing... The global drops in commodity prices over the last decades are making vegetables and fruits more profitable and market farming is on the rise. When I was a kid there was very little regional trade. Now Ghanaian tomatoes go to Burkina Faso and Mali. Burkinabe onions make the reverse trip. Though farmers are frustrated by the lack of market regulations, little to no irrigation & transport infrastructure, and limited access to appropriate technical & financial support, a growing regional food system is being built. There has also been huge growth in small “commercialization” businesses developing processed and value-added products from local crops.

As Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda said in a TED talk several years ago, “There is a wealth of opportunities that never navigate through the web of despair and helplessness that the Western media largely presents to its

audience.” Although we cannot alter the past or easily change global economics and trade structures, we can easily begin to tackle misperceptions and ignorance starting with ourselves.

“It’s not like in our day, when kids learned to cook & help in the kitchen. Kids today are disconnected from their food. It’s hard to pull them away from their cell phones, TV’s, and computers. A group of mothers & I decided to do something about it; we started a summer cooking camp for kids. We teach them the basics of traditional cuisine & nutrition. If you don’t learn how to eat healthy young, you develop bad habits that lead to what we call here “diseases of modernity”: diabetes, heart disease, hypertension...”

-Flore Yameogo, TV cooking show host, Burkina Faso



Bibliography

Allafrica.com. "Africa: Agriculture for Development." Allafrica.com. 12/27/2007.
<<http://www.freshplaza.com/print.asp?id=9891>>.

Abouet, Marguerite. Oubrière, Clement. Aya. Montreal, Quebec: Drawn & Quarterly, 2007.

Altieri, Miguel; Hecht, Susanna B. Agroecology and Small Farm Development. Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press, Inc., 2000.

BBC News, special reports. "Counting the Cost of Wheat Price Hike". 2/25/08.
<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/in_depth/7004409.stm>.

BBC News, Business. "Cereal Prices Hit Poor Countries". 2/14/08.
<<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/business/7244382.stm>>.

BBC News, Special Reports. "UN Warns Over Food Aid Rationing". 2/25/08.
<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/in_depth/7262830.stm>.

Becker, Laurence, Diallo, Roger. "The Cultural Diffusion of Rice Cropping in Côte d'Ivoire." *Geographical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (Oct. 1996) pp. 505-528. American Geographical Society: 4/29/2008.<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/215930>>.

Bell, Roanne; Sinclair, Mark. Pictures & Words: New Comic Art and Narrative Illustration. London, UK: Lawrence King Publishing, 2005.

Brady, Mathew. Deogratias: A (Depressing) Tale from Rwanda. Blog-Reviews of Graphic Novels. 12/08/07. <www.tcj.com/journalista/?p=380>.

Centre D'Analyse de Politiques Économiques et Sociales. État des Lieux Des Savoirs Locaux au Burkina Faso. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso: CAPES, 2006.

Carney, Judy. Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Cohen, Ronals. Satisfying Africa's Food Needs: food production and commercialization in African agriculture. Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienne Publishers Inc, 1988.

CIRAD. "An International conference on Genetic Resource Management in the Grasslands of West Africa". CIRAD. May 4, 2007.
<<http://www.cirad.fr/en/presse/communique.php?id=273>>.

- Dafforn, Mark. Phone interview. 5/15/08.
- Eden Foundation. "When Endemic Malnutrition is Labeled as Famine". 2006. 23 Mar. 2008. <www.edenfoundation.org/project/articles_niger_crisis_2005.html>.
- Enwezor, Okwui ed. With essays by Chinua Achebe et. Al. The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994. Munich, Germany: Prestel, 2001.
- Escobar, Arturo. Encountering Development: the making and unmaking of the Third World. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Fernald, Anya; Milano, Serena; Sardo, Piero. A World of Presidia: Food, Culture, and Community. Bra, Italy: Slow Food Editore, 2004.
- Food and Agriculture Organization. "Food-based approaches for a healthier nutrition in West Africa." FAO Newsroom, 2/09/2009. <<http://www.fao.org/english/newsroom/news/2003/24788-en.html>>.
- FoodAfrica: Improving Food Systems in sub-Saharan Africa: Responding to a Changing Environment, Overview Summary. FoodAfrica, Cameroon: 5-9 May 2003.
- "Franz Masereel". Graphic Witness: visual Arts and Social Commentary. 12/08/07 <<http://www.graphicwitness.org/historic/st.htm>>.
- Freidberg, Susanne. French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Gliessman, Stephen. Agroecology: Ecological Processes in Sustainable Agriculture. Chelsea MI: Ann Arbor Press, 1998.
- Greenberg James B.; Park, Thomas K. "Political Ecology". *Journal of Political Ecology*: Vol. 1, 1994.
- International Center for Economic Growth. "Poverty Alleviation Schemes: A Critique of Development Policies". Policy Brief #9907: Online. May 27, 2008.
- Illiff, John. Africans: the history of a continent, new edition. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Kloppenburg, Jack Ralph. First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Leach, Melissa. Rainforest Relations. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

Lemelman, Martin. Mendel's Daughter, A Memoir. Free Press, 2007.

Mintz, Sydney W. Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1985.

Motswagole, B.S., Wambete, J.T., Mpotokwane, S.M., et. Al. "Botswana Traditional Dishes and Their Nutritional Adequacy in the Diet: Is Food Fortification Needed". FoodAfrica Conference, Cameroon. 5-9 May, 2003.

National Research Council. Lost Crops of Africa, Vol. I: Grains. Washington D.C: The National Academies Press, 2008.

National Research Council. Lost Crops of Africa, Vol. II: Vegetables. Washington D.C: The National Academies Press, 2008.

National Research Council. Lost Crops of Africa, Vol. III: Fruits. Washington D.C: The National Academies Press, 2008.

Oxfam America. "Interview: Ibrahim Coulibaly". 1/30/08.

<http://www.oxfamamerica.org/whatwedo/where_we_work/west_africa>.

Patel, Raj. Stuffed & Starved. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2008.

Richards, Paul. Coping with Hunger: hazard and experiment in an African rice-farming system. London, UK : Allen & Unwin Publishers Ltd, 1986.

Schroeder, Richard. Shady Practices: Agroforestry and Gender Politics in the Gambia. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

Searice. "Good Quality Seeds From Farmers' Seed Clubs". Leisa Magazine. June, 2007.

Schiebinger, Londa. Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Skinner, Elliott. The Mossi of Upper Volta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964.

Thomas, Kate. "Liberians Drop Rice for Spaghetti". BBC New, Africa. 4/23/08. <<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/7360649.stm>>.

Ukadike, Nwachukwu Frank. Black African Cinema. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994.

UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity-Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development. "Organic Agriculture and Food Security in Africa." United Nations Publication, 2008.

World Health Organization. "Facts about Health in the Africa Region of WHO". WHO Media Center. 2/09/09.
<<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs314/en/index.html>>.

Wrigley, Gordon. Tropical Agriculture: the Development of Production. New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger Inc, 1969.

Appendices:

*Filmography

- "Adwa: An African Victory", Haile Gerima, 1999
- "Bye Bye Africa", Mahamat Saleh Haroun, 1999
- "Drum!" and "Mapantsula", Zola Maseko
- "Borom Sarrat", "La Noire de...", "Mooladé" Ousmane Sembene
- "Fary L'Anesse", (Fary the Ass or Donkey) Mansour Sora Wade 1990
- "Great Grandfather's Music", Trailer from Taale Laafi Rossellini, work in progress.
- "Keita! L'héritage du griot" Dani Kouyaté, 1994
- "Kounandi", Apoline Traoré, Director; Idrissa Ouedrago, Producer
- "Le Silence de la Forêt", Bassek ba Kobhio and Didier Ouénangaré, directors. 2003,
- "Ndeysaan, Le Prix du Pardon" (The Price of Forgiveness) Mansour Sora Wade,
- "Picc Mi" (Lil Bird) Mansour Sora Wade, 1992
- "Thomas Sankara: the upright man". Robin Shuffield 2006
- "Three Tales From Sénégal: Le franc". Djibril Diop Mambety 1994

Some other African crops you may not have heard of:

Egusi is a word that is used for several different melon-like fruits all in the Cucurbitaceae family. Some are more like pumpkins; others are more closely related to melons. Though quite different, all of these plants are grown for their seeds, which are dried and ground into seed butters that are used to thicken sauces and make a type of steamed dumpling also called Egusi. Widely grown and eaten throughout sub-Saharan West Africa, there hasn't been much research as to the nutritional value of this crop, nor have I found any data as to its commercial importance in the local economy, though I remember seeing these products ubiquitously at markets and know they were ingredients to many dishes I ate as a child.

Bambara Groundnut is closely related to the peanut, which we are familiar with worldwide. All peanuts are commonly thought to have originated in the Americas and very few people, are aware of Africa's native "peanut". The South American peanut was introduced some time ago and quickly became omnipresent. The Bambara groundnut is no less productive or difficult to process, or nutritious. In fact, it has a much higher protein content, though less fat. During the 70's it seemed to have all but disappeared from markets and the South American peanut achieved near total dominance, but over the last 20 years it seems to be finding its place again.

Fonio is a tiny grain much smaller than rice, with similar protein values as wheat, but with more amino acids. Another crop that was widely grown and consumed all over sub-Saharan Africa, fonio was a critical component of many diets as it was the base starch and calories upon which other things were served. Ignored by Western agronomists due partially to a misunderstood translation of its name "hungry rice", fonio is called so not because people eat it only when very hungry, but because its taste is so prized. Over the last 10 plus years it seems to be finding a niche as more than just a subsistence crop. It is now being grown by market gardeners as a cash generating enterprise and can commonly be found on the menus at high-end restaurants. I just recently discovered an African import company in New Jersey that is marketing fonio couscous for those with gluten allergies. Traditionally it is quite difficult to process, but in 1996 Sanoussi Diakite, a Senegalese mechanical engineer invented a husking machine that makes processing feasible on a commercial scale, though the machine does not yet seem to be widely available.