
**"But Where on Earth Has Mamadou Hidden
His Production Function?" French Africanist
Rural Economics and Institutionalism**

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In the last twenty years social scientists in the English-speaking world have become increasingly interested in the effect of institutions on economic performance. Similar interests have arisen among French researchers. French rural economists working in Africa have developed an original approach to this subject. Although there has been no interaction between French Africanist rural economists (FAREs²) and American and English institutionalists,³ they share common methodological ground and certain similarities in their work which should not be overlooked. In this paper, we will describe the work of French Africanist rural economics (FARE), and assume that the reader is familiar with American institutionalism.⁴ With fortune, this essay will stimulate communication between the two groups of social scientists.

In the first part of this text we will put forward the characteristics of the works of French Africanist rural economists.⁵ In the second part, we will outline the underlying paradigm to which these works can be most often related. We will show that like American institutionalists, the FAREs are heterodox in relation to the dominant trend in economics. Their heterodoxy

may be seen in their research agenda, in their methodological choices and in the contents and form of their published papers. Hence the title of this paper--the reluctance of the FAREs to use econometric tools and mathematical models partly explains why they do not publish in mainstream academic journals. The FAREs' approach is based on:

- a broad conception of economics--economic agents are situated in their social, cultural, historical and political environment;
- the use of inductive methods, starting from real situations and case studies;
- a holistic and dynamic approach, integrating the facts studied into the overall picture, and integrating spatial and temporal scales;
- the rejection of any postulated rationality, i.e. the rationality of peasant behavior is a question of empirical research, not of postulate.

Genesis of French Africanist Rural Economics

French Africanist rural economists focus on the effects of institutions on production. Their main objective is to understand peasant practices⁶ and strategies in the light of the management of natural resources, access to the factors of production, and the relations between production and distribution. They also emphasize the way production units function and their relations with the economic and institutional environment, particularly the state and the development agencies. They do not base their analyses on the neoclassical model, the aim of which is to explain prices and markets.

FAREs may include in their research an economic component which is marginal, dominant or exclusive. The work of FAREs is thus characterized by plural approaches corresponding to different methodological and conceptual frameworks which in turn are linked to the history of the research institutions and their mandates.

The Intellectual Roots

FARE is part of the melting pot of French research in social sciences, which is characterized by a humanist tradition (expressed by Universities, the *Collège de France*, the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* or the *Ecole des Annales*) and influenced by Marxist thought between the years 1950 and 1970. It is also a product of colonial history, which gave rise to a wide range of research on tropical zones. It therefore might be described as the fertilization

of the French intellectual tradition by the African field of study. This fertilization has been enriched by the dynamic processes of decolonization and then by cooperation and development aid policies.

There is also a clear common ground with the French (or French-speaking) school of development which was set up just after World War II. While the dominant economic school reasoned in terms of growth and accumulation models, French-speaking economists stressed the socio-cultural environment, historic processes, institutions and power relationships (Hugon 1991). This intellectual movement gave rise to various schools of thought which are united only in their opposition to mainstream economic theory. The 'social' and globalizing approaches developed by the school of *Economie et Humanisme* (L.J. Lebreton), the contributions to the structuralist current (F. Perroux) and the radical critics of the school of dependency (S. Amin, G. de Bernis, etc.) are representative of these schools.

In such a context, the work of FAREs has been designed to untangle and reconstruct the complex reality of African agricultural economies, in a cognitive or operational perspective according to their institutional origin.

Institutions

To understand FARE it is necessary to recognize that it evolved within bureaucratic institutions and is marked by their histories, especially if one recalls with Bourdieu et al. that it can't "be useful to treat epistemological professions of faith as professional ideologies which, in the last analysis, aim to justify less the science than the researcher, less the real practice than the limits imposed on that practice by the position and the past of the researcher" (1983, 99).

The colonial period led to the establishment by the French State of agricultural administrative departments and agronomic and basic research institutions supporting development. Thus the State has maintained or set up specialized research institutes and has founded or favored the emergence of institutions supporting development. Their coordination and funding are basically carried out by the *Ministère de Coopération & Développement* and the *Ministère de la Recherche & Technologie*, both of which supervise the research institutes. The *Caisse Centrale de Coopération Economique* (CCCE), a specialized financing institution, successor of the *Caisse Centrale de la France d'Outre Mer*, also intervenes in this process. It is important to note that there is a relative absence of private sources of financing such as the foundations which play a key role in financing American research.

1. *The Research Institutions:* The originality of French institutions specializing in the tropical zone in comparison with other national research bodies is the result of several characteristics:

- the concentration on research activity: researchers are *full-time* researchers;
- the perennial nature of research: researchers usually have tenure; the programming of activities relies on an annual budget provided all or in part by the Authorities, but which is managed by the institutions. This situation allows long-term fieldwork to be financed;
- the researchers are sent to developing countries for long term assignments, in order to conduct research programs *in situ*;
- the existence of several disciplines within one institution facilitates contacts between researchers belonging to different disciplines.⁷ This contact may be fostered by the creation of interdisciplinary departments or research units.

The specialized research institutions either have a general or a sector-based vocation. Among those intervening in the rural studies field, particular mention may be made of ORSTOM and CIRAD.

ORSTOM (*Institut Français de Recherche Scientifique pour le Développement en Coopération*),⁸ undertakes research in fields as diverse as health sciences, plant sciences, social sciences, etc. There are about 1,500 researchers and engineers, 200 of whom belong to social sciences. Research is carried out with cognitive or applied aims.

CIRAD (*Centre International de Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement*), was set up in 1984, incorporating different research institutes of tropical agronomy.⁹ Most of its work is not in the social sciences. What social science work it does is increasingly oriented towards understanding the social and cultural factors influencing the adoption of technological innovations. Today out of one thousand researchers, however, only five percent are engaged in social science endeavors.¹⁰

Research teams of other institutions, working mainly in France, are also developing programs linked to developing countries. Apart from specialized university laboratories, special mention may be made of the EHESS, the INRA and the CNRS,¹¹ which contribute largely to the Africanist social sciences field.

2. *The Operational Structures:* The operational structures include the technical departments of certain administrations. Among these, one must mention the Cooperation department of INSEE which plays an important part in the publication of research results and methods,¹² as well as the publications department of the Ministry of Cooperation and Development, which has provided considerable support for research publications.¹³

The operational structures also include different consulting organizations (*bureaux d'études*) which for a long time have been the mainspring of the operational side of development. These organizations are either of para-public origin like SEDES,¹⁴ or of private or associative origin (like IRAM¹⁵), but they intervene above all in public contracts and financing. Their action has recently been complemented by certain non-governmental organizations and independent experts.

The *bureaux d'études* have their own permanent staffs who bring with them considerable experience and expertise. They send staffs for long term technical assistance of foreign governments or on shorter-term assignments. They are engaged in regional socio-economic studies, economic planning, and the elaboration, follow-up and evaluation of rural development projects.

SEDES may be considered as the model of these consultancy organizations. In addition to making notable contributions relating to fields of knowledge,¹⁶ it has produced methodological works which have become classics. One can mention its contribution to information collection techniques in the rural milieu and above all its role in the formalization and the promotion of the so-called 'effects method,' both of which lie behind the French approach to economic evaluation of projects.¹⁷

Diversity and Convergence in FARE Research

There is a great deal of diversity in FARE research. Although there are many institutions working in the field of Africanist rural economics, each institution carries out a certain brand of research. The following major factors account for this:

- the mandate of the institution: cognitive research, problem-solving research, or direct intervention related to development;
- the field of activity: agronomic research, research in various disciplinary fields, economic or socio-economic studies;
- the training of researchers and experts: Due to the the French system of education¹⁸ there is a dominance of engineering degrees (agronomists,

economists, statisticians) in the field of operational research and a majority of university degrees for more fundamental research. the mode of financing: What distinguishes some of the mentioned research institutions (like ORSTOM) is that they are financed almost completely by the State, with few constraints in the definition of research programs themes, localization and length. Institutions which are only partly financed by the State (like CIRAD) or institutions which do not receive grants, are much less free when it comes to the innovation of programs.

We can, however, single out two dominant frameworks of analysis which reflect the distinction between research with a cognitive orientation and operational research aiming to support the decisions of public or private decision-makers. The final objectives of the work indeed determine the choice of methods, the themes studied and the concepts applied.

Problem-Solving Research

Two major branches of problem-solving research may be distinguished: work relating to economic evaluation of development projects, and agro-economic studies of agricultural systems.

The application of the concepts and methods of the French school of economic evaluation in the African rural milieu has resulted in the accumulation of a great deal of knowledge and the improvement of means of analysis. The concept of agricultural production subsectors and the 'effects method' have allowed the consideration of both the economic and social aspects of production. Economic evaluation has involved identifying direct or indirect value added by projects and has required above all recognition of the various economic agents and their characteristics. It has also led to identifying different flows (circulation of products and by-products, circulation and redistribution of incomes) in order to be able to set up subsector economic accounts. This procedure has led in particular to the enrichment and formulation of fieldwork methods in rural areas. It has also given rise to many detailed case studies which have broadened the the base of available references.

The framework of agro-economic approaches, undertaken mostly by agronomists, is that of agricultural development without reference to an academic disciplinary field. The economic part of the work is generally limited to borrowing a few concepts and methods.¹⁹ The reference to agro-economics (frequent in France over the past fifteen years) may be interpreted

as a means for agronomists to explore empirically the field of social sciences in order to gain a better understanding of peasants' behavior. Agro-economic approaches are behind a variety of research projects, ranging from simple techno-economic analysis of production costs, to historic studies of access to and implementation of production factors through the analysis of the dynamics of production and agrarian systems. The dominant theme of the work remains that of technical changes and response to innovation.

Research With a Cognitive Orientation

This research focuses on the linkage between the behavior of economic actors and the dynamics of economic systems. Some studies emphasize historic processes and institutional change such as monetarization of exchanges, transformation of land ownership systems, disruption of production relationships, economic and social conditions and effects of the introduction of technical or organizational innovations. Other studies are primarily concerned with the behavior and strategies of producers in a more micro-economic perspective and on a shorter time scale.²⁰ These studies are concerned with topics such as crop choices, conditions of access to and the implementation of production factors, anti-risk strategies, or accumulation patterns.

The natures of these two types of cognitive studies are not fundamentally different. A distinction may be seen, however, in the emphasis placed on the behavior of economic actors versus the dynamics of economic systems. In the first group of studies, the behavior of economic actors is always seen in the context of networks of constraints and opportunities defined by the social, economic, institutional and natural environment. In the second, the dynamic-structural analyses are always founded on observations on the local scale.

Although problem-solving research and cognitive-oriented research represent two different approaches to FARE research, there are ways in which the two approaches converge. Not only do problem-solving research and cognitive-oriented research share African rural economies and their environment as their object of analysis; they have common sources of funding (principally the French State) and common methods. The AMIRA²¹ group was founded in 1975 to promote interdisciplinary and interinstitutional research and scientific debates between experts, consultants, researchers and teachers, and to improve research methods in African rural studies. Before it was dissolved in 1989, this group helped to consolidate a common system of references and made substantial methodological and theoretical contributions.

Unfortunately these contributions have generally been available only to members of the AMIRA network.

The FARE research community is characterized by personalized relationships (with the dynamics of informal networks) and inter-institutional mobility.²² This environment encourages the sharing of a corpus of references both in methodological and practical fields.²³

Exploring a Heterodox Rural Economics

In this second part we will present an outline of the main characteristics of the research themes, methodological foundations and theoretical bases for FAREs' work, concentrating mostly on cognitive oriented research.²⁴ We will also clarify the place occupied in the research process by fieldwork, which distinguishes FARE studies from much economic research. We will also present what we see as major convergence points between FARE and the 'old' American institutionalism.

Major Features of Research Themes

Certain common features of FAREs' studies may be discerned from the themes of their research. FARE studies may be characterized as follows:

- They are carried out at the local or regional level.
- They are not restricted to the analysis of resources allocation but give considerable attention to the social conditions of access to resources. The economic calculation in terms of production costs and factor valuation is also systematically situated in the institutional context which gives it its meaning. The economic calculation is not in itself the purpose of the research but is used to explain peasant practices and economic dynamics, which also parallel other factors. This orientation explains the fact that in the literature quoted in the bibliography, there is no trace of the traditional writings of economists, such as papers aiming to verify a relation between factors of productivity and the size of smallholdings on the basis of statistical data collected on a large scale, or those seeking to determine the price-elasticity of supply of any given agricultural product.²⁵
- The analysis includes a historical and spatial dimension which brings to light the present conditions of access to resources and the ambient economic system.

- The processes of economic differentiation are stressed. African rural society is considered as neither stable nor homogeneous. Recognition of this heterogeneity is key to understanding the diversity of peasant practices, even on the local level.

Some fields of research have been particularly studied by FAREs: the analysis of development projects, the economy of transition from a subsistence to a market economy, the dynamics of the peasant plantation economy, the intensification of production systems, the relationships between local economic systems and kinship, religion or migratory phenomena.

These themes are approached in particular through the analysis of land tenure systems, social relations of production, intrafamily relations of production and accumulation, conditions of the introduction and diffusion of technical innovations, and relations forged between peasants and development corporations.

The research carried out by FAREs ultimately deals as much with institutional change as with the allocation of production factors. However, this allocation is studied on a very different scale (the local one) and uses very different information collection techniques and analytical tools from those generally used by orthodox economists.

Methodological and Theoretical Features of the FAREs' Production²⁶

An Inclusive Conception of Economics

Like the institutionalists, the FAREs refer--usually implicitly--to a substantive conception of economics, understood as a discipline studying not only the production / distribution / consumption processes in their man - object dimensions, but also the social relations involved in these processes. This conception means going beyond the neoclassical perspective centered on resource allocation processes through maximization behavior to open up 'black boxes' considered by the neoclassicists as outside the economic field.²⁷ The determinants of economic phenomena (i.e. those considered as economic by the mainstream) can thus be identified in a field more expansive than the one usually explored by economists.

Partial Theories and Practitioner's Knowledge

Starting from empirical questions, the FAREs try to provide an outline to make intelligible a specific localized reality (the titles of the publications are

explicit in this respect). This perspective tends to expand the connection with established theoretical bodies and with a 'hard' disciplinary approach. In terms of scientific production, the final aim is not to propose a general theory or to embellish an existing theoretical edifice, but to provide explanatory models which are valid locally, i.e. partial (as opposed to general) theories. To build up these locally valid models, it is necessary to immerse oneself in this local reality, to gain a many-sided perception of rural society, and to accumulate knowledge which is specific to that society. The FAREs are therefore in agreement with an institutionalist like Ramstad, when he writes "one needs a theory capable of saying a great deal about a few cases, rather than very little about all cases. (...) to develop 'practitioner's knowledge,' that is, knowledge directed to the understanding and control of the specific case. This is in sharp contrast to the formalist's preoccupations with the development of knowledge applicable to aggregates even if it is of limited applicability to individual cases" (1986, 1075).

In fact, the pattern model of explanation--considered as the typical institutionalist mode of explanation (Wilber and Harrison 1978, Ramstad 1986)--describes quite well the kind of procedure followed by most FAREs. The first step is the socialization of the researcher, allowing him to remain close to the system, grasping its norms and categories, observing recurrent themes (such as socio-economic or technical practices, etc.). The next step is to formulate tentative hypotheses about parts of the system and to try to capture the linkages between themes which contribute to the system's uniqueness. The interpretations are based on a wide variety of data (case studies, survey data, and personal observation).²⁸ The last step is to construct a model of the system by linking validated hypotheses or themes in a network or pattern.²⁹

Immediate Induction But Not Hyperempiricism

The (non-mathematical) models built up by FAREs are not the result of hypothetico-deductive procedures, but refer to a process of immediate induction³⁰ which enables one to connect facts to produce a sequence which creates meaning (Couty 1984). However, these facts are not given; they do not speak for themselves. They are constructed on the basis of previous questioning or at the very least on the basis of a conceptual framework itself making up an implicit theoretical framework. Resorting to an inductive approach does not therefore mean a hyperempiricist methodology.³¹

Ad Hoc Concepts

The concern to stay close to the concrete situations studied often leads to conceptual construction or redefinition (for example, the identification of economic units).³² This flexibility, which is shared by the institutionalists, is necessary when one wishes to define situations rather than to fit them into an existing theoretical body taken as an obligatory framework--whether it be neoclassical or Marxist.

Theoretical Eclecticism

One rarely finds in FAREs' work coherent and exclusive references to an existing theoretical paradigm. The dominant trend is a rejection of both neoclassical and Marxist paradigms. This rejection does not preclude borrowing from those theories, however. From one an interest in resources allocation and economic calculation may be retained, and from the other a dynamic perspective, the consideration of reproduction, of power relations and conflicts of interests.³³

The place that Marxist thought gives to historic and structural determinism and to conflict as the sole driving force of history is fundamentally questioned by FAREs. More practically, the generality of the concepts proposed (like that of production mode) reduces their relevance when taken into account the diversity of peasant practices at the local level (Olivier de Sardan 1985).

The rejection of neoclassical theory is today widely accepted in professional circles--thus one can understand that it is rarely mentioned explicitly. In fact, neoclassical theory is now less often criticized than it is ignored,³⁴ but most FAREs implicitly agree with the criticisms that the "old" institutionalists address to the dominant paradigm³⁵ when they call into question its formalism, its non-historical approach, its indifference toward social structures and the dynamics of human interrelations, its conception of a balanced world of harmonious complementary interests joined together in a neutral market, and its omission of power relationships.

In fact, neoclassical theory considers as exogenous and therefore eliminates from the field of investigation those problems with which FAREs' research is concerned, such as the condition of access to productive resources, the rationality of actors's behavior, the institutional context, the concrete mechanisms of exchange, or technical change.

Limited Interest in Mathematical Models and Econometric Analysis

This standpoint is generally justified by the classic problem (which is particularly acute in the African context) of the quality of initial data, by clear reticence towards mathematical modeling of qualitative information, dynamic processes and risk factors. However, this does not imply a refusal of quantification³⁶ or a sterile opposition between the quantitative and the qualitative.³⁷ Although it is nowadays considered fashionable to revile descriptive studies, the importance of description (of situations, facts, practices) in FAREs' studies should be stressed. Description is not an end in itself; it may reveal the facts necessary to understand a previously unexplained phenomenon or may suggest new, more relevant questions which help one to avoid falling into the reductionist traps of certain models.

Methodological Interactionism

Between individualism and methodological holism, the majority of the FAREs seem to lean towards interactionism, defined as the simultaneous consideration of individuals and structures (Mingat et al. 1985). Research tends therefore to reconcile the tension between two poles--the individual as a member of a social group, relatively constrained by the relations between groups and the individual as an economic actor who has a freedom of action which is materialized by a strategy and a behavioral logic that cannot be reduced to his belonging to a particular social group. The degree of social determination of behavior remains an empirical question--an object of study--and not a postulate. This interactionism does not exclude a holistic approach to observation, considering this term to mean that the understanding of an element of the system studied necessitates an overview of the system.

In Situ Research

In the African context, information is available in limited quantities and is of doubtful quality--especially those statistical series which are the delight of econometricians. The possible use of such data is limited by a desire for rigor, making necessary the collection of information during research. Even when reliable statistics are available, collecting first hand information is nonetheless indispensable because the type of studies carried out cannot be simply reduced to figures and realized on the basis of pre-existing works.

What distinguishes FAREs as economists, however, is less the collection of first hand information--nowadays a common practice in rural economics--than the fact that data collection is delegated only partially or not at all, in the tradition of anthropological works.³⁸ As Couty stresses (1991, 4), "in social sciences, experience requires personal sincere and long term involvement in the historicity and singularity of the situation under study. Without this we are threatened by empty mathematical formalization or by verbiage." In most cases, long assignments in the country under study are possible due to the institutional characteristics of French research (especially for researchers from ORSTOM and CIRAD). The length of extended stays in the field is rarely less than three years.³⁹

This tradition of information gathering is not without epistemological implications. The nearness of the 'realities'⁴⁰ of the field in all their complexity makes one sensitive to the interrelations between the economic, technical and sociological dimensions of the research problems. Awareness of local circumstances is an excellent antidote against the reductive oversimplification of grand theories which contribute little to the understanding of peasant practices in a specific environment. This tradition also allows one to not succumb to what A. Hirschman calls the syndrome of the economist on an assignment: "(the) habit of giving peremptory opinions and prescriptions while invoking economic principles and remedies of universal values (...) after having barely got to know the 'patient'" (1984, 76). Finally, the usual sequence... definition of the problem / formulation of hypotheses / choice of operational concepts / information collection / analysis, can give way to an iterative process leading to a reorientation of the problem under study, or a redefinition of the concepts chosen; in short, it can lead to a more flexible and less pre-established research practice.

The FAREs thus do not follow Heady (1952) when he qualifies information collection as simple routine; this phase is conversely seen by FAREs as an extremely important component of the research process,⁴¹ justifying an on-site time investment of the researcher, even if he already has his PhD. Thus the emphasis of FAREs on methodological concepts and observation techniques can be explained. In this vein, the AMIRA network has produced and published documents on as varied topics as the comparison of aleatory and non-aleatory sampling, the connection between the qualitative and the quantitative, the complementarity of statistical survey and monographic studies, the definition of economic units, and the problem of scale of analysis. This critical reflection on concepts and information collection techniques is considered fundamental in order to guarantee a minimum degree of rigor in research efforts.⁴²

The eclecticism of the FAREs is not limited to the realm of theory; the information collection techniques they use are many and are borrowed from both anthropologists and geographers: participant observation, informal interviews, kinship and biographic descriptions, one-shot questionnaires (demographic and agricultural censuses, thematic questionnaires), follow-up questionnaires with a variable frequency (recording effective labor requirements per hectare, work time per individual, expenditures, consumption), yields and area measurements, or cartography, etc.

When all is said and done, the heretical FAREs' practice of economics--when compared with norms of the theory--does not constitute an apology for woolliness. Is this not a decisive way of contributing to the understanding of the reality, when one goes beyond the magic of equations to wonder--on the basis of the researcher's direct knowledge of the studied situation--about the objects observed (or rather, constructed) and on the methods of observation?

Economics or Socio-Economics?

Given the approach that FAREs have chosen and the object of their studies, they contribute, as do researchers from other disciplines, to what Couty (1985) qualifies as historic and spatialized socio-economics, a scientific field made up of the combination of two fields of studies, systems of production and production relationships. We think of historic and spatialized socio-economics less as a new discipline, as Couty suggests, but as a field of research practice bringing closer anthropologists, economists, geographers and some agronomists.⁴³

There are a number of interests which socio-economic studies share. Their general object of study (African rural societies, peasant practices) and their desire for empiric analyses entrenched in the locality and depth of time of phenomena are two such shared interests. Also an awareness of the limits of a strictly disciplinary approach, emphasis on the importance of fieldwork, and similar investigation techniques are recognizable in the work of FAREs. It is sometimes difficult to give a disciplinary label to certain publications, just as it is difficult to distinguish between the economist and the anthropologist in the *Norfolk Bar* in Nairobi described by C. Gladwin (1989)... the meeting-points in our case being the *Bar Bozo* in Mopti or *La Canne à sucre* in Abidjan.

Can FARE's contribution to socio-economics be classified under the heading of economics? We tend to answer positively for two reasons:

First of all because we think that it is epistemologically unfounded to give a normative definition of economics--here we follow Schumpeter when he reminds us that "the frontiers of the sciences are incessantly shifting; there is no point in trying to define them either by subject or method" (1986, 10).⁴⁴ After all, cleavages between disciplines are often less deep than paradigmatic splits. If it were possible to calibrate thought, an economist and a sociologist referring to the same paradigm (neo-classical for example) would be closer than two economists or two sociologists referring to different paradigms.

Secondly, while FAREs contribute an economic perspective to socio-economics,⁴⁵ explanations are found outside the realm of orthodox economics and concepts and methods of investigation are borrowed from other disciplines. Perceiving the economy as an 'open system' (Grunberg 1978), the economist will consider kinship relations as unavoidable in the understanding of the implementation of household labor input decisions; this will not, however, turn him into an anthropologist.

It is clear that such a conception of economics does not correspond to the neoclassical norms, nor to the representation that other social sciences often have of economics, where it is reduced to an accounting systems builder and to the technical analysis of costs and markets.

Should the socio-economic approach--whether it be understood as a discipline or as a contribution of economics to a research field--be limited to problem-solving research as A. Etzioni (1988) has suggested? According to Etzioni, 'explaining the world' would proceed from a selective and disciplinary construction of the object of research, whereas the political decision-maker has to act on the world such as it is, beyond the frontiers of disciplines. We agree with this last point but to us it is questionable whether the interest of socio-economics has to be reduced in this fashion. It is precisely because 'hard' disciplinary approaches proved to be insufficient to 'explain' the African rural world that socio-economics is so dynamic in French research. Far from being limited as an instrument in the service of political decision-makers, the socio-economic approach seems to us a desirable way to gain the real knowledge of the African rural world which is necessary for efficient action.

Limits of FAREs' Works

In addition to recognizing the heterodox conception of economics of FARE we also consider it important to recognize that FARE has certain weaknesses, some of which may also be shared with the "old" institutionalism.

We just pointed out that research was often limited to what should be its first phase (construction of a conjectural model on the basis of immediate induction).

The risk of the one-man band, or of uncontrolled borrowing is increased when the researcher succumbs to the temptation of going beyond his discipline without having sufficient knowledge of the other disciplines explored and without making explicit the methodological coherence of this encroachment.⁴⁶ Looking for explanatory tools in another discipline is not devoid of risks--it is sufficient to recall the pseudo-anthropological explanations in terms of traditionalism put forward by certain agronomists or economists in their efforts to analyze response to technical change.

From a theoretical point of view, it seems to us that the rejection of the neoclassical paradigm--which is often an ideological rejection--would gain from being argued and modulated. The fact that this paradigm is not efficient as an exclusive conceptual framework in the FARE research field does not mean that it should be forgotten.⁴⁷ This rejection should center on the pretension of neoclassical theory to explain everything⁴⁸ and not on its capacity to provide a coherent set of hypotheses or partial explanations. We are thinking here in particular of the neoclassical theory of production and above all of the perspectives developed by the new institutional economics. In other words, one should explain the theoretical eclecticism practiced in order to avoid sinking into the same normative shortcomings as mainstream economics.

In the same light, the fact that econometric tools are not always appropriate for the type of questions handled by FAREs should not lead to their unconditional rejection. Here again, the problem is not to exclude *a priori* certain research orientations or analytical tools, but to promote synergy between disparate but complementary approaches. We consider that econometric studies are useful, indeed indispensable, if they are well done, i.e. if they are critically adapted to their object and realized on the basis of reasonably reliable data. As this reliability is to be appreciated in relation to the object of study, the purism shown by many FAREs regarding data quality seems to us often to be excessive and may, in some cases, lead to a decreasing margin of productivity in the research effort.

The weak support given to development by FAREs' studies--which are said to be more critical than constructive--has sometimes been criticized.⁴⁹ We believe that although this criticism is not unfounded, it should be reformulated.

Let us note first that the criticism cannot be accepted if the relevance of cognitive research is acknowledged and if the limits of problem-solving research are recognized. Is it necessary to recall that the activist pleas

justifying this kind of research often result in self-interested pieces of rhetoric, designed to convince backers to finance the research? One must avoid 'pragmatic totalitarianism,' a form of intellectual and institutional totalitarianism which leads to the opinion that research which does not lead directly to action is of no interest whatsoever.

Secondly, the problem in our view is less one of gaining the knowledge on peasant behaviors and more generally African rural societies which is a prerequisite for development management than it is the transfer of this knowledge within the sphere of decision-makers. The diffusion of results is often less than perfect. Due to style, size and time-limits the products of research may not be easily accessible and the desired audience of decision-makers may not themselves be accessible. In other words, there is first and foremost a problem of communication and of presentation of results.

Finally, one should stress the effective use of FARE works by the French government in its cooperative programs with African countries even when the studies did not display a finalized aim in terms of action. By this we are not referring to the use of concrete localized empirical results, but to the recognition of the logic of peasant practices, of agricultural production organization, and so forth. Consequently, a major contribution of FARE will have been to modify the perception, at least in France, of African economies.

Conclusion

The main contribution of FARE is not of a disciplinary nature but is concerned with the knowledge of the economic systems of the peasant societies of Africa and with the production of suitable methodologies for information collection in rural Africa. Its contribution to economics can be interpreted in terms which are principally critical regarding orthodox economics (definition of economic units, rationality of the actors).

Generally speaking, FARE's methodological position might belong more to the French intellectual tradition earlier mentioned than to the African context of FARE research. One only has to read the work of M. Blanc and Ph. Lacombe (1990) or of M. Petit (1982, 1986) concerning French rural economics to realize the closeness (even though institutional links are virtually non-existent) which would lead many FAREs to associate themselves with this statement of Petit : "In the old economics debate between the wish to build a 'hard' science that is as rigorous as possible but at the expense of necessarily simplifying abstractions, and the concern to take into account the social and political dimensions of the phenomena under study, I lean very much towards the second attitude. (...) To explain is sometimes to shed light on conflicts

which are sometimes hidden. In that sense, our role becomes one of social criticism (...) (1986, 53).

We believe that in the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research carried out by FARE, we have brought to light many common points with the "old" institutionalism as we perceive it: a similar research agenda, a substantive conception of economics, a pattern model of explanation, the production of 'partial' theories, a theoretical eclecticism, the development of a practitioner's knowledge, the development of *ad hoc* concepts, the importance given to description, a critical perspective toward the neoclassical paradigm, a common neglect of mathematical modelization and of the econometric tool, and the importance allotted to fieldwork.

A better knowledge of institutionalism and an attempt to formalize with greater detail French Africanist rural economics may well lead to as many points of divergence (such as the institutionalists' pragmatic philosophy and their great interest in the value problem discussion) as their are of convergence. However, the establishment of a shared criticism of the neoclassical paradigm as the only recognized framework for economic research seems to us a plea in favor of the development of transatlantic scientific exchanges between heterodox economists and economic anthropologists, especially in these times of revival of an ideology aiming to institute the Market as the sole regulator of economic and social life.

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Journals publishing FAREs' articles

Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, Cahiers des Sciences Humaines, Cahiers de la Recherche-Développement, Politique Africaine, Tiers-Monde.

Notes

1. Respectively economists at ORSTOM (*Institut Français de Recherche Scientifique pour le Développement en Coopération*) & at CIRAD (*Centre International de Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement*). We would like to thank our colleagues for their comments and criticisms. We assume responsibility for the imperfections of this paper and for the positions presented in the document, which in no way involve our institutions.

2. FAREs will designate French Africanist rural economists. The use of this acronym for reasons of facility of presentation will doubtless displease many of our colleagues who are so reticent about being classified. May they forgive us for this liberty of choosing an acronym which is by no means intended to be a lasting or definitive one.

3. We do not refer here to the new institutional economics (a development of the neoclassical theory, see for example Williamson, 1985, or North, 1990) but to Veblen's or Commons's heirs (as the contributors to the *Journal of Economic Issues*).

4. See for example Dugger (1979 and 1990), Gruchy (1987 and 1990), Hodgson (1988 and 1991), Klein (1990), Mayhew (1987), Mayhew and Neale (1991), Myrdal (1978), Perlman (1991), Ramstad (1986), Samuels (1979, 1984, 1987, 1988), Schmid (1987), Tool (1988), Wilber and Harrison (1978).

5. For references regarding FAREs' publications, see the bibliographical orientations. We have to clarify that this paper has been written more in the spirit of an essay rather than of a survey. We do not claim to be exhaustive in our attempt to reproduce an

original approach in relation to a research field made up of the economics of agricultural production in Africa. In this it only completes the small number of other synthetic approaches on which it has drawn (see in particular Ph. Couty's work).

6. Including both social and techno-economic practices. The qualifying adjective 'peasant' is used here for convenience; it does not correspond to a position in relation to the debates about the farmers' theoretical status.

7. Contacts and exchanges are real; however, carrying out truly interdisciplinary programs has proved to be more delicate.

8. Originally *Office de la Recherche Scientifique Coloniale*, set up in 1943, then *Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d'Outre Mer* (the acronym ORSTOM has been kept after the ultimate change of denomination).

9. These research institutes either came out of professional groups, the oldest of which were founded before World War II (1936 for the IFC--*Institut Français du Caoutchouc*--afterwards called IRCA), or out of colonial agricultural departments (like IRAT--*Institut de Recherches en Agronomie Tropicale*--founded in 1960 at the time of independences in Africa).

10. If one includes the agro-economists, i.e. agronomists using methods and concepts drawn in part from economics (see *infra*).

11. *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique* and *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*.

12. The INSEE (*Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques*) periodically publishes through its Cooperation department a liaison report with a collection of articles (*Stateco*) and a bibliographical report. It undertook the permanent secretarial tasks of the AMIRA group (see *infra*).

13. See in particular the collection "Méthodologie de la planification".

14. The SEDES (*Société d'Etudes pour le Développement Economique et Social*), founded in 1958, is an offshoot of the public *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations*. Its founding corresponds to the French government's wish to have operational structures to help set up administrations and development projects in the newly-independent former colonies.

15. *Institut de Recherches Appliquées et de Méthodes*.

16. In this respect, the regional socio-economic studies carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Economic Planning of the Côte d'Ivoire in the sixties are particularly revealing. Unfortunately this type of study is normally not published and is of difficult access.
17. This method (see Chervel & Le Gall, 1976) can mainly be set against the 'shadow-prices method' developed by the World Bank.
18. Characterized by the duality of the universities on one hand, and the *Grandes Ecoles* (mainly engineering schools) on the other hand.
19. On this point it may be compared with the original Farm Management research in the U.S.
20. These last studies can also have an operational aim, when public decision-makers are willing to take them into consideration.
21. *Amélioration des Méthodes d'Investigation en Milieux Informels et Ruraux d'Afrique, Asie et Amérique Latine* (Improvement of Investigation Methods in Informal & Rural Milieu in Africa, Asia and Latin America). It is not insignificant to note the development of the thematic and geographical fields of the group which originally dealt only with rural Africa. This development bears witness to the role of Africanist rural research in methods and concepts of French development experts.
22. Between research organizations, cooperation administrations & research institutions.
23. The work on economic evaluation of rural development projects, ordered between 1981 and 1986 by Evaluation unit of the Ministry of Cooperation & Development is a good illustration of the mobilization of this professional community (see Freud, 1988).
24. While at the same time stressing the proximity of numerous studies dealing with economic evaluation or developments of the agro-economic approach.
25. Such works do exist, but they are carried out by university economists who do not consider themselves as ruralists; see for example the publications of the CERDI of the University of Clermont-Ferrand, or of the Delta group (Departments of theoretical and applied economics of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, etc.).
26. This presentation is an attempt at reconstruction; in the writings of the FAREs, what is theoretically and methodologically implicit generally contrasts with the importance

- of developments devoted to conceptual framework and to information collection techniques.
27. At least before the contributions of the new institutional economics.
28. Unfortunately, as is correctly pointed out by Wilber and Harrison (op. cit., p. 76), "this technique of contextual validation can never produce the rigorous certainty espoused by logical positivists; it can only indicate varying degrees of plausibility."
29. If one considers in Popper's perspective that the scientific nature of research work comes from the testing of a conjectural model for a refutation purpose, one is reduced to qualifying the majority of the FARE's production as belonging to the pre-scientific stage of a research procedure. But is it necessary to recall the limits of a normative methodology (Caldwell 1985, Hodgson 1988) and the proportion of rhetoric found in a large number of economic works with scientific pretention (McCloskey 1983)?
30. Which Blaug (1982) calls adduction.
31. At least for the majority of researchers.
32. See Ancey (1975) or Gastellu (1980).
33. The Marxist influence has come above all from the French neo-Marxist economic anthropology during the sixties and the seventies (works of Godelier, Meillassoux, Rey, Terray).
34. In our view, the weakness of FARE's epistemological production can be explained by the lack of domination of the neoclassical stream and therefore the lack of necessity to justify an heterodox economic orientation (the American institutionalists adopt a very different position).
35. See references in note 4.
36. The FAREs make abundant use of statistical methods, such as those developed by the French school of data analysis (i.e. factorial analysis of correspondences).
37. See AMIRA's work (in particular Couty & Winter, 1983).
38. People tend to forget the originality that the choice of 'setting up in the village,' which was done during pioneering studies carried out just after World War II by researchers like Boutillier, Couty or Robineau, represented for economists.

39. Experts from the *bureaux d'études* are subjected to more time constraints.
40. The quotation marks are there to remind us that these realities are not given, that they have to be constructed from a paradigmatic framework.
41. In this way they are in agreement with an institutionalist like K. Parsons who, as early as 1949, stressed that the data collection constitutes an integral part of research—and one of the most difficult ones.
42. "Given that one can ask anything of anyone and that anyone is almost always willing enough to reply at least any old thing to any old question, the questioner who, without a theory of the questionnaire, does not question the specific meaning of his questions, may too easily find a guarantee of the realism of his questions in the reality of the replies that are given" Bourdieu et al. (1983, 62).
43. In their analyses of the logic of technical practices (see Milleville 1987).
44. Boudon means nothing else when he writes "I believe it is an error when people sometimes try—rather like a geographer—to cut continents out of the real world which would be placed under the authority of the sociologist, the economist or the demographer. Of course, each one of these disciplines deals preferentially with one or another type of phenomena. But the frontiers separating them are more apt to be found at the level of certain trains of thought" (1984, 52).
45. i.e. generally recognized as such by the scientific community, as for example resources allocation and product distribution.
46. "(...) cross-fertilization might easily result in cross-sterilization," stressed Schumpeter several decades ago (op. cit., 27).
47. Notwithstanding, the analyses put forward by the FARE sometimes tend to reintroduce implicitly elements of the neoclassical model; the interpretation of an extensive agricultural production logic as a brake on certain forms of technical change could, for example, be rewritten in 'orthodox' terms.
48. Expressed by the authors of a recent textbook: "(...) these neoclassical economic tools, if used in the right way, enable an understanding of how traditional agricultural systems work. And thus no special, or different, economic theory is required to explain the economics of agricultural systems in developing nations" (Stevens and Jabara 1988, 84). As for us, we remain convinced that the subtle handling of isoquant and isocost lines remains largely insufficient for such a purpose.

49. We are not referring here to the studies done by experts from the *bureaux d'études*, whose job is precisely to provide support for decision-making in economic policies or to set up and evaluate projects.

SEA MONOGRAPHS

Monographs of the Society for Economic Anthropology are conference proceedings of the annual meetings of the Society and are published by University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, and the Society for Economic Anthropology.

- No. 1 Sutti Ortiz, ed., *Economic Anthropology: Topics and Theories.*
- No. 2 Sidney M. Greenfield and Arnold Strickon, eds., *Entrepreneurship and Social Change.*
- No. 3 Morgan D. Maclachlan, ed., *Household Economies and their Transformation.*
- No. 4 Stuart Plattner, ed., *Market and Marketing.*
- No. 5 John W. Bennett and John R. Brown, eds., *Production and Autonomy: Anthropological Studies and Critiques of Development.*
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Erratum

Some editorial changes might have introduced risks of misunderstanding. Please consider the following corrections:

Page 333, 2d paragraph, "This intellectual movement gave rise to various schools of thought which are united only in their opposition to mainstream economic theory", delete "only".

Page 333, 4th paragraph, read "public" instead of "bureaucratic", in "To understand FARE it is necessary to recognize that it evolved within bureaucratic institutions...".

Page 337, 3rd paragraph, read "However, in the first group of studies..." instead of "In the first group of studies".

Page 338, sentence starting with "This orientation explains the fact that in the literature...", read "factors' productivity" instead of "factors of productivity".

Page 339, 5th paragraph, read "... through maximization behavior to open up 'black boxes' such as institutions, considered by the neoclassicists as outside the economic field.", instead of "... through maximization behavior to open up 'black boxes' considered by the neoclassicists as outside the economic field".

Page 341, 3rd paragraph, "... when one takes into account...".

Page 341, 4th paragraph, delete "today" in the sentence "The rejection of neoclassical theory is today widely accepted...", and delete "now" in the sentence "In fact, neoclassical theory is now less often criticized than it is ignored".

Page 344, 3rd paragraph, "As for us, we think of historic and spatialized socio-economics...".

Page 344, 4th paragraph, instead of "... are recognizable in the work of FAREs", read "are recognizable in these studies".

Page 346, 2nd paragraph, read "variables" instead of "tools".

Page 346, 4th paragraph, read "marginal productivity" instead of "margin of productivity".