

the NICOLSight

Mid Term 1, Volume 8

November 2009

Living in Community

Fonio Beating

The music of the balaphon* led us to the work-site from over a mile away. As we approached, we saw a line of 15 young men flaying a huge pile of dried grasses with long, thin sticks. They were beating the fonio in time to the music and in competition with each other, dripping with sweat and covered with straw and fonio seeds. During regular intervals different people from the crowd would approach the musicians, stopping the music to give a speech of praise for someone or to jokingly insult a fellow beater in order to heighten the competition. Then the speech maker tossed a coin to the musicians and the beating competition continued in time with the song request. Work and play, dance and song mingled together to accomplish the task at hand.



The fonio threshing machine

Fonio is the traditional grain grown in a narrow belt across Burkina Faso. It is smaller than grass seed but more nutritious than all of the other grains and a handful can feed a family. During harvest time a large area is cleared and swept and pounded. The thigh-high fonio grass is cut with machetes and piled on this cleared area. The grass is then beaten to separate the seed from the stalk. The seed falls to the ground and the stalks are shaken and piled on the side. Finally, the seed is swept off the ground and put in sacks.

Corn has largely replaced fonio as a staple food because it is less labour intensive and it produces more sacks of grain per hectare than other grains. Fonio is planted only as a sort of insurance against starvation in case

other grains fail. To my North American mind it would seem economically sound and easier to harvest with a threshing machine. Less seed would be lost, the grain would be cleaner and one family could harvest it. Perhaps having a machine would encourage farmers to cultivate more of this nutritious, delicious cereal.

On the other hand, using a threshing machine would destroy working in community as people would no longer need each other. In a traditional fonio beating everyone plays a role. The young men cut and beat the fonio, the old men turn the pile of fonio and haul away the beaten stalks; the women cook a huge meal for everyone and then, after the meal, they cheer the beaters to work harder. Even the children have their role, playing in the straw and watching how a fonio harvest works in anticipation of the day when they are old enough to actively take part.



The griots play an integral role during the harvest.

*wooden xylophone

Translation Tidbits

If one wants to experience an animated discussion all one needs to do is gather several Siamou together to analyse the meaning of certain words and phrases in their language. During the first week of November the Siamou Bible Translation team organized a workshop to train any Siamou who was interested in helping correct and edit translated passages. Ten men representing several different denominations and villages attended this week long workshop



Anne teaching in the revisers' workshop

where Anne Garber Kompaore taught about the challenges, requirements and characteristics of Bible Translation. The participants also worked at editing several translated passages, putting to use what they had learned.

One lesson taught about the danger of translating literally. The participants were asked to translate the English phrase "cold-hearted" word for word into Siamou. They responded, "nir gbal". Then they explained the meaning as a person who is patient, kind, and content with life. Oops! The end meaning was opposite of the intended meaning in English. A too literal translation is only one of the challenges in this work but now we have a trained team of revisers to help us write a clear and accurate translation.

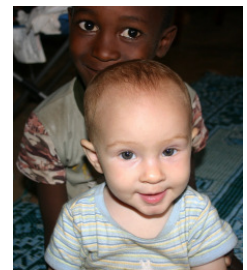
Prayer Concerns

- Omar passed away on Sept 1 leaving behind a wife and 9 children. He was 43. Pray for his family in this loss.
- Norm's health has improved but we continue to request prayer for good health for the three of us. This prayer request is becoming like a stuck record but we can not take good health for granted here and our productivity is directly related with how well we feel.
- Norm still needs to find/make time for concentrated language study.
- Pray that Norm will find a close friend from the village; one he can communicate with, hang out with and learn from.

Addresses

The opportunity to align with God's work in Burkina Faso is made possible through the prayer and financial support you give. Your notes of encouragement and gifts of finances are greatly appreciated. If you would like to express your support of the ministry in Burkina Faso with a donation, you may send it to:

Mennonite Mission Network
1601 W. Beardsley Ave
PO Box 370
Elkhart, IN 46515-0347



Praise Items

- Tim and Carmela (Penner) Toews moved into our courtyard and will live with us for six months. Carmela lived with me six years ago when she was homeschooling the Thiessen children. Now she is studying Siamou verb tenses for her PhD.
- Paul Thiessen came to work with us for the month of November.
- Solo is taking initiative by choosing passages which he feels are necessary to translate in order that the Siamou will understand God's story better.

Please send personal mail to:

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