



**The female Doorway:  
Minyanka women burdened and empowered by male out-  
migration**



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## **DEDICATION**

**To Mme Diallo Namissa Sissoko,**

You gave me life and with your very special talents, taught me to love life.

(Merci pour tout!)

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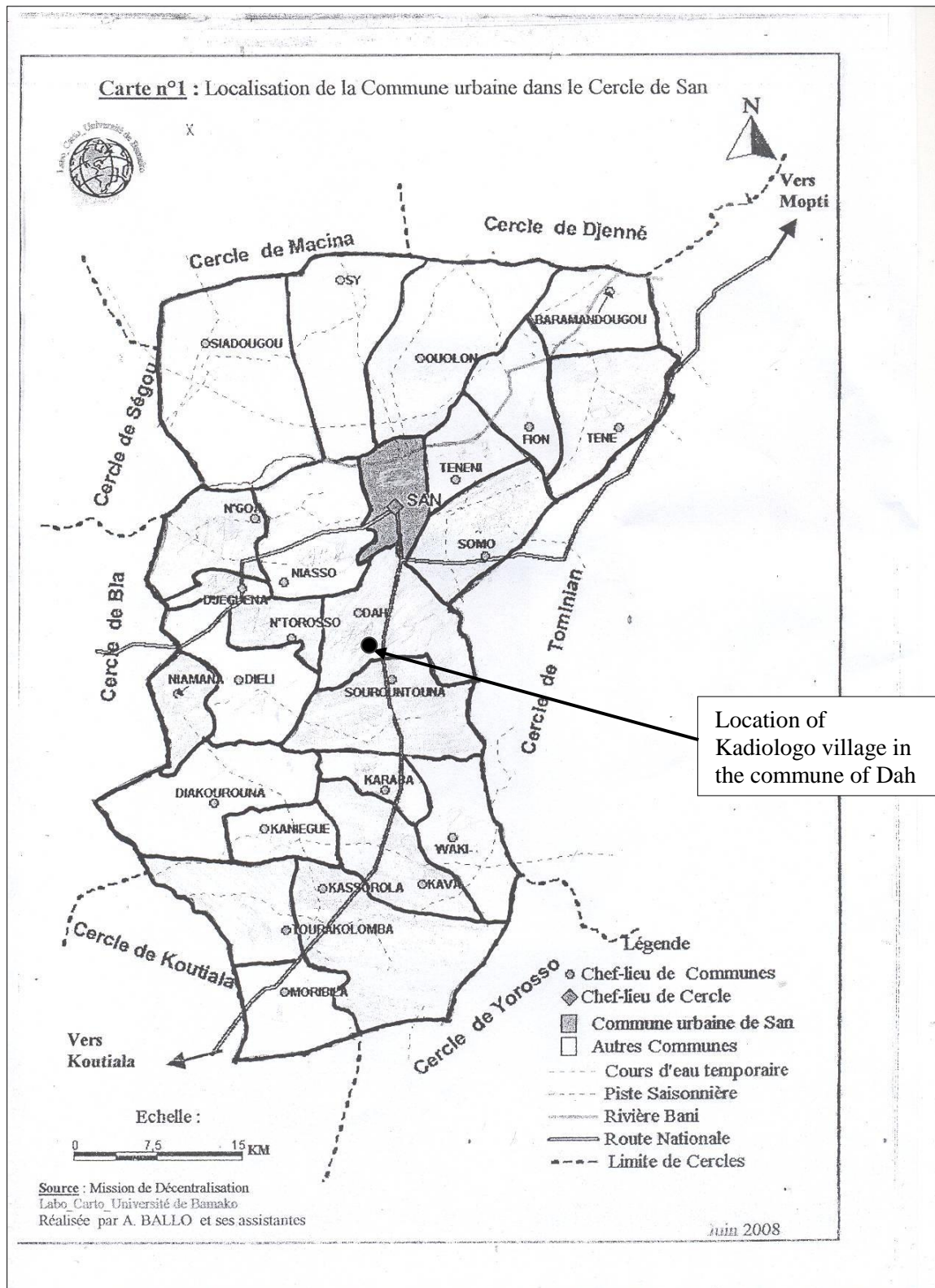


# Map 1: Republic of Mali



Kadioloko is located in these areas of the Cercle of San in Ségou region.

## Map 2: Cercle of San



## **GLOSSARY**

**CFDT** : Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Textiles (French Company for Textile Development)

**CMDT**: Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles (Malian Company for Textile Development)

**EDS** : Enquête Démographique et de Santé (Health and Demographic Survey)

**FHH** : Female Headed Household

**NGO** : Non Governmental Organisation

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis deals with the way women in Minyanka society are being forced to take on responsibilities that, in former times, were borne exclusively by their men. For the Minyanka people, control over productive resources has traditionally been centralized in the hands of the head of the household; almost always the husband. It's been the man of the house who's been in charge of economic decisions and the supervision of family affairs. But nowadays, with such large numbers of men absent from their home villages in search of wage labour, the entire complex of customary gender roles is seriously disrupted. In fact, this constitutes one of the major challenges confronting the nation state. This thesis will, for the most part, focus on what happens to a particular woman after her husband has, more or less permanently, left the family. My main informant is a mother of nine children. I have sought, in my writing - and in the accompanying video - to examine and depict her everyday lifeworld, especially those aspects of it which pertain to the theme of altered gender roles.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This master thesis is based on research carried out in Kadioloko, southern Mali. It deals with the way women in Minyanka society are being forced to take on responsibilities that, in former times, were borne exclusively by their men. For the Minyanka people, control over productive resources has traditionally been centralised in the hands of the head of the household; almost always the husband. It's been the man of the house who's been in charge of economic decisions and the supervision of family affairs. And yet, this customary leadership function of senior males is now under challenge by modern circumstance (Colleyn and Jonkers 1974, 1983, Jonckers, 1989). Married men, in ever growing numbers, are throwing off their family responsibilities and fleeing to towns and other places in search of a better life - often, first and foremost, for themselves. In most cases this leaves the next-in-line in responsibility - usually the wife/mother - as family leader; the one who must stay and bear the whole of the burden alone. The back becomes the front. The husband, who, by right of custom, ought to carry that responsibility can no longer be relied upon to do so ( Eidheim, 1969). The phenomenon of women needing to assume the role of head-of-household (and thus primary provider) is, becoming more and more common in Malian society. It is turning out to be, as will be explained broadly in later sections, one of the major challenges now confronting societies all over this region. Despite its getting much less attention than other phenomena by social researchers<sup>1</sup> it's well evidenced by the many development projects<sup>2</sup> now aimed at tackling the problem.

In this current project, I will be focusing particularly on what happens to a woman after her husband has left, has migrated; how she copes with her new responsibilities to her family and engages with community matters. Taking one female head of household as my main informant, I sought to find out what happens after she has faced a crisis and has had to put up with it in her everyday life. Through ethnographic research, I studied and observed her interaction with other members of the household and the village, how she has handled these new responsibilities and to what extent her life and her way of living have changed after her

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<sup>1</sup> There are quite a few studies about female heads of households in Portuguese, Spanish, and English, but in French there has been almost nothing until the publication of the book "Femmes du Sud chefs de famille" by Bissiliat (1996).

<sup>2</sup> One of the major aims of PADDECK in northern Mali is to support the most vulnerable citizens such as women and youths (female heads of households, children, and jobless young men). There has been a resulting improvement their livelihoods by way of a poverty alleviation approach - in the broader understanding of the term: economically, financially, in terms of status, in terms of education, etc. and specifically in the northern part of Mali.

husband left a few years ago. I will also be focusing on how this woman interacts with other women that are living in the same village and, more generally, the set of challenges facing a woman acting as the head of her household in a Minyanka village.

One main reason for my doing this research is to address some related problems still remaining from the research I conducted for my undergraduate studies in 2007. That research dealt with the re-adaptation of young girls to their home village after a period as migrant workers in urban center. One of my findings in that research was that the experience of the urban environment contributes to the construction of stereotypes about such girls. They (the girls) relegate aspects of their former personality and conform to the "new" code of behaving within their work environment. This way those girls are enrolled in a process of becoming "others" through an explicit or implicit learning; consciously or unconsciously. Returning girls relate the city to the village. By bringing back with them a new mindset, as well as a bundle of accessories aimed at improving the self-esteem of their families in the village, they wish to present themselves as figures of urbanization.

At the inception of the current project, I was planning to follow Lidy Coulibaly, one such girl, back to her village to observe her later life as a married woman. Lidy actually worked with my own family, in Bamako city, as home help (maid servant) over a number of years in order to prepare for her marriage and meet her various other needs. She was one of my main informants for that former project. The idea to follow up Lidy's life story by filming her might have been, for me, related, in large measure, to the practice of developing one key informant in the course of long-term fieldwork (Davies, 2008: 205). Certainly I had always been interested in the daily life of her home area; particularly so, because of the traditional ways and special sense of intimacy within that community. Brought up in the city, I was not so familiar with all that and it attracted me. Also, personally, I think it's important and useful to continue research in areas where new kinds of social networks are in the making as new career paths and lifestyles come into play.

When I went to the village, however, the reality was somewhat different from what I'd imagined in my project description (at the beginning). Despite my having planned to work primarily on the returned migrant-worker girls, the present work (both the text and the film) has turned out, rather, to be about the daily life of a particular senior woman; one of those who's been forced by circumstance to assume the role of head-of-household. The shift from the former project idea to this one has been something of a process. One of the first major

consequences of this turn for me has been to do with the very idea of social science research. It's an epistemological issue. It has, for me, challenged the whole 'knowledge' basis of such research by problematizing the relationship between pure ideas (theories) and lived reality (ibid: 15). And I have discovered that I really prefer to study peoples' lives, as far as it is possible, from their own point of view; out of their own daily concerns.

The term 'female-head' in a patriarchal culture must refer, of course, to a de-facto head such as a woman managing a household in the absence of an eligible male within the family system (Tanzima, 2010: 173). And yet, in many regions of Mali<sup>3</sup> female headed households (FHHs), within patriarchal societies, are on the increase. This rising trend of FHHs across patriarchal cultures is usually explained away by reference to rapid industrialization, urbanization and subsequent socioeconomic changes. These factors are held not only to affect the family system and inter-generational social mobility but also to seriously disrupt intra-family relationships. Mali is known to be one of the poorest countries in the world and Malian women in rural areas are considered the poorest of the poor (EDS III 2001)<sup>4</sup>. Apart from her economic posture, she's also prejudiced by customs and beliefs and must struggle against the patriarchal dominance of the society. And women who must take on the role of head of household are especially worthy of attention because they are triply disadvantaged: they experience the burden of poverty, of gender discrimination and of the lack of any husbandly support (Buvinic & Gupta, 1997). Djeneba, the individual on whom I will concentrate in this study, a female head of household in Kadioloko village, indeed seems to face such triple disadvantage in her daily life. She also faces difficulties regarding the natural resources available to her. For example, she is left to negotiate with Fulani neighbours - herding people - over land use. This usually involves conflicts over land use; the competing demands of agriculture and grazing. It's also left to her to arrange the buying and selling of market goods and to negotiate over other relevant resources with fellow villagers. Furthermore, she is caught up in traps set by discriminatory socio-cultural norms and practices. For example, people disparage Djeneba for being a "*tiukuluchifo*", meaning 'woman in male attire'. In other words, Djeneba and others like her are not only economically disadvantaged but also held back by social and cultural factors: education, access to services, rights to land and other assets etc. (Mannan, 2000; Mencher, 1993 & Lewis, 1993). Thus, this paper aims to describe

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<sup>3</sup> Read « Les époux en migration, les femmes a la maison » : analyse de leurs relations conjugales a distance : L'exemple de la ville de Kayes (Mali).

<sup>4</sup> Demographic and Health Survey (DHS-Mali III).

this new socio-economic profile and resource position of female heads of household in Kadioloko, using the life experience of Djeneba Dembele as a case in point.

As well as observing and note taking in the field, I was also engaged in filmmaking and I intend to reflect here on questions around how this deployment of video technology might have contributed, positively or otherwise, to my research. I am strongly motivated to continue this line of research because, as a Malian, it's very important for me to invest my efforts in a research topic which will ultimately be of some use in my country's development.

### **Contextualisation of womanhood in Minyanaka**

Here I will canvass ideas relating to women's role and status in Minyanaka society in general, and in Kadioloko village in particular.

The Kadioloko women that I met refer to the status of a married woman with the expression "woman as door". This notion is consistent with the terms by which women are generally accorded prestige and value within the household. As Djeneba says, after getting married a woman becomes "*ko*" which means 'door' in Bamanakan<sup>5</sup>. This represents, for one thing, an emblem of woman as guardian of the house. Whereas the metaphor of 'door' may be figured in some cultures as an exit; a thing for escape, in this context it refers rather to the fact that after being married a woman's place is seen as inside the house, protecting everything that constitutes the household. It refers to the 'she' whose task is to perform indoor activities; she who is constrained from going out or away (Camara: 2002: 36). Women are considered as the main caretaker of a household's income and resources. Minyanaka call married women "*sichôô*", which traditionally means «the one who prepares the sauce» The word '*sichôô*' comes from "*siguè*" or sauce and "*chôô*" also means 'to cook'. Thus 'the one who prepares the sauce' or put simply in English, 'the cook'. Malgras argue "The Minyanaka woman's specific domain is domesticity, inside the home. When a woman gets married, she is said to "enter the home", her husband's house. Her introduction into the new home becomes effective only the day she lights up a fire between the three ritual stones that make up the humble fireplace, the "beating heart" of the household".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bamanakan is the main local language spoken in Mali

<sup>6</sup> My translation



In many West African traditional societies, including the well known Asanti of Ghana, as describe by Gracia Clark, cooking is a form of work and it remains women's responsibility (Gracia 1994; Dumestre 1996). The kitchen is taken as the social center of the house; in these settings women are not only visible but also responsible. Cooking is one of those time-honoured specialist activities that tie the household to society in economic and symbolic terms (Rudie, 1984:56). It is on the basis of such considerations that we will be going further into the family organization; to uncover more of the societal background - as will be explained in the following sections.

Gbun<sup>7</sup> or family (Kaperon 1973: 315) is the basic unit of production for Minyanka people. The Minyanka people have experienced a great many internal and external changes such as the coming and going of the colonial administration, new agricultural technology and the inception of their access to international trade. They were pushed in the direction of modernization by adopting the production of cotton for cash (Jonckers, 1989). Economically 'the white gold' (cotton) has become a productive force. But the various structural adjustment policies have had a bearing on family relationships; they've brought a lot of change. One factor has been the lowering of the cotton price on the international market. This factor, alone, was heavily felt by this community. One of its major consequences has been the dislocation of families (*Gbun*). This divisive pressure on families and communities is certainly the most important sociological and economic phenomenon affecting the Minyanka people<sup>8</sup> since the beginning of the twentieth century (ibid: 195). And, then, in turn, so much family breakdown has tended to increase further the out-migration of men. The phenomenon of men leaving for the cities and foreign countries has played a big part in fragmenting family ties. One of the main social consequences of this has, of course, been the abandonment of wives and the transference of familial responsibility onto them. That has meant not simply the loss of family ties but also a rise in the suffering of the women.

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<sup>7</sup> Gbunu Minyanka is rather a network of related families which happen to live together under the command of a head (an elder).

<sup>8</sup> My translation

## **CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

At the theoretical level, I will deal with change and continuity (Rudie, 1985) in a Minyanka community. I will describe here the social organisation of the family among the Minyanka in Kadioloko. My analytical approach stresses the importance of people's own perceptions and intentions for the understanding of aggregate, and often unintended, effects of behaviour. What has been accumulated varies, and so do the various accumulative strategies. This approach can help me to learn more about the frames of reference of my informant; about how she sees the world around her. In order to understand other people's frames of reference, we first must avoid the trap of remaining unthinkingly anchored in our own perspectives and frames of reference (Holtedahl 1993). I would like to place myself in the perspective of the Minyanka, more precisely, from within Kadioloko, by way of the different clarifications made to me by the women I met in this village. My analyses will be addressing how womanhood in Kadioloko is constructed in terms of gender images; constructed as models for action in a variety of public and private discourses. I will also address the ways in which living individuals carry such images along with them in their identity structures, together with various repertoires for social and practical situations (Jenkins 2004). Following on from that I will ask what, actually, is the relevance of the "chief of family" status in women's lives? I will do this by way of looking at Djeneba's personal history and her processes of negotiating her life; processes that encompass a wide range of female careers in Kadioloko.

### **2.1 Change and continuity**

Change is conceptually contrasted to continuity, but it is not always easy to decide whether a particular observation exemplifies change (Rudie 1985). Of course, many changes have occurred in the way households are managed by Minyanka people. People must adapt to change in order to maintain or improve their living standard. In a sense the whole world has changed around them. Wage labour which previously had been ignored and even disdained has now become vitally important. Such major changes have the effect of shifting the way responsibility is shared in the household. The elements of changes I'm examining are those having an impact on women; shifts in the responsibilities they bear. Changes show up in complex interrelations among and between such elements: urbanization, schooling, money, personal behaviour, individual strategies. They show up in shifting interactions between affected women and their co-villagers. The success or otherwise of a woman's adaptive

strategies can mean the difference between an improved standard of life or more suffering for the family. This where a life-career approach to ethnographic enquiry can lead to a more straightforward and potentially more precise method of description. At the same time, looking within households at perceived notions of skill, learning and identity may provide some useful tools for analyzing trends in cultural reproduction (Rudie 1985).

Change ushers in novel practices and some of these practices end up having had a big effect on gender relations. Gender as a structured relationship will always, and necessarily, be reproduced in some form or other in each generation (ibid: 59). But the fundamental question is how, exactly, such changes to common practices are generated? And to what extent those practices are new or reproduced?

First, new responsibilities make for novel challenges to cope with. Such challenges can indeed be welcome if they involve opportunities to move into other strata of the society. But still, it is a common social reality that where there is a shift of responsibility there is also an implied threat to entrenched power somewhere in the social system. Accordingly the life-world of Djeneba seemed to be under the influence of two factors which went hand in hand; the new macroeconomic situation - a fundamental immutable element of change - and the repetition of certain household responsibilities - an element of continuity. These influences are inseparably linked to the life process of my informant. And it's the taking account of these factors that our understanding of women's lives - as change and/or continuity - depends. In this context, I am referring to Kadioloko women in general.

## **2.2 Identity and roles and status**

One can see that collectivities and collective identifications are almost by definition institutionalised. And institutions are, in turn, sources and sites of identification for individuals (Jenkins, 2004:164). In spotlighting those issues a question arises. How to discover the relationship between institutional identities and the individuals who occupy them? To discern the concept of identity, from Rudie's perspective, is to point out the skills behind the roles and practices. Yet roles are fleeting. They're always changing and new experiences are always involved when new roles are laid down.

In a recent work, that ultimately problematizes the question of identity within the framework of culture, Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) suggests that culture: "is whatever people make and invest with significance through the exercise of their human creativity" (Appiah: 2006,

118). In other words, beyond gender and socio-cultural determinisms, human beings are actively involved in defining their own identities. But whatever the confusions of these postmodernist fabrications, there are certain traditional African concepts of identity which are by no means simplistic in their extrapolations, especially, as they are not merely dichotomized in oppositional terms (Oyewumi, 1997:31). The affirmation of one's identity, as individual, group, or nation includes the establishment of certain values; for the recognition and acceptance of them. This affirmation or rejection would consequently have far reaching effects on the sense of self at both the personal and social levels.

Rudie suggest that to study the process of individualization within the context of recent global change it's important to secure emic ideas about what a person is and the skills and experiences they have. She recommends distinction between roles and identity in any analyses. We should give special importance to the dynamism of the negotiation between these levels so that transformations can be identified. That will help to capture analytically the relation between individualization and modernization. The negotiation of roles brings about moments of interaction where cultural and social agreements are continuously being negotiated and re-negotiate. The process of socialization as understood within this perspective is about testing out new skills through role-negotiation.

Djeneba faces difficulties in managing her identity as a head of household. She sees herself as a bit brave, and regards herself as doing a good job for the well being of her children. But her co-villagers sometimes disparage her as a "*Tiecoulochifo*". Because by a certain moral standard, the making of major decisions regarding household affairs is not appropriate to her recognised role as spouse and mother. This is a real dilemma for Djeneba in her everyday life. And it presents, as well, as an analytical dilemma for me, as researcher.

In my attempt to address this I will try to distinguish the relationship between the positions (roles) of Djeneba as an actor vis-a-vis her different identities - which might be quite complicated. It is useful to establish a distinction between roles and status. From this point I will be referring to Ralph Linton's definition of status and roles (1936: 113-331) quoted by Jenkins (2004: 164). In Linton's view status is an institutionalized identification viewed in the abstract, as a collection of rights and duties (Linton: 1936: 113). My informant, Djeneba is both a spouse and a mother. Both, of course, imply status. But in this context to identify Djeneba in terms of one status is irrelevant. Because every status has a practical element within the role attached to and specified by it. This is what Djeneba, as spouse, does when

acting as spouse. In Minyanka culture, man in a sense ‘owns’ a woman. But what happens, as here, when the woman takes on herself all the responsibilities of the man. Ultimately does this imply that the man is no longer properly regarded the husband of that woman?

### **2.3 Joking as a tool in decreasing conflictual relationships**

To account for everyday adaptations of people to one another, syncretism is a useful conceptual tool. And ideas about culturally sustainable development institutions of cooperation<sup>9</sup> are important in accounting for the relatively low level of identity based tension in Kadioloko. Ethnicity means identifying with, and feeling part of, a socially recognized ethnic group. It also means being excluded from other such groups precisely because of one’s ethnic identity. An ethnic group refers to a particular culturally defined group in a nation or region that may contain others. Ethnic distinction can be based on language, geography and kinship.

The well known set of practices known as "joking relationships", are very much in evidence here. Joking relations as played out in Kadioloko can be seen in the context of widely held notions of perceived relatedness that may link large extended families (patrilineal and, sometimes, matrilineal) but more especially in the context of ethnic groupings. As observed in the founding colonial anthropological works on the subject and in more recent scholarship, a joking relationship typically centers on regularized patterns of mutual ribbing, ostentatious insulting and teasing, with primary themes of historical subordination/slavery, food insecurity and field problem etc.

Upon first meeting a person of the Fulani ethnic group, a Minyanka person might include among the usual greetings a joke like “Oh, so you’re a Fulani? Well, you’re my slave then.” To which it would be appropriate for the Fulani person to retort, “No, no, all Minyanka are the slaves of the Fulani”. Both parties might continue this type of mutually insulting banter for a short time, and, greetings aside, move on to everyday conversation or the particular subject that brings them together. Actually such joking relationships are more prevalent between certain groups among the Minyanka (particularly those with the last name Sogoba) and the Fulani. I actually came across this phenomenon on the day of my first visit to the grand old man of the village, one of my most important informants, Nono<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Senegal

<sup>10</sup> When I went the first time to Nono’s place, he asked me ‘What is your name?’ I answered “Bata Diallo.” “Diallo?” he said, “A Fulani, huh? ... eh eh eh. Really? Are you a human being or are you a Fulani?” I said “Yes, I’m a Fulani, of course. We are the best people in the world.” “Oh, no! You Fulani are really bad people. After

Paradoxically, these regularized insults, and other rhetorical forms of joking relationships serve to minimize open conflicts between these metaphorical “cousins” (the Miniyanka and the Fulani). Joking relations are usually expected, in spite of the teasing, to show special willingness to support another or provide material resources when one of the two groups are in need. Moreover, it is widely held that joking relations are especially suited as a way to intervene in the internal conflicts between groups that are paired as cousins (2004). During my fieldwork, there were numerous instances of such mutability, of pragmatic situations where the deployment of joking relationship were used to hose down conflicts. Incidentally, one villager told me a story about Djeneba when, around three years ago, she had been in dispute with a Fulani man over one of her planted fields. The Fulani’s cattle had gotten into it and destroyed her crops. To avoid a direct personal fight the chief of the village convened a meeting in his presence. But here the problem of changing gender roles arose; women are not, by custom, permitted at such meetings. So in order for Djeneba’s complaint to be heard before the chief, it had to be her son, Madou, who represented her. As it turned out, though, the amount of compensation that she was claiming from the Fulani was not forthcoming, Madou up to bargaining for the full amount and a much lesser amount was settled on.

This kind of situation is common in Kadioloko. But the villagers usually manage to deal with it by skillfully managing their diverse social entanglements. According to Galvan, political elites and cultural entrepreneurs, especially in Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso, have publicly promoted joking relationships as an explanation for why these countries did not suffer the fate of Rwanda, and as a means to promote nation building and the consolidation of a "genuinely African" basis for political community (Galvan, 2006). Joking relationships serve as a basis for a particular syncretic form used by certain actors at particular times.

I came to realise that these kinds of perpetual conflicts are, in some form or other, mentioned in almost every conversation between these paired groups. Even if the actors themselves would not see it that way, we can notice it in the forms that different actors use to express themselves to each other in conversation. To reveal what they think of each other indirectly, in an atmosphere of joking, somehow keeps tensions under control.

My particular interest in forms of joking relationships is in the context where they offer village women a way to express themselves - far more effectively than they otherwise might.

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all, you destroy people’s fields all through the rainy season. Anyway, just keep it in mind that you are now here in the presence of the true chief!”

It permits a woman to speak out on certain issues when she'd never be allowed to do so in formal settings among men, or in everyday life.

Apart from this partial exception we can see to what extent the notion of woman as head of household is so limited in practice. Since a woman is culturally forbidden to attend official assemblies, she is prevented from presenting any case, on her own behalf, to any council or before a village chief. If she's defrauded or has some property stolen, she is forbidden, because of her gender, to directly accuse the thief. She may only submit a formal complaint to the chief. So in any number of common instances where formal negotiations or legal process is called for, a woman whose husband has migrated out (and left his household for her to manage) is left powerless and unrepresented. This brings me to a research questions:

- How social dynamics have pushed Djeneba to re-position within the world of men?
- Have some basic rules changed? Which are new and which merely reproductions?
- What coping strategies has Djeneba used to deal with this radical shift in her identity?

My analyses in the next chapter have helped me to come up with answers to these questions.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will focus on my field experience (Hall, 1997: 95). I will detail here the techniques I used during my three months of collecting and analysing data. Some of these methods might be regarded as unique to an anthropological approach, that is, among social science methods in general. In particular, I would cite the use of documentary film; a method for gaining understanding of the social world that has been, for me, a crucial ethnographic tool.

In this section I will discuss how I came to discover the video camera as a research tool. And beyond that, how using such a camera in the field also had the effect of exposing me, marking me as a ‘researcher’, and thus of influencing, in complex ways, my relationship with my informants. I also deal with how I struggled with my own status in this ethnographic process of learning; how I’ve tried to come to terms with the many ethical issues that arise when one lives with, and among, people whose way of life and worldview one is ‘studying’. But first I will tell of how I first came to the use of a camera as a research tool.

### **3.1 My use of video camera: where did it come from?**

It all started in 2006 when I read a notice on a wall at my University in Bamako. It was a call for applications from students who might be interested in the ‘visual way’ of approaching an understanding of people’s lives and experiences. Anyway, I decided to apply and I was accepted into the program. As it happened, two instructors from Norway came to Mali to teach us. And so I followed, along with nine others students, two academic years of the ethnographic approach to describing and analysing the social lives and individual experience of people, including by the scholarly application of photographs, sound recordings and filmic storytelling. The workshop culminated with the production of a 15 min documentary and the writing of an ethnographic thesis by each student. My own film, as well my thesis was about internal immigrant girls; those who come from villages to work in towns and cities as home help. On the occasion of our graduation we received critiques and encouragements from our teachers as well from the great Malian filmmaker, Cheick Oumar Sissoko. This first experience of the ‘visual’ method had certainly been a process of discovery; a new way - different to the standard sociological approach - of understanding and representing other people’s social lives. But also, by applying reflexive thinking, we could learn also about ourselves, own motives and our true epistemological status as ‘researchers’. In any case,



subsequent to finishing that course, I was offered a place in the Visual Cultural Studies masters program at the University of Tromsø which I was happy to take up. This thesis constitutes a part of my course requirements of that program, together with the 59 min documentary film I made with the title “ Djeneba: A Minyanka woman of southern Mali”. In the next part I will discuss the methodological approach I used to make “Djeneba” and the kind of data I was able to collect for my overall thesis in the process of actually making the film. That is, before, during and after the actual period of my fieldwork.

### **3.2 First contact with my main informant**

Before I finally set out for the actual fieldwork component of my course I was wondering about how I might be accepted in the village. After all, I’d never been there before and the only person I knew in the area was Lidy. She’d told me that she was not, in fact, married into her own Bobo community but rather into a neighbouring Minyanka group and that, therefore, she was now living in a village called Kadioloko. That’s how Kadioloko came, in the end, to be my main area of research. Actually, it was the first time I’d ever heard of Kadioloko village so I started to do some of my own research on it. I didn’t find any books which spoke about this village in particular but I did manage to find “La societe Minyanka du Mali” by Danielle Jonckers which touched upon many aspects of the social organization of Minyanka community in Mali. This served as an introduction to my field area. As I continued to wonder how I’d be received in that place it occurred to me that Lidy - my only contact there so far - was also something of a newcomer in that village. She’d been living there for less than a year by then.

Actually I wasn’t, by then, overly concerned about my status as ‘researcher’. After all, nowadays we’re a long way from those traditional academic models of ‘the field’; from the archetypes of anthropology with their own ‘rites of passage’ into professional anthropology etc. (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). No longer did one really need to feel implicated as an actor inside that image of ‘the field’: a bounded, culturally distant site where fieldwork was an heroic enterprise, with the lone anthropologist braving hardship to spend a year or more discovering the ways of life of an exotic people. And yet, I was still concerned how people in the village might react to my using the video camera around them. I was thinking about ways I could explain it to people so they could understand what it was I was really up to in their place. I was hoping that beyond being tolerated as a “city girl” who’s come to take photos and movies, I might find ways to truly share all that I was doing with them. I knew that I’d be able

to communicate with people alright because in this area everyone can speak Bamanankan, my own native tongue. In any case, I finally understood that it would all depend, for the most part, on my own disposition and behaviour and on my finding my own solutions to the many ethical problems; on my avoiding, as much possible, the interpersonal pitfalls I'd imagined. It was vital for me to incorporate all that into my practice if I was to enter a process of data collection and analysis among the people and making out of their life-world a scholarly thesis. But before getting into that situation I had first to make my way to Kadioloko. The next part will tell of my entry into the field.

### **3.3 Entering in the field**

I left for the town of San on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2010, where I spent a few days consulting documents and archives at the catholic mission. In that place I was introduced to Cheickna Ezéchiél Mallé, a poet who has written two collections on Minyanka culture. I came to regard him as one of my important resource persons for the project.

There was no public transportation available between San town and Kadioloko village so my uncle, who'd been working in that town as a teacher - at the Dah community school - for some years offered to take me to the village. Actually my uncle's involvement turned out to be particularly helpful. He became a thread which connected me to several school teachers in the area. And then they, in turn, facilitated my cooperation with the local people. These teachers were among a certain group of people with whom I was in constant contact throughout the period. I will come back on these matters later. Anyway, we finally arrived there on April 27<sup>th</sup>. In the next part I will tell of how I gained an appreciation of the people's own perception of their situation in the village.

### **3.4 The people's perception of their village**

During the trip from San to Kadioloko my uncle introduced me to his colleagues explaining to them what my purpose was. Some of them had asked me questions such as "How long will stay in that village?" When I said "Three months" they seemed surprised, "What? Three months!?!... But they have nothing out there." "We will see" was all I could say. Actually, that is something I learnt well during - and since - my time in the village: what seems as "nothing" to some can be "all too much" for others. The head of Tamaro's school had told us that his colleague's wife was teaching at Kadioloko community school and that her name was Agnes. We arrived in Kadioloko at a place in between two villages, about 500 meters apart.

We didn't know, for sure, which was the place I was looking for. According to my notes on that first day of fieldwork:

Dried stalks of millet were scattered across the empty spaces. Everywhere seemed empty and uninhabited. Far away we could see a little girl with a bucket of water on her head walking towards one of the two villages. We came close to the girl and asked her to indicate the village of Kadioloko. She seemed not to understand what we asked her. But she moved her hand towards the school, making us a sign to go there.

With half-dried ears of millet all around, we approached the school. Teachers and students saw us coming through the windows. In front of us was the Community School of Kadioloko, with three adjoining classrooms. In each classroom we observed a teacher. We came near to the classrooms and the three teachers, one man and two women came out. We greeted each other. My uncle introduced himself to them and me to them, as well. The teachers introduced themselves. One of them was Agnes.

Agnes asked us if anybody in the village knew that we were arriving today. If not, she said, just come to my house and you can rest there before you are introduced to the village. But my uncle explained that Lidy had, in fact, been informed of my arrival date. Then they immediately asked two pupils to go and let her know we'd arrived. After greeting her we went to meet her family at their compound and there I was introduced to Djeneba<sup>11</sup>. Djeneba welcomed me and asked Lidy to put my stuff in the place they'd arranged for me to stay in. After about 2 hours of chatting, my uncle deciding to go back to San and Madou offered to him a live coq, a substantial gift.

When the night came Djeneba asked me to explain to her the basis of my project because tomorrow morning we'd have to go to the village chief and explain it all. What follows is an account of the conversation between Djeneba and me:

- Bata: I would like to study the re-integration here of young girls coming home from a period away on labour-migration.
- Djeneba: The re-integration of young girls?
- B: Yes ... to see how they try to re-adapt themselves to the local milieu. And to find out what kinds of problem they face...

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<sup>11</sup> My main character

- D: The problems they face? I'm not aware of any problem with all that. They usually go away before the age they'd normally get married, and when they came back, they usually do get married ... that's about it.

This is an entry in my field notes about that meeting.

I had a conversation with Djeneba tonight and I'm starting to get confused: this 'problem', could it be me, myself, who's actually creating it? From what I'm hearing the out-migration of girls and their return is not perceived by them as particularly problematic. So how am I to make a film and to write about a phenomenon, a problem, that doesn't even exist in reality?

The day following my arrival I was duly conducted to the family of the chief of the village. I was also to meet three others families to whom, as Djeneba explained, I ought to introduce myself and explain my purpose in being there "... so that you will have access to each of these families if you ever need it". In fact, as it happened, all of these families were to bring me gifts of food at various times during my stay there.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.5 The project as it turned out:**

In practice, the research process is often represented as having evolved in a quite logical, unilinear fashion with a minimal degree of overlap between its various phases. This misleading impression can easily be conveyed, especially when the research is assessed retrospectively, with reference to its final written products (Davies, 2008). However, the ongoing processes of research work, from problem inception, through data collection and carrying through to writing up actually requires researchers to respond quite flexibly to contingent situations arising in the field - and even beyond it. This can be quite confronting to one's well thought out research plan, both practically and intellectually (Davies, 2008: 29). And, as it turned out, my somewhat deliberately de-focused approach to my 'topic' in those early stages, actually had the effect of leading me to my unexpected subject matter: the rapid local trend towards women in the position of heads of household. This change of emphasis came out of my direct experiences in the field. There it was, staring me in the face. I couldn't help noticing that demands on women to be involved in social realms that were once exclusively those of men was on the rise. And that people were very much pre-occupied with

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<sup>12</sup> A gift of a dish of beans is meant to convey to the receiver a heartfelt wish for a pleasant stay. The various dishes sent to me also attest to the good relations between Djeneba's family and their neighbors. Good relations with the landlord are particularly important. He's a very influential person, generally treated with a lot of respect.

that fact. They were, I could see, more concerned with the ramifications of the increasing out-migration of men seeking wage labour than they were about the re-integration of young women returning home. And I came to see that whatever it was that was concerning them really ought to concern me too. And that those things were probably going to be of more interest - and more use - for the outside world as well. On this point Davies (2008) suggests how the 'research question' might best be developed in the process of actually doing research, stressing the need for us (as researchers) to examine the reasons behind our selection of topic. This way, he suggests, we might respond better if the need arises to alter it, for whatever reasons. Actually it took me some time to understand my own motivations for going ahead with research on my chosen topic. I mean the ways in which my personal background and consideration of possible future agendas led me to the study of a specific subject. This might be explained by the fact that the selection of a topic often comes out of a combination of personal factors, one's disciplinary culture and various other external forces in the broad political, social and economic climate (ibid: 30). There is also the factor of my being influenced and urged on by friends and colleagues. And yet, as it turned out in the end, perhaps the most potent influences came from deep inside me, after all. Maybe my decision to move towards a film and thesis based on Djeneba's everyday life and worldview - with a crucial thread provided by Nono's philosophical thought - is linked to my lifelong fascination with, and concern for, older people. They have always influenced me a lot.

### **3.6 Side by Side with Nono**

Oakley (1981) argues that the interviewer ought to become thoroughly involved with the interviewee; to answer questions as well as ask them; to accept, indeed, welcome, his or her own effect on the relational dynamic shared with the informant.

At one point I during my stay in Kaioloko I decided I'd visit the grand old man of the village, Nono, every afternoon; to make whatever little portrait I could of him each day with my camera. I think I wanted, as much as anything, to keep these as mementos of my fieldwork. Nono's real name was Sina Sogoba, though when he converted, very late in life, to Islam, he took the name Zoumana Sina Sogoba. But his grandchildren knew him as 'Nono' and that's how I eventually came to call him too. In the beginning of my stay there, however, I really didn't know how I could approach this venerable personage. I felt I had to find some reason, a pretext to visit him. To that purpose one of my teacher acquaintances turned out to be very

useful. My first visit Nono's family was on a day in April. I was accompanied by Souleymane Denon, the teacher, who'd already informed Nono that we'd be coming. We found him there in his compound resting on his mat. Some of his grandchildren were playing nearby. After the customary greetings, he asked Denon if it was the strange woman with him who liked to take pictures. He needed to ask this question because he was, by that stage, nearly blind. Denon told him that it was that one. He told the old man that I'd come that day especially to meet him and that I'd like to ask him some questions about the village and its history. And he told him that, if possible, I'd like to record the conversation and come to do some more filming of him later if he would agree. At that, he stood up from his mat; he declared gravely that he did not want to be filmed. Naturally, I really felt terribly deflated by this announcement. I turned my camera off and started worrying all over again about the insoluble ethical problems surrounding social science research. Still, I did go on to ask Souleymane to ask Nono for me what the reason was. Why he didn't want to be filmed? The reply was that he felt he was too old for any pictures to be taken of him "Pictures are for young people, an old man like me shouldn't have anything to do with pictures. Nobody will be interested in looking at such a lined and weathered face as mine. Images ought to be made only of those people whom the world might really want to see». Despite the doubts creeping over me at the time I countered his point by saying that by filming discussions with an elder such as him we might be able to gain a better appreciation of our most basic cultural values. After reflecting on this, he agreed with the reasoning and finally accepted to be filmed there and then. Then he sent a child off to call for the Imam<sup>13</sup> to come and help him with the session. What I had in mind had been a quiet conversation but somehow it had turned into quite a staged formal interview; me asking questions and Nono duly responding with, all the while, the Imam and Denon sitting with him, helping out as intermediaries and co-contributors. That was not at all how I'd imagined it. And yet, over time, especially after I'd gotten into the habit of visiting Nono on a daily basis, our little talks transformed into just the kind of filmic conversations I'd been hoping for.

The topics of our habitual talks were never predetermined. And we often ranged over a good many diverse subject areas. I'd determined to avoid setting myself specific goals or agendas for these meetings; a strategy which might be seen by some as not quite objective nor systematic enough to constitute proper research. But my intuition was telling me that I needed

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<sup>13</sup> The Imam and Souleymane Denon were present only during my first discussion with Nono. This facilitated our getting to know each other. The unexpected outcome of that first session helped me to devise better filming approaches for all subsequent filmed conversations.

to approach this great man with an open disposition; it was my job just to listen intently for he spoke with a unique voice from a very special place. He could and would teach me things no-one else could or did. In support of this approach it has been argued by Paul Henley that “film making based on this process of observation lays particular emphasis on following the subjects’ actions and recording them in their entirety rather than directing them according to some preconceived intellectual or aesthetic agenda”.

These filmed conversations were usually held at the compound of Nountegue<sup>14</sup>. This was because Nono did not much like staying long in his own house, alone. He said he had felt quite lonely there since his wife passed away in 2009. During this process Nono started to tell me many things about our country's political history, about the many changes that have taken place over his lifetime. And, one day, as it happened, he got around to telling me a story about my own grandfather, without his knowing that I was, indeed, that man’s granddaughter. So this ‘Nono’ strand of the my film project - away from the main work with women and their families - turned out to provide one of those unexpectedly fruitful fieldwork experiences (Spradley 1980: 3). I even came to learn about a part of my own family history; the filming process even took on the character of an intimate research of me (Jensen, 209: 135).

**Figure I:** Nono laying on his chair



**Source:** Bata Diallo, field work in Kadioloko

<sup>14</sup> Nountegue is Nono’s first-born daughter. She is the president of the women’s group Soro Yiriwaton. She and her husband live in the same neighbourhood as Nono.

### **3.7 Camera**

“Film makes field inquiries more accessible and "thicker" in Geertz's sense. We have words, intonations, pauses, facial expressions, and even a suggestion of the elusive quality of the relationship between the researcher and informants. These are matters that might be difficult to write about" (Loizos 1993: 60-61).

To enter the lives and the lived realities of people, the anthropologist travels to where those people live and does his or her fieldwork. This involves participating in all kinds of activities, asking questions, eating strange foods, taking field notes, interviewing informants and a hundred other things (Spradley 1988: 3). Whilst doing all of those things, the visual anthropologist is challenged to go further. The cinema as anthropological tool inevitably leads one off in other directions. To enquires of a particular kind.

But actually, following my informants in their daily life in order to film them turned out to be a good research method in and of itself. It was invaluable for the collection of data that otherwise would have been missed by other approaches. And viewing the film records since fieldwork has assisted me a lot in understanding obscure connections between diverse issues and phenomena. My being seen always using a camera has, though, tended to unmasked me, to exposed me undeniably as a ‘researcher’ in the field. With this recording, filming, probing and even, at times, taking part in the events themselves, I have found myself better understanding the nature of enquiry in general and my own research material in particular.

### **3.8 Filming process: how the camera influences our relationships**

In filming Djeneba’s daily life the way I did, I was, in a way, enrolling in the broad project that Jean Rouch called ‘cinéma direct’. To explain it, I would like to refer to Dziga Vertov’s definition of “cinéma vérité” and the approach to the filming that it implies. That is, it involves a kind of montage deployed during the filming process itself (choix de l’œil arme); finding the optimal position for the camera at any given time and adapting its point of view to the different stages of an unfolding shot. The compact apparatus that I had access to was certainly very useful in applying that approach. In his time, Jean Rouch’s cherished aim was that the filmmaking team be reduced to two just persons. And for him it was important that the sound recordist understood the language of the people being filmed. Using our current ethnographic film methodology I found myself operating within the dynamic of a lone woman



with her camera. In any case, as it happened I was at least able to adhere to Rouch's ideal given that, luckily, most people speak fluent Bamanakan in Kadioloko. Whilst trying to adopt this method in as natural a way I could I also - as a lone researcher - needed to be always attentive to the informational dynamics within Djeneba's family. I needed to be listening in. This allowed me to deepen my knowledge and be sensitive to the way a woman in my position could occupy space within the family.

Each element of the filming, each framing plan and movement in time and space were improvisations. No scene was predetermined. I was also necessary to stay in touch with my intuition. Jensen pointed out that the many practical aspects of filmmaking - some of which are emotionally demanding can get in the way of personal creativity, not to mention scholarly analysis. This certainly applies to many an encounter with one's informants but also, for that matter, to the figuring out of filmic ideas: how culture may be adequately represented through filming and, down the track, editing (Jensen: 2009: 75).

### **3.9 Film 'Djeneba'**

My whole approach to the Djeneba filming was to be, first and foremost, with and among the family in their daily lives. Not to be just an outside observer but a true participant, even as I went about my 'observing'. As far as this goes MacDougall's theories of "Participational Cinema" are certainly applicable to my film work and have had an influence on my own approach. After all, even though I'm a Malian, the same as Djeneba and the family, I was born and raised in the city, plus I come from a different ethnic group to the Minyanka. Therefore, I certainly could not just expect to be accepted and taken on trust in the village. For these reasons alone it was necessary for me to find a film style that implied proper humility and respect towards the people I was 'studying'.

### **3.10 Being a Fulani woman in Kadioloko**

In this part I will tell how my social identity - belonging to the Fulani ethnic group - has been of central importance to this study (Davies: 2008, 88). It undoubtedly had an influence on my access to certain people; opening some doors whilst firmly closing others. But in general, I found that by using everyday humour - the customary 'joking relationship' - I was able, even as a Fulani, to interact in a friendly way with most people in the community very quickly. To

return to the internal-external dialectic, what people think about us is, after all, no less significant than what we think about ourselves (Jenkins, 2008: 42).

Differences in ways of apprehending other people's lives and then telling about them, it seems to me come down largely to the given ethnographer's worldview and personality. So quite a lot would depend, in the end, on an individual's family background, education, intellect, sensitivity, and so on. But perhaps most important of all for the ethnographer might be his or her way of establishing human relationships. This is an inter-personal skill which varies, of course, from one person to another. The researcher's acceptance within a given group might depend on seemingly insignificant things: from the tone of one's voice, the expressions in one's eyes, the set of one's smile, one's way of dressing - to other innumerable factors which will obviously vary from one society to another.

### **3.11 *Badri Pike Namputcho***

In the process of integration into her new cultural milieu the researcher may well be given a new local name; one that might be seen to reflect the degree of her acceptance or might just be a way to put her in her place - a place enacted especially for her within the group. (Davies2008). This brings me to the special name that I was given at the beginning of my fieldwork: *Badri Pike Namputcho*.

The word *Namputcho* (strange woman) marked me as being from the far off city and also referenced the unusual things I was observed to be doing. But such a naming convention also reveals the Minyanka as a firmly patrilineal society. Each member of any household, whether inhabitant or stranger, as in my case, becomes identified by way of his or her connection to the oldest male of that household. That is to say, the one who 'owns' the household, the one, ideologically speaking, who is first in line of responsibility. Taking Djeneba as an example, people call her "*Badri Tcho*" meaning Badri's wife. Children are similarly name-identified in relation to their parents as women are to their husbands. As for me, the word 'pike' means house, so my village name might be translated as 'The strange woman living in Badri's household.'

### **3.12 To live with one's informant**

For me, living in the same household with my informants provided some advantages but also some drawbacks. Whilst I certainly enjoyed constant ready access to Djeneba, I was, by the same token, sometimes blocked from certain information. As a virtual member of the family, as Nampoutcho it was important to the family that everything be perfect for me. As Nampoutcho to that family, it seemed that the whole village was concerned to take care of me. Perhaps this being so well taken care of which implied I shouldn't be bothered or be involved in any adverse situations was a kind of drawback in my research. But then again with such a comfortable meshing of our personalities, together in the field, for example, it was, in the end best to share Djeneba's daily life so closely. It allowed us to become very close to each other which taught me more than if I'd just visited her a few times per week. The harmonious understanding and trust she had with the people she worked with was absolutely essential to her work according to Marsha. B Quinlan referring to her highly regarded study of life in a Caribbean village. It is only this kind of relationship that enables useful ethnographic work as Postma and Crawford have pointed out (Postma and Crawford, 2009: 340). They argue that the transfer of knowledge and the sharing of experiences can only be a product of a relationship in which both researcher and participant determine together where they stand; what they want to share and what not. It's a process based on development of confidence. The relationships I was allowed to build with people in Kadioloko meant that both I and my informants were able to feel comfortable with each other. It facilitates a seeking after truth by giving me access to deep knowledge of their family life, economic situation, their fears, sorrows, joys etc. Actually it's quite a difficult thing for the Minyanka people to share such intimacies with strangers. This special privileged access that was granted to me by my friends in Kadioloko is well illustrated in the film "Djeneba". Over my whole stay in the village the affection between us just grew stronger. The intimate personal interactions we all shared, the sympathy, support and advice I felt I had from them - and, I hope, gave back in return was the foundation upon which my 'research' was based. I might do some things a bit differently today, but the overwhelming thought I hold to is just how lucky I was to have the chance to do ethnographic fieldwork.

## **CHAPITRE IV: DESCRIPTION OF KADIOLOGO**

This chapter is about the general history of Kadioloko. I will outline this brief history as it was told to me by the people themselves, particularly by Nono, the village chief.

### **4.1 Kadioloko village**

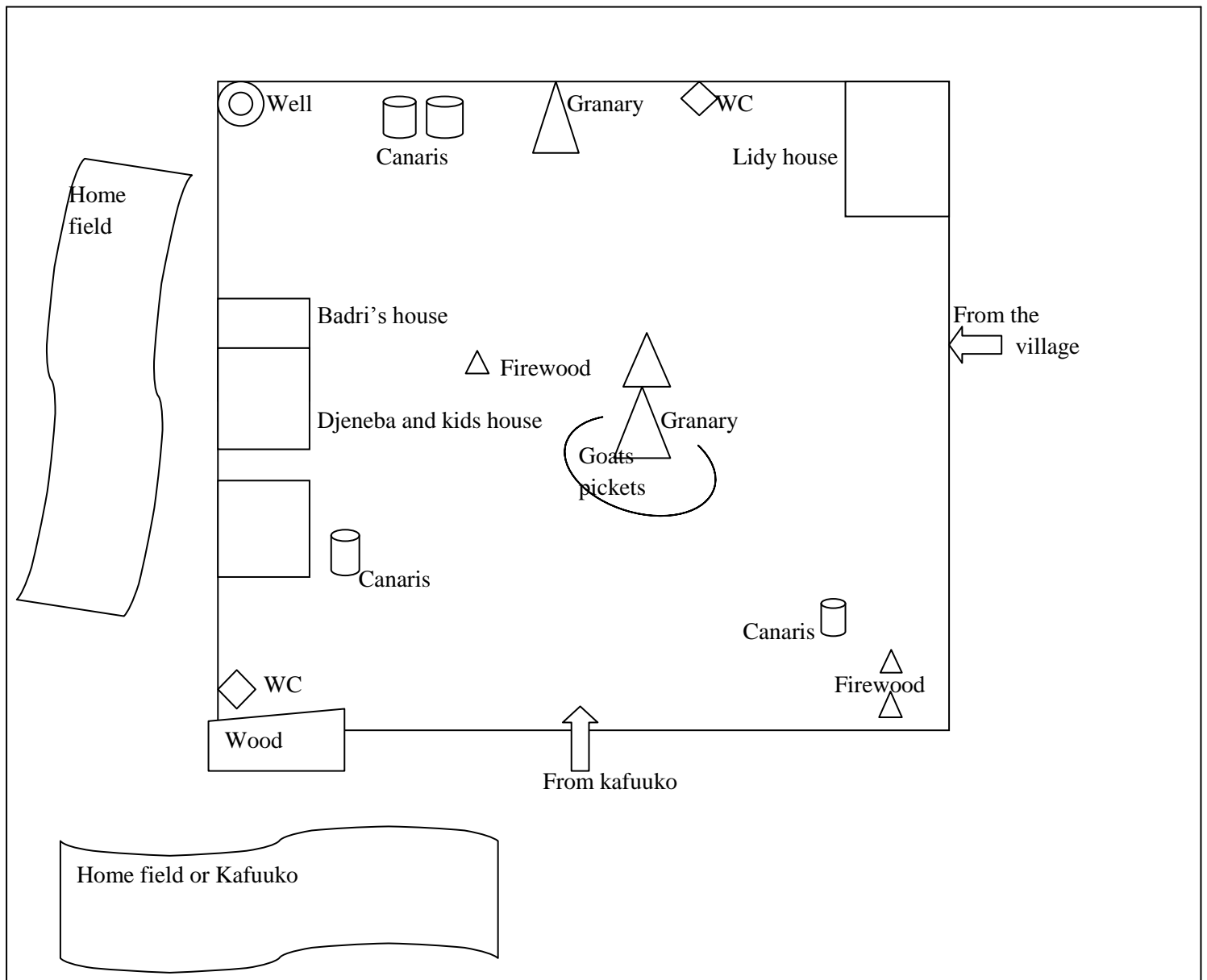
Kadioloko is situated within the San commune, 237 km northwest of Bamako, Mali. The village is bounded by Niasso in the north-west, by Sourountouna in the south, by the city of San in north and by Tominian in the east. The population according to the census taken in April 2010 by functionaries of the mayor was 389.

The village has a community school<sup>15</sup> is about a 5 km walk from the village. It has three classrooms with one teacher for each. Two class levels are taught in each room. The school accepts pupils from several surrounding villages as well as from the hamlets closer in.

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<sup>15</sup> The community school is a school that is created and handled by the community.

**Figure II: Djeneba's compound**



### 4.3 Residences

Regarding the general architectural aspect in Kadioloko, dwellings tend to be rectangular with doors opening onto a terrace. The lofts are large, square-shaped and built of mud brick with thatched roofs.

The bricks of mud are made of a mixture of clay, water and straw. They are sealed in place by using shea butter. The walls are plastered and the roof is supported on beams. During construction, a large plastic sheet is placed over the beams to prevent water leaking through

the roof. A door opens onto the outside and a small window lets in light from the outside. In each household the husband has his own room, even when he is not actually present. A woman typically shares her room with her children.

A woman does not usually seek to own land; it is thought that she should never enter the granary so as to avoid being taken for a head of household or of harbouring intentions towards family property.<sup>16</sup> There is usually a room for storing crops, often adjacent to the veranda. It typically contains peanuts, pouds de terre, 'boutégué', 'sombala' and beans. These are the responsibility of the wife or the most senior woman of the household. She is the one responsible for providing condiments to all the other women of the household. However, the main mud-brick granary structure in the middle of the compound is the biggest and most important. It contains the various staple cereals such as millet, maize etc. Its management remains exclusively in the hands of the head of the household (the husband). Whilst it's permissible for a woman to approach the granary - typically she stands beside it to receive grain thrown down from the overhead hatch - but she's not allowed to enter the structure.<sup>17</sup>

Some distance from the main village, there is a separate neighbourhood for the *Guimbala* Fulani, originally from Toumbouctou. They live in groupings of straw-covered huts; dwellings for each head-of-household, and others for his wives, his children and for visitors. Alongside these huts there are corrals or "fogos" within which their animals are held.

Regarding the climate, Kadioloko village can be taken as part of the southern Sahel, experiencing a typically Soudanian climate, hot and dry, except in the months of June to October, when the rain comes setting off intensive activity on all the farms. In the villages, by far the most important source of livelihood is agriculture. And, of course, yield is highly dependent on the quantity and dispersal of the rain.

The arrival of the first rain drops often usher in violent tornadoes, the ground puts on its greenest costume and the trees make a display of their first leaves. The immediate metamorphosis brought by the rainy season lends the dry bush a newly lush aspect. The village, standing out on the infinite plain burned by the harmattan wind blowing off the desert in the dry season, takes on the appearance of a bird's nest during the rainy season with all the shade trees shimmering green.. At this time, people can find themselves almost buried in the

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<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Cheickne Ezieckel Malle for this comment.

crops; tall swaying stalks, upright, densely packed. Apart from little pathways between, the whole landscape becomes verdant and alive with the many varieties of local millet.

#### **4.4 Farming system in Kadioloko**

The principal crops are sorghum « Kalege » in Mama<sup>18</sup> area, millet in Mamaara shyo, corn, beans and rice. Because the village is in a flood zone access can be difficult during the rainy season.

Joncker's description of a Minyanka village corresponds closely to what's observable in Kadioloko. The village is surrounded by three distinct 'culture' areas, closest to the village is the '*kaafugho*' just behind the dwellings, beyond that, the second level, the village fields operated continuously "*sisaya*" and further out there are the bush fields devoted to seasonal crops "*kereye*". The distance between the home fields "*sisaya*" and the bush fields "*kereye*" rarely exceeds 15 to 20 minutes by foot.

#### **4.5 Population**

Because of a lack of financial opportunities in the village, people in Kadioloko are in constant flux as work becomes available elsewhere. Typically, in each family 2 or 3 people are, at any one time, engaged in labour migration. The census counts all individuals who villagers consider are "sodden". Thus some individuals recorded are not actually full time village residents. During the first month of my arriving in the village, the total population in residence was between 200 and 250. Of this group, approximately 190 individuals (about 70%) were in the village throughout the entire period of my fieldwork.

These would be, for the most part, Kadioloko's permanent residents. But, on the other hand there were quite a few people - migrant labourers - who arrived during this period to visit their families.

The range of immigrants who could be seen as part time residents might be illustrated by the case of Djeneba's family. For example, her husband left Kadioloko a few years ago. He works at a construction job in San town and returns only occasionally to visit his family<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Mamaara is the Minyanka ethnic group language.

Also two of her daughters two of her daughters are working in Bamako as house maid girls. They both come back in the village during the rainy season to help the family in farming.

#### **4.6 Religiosity**

To analyse people's religious orientation in Kadioloko I have been engaged synchronically and a reading of Goody's description of LoDagaba society has influenced me a lot at this level (Goody, 1971). I have tended to emphasize the perpetuity of a social structure, from my own position as researcher and also from the viewpoint of the people. In Kadioloko they have a system of minor, major and maximal ritual area. So using such material it is difficult to make definitive statements about the process of fission vis-à-vis larger groups in the village. I believe that in the case of Kadioloko villagers, they actually originated in Koutiala. Stories to this effect are not only statements about the organization of the Minyanka in Kadioloko, but may well be accounts of an actual historical process of fission (Goody, 1971:60). This account given to me by people in the village, particularly by Nono (the chief of the village), appears to fit with my own partial view that I acquired during my stay in the village.

That religion is important in Djeneba's life is clear from what she has told me of her life story. Furthermore she seems to have been influenced by different religions at different periods in her life, having had to move from their traditional religion to Islam and afterwards to Christianity. Djeneba and her family are now Christians, and their practice of Christianity is of great importance to them. The first Sunday after my arriving in the village, Djeneba and her children took me to church. As it turned out this was an important contribution to my fieldwork as it allowed me and my camera to be introduced to the villagers. Even though I, myself, am Muslim, Djeneba appreciated the fact that I was happy to follow her to her Christian church. When her time to speak came, Djeneba asked the people to pray for me; that my project would be successful. For the whole time I was there, I saw that every morning, Djeneba led morning devotions with her children.

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<sup>19</sup> During the whole period of the fieldwork he came to visit the family twice; for just one night the first time and for three days the second.



**Figure III:** Djeneba and her family member working in the field.



**Source:** Bata Diallo, field work in Kadioloko

## CHAPTER V: FROM HOUSEHOLD ADMINISTRATOR TO HEAD-OF-FAMILY

In this chapter, I aim to clarify the various factors that are combining to bring about the changes in women's responsibilities within the household. First I will describe one situation concerning the selling of a crop (millet). This occurred when Djeneba's husband, Badri had returned on one of his rare visits home. After this discussion the chapter is divided into four major categories: migration, urbanization, schooling and, finally, the problems of the weak. My treatment of the first three takes, as its starting point, Djeneba's own account of her life story. And the last is based on my analysis of the ideas of Nono on the subject, the grand old man, and one time chief of Kadioloko. This has been based on some of our many video conversations, some of which I used in the film.

For almost three decades now, women in Mali have been at the centre of the rapid economic transformations in their society. As a result the role of women in the home, and in the wider society, has been in a constant state of flux. They have been forced to move into roles that were traditionally viewed as the exclusive domain of men. The distinction between what have traditionally been proper "*male*" and "*female*" roles is becoming blurred. However, these changes did not come about through altered perceptions within society of women's overall social status and responsibilities. If anything, the conventional view of women as housewives and of men as breadwinners has only hardened. Rather, the changes came about by force of extraneous circumstances, namely, the mass out-migration of men in search of wage labour available only in other economies. The absence of their husbands over long periods and labour shortages both pushed women into the work force. Women, by default, became responsible for an increased percentage of household income and it was left to them to take on traditionally male job of managing the household. But in shouldering this load women found themselves in a position to demonstrate their real capabilities. They became more confident.

That change in female roles has resulted in what might reasonably be called 'the awakening of female genius' or, rather, of female entrepreneurship. It engendered a major social shift (Camara, 2002: 36). Of course, with women's changing occupations over time, various state programs have also played an important part. In different periods, interest has been mobilised, for example, around political initiatives such as quality education for all (1963), schooling for girls (1988) schools in villages (2000). Consequently male heads of household have

progressively lost the all-powerful status they once had. So, in fact, the number of women as heads of household has continued to rise over the years (Tichit, 1994). Up to the present day, according to Boserup (1985), various crises of transition have pushed women to assume the burden of daily household expenses. This trend continues still, whether due to male labour migration, the total abandonment of families by the male head or, because of a decision taken independently by the woman herself (Pillon and al, 1995: 12).

The following is a description of one scene from my raw video footage. It is a simply taken shot, several minutes long. But reviewing and examining the subtle interpersonal dynamics has revealed many things to me. It has opened up my thinking on aspects relevant to this part of my thesis.

The chirping of hens and swirls of dust filled the air of Djeneba's compound in the quiet of the afternoon. Badri, Djeneba's husband, home for a few days on a rare visit, made his way slowly across the courtyard, his arms folded across his chest, a gesture that seemed to close him in. Lidy, Djeneba's daughter-in-law, was there, preoccupied with her own sweeping the ground near some of the huts, her face half-concealed by a cloth over her head. Madou, Lidy's wife and Djeneba's son too, had climbed up on a small ladder to open the hatch of the granary hut. Soon he was throwing down handfuls of millet on the stalk; pulling it out from the stack through the hatch. Djeneba, was already busy threshing what he was throwing down; beating the reddish edible seeds from the stalks with a stick. "Karamoko" she called out to her infant son "go play over there or this scratchy millet dust will get all over your skin." She picks up her beating rhythm, smashing down on the pile of millet with all her strength. Madou had, by then climbed his way right inside the granary. And, hidden now, he called out to his mother through the small hatchway "Nia<sup>20</sup>, didn't you tell me that the millet price was very low these days, at San market?" "What?" said Djeneba, pausing her rhythmic blows upon the stalks. "I said: haven't you been saying lately that millet's fetching a poor price in San and that it'd be better to wait, and maybe sell somewhere else?" Djeneba straightened up, the threshing stick hung from her right hand, her left one propped against her waist. She took her time to catch her breath, she looked vaguely around the yard but finally she said nothing. Badri, meanwhile - he was resting nearby, straddling his motorbike - had been listening in. Now he got up; started pacing back and forth "What were you saying about the millet?" His left hand stuck in his belt as he paced. (All this time my camera has been rolling, now I move a little closer to

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<sup>20</sup> All Djeneba's children address her as 'Nia'.

the action.) Madou had stuck his head outside the hatch so now his voice was loud and clear, no longer muffled. “I was telling mum that maybe she should wait a bit longer; wait until she can find a better price for it.” Badri took this in and turned slowly to walk past me and out of my shot. “Millet should never be sold off for this kind of purpose anyway.” He went back to sit on his bike and continued the conversation in Mamaara<sup>21</sup>, the local tongue I didn’t comprehend. Goats darted here and there about the compound, led, it seemed by their forever sniffing snouts and quivering lips. Djeneba’s eyes widened as she listened. She bit her bottom lip but still wasn’t saying much. Madou, now out of the granary and back on the ground made his way over to the well “On the other hand, if she doesn’t sell it now where can she find the money? Where else could she find it?”

When Djeneba spoke up she was calm and she was brief “The debt that I owe to Hawa is already long overdue. Even if she isn’t pressing me for it, I cannot bear the shame of it.”

At this point, it seemed that all movement in the compound had ceased. Except, that is, for the hens continuing to scratch and peck around under the granary, taking full advantage of this pause in proceedings. But they scattered as Djeneba took to her stick again as if nothing had happened - or been said. Badri, though, carried on speaking out in Mamaara with his back to my position of view. Since this was the first time I’d ever met him I’d no idea what to think of him or what to say to him. I think that’s why I made myself busy, with my eye stuck firmly to the viewfinder.

“Bata” A voice called from the other side of the compound. “Bata! Denon is calling for you.” Then Souleymane’s angular face appeared around a corner, his arms, outstretched, radiated warmth and fondness. “Bata, if you like, we can go looking for the *Banikono* bird. You said you wanted to take pictures of it. I saw some just now in the *Doubalen* fig tree, just behind the mosque.” “Yes, okay, I’m coming now” I said, turning off the camera.

Djeneba had paused again. As she stood erect, her narrowed eyes searched the limits of the compound and beyond. “It is always the same. Whenever those girls go off into the bush they seem to completely lose track of time. It’ll be sundown before they think to start heading home. That’s why I’m not happy for Elisa and Martha to go off by themselves into the bush.”

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<sup>21</sup> Mamaara is the Minyanka language.

Not knowing what to say about that I changed the subject. I let Djeneba know that I was going off with Denon to film some Banikono herons. “*Allah ka segi i nyuma yie.*” She said. May God help you to come back safely.

One of the many things I picked up from that common everyday scene was who, in the household, was supposed to be in charge of managing millet. After all, millet is the staple food of this region; the welfare of families depends on it absolutely. One of my main research questions has been around who makes what decisions within the family (that is, normally, when there is a husband on the scene). At the outset, I want to make a distinction between home-administrator and head-of-household. I am talking about the role of women in the old days and I mean by ‘administrator’ I refer to the (traditionally) responsible for setting up and maintaining the internal household system. She would, though, be expected to do all that by way of executing orders passed down to her by the real head. In her wifely role, she’d need to keep track of all household affairs and know what ought to be done by whom and how and when. The following discussion, however, is to do with the process of women’s transition from household administrator to head of household.

The duties of women as a household administrator ranged widely, and varied according to her age and also, it’s true, from one household to another. Generally she’s need to stand ready to serve her family and know how to resolve internal problems. Managing a household meant serving every need of the man, the children and any other persons connected to or dependent on the household.

Though the woman may have been seen by her children as actually first in line of responsibility, actually, in principle, it is men alone who were regarded as fit, and thus destined, to fill the role of head of household. The position expected from women has traditionally been the complementary one. But my fieldwork experience has shown me just how much - and how rapidly - perceptions about the job of mother and spouse has changed: “I do my best to meet the needs of my children. But when my husband lives so far away, his remittances cannot meet the expenses of the family. So I do my best regarding the purchase of condiments and I must pay attention to the price of soap, oil and many other internal expenses. When your husband does not live with you, he is not aware of the realities of the family. So he cannot participate in all the various decisions that must be making. The children are relying only on me because I am the only one they see and live with. Thanks God I am just managing so far to satisfy them. Without a husband, it is not easy for a woman to run the

family and take care of its needs. It's the wife who must play both the role of father and mother. Being the head of a household is not easy. We seem always to be in situations where we need to spend money. But we must trust in God because he's never failed us yet. "Je me débrouille"<sup>22</sup>.

We can affirm in this context, following Tichit, that until recently the only prestige or power to be won by women, beyond their due, was available from within the fixed condition of the household - or its limited local extensions - only; that is, the realm fixed upon them by custom. That stands in contradistinction to males who've long been able to enhance their individual power and stature by way of education, travel, professional activity and access to externally derived incomes.

### **5.1 Migration: They decided to come back home and stay**

The historical geography of settlement within the Sahelian zone, tells us that mobility itself has been a medium of change (Rain, 1999). This state of affairs has developed in phases across epochs. Rain classified it into three different phases. The first was the frontier phase which occurred in the Sahelian zone from the early nineteenth century to the 1920s and 1930s. As was recounted earlier the land was initially uninhabited or thinly populated. And settlement was limited due to inter-group conflicts and by the challenges thrown up by climate. The second was the bush consumption phase from the 1930s and the 1960s. This was driven largely by natural increases in the population. Expansion, thus motivated, continued to spread across the Sahelian zone until most bushland was gradually cleared and converted into agricultural fields. So an increasingly inhabited landscape was brought about, marked by the spread of markets and roads at a cost to the availability of game animals and bush foods. Then the colonial enterprise encouraged still newer forms of livelihood and means of exchange. At its inception the new Malian state heavily promoted the cultivation of cotton and, in early 1964, formerly entrusted its cultivation to the CFDT<sup>23</sup> (Jonckers, 1987).

The circulation phase, the third, was seen to begin around the late 1960s and continues to the present. Mass movement of rural populations, triggered mainly by drought, saw peasants becoming gradually habituated to urban life and the new and different social networks that that implied. Another push factor came from administrations forcing peasants to pay taxes in

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<sup>22</sup> "Je me débrouille" is a stock phrase commonly used by people when they explain how they cope with unforeseen everyday life situations and challenges (Waage, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Textiles. In 1975 the Malian state regained control of the CFDT and it became CMDT (Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles).

cash. This caused many more away to participate in urban economies and also to neighbouring countries such as Ivory Coast. Every year in the rainy season, though, they tended to return to their villages for the planting. As more and more village took part in this a seasonal circulation of people developed locking rural communities into cash based economies. If asked men will usually say that it's an absolute necessity for them to travel away to look for money so that they can help their families. And yet, Kadioloko village actually has a plenty of land. People in the village agree that it's not because of lack of land that they no longer enjoy the abundance they once did. For the villagers, the direct connection between the complex of local conditions and the ever higher rate of circular migration is obvious. The villagers maintain that even if there's land available they would still need fertilizer and other inputs nowadays to produce a decent yield. So, in any case, they still need to go looking for money from outside. However, some older people in the village, Nono in particular, bear strong antipathy to mass out-migration and the effect it's had on village life. Nono sees that it's ever diminishing rainfall and crop yields - and thus the need for money - that's mainly driving the exodus of the young and able. But out-migration, in his view, is clearly a very bad thing. In his view it's destroying the very fabric of social life as he knows it.

Nono: "It's only because of the severe shortages that we even allow them to go away. But then we lose them for such a long time." The Imam: "But when they return aren't there some benefits? They do, after all, bring money back with them ... as well as lots of store-goods from town." Nono: "What money? In fact, they're lucky to come home with clothes on their back. They're not even well dressed, let alone, well off!" He turns his head slowly and aims a fulsome spit away from the mat onto dusty earth. "All this labour migration has destroyed the world. They go off and leave us, often before the rainy season has even ended. These terrible times force our young people away to chase wage-labour. Myself, I never did anything like that" "You've never done it?" I asked "No - apart from the forced-labour days. No I've never stooped to freely selling myself, my labour, to just any outsider who wanted it. Never". But Nono I said, "you mean you've never even worked a day for another?" This time it was the Imam sitting with Nono who answered for him: "Worked for wages? No, he never has." Nono, who had been sitting up, slowly lowered his fragile frame till he lay flat on the mat. "But wasn't life good in the old days? And is it not much worse now? The world's really gone mad. Everything is about money now. We see consumer stuff everywhere we look. People see something in town and they think they just have to have it. Isn't everything ruined now? In

our day we got along just fine. We got plenty of rain. We grew plenty of millet. We had everything we needed. See how it is now: if ever it happens to rain, even at night, people rush outside just to splash in it. And even then, you'll be lucky if there's any follow-up rain.”

In my analysis of the migration phenomenon in Kadioloko one thing I was interested in following up the way a person's complex of social networks was modified by their migration experience. The so called 'circular migrants' such as Badri do maintain enduring ties to their village. They make at least occasional visits home and often send gifts and remittances. And yet it seemed to me that this class of out-migrant tends nowadays to be less and less involved in the work and the management of household agriculture. It appears that this is because they no longer have a deep personal investment in it; in the spread out cycles of crop production.

## 5.2 Urbanization

The changes in context, urbanization, capitalistic market economy, and schooling articulate do influence local people's priorities. Their strategies and may be conventions of cultural rules and statuses are threatened. The study of urban influence on the rural sector is sometimes confused on this subject of "investment" by individuals. It often takes into account circular flow of labour migrants directly related to agricultural production but does not deal sufficiently with the maintenance - or otherwise - of their complex of social networks (Rain, 1999: 197).

Earlier in their marriage Djeneba and her husband spent a number of years living in Sikasso city<sup>24</sup>. He worked as carpenter and Djeneba as a house-maid. Apropos this period Djeneba said: "It was when Nene<sup>25</sup> was about 2 years old that we decided to leave Sikasso and come back to live here in the village. It was because we thought that if we stayed in the city, without a job in an office it would be difficult to provide the kind of education that we wanted for our children. We realized that for people without a (professional) job; who work as, for example, a carpenter ... it would be just too hard to stay in the big city together with all our children ... We feared that if they grew up with no proper jobs available to them, they could easily turn to

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<sup>24</sup> Selon le dernier recensement général de la population et de l'habitat (Décembre 2011), Sikasso est la plus grande ville du Mali en terme de population (2 643 179 hbts) alors que Bamako n'est que (1 810 366 hbts).

<sup>25</sup> Nene is Djeneba's third daughter, and the first to be enrolled at school. But she stopped her studies at 6e année level because she got pregnant and didn't manage to get back to her studies. Now she's working in Bamako as house maid and the baby - about 2 years old now - lives with Djeneba.



robbery; to a life of crime. So we came back here so that we'd have a chance to show them the correct way in life.”

By a 'job in an office' Djeneba refers to any occupation with a regular, secure salary, as opposed to those like their own in the informal sector. Djénéba was preoccupied with the precarious life they were living in Sikasso. Her husband's job there was neither satisfactory nor stable, so she concluded that it would never offer happiness or fulfilment to her and her children. Djeneba was very conscious of the fact that secure, well paid jobs in the city, called for the kind of qualifications that neither she nor her husband had ever managed to acquire. At least some background in formal schooling is a prerequisite but neither of them had even that much. Their lack of education, as they themselves understood it, has been the major obstacle to their successes in the urban job market. Djeneba's preoccupation with her lack of education is no doubt why Djeneba takes the education of her own children so seriously.

“Well, we don't really like to talk about things like that around here.” “What things?” I asked Djeneba. “Well, you know all the things I'm doing for my family.” “Why is that?” “Because it is just not ... it is, after all, only my duty.” This is Djeneba's attitude to the responsibility she assumes for ensuring the family income and for making all the choices, taking all the big decisions etc.

The burden of responsible decision making has always been a big part of Djeneba's life, decisions about her children's life, choosing what should be done and by whom. This personal posture that she readily assumes; the one who willingly bears decisions about household affairs has had an important determining effect on her various family relations, not only vis-a-vis her husband<sup>26</sup> and children's but also, importantly her daughter-in-law, Lidy.

Most of the adults have all been involved in labour migration but Lidy, significantly, is from the Bobo ethnic group. She and Djeneba then, have different religions as well as sub-cultures so it's not surprising that they sometimes perceive things differently. Ethnic identity is a topic of importance within finely tuned webs of village relations. After all, we know that management of identities is of constant concern to all actors in such spheres of interaction, following Eidheim (1969, 40).

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<sup>26</sup> Djeneba has been the one who help her son Madou to take Lidy as wife. Because of the family doesn't want him to be married with someone who belongs to another ethnic group. Their argument was that Bobo women doesn't follow the rules of marriage i.e it is easier for them to get divorce.

Truth be told, Nia (Djeneba) doesn't listen to anybody. She has always been like that. Her radical decision to insist on taking the children back home from Sikasso was in her own view doing her duty, taking responsibility to keep her offspring from a dangerous, insecure life in the city. The city life, she adjudged, was no life for her children.

### **5.3 Children's schooling**

*Marthe doesn't care about school. She does not have any idea about what the school can do for her in the future. For a girl, when you get even at least a little position<sup>27</sup>, you'll earn much more in 2 years than a girl who works in the city<sup>28</sup> cannot afford in 8 years of working. And you will be able to help your parents.*

As I point it out in the theoretical chapter we are in the context of change and continuity. First this can be seen as a part of changes which is taking place. I will argue this statement of Djeneba of being educated in Mali today from Diallo's (2008) work. Like many other post-colonial nation states, knowledge stemming from school (setting for formal education) is the basis of power which gives access to the decision making sphere (Diallo, 2008: 1). So student is an investment to the eyes of his family. So after the integration into the structures of power, this investment will bring money and prestige. In terms of social exchange creates in African countries today, the student is a resource whose capitalization must produce benefits to all family members. From then, student is not more student for oneself but for the family, lineage or clan to which one belongs<sup>29</sup> (Mbembe, 1985:51).

The weakest point of Djeneba is that neither she nor her husband doesn't attend formal education, which can partly explain the fact they didn't "worked in office"<sup>30</sup>. So she decided to move back from Sikasso city to Kadioloko village with their children's many years ago. By taking back home the children's it was a way to prohibit them from an insecure life in the city. The city way of life, she judged, was not for her children. For not being educated, living in the city was not an option because they were outside the national corridors of power.

The way school is important as new value (change) it is in the same vein that that agriculture is important as former value (continuity). Like in most of rural areas in Mali, the main source

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<sup>27</sup> Represents an important position/job in the administration.

<sup>28</sup> Work in the city is referring to the work of girls as house maid in the city. Like many other rural village in Mali, the majority girls in Kadioloko went to town and work as home maid. Many of them even, abandon school for wage work in town.

<sup>29</sup> My translation

<sup>30</sup> Be referred to the page 43 for "work in a office" explanation.

of livelihood among Minyanka is agriculture. Almost every family or household has its own land.

After schooling it is a great value for parent to see their children's working hard in the field is important too. And the school teacher, Souleymane Denon told me that school teachers and parents in the village fight every year about the school vacation period for children. Because of the parents want to involve earlier their children's into agricultural work, i.e they stopped to send them to school before June, the end of school year. And when I asked Djeneba about that, as follow her argument.

*When the rainy season starts it is a time of competition. Because of the rain is not always abundant. So when it's rain a bit, people start working before it get dried so maximize the chance to have a good harvest. But when your workers are not available, it might be difficult. That is why I even want Nene to come back home, and hope that Eliza and Marthe will be done soon with their exam.*

Agriculture work is done by a family as a group. All members participate in economic production. Children perform a set of various tasks for their families across the year. But we should understand that stains attracted to children are not necessarily a logical operation as is generally publicized or as it can be perceived by the outsiders. But unlike these different tasks are included in logic of socialization (Marcoux, 1994; Brisset, 2000). Other literature indicates the important participation of children in keeping families to which they belong. Historically and culturally, the «socialization of children passes by putting to work gradually, by increasing its stake, proportional to its age, the work collectively of the family community<sup>31</sup> (Schlemmer, 1994: 289). Those who are in the age of 5-12 years old caring for very specific tasks such as counselling in the bush of a few goats and sheep available in the family and they are also involved in guiding labour animals in the fields.

Because of the lack of workers, all members of the household participate actively in the agricultural work. “*When you do not have a plenty workers, we all must participate in the field work* Djeneba said. *But it is a shame for Madou to see me working in the field with them side by side.*

- Bata: Why?

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<sup>31</sup> My translation

- D: *Because of the spouses of the young like him take over their mother in-law duties. But I told him, to not be ashamed because of our different realities. .... The people here have installed for the cultivation of land. So when the rain started all people keep on the cultivating. The daba is our pen, we must do our best when the work it is demanding.*

Working in the land, first task for men in Minyanka community, represent both the basically vital activity and means of acquiring prestige. It is called « fauve de la culture » someone who handles the hoe bravely<sup>32</sup> (Jonckers: 1989, 145). Despite the intensive use of the plow, easier, this is not valued. Nono arguments as follow: *The plough is destroying young people, they do not know anymore how to cultivate the land. Can you see that the grass grows over the whole field? It is because people do not work correctly in the field. By not cultivated the land, they will get lost.*

#### **5.4 Being a tièkuluchifô**

In this chapter, I intend to spotlight people's perceptions toward women as heads-of-household in a patriarchal society. The chapter will contain three parts as follows: breaking rules; gaining a new identity; coping strategies. The last one will focus on how my informant coped economically and socially with her new status as head-of-household. But the descriptions and analyses of the chapter as a whole will help me either confirm or quash my second question of research and provide a description of the coping strategies employed by my informant to deal with her new identity thus addressing the concern of my last question of research. Contrary to the way I preceded in Chapter IV, I will start each part from an author's point of view and argue the idea from Djeneba's life story. I will also use folktales, representations by local elders of their "idealized" past, to discern instances of continuity and change vis-à-vis the strategies of - and opportunities for - women in Kadioloko.

Categorization is predicated upon the proposition that those who are categorized have a criterion of identification in common. Collectivity means to have something in common, whether "real" or imagined, trivial or important, strong or weak. Without some commonality there can be no collectivity. These issues have a long history in social theory, particularly the theme that the less people have in common with each other, the more problematic collective

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<sup>32</sup> My translation

cohesion becomes (Jenkins, 2008:132). Marx's writing on alienation and his subsequent discussions of class conflict and mobilizations are all about this. Women who wear men's clothes are in a position to speak in the place of men. I mean they are the ones who have learned to take decisions about family affairs and are in a position to speak out on such matters.

A few years ago, Djeneba's daughter Batoma fell in love with a man from the village of Tamaro<sup>33</sup>. They met in Bamako town where they both worked - as a housemaid and a caretaker respectively. In 2006, they decided to marry. After they were engaged they went back to Bamako to continue working. During the first rainy season after their becoming engaged, Batoma's fiancé came with friends to cultivate the household field<sup>34</sup>.

After the first year, Batoma's fiancé did not show up anymore. Djeneba was not happy about the fact that Batoma's fiancé didn't come to help them in the field. She complained to their *Gbun* about the problem and asked for compensation. But the fiancé's father refused to pay the money for compensation. He argued that he did not have to discuss such matters with a family where a woman, acting as the head of the household, discusses issues connected with marriage. Negotiations about marriage are traditionally the responsibility of men. Women are not supposed to take part at this level. A woman who does so is acting outside her traditional role; she is doing or saying things she is not supposed to.

## 5.5 Breaking the rules

Without rules there can be neither society or culture...it was the emergence of the capacity to make, enforce, and, by corollary, to break rules that made human society possible (Fortes 1983: 6) quoted by Jenkins (2008: 151). This statement is credible and Fortes points out an intimate relationship between identification and our capacity to live collectively. In this sense, the fact that a woman expresses her ideas in realms where she is forbidden to do so can generate disorder; a confusion of identities. To some extent it can be seen as a sin.

Initiating practices that have, in the past, not been done or known of can be seen by the community as simply in defiance of common sense. The Oxford dictionary defines a rule as

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<sup>33</sup> Tamaro is about 7 kilometers from Kadioloko.

<sup>34</sup>In the tradition of the Minyanka people, a man works in his fiancé's family's fields from when she is around 7 years old until the time of her circumcision. Such participation of men in the farm work of their fiancé's parents continues throughout the period of the engagement; right up to the time marriage. And sometimes even until the first child of the marriage starts to talk. (Jonckers, 1989: 47). (My translation)

"one of a set of explicit or understood regulations or principles governing conducts within a particular activity or sphere". In other words, rules are beliefs that we hold about how things should be and we use these rules to guide our behaviour and choices. Therefore, when "female intelligence and capabilities are being transferred from "domestic spheres" to "public spheres" (Rosaldo, 1974: 23) the rules are, by definition, to some extent, being broken. Even if Djeneba's status allows her to take some decisions at the household level, this still creates problems in the public sphere.

In this way, families with a woman as the head of the household represent a potential threat to the social order which is based on the subjugation of women's control over their labour, their sexuality and their descendants (Bissiliat, 1996: 19).

People gossip a lot behind my back, they say that I am not serious. A few years ago, a question was raised about the paternity of my last children. Some people went to tell him that I was unfaithful to him. Their argument was that I am using the selling of soup to receive men in my house. Instead of asking me about it, he came to the village and started stalking me, but he didn't uncover anything. Still they continued to push him until he was so angry that he decided to come and tell me that he was not sure if he was the father of my last son. It was very difficult for me to hear that from him. I have been suffering so much for him that I didn't deserve this kind of accusation from him. And I decided to talk to him. Finally, he came to realize that I was right.

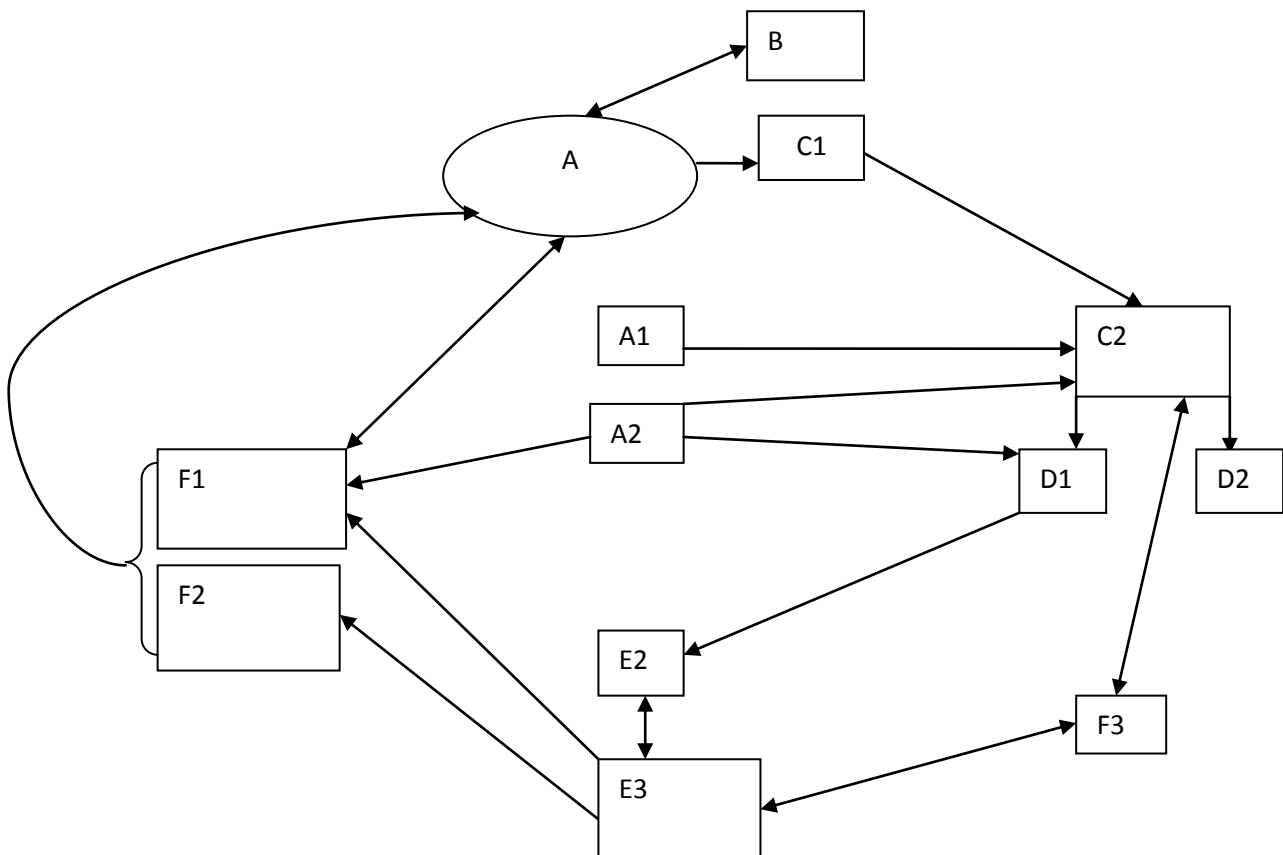
The evidence available to us here suggests that taking initiative to do some activities such as running a business, need time to be well accepted. The joint occurrence of new responsibilities and resistance to these new changes usually pose problems. How can one explain their coexistence? Is this a sign of the powerful pressure of men to control women's life that refuse to go away even in the presence of a new responsibilities and structural changes leading to changes in women's status? Rosaldo pointed out that woman everywhere lack generally recognized and culturally valued authority (Rosaldo, 1974: 17).

## 5.6 Gaining a new identity

With their men away, wives had to be entrusted with the responsibilities of maintaining families, often with little more than a minimal agricultural income to rely on. Faced with the poverty and the uncertainty caused by declining agricultural income, women increased their participation in home-based informal labour to bring in extra cash. Housewives tended to replace the purchasing of goods from outside with their own production. For many households, additional income from women's work was the first line of defence against a declining economy. Consequently women became more economically significant. In the absence of men, family economics came to depend not only on women's labour but also on women's cash income. This situation was further entrenched by the support given to the enterprise of women by certain NGOs including micro-finance organisations such as "Soro Yiriwaton".

On the next part I will be referring to Barth (1975) to illustrate the forms of production, circulation and exchange of goods in Kadioloko. To see how they are produced and how they can exchange to each other.

**Figure IV:** The main form of circulation of goods and services in the household..



**A:** Fields. The cultivation of crops is the main livelihood.

All products from the fields are taken into granaries.

**A1:** Natural resources from the bush, such as baobab leaves, including processed foodstuffs such as *sumbala* are partly for own consumption and partly for sale. The weekly market-places are available to transform these products into cash.

**A2:** Out-migrants: migrants such as men are contributing less and less to the economy of households. But unmarried (girls and boys) come to work their family's field during the rainy season.

**B:** Food: Crops are kept inside the granary. Part is consumed by the family. Some of the millet crop is also sold at the weekly market to meet cash needs. Animals are also sometimes sold to make up for shortages of cash.

**C1:** Granary: this is the main space for keeping the household millet and maize.

**C2:** People have a well-organized system of market places, which facilitates a great number of economic exchanges. A part of the cash from the weekly market is again used to obtain a variety of consumer goods from the market.

**D1:** Cash income from the market is typically used for children's needs (school, clothes, Tontine, etc.) as well as for Soro Yiriwaton payments (deposit). Women have to paid about 30% as deposit of the amount of money they want to borrow.

**D2:** Condiments bought at the market are sometimes re-sold in the village.

**E2:** The cash get from the weekly market allow buying soap for the Tontine contribution. About 90% of women in the village are a part of it. The principal consists in each woman bringing a piece of soap "*gabakourou*" every Tuesday. This organization has resulted in the creation of an AV (Villageoise Association). It is the women of this association who are qualified to get money from Soro Yiriwaton.

**E3:** Soro Yiriwaso is the microfinance system which has operated in Kadioloko since 2006. At the time of my fieldwork there were 35 women in the group. The president was



Nountegue Sogoba<sup>35</sup> (the chief's daughter). Most of these women were already acquainted through parental and neighborly ties. They ranged between 25 and 50 years old and all were married with children. Apart from being helped to buy farm inputs and pay workers, some were funded to set up small businesses such as the selling of rice, condiments, etc.

**F1:** Workers.

**F2:** Fertilizers, and other inputs for field cultivation.

**F3** Every family keeps animals. The number, of course, depends on the overall household income. Oxen are used for plowing whilst donkeys and horses are commonly used both for transport and plowing. As with other families, Djeneba's household owns a number of sheep, goats, pigs and hens. Apart from being a source of food, household livestock are very much seen as "moyens liquides" (liquid capital). Sheep are kept and fed for a few months by the family. These are sold during the "campagne of Tabasky". The money raised is typically used to pay back some of the Soro Yiriwaton debt.

## 5.7 Coping strategies

Implicitly declaring herself head-of-household can have far ranging social consequences for a woman in Kadioloko. That is, the radical changes to social life that have necessitated such declarations put enormous pressure on village women, especially on those whose husbands have left them - and left them in charge of the family. Part of this pressure comes from the sheer increase in workload and responsibility: the provision of food, clothes and schooling all demanding new sources of cash flow. Women typically respond by inventing ways to diversify their income. In the case of Djeneba it has included cooking and selling soup in the village and joining tontines and other associations of women. The majority of village women are part of the tontine which, significantly, has caused them to be in frequent close communication with each other. One of the ideas of this group, for example, is that each woman brings a piece of soap « *gabakourou* » to every Tuesday meeting. All the collected soap is then given to one among them. In fact, this tontine inspired the creation of the village women's association. Only women who are members are eligible for credit from Soro Yiriwaton. The president of the association is Nountegue Sogoba.

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<sup>35</sup> Nono's daughter

When my husband went into San town, as often as possible, he sent me money. But the money he sent was not enough so I just told myself to get going and try some other activities.

Then I sent a letter to my brother and asked for help. He sent me money which allowed me to start my first business: buying salt, hot-pepper and dried-fish from the weekly market and then re-selling it here in the village.

After that, about 6 years ago, I returned to Yasso<sup>36</sup> market. I went there to buy the heads of goats, sheep and cattle to start a little business, making soup that I sold in the village. The children helped me a lot, if it wasn't for their help I wouldn't have been able to continue. They helped me with all the cooking and selling to our customers, even at night. As Eliza says...you cannot have money without suffering. So we put up with the fatigue it brings because for someone who has children it is impossible to remain inactive.

“With the advent and the persistence of the experience of being the head of the household, women tend to intensify and diversify their associated activities”<sup>37</sup> (Tichit, 1996). This means there are greater opportunities for active participation in association which are a way to alleviate emotional and social isolation.

Djeneba is a member of diverse tontines and groups such as the Association of Women of the Church, the Association of Village Women which has access to credit through Soro Yiriwaton. There are also associations which enable women to develop their own enterprises and an in-group culture. One group, for example, organises its members to winnow crops for other villagers on a fee-for-service basis.

But the only thing I dislike about Soro Yiriwaton is that it is not very private. Everyone knows how much everyone has borrowed and how much they have repaid. If you managed to repay your loan you are regarded well but if not, people will start talking about you behind your back.

### **a.) Analysis of Village Associations**

Unlike in the case of some villages in Northern Mali, there are no specific organizations here for women whose husbands are no longer present in the home. Thus we might assume that

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<sup>36</sup> Yasso is a Bobo village. It is about 5km from Kadioloko. The weekly market of Yasso is one of the most important ones for Kadioloko woman.

<sup>37</sup> My translation

such women aren't thought of as holding a particular status vis-à-vis other women in the village. In any case, these women would rarely openly lay claim to being the mainstay of the family. Those whose husbands are alive but absent would be more likely to say only that "I'm just helping my husband out"; The widows amongst them, only that "I'm just helping my children to get by". Just how these women have thus become actively involved in the normalization of their own extraordinary situation may be explained by, what we might call, an 'epistemology of modesty'<sup>38\*</sup> at play within the culture, or rather, within the feminine sub-culture. Rosander (2004) raises interesting questions in the introduction to begin the discussion, such as whether these associations work to change the inequities in society or support the current norms, how the different female identities interrelate, and how collectivity relates to individual identity (pp. 11-17). She demonstrates how women in Africa generally are well able to employ their various associations to transform their social, economic and professional identities. That is, in the context of continued systemic subordination of women; of their inadequate, unequal access to political, social and economic power.

#### **b.) What is the income from these activities?**

It might be difficult to speak in terms of labour-derived income in cases like Djeneba's because so many of her activities are not formalized. That is, there is no stable, ongoing income from that work that she can rely on. Whenever I asked questions of village women about how much they earned per week, or month, the response was always the same. As Djeneba, herself, put it "Well, I'm just doing my best ... with God's help". She explained her financial obligations as being in charge of the economic needs of her children and daughter-in-law.

Regarding cash advances from Soro Yiriwaton, women, of course, use them for a variety purposes. The most common ones, though, are the purchase of fertilizer - and other agricultural inputs - and paying workers to help in the fields. With what's left they typically implement AGRs, just, for example as Djeneba did: "At the next Yasso market I will buy two sheep that we will raise in order to help the campaign"<sup>39</sup>. "Which campaign?" I asked. "The campaign of Tabasky." said Djeneba. "Later, traders will come to us to buy the sheep for selling at a higher price in Bamako".

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<sup>38</sup> A phrase applied in a different context by filmmaker/teacher Gary Kildea.

<sup>39</sup> By campaign they are referring to the electoral ambitions of politicians.

Usually the bank grants a loan to each woman according to its assessment of her ability to repay it. Accordingly Djeneba, Nana, Leré, and Mbougou Mpe were able to borrow, respectively, the sums of 75,000F CFA, 100,000F CFA, 75,000F CFA and 100,000F CFA. Since such loans are granted exclusively to women, a few men living in the village have been able to obtain credit through their wives. Leré, for example, received 75.000F CFA at the request of her husband. They'd been relying on the sale of a sheep they were raising to repay the money but unfortunately the sheep died. The repayment was then spread over 8 months.

Since so many of the income producing activities of women are informal, their efforts often remain invisible. They strive endlessly to produce a household surplus but the economic quantification of this kind of participation is difficult to calculate. It's hard to talk about labor as wage-generator when there is, in fact, little separation between what is purely economic and what is domestic activity. The logic that impels the everyday striving of these female heads-of-household is, first and foremost, that of the survival and the sustainability of their families. So what we must understand in this context that in West Africa, investment means alliance in which obligation and tribute allow individuals to work the system to fulfill needs and gain a measure of security (Rain, 1999: 221).

## **5.8 Out of pain, the gain of successful enterprise**

### **a.) Fact of migration**

One night I met a few women at Agnes' place (a local teacher). Some of them were the heads of their respective households and some were not. There was no restriction on the topic of discussion, but mostly they prefer to discuss about their responsibilities among their households. I also had some talks with the men. But, with the men it was not any organized meeting. I had to join them in their homes. From my nocturnal threads with women to the interview guide with men, I conclude the migration is not a new phenomenon in Kadioloko. With the exception of Nono and Nah (two of the four eldest people in the village), Because of a lack of financial opportunities in the village, people is in constant flux as work becomes available elsewhere.

Many authors have extensively studied the phenomenon of migration in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this context I will use the term of circular mobility (Rain, 1999). It seems more useful in this context than the concept of long-term migration used by Sally Findlay (Findlay 1987, 1992). To understand the phenomena circular mobility in Kadioloko, we must browse the

concept of family as unity of production for Minyanka people to enlighten us about the complexity of men and women responsibilities.

Twenty people (men and women) I talked to have personal experience with migration. Their age ranges between 25 to 65 years old for Men and they used to go to San, Bamako and Ivory Coast. Women started in San town after Bamako and few have been in Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso). They age ranges between 23 to 58 years old.

From people's explanation it is because of a lack of financial opportunities in the village, that they are in constant flux as work and becomes available elsewhere. The common point between the men and women is that the majority of them have experienced migration, though depending on time, space and marital status. Many women also do migrate with their husbands. Contrary to people in Guidan Wari describe by Rain (1999), married women in Kadioloko do not migrate without their husband. It is only in the case of being divorced which is quite less common.

We can divide the different forms of migration of men in three categories. From 20 couples, only 2 women accompanied their husbands, and 18 remained in the village. Among 18 women remaining in the village, the husbands of the five left for a short term ranging from 3 to 9 months. For the rest 13 women remained in the village, migration is a long term of up to 3 years and some men decided to settle in town with irregular visits to the family in some cases.

Women in this last category including Djeneba, have learned to perform administrative tasks (enrolment, withdrawal of transfers), using various legal institutions, economic, social public spaces that line as the system of micro finance, like *Soro Yriwaton* through village cooperatives. They are now used to take an active part into the male sphere of the village which allowed them to participate in case administrative and management tasks of the village, like women of Lesotho, has been described by Martha Mueller (1977). This active participation at different instances of the village develop in them a spirit of activism, following the realization of its ability to economically support their families, as such women observed in India (Sai Rajani 1982). So, the survival and the accumulation of means constitute contributions to the lineage, as well as satisfying personal goals. The financial aspects of motherly and kinship responsibilities drive a woman on, to ensure a steady, personal income rather than it discouraging her participation in paid work. To some extent

this creates a conflict between motherhood and wifehood, in which personal services play a more central role (Gracia, 1994: 338).

## **b.) Intervention of development program**

Many development interventions have been introduced into the southern part of Mali. The donor agencies, as well as the Malian State, became the means through which the rural population gained access to resources.

To help these communities the state has established a system of agricultural loans through micro-credit systems which allocate funds to heads of qualifying households according to need.

But despite these grants of agricultural loans, men have continued to leave the village, to travel outside the country, and the number of women left-behind with children continues to increase. This situation has actually caused the procedures for gaining access to agricultural loans reverse over time. Whereas credit was, in the past, only given to men, nowadays it is exclusively women who are able to have access to credit in Kadioloko village.

Action against rural poverty is not just a question for the state, nor for locally based international organizations, nor for local NGOs, important though their activities may be. In fact, the lifeworlds of village people consist of innumerable daily actions that attempt to alleviate their own hardship, from trying to secure ways of growing more food, to earning extra income, to negotiating the distribution of resources within households. These daily struggles may be accompanied by individual and collective actions to subvert or defeat structures which reinforce poverty (Johnson, 1992: 274).

The broad acknowledgment of the neglect of the status of women in the past, has led to present interventions being targeted equally at rural women and men. In fact, sometimes women are more than men reflecting current emphasis on female participation in development. Initially the designers of programs and projects saw rural societies as mere passive recipients and their own development interventions as the primary focus of action. The people of rural societies were taken as passive actors; awaiting help and/or empowerment by outsiders - as if their whole existence and subsistence was based on passivity. That is, as if their livelihoods were totally dependent on the state; an example of which may be the introduction of *Soro Yriwa Ton* in Kadioloko.

However, in reality, people continuously and independently manage their livelihoods, and devise their own strategies to cope with their everyday lives. In others words, while planners plan for the targeted population, the targeted ones themselves have their own ways of striving for a better life. Clearly there's a need to recognize the great variety of activities organized apart from, without the intervention of, state initiated development projects.

Initially encourage by the CMDT (Compagnie Malienne pour le Developpement du Textile) (Jonckers, 1987), people in the village began a functional literacy program. And forming an "AV" (Association villageoise) was a step intended to simplify the marketing of agricultural products and promoting access to credit. As Djeneba said, "Previously, people in the village were frightened by stories of banks and credit. But now, because of our worsening circumstances we're now prepared to take a chance and see what happens."

During the all process Djeneba's husband and her neighbors has been a key informant to my work. The understanding that I acquire through them and mostly from my daily conversation with Nono has been of great relevance to my understanding of Djeneba's situation and strategies she decides upon. As her choice of Christianity, and how the joking practice that is usually between ethnic groups/families and clans is introduced into the gender field.

## CONCLUSION

This study has looked at changes in household management as a series of dynamic processes with women assuming family responsibilities formerly controlled exclusively by men. It's examined these phenomena in terms of social change as well as of cultural continuity. In doing so, it's been necessary to establish the relations between individuals and their social networks; the complex re-negotiation of cultural identities. In this case-study of Kadioloko village I hope to have shown how qualitative anthropological research has contributed to an understanding of how Minyanka women - having been forced into the realms of men - have dealt with the situation. How, on the one hand, they've developed new skills - introduced change - and, on the other, reproduced certain normative modes.

I have come to reflect on how my original ideas and hypotheses have developed through this extended process of research, interaction and re-integration. Perhaps this is a bit like the transformations in social relations that we anthropologists set out to investigate.

Ethnographic data collected for this thesis has clearly shown that taking over men's responsibilities in everyday life has been a tough challenge for women. A traditional Minyanka woman would only have ever identified herself as someone who stays at the back, a less significant part of the household. This was the only status allowed her, demanded of her, in fact. In this sense alone, the fact of any woman daring to express her ideas in realms formerly forbidden, couldn't help but generate disorder; a generally disconcerting confusion of identities.

It follows then, that for the community to understand and accept the choices of Djeneba and her children - and of woman generally - it needs to understand and appreciate the dynamic processes they've had to live through: the dislocation of the customary big family (*Gbun*); its reduction in size; the out-migration of men and the implicit passing over of family responsibility to women. These observed phenomena, I believe, go towards supporting my underlying hypothesis: in order to succeed in the new roles thrust upon her by historical, cultural circumstance, a Minyanka woman is forced to transgress some basic laws of the very culture that formed her. And this, needless to say, is a big challenge for a woman. She faces many direct and implied instances of discrimination. In Djeneba's case, these even included being called "*Tiekoolouchifo*". The purpose of such name-calling, of course, is to discourage those who might tend to regard women such as her as positive examples. This is because the



circle of men – as traditionally constituted - is taken to be a necessary source of continuity and security. Therefore, for a society or community to accept the social re-adaptation of women, it must be able to understand these underlying dynamics; the totality of the socio-historical processes in play. Those include, as we've seen, the dislocation of the family as the basic unit of production by the absence of men and the subsequent taking on of men's responsibilities by woman. In the process, a woman's status can't help but change, in the first place from that of wife to head-of-household. Subsequently a woman's extended responsibilities lead to altered interactions with other family members and with the community in general. This is historically important because it marks the beginning of the end of some of a woman's traditional bonds; the economic subordination to the *Gbun*. Thus a woman's status as social actor changes in many ways. Djeneba, for example, has as a mother, been pushed into the men's circle to discuss her children's marriage arrangements. This supports one of my hypotheses: that surviving as a head-of-household necessitates the breaking of existing relational bonds. And Djeneba has, in time, learned very well to interact with many people in what are, for her, novel contexts. According to my second hypothesis, this process has involved the forced changing of some rules whilst others have been merely reproduced.

At the beginning of my fieldwork my focus was on the re-adaptation of young girls recently returned home after periods away as labour migrants. But the issue of women as heads of households became even more interesting from the perspective of social change and the reproduction of social continuity. Women's identity has changed radically over these last ten years. I found it difficult to comprehend how someone so well regarded within her family and the community, an exemplary head-of-household could, nevertheless, at the same time, be derogated as a "*chiekoulouchifo*". The explanation seems to be, in part, that she was a woman forced to operate in a men's world into which she has not been effectively integrated. The reality is that only time will afford her proper acceptance in that realm; more everyday interaction. The same applies to other women living there. As my fieldwork progressed, I realized that it had really not been easy for her; that all she'd wanted was a little understanding of the circumstances she faced instead of being subjected to unreasoned judgment. Especially later, during the editing of my film 'Djeneba', I came to feel that I was gaining a much deeper understanding of her; the complexity of her personality and of her situation. Despite her acute consciousness regarding her own situation her main preoccupation was with her children's lives, with the hope that they'd get better chances than she'd had. And yet, she didn't encourage her children in any kind of rejection of the status quo. She wanted

them to study at school so they could improve their way of life, to that extent to bring about change. But at the same time she impressed on them the importance of being a good Minyanka person; to that extent, to conserve continuity.

I am at this point admitting that in the vein of continuity, woman identity has been changed. The changes that have impact on my life from Djeneba point of view. Because she never did consider me as a *Namputcho*<sup>40</sup> but rather as a daughter, one that she'd like to keep around her. And she sometimes said how happy my parents must be to have a daughter who has travelled so far away to study; a highly educated girl, who came to the village to do research about her life. This seemed to give her confidence somehow, when she moved around interacting with people in Kadioloko. It's as if my association with her afforded her some kind of legitimacy in the community. Nevertheless, there was always the need for her to strive, to go about pursuing her many objectives; always the need for her to grow ever stronger.

In any case, women in Kadioloko are now ever more on the rise as part of the job force. And more girls continue to go to school. Hopefully, in the future, they'll hold down important corporate jobs. Meanwhile, men continue to travel away. What will this mean for the village in the future? It means, for one thing, that more men might lose the title of 'provider' of their families and more women must therefore become primary supports. This might raise some new questions such as: *can men handle a woman making more money in the household?* There have been various responses to this question, with myself falling on the side that thinks that it will indeed be hard for them to handle it. But I think that they'd have a better chance of handling it if they were more often available in the village. For losing the title of provider, men might well develop insecurities. But some men say that they would probably be able to deal with it if it were not for the way women themselves handle the situation. People seem to use such thought processes to identify themselves with quite different situations. But in any case, women continue to win understanding from their families and communities through gradual processes of both formal and informal education. People will, before long, be in a position to accept a new status for women in their everyday lifeworld in Kadioloko.

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<sup>40</sup> To be referred to the page 31 for translation

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