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**Families in movement: transformation of the family in urban Mali,
with a focus on intercontinental mobility**

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Families in movement

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Families in movement

Transformation of the family in urban Mali,
with a focus on intercontinental mobility

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Preface

This book is the winner of the Africa Thesis Award 2008. The jury's report included the following comments:

The jury is very impressed by the quality of Janneke Barten's thesis, which looks at changing family relations in Malian cities and among Malian migrants in The Netherlands. According to the author, these changes are: the growing importance of consumption, changing sexual norms, the upcoming individualism and conflicts with the extended family. It is 'not anymore as it used to be'. Malian migrants in The Netherlands are far away from the often galling social norms in Mali and newly shape family relations. They do keep in touch with the family back home (mainly by mobile phone), but also succeed in keeping their demanding family members at a distance. Men prefer a European residence permit (sometimes through a relationship with an older Dutch woman) above the responsibility of a family with many children in Mali. Family relations are very dynamic, with global mobility and increasing individualism playing an important role. In Janneke's words: "The time that in sociology or anthropology one could speak of 'the African family' lies behind us."

By in-depth interviewing Malian migrants, both in Mali and in The Netherlands, and by asking the right questions and listening very carefully, Janneke collected a unique data set. As a result, she succeeds in presenting a very good view of the problems these African migrants face. The jury's only critical remark is that the theoretical framework is rather limited and not consistently applied.

Janneke's thesis has a high level of societal relevance and, because African migration to Europe is a hot topic, is clearly also meant for a wider audience. The thesis describes the problems of these migrants who come to Europe, helps to understand them and provides perspectives from two sides, namely those who want to leave Africa and those struggling to find their feet in Europe. We all know the pictures of the young men and women who dare to cross the sea by boat or other means. If they manage to get here, there is still the problem of integration. In this thesis, these problems became clear in a painful way.

Tunga-ra ge lou

Tunga-ra-ge lou, Tunga-ma-dameedon-sike
Tunga Magny
Ni ta-ra tunga la, Ni ta-ra diamana yalala
Ni bora-I-fa gun koro, Ni bora I nageba bere koro
Dungo dungo mirrydun
Dungo dungo Hami
Malidenw Niwala dun-ny-ya sigi-la
Tunga magny

Adventurers

Adventurers, the adventure does not know your value
Adventure is bad
When you went on adventure, when you went to go walking around the world
When you are leaving your fathers place,
when you are leaving your mothers place
Always and every day you have in mind that it's not good
You are always thinking
Children of Mali, wherever you are sitting in the world
Adventure is bad

Song from Awa, translated by Issa.

Contents

Acknowledgements *ix*

Abstract *x*

1. Introduction *1*

The background of this study: Staying at Fanta's *1*

Explanation of concepts *5*

Research area and population *7*

Methodology *9*

Contents of this thesis *11*

2. Migration studies and the family – Literature review *13*

Introduction *13*

Overview of migration flows: numbers and patterns *13*

Brief historical context *15*

Economic and structural approaches *16*

Cultural and social approaches *18*

Transnationalism *20*

Migration and development *22*

Conclusion *24*

3. Family dynamics in contemporary urban Africa – Literature review *26*

Introduction *26*

From the 'traditional' to the 'modern' family *27*

Family in crisis? *30*

Family as a social network *31*

Family versus individualism *33*

Women, consumption, and sexuality *35*

Conclusion *37*

4. Family dynamics in Mali – A case study from Segou *39*

Introduction *39*

Composition of the quarter and livelihoods *40*

Migration patterns *44*

Extended family: They come and wait until the food is brought *47*

Marriage: I'd rather have my own house *49*

The importance of consumption *51*

Young people and Europe *53*

Conclusion *57*

| | |
|--|-----|
| 5. The African individual in Europe? – Stories of Malian migrants in The Netherlands | 61 |
| Introduction | 61 |
| General information about Malian migrants in The Netherlands | 62 |
| Knowledge gap | 64 |
| Eternal wish to return | 68 |
| Imagination | 69 |
| Extended family | 71 |
| From the Malian social to Dutch individualism | 76 |
| Sexual and romantic relations between Malians and Dutch | 83 |
| Conclusion | 87 |
| 6. Conclusion | 89 |
| References | 95 |
| Appendix 1: Overview of economic activities of men and women | 99 |
| Appendix 2: Number of migrants per country | 100 |
| Appendix 3: Contact with migrated family and remittances | 101 |
| Appendix 4: Migration background Medine | 102 |

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I would like to use this space to thank several people who have helped me ‘giving birth to my thesis’, or in other words the whole intensive process of doing research and writing this report.

First, and most of all, I would like to thank my respondents. The people in Medine, Segou, who without exception opened their doors for an unknown white girl who fired questions at them without shame. And the Malian migrants in The Netherlands, who warmly invited me and often didn’t need much time to go into very personal stories. I am grateful for their time and confidence.

Also thanks to my supervisors, Mirjam de Bruijn and Alberto Arce. They have helped me with all their questions, comments and suggestions, but their personal support was just as important.

One day, I was in quite an uncomfortable situation. I had a high fever, was lying in a room in Bamako that was small, hot and unclean, there were noisy people with a radio around me, and a young nurse, still at school, tried his best to give me a drip infusion. He just could not find the vein. Exactly at that moment Mirjam, my guardian angel, came in. She got me out of that place and a couple of days later brought me back to The Netherlands. ‘The woman who saved your life’ is what my parents still call her and what more could you possibly ask from a supervisor?

Thinking about Alberto, another image comes up. We are sitting in a room and keep on talking for hours. Nobody else was ready to listen to my complaints in moments of despair, boredom or discomfort with the academic system in such a sympathetic way. He somehow always managed to turn it back into enthusiasm and inspiration, so I could move on.

Further, I would like to express my gratitude to the Malian consulate in The Netherlands for kindly providing me with very helpful information, and to the association of Malian women in The Netherlands for inviting me and helping me to get into the Malian community. Also thanks to Lotte Pelckmans for her helpful suggestions, and thanks to Helen for hours of proofreading!

Finally, I would like to thank my friends, my parents and my friend Issa Sangare for moral support whenever needed, my uncle Guillaume and aunt Aleid for all the hours of tea, TV and necessary relaxation, and my cousin Egbert for letting me use his home cinema as a living and working place. In Mali, there are many people who have assisted and inspired me, but I would especially like to mention and thank Kama Sissoko, Bengaly Dia and the family H. Bagayoko. They helped and supported me and made me feel like an insider in the complexity and beauty of Malian life.

Abstract

This thesis is about the transformation of family relations in urban Mali, with a focus on intercontinental mobility. The main question is in which ways family relations are transforming, both in urban Mali and for Malian migrants in Europe, and what insights this offers for the use of the concept ‘family’ in social sciences. This can be an interesting addition both for migration studies, which do not always go very much into family relations, and for studies about social changes in modern Africa.

Considering changes in family relations in urban Africa, a literature study has shown different processes and approaches. The family can be seen as a social network, and thereby as a way to achieve things. Other studies point to an upcoming individualism. Other changing processes are the increasing importance of consumption and, connected to that, changing sexual norms and values.

Similar developments were found in a case study of a family in Segou. By looking at marriage, relations to the extended family, the importance of consumption and the widespread wish and practice of migration among youth, it was shown how family relations are subject to change. Thus, ‘the African family’ should no longer be spoken about as a system or order of society, as used to be common in anthropology, but attention should be paid to the contemporary dynamics.

Concerning Malian migrants in Europe, in this study limited to The Netherlands, changes in family relations can be seen even more clearly. On the one hand, a distance arises between migrants and their family in Mali, because of changing values in case of a long stay in Europe, and different knowledge that is difficult to transfer. On the other hand, migrants do stay connected to their family through imagination, contact, and the eternal wish to return. Living in Europe, some migrants are totally sheltered by a Malian surrounding, while others consciously distance themselves from Malian social contacts. A new kind of relation that occurs – perhaps a challenge to traditional ideas of the family – is that between a younger Malian man and an older Dutch woman. Hereby, access to a residence permit often plays an important role.

The main conclusions are that the family should not be seen as a ‘fixed category’, but as a dynamic process. An increasing individualism is occurring, especially when people have more options. Finally, family relations of some groups can increasingly be seen as separate from a certain place and because of the normality of mobility in a global context it becomes important to look at global kinship relations.

Introduction

The background of this study: Staying at Fanta's

Fanta was my first female Malian friend. She worked at the petrol station close to where I lived, on the edge of Bamako. She was standing at the pump, the only woman I have ever seen in Mali who did that kind of work. When I passed by to get toilet paper, mineral water or fuel for my little motorbike, we usually had a chat. I invited her for dinner, while she invited me to celebrate the Tabaski feast in her village. When I came back to Bamako one year later, she was one of the first people I visited. I went to a house in the centre of Bamako where she lived with her uncle and aunts, and I ended up staying with the family for some weeks.

I will give a description of the house, some of its inhabitants, and the way they were living together (and without doubt still are). To get a feeling of where I want to go with this thesis, it helps to imagine that particular house in Bamako.

To get there, just call any taxi and ask the driver to take you to the *troisième arrondissement*. This police station in the centre of Bamako is squeezed in between two crowded roads of the kind that can be crossed either with courage and creativity or with a lot of patience. Fanta's uncle, monsieur Dabo, is the head of the police station. He was appointed the house next to the office. It is relatively quiet there, with a small path and strip of grass between the house and the main road.

Arriving at the gate of the yard, you first see a group of young people sitting outside, chatting, drinking tea, or playing cards. It is an unmistakable sight in Mali. At every few houses, such a group is sitting together, at whatever time of day.

When entering the yard you will meet a few women who are sitting together, eating, chatting and drinking tea. Some children are running around and the *bonne* and *boy* are busy with domestic work such as doing laundry, carrying water, cooking, cleaning up the yard or taking care of the goats that walk around the house.

The first room to enter is the living room. The couch takes a central place – and the television no less. When coming in you cannot avoid noticing the couch in the middle and the television in a corner on the ground. In fact, the room is filled with nothing else, except for a cupboard with posh China. An enormous portrait hanging on the wall also catches the attention. It is a picture of Madame when she was still young, with beautiful make-up and a white wedding dress, smiling and in love and looking straight into the camera. Monsieur, a bit chubby and not that young any more, holds her in his arms. She is his second wife. The first wife is looking down at the family from another portrait with a serious expression.

The television is always on, usually showing Malian video clips, except of course in the case of an electricity breakdown. At the end of the dry season, this happens practically every day, because the water power plants do not function so well any more. The available electricity is divided over the different quarters, and most quarters cannot count on more than a few hours of electricity per day. In this quarter, people were happy that the electricity usually came in the evening, just before the favourite soap opera started. For the rest of the day the atmosphere was even lazier than normal, because the television could not provide distraction and the fan could not provide cooling any more.

There are always people on the couch in the living room, day and night. It could be Fanta's nieces or aunts and grandaunts with their children and grandchildren around them. Or it could be cousins, just passing by for a meal and then leaving again. It was practically impossible for me to get to know everybody in the household, because they were so many and there was so much change. 'Where is your uncle actually, with whom I was talking outside the other day?', I asked Fanta. 'Which one? Oh, that one! He is from a village close to Kayes, and he went back to Kayes now.' 'And what about your aunt, the one who could sing so beautifully?' 'Well, she left again.' 'And what about the other woman, with the little child, I didn't see her last time.' 'Yes, she is another aunt, she moved in and took her grandchild.'

In another room, Madame had installed herself. Her privileged position became clear by the fact that her room was the only one with air-conditioning that

was permanently on (it is really a luxury because electricity is expensive in Mali). It is so cold in her room that the children put an extra cloth around them or put on a sweater and cuddle closely together when they are watching television with their mother. Madame has her own TV, in her own room, with her own air-con.

Her daughters – some teenagers and some around twenty – and Fanta share another room. Every girl has a section of the wardrobe with her own key to prevent others from borrowing her things. The girls constantly walk in and out to take their clothes, jewellery and perfume. The bed is reserved for Fanta – and me as a guest. There is always a cousin or aunt sleeping on the ground on a mattress, while the others find a place in the living room on the couch or on the ground. The bedroom is messy in a girly way, with clothes and cosmetic articles spread around everywhere. The walls have once been painted white, but have now turned a kind of yellow with stripes. To keep the mosquitoes out, there is wire gauze in front of the windows, but it is broken and has not been repaired. The fan that is hanging on the ceiling is happily swinging from left to right and I wondered how long it would take to fall down. Everybody assured me that it would not, but to my relief it was screwed more tightly in the end. The women do not bother about these kinds of things. The *boy* is for small jobs, the *bonne* is for cleaning. Once a day she sweeps over the floor indifferently.

The bathroom that is next to the sleeping room is messy in the same way. I find it the most unpleasant place in the house. A bathroom in the house is a kind of luxury, and everybody assumed that I would prefer this to hanging over the hole in the ground that is behind the wall outside. But the hole behind the wall, that almost all houses in Mali have, is usually quite clean, dry and not smelly, which cannot be said about this bathroom inside. The toilet does not flush and bad smells are kept out by a strong odour of incense, which does not make the situation any more pleasant. You can easily see what your predecessor has left in the closet. The shower does not function, but a small stream of water constantly drips out of the tap and over the wall. It is humid and just as unbearably hot as in the rest of the house, except of course for Madame's room. The *bonne* also comes here every day to clean up the worst mess.

One of the things that surprised me most in this house was the slow pace of the inhabitants. Fanta's cousin is studying and goes to university twice a week, i.e. if there are no strikes. The other five days she is lounging on the couch, talking, or going around the house in the most beautiful outfits. I have never seen her look at a book. Fanta's aunt, also beautifully dressed, spends most of her days in her air-con room in front of the TV or outside talking with neighbours and aunts. Another aunt can usually be found lying on the couch.

Fanta's uncle, monsieur Dabo, head of the police station, was the person who kept everything together financially. Without complaining (or perhaps

with, I don't know about that), he donated enough of his salary to provide for the needs of all the children, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, and nephews. Apart from that, he seemed to be quite indifferent to the fate of his household. I have hardly seen him. As an explanation, Madame told me that he left early in the morning to go to work. I didn't dare to ask why he came back in the evening that late.

This is a description of one household, but at the same time it points to certain practices and expresses a kind of atmosphere that is common for households in urban Mali. I hope that this description reflects this atmosphere well enough. The direction I went with this study was in fact determined by my amazement of these kinds of households. So, my main research question was: *What is going on here?*

Many different themes can be deducted from this simple description of a house. It can be about mobility, relations with the extended family, social networks, division of work, social status, marriage, consumerism, sexual relations, polygamy and more. These themes are put together in the main subject of this thesis: family relations in contemporary urban Mali.

Practices in the domain of the family are changing in Mali. I have noticed this by witnessing all kinds of situations when I was staying in the country, such as in the household described above. Later on, I saw it confirmed in other studies, from different disciplinary backgrounds.

The domain of the family is one of the most personal parts of social life, so a description of it comes close to the personal stories of people and their daily life. At the same time, there are not many changes as essential for the way people are living their daily lives (which is in the end for most of us the biggest part of life) as changes in family relations.

The first main objective of this thesis is to translate these observations of ordinary daily life into general processes in society and thereby to put a finger on certain transformations of family relations in Mali. This will be placed in a broader theoretical framework. The second objective is to gain certain insights considering the use of the concept of family in social sciences.

Furthermore, this study focuses on intercontinental mobility, specifically migration from Mali to The Netherlands. There are two reasons for this. The starting point of this study, as further explained in Chapter 2, is the idea that mobility is such an important part of the social life of many groups in Africa – and this certainly counts for the group this thesis focuses on – that the aspect of mobility should always be taken into account to be able to understand social relations. In studies on social and family relations this is often not the case, so

special attention to the aspect of mobility can be seen as an addition. The second reason is that changes in family relations are more noticeable for migrants than for people residing in Mali. By encompassing migrants in the research, it is possible to get a better view on processes that do take place in Mali but are not always very visible.

Because of the combination of mobility and family relations, this study is interesting both for those interested in changing social relations in contemporary Africa and for those interested in (intercontinental) mobility. What is often lacking in migration studies, as argued more extensively in Chapter 2, is a profound interest in social relations and how they are experienced and lived by migrants. *When* attention is paid to family relations, it is usually in support of subjects like remittances or return migration and not as an issue in its own right. Therefore, it is often not possible to find a broader view, and in certain cases even very contestable conclusions are drawn. This study – which is of an exploratory nature – can thus be an addition.

Considering social relations, I have already remarked that mobility does not always get the attention it deserves. Mobility might be an aspect of African social life that is as normal for the people as it is difficult to grasp for the researchers. Also in that respect, this study can hopefully provide additional material.

The two main research questions are thus as follows:

1. In what ways are family relations transforming, both in urban Mali and for Malian migrants in Europe, specifically The Netherlands?
2. What insights does this offer for the use of the concept of family in social sciences?

Explanation of concepts

Three important concepts that need some explanation are *family*, *migration* and *mobility* (and *migration*). I will discuss these and explain the way they are used in this thesis.

The concept of *family* is tricky. Although what is meant by it does not seem so difficult, the story about Fanta's place illustrates that it is not that easy. Who is part of her family? Her parents in the village who she has not seen for years, her great-aunt who suddenly appears and then suddenly leaves again for an unknown period, her husband with whom she is not in contact but who she never officially divorced, or a good friend where she moves in for months as if it were her own house? Especially in an African context, the concept of family can be stretched eternally, just depending on the enthusiasm of the researcher.

The concept of *household* is often used as an alternative and seems clearer. It is sometimes defined as the people who share a cooking pot. But again, a look at Fanta's household is enough to show that this situation is also dynamic. Besides, when translating 'family' into 'household', many aspects get lost, because family relations encompass much more than just some people living together.

For this study, it is in fact not that necessary to restrict the subject, on the contrary. Because the aim is to study changes in family relations, a restriction could limit the possible outcomes. Therefore, as a guideline, I have used how people themselves talk about their family. For the survey carried out in Segou (see Chapter 4), people were asked about their migrated family members and they could decide for themselves whom to include. However, other social contacts were also taken into account, such as friendships and romantic and sexual relations.

Just as family, migration is a concept that seems easy at first sight and gets more complex when using it. A simple and seemingly obvious definition of migration is the one used by Held (1999: 283): 'At its simplest, migration refers to the movement of people from one geographical location to another within and beyond a country of normal residence.'

At a first glance, this definition is clear. However, when translating it to the measurement of migration, things get more complex. 'When writing on migration, authors usually distinguish various types, but these distinctions are seldom based on clearly defined criteria', Van Dijk *et al.* (2001) state. To describe the large variety of migration, they have used six criteria: the geo-administrative level (distinction between international and intra-national), area of destination (from/to rural from/to urban), duration (permanent, temporary, circular, or anything else), choice (forced or voluntary), legality, and motivation (e.g. labour migration). These criteria point at a wide diversity in types of migrants. Depending on the type of study, it should at least be made clear what kind of migrants are being studied.

Another concept that is often used, especially in social and anthropological studies, is mobility. Van Dijk *et al.* (2001) prefer using the concept of mobility above migration, because it encompasses other types of moving, such as mobility as a way of life. It also includes non-human and non-material aspects such as ideas and values. Another advantage seems to me that mobility implies a way of moving that is less static, more dynamic. It offers a way out of the implication that seems to be in the term migration, namely that it is a movement from A to B, end of story.

In this study the term intercontinental mobility is preferred above intercontinental migration because of the very nature of the mobile experiences of the people concerned. Although people are often labelled as 'labour migrant', they may have moved for various reasons, such as study, curiosity (just to look

around), to gain experiences or marriage, and these reasons often change over time (this is described in more detail in Chapter 5). Often more by coincidence than by choice, they became labour migrants over the years but do not always see themselves as such. Because of this flexibility and change, the concept of mobility seemed more suitable. However, I have used both migration and mobility in this thesis, and to keep things simple I often refer to the Malian people in The Netherlands as migrants.

The type of migration that is meant here is voluntary migration from urban areas in Mali to Europe (particularly The Netherlands), both with and without a residence permit. Different motivations can play a role and the stay in Europe has a length of at least several years.

Another term – not used in literature but it is used in discourse – is *adventure*. When talking about a certain type of migration, people in Mali use the term *aventure* in French or *tunga* in Bamana. To explain it, I have to recall the conversation I had with the woman who first explained the term to me.

‘Do you think your trip to Mali was an adventure?’, she asked. I replied ‘Yes, it was, to me it was quite a step into the unknown’. ‘No’, she told me, ‘you had everything arranged! You knew where you were going to live, where you were going to work, that you would have some income. Real adventure is the exact opposite of that. You will have to manage without any securities, you don’t know what will happen to you.’

Adventure is the phenomenon of people leaving their place of residence in a very insecure way. There is ambivalence in the term, of something positive and exciting, on the one hand, and something dangerous and not very desirable, on the other. I did not particularly go into using adventure as an alternative concept for mobility or migration. It would complicate things, and besides, not all forms of mobility of the Malians respondents in The Netherlands can be described as adventure. Adventure was mainly used in conversations with people when doing the survey.

Research area and population

This research was carried out in the cities Bamako and Segou in Mali and in different places in The Netherlands. Why Mali? Why The Netherlands? The starting point of the study was an interest in mobility from Africa to Europe. Mali is a country with one of the highest rates of out-migration in West Africa (Black & King 2004). People of Malian origin can be found in many countries all over Africa, in Europe, the United States and elsewhere in the world. The mobility of others also has considerable impact on the lives of people who stay behind and is thus omnipresent in Malian society.

Map of Mali

Another reason for focusing on Mali was the fact that the researcher was familiar with the area. The Netherlands was chosen for practical reasons. Later it turned out that because there is only a small Malian community, in comparison to for example France, the findings about changing social relations were even more interesting.

This study focuses on urban areas. For the kind of changes in social relations that are described, rural areas were not taken into account. Even if the same processes would take place in rural areas, they would follow different dynamics and therefore make another study.

The part of the population that this study specifically deals with is the wealthier part. What I mean by this is explained in more detail in the first half of Chapter 4, but it roughly means the ‘kind of people’ who have an office job, have finished higher education and who can afford some luxuries such as a television, nice furniture in the house, a car, etc. It is the kind of people who manage to obtain a sum of money to be able to go to Europe by plane on a

tourist visa. It does not mean the absolute upper class, but roughly the richer third of the population. For this group, intercontinental mobility is a very common phenomenon, much more than for poorer people who often have the desire but not the means. Another reason for concentrating on the 'wealthier urban' in Mali was that the community of Malian migrants in The Netherlands almost only consists of people who are grown up in urban areas and come from richer families.

The study was carried out in Mali and among Malians in The Netherlands, and in the conclusion findings are discussed considering the family relations of a specific group. That does not mean that these findings have to be limited to this group, they could be similar for other groups of African migrants and for other countries in Europe. Yet, in this thesis, I will not claim anything like that, due to lack of founded material. The reader who is familiar with other, comparable situations can draw his or her own conclusions.

Methodology

In total, it has taken almost a year to carry out this study. Two main periods were important for gathering data. I first stayed about two months in Mali (Bamako and Segou), followed by a period of about three months of gathering data among Malian migrants in The Netherlands. This multi-locational way of data collection was very important for this study.

By collecting ethnographic material in Mali, I could get an understanding of the way family relations are functioning and changing there. Because of this, it was possible to ask Malian migrants in The Netherlands certain questions – and interpret their answers – in a way that otherwise would never have been possible.

There was also a practical advantage. My stay in Mali has without doubt helped in making contact with Malian migrants, if necessary even by speaking some Bamana. From the beginning, they were very open in interviews.

The last – and probably most important – reason for a study in different places is that different kinds of insights can be obtained. By limiting a research area, the kind of outcome is also limited. For example, in research about social relations and family relations in Africa, relations with migrants are often not included, although a large part of the families might stay in contact with several migrated family members. For me, it was only possible to come to a certain understanding of family relations when they were not restricted to one geographical location, in the same way people themselves do not restrict their relations. In this way, I have tried to come closer to the experiences of people, without clinging to the pre-set scientific categories too much.

This research is of an exploratory nature. The idea was to look at changes in family relations in an open way, to see how social practices are changing, how people perceive those changes, how they act them out in daily life and how new kinds of relations develop. The research method deemed most useful for that purpose was qualitative research in the form of participatory observation and in-depth 'official' interviews as well as informal conversations. For basic contextual information about mobility, a mostly quantitative survey was also carried out. The different methods that were used included:

- Literature research.
- Ethnographic research in Segou and Bamako: observations and informal conversations with people in urban areas within the context of their households. This included two case studies of households where I have stayed for several weeks.
- Quantitative research in Segou: a survey among 74 households in the same quarter.
- Ethnographic research in The Netherlands: informal meetings and conversations, going out, visits, etc. It included making contact, observation of social life and personal relationships.
- In-depth semi-structured interviews with seven migrants, which mostly included several visits.

Some specific information about the survey in Segou and the interviews in The Netherlands

• Survey in Segou

This survey was carried out in Segou, in the Medine quarter. Segou is a larger city in central Mali, which is not especially known for high rates of migration like for example the Kayes region in the west. I do not claim that the results are representative of a larger area, but they are at least a rough indication of migration from other urban areas in Mali.

The Medine quarter can be seen as a common quarter and according to the citizens it does not differ in a special way from other quarters concerning welfare, professions, age, ethnic groups, or otherwise. The survey can be seen as fairly representative of Medine. I estimated that there were about one thousand houses in Medine; 74 of these were part of the survey that was carried out during about two weeks. The households were selected at random and were without exception willing to take part in the research. The survey was carried out together with a Malian sociologist, who assisted as translator and gave cultural advice as well.

There were also some constraints. In Chapter 2, it is explained how difficult it is to get reliable data about migration and this survey also has its limitations.

The most important problem was trust, or rather, the lack of it. Many respondents had never taken part in a survey before, they had not been through higher education, and could hardly imagine the aim of all the questions that were posed. Although nobody refused to cooperate, some respondents were hesitant in responding to questions. In addition, migration is also a difficult subject because of the illegality in which many migrants find themselves. In some cases, people probably feared that the results of the survey would be shared with authorities, or something comparable. Nevertheless, we always got answers to our primary questions, while part of the information was gained by observation.

The main aim of the survey was to find out the characteristics of different kinds of households and their different (intercontinental) migration patterns, as a quantitative background of the case study in Segou. This also led to the decision to focus this research on the wealthier households. Results are presented in the first part of Chapter 4.

- Research in The Netherlands

In The Netherlands, I found my respondents through the Malian consulate, the association of Malian women, Dutch acquaintances who have been in Mali, and later via other respondents. In all, I have met about 30 people; with seven I had in-depth interviews, while others I occasionally met and talked to. The general estimation is that there are no more than a few hundred Malian people living in The Netherlands. Not all people who are staying in The Netherlands are registered at the consulate (about 50 addresses), not all women have joined the association and not all men keep in touch with other men.

I cannot claim that this research is representative of all Malian migrants in The Netherlands, because the number of Malian migrants is no more than a rough estimation and is, in fact, unknown. However, I have looked for a variety of respondents: both men and women, both married (to Dutch and Malian partners) and single, residing in different parts of The Netherlands, and both with and without a residence permit. This resulted in a great variety of stories, but also with many common elements. The people without a residence permit are slightly under-represented, because I found it more difficult to get in touch with them. However, by talking about previous experiences of others, I could still get information about this kind of living.

An important ingredient of my ethnographic research both in Mali and in The Netherlands was my personal involvement with some of the people concerned. This permitted me to get access to information that would otherwise have been difficult to obtain. On the other hand, it also created a dilemma: how much of the personal information of both respondents and myself do I want to share with an unknown outside world? I have tried to make up the right balance and

decided not to cover certain topics here. Still, I think that there is more than enough information in this thesis to be able to reach a conclusion. For the sake of privacy, names and some places have been changed.

Contents of the thesis

The thesis is divided into a part based on literature study and a part based on own research. The latter part is split up into two chapters that are based on fieldwork carried out in Mali and in The Netherlands, respectively.

Chapter 2 starts with a literature review of migration studies. To get an overview, different disciplines in migration studies are discussed, from structural economic approaches to cultural and social approaches, studies about transnationalism and about migration and development. Attention is paid to the way ‘family’ is used in these studies and what insights into family relations are offered. It leads to the conclusion that to get to an understanding of family relations and mobility, it is necessary to delve deeper into the subject of changing social relations in Africa. This is done in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3 is also based on literature study, but from the angle of ‘family’ and social relations in Africa; Mali in particular. First, the issue of *tradition* versus *modernity* is tackled by looking critically at the way family was studied in classical anthropology. Then, different approaches to processes of change in contemporary Africa are discussed: family as a social network, individualism, and the theme of women, consumption and sexuality.

In Chapter 4, these issues are further explored by using own research material from Bamako and Segou. First, the results of a survey are discussed, to give the necessary contextual information about livelihoods and migration patterns. Then one family is used as a case study, to look more closely at processes of change such as marriage, relations with the extended family, consumerism and the future ideas of youth. In the end, the findings from the case study in Chapter 4 are compared with the literature discussed in Chapter 3.

Subsequently, in Chapter 5 we move on to The Netherlands and to the lives of Malian migrants in particular. In many personal stories, mostly direct citations from interviews, they tell of their experiences with family and social relations, both in Mali and in The Netherlands. Particular aspects come to the forefront, such as knowledge, the wish to return, imagination, the extended family, individualism and sexual and romantic relations.

In the Conclusion, three main insights from this thesis about the transformation of family relations are explained: the family as a dynamic process, a turn to individualization and ‘towards global kinship relations’.

Migration studies and the family – Literature review

For a literature review of the subject of family relations and intercontinental mobility, I first looked at what is known about this subject in migration studies. This was not an easy assignment. Literature about migration is abundant and comes from different disciplines, so it is impossible to be complete in this chapter. But to bring some order in the academic chaos, this chapter at least provides an overview of some important approaches in migration studies: economic/structural, social/cultural, migration and development, and the idea of transnationalism. With their usefulness for this thesis in mind, I have looked critically at these different approaches, considering the way the concept of family is used, as well as other insights that could be used. At the end of the chapter it is explained in what way this thesis can be an addition to existing studies. But to get an idea of the phenomenon, first some figures and statistics and a brief historical context are presented.

Overview of migration flows: numbers and patterns

A logical primary question in any kind of study about migration would be to find out the number of migrants and their patterns of movement. This is already one of the most difficult questions. Almost every study starts by mentioning how difficult it is to get reliable data about migration. It seems that human movement is not so easy to capture in numbers.

There are different reasons for that (Merabet & Gendreau 2007). In general, no statistics of the number of migrants who pass at borders are being kept. The number of migrants known at consulates is usually an under-estimation, because many migrants are not registered. Another difficulty is finding out a person's nationality, for people may be known under a different nationality as their own, especially when passing through transit countries. And finally, the difference in the way different studies define a migrant can be a problem. Flows or stocks can be counted, temporary or permanent migrants, first or second generation, etc. Nevertheless, what follows is an overview of indicative numbers and patterns, to get a general idea of the phenomenon of migration and its magnitude.

Starting with worldwide migration, Zoomers & van Naerssen (2006) provide an overview. They estimate the number of international migrants worldwide to be between 175 and 200 million, which is about three percent of the world population. Some of the main receiving countries are the US and Canada (migrants mainly from Mexico, the Caribbean, as well as highly skilled migrants from China and India), the Gulf States and the Middle East (migrants mainly from Asia) and the European Union (migrants mainly from North Africa and Turkey).

Looking at it this way, it may seem that migration is a linear process represented by a big arrow from 'south' to 'north', but this is far from the truth. The majority of migration is actually taking place from south to south. In West Africa for example, people leave countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and go to countries within the same region such as Nigeria, Senegal and Ivory Coast.

Migration patterns are diverse. Many countries are both sending and receiving and some are important transit places for people to go to Europe, like Morocco or Senegal. This is why a simple division between 'sending countries' and 'receiving countries' would be too simple.

When migrating from Africa to Europe over land and sea, there are some main routes. One starts in Mauritania, goes through Western Sahara and Morocco, and to the Canary Islands. Another route is from northern Morocco to Spain and a third possibility is from Tunisia to Italy or Malta. Many migrants also travel by plane, though this seems to have decreased because of stricter visa requirements and increasing immigration controls (Zoomers & van Naerssen 2006).

Many Malians migrate to countries outside Africa and the destinations are diverse. For example, there are groups of Malians living in China and Indonesia. But the main destination – after Spain (that is gaining popularity) – continues to be ex-colonial ruler France. Paris is being called 'Bamako sur le Seine'. A study carried out for a Malian ministry (Ministère des Maliens de l'Extérieur et de l'Intégration Africaine) in 2007, revealed a number of 70,000

Maliens in France, of which 40,000 were unregistered. According to the ministry, the ideas that Europeans may have about overwhelming flows of migrants are not confirmed by the numbers: ‘des chiffres dont font écho certaines opinions européennes à propos de « l’invasion de l’Europe » par les Africains, en général et des Maliens en particulier’ (Sacko 2007; website of the Malian ministry: http://www.maliensdelexterieur.gov.ml/cgi-in/view_article.pl?id=489).

Malian migrants’ main destination within Africa is Côte d’Ivoire. It has, depending on the source, a Malian population of between 1 and 2,5 million people. However, since the civil war Côte d’Ivoire started (2002), many people have moved back to Mali (see van der Meer 2007 for migration dynamics around the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire).

A study carried out in 2001 stated that a total of 2.67 million Malians live abroad, while other sources even speak of 4 million (Merabet & Gendreau 2006). This is considerable for a population of less than 12 million living in the country. The number of *immigrants* in Mali is quite small – less than 2% of the population – and mainly from surrounding countries like Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Guinea (Merabet & Gendreau 2006, data from 1998). A table presented by Black & King (2004) shows that the four West African countries with the highest negative net migration are Sierra Leone, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Though the accuracy of the numbers is questionable, as said before, the statistics at least indicate that the number of migrants that leave the African continent is only very small compared to the number that move to different countries within Africa. It also becomes clear that Mali is a real *out*-migration country – with a considerable part of the population moving away – and only a small number of *in*-migrants.

Brief historical context

As stressed in many writings, migration is as old as mankind, which points to the fact that we are talking about an ancient phenomenon that is not so much a disturbance of order as it is a normal part of people’s livelihood strategies. When going into African history, Africa has been ‘a theatre for large population movements’ (Conde 1984: 3). Not so much as individuals but rather as tribes, people’s movement was driven by conflicts and wars between ethnic groups, or simply by looking for new land, new pastures and places for settlement. For certain ethnic groups that have a nomadic way of living, migration was, and still is, a continuous part of their lives.

When in the 17th and 18th century contacts were established between Africans and Europeans, the slave trade came up and thereby a forced migration of

millions of people across the Atlantic. Estimations of numbers range between 8 and 20 million (Conde 1984).

Under colonial rule, people were stimulated or forced to go to the coastal region, to work on plantations or in industries. According to Conde (1984), this migration had little impact on attitudes and behaviour because of its seasonal nature, with migrants having 'one foot in the village and the other in the modern economy'. But Rwezaura (1989) argues that it had a deep impact and that it was the beginning of the end of the traditional economic organisation and its related social relations (a more elaborated discussion about 'tradition' and 'modernity' is presented in Chapter 3).

After independence, 'initial forced migration through forced labour, taxes and compulsory cropping, later became institutionalised into regular migration in various African countries' (Hinderink & Tempelman 1978: 98). This resulted in the current main migration patterns from countries as Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to the main host countries Nigeria and Ivory Coast (Konseiga 2005). This migration can be temporary, permanent or anything in between.

Migration from Africa to Europe and the U.S. started in the 1960s on a larger scale, either because of guest worker agreements or linked to decolonisation. The general trend at that time was welcoming and encouraging of immigration, so it would meet labour demands. When the economy went into recession in the 1970s and 1980s, migration was no longer stimulated by western countries, where increasingly a restrictive policy was adopted. Nevertheless, migration continued through family unification, as undocumented migration or as political refuge (Carling 2002).

Another migration trend that should be mentioned is the movement of people to urban areas. Several African cities have been booming over the years. However, other sources (such as de Haan 1999) stress that rural-urban migration is over-represented in studies and that in developing countries the bulk of migration is between rural areas.

Economic and structural approaches

Economic approaches are an important part of migration studies, so although this thesis has adopted a different approach, it is surely relevant to pay it some attention. There are a number of economic approaches and differentiations within them, so only some of the most common ones will be discussed. These kinds of studies are generally structural. The aim is to find out about migration patterns, to identify factors that influence them and to deduct certain regularities that may be used to predict migration flows in the future.

Research on migration dates back to 1885, when Ravenstein wrote his paper 'Laws of Migration'. In this paper, he tried to deduct universal laws about

migration from the migration flows he observed in Britain, Europe and North America. A couple of 'laws' he described are that migration is negatively related to distance, migrants move from adjacent areas to economic centres, flows are opposed by counterflows, long distance movers prefer industrial centres, people from rural areas are more likely to become migrants, women are (surprisingly) more mobile than men, and migration is related to economic development. Later studies show that these interesting characteristics are, instead of being universal laws, merely a description of specific migration flows in Europe and northern America in the 19th century (Rotthoff 1995).

Yet, this kind of thinking about migration has been further developed, criticized and extended. Often, modernization theory is used as an assumption. Countries and regions are divided between industrialized ('modern') and non-industrialized ('traditional'). The non-industrialized regions will be a driving force for migration to the industrialized centres (within the country or abroad). Wage differences are the main driving factor.

A migration model that has been widely used in economic studies is the Todaro model (de Haan 1999). It puts migration within the context of economic development, where urban centres are seen as a source of employment for the rural population. Potential migrants are individual decision makers, who move to cities depending on their expectations of wages and the probability of finding work.

This kind of model has been nuanced in different ways. Incomplete information is taken into account, transaction costs and risk spreading are emphasized, and not the individual but the household is seen as the most important unit of decision making. The interest of economic studies in the family is thus to use the household mostly as a profit-maximising unit of analysis in its models.

Following on this, a model of push and pull factors of migration has been developed by Lee (see Rotthoff 1995). The kind of factors he distinguished are factors associated with the area of origin, factors associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles and personal factors. Looking at migration in terms of push and pull factors is still common in economic approaches.

Another kind of structural thinking is the (neo-)Marxist approach. Migration is not so much seen as the outcome of individual decision-making, but as part of a global system where the economies of developed countries are functioning at the cost of developing countries. Migration is seen more negatively, causing a brain drain and lack of labour in developing countries that is not compensated by remittances (see for example Rubenstein in de Haan 1999).

Studies differ in terms of the determinants that are identified as most important, but they all seek to find a certain explanatory framework that can generally be applied. A recent example is a micro-economic study by Wouterse (2006) about the determinants and effects of migration to Italy in four villages

in Burkina Faso. She uses a farm household model, where households are assumed to be rational, utility-maximizing decision-makers, with labour, wealth and wages as some of the main determining variables. Wouterse recognises that social costs may be of importance, but ‘although including social costs of migration may yield interesting insights, such inclusion would also greatly increase the complexity of the model’ (Wouterse 2006: 34).

In such a kind of study, family relations are simplified to the household that is seen as a profit-maximising unit of analysis for explaining migration patterns. Although the family is of importance in economic studies, this importance does not go much further than being reduced to a unit that maximises their profit. Thinking back for example to the description of Fanta’s household in the introduction, this seems to be a too simplified view for a complex reality and it does not lead to path-breaking insights considering changes in family relations.

To me it also demonstrates the most important limitation of a model-approach, as many social scientists would agree: societies are too complex to describe in models. Practices of mobility may also be too complex to describe just in a structural way and it could even lead to missing important information. Different authors argue that in migration studies, social and cultural factors are not enough taken into account (see for example Castles 2007, de Haan 1999, Tvedten 2004) To give an example: in the book ‘At home in the World’ (Manuh 2005), which deals with migration in Ghana and West Africa, there are articles about the volume of migration, remittances, the brain drain and possibilities for development. Cultural and social factors are largely ignored.

Cultural and social approaches

The criticism that there is too much emphasis on economics in migration studies is also shared by Klute & Hahn (2007). Their introduction of the book ‘Cultures of Migration’ immediately starts with four arguments that challenge the push-pull factor approach. Firstly, it is seen as a sedentary point of view of migration, while this is a phenomenon that should be studied in its own right. Moving is not always as problematic in practice as is often presented. Secondly, it is a structural way of looking at migration, while the agency and creativity of migrants with their individual choices is not taken into account. Thirdly, the focus on push and pull factors tends to put an emphasis on economic reasons where non-economic motives may be just as important. Finally, it looks at sedentary ways of life as the rule and at migration as the exception, while this contradicts to the realities of many people, especially in Africa.

There are enough reasons for a cultural and social view of migration. To start with, I will give some examples of cultural studies that look at how migration can be seen as part of cultural practices.

An example is a study of Sanders (2001) about territorial and magical migrations in Tanzania. When a certain ethnic group is moving into another territory, people explain this in terms of witchcraft. The group that is moving is successful, which is explained by their great knowledge of witchcraft. Therefore, the other people see the movement into their area as something irreversible and unchangeable. This study is meant as a first example to show how cultural factors can be important for understanding mobility. Only when paying attention to a cultural phenomenon such as witchcraft, can it be understood why a group has a specific way of dealing with mobility.

A study on the notions of witchcraft amongst Ihanzu and Sukuma in north-central Tanzania may seem a little obscure. One could wonder if the behaviour of people in 'modern' society, which is the focus of this thesis, can be explained in such a cultural way. Other studies focus more on this side, and show how, for certain groups, one can speak of a real migration culture.

Thorsen (2007) made a study of cultures of migration among adolescents migrating from villages in Burkina Faso to the capital or to neighbouring countries. For both the ones that return and the ones with the desire to leave, there is a similar culture of migration. The emphasis is put on success stories, gaining money and consumption items, and taking care of parents (in a broad sense) in the village. Another aspect is being able to adopt a modern lifestyle, for example by following television programmes. According to Thorsen, migration has become part of the local culture. 'One important aspect of the pervasive migration for several generations is that nobody finds it strange or wrong that youngsters wish to migrate' and '... although migration is not per se a rite of passage, it is perceived to accelerate the process of maturing and of understanding what is required of young adults' (Thorsen 2007: 195).

Martin (2007) describes a culture of migration in southern Ghana that is characterized most of all by the wish to migrate to the West to gain money and seek a better life. Her study is specifically about return migrants from Germany who, as she argues, have developed their own migrant culture. Some elements are differing norms and values, their social networks and specialties of their lifestyle.

Mobility should in many cases be seen as the normal situation and not always as an anomaly. This point is stressed in a study of de Bruijn *et al.* (2001b) that analyses cultures of travel of Fulbe pastoralists in Mali and Ghanaian Pentecostalism. 'The problem with the study of population mobility is that it has always been regarded as a special and temporary phenomenon and that the natural state of people and the world was conceived in terms of stability and coherence' (Ibid.: 64). The study shows that in the case of the Fulbe for example, this is not a right representation because in fact the whole culture is organised around mobility, which is thus the 'natural state'. In the introduction

of the same book, it is argued that ‘mobility in its ubiquity is fundamental to any understanding of African social life. The astounding degree of mobility in Africa makes one wonder whether it is indeed possible to understand the livelihood of large sections of the African population without taking into account the perspective of movement’ (de Bruijn *et al.* 2001a: 1). The idea of the normality of mobility is in fact the basis of the present thesis. It is one of the reasons for the special attention that is paid to mobility when studying changing family relations: it is an intrinsic part of African social life, but is too much seen as the exception on the rule of sedentariness.

Sociological studies do not speak so much of a culture of migration, but focus on social issues related to migration, such as gender, ethnicity, identity, agency, networks, social exclusion or inclusion and social capital (Castles 2007). An interesting study is ‘Migration in the age of involuntary immobility’ by Carling (2002). Although migration is seen as to be increasing from a European or American point of view, Carling points out that from the perspective of Cape Verdeans, possibilities have decreased. Though mobility is increasing, as studies say, people’s experiences are closer to a massive involuntary immobility: borders are largely closed. An interesting part of the study is the way perceptions of people are incorporated in a constructivist way. Most important is how people on the island frame their situation, which matters more than a kind of objective situation. For example, many people see themselves as poor. Whether this is comparably the case is not so relevant for that matter, clearly poverty can only be defined in comparative ways. Furthermore, they see a continuing drought as the reason of their poverty, a factor that cannot be changed. Temporal migration to either work or study is perceived to be the only way out, the only way to succeed in the project of establishing a family and securing an income.

Though a typically social and cultural subject, I have not found studies in this discipline that explicitly deal with changing family relations in modern urban Africa in relation to mobility, although related subjects are touched such as gender relations. Nevertheless, some important insights were used in this thesis, such as the existence of cultures of migration, reasons for migration as being socially constructed and the normality of mobility.

Transnationalism

Lacking in this overview until now is the concept of transnationalism, introduced in migration studies in 1994 by Basch *et al.* (see Spaan & van Naerssen 2005). Transnationalism is opposed to the previous idea of migrants as people who are simply moving from one place to another. This reflected the political view, namely that migrants should either return to their home country or adapt

fully to the host society and not become part-citizens who are still loyal to the country they come from. However, in reality this political wish was not fulfilled. Full integration did not turn out to be possible for all, because of racism, among other factors. Instead, migrants can be seen as people who are in between different states, closely connected to two or more countries. This is enhanced by processes of globalisation, and facilitated by cheaper transport, cheaper international phone calls and a growing network of mobile phones and internet.

To describe that phenomenon, the concept of transnationalism is used, and still hotly debated. Glick Schiller *et al.* (1995: 48) define it as follows: 'transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across national borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.' This is seen in relation to processes of globalisation, 'marked by the demise of the nation-state and the growth of world cities that serve as key nodes of flexible capital accumulation, communication and control' (Ibid.: 49).

Transnationalism seems to be an adequate concept to describe current practices of mobility. But looking at the practices above, and as different authors recognise, it is very important to distinguish different kinds of transnationalism and the possibilities that different people have for living such a cosmopolitan life. To take an example, Wilding (2006) writes about communication between migrants in Australia and their families abroad. The possibility of sending e-mails and making cheap calls has added another dimension to keeping in contact with family members. However, while some migrants (from Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands) used the internet to have frequent contact with their relatives, communication was much more difficult for those from Iran. Their kin did not have a telephone connection at home, they did not mention e-mail as a possibility or a practice, and postal services were unreliable. The only option left was to give news and letters to people travelling to the country. Grillo (2007) stresses the same point, when debating Appadurai's approach to transnationalism: 'We are all transnationals now, but some more than others, and certainly in different ways. The manner in which he and others conflate disparate experiences is disturbing' (Ibid.: 205).

Wilding (2006) also makes the point that though people may seem to live a very transnational life by moving to different places, this is not always reflected in their consciousness. She illustrates this with an example of a woman who regularly flies between Ireland, Australia and the USA, and who looks with a suspicious eye at a place twenty kilometres away from her home village, because she has never been there.

Now what about transnationalism and social relations, or family relations? An example is a study by Mazzucato *et al.* (2006) about funerals in Ghana and

the way Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands are involved in these. A starting point of this study is the importance of family relations and the involvement of migrants in their country of origin, but the approach is mainly economical. One of the main subjects is the economical value of funeral remittances. Social subjects, such as funerals as reaffirming ties of belonging, only take up a minor place. In this study the importance for people to be buried in their hometown is assumed but not further analysed. Also, in another study about a double engagement between Ghana and The Netherlands (Mazzucato 2008), the subject keeps turning around the question of where people spend their money and how much. There is a great emphasis on flows of remittances and hardly any attention for the social and cultural experiences of people.

A follow-up question could be to what extent social relations actually change as a consequence of these transnational practices. What does a stay in The Netherlands and a connection to Ghana do to family relations, identity, changing values? As becomes clear in Martin's study (2007, discussed before), the 'been to' migrants in Ghana have specific norms and values, social networks and a different lifestyle. I miss these elements in studies about transnationalism, which deal more with remittances but less with the experiences of the transnationals.

Family relations is also a subject that receives minimal attention. Grillo & Mazzucato (2008) point to three ways in which African family relations are influenced by transnationalism, namely the way in which migratory regimes may lead to families being split between continents, the transformation of gender relations and a shift in the role of non-kin relationships. The authors add that kinship and family relations are under-researched in the context of African transmigration. So there is a gap to fill and to which this study hopes to contribute.

Migration and development

Apart from seeking to describe and understand the phenomenon of migration, as in many cultural and social studies, a different collection of literature links up more with policy. The main question in such an approach is what the relation between migration and development is, in order to make a policy that enhances the developmental impact of migration. By explicitly questioning whether migration is positive or negative, and for whom, values become more important in these studies. Note, however, that literature about migration and development concentrates on the questions of whether and how migration can be helpful for countries of origin. The question whether it relates positively or negatively to development in countries of destination is hardly asked.

Spaan *et al.* (2005) give an overview of changes in discourses on migration and development. They describe two basic contrasting approaches to migration and development. The first is the balanced growth approach, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, and based on neo-liberal economic theory. This theory assumes that 'the emigration of (surplus) labour from underdeveloped, peripheral areas leads to a new equilibrium between capital and labour that eventually fosters development' (Ibid.: 37). Migration can have some negative effects, but these are short-term. In the long term it is assumed that it leads to an improvement in resource availability and income distribution.

The asymmetrical growth approach, developed in the 1970s and 1980s, is contradictory. Migration is seen as merely negative. A link is assumed between the underdevelopment in sending regions and development in receiving regions. This inequality is enforced by migration. Negative consequences are a brain drain, loss in productivity, dependency on remittance income and an increase of social inequality.

Previously, migration was seen merely as a failure of development (Black & King 2004). Policy was oriented at 'the reduction of poverty, or associated environmental degradation, conflict and economic decline, in order to address what are seen as the 'root causes' of this migration' (Ibid.: 77). Note the difference with ideas of migration as a natural way of being in cultural approaches.

Recently, the view on migration and development has become more positive. It is recognised that remittances to developing countries exceed the amount of official development assistance (Black & King 2004). Possible advantages and disadvantages are both taken into account and a main question is how policy can contribute to enhancing the positive effects, while minimising the negative. Brain drain has moved to brain gain and, in line with insights about transnationalism, to brain circulation. Other questions are how it can be stimulated that remittances are being invested in productive ways and what could be the development potential of returning migrants.

This brings us to the importance of family relations, because remittances are almost exclusively aimed at the families of migrants. Besides, family relations are also an important factor for return migration. From the policy point of view, what exactly the impact of the family is, is an important question, so policy measures can be directed both to migrants and their families.

A study that is concerned with this issue was carried out by Tiemoko (2004). It is about the role of the family in decisions about migration and return from West Africa to Europe. The study is in fact an attempt to explain that besides economic motives, there are also social factors. Going beyond the 'push and pull' model, it is assumed that migration also has a cultural and social dimension. The study continues by trying to divide migrants (from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) on the basis of a survey among two categories: 'family-influenced

migrants' and 'those whose migration decisions are not directly influenced by their families'. In my opinion, the outcomes are too much of a simplification of reality. One man's quote about return migration demonstrates this: 'Return is circumstantial', is what he says, after which he mentions all kinds of circumstances that play a role. Nevertheless this was then summarized by a list with four reasons (end of study, family reasons, employment, business) that are presented in a nice simple table. Does Tiemoko actually take his respondents seriously?

Tiemoko also comes to the conclusion that family does not play a role in moving to a second country, such as from France or the U.K. to elsewhere in Europe. In my study, I found the opposite. For Malian migrants, family plays a very important role in the decision to move to a second country (see Chapter 5). People often want to distance from their family and the Malian community and therefore move to another country. Are these kinds of factors not important for migrants from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire at all, or didn't they find their way into Tiemoko's table?

The reason I am paying so much attention to this study is that it demonstrates to me that in an attempt to get to quantitative results, sometimes the outcomes no longer represent reality. Although attention is paid to family relations as a social factor because of the large sums of money that are sent to family, studies do not yet adopt a very nuanced view on family practices. In that respect, this thesis, with a qualitative approach, can be an addition.

Conclusion

We will go back to the main question of this chapter, i.e. how to value these different approaches and still come to new insights? It is a general line in this overview – and stressed from different sides – that too little attention is paid to the social and cultural sides of migration. When going through endless piles of studies on migration, various questions arose. Where are the stories of migrants? Where are their experiences, the broader context, life histories and multi-locational approaches?

Considering the economic and structural approach, I think that it surely has insights to offer. Wage differences matter, expected and real wages matter, industrialization is a factor, population pressure can be important, etc. But as already stated, in literature there is not enough interest for other aspects.

Studies such as the one by Tiemoko (2004) try to fill that gap and pay attention to the family as a social factor. But in doing this he doesn't get further than a systematic approach where the sometimes so obvious stories of respondents are reduced to a table that is all too simple. Mazzucato *et al.* (2006) use social factors as a starting point, such as the involvement of Ghanaians in The

Netherlands with funerals in Ghana, but do not actually get into it. Social relations are only used as a first step in a study that is actually about no more than the visibility of certain flows of money.

Considering all this, there is need for studies that have an explicit interest in the complexity of African family relations in relation to mobility. This should go further than an interest in flows of money, which can be an interesting argument for policy in relation to migration and development, but does not directly lead to new insights in social practices. What is necessary is not to treat the aspect of family relations as an addition in studies about remittances, but as a subject in its own right. With this thesis I have tried to make a start.

Family dynamics in contemporary urban Africa – Literature review

Introduction

Together with the next chapter, this chapter forms the base of the perspective on family in Mali that is outlined in this thesis. Changes concerning migration to Europe will be dealt with later, first I have looked solely at the situation in the African context. The main questions that runs through these chapters are what kind of processes of change African families in urban areas are currently going through and what implications this has on the ways in which social scientists should look at the family. This chapter provides an overview of what is said in the existing literature about this subject.

First of all, the way in which family was looked at in early anthropology is explained, as well as the way we could see that now. Following this, different studies that shine a light on contemporary processes of change in African families are discussed. Some of these deal specifically with the subject of changing family relations. Others may look at social relations from a different angle, but sometimes provide a useful insight about family relations as well.

I have used studies that were carried out in different countries in Africa, but with a preference for Mali when possible. In most literature, it is assumed that similar processes take place in more or less the same way in different African

countries. For example, comparing articles about Senegal and Cameroon with my observations in Mali, I would indeed agree that it seems that comparable kinds of development take place.

From the 'traditional' to the 'modern' family

In what way did the first anthropologists look at the reality around them as they marched into the African continent? What kind of situations did they encounter and how did they describe them? It is not necessary to go back to a detailed report here, in the style of Gluckman who wrote down the movements of his exotic fellow men in a detailed way, but it has to be acknowledged that the family was a very important unit for structuring the lives of alien peoples and tribes by anthropologists. The family was used as a central unit of analysis to come to an understanding of the functioning of rural societies. On the one hand, attention was paid to all kinds of exotic sides of African family life, such as polygamy and circumcision. On the other hand, the family was used to get to grips with the structures of rural societies: housing, arrangements around the birth and raising of children, the organisation of labour, what happens in case of death, the meanings of symbols and rituals, etc.

The central place of family for researchers becomes clear in what Rwezaura (1989: 60) writes about the traditional extended family as it was thought to be functioning in Africa before colonialism:

Kinship, and ideas associated with it, provided the major organisational principle under which the group's economic and social activities were performed and rendered socially meaningful. A woman's economic role was given social meaning by reference to her duties or obligations as a daughter, a wife, or mother, while that of a man featured in terms of his status as a son, husband, father etc. Kinship ideology thus translated as well as masked every form of economic and social relation into a kinship relation. The same could also be said of the assignment of economic rights within the group which were also defined in terms of kinship relations.

Notably, Rwezaura mentions kinship as an organisational principle. This almost suggests that it is not a concept of the researcher, but an inherent quality of society itself. In any case, this citation is used to understand that the family before colonialization was seen by anthropologists as one of the most important organisational forms in African societies and that it was merely described in a structural way.

Under the influence of colonialism and modernization, the situation changed. Rwezaura (1989) for instance argues that the forced or voluntary migration by men to the coast was the beginning of the end of traditional African family life and the way it had been functioning before. Scientists changed their point of

view and the grand narratives – whether following neo-Marxist or neoclassical economic theory – came to play an important role. Nevertheless, Long (1984) noted that despite these structures, all kinds of practices do take place outside the logic of the market and within the household as forms of non-wage labour. Also in modern times, families in the countryside do play an important role as an organising factor of production.

At present however, a large part of the population is living in urban areas and it is this part of the population that this thesis is concerned with. All kinds of beautiful terms can be used to describe their situation, such as urbanization, migration, modernisation, or globalisation. It may be clear that the contemporary African family living in an urban area can no longer be described in the same way as they were in the first days of anthropology of mainly rural societies. All kinds of relations that used to be clear have been turned around. What about marriages and divorces, where is the family actually located, what about work division and gender, what is the meaning of the extended family, and many other questions can be posed. There is no simple answer. In short, the traditional African family – once described so beautifully by anthropologists – no longer exists in the same form, particularly not in urban areas. The question now is what do we see in urban areas and how do we look at it?

Before continuing the search for an answer to that question, another point first has to be made. Has the traditional African family ever existed? In other words, what is actually meant by tradition and by its opposite, modernity?

In the first days of anthropology and in a context of colonialism, modernity was mainly associated with a western idea of progress. The colonial powers saw the expansion of their territory as a modern change and as progress opposed to the traditional and backward culture of the native population. Asad (1991) stresses that it was in that context that the first anthropologists did their work and that it heavily influenced their work as well. A similar kind of critical view is also taken by Arce & Long (1999: 5):

At that time the strategic idea of modernity was organised around attitudes and policies based on a sense of the superiority of those nations that had successfully modernised themselves. ... Any idea of there having existed specific types of modernity linked to the past in these countries before the arrival of colonial rule and development aid was denied.

Modernity was very much a western invention that was used to express their cultural superiority and gave meaning to their need for expansion.

In this way we can look at modernity as a concept that was used at a certain moment in history by a certain group to oppose against the past or against other groups, instead of looking at modernity as a universal path of development. The fact that African societies have been described by western scientists as people

without history who live in a continuation of gratuitously taking over the traditions of their ancestors, does not mean that this represents their history in an adequate way. Taking a little distance from the western way of superior thinking, we can take a different stand.

The same goes for families. I would argue that 'the traditional African family' has never existed. African families have probably always been in development, practices have changed, as well as the norms and meanings of people. Looking at it in that way, contemporary changes could as well be seen as a continuity of family dynamics that have taken place forever.

The concept of modernity nevertheless does not lose its meaning. It becomes all the more relevant to wonder what is associated with modernity or tradition nowadays and by whom. The symbols of modernity, the things people associate with modernity or tradition and the different interpretations are interesting, as well as the ways different societies shape this in contact with each other. Instead of talking about modernity, it is more adequate to use *modernities*, and to look at the wide range of forms these can take in different places and by different practices. Perceptions of what is modern or traditional will also come back in the case study in the next chapter about urban families.

Summing up briefly, at first, the family was used in anthropology as a basic structure to describe and explain 'traditional' rural societies. Also when modernization had set in, the family still held as an important unit of analysis. Currently, however, it is a question what is left of that because of all kinds of changes, especially in urban areas. This is the more relevant being aware of the stigmatising way 'tradition' and the 'traditional family' have been used in the past. The question now comes up what kind of processes of change African families in urban areas are currently going through and in what ways this can be analysed.

This way of looking at the African family, i.e. as being in development in which modernities take their place, is not as self-evident as it may seem. A bit to my surprise I found out that certain contemporary studies still use 'the African family system' as was happening in the first days of anthropology. An example is Therborn (2006) who gives an overview of the five most important family systems worldwide, which can again be divided and subdivided. In Africa we find 'the Sub-Saharan African set of family systems, characterized by a distinctive marriage and descent pattern in spite of religious pluralism and enormous ethnic diversity' (Ibid.: 18). A comparable systematic approach is followed by Findley (1997). She supposes six 'key features' of the African family structure and links them to migration. One of those features is of course polygamy. Because of polygamy, she argues, men often have to pay a bride price, which stimulates economic migration.

However, as I have argued before, the African family is in constant development and describing it by these kinds of systematic and fixed features – that often tend to stress the exotic much rather than the normal – demonstrates a lack of understanding of the dynamics of a society. I will continue discussing different kinds of studies, which show what kinds of developments are taking place in social life in modern Africa without being fixed on the assumed features of an African family system.

Family in crisis?

A logical first step for this literature review was to look for authors who specifically deal with the subject of the African family and contemporary processes of change, especially in urban areas. This is how I came across the book ‘African families at the turn of the 21st century’, edited by Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi (2006). They place changes in African families in a historical context of influences by Islamic and Christian culture since the 7th and 15th century respectively, and thereby give them a history. They also point to the one-sided way that aspects of African ‘traditional’ societies were investigated by western social scientists ‘with limited understanding of the proper cultural and institutional context within which these practices occur’ (Ibid.: 6).

Subsequently they refer to more recent studies that should look from the African point of view and have an open eye for the dynamics of society and family life. In these studies, the picture we get from the African family is not very rosy. They point at all kinds of negative developments such as disorganisation and changes in family dynamics, an increasing number of divorces, the crisis of HIV/Aids, and the elderly support being under stress. ‘African families are confronted with a series of developments that are posing serious threats to the traditional family structure’ (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi 2006: 14).

An example of a study that stresses the same point is the book by Weisner *et al.* (1997): ‘African families and the crisis of social change’. The title alone says enough. The assumed crisis in African families is taken as a starting point. All kinds of developments that can be seen as proof of this crisis are put to the fore, such as overpopulation, HIV/Aids, the practice of circumcision, urban street children, less care for the elderly, a breakdown of morals, and the dispersion of family members.

Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi (2006: 276) conclude that:

... while it is true that the traditional family has changed in many ways and African families are confronted with new challenges, we need to point out that being a dynamic institution, the African family continues to adapt to the emerging structural changes. This is not to say that all is well within the family. Far from it, as we enter the first decade of the new millennium, we see a host of issues and challenges that

have the potential to weak or threaten the survival of the traditional African family as we know it today.

I think it is a strange remark. First, why do they call the African family traditional, especially taking into account their critical remarks concerning western scientists who, in their assumed superiority, first came up with the idea of the traditional African family. Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi distance themselves from descriptions of the traditional African family, and at the same time they pity that this assumed traditional family is threatened in its existence!

Second, one could wonder whether all these social changes are really that negative. In the books of both Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi and Weisner *et al.*, changes are discussed in terms of a crisis. They give the family and the way it should apparently be organised an intrinsic value without wondering what kind of benefits as well as constraints it offers to different members. They notice that the family is in change and are worried. What about care for children and the elderly, aids, changing sexual practices and the growing number of divorces? Apart from the subjectivity of the idea that social life should be centred on the family and that something like a divorce is negative, such a way of analysing of the family does not help in coming to an understanding of what is actually changing. A better way would be to look as openly as possible at the kinds of changes and continuities and the ways people perceive changes in their families.

A next step in this literature study about family relations was looking for studies that provide a different angle for looking at the nature in which families in contemporary Africa are subject to change. Some creativity was needed, because the studies have different backgrounds, and do not always explicitly deal with changing family relations. However, they do observe and name processes of change in social relations that also concern family relations. I have put these studies under three headings: 'Family as a social network', 'Family versus individualism', and 'Women, consumption, and sexuality'. I hope that by discussing them it will become clear that these studies are complementary and that the different themes can be seen in relation to each other.

Family as a social network

One way to look at family is by seeing it as a kind of social network. It is a network that people are part of by birth, but that can also be managed for surviving in daily life or to get a better position in society. Looking at it in that way, family relations are complementary to other sorts of social networks, such as being a member of an organisation or a network of friends or acquaintances. Family networks can even be more decisive than other kinds of networks for the

success or advantage of a person. I have found two studies as examples of this kind of perspective on the family, namely Yunusa (2005) en Fokwang (2006).

Yunusa (2005) has made a study about lifestyle and income-generating activities in a high-density urban area in Nigeria. By analysing the time people spend on social networking, he concludes that the most productive activity critical to the people is social networking. It brings people and resources in times of need. Official organisations are important for these networks, but even more important are the inter-personal networks between family and friends. This is reflected by time spending. Both men and women spend 53% of their weekly time (from 7 a.m. until 11 p.m.) on 'recreation' (sports, sitting around, sleeping) and 'social networks' (sitting with friends, attending club meetings). As a strategy for survival – or differently put: 'to get things done' – people highly rely on networks of family and friends.

Social networks and family relations are not only of importance in managing daily life in high-density urban areas. They are also essential for young people who are trying to get access to schooling and work, shown in a study of Fokwang (2006). She describes how many young people in Cameroon join a so-called Presby group, which is short for President Biya's Youth. This is a youth organisation that officially aims to support the current president of Cameroon. Young members of the group may not necessarily be enthusiastic supporters of the political ideas of the president, but by their membership they hope to get better access to schooling and jobs, which are rather scarce. The young people who do not join such an organisation, often claim to have other access to social contacts:

According to one insightful informant, one did not necessarily need to be a member of the CPDM or its related organizations to enjoy the 'favours' of the state. One could be a nephew, niece, cousin, far kin or just a friend of an influential member of the ruling party, and use these networks to negotiate state favours. (Fokwang 2006: 81)

Looking at the family as a social network provides a certain view on family relations. It helps in getting an insight into the ways people might manage these relations strategically, as well as the importance of family relations for surviving or getting a better position. It is for example a way to explain why young people who do not have high-placed family members easily opt for the exit option, which is migration to Europe (Fokwang 2006). In this way, it can also be concluded that family relations are still of high importance, also in urban areas.

On the other hand, a perspective of family relations as a social network is only part of the story. This network is not a fixed situation and family relations may not be experienced by people in that way in the first place. Family relations

are relations of intimacy and connection, but also of conflict, that have a meaning to people, which is much deeper than just to function as a social network. The kind of conflict situations where the network comes under pressure can only come to the surface when the matter is researched more thoroughly than in the studies above. To be able to understand such dynamics, the network perspective is useful, but not sufficient.

Family versus individualism

Another way to look at contemporary family relations is from the angle of upcoming individualism. The general idea behind such a perspective is that more and more people make their decisions out of an individual conviction rather than following the accepted social norms. A romantic story illustrates this point.

‘The story took place in Paris in the 1990s and is about two lovers who violated the ultimate taboo, that is of a sexual union between a male slave and a female noble, in this case the daughter of a marabout’ (Klein 2005: 834). The couple originally came from Mauritania. The social sanctions that were used against them were severe, both for the man and the woman. The man was denied all access to mutual aid, and so were his uncles. The couple was being cut off from any possible assistance if struck by ill health or unemployment, which people were usually provided with from a fund of immigrants from their ethnic group. Other sanctions concerned his family in the village, who were excluded from village events, denied access to the cemetery and denied the right to get married in the village, while some in the village were deprived of land allocated to them. The woman was totally excluded from her family, and her sisters were sent back to Mauritania.

‘The young couple was able to sustain their relationship only because they were in Paris and because she escaped her father’s apartment before something more drastic was done. In rural Mauritania or Senegal, a dissident could leave, but that would involve cutting himself off from his family or from networks that provided work and security. What is striking about this story is while fears of physical coercion were present, the most important threats were of exclusion from the material and psychological benefits of being part of the community.’ (Ibid.)

I will not get into the history of classes and castes in Mali and contemporary practices that are connected with this. It should be remarked, however, that the taboo of such a relationship between a person of noble background and a person of slavery background is also a reality in Mali.

The story is an example to illustrate different things. Firstly, there is the severity of social sanctions that can in fact affect a person and his family much more than official sanctions would. Hereby it becomes clear that certain devi-

ating behaviour would probably not be possible in another place and only became an option in a different environment. Only because they were in Paris, the couple was able to sustain their relationship. Of course, this does not mean that these kinds of social tensions and conflicts do not exist in Mauritania, or let us say Mali, but they may come to the surface in a different and perhaps less radical way.

Secondly, it shows that a practice that is commonly considered as traditional has changed, namely not to marry or have a relation with somebody from a specific group. The opinion of the younger generation seems to be moving away from that of the older generation, whereby the subject can also be polygamy, birth control, taking care of the extended family, or ways of raising children.

Another example of a family conflict in which values are being challenged can be found in a study of Vuarin (1997). It is a study about the way people in Bamako start and manage their enterprises individually, about the advantages and disadvantages of hiring kin as employees, and the difficulties to separate their business budgets from demands made by the extended family. Here it also becomes clear what kind of struggles can be involved in family relations. One respondent explained, when the question of whether his family members request for support was asked:

“Bon, moi c’est un cas très particulier. Moi je n’ai pas rencontré beaucoup de problèmes compte tenu de ma manière de voir les choses. Je n’accepte pas. J’ai eu refuser à mes propres sœurs qui sont venu ici: ‘Voilà, je viens parce que j’ai besoin d’argent.’ Je n’ai pas d’argent, attendez, lorsque j’en aurai je vous ferai signe ... Je ne donne pas! J’ai eu beaucoup des problèmes pour ça! Parce qu’on me traite de tout pour ça! ... Quand tu me dis ‘voilà, tu as, mais tu refuses!’, Je dis oui, d’accord, je refuse, parce que c’est pour mon entreprise.” (Ibid.: 193)

A certain social norm is challenged, namely that all personal revenues should be shared with the family. This person had considerable problems with his family when he refused to do so and chose for himself and his enterprise. The question, however, is whether we should see this as upcoming individualism and how this possible individualism could be explained.

Marie (1997) offers a clear vision. According to him, there is indeed a tendency to individualism in Africa. Driven by difficult circumstances, people are made to act in an increasingly individualistic way, even though this may be contradictory to their values. He points to all kinds of structural and macro-economic developments (structural adjustment, global trade) that have led to a kind of crisis in Africa. In this reality, life circumstances only become more difficult with multiplying risks and misfortune (unemployment, degradation of grades, misery, marginalization):

Affaiblit les mécanismes antérieurs de la solidarité et oblige les individus à devoir de plus en plus compter sur eux-mêmes dans un climat de tension créatrice entre un individualisme de nécessité et une éthique de la solidarité communautaire toujours vivace. (Ibid.: 412)

Personally, I would plead for more agency for individuals, instead of assuming that they are *forced* to act in an individualist way, as Marie suggests. Definitely not all changes in values can be explained by marginalization, as was also shown in both examples discussed before.

But apart from the causes Marie mentions, his focus on upcoming individualism in Africa is certainly interesting. At the least, there is a situation of changing values and practices concerning the family, which can be seen as increasing individualism.

Women, consumption and sexuality

I found yet another angle to look at changes in family relations in studies of Schulz (2001), van Binsbergen (1999) and Nyamnjoh (2005). A common theme in these studies is the importance of consumption in cities and the way this influences social relations.

Van Binsbergen (1999) describes the story of a young woman who moves from a village to Francistown in Botswana and becomes a consumer there. First being unaware of urban consumption articles, she gradually becomes influenced by other women, mainly colleagues from the weaving factory where she works. She starts using different cosmetic articles such as body lotion, hair styling products and disposable menstrual pads, and she replaces her sandals with sports shoes. She starts to take taxis as well, and finally manages to buy a wardrobe that costs almost twice her monthly salary. Her monetary gifts to her mother, brother and son in the village continue but diminish.

What is interesting about this study is that it explains very well how a girl experiences the move from a life in the village (relatively 'traditional') to a life in the city, where the consumption of certain commodities attracts her as being part of an urban lifestyle. Van Binsbergen (Ibid.: 200) especially points to the meaning this can have for family relations:

Gone forth in order to honour a village based obligation to support one's kin, the migrant worker may well be drawn into a domain of urban consumption that implicates values incompatible with those of kinship.

Schulz (2001) writes about the same subject, but from the point of view of women who grew up in an urban area (Bamako). For these women, there is also a high attraction to an urban lifestyle that includes a kind of consumerism. A

general problem, however, is: where to get the money? Many women expect their lovers and husbands to provide, but this also creates a certain ambivalence:

Many girls and married women want to show that they are 'up-to-date' with the most recent fashions and fads, as they know it will win them the admiration of their friends and the favours of male suitors. At the same time they feel the constant risk of being blamed as 'wasteful' and 'vain'. Younger women are confronted with contradictory normative expectations and constantly have to fend off charges of immorality. Even though they will never aspire to life in a village, which they regard as boring and restrictive, they sometimes romanticise the country girl whose morality is not under attack. (Ibid.: 355)

According to Schulz, this romanticising of life in the countryside also explains the popularity of female singers in music videos, who base their songs on music and oral traditions from the countryside. They are singing about typical traditional values, such as the importance of being faithful and obedient to your husband. Though this seems to be contradictory to the kind of situations that young, modern girls face, these singers are very popular in urban areas, especially because they represent a kind of ideal.

The expectations of men, as lovers and future husbands, are just as ambivalent. For young men, the kind of wife they would like to marry is a common subject of conversation. The urban woman

is usually 'well adorned', knows how to dress, and can charm men by her smiles and the provocative way she moves her body. But a man can never trust her fully because she is volatile and will leave him once he has nothing left to offer. (Ibid.: 354)

Both women and men compare these materialistic urban girls with the countryside girls who are supposed to possess moral integrity.

Nyamnjoh (2005) delves into the same subject in a study about *disquettes* and *thiofs* in Dakar. Just explaining what the words mean gives quite a good impression of the point he wants to make. A *disquette* is, apart from a computer disk, used to describe a certain kind of girl: the ones who are fashionable, young, slim, trendy and fascinated by western consumer tastes. A *thiof* is a big expensive fish. It also means the human 'big fish': high society men, with good positions and – more important – a 'wallet on legs'. Nyamnjoh describes how *disquettes* are fishing for *thiofs* who fulfil their financial needs in exchange for sexual pleasure.

New strategies come up for girls to manage their love lives in satisfactory ways. Among university students, a *ménage à trois*, or also *ménage à quatre*, is well known. Girls are involved in different affairs. There is the regular boyfriend for love (*le chic*). There is the *thiof*, an older man who provides financial support (*le cheque*). And in addition there can be a classmate who helps with

class work and administrative headaches, in exchange for sexual favours (*le choc*). ‘This 3C’s phenomenon is common on university campuses throughout francophone Africa and is said to be responsible for the culture of the 4V’s (*villa, voiture, voyages, virement bancaire*)’ (Ibid.: 303-304).

Nyamnjoh perceives increasing consumerism as an important – and not very positive – development in modern Africa:

Accelerated consumerism is radically redefining relations of power and value in ways that celebrate opportunism and greed, that heighten the uncertainties in African lives and dramatize the helplessness of those at the margins of consumer power and success. (Ibid.: 296)

In fact, these three studies show different levels of a similar phenomenon. First, there is the village girl Mary in Botswana who starts to buy body lotion and sport shoes and sends less money to her family in the village. Then, there are the young women in Mali who use their lovers to provide for their consumer needs, but at the same time are longing for the moral values as they are still supposed to exist in the countryside. Finally, we get to students in Senegal who manage their love lives strategically and are fishing for the big fish to reach the aim of a villa and a car. Perhaps this is put a bit simplistically, but what it is all about is the importance of consumption and the link with changing family relations and sexual norms. At the same time, these three studies shine a different light on the subject, and in Africa (and why just Africa?) it may also manifest in many different ways.

Conclusion

In ‘the early days’ of anthropology, the family was used as the main unit of analysis or even organisational principle of society. It was described in all its exoticism, but also used as a unit of analysis to explain production and the organisation of labour. Although the family has certainly not lost its meaning, practices in urban areas have changed so much that such a perspective on the family is no longer valid. On top of that, there can be doubts about the notion of the traditional African family. What is the contemporary situation in urban areas in Africa?

Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi (2006) and Weisner *et al.* (1997) speak of a crisis of the family, which they see confirmed in all kinds of problems in society. I have argued that this reflects the values of the researchers too much, that it is put very negatively and in fact draws the attention away from the question of what is actually changing in families. In other publications, I have found certain other perspectives and tendencies of changes.

First, the family can be seen as a social network that is incredibly important for surviving and making promotion in urban areas. Such a perspective stresses the importance of family relations, even in the chaotic urban society, and contradicts the view that the family would be falling apart. The family as a social network is nevertheless not enough to come to a full understanding, because there is no attention to all kinds of other meanings that family has to people.

Another perspective is the idea of upcoming individualization in society. This is illustrated by examples of people who base their actions more on individual choices and thereby oppose generally accepted values. I argue differently from Marie that this originates from changing values of young people, made concrete as they are actors with their agency, rather than individualization being a negative effect of structural changes.

Yet another tendency that is pointed out by several authors is a change of sexual norms under the influence of (or parallel to) the attraction of consumption and an urban lifestyle that people in all kinds of situations want to be associated with.

By discussing these different studies I have put a finger on the kind of changing processes that families in urban areas go through, and several perspectives have been offered to look at it. In the next chapter I will further explore this subject by delving into a case study of a family in Segou, Mali. In the conclusion of that chapter, the material from the case study will be compared with the articles discussed here, and this will lead to a perspective on the transformation of family in Mali.

Family dynamics in Mali – A case study from Segou

Introduction

Segou. Imagine a place that is sandy, very hot and terribly dry. In contrast to the capital Bamako, where the chaotic mass of traffic and people never stops, Segou is quiet. Most of the streets are wide and unpaved. Some women in colourful clothes pass by with their trade loaded on their head. Boys hit their donkeys that pull carriages that function as taxis. The youth who can just about afford it get around on a scooter or motorbike. The houses on the dusty street sides are surrounded by a large yard with a wall around. At the gate, there are always some men sitting and drinking tea. Going into the yard, you can see interior life. Women are endlessly busy doing laundry in big basins, somebody is cooking, some chickens are walking around and somehow a troop of kids is always present.

For a while I was living in such a yard. In the morning I would sit in the shade of the house, in the afternoon in the shade of the tree. I greeted granny every morning and in turn I received her blessings. May Allah give you a peaceful day! Amen! I washed myself behind the wall with a bucket. I ate with my hands out of the same bowl as the rest of the family. And I got the chance to get to know the life of the people.

Family relations. In the previous chapter, we saw that there are processes of change going on. The (real or perceived) clarity of family relations in the past is

vanishing due to different circumstances in an urban environment. How does this show in the daily lives of people? What are their options and strategies? How do young people deal with the situations they find themselves in? By describing some of the situations and conversations I witnessed, I have tried to put these changes in social relations in the necessary context, and thereby give them a meaning.

In this chapter, material that was gathered in Segou is used. The family Samake and their social surroundings occupy a central place. The chapter specifically deals with relations with the extended family, marriage, consumption, as well as future perceptions of young people. In the end, the findings from this case study will be compared with the literature that was discussed in the previous chapter. This leads to a vision of how to look at the family in contemporary Mali.

The first part of the chapter consists of a description of the quarter where the case study took place. This is to give an idea of what kind of households are situated there, how they sustain their livelihoods and to what group the family that was used in this case study belongs. It is also used to better explain in context the 'kind of people' this thesis is about, and special attention is paid to their options for migration.

Composition of the quarter and livelihoods

Segou is Mali's third largest city with about 100,000 inhabitants. The family that was used for this case study lives in the Medine quarter. According to the inhabitants, the quarter did not particularly differ in terms of welfare, professions, age, ethnic groups or otherwise. Nevertheless, within the quarter there was quite a wide variety of ways in which people made their livelihoods. In this quarter, a survey was carried out among 74 households - as described in the methodology part in the introduction - to get an overview of their composition, livelihoods and migration patterns.

First, I will give some basic information about the composition of the households. The average number of people permanently living in the household in this survey was 12 (excluding the maid or boy). This ranged from 3 to 40 persons, but was usually around 10. The average number of children of a head and his one or more wives was seven. This did not necessarily equal the number of children of the household. Some of the biological children may live elsewhere, because of education or work for example, while other family members may be part of the household. One third of the family heads had a second wife and less than 10% also a third wife.

Households mostly consisted of the head of the family, his one or more wives and several children and grandchildren, and sometimes included extended

family members as well. Different situations occurred. In some cases, a woman was living alone with her children, because the husband was deceased, had left, or lived elsewhere with another wife. In other cases, there were also young couples that lived like a nuclear family: husband, wife and one or several children.

It would be interesting to see what shifts were taking place in terms of family structure. The results of this survey showed that the younger heads of the family had less wives and children than the elder ones. Unfortunately, nothing can yet be concluded from that because, obviously, the older the men become, the more children and possibly wives they will have. Whether or not the younger generation will follow different patterns of family structure can thus only be researched over a longer time.

To get an idea of the way people were living, I will give three brief descriptions of households in terms of composition, activities, ties with their family and migration.

The family Aidara was one of the poorest families I came across. As we were doing the interview, the head of the family was lying down because he was ill, while his two wives answered most of the questions. They told me about their difficult situation.

The head of the family was 60 years old. He had moved to Segou more than 40 years ago from the Kayes region to look for options to trade. He said that he was working as a trader, but in fact at that moment he could not do anything because he was ill. His wives also did not start any trade, because they were lacking even a small starting capital. They had hardly any income. The head had married his second wife after her first husband had died. Thereby he had to take care of her and her five children.

They maintained close ties to the village. Most of the children and grandchildren were living in the village. Some of them were married. The four small children that were living with them in Segou looked poorly fed and dressed. One of them was going to the Koran school, the others had never been to school. The extended family from the village did not come to visit very often. There was no money in the village, neither with this family in town.

When talking about adventure, Mr. Aidara told me that he had been to Côte d'Ivoire, while he knew some other family members who went there. They also said they had heard about people who left, but nobody had ever heard from them again.

In another household, there were 25 people living together, the family Coulibaly. The head of the family was 60 years old, living with his two wives, a couple of children (aged from 12 to 23) and some other family members. 'Tout

le monde se débrouille', was the way they spoke about their situation, like many people did. They managed, but not much more than that.

Most children somehow contributed to the household budget when they had finished primary or secondary school. One was repairing carriages, others did petty trade, but nobody had a fixed salary. One son was studying in Sikasso, in the south of Mali. The family also cultivated rice and millet. Family members from the village often came for a visit and to share in the benefits of those living in town.

Mr. Coulibaly had been in the army, and therefore had to go to several countries in West Africa. His children had never been abroad, and they did not have any family members in Europe. His son spoke about going to Europe. He had no friends there, but he said that they were all ready to leave. They were waiting until they find money, waiting for a chance. They did not yet know how to do it, but they wanted to go.

Arriving at the house of the family Kanjasi, it was easy to see that they were better off. They were living in a beautiful house made of stone, while many houses were made of the less popular but cheaper banco (clay). Instead of the usual messy yard, they had a paved yard with potted plants for decoration. A big car was parked in front of the house.

Mr. Kanjasi was a 'functionary', to be more precise a financial inspector. He and his wife had six children, most of them had moved out already. Most children were studying in Bamako, while one daughter was in France, married to a Malian man. She often sent sums of money, around €300, and also presents. A son had studied in France and was now travelling a lot 'for business'. The son who was responding said that he knew many people who had moved, for example to the U.S. or Spain. They had succeeded well, they had a house, they were married and had children.

The families that are used as examples can be seen as representing larger groups. Although the exact situation of different households is never the same, some general patterns were found by analysing qualitative and quantitative data from the survey.

In different households, people have different possibilities open to them. One of the most striking differences between households is whether or not somebody in the family has an office job with a fixed income. These people can be working for governmental or semi-governmental institutions, or for example at a bank, in the army or as a teacher. Their salaries range from 75,000 FCFA (€12.5) to 200,000 FCFA (€300), mostly around 100,000 FCFA (€150) per month. It is also typical that if somebody in the family has an office job, other people (brother, wife, son) also have a fixed income and contribute to the household budget. In the Medine quarter, about half of the families belonged to

this group. The Kanjasi family described above is an example. Mr. Kanjasi was working as a financial inspector and all his children were able to make a good start by going to university in Bamako, and some even in France.

I want to stress that although I will refer to this group as ‘wealthier’ or ‘richer’, this does not mean that these people are living in opulence, especially concerning the large number of people that are often dependent on one salary.

The families that are not in this situation of having a fixed income, like the Coulibaly and Aidara families in the example above, make up more or less the other half of the population. They constantly have to make sure that they manage their daily life somehow.

As an economic activity, some kind of trade is an option that is open to many people, both men and women. In the survey, it turned out that except for a few cases, most people were in the position that they could obtain at least a small sum of money to start a kind of trade. And on the streets everything can be bought and sold: cd’s and cassettes, cakes, fish, clothes, shoes, small plastic bags with fresh water, candies, medication, cosmetics, toys, carbon, sheep - it goes on and on. Many people could not indicate their monthly income by trade, but looking at the ones who did, and estimating by people’s possessions, it seemed that most traders do not exceed an average of 50,000 CFA (€75) per month and in many cases the income will be less. Other ‘non-fixed’ occupations included artisans such as carpenter or shoemaker, or working as a mechanic, in road construction, at a petrol station, a radio station, or as an Islamic teacher. The people who indicated to have a salary said that it was between 25,000 and 50,000 FCFA (between €37.5 and €75) a month. For many of these families, agriculture in the surroundings of Segou was another way to add to family earnings.

This information mostly concerns the heads of the families, now what about the women? In total 39% of the women were working, either in trade or with a fixed salary. The women who were employed with a fixed salary (28% of all) were always married to a husband who had such a job as well. Almost without exception, the husband was the main wage earner and 61% of the women said to ‘do nothing’, meaning that housekeeping was their principal activity.¹

There seems to be a gap between the households ‘with’ and the ones ‘without’ a fixed income. This is not only reflected in their income, but also in housing and schooling, for example. For very successful tradesmen it might be possible to overcome the gap, but not everyone will manage. What illustrates this point is a question that was asked in the survey: ‘Is there any member of the extended

¹ Appendix 1 shows the various economic activities of men and women.

family who has succeeded well in life?’ (my translator translated this directly into ‘does anybody have *moyen*?’). For the group without a fixed salary, almost nobody answered this question in a positive way. (‘Tout le monde se débrouille’, was the common explanation.) In the families where somebody had succeeded, most respondents pointed to at least one other family member who had a good job, and in some cases in this group the answer was ‘almost the whole family’.

Migration patterns

To different kinds of households, different options for migration are open. To explain which households are likely to have a member of the family in Europe, it is first good to know the kind of migration strategies that people can follow. There are three basic strategies: legal, semi-legal and illegal. Legal migration – for studies or work in Europe – is the most preferred option, but only open to a few, generally educated people with good connections. Semi-legal migration means going to Europe by plane on a tourist visa and staying illegally. An investment has to be made, because bribing is the most common strategy of obtaining a tourist visa. In Bamako, a tourist visa is said to cost €1500 now and prices are rising. Once in Europe, people stay and hope to get a legal status after a certain time. The illegal way is, as we know, following the Sahara route, travelling over land and by boat. It is the cheaper option, but very insecure and not preferred.

The poorest households only have the Sahara route as an option. The chances of succeeding are quite small, many die on the way, never manage to cross the border, or never manage to send money home because they are living under very difficult circumstances. In a few lucky cases, these households might benefit from a migrated family member.

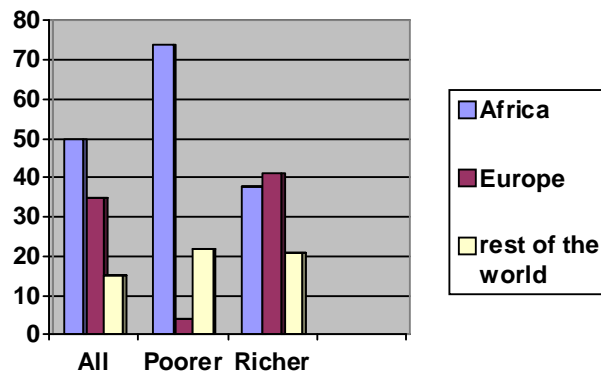
Households that manage to get a sum of money for a tourist visa and plane ticket belong to the wealthier group. The contributions of their migrated family member(s) can add more to their income.

Based on their occupation, but also some other factors such as type of housing, assets and education, the households of this survey were divided into two groups (the ‘wealthier’ and the ‘poorer’) in order to clearly see their different migration strategies. In total, 57% of all households had at least one migrated family member (meaning a parent, a sibling or a child). This was surprising, considering that many Malians had advised me not to do my survey in Segou, because it is not a migration region. It is also clear that there is more migration in the wealthier group than in the poorer group, namely 73% against 38%.

In Figure 1, three migration destinations are compared: Africa (mainly Côte d’Ivoire), Europe (mainly France) and the rest of the world (mainly the U.S.). In

the poorer group, almost all migration is destined for African countries, while in the richer group, Europe just about exceeds the African countries.

Figure 1 Destinations of migrants by income category²



It should be noted that for the majority (about two-thirds of the ‘migration families’), there were several members of the family residing abroad, often spread over different countries. It was also interesting that for a relatively small but noticeable group (less than 10% of all households), family members were spread over four or more countries. The answer to the question about migrated family members could be for example: They are in Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Niger, France and the U.S. These kinds of families were all from the wealthier group.³

It has become clear that for the poorer families (i.e. without *fonctionnaire*), migration to Europe often takes the route overland and usually does not succeed. This is reflected by some statements about migration from respondents belonging to this group:

‘I heard about people who left, but nobody ever heard of them again.’

‘I have an acquaintance who has been en route for three years and never reached Spain. He left his wife and children, and didn’t even have money to come back.’

² This figure compares the share of different destinations, it does *not* express the actual percentage of households with migrated family members.

³ For more information about the exact number of migrants per country, contact with migrated family members and remittances, and the migration background of respondents, see Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

‘You can meet a family who lets you work very hard, you can be exploited. You can even get ill and die, without being able to inform your family.’

‘I know somebody who went on adventure, but he didn’t have money to come back, his parents picked him up.’

For the ones from the richer group it is easier to reach Europe by plane. In this group there are more stories of people who reached the promised land, both positive and negative:

‘I know somebody who went to Spain. He was there for two years, and then returned with empty pockets.’

‘Adventure is very difficult. My daughter misses her family, she asks for tapes, which we send her.’

‘There are negative cases. My cousin doesn’t have papers, he left, his wife is here, and he cannot go back. There are many cases like that.’

‘There are those who left and didn’t bring anything back. Another one got crazy from drugs.’

‘I know somebody who has been to Italy, he came back with a lot of money and built himself a house.’

‘It’s good, they have *moyen*. The ones who left have succeeded, as far as I know.’

‘I have an uncle in France who has *moyen*. Adventure is good. If you go, you can do something for yourself and help your parents. I would like to go for studies, but I don’t have money.’

In this thesis I am mainly concerned with transformations of the family in connection to migration to Europe. That means that what I call the ‘wealthier group’ is more interesting for this study. Those are the people who at least have a fixed salary (or someone in their family), who are living in urban areas, who are better educated and who often have one or more migrants in their families. Somewhat less than half of the population of the Medine quarter were these kinds of families. The Samake family that is used for the case study also belongs to this category. Notably, all migrants who were interviewed in The Netherlands also came from those kinds of families. In poorer families or in rural areas, similar kinds of transformation processes of the family may be happening, but this is outside the scope of this study.

Case study: the Samake family

Extended family: They come and wait until the food is brought

When I first came to Amadou Samake's home, he immediately excused himself for the messy yard. What he meant was the way his family lives with their animals. The family, by the way, means Amadou and his wife Ami, their six children and at that time also granny and niece Awani.

When we were enjoying our meal outside, pigeons and chickens were going around to pick up the crumbs that fell on the ground. When sleeping outside under a mosquito net, a dog was walking in between the beds. I wasn't fond of the dog. At night it could bark endlessly and once it bit a homeless boy's arm.

In a corner of the yard, a couple of sheep were put together. Moussa, Amadou's second son, challenged me to help him wash them and of course I accepted the challenge. I told him I had worked more with sheep in the past half year than he had in his whole life, but I don't think he believed me. He made sure that I quickly returned the soap and the bucket of water to him, because otherwise my clothes would become too dirty and my hands would become too rough. 'Those little hands', Amadou's daughter Fatim said to me as she touched them, 'they are too soft to work, aren't they! Let me do your laundry!' It didn't help to protest, anything I took was taken out of my soft hands.

The sheep had a special meaning for Amadou. They were the symbol for everything he had achieved in his life and how he owed it to his own effort. He told me how he started to keep sheep when he grew up in a small village south of Bamako. 'When I was young', he told me, 'maybe still a bit younger than Braman, my youngest son, my grandmother gave me a goat, a sheep and a chicken. It was a present to test whether I would have some success. After a while, the chicken had died and the goat ran away. But with the sheep it went very well. I have always taken care of them. With the benefits, I could pay for my school necessities and buy my clothes. Later I could pay for my studies in Bamako with the money I had earned with the sheep. That is why it is so important for me to keep the sheep. They are good for me.' I asked him if his brothers and sisters in the village had also been successful with animals. 'They? They didn't take care of them! When I was in the city to study, they have sold all the sheep on the market!'

Though Amadou was living a few hundred kilometres from his village, he did not forget his rural background and his family. When he had to travel to Bamako for work, about once a month, he always tried to combine it with a family visit. Whenever he was in Segou, the first thing he did in the morning was to call his family from the office, to wish them a nice day and to exchange the

latest news. Occasionally he told me what was going on. 'My father said it has been raining! He was very glad.'

Because of his job as a director of a big agricultural cooperation, Amadou often visited villages in a wide surrounding of Segou. He felt very attached to the rural life, although he would never want to return to his village. Like his father, who was the head of the family, he also had three brothers living there, all with several wives and many children. It had to be a fertile family, because his father still managed to procreate a child with a new wife he recently married, despite he had already reached the age of 90. Amadou's wife Ami did not like this at all, which she clearly showed. 'That wife of his father, she is my age! But what can you say? After all, he is still the chief.'

Amadou's family also had not forgotten their successful member in town. During the period I was there, his mother and niece Awani had come from the village to live in Segou. Awani helped with the household and did the same heavy work as the maid. Grandmother was too old to work. She was sitting in her chair all day and watched what was going on in the yard. She had difficulties talking, but still gave me her blessings.

After dinner, Amadou and me often took some time to talk about all kinds of topics. He had studied in Canada and had travelled to France, and this past regularly came up as a subject. 'I remember one time when I was invited to a dish. There were enormous plates with all kinds of food, meat, chicken, fish, everything, you cannot imagine!' Or comparing: 'I have a pain in my back now, it is because of those mattresses here. But in Europe, I have seen such excellent mattresses! Once I spent a night in a hotel on such a great mattress, I wanted to take it home by plane!' The rest of the family was listening.

Many subjects also came up around the issue of Africa, the west, and differences between the two worlds. In this light, we discussed the extended family in Mali. Amadou defended the typically African values and stressed that it is good – and a duty – for everyone to take care of their family. I suggested that I had seen cases where people seem to take advantage of this principle. 'Yes', he replied, 'that happens and it is not good. It used to be different before. People were working on the land together and it was simply not possible to withdraw from the work.'

His wife Ami was often present at these conversations, but hardly mingling in. I talked to her separately. When her husband was gone, she whispered to me that Amadou's family is exactly like that. It is her duty as a wife to take care of her husband's family, but she was not satisfied.

'What you see now, it is nothing, it is quiet now. But during other times of the year, this place is stuffed with Amadou's family. They just come! Even when you say that

you have no more place, they come! And then they wait until food is provided. In those times, your children don't get enough to eat, it's not good. But if you say something, they say that you are mean (French: *méchant*). Okay, I am mean, I don't care! Even Amadou says I am, but I don't care about it. But you always have to be careful. If not, there will be an argument, or they say that you don't respect your parents-in-law. That can be a reason for divorce, and in that case your children will face a very hard time. Everybody will judge them for that.'

Ami told me stories about her husband's family more often when he was not around. Usually she was not very positive. 'During the time when we were living in Bamako, after Amadou had finished his studies, we went through a difficult period. We already had children, but he didn't have work, it took a couple of years. In those years they didn't come so often!' she tells bitterly. When Amadou became more successful, it changed.

'It is a large family! Altogether they are 40 to 50 people. They all live in the village and they don't do a lot. During the rainy season they take it easy instead of working on the fields. They cultivate something, but not as much as they could. And when subsequently there is nothing to eat in the village, they just come over here.'

Another time she came back to the subject when two of her children were present as well. They all agreed that Amadou cared too much for his family in the village and too little for his own family. Ami said: 'He doesn't care about us, he doesn't take care! His brothers just take another wife, and again even more children. And when one of them gets ill, they ask Amadou for money for medication.' The daughter Fatim added: 'Il s'enfou de nous.'

To show the contrast, Ami told me about her own family, who she presented as being more independent and self-sufficient.

'My family is not that big. I've got three brothers, who all have no more than two children. They are merchants. Everybody does something, they take care of themselves. It is not good to sit still. My father has passed away and one of my brothers takes care of my mother. When I visit her I give her some money, if I have it, to get her blessings. But it is not obligatory.'

Marriage: 'I'd rather have my own house'

The marriage of Amadou and Ami, both around 40, seems to follow general norms. Amadou earns a living, while Ami manages the household. Ami has given birth to six children and to her discontent, she is encouraged by Amadou's mother to try for even more. Amadou pays enough to support them. When he comes home after a trip to the villages for a couple of days, Ami looks extra beautiful when she welcomes him. They are prosperous enough to build their own house bit by bit in another part of the city.

Amadou and Ami both complain about their marriage, usually separate from each other. Amadou grumbles: 'I am a slave of my own family! I am the one who has to work all day to make a living for everybody. And look at that wife, she is sleeping too much!'

Ami, however, proudly claims her financial independence. She is a merchant. She sells some items at home, such as shoes and cloth, but most important is her trade in water bags. Her task is merely coordinating. She makes the maid and her niece fill small bags with water and put them into the fridge. The next day, cool boxes are filled with the cold bags and the girls are sent out on the street with their heavy load on their head to sell them. Ami was proud of her income that she made in this way, which she used for her 'petites problèmes'.

'But who pays the electricity bill for the fridge?', Amadou asked rhetorically. Considering that electricity is quite expensive, I also wondered about the profitability of this trade if costs would be taken into account.

Who pays decides, that was made clear. Ami once told me that she wanted to go to Bamako for the weekend, to attend her brother's wedding. When I asked her later, she said that her husband had not given her permission. No more word was spoken about it.

She told me about her dream: building her own house:

'With these men, it is not always easy. Especially with polygamy, it is not easy! When you have your own house as a woman, you can quietly live there. The husband can pass by, and if he doesn't want to, he just stays away.'

She was laughing when imagining the situation. I asked whether it is very expensive.

'Not that much. You can do it little by little. When you have some money, you buy for example some cement. I know several women who have done it that way. The husband knows that she is doing it. Usually he doesn't mind too much. Some men don't agree, but that is selfish.'

Ami's marriage was not polygamous, but she still felt the threat of a possible second wife. Although Amadou said he didn't want that, she was not very much at ease:

'You never know! Men can always take a second wife, even when they are 60 they can marry a younger wife. For women it is difficult, polygamy. Men are, how can I explain ... [she makes a slalom-movement with her hand]. That is the way men get along with their wives. And it is not good, nobody wants that.'

Amadou's role in this was a bit ambivalent. On the one hand, he assured me that for him, one wife was more than enough, although he made many jokes that he would take a second if Ami wouldn't please him any more. On the other

hand, he had registered his marriage as polygamous, which always left the option to have another wife. He explained to me: 'It is what most men do. It gives them the possibility to put pressure on their wife, because they can always take another one if they are not satisfied.' Sometimes, Amadou longed for the old days: 'Marriages used to be more stable, there were not that many divorces. If there were problems, they were just solved between the families.'

And what about women, do they have other options? I was assured that a woman should never cheat on her husband, that this was very bad and dangerous. But ... 'on the other hand ... if he doesn't satisfy your needs, financially or sexually ... you also go look elsewhere ...'.

The importance of consumption

In the evening, when it was dark and the strongest heat was tempered a bit, some young people gathered on the street just in front of the house. They brought some chairs, drank tea, and were chatting for hours. The girls looked especially beautiful to impress their boyfriends who passed by. The couples made a small walk before joining the others again. Mobile phones were shown and passed around to look at pictures and listen to music or radio fragments.

Once, we listened with full attention to a part of a radio discussion programme for youth. The fragment aroused a serious discussion among the audience. In the fragment, a girl argued that Mali was in fact a class society. If a guy is interested in a girl, whether he will get her or not depends on his income. The listeners largely agreed with this proposition. 'In Mali, everyone wants to achieve something, get a better position. So if a girl is beautiful, she will not be satisfied with a guy who is not able to support her. She must think ahead. He has to give her presents, take her out, those kinds of things. If he cannot do that, he doesn't stand a chance.' The guys emphasized the danger of falling in love. 'Once you reach that point, you spend all your money on her.'

'Oh, those girls on their Jakarta's!' the men sighed, as they were hanging on their chairs by the side of the road in Segou, watching everybody who passed by. 'You see them, you have to watch them. When a girl passes by on foot, you hardly notice her. But when she drives her scooter, all men will look at her.'

In Segou it was an absolute must for young people to be able to drive a scooter or motorbike. Moussa, Amadou's second son, was one of the few young people I met who voluntarily moved himself around by walking. His older brother Mohammed rode a motorbike, his younger sister Fatim used her scooter, and most of their friends had some kind of motorized transport. He told me this was normal. 'If you go to our school (an economic college), you see nothing but motorbikes!'

To acquire such a means of transport, the youth are dependent on their parents. A motor or scooter can easily be around €300, a sum that is not so easy to attain. They explained to me that parents give it as a present, for example for graduating, or the money comes from a family member in Europe. The next problem is how to get money for petrol. Moussa told me that this was in fact one of the reasons he didn't drive a motorbike. 'It is such a pain in the ass, you keep looking for money for petrol! Besides, it is dangerous too.'

But most importantly, the motorbike was a symbol of progress. It was explained to me that 'the previous generation was riding bicycles, we are driving motor bikes, and the next generation will be driving cars!' Bicycles were therefore very unpopular.

Mobile phones were not less popular than motorized transport. Once I had a discussion with a group of young people in Segou about using them. I am not a great fan of mobile phones, so I argued that they are relatively new, life went perfectly without them before, and that in my eyes it was a bit a waste of money. They said that I was right, and then continued their discussion about the fanciest models and greatest ringtones.

I have no idea of the official numbers, but in my experience it seems that mobile phones are very widespread. In Amadou's family, all parents and children above the age of twelve had their own phone. Among the friends of Moussa and Fatim, everybody had their own phone. Come to think about it, the only person I met who openly said that he didn't have a phone was the president of the Rasta Association in Segou, who probably had ideological reasons. He was an exception.

'Without a phone, you are really lacking something, you don't have anything any more!', a taxi driver once told me. Having a mobile phone is most practical for maintaining social contacts, and it is a symbol of status and progress.

The importance of having a mobile phone can be seen in a story that Moussa told me about one of his friends. I had always found this friend a kind of anonymous person. He passed by frequently to see Moussa, and then followed him wherever he went. Often he was present like a silent witness without saying a word. But at a certain moment Moussa told me his story.

'The parents of this boy have died. He is very poor, he doesn't have anything. Sometimes he asks me for money, to buy credits for his phone. If I have anything, I give it to him.' I was surprised that while he was in such a difficult position, credit for his mobile phone was his first priority. 'But he needs it, otherwise he will lose his subscription, and it will become even more expensive!' Moussa thought it was a very legitimate way of spending money. He told me why. 'When you are poor, don't let anybody find out! That is really

not good, people will turn away from you because they think that you will only come to ask them for money. Only when it is dark, in the evening or at night, you pass by your friends to ask them for something. Only your intimate friends know that you are that poor!' By possessing a mobile phone this boy could show he had money, even though he had none.

One of the daily challenges in daily life for young people in urban areas is to find money. Money for credit for their mobile phones, and money for petrol for their motorbikes. Amadou said: 'And look at Ousmane! (his son, 14 years old) He has a phone, but he doesn't even have 30 cents to buy credit! What is the sense of that?'

People also showed me the importance of other items, such as clothes and furniture. Once I went with Ami to one of her friends who lived close by, because she wanted to show me the hens. The woman looked beautiful and tidy, just like her house. We talked about the different looks of European and Malian women. I think Malian women usually look very beautiful, with great dresses, hair done nicely, nails done, pretty shoes. 'You think they are going to a wedding', I said. 'And they are only going to the market!', Ami added and we had to laugh. 'But for us it is not the same as for you. It is expected from us to follow fashion, we are obliged! We always have to look beautiful. If you don't take care of that, your husband will tell you!'

Later Ami told me more about the situation of her friend. 'That woman, she has nine children from three different husbands. The first one died. The second just left her, nobody has heard from him again. Then she remarried, but the third one refused to contribute financially. He only came to do his business, but he still had another wife. So she divorced him. Having all those children, she won't find another husband easily now. She tresses people's hair for a job. If she doesn't find a customer, they don't have anything to eat. Sometimes I bring her some food. But those people are really living day by day.'

I wondered how she got the money to make it all look so well. The women explained to me; 'If you find some money, first you spend it on clothes. Then you spend it on your house, to make it look good with furniture and all. Finally, you spend it on food. And you know why? Everybody can see how you look. But nobody has to know that you didn't have enough to eat last night.'

Young people and Europe

In the period I stayed with them, Moussa and Fatim were just preparing for their final exams at the economic college. Every day they gathered with about ten classmates, all around the age of 20, to practice and help each other. They concentrated fully on mathematics and economy, writing complex equations on the blackboard that was put down in the yard, and explaining to each other. For

the subject of English there was nobody who knew enough to be able to explain to the others, so they asked me to help them out. The expectations were high.

‘Write a letter. You are very sorry that you missed your appointment. You had to help your father in the shop and it was very busy. After working you became so tired that you fell asleep, and that is why you could not be on time.’

We really tried, and there was definitely not a lack of enthusiasm. I had to disappoint them nevertheless. There was not enough time to improve their skills in such a way that the assignments for their exam would be within their capabilities. Their teacher had reached the age of 70, they told me. He had been in England once, but he could hardly speak English. Instead of the English language, he had picked up the habit to drink, and he was a totally incompetent drunkard. The head of the school had given him the job. They had discussed the bad quality of the classes, but nothing had changed. When they were tired of learning grammar, they asked for other things. So I taught the guys phrases like ‘I’ll see you later’ and ‘I will make us a steady living’.

Now we will all pass our exams, the class cheered and they were relieved. Now we have a white, who came all this way to teach us! Moussa told me that everybody in Segou knew about me. ‘The students come from different quarters, and they are all talking about you! Everybody likes you.’ I don’t know if it was true, but it was flattering nevertheless. When they were done with their mathematics and English, we hung out together and chatted.

As we were sitting, a girl who was also in the class joined, and she told me about her life. She is 23, she has been married for a couple of years, and has a child. Fulbe girls (her ethnic group) marry young, she explained, sometimes at the age of 12. She told me very openly about her marriage. ‘I do not trust my husband fully, so I still use condoms although we are married. But you cannot always do that, because after all the purpose of marriage is having children!’

Every day she takes the baby to her parents when she has to study. It is not so easy to combine marriage with studying, she said. The guys told her that as a married woman, it is your duty to take care of your parents-in-law. ‘But how can you do that, when you are working or studying!’ she defended herself. Although she has failed a few classes, she wants to complete her education. ‘You have to. Without a diploma, you will never find work. My husband owns a store that runs quite well. But as a woman you need some money for your own. Some women have to ask their husband for everything, *c’est pas jolie*. When they are cooking and they need matches, they even have to ask their husband! It is better to find something yourself.’

We continued to discuss the options of finding work. They all agreed that it is very hard to find a job after finishing education. ‘It can easily take ten years’, someone said. ‘You could start trade’, one guy proposed. ‘But trade doesn’t suit everybody’, the girl replied. ‘Not everybody has the same skills for commerce.’

The subject of Europe always returned in these kinds of conversations. I was a source of information, and they started asking me all kinds of questions, that usually started with 'et chez vous ...?' And where you are living, how is life there?

Et chez vous, is there also so much corruption? Et chez vous, what do they actually think about Africans? And is it possible to marry several wives? Are there European girls who would marry an African? Is it easy to find work? Is it possible for a mother to raise her child alone? And does everybody have air-conditioning? 'No, but they do have heating.' Really, is it that cold! They concentrated on every word I said and wanted to know everything.

One of the guys wanted to have detailed information. How much is a ticket? What if you go by boat, how much is it? And when you want to go from Italy to The Netherlands, how much would it be? Another guy asked me to find him a European pen pal. 'Just to exchange ideas, to get to know each other, even if I would never meet him. I just would like to have one friend who is not African!'

I tried to answer their questions as frankly as possible, but no matter how I tried, the answers were always interpreted in a way that seemed too positive to me. I tried to make clear that the life of Africans in Europe, especially the ones who are illegal, is not easy. I didn't succeed at all.

'And where you come from, is there also poverty?' Quickly I responded that this also exists in Europe, but I didn't get away with it that easily. 'How poor, really in a way that people don't have enough to eat? How many percent doesn't have enough to eat?' I had to admit that this probably does not exceed one percent. 'You see! Here in Mali there are millions of people!'

I made an effort to explain that it is not self-evident to find a job, and that social welfare has its limitations. I also told them that some things that are ordinary in Mali, especially for the people who are wealthier, are perceived as quite luxurious in Europe. My mother doesn't have a maid, I told them, we have to do housekeeping ourselves. 'But you have got machines to do the house-keeping!' they argued. 'And I cannot afford to take a taxi, I always take my bike' I told them. I don't know if they believed me. In Mali, taxis are so cheap that being a European, it is never an issue to use them. All Europeans they had ever seen were using taxis, had a car with a driver, or were driving their own four-wheel-drive. When I rode a bicycle in Bamako, people gazed and laughed at me.

We were talking about images, and I told them that many Europeans have an image of Africa that is not realistic. They only see misery, wars and famine on television. The class was hanging on their chairs in the shade of a tree, playing with their mobile phones. They looked at me and replied 'but it *is* like that, isn't it!'

Moussa was dreaming about his future:

‘Of course I want to go abroad! My brother Mohammed and me, we always talk about the countries we want to go to. Mohammed always talks about going to the U.S. My favourite countries are England, then The Netherlands, and then Belgium and also Canada. Not the French, they are mean, they are racists. We have fought for them in the war, and now they are sending people back! Does The Netherlands ever send people back?’

I want to go to Europe. When you come back, you have made it, you have been in Europe! I would return and tell about all the great things I have seen. We all want to live close to you, to see how you manage things.

First, I will finish my studies in Mali. Then I will go to Canada to find work, to make money. After a couple of years I can build my own house in Mali, and I can pay for my wedding. My parents will find me a wife in Mali, while I am still in Canada, and then I will return.’

To grasp this image, I would like to take a look at Foucault (1986) who writes about utopias and heterotopias, that are opposite. ‘Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.’ (Foucault 1986: 11) I think that the image of Europe can be seen as a utopia, and the image of Africa on the contrary as heterotopia. People imagine themselves in one place, while dreaming about the opposite. The reality as they experience it touches their dreams when looking into a kind of mirror:

I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed joint experience, which would be the mirror. ... In the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. ... Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (Ibid.)

Imagine yourself on the other side of the mirror, the same person but simply turned around, who has moved from heterotopia to utopia. It is so close, you can almost touch it. Only a virtual point to pass through, only a border to cross.

Conclusion

It is important to take some time now and then to write, or read, a story like this case study about the Samake family. Many different storylines and many different persons come up. Hopefully in this way it has become clear that events are connected to each other in some way, and that they do not always fit perfectly into a category or a process. Hence, the case study seeks to represent social reality. Commonalities can thus be put in the perspective of the way they come to the surface in daily life. Nevertheless, some general processes of changing family relations can also be deduced. I will compare these with the articles discussed in the previous chapter.

Individualism, extended family.

It is interesting to compare the article of Vuarin (1997) with the case study material about the extended family. The kinds of problematics are comparable. In the article of Vuarin, the entrepreneur has difficulties to support his extended family because it may lead to the bankruptcy of his company. In the case study of the Samake family, Ami is complaining about the dependence of her husband's family, because in this way she cannot feed her own children well. It is a common theme in family life, where solidarity might be challenged.

According to Marie (1997), such individualistic behaviour is due to structural changes that lead to the marginalization of people. They have no choice, but this individualism is in fact contradictory to their values. I would like to take a different point of view.

When looking at the Samake family, and their extended family, they are in very different situations and the relation is somehow unequal. Amadou has a fixed salary and is integrated in the modern economy and modern urban life, while his family is living mainly from subsistence agriculture. Amadou is satisfied with one wife and six children, while his father marries a younger wife at the age of 90, 'and we are the ones who have to take care of the children while they are hardly working on their field', Ami complains. Different kinds of values get mixed. The important value of taking care of the family is still respected, but is not always totally self-evident.

Although these changes in values can partly be explained by the economic structures that have changed, people rather distance themselves because of a certain luxury, than because of necessity. It is not the most marginalized who distance themselves a bit from their family, it is the most wealthy. This is why I

would connect an upcoming individualism more with agency than with structures that almost force people to become more individualistic. Compare also the harsh social control and social sanctions in the article of Klein (2005). It seemed here that when people are able, they do take some distance from certain norms, for more freedom in their personal life.

Women, consumption, sexuality

Also considering this theme there are similarities between the case study material and the studies from the previous chapter. The importance of the consumption of certain articles as a symbol of modernity and progress also shows in the case study. The youth in Segou clearly makes the link between consumption and romantic and sexual relations, in the sense that a guy is obliged to give his girlfriend presents to keep her, and the girl should for example ride a scooter to be seen. Perhaps it is a bit too strong to say that it is the most important thing in the lives of these urban young people, but it is surely not insignificant: money for credits and fuel.

Van Binsbergen (1999) argues in his study about a girl who moved from a village to an urban area that the values of urban consumption are incompatible with those of kinship. This seems to be less the case for urban families. Urban consumption is rather a kind of 'common project' for families than creating separation between them. It is often the parents and other (migrated) family members who enable the buying of a phone or a motorbike, or friends who help each other to keep up the status of the carrier of a mobile phone.

The network studies of Yunusa (2005) and Fokwang (2006) provide yet another perspective. These studies stress the importance of a social network and family network for both surviving and getting a certain position in urban areas. In the case study about the family Samake it was shown how important the consumption of certain articles can be not just as symbols of status and progress, but also for hiding poverty and thereby getting or keeping access to a network of social contacts.

Youth

Another subject that was discussed is the youth, their ideas about the future, and the central place of migration to Europe or North America. Migration is put in the context of the family as it is in Mali. Moussa imagines the situation that his parents will find him a wife while he is abroad for a couple of years, and he will come back to start his own family. Looking ahead, at the situation of Malian migrants in Europe, the chances that things will develop in that way seem to be rather small and there is the risk of getting into the 'migration fyke'. Many are able to get in, but are no longer able to return. Moussa is not aware of that. In

his migration plans he does not imagine a break with the family as might happen in reality. A 'family structure time bomb'.

In his book about individualism in Africa, Marie (1997) does not get to the subject of mobility. Perhaps it is not his focus, but I think it is a missed chance. There are so many families that deal with (intercontinental) mobility, it takes such a central place in the imagination of young people, and it leads to such differences in family relations and social relations, that it is a pity he does not pay any attention to the subject.

Longing for the old days

In the case study a reference to 'the old days' is made several times, when marriages were still stable, problems were still solved between the families, women still took care of their parents-in-law, and everybody worked together on the fields in harmony. Some are longing back for these times, also compared the studies of Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi (2006) and Weisner *et al.* (1997) in the previous chapter.

At the same time, this does not seem to be much more than a nostalgic feeling. In daily life, people use all kind of possibilities that are offered by 'the new days': a woman saving for her own house, a woman divorcing her husband when he does not contribute to the household, a girl choosing her studies rather than taking care of her parents-in-law, the options of birth control, or a man who prefers living independently in the city much over living with his family in the village no matter how nostalgic his feelings. As also pointed out by Schulz, the longing for 'traditional life' is more symbolic to stress the importance of certain values, than that people are really seeking to live such a life. Weisner *et al.*'s idea of 'families in crisis' can therefore better be replaced by 'families in change'.

I hope that this chapter and the previous chapter have shown in a convincing way that the African family is in a process of change, or transformation. In itself this is not a new occurrence, neither is it alarming. Certain values are subject to change, for instance values concerning marriage, sexuality, and the extended family. This does not always mean drastic changes, but rather a consistent shifting, that is expressed in different ways.

Hereby it is important to look at the family as a dynamic entity. Instead of the 'organisational principle' of society that follows fixed patterns, it is a category that is subject to change, both in practice as in conceptualisation. Though the family used to be the main unit of analysis for anthropologists, it has now become more relevant to look at what kind of processes of change families are going through. That is why a critical look should be taken at the way researchers are using the concept of family.

This does not mean that the family loses its meaning in Malian society, far from it. Especially in the experiences of people in Mali and in their values, the family is of high importance, and takes a central place in social life. However, it is important to see the difference between the value of certain family practices (such as taking care of the elderly and the extended family, respect for the elderly, obeying the parents-in-law) that is so often stressed in discourses, and the reality in which people live with their family, often in constant negotiation.

What is needed is a critical look at what family actually means concretely for people, when they distance or approach themselves, and what kind of conflict and dynamics there are. Looking at the family in an open way makes most sense, to see what it means to the different people who are part of it. Inter-continental migration is surely an interesting part of that, both because it is such a widespread phenomenon, and because of its deep influence as well as dependence on family relations. For instance, a migrant might not immediately mention that problematic family relations were a reason for migration, but in fact an urge for freedom and independence from the family may have been a very important motivation. At the same time, the family ties may last for years without people ever seeing each other. More about that in the next chapter.

The African individual in Europe? – Stories of Malian migrants in The Netherlands

Introduction

And then, about a 5000 km or simply a ticket and a couple of hours by plane further. Because of illness, I had to leave Mali all of a sudden. The next day I was looking around somewhat surprised, realising that I was in The Netherlands. The other side of the mirror. Another world.

In the previous chapter, the happy excitement of young people when imagining going to Europe could be felt. They would not hesitate to go whenever a chance would occur, no matter how vague their imagination of such an opportunity. Back in The Netherlands, I started to look for Malian migrants, the lucky ones, the ones who had the chance. It turned out that there are approximately a few hundred, of which I have met about 30 people; I had in-depth interviews with seven. They often didn't feel very lucky.

Also in this chapter, the subject of changing family relations takes a central place. For that aspect, the situation of migrants is very special. How does a long physical absence, and perhaps never a return, affect their relations with family in Mali? Do people still experience ties of kinship, and how, or have they

floated away and individualised? And in what ways are they involved in social relations in The Netherlands, whether with Malians, other Africans, or Dutch? Do people build up kind of ‘replacement family relations’, or do they behave in a more individualistic way as true Europeans? And how to look at the concept of family in social science, taking into account the experiences of intercontinental migrants?

To come to an honest and nuanced answer to those questions, as described in the conclusion of this chapter, I wanted to let the migrants speak for themselves as much as possible. Therefore, I have weaved many personal stories of Malian migrants into the chapter. First some general information about Malian migrants in The Netherlands will be given, and then I will delve into different aspects of their social relations and family relations.

The first aspect that will be discussed is the distance between Mali and The Netherlands. There are different kinds of distance and proximity between people. A kind of distance between people in Mali and migrants in Europe is caused by a knowledge gap. This causes a break that turns out to be very difficult to overcome by giving information. Then attention is paid to proximity, by the eternal wish to return, and by an imagination of living in another reality.

Subsequently this chapter will deal specifically with the subject of relations with the extended family, certain difficulties that are encountered, and different ways people have of dealing with it. Then attention is paid to social relations among Malian migrants and a certain degree of individualisation people may have. The last part of this chapter is about romantic and sexual relations between Malians and Dutch.

General information about Malian migrants in The Netherlands

When talking about the situation of Malian migrants in The Netherlands, it is useful to look at the difference between men and women. Their number is probably more or less the same, but the way they arrive is different. Most women migrate through marriage, either to a Malian man who has already been in Europe for a while, or to a Dutch man who they have met in Africa. When they arrive, their situation in terms of income, housing, and residence permit is often arranged. Their next challenge is to find their way in a foreign country: learn Dutch, find work, get a driving license, etc.

Men usually come by themselves, through other contacts such as family or friends. They often have the idea to look around, and see if they have a chance to find work. If it works out they stay, if it doesn’t they try their luck elsewhere. They usually have to go through a certain period of being illegal, until they can somehow get a residence permit, and find legal and fixed work.

In the first period, people live from small jobs such as delivering newspapers, work in restaurants and hotels, working in a telephone shop, or construction work. The next challenge is to get a residence permit. People have told me that this became more difficult over the years. 'Before, you could just open a bank account, subscribe for a house, everything on a Malian passport. But since the *koppelingswet*⁴, everything is difficult', somebody explained.

One man has been living without a residence permit for a while. When he met a Dutch girlfriend, they wanted to put things straight, and they went to the Aliens Police. There it turned out that he was already known by the authorities, so he was immediately locked up and sent back to Mali. He waited for six months in Bamako, and with the help of his girlfriend he could finally get a residence permit. Somehow getting the papers seems to be a matter of luck. Some lucky ones have managed within a couple of months or a few years, and for others it takes a long time, if they ever manage.

After an irregular period, people somehow find their way. Most Malian people I have met here had a fixed income, and were working for example in factories, construction work, as a bus driver, French teacher, at a computer company, or as a welder. The women worked for example in childcare, care for elderly, or production work. Several women I met were still working on their education, doing additional courses, and improving their Dutch skills.

The table below gives an impression how my seven main respondents managed their 'first integration' in Dutch society. They have all been in The Netherlands for more than five years. Currently, some are actively working on their Dutch skills, and everybody wants a driving license.

| | Residence permit | Dutch language | Driving license |
|----------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Diallo | + | + | + |
| Tungara | + | + | + |
| Kadi | + | + | + |
| Djenebu | + | + | - |
| Fatimata | + | +/- | - |
| Aisha | + | - | - |
| Sourie | - | - | - |

⁴ A law that was introduced in 1998 to discourage people to live in The Netherlands without a residence permit. It prevents these people benefiting from social assistance, rent subsidy, student grants, or a health insurance.

It is hard to really speak of a Malian community in The Netherlands. The number is too small, and people are literally spread all over the country, from villages in the southern province Limburg to the northern island of Schiermonnikoog. The women are more organised than the men. About 20 women are members of an association, and a couple of them meet every month. More than half of them have a Dutch partner. The men meet in smaller groups, like for example in one house in Amsterdam where some men are living together and many others frequently pass by. They have looser contacts with many others, who visit occasionally, and then they can lose sight for months or years. But many people also live in towns where no other Malians live, and are more connected to other Africans or Dutch.

The situation is fundamentally different than it is in France, where there is a large Malian community in Paris. People have told me about rooms stuffed with immigrants without papers, who will do anything to be able to pay their rent and save some money to send home. My respondents usually had a fixed income, or were married to somebody with a fixed income. The married couples had a house for themselves and their children. Some others still had to make a living from smaller jobs, and did not have their residence permit.

To get an idea of the 'type of migrant' residing in The Netherlands, it is also interesting to look back at chapter four. The survey in Segou revealed that the majority of migrants who leave to Europe come from richer families. Without exception, the migrants here indeed do come from such families. They absolutely fit into the category 'more wealthy' as described in the previous chapter. Most people have at least secondary education and they all have many other family members abroad. Everybody came by plane, on a tourist visa, or with the help of a Dutch partner. The migrants who are less fortunate and make their travel by boat, do not seem to reach The Netherlands (none of my respondents knew such a person). I suppose that The Netherlands is too far out of sight for these people. All the Malians I met grew up in a city, either in Bamako or in another urban area.

Knowledge gap

What is the distance between Mali and The Netherlands? When looking on a map, you find a distance of approximately 4800 kilometres. That could sufficiently answer the question for a geographer. But what is the social meaning of distance? The distance between Mali and The Netherlands can be as small as a phone call. It can also be as large as if it were another planet, that can just like Mars and Venus never be reached and seen. For Malian migrants the distance can be that small that they are in fact in Mali while residing in The Netherlands, because all their surroundings look like it. The distance can also be that large,

that they are living with the difficult thought that a return will not be possible for the coming decades, because they do not dare to face their family members and tell them that the dream of a better life in Europe turned out to be a chimera.

There are many kinds of distances, in a social meaning. There is, for example, a distance that is caused by knowledge. Knowledge of another reality, which you can only understand once you have seen it with your own eyes and felt it with your own body. Stories to bridge the distance keep hanging in the air. There is also a distance, or better to say a proximity, by a feeling of being attached, by a perception of the future where you see yourself in that other place. There is distance both as proximity by imagination, by imagining yourself in that other place no matter what geographical distance, and wondering: what would my life look like there, would I have been better off?

Before leaving to Europe, many migrants have high expectations. They do not only hope to make a lot of money in a short time, but also expect to see another reality in the west. I should almost say a kind of superiority, all kinds of special things that you cannot obtain in Africa and that can be used to your advantage. A couple of citations of migrants about their expectations before leaving:

‘I thought that Europe would be very advanced compared to my own country. So with that idea I wanted to show in my country how people work here, and what they are doing here, so it could help us in Africa. So all that I had in mind. Because I thought that here, it would really be very very advanced compared to my country.’

‘Very simple, it is Europe, it’s true, but I didn’t really see new things that impressed me. Because before coming, I had the impression that when you go to Europe, there are things that are very impressive, immediately ... For example, when you get out of the plane, you will see something extraordinary that you are not used to see in Africa. But for me this was not the case. It was just as ordinary as I was used to see.’

‘My sister was already here. She always came for holidays, she had everything, so I thought that here ... [she laughs] When I was still in Mali I asked my sister “big sister, give me trousers, give me shoes, bring me a bag!” I thought that everything was easy here, until I came myself.’

‘It is like a chimera, it is not a certainty. It is something that they say ... they imagine ... Prosperity ... It is the image that is also given by the west, that here ... it is a paradise. But when you see how migrants live here, in reality, when you come ... They find themselves in a situation they did not expect, but return is no longer possible.’

‘My sisters boyfriend, who is in France, said “it’s like I fell into a well. I cannot get out any more. I cannot get myself up, I have to stay in this well.” The well is ... I don’t know, it’s like you are ended. It is sad. And you think that you are going to paradise ...’

As shows from these citations, once arrived in Europe people are very disappointed. The expected special knowledge, great chances, or the good life are not found. Here, life also turns out to be a matter of hard work and survival, especially for migrants. Family and friends in Mali, however, have never experienced that reality. They still cherish the high expectations that the migrant should fulfil.

It leads to all kinds of misunderstandings. Some migrants try to hide the truth by telling fantastic stories to get a certain status that they do not have in reality. Others try to be honest but are misunderstood. Their negative advice about migration is explained as a refusal to help others to also gain such wealth. The ones staying behind are asking for large sums of money and favours, which are impossible for the migrant to give. Some migrants do not visit family and friends at all, because they are afraid to be called a loser, and are ashamed not to have reached the great success.

There are several causes for the persistent myth of Europe as a paradise, but a deeper study would be needed to unravel them. But indeed it has turned out that the stories of migrants are not sufficient to overcome the knowledge gap that separates them from the ones staying at home. Some stories of migrants to illustrate this:

Sourie, a young man without a residence permit, tells:

‘The young people don’t want to believe. I’m trying to keep my younger brother from coming here. In the beginning, he didn’t want to believe me, but slowly he starts to understand. I call him all the time, for months, every week. I tell him about my life, what I’m doing, and so on. I tell him it’s not paradise. I say that I’m tired, because I’ve been working all day. “Really? Are you tired? Did you have to work hard?” Slowly he starts to understand. I tell him, listen to your big brother, you have to finish your studies, I will pay for you. And then you have to find work in Mali. Now he has changed his mind, he doesn’t want to leave any more.’

Later he explains:

‘My father thinks that in Europe, everything is easy. And there are Malians who don’t tell true stories when they come back. When you will come back, and tell them that you didn’t manage, that it was difficult, and that you have no money, they won’t believe you! They will say that you have been lazy, you haven’t been smart, you have only been in bars spending all your money.’

Kadi tells about her sister. She went from France to The Netherlands without papers and was caught at the border. She was imprisoned for six weeks in The Netherlands before she was sent back to France, where she was immediately released.

‘She suffered, she went through all kinds of humiliations. When she was treated so badly, I told the police, better send her back to Africa. That’s still better than the way she is living now, that is no life. But she herself, she didn’t want! She said no, she wanted to go back to France, but not to Mali. Because if she would return to Mali, it would be a shame. She rather wanted to stay in Netherlands and endure all this, to be able to go back to France. Even dying, she would rather die than go back. It is to show you how much people are inclined to stay in Europe, despite all the problems.’

Tungara:

‘When I go to Mali (about every other year since he’s got his residence permit) it is always very pleasant. Contact with the family, it is a way to recharge myself. This side is very pleasant. If I go there to help for example a brother or sister, or to bring presents for my parents it’s always a pleasure. But on the other side, there are always people ... When they hear that I will come, they prepare themselves. They think that, he comes from Europe, he has taken all his wealth. As if it would be easy to get all that money that we gather! So when you arrive, some people immediately come with their problems, they expose all problems they have had for a very long time. And they hope that you will help them. I think you have to be honest and tell them the truth. Not everybody can sit down and think that when you come, you will solve their problems, no! You have to tell them you cannot do the extraordinary.’

‘One of my friends, he is my friend since childhood, since we were really small. But he didn’t want to continue his studies, he only went to primary school. So he doesn’t even speak French, or English, he doesn’t speak any language but Bamana. And he wants to come. He told me, and I told him no, you cannot! Besides all other conditions that I have told you, you, when you want to come, you will have to learn to communicate with people in another language. And how are you going to do that, even the more having your age! He told me that I only say this because I don’t want him to come. If not because of that, he could very well learn the language. I told him, but what other language have you learned apart from Bamana? At least you’ve had the opportunity to learn French! He was silent. He looked at me, looked at me once more, and told me to stop talking like that. He will never ask me again. It is not easy, and you shouldn’t be angry, I told him, but I’m only telling you the truth. Now he never talks about coming any more, he talks about his business over there. Now you have learned your lesson, I said, because your future is here and not there.’

Eternal wish to return

Kadi:

‘It is rare to meet a Malian who tells you he wants to die abroad. We all come with the idea that once we’ve got money, we will return. That is the difference between us and migrants from Congo or central Africa. When they come to Europe, they say that they won’t return. But Malians all leave with the idea of searching for money, and once I’m rich, I’ll return. The majority is building a house in Mali. In any case they prepare their return, even if it will never happen. Have you seen all those houses that are under construction in Mali? When you ask who is building, the owner is in France or in the U.S. One day, maybe he will return, but perhaps he will never return.’

It is a red line that runs through the stories of many Malian migrants. People have left with the idea of leaving for some years, to make money, and return. The house in Mali is as a symbol of their return. Many of them are constructing a house, or at least making plans to do so.

In reality, return is usually not realised within a few years, if ever. This has several causes. First, it turns out that it takes longer than expected to get installed in Europe and to make some money. Once people have reached that point after a couple of years, they sometimes have children that they want to raise in Europe because it would give them more options. Apart from that, there may be family members financially dependent on the migrant, which also makes return difficult because it will cost the family their income. Another reason is that people do not want to give up their certainty of a fixed salary for an insecure position in Mali, especially considering that they have not maintained their social contacts in the same way, and thus have a limited network. Or they realise that they have changed, and wonder if they could still fit in Malian society. Often a combination of several reasons that can also be described as ‘the way life goes’, leads to the situation that the majority of migrants stay in The Netherlands.

The idea to stay develops slowly, but is never totally embraced. There is always an addition somewhere such as ‘once the children are grown up ...’, ‘once I have saved some money ...’, ‘if I hadn’t have got married ...’.

Because of the idea to return some day, people also keep emotionally attached to Mali. For some this is very concrete. They are in continuous contact with family and friends in Bamako by phone, they know about the latest news in Mali, and visit the country as often as possible to be able to go back any moment. For others being attached is more symbolic. They have become very integrated in Dutch society, but still speak about buying a piece of land and building a house, even if it would only be for the holidays.

Imagination

Remember the magic mirror of Foucault (1986) that connects utopia and heterotopia? But what happens once you are on the other side? Utopia does not turn out to be so perfect, which perhaps makes heterotopia not look so bad. Migrants always carry the mirror with them. They always have the possibility to look at the other side, and to imagine themselves in that other place where they come from, and that they know so well. Though certain things may keep them from returning, I have heard many people admit that 'if I had known that it would be like that, I wouldn't have come'. When they imagine themselves living the life they would have led in Mali, many conclude that it would have been better.

This goes even more for the women. Being from the wealthier families, these urban women often have a certain position in Mali. They are neither obliged to earn an income, because the husband should provide, nor do they have to do domestic work, because there is a maid who does that.

To illustrate this, I want to tell the story of Djenebu. It also shows some of her high expectations, her disappointment, and her difficulties to explain to other women in Mali the reality as she experiences it in Europe.

Djenebu was born in Côte d'Ivoire, where she lived with her parents, both of Malian origin, until she was five. At that time her father died, and with her mother and siblings she went back to Mali, to Kenieba (Kayes region) to live with her mother's family. Back in Kenieba, Djenebu was largely raised by her grandmother. She proudly told me about her noble background. Djenebu's great-grandfather was the last king of his village, and that made her grandmother a princess. Being a princess, she would not just marry whomever, but she married a rich merchant, Djenebu's grandfather. When her grandmother married she took four slaves with her, of which—only one stayed because of jealousy of the other wives. Djenebu's mother also still had a slave at her disposal.

'So my grandmother didn't work, she didn't cook the meals, she didn't wash clothes. It was the slave who did all that, who washed her clothes, who washed her feet ... all that! It was the slave who did it. And when she died, the slave, her first daughter stayed in our house and did everything for my grandmother, and later for her children.'

Nowadays she says that young people don't do it anymore and she could not have her own slave, although in some regions slavery still exists. Growing up as the granddaughter of a princess, Djenebu also had a certain position and she said that she never had to do a lot of work.

After her youth in Kenieba, which seemed to be free of sorrow, she went to Bamako for further education. Due to problems with the family, she has never

finished it; instead, she started to trade. Djenebu asked her mother for some of her gold, that she sold to start commercial activities. Throughout the years she has been travelling through all West Africa, such as to Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Benin, and Senegal. Her trade items were as diverse as clothes, shoes, vegetables, sheep and more. At some point she has even opened a restaurant that was running well, but during the dictatorship of Moussa Traore it was destroyed by soldiers. She started to trade again, and ended up in Guinea Bissau. There she met a Malian woman who had married a Dutch man, and through this contact she went to The Netherlands on a tourist visa. She told me about her expectations and ideas before coming.

‘Before coming here, I didn’t know. Ok, I have seen things, heard things, but I didn’t want to take people’s word. I had to see it myself. Me, I don’t listen to what people are telling. So when I came, I had heard many stories, but then I made my own remarks.’

‘Well, me personally, it was my idea to come and trade here, to go and return. Even when I would have my permit, I just wanted to trade. Because it is trade that I know well. I have always done my personal work, I’m not depending on the government. So that was my wish. To come here, work, make some money ... and a permit to be constantly able to leave and return, that was my wish.’

When she came on a tourist visa, she overstayed, and later she got to know a Dutch man whom she married. Currently they have two children, and they are living in a nice apartment in Amsterdam. Her husband provides an income, and Djenebu is responsible for housekeeping. With some regret, she looks back at her decision of going to Europe.

‘If I would have known that Europe was like this, that the foreign was like this, I wouldn’t even have come. What should I do here? I have everything where I come from! Only the great possibility that I was waiting for, I didn’t have. It is for that reason that I migrated. I thought that if I would come here, it would improve the situation. Thank god I feel well, but it is not my country! To be honest, if I wouldn’t be married to a Dutch man, I wouldn’t stay any longer.’

Her dissatisfaction also shows from what she says about encounters with Malian women in Mali, who pointed to the usefulness of machines in Europe for domestic work.

‘Yes, there are machines everywhere. But it is you who takes the machine to do it. It is you who takes the vacuum cleaner, it is you who puts the laundry in the machine! It takes time! To prepare your food, there is no machine to do that! To take the children to school, there is no machine! It is you who has to do all that. When I was in Mali, I told the women, you are at ease here. You are at ease! For us, we are our

own maids! We have to do everything ourselves. But when I ask you, you say that we have everything in Europe. But you are much better off than we are in Europe! We are suffering in Europe! We suffer.'

'We explain, but they don't understand. Some say that it is just because we don't want them to come. Because they see that we are wearing nice things ... We explain, but they don't even try to understand, you see.'

'I regret, in a way I regret. Because all that time I have been here, if I would have been in Mali, maybe I wouldn't have had all that money, but I would have been at ease. Here, we are not at ease. When you have some money in Mali, you have your domestic servant, they will do everything for you. But here, you are your own domestic servant. We suffer. We are suffering here. When I'm in Mali, I don't cook, it is my servant who does everything for me. But here, we do everything, I cook, I take the children to school ... It's you who has to do everything. You are your own slave!'

Extended family

In the previous chapter it was shown how different kinds of values can lead to conflicting situations within families, as was the case with the family Samake and their 'demanding relatives' from the village. Although open conflict was avoided, there were definitely certain tensions. Migrants have to deal with the same issues, but their situation is different because, after all, they are in another continent. How are the relations between migrants and their (extended) family back home?

The tragic image of the migrant being far away from his home country and loved ones is well-known. Many Malian migrants make frequent phone calls, send remittances, maintain contact over the internet, and visit as often as possible. But in fact, respondents also pointed to positive sides of being further away from their family members, and for some of them the family had even been a reason to leave. By living elsewhere, people can take a distance that would have been impossible to take in Mali. They are able to make more individual choices and do not let the family mingle in all their affairs. This is often appreciated. For migrants, being further away from the family and the Malian community in general was also a reason to move away from France to The Netherlands, which people experience as 'more quiet'.

A young man tells:

'I would never want to go to France. There are too many Malians there! You hear Bamana everywhere, even on the bus. So if you are, let's say, drinking a beer somewhere, somebody may see you and the next day your family in Bamako will know. Here you can do what you like. I'm calling with my parents in Bamako and

they ask me if I'm respecting Ramadan. I say yes, and at the same time, I'm just drinking a beer!'

A woman tells:

'In Africa, there are too many problems. And when you're in Europe, you are far, so ... well ... I could say that you have fewer problems. For example, when you are in Mali, your whole family mingles in with your life. You have to get married, you have to do this, do that ... You are not really living ... When you are here, you manage your life how you want, without telling a word. And that is also a reason [for migration] ... Money is the first, but that is also a reason.

If you have some money, you have to give it to everybody. You have to distribute. Finally you don't have anything left for yourself, you don't even live for yourself. But if you are in Europe, or somewhere abroad, even if you don't have a penny, but people don't laugh at you, nobody is mingling in your life. You are alone in your suffering, but you still prefer that over staying in Mali. And that is the reason that people want to leave. You leave ... for leaving all that behind.'

There is a kind of double feeling. Although most people stay in close contact with their family (there are few cases who have broken all contact), they also see advantages in the distance. Migrants do not have to lodge an endless number of relatives, they do not have to share all their income and can more easily make individual choices. Though there is a kind of behaviour that could be seen as more individualistic, the feeling of being responsible for the family is deeply rooted. For many migrants it is common to have many people asking and not being able to meet all demands. It can be a heavy weight. Many people have to face a kind of internal conflict. They have difficulties to make ends meet in their own lives and wish to save some private money on the one hand, while there is the value of taking care of your family that is so often stressed in Mali on the other. The outcome is sometimes confusion, despair, anger, stress, while in some cases people shrug their shoulders and decide that 'it is not my problem.' Some stories illustrate this.

A Malian migrant talks about the confusion of his friend:

'A friend once called me in the middle of the night, just because he needed to tell his story. He didn't want to have anything to do with his family any more! He said that he couldn't handle it any more. Sometimes they called him even in the middle of the night with their demands, forgetting that in The Netherlands it is two hours later.'

Tungara tells about the responsibilities of young graduated people back in Mali:

‘In most cases, for young people, when they have finished their studies, the family is counting on them. It is not like here, that you are totally independent when you have finished! The parents count on their children. And when children don’t find something, the family has to continue supporting that child! Your father is tired, maybe he doesn’t even have a job, your mother has to manage somehow to feed the family. And he knows that his family is waiting, his younger brother ... It is not only the father and mother, but the whole family! It is really something that keeps him busy in his mind.’

Of his fellow-students, only 5 or 10 out of 70 people found a job. What happened to the rest, I wondered, having to face this responsibility but not being able to.

‘Some end up as alcoholics, or drug addicts. Others become criminals ... They are intelligent, they have studied ... or there are those who become angry with everybody. They will say it is the system and they are victims, they are against everybody, everything! It is grave, they are outside the society. They are ready to do anything. For any kind of solution that comes, they are ready. They are ready to sacrifice everything. And there are many cases like that!’

Another woman tells about the pressure that families put on their children to help them and to keep sending money when they are in Europe.

‘The family rather wants you to die than to return. Even when you have helped them! You go through all this suffering to help them, and they prefer you to stay, stay there, just send us money. If you come back, it is a shame, it is not good! This is also because of the poverty. It is solidarity, but the poor families, in the end they just seek to survive. So if one has to die to help the others, it is not so terrible. Well ... it is bad, yes, they will cry, okay ... two or three days, but after that? Sometimes we wonder if our parents really love us, or if it is because of the money.’

The pressure of responsibilities that are difficult to meet and the demands of a large number of extended family members is felt by many. Of course people have different ways of feeling about it and of dealing with it. Dilemmas come up in situations in daily life, in encounters with family members, and particularly in special situations such as when somebody dies. In interviews I came across some examples of these encounters, of a family who moved back to Mali, a young man and his sister who live in Europe and who visited Mali, and a woman who talks about contact with her extended family members while she is in The Netherlands.

Kadi grew up in Burkina Faso and her parents, both of Malian origin, have lived there for a long time. She married a Dutch man and moved to The Netherlands, while her parents went back to Mali. As they were still in Burkina they were

quite successful and many compatriots and family members came passing by, but not to the same extent as when they went back to Mali. According to Kadi, her family fell into poverty as soon as they moved back. They could not get out of the burden to take care of the extended family.

‘When my father returned from Burkina to Mali he became poor. The whole family is living there, and he is the only one! The only one of his village, of the whole extended family who went to school, studied and who succeeded. So all of a sudden, he is the only one who has to take care of everybody. They have a different life now in Bamako than they had in Burkina Faso. You are living in a white environment and then you end up in a very traditional environment, for my brother it was a total shock. My father has never saved, because all the time he had to take care of his family. He has a big house, but there is nothing inside.

You were grown up in a good environment and then you find yourself in a poor environment, really poor! Everybody passes by with their problems ... In Burkina we had a villa with all equipment and now in Mali it is a traditional house, without shower ... But I don’t mind, I still visit my parents. It is like that. C’est l’Afrique.’

Aisha tells about the way family ties stretch from Mali into her living room in Groningen.

‘You know what I like here? The social security. If you’re not working, you get at least something. But in Africa we don’t have that. If you don’t have work, you cannot eat! So if somebody has a job, he has to feed 20 to 30 people, it is impossible! That is the reason that in Africa, we can never achieve anything. The same here, we even have those problems. All the time the people call, aunt, we need this, aunt ... it’s not easy! And you are obliged to do it, you are obliged to work to help them.’

She says that she had been in Mali only four months ago, because her father had died.

‘My father was rich, everybody was dependent on him. Now that he died, the people call us. In December there is the Tabaski feast, people call ... “We don’t have a sheep, our father has died, aunt, we don’t have anything to eat.” That’s why I say that the problems are never finished. Sometimes I don’t even answer the phone. When I see there is a call from Mali, I don’t even pick up the phone.’

Adama has been living in The Netherlands for a couple of years. In the beginning, he never went back to Mali. Now he tries to go every year, because he does not want to lose the connection with his home country. This time he had to return because his old father had died. He was there for moral and financial support and to help making arrangements for his relatives. We met in Bamako.

We were sitting in front of the house on small chairs, a bottle of coke in front of us. Adama's sister, who had come back from France for the occasion, joined us with her baby. The child was wearing western napkins, was drinking mineral water, and it seemed that it had more difficulty bearing the heat than me. They told me about their deceased father.

Originally, he had come from a village in the surroundings of Kayes, an area in the west of Mali that is known as a particular emigration region. Adama's father had also tried his luck elsewhere and had gone to Sierra Leone to search for diamonds. Presumably, he had been lucky, because after some time he could go to Belgium to sell them. Having some money he went back to Mali and settled down in Bamako. He used the benefits of his diamonds to buy land and to build houses that he managed to sell for a good price. 'He built in good neighbourhoods', Adama told me, 'he even sold to Europeans.' In this way he could support his three wives and many children. When it was known that a member of the family had become successful, almost the whole family left the village close to Kayes to go to Bamako and move in with him. 'Maybe there are five people left of the whole family in the village', Adama explained indignantly. Adama and his sister are talking about the extended family that profits from their father's success. The two migrants from France and The Netherlands are on the same side, though Adama's sister judges even stronger. She has been living in France for seven years now, where she married a Malian and earns a living in domestic service. Because her father died she came back to Mali for the first time, but she does not show much nostalgia.

'There are 50 to 60 people living in this house, if you count all the children. They are all living from one salary! They are just sitting, hanging around, waiting until somebody gives them something to eat. The next day they are waiting again for food to be put on the table. It is incredible. They have no idea what it is like in Europe! It has been like that since 1900 and it will stay the same. Nothing is changing here. After seven years I came back, and what did I see? They are all exactly the same!'

Now that the head of the family has died, the problems have started for everyone who lived on his money. The family is in a crisis. The wives are grieving, but at the same time wondering how all mouths will be fed. Adama explains something of the discussion.

'I have a brother who is still living at home, he is 30 years old [Adama is 24]. In his opinion I should solve all of it, but I don't have money in the first place. My brother has to face all this problems of the whole family now, but that is also his own fault. He is still living at home and doesn't do a lot.'

For the extended family, Adama only sees one solution. ‘Those people simply have to leave.’ ‘But where to?’, I wonder carefully. He doesn’t show a lot of mercy. ‘They came from somewhere, didn’t they!’

It is interesting to see the different ways people are dealing with a similar issue. The family who moved back to Mali (from Burkina Faso) have accepted the situation that they have to take care of members of the extended family, because after all you cannot throw them out on the street. Because of this, as the daughter says, they have fallen into poverty themselves. The woman in The Netherlands keeps in touch, tries to do whatever she can, but sometimes at least she has the possibility not to pick up the phone. Adama and his sister, coming back to Mali for their father’s funeral, take more distance and stress that they are not able to solve all the problems of their passive family members. ‘Those people simply have to leave’ is what they say.

From the Malian social to Dutch individualism

Despite the contact that is maintained, it was shown that migrants do take a certain distance from their family in Mali and in a way individualise. What about the social contacts among Malians and between Malians and other Africans in The Netherlands? Do they function as an alternative for family and friends in Mali or do people become more individualistic? Or have people exchanged their African contacts for Dutch?

After a certain time Malian migrants get to know Dutch society and also develop a different view on their own. In line with the general opinion – and not very surprising – for them ‘the Malian’ represents the social, while ‘the Dutch’ represents a high degree of individualism. In interviews, both positive and negative aspects of these came up.

It was noticed – as well as appreciated by migrants – that The Netherlands has a lesser degree of corruption and that social relations are less important compared to Mali. It was said that ‘when you want to do something, you can just do it’, without the need to have relations or money to bribe. Some even see the deeply rooted corruption in Mali as one of the fundamental reasons for migration to Europe. Other positive sides of the ‘less social’ are the lesser extent of social obligations and the way it is possible to get help from anonymous institutions without having obligations to a person afterwards.

Negative sides of Dutch individualism were also mentioned. Some respondents were deeply shocked by the way people do not take care of their parents, or the situation of relatives who are living in the same city but never see each other. In daily contact, for example with neighbours, the Dutch are seen as more

closed. People sometimes have difficulties in making contact with Dutch, even though they would like to do so.

Migrants are aware of both of these ‘sets of values’ and they are moving in between these realities. Some examples and stories show different ways of dealing with it in daily practice.

Chez Sourie: Bamako in Amsterdam

To see the life of Malian migrants in the Netherlands, it is good to pass by at *chez Sourie*, an apartment in west Amsterdam. Ring the doorbell of S.S. Olala. Walk in, up the steep stairs, through the dark because the light doesn’t work. You get into a smoky room, strong scent of rice, dim light. Five Malian guys are hanging on a chair or couch. An evening like all others. Traore is having his beer, Madou is making Malian tea, Bas is bent over an article. (‘What is it about?’ ‘Oh, nothing interesting, it’s about migration.’) Later on, Sourie comes in, with a plate of rice, meat and *loco*, fried banana, that we eat with our hands from the plate. The television is always on a Malian channel and we watch soap operas and soccer. The guys are all speaking Bamana – and French to me; they only speak a little Dutch. They are joking, talking about sports or exchanging the latest news from Bamako. ‘Did you hear that they are constructing a new road to Sibi?’ Or commenting on what they see at television: ‘I know that guy, he sold me my ticket!’

Proudly they tell me that I am at the embassy of Mali. Many Malian people pass by, especially in the weekend. Koke comes from Deventer every week to hang out with the guys. Abdoul comes from Leiderdorp, Diallo comes from The Hague. Some guys pass by and then they do not show their face for months, others are regular visitors.

From time to time, the place is like a phone shop. Everybody is calling Mali. Somebody shows me the phone cards he has bought. Every month he calls for hours and hours to talk to friends and family back home and to be constantly informed about the smallest events.

Bouba is living next door and passes by every evening. The group is like a grin in Mali, a group of friends who hang out together and drink tea. ‘Look at Bouba, what did he actually say all evening!’, Sourie says laughing. In fact Bouba hasn’t said a word. ‘He just comes, watches soccer, drinks his tea. And that’s okay, it’s like a grin, we just hang out together.’ For me it feels like I have arrived in Bamako.

Diallo: between the Dutch and Malian

Diallo was one of my first respondents and no less than three people I know from different directions could give me his contact. He is by far the most well known Malian in the small world of ‘Dutch people who like Mali’. He has been

active in the cultural promotion of Mali and has given lectures and classes of Bamana.

Well-dressed, fancy and cool, he was waiting for me at the train station in The Hague to pick me up and take me to his place by car. In his house, 'the Malian' was obviously present by some touristic items in the living room and a paper of 'Bamana for beginners' on the wall in the bathroom.

Diallo is living alone. He had a relationship with a Dutch woman, they had a child, but about two years ago she went away and only left the piano behind. It is still in the living room and on it is a picture that Diallo proudly shows: him standing next to the queen. Diallo has been in The Netherlands for about ten years now.

He is intelligent and easily makes contact. Despite some small mistakes his Dutch is perfect and he even uses certain expressions that one can only pick up by intensive contact and listening very well. He also makes sharp observations about Dutch identity. He is one of the few Malians I have met who has an office job, at the service desk of a large insurance company.

Diallo sees himself as a trader. He has told me his story that is almost reminiscent of the American dream, from selling newspapers to becoming a millionaire, except for the fact that he never became a millionaire. His parents died when he was still young and he was raised by his brothers and sisters in Bamako. As a small boy he started to sell cookies, with a profit of 30 cents per package. He proudly told me that in that way he learned all the selling tricks. Later he started to trade between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, which went well. It was his dream to start his own factory. He wanted to go to Europe to see how things are done and to return with new ideas. In The Netherlands, he has also traded and became a seller in a big store, where he learned to distinguish Dutch customers by their accent and their looks. Later he travelled to China for orientation and it is still his dream to start his own business. He has tried to trade in Mali, but it didn't work out because of problems within the family. 'I send them things that they sold, but then they put the money in their own pockets! This is why I only do business in Guinea and Sierra Leone now. Never do business with your family!'

His motivation to live as an independent trader is fed by the difficulty to truly integrate in Dutch society. Diallo often had the feeling that he was discriminated against:

'A man in the street, who thought I was a criminal. Another example, a friend of mine was delivering newspapers and somebody called the police! Or people who don't greet you in the street. And when I was working in a factory, I systematically had to do heavier work than my colleagues. I didn't accept that, I left. And also at the company where I'm working now. I do not get a promotion, others do. They do

not let me follow courses. Once I had to teach somebody the work, and afterwards he got a promotion and I didn't! There is no possibility to grow. As a black, you have to try twice as hard to achieve the same thing as a Dutch. The only time when a black gets a position, is when they want to do positive discrimination, not to make it all look totally white.'

Diallo has quite good contact with his family and calls his sister in Bamako weekly. Nevertheless, he says that he has distanced himself from the community in Bamako. Other family members are elsewhere in the world, in several African and European countries and in the U.S.

'Just a while ago my niece called. "It is the end of the Ramadan, so I want some money." Okay, I will give you 50 euros, I told her. But I also haven't seen her for four years. In a way, it is easy for me, because I'm the youngest child. I'm not obliged to contribute. When I was young, I did make use of my family's money, but now I stay far from that, I am independent.'

Diallo also dreams of building a house in Mali and tells me about a beautiful spot in Bamako where he could buy land, near the river. If he had money, he would buy it.

His stay in The Netherlands seems to be quite easy in comparison to others. Even though he tells me that he has been through a difficult period, when he had to accept such simple jobs as delivering newspapers and doing construction work, it later turned out that this period did not take longer than a few months. Perhaps by a combination of luck, easily making contact with people and quickly learning the language, he managed to get a Dutch passport within a short time; so short that he is still a famous example for other Africans who have not been so successful over the years. He is not very popular for that.

Being aware of his own smartness, he does not always want to share his success with others. When he found a job in construction work, in his early period, he told the African guys with whom he was living where he worked and what he earned. They were jealous and asked him to go to his boss and arrange them a job as well. 'But I couldn't do that. That man hired *me*, not all my friends!' It ended in an argument and he was kicked out of the house.

'You should never tell those kind of things, what kind of work you are doing exactly, or how much you earn. Despite, you should never listen to others, because they always discourage you and say that things won't work out anyway.'

He told me about jealousy.

'There are all kinds of ways in which people are jealous. For example, there was a man from Guinea who had a relationship with a Dutch woman. She was rich and willing to help him with his papers. So he went back to Guinea, to apply for a

residence permit. In the meantime, his friends did everything to convince the woman that he only went back to Guinea to marry somebody else! She believed them and the relationship ended. No, it's better not to tell too much!

Diallo consciously took a distance from the Malian community. He moved from Amsterdam to The Hague and despite the fact that he is now single and working in Amsterdam, he does not consider going back. 'Nice and quiet!' From time to time he passes by to see the guys in Amsterdam, sometimes they don't see each other for months.

He is not very orientated on life in Mali. He is not aware of the Malian celebration days and does not watch Malian television. A friend who visited him asked him why. 'I deliberately do not have a Malian channel. I want to live in The Netherlands; after all I've got my Dutch nationality.' 'But you are Malian aren't you?', his friend replies. 'Of course, and I always will be, but if I am here, I am here. I feel at home in several countries, I'm a globalist.' His friend has been living in The Netherlands for 27 years. He has two wives, one in The Netherlands and one in France, and is completely orientated on Mali.

Diallo does have a special sympathy for old African traditions, proudly speaks about African history, and he is the only migrant I have met who deliberately speaks Bamana with his child, so she will not lose the connection with her background. He does not want to be connected to the contemporary African migrants so much. He tells me that he sometimes looks out of his window before going out. When he sees a group of African guys hanging around, he waits a bit. 'Because the people will think that we are all the same.'

Despite the many Dutch contacts he has, most of his friends are African, either Malian or from Guinea, Nigeria or elsewhere. Sometimes, these relations are a bit difficult. He accuses one friend of stealing his ideas for trade, instead of helping him. He also stresses that his friends are not welcome whenever they like, as is common in Mali. The visitors do not always care. Once he called a friend in the middle of the night to help him, because he was ill. Some days later he came, with a group of other Africans who were in fact uninvited, but who just came to hang out and drink ginger tea. Diallo had to change his appointment because they stayed and out of politeness he could not leave.

For some months I lose contact with Diallo. Then he calls me and tells me he has a large debt, he has been kicked out of his house and has lost his job. 'Is there anybody who is helping you?' 'No, nobody.'

Fatimata: rather anonymous help

Fatimata comes from quite a rich family in Mali. She grew up in Bamako and after finishing her studies she found several jobs as a secretary. After her

studies, she could afford to travel back and forth between Mali and the United States four or five times. Her misfortune started in The Netherlands.

When she was still working for a travel agency in Bamako, she sold her future husband his ticket and fell in love with him. He had already been living in The Netherlands for a while and had a residence permit. They started a long-distance relationship and got married a couple of years later. Before her marriage, Fatimata still went to the United States to visit members of her family. She became a hairdresser, worked and travelled around. She talks proudly about this time.

‘I was in more than 13 places, New York, Philadelphia, San Diego, I went to the Grand Canyon ... I love tourism! But every six months I had to go back to Mali to renew my visa, because I didn’t want to live in a clandestine way, I wanted to be legal there.’

She stayed in the U.S. for two and a half years, then went back to Mali and married.

‘It was not the family who had decided for us, we had chosen each other. My husband, he is somebody, when you talk to him, you think he is the best man in the world! But that is not what is inside him. Very nice when you talk, you think oh, he is so nice! But he is really aggressive; he doesn’t know how to discuss.’

Once in The Netherlands her husband started beating her and her situation became very difficult.

‘And in that other house, my husband didn’t pay electricity, for five months I was without electricity! There was no hot water, I cooked on camping gas.’

After about four years of marriage, she wanted to divorce him. The first problem was how to get a house where she could live undisturbed with her son.

‘You know what is the problem here in Europe, you are with no more than two people in the house. You are locked in. There is nobody. And when there is violence, my husband is stronger than me, he could kill me! Sometimes, he hit me and I fell down. The ambulance came and I found myself back in a hospital, unconscious. My life was in danger.’

At that time, she received help from a social worker. With proof from the police and proof from the hospital, she got her own house within a week, where she is living with her child now. She has a Dutch boyfriend, who is helping her a lot, as she says.

‘Getting my driving license, that is my biggest issue now. Because at the moment, I have to do everything by bike, even this morning, and it was raining! I was in the rain with my son, to take him to school, and it was cold! It is difficult. But I really

want to try, I have to integrate in society, it is difficult but I have to, because I'm a woman alone. And even when I'm with a man, I'm an independent woman. I don't always want to tell him "give me this, take me that" ... I don't like that, I want to be independent.'

'It is also the problem, when you come, you don't have anybody! You don't have anybody except the one who took you, that means your husband. And if he treats you badly ... For me also, this violence has lasted for four years. I thought that he would change. It's often like that, the women who stay, they often think he's going to change ...'

'So there is the one who has taken you, and apart from him you don't know anybody else. And even if you know somebody, who will lodge you? Nobody! There is already a lot here, life is expensive and so on. And nobody takes the responsibility to lodge a woman who is married and who has problems, you see? Maybe for financial problems, but for social problems ... People will say that you have helped her to quit her husband! You see, chez nous, there are things that people cannot do. So you find yourself a prisoner, that was my case. I didn't have anybody, not even a single friend here. I could stay for two weeks in the house, I didn't even go out. I was always in front of the television, or sleeping, it was difficult, the beginning in The Netherlands.'

What about help from the Malian community?, I ask her.

'At that time, the association wasn't there yet. But also, we should not talk too much about our problems. It is private. With the Malians, I do not tell them about my life, because the people talk a lot. You see, they listen very well and then they are talking differently. I don't like that. The people are hypocrites. So I prefer to solve my own problems myself.'

'And also, when maybe an African helps you, one day, when you become rich, or when you don't have problems any more, he will say: yes, it was me who has done that, it was me who helped you, it is because of me that you became like this. Or if you have a problem with somebody ... Because this person has helped you, he will start to believe that you are his slave. And you cannot react, because if you react, he will say yes, but when you had problems, it was me who has done this for you. It's because of that. There is nobody who helped me, I have arranged my things alone. I don't like when they help me, I don't like it at all.'

The next time I call her, she has no more time for an interview. Her ex-husband has left to Africa and left a debt of more than €20,000. Because they were married at the time, she is now responsible for paying his debt. There is a payback arrangement proposed which will put her on the absolute minimum income for three years. She tries to resolve the situation with her boyfriend.

Different situations occur concerning the social contacts of Malian migrants. They stretch from being very orientated around Mali and the Malian community to being very orientated around The Netherlands and taking a distance from Malian contacts. Considering the Malian contacts, there are all kinds of positive sides, such as support, the feeling to be at home, having a good time together. When looking more closely, there also seem to be negative sides, such as social control, jealousy and compensation that may be asked in return for help.

Because of these negative effects of the Malian social, some migrants deliberately opt for some distance when they can. Look at the example of Fatimata. When she found herself in a difficult or even life-threatening situation, she did not want to ask for help in the Malian community, but turned to anonymous social institutions.

It is a problem, however, that the Dutch system is problematic as a real alternative, because even the ones who are most integrated have the feeling that they are not able to really penetrate society because of discrimination and racism. This is illustrated by the story of Diallo. He tries to take a distance from his Malian contacts, but does not really manage. At the same time, he is discouraged by Dutch society, for example because he cannot get a promotion at work. A way of living that is somehow in between different countries is most suitable in his eyes and in fact becomes the only option.

Notably, difficulties to truly integrate are experienced more by the ones who look very integrated, who speak Dutch very well, who have or had a Dutch partner and who have a fixed job or are engaged in voluntary activities. They are more aware that they do not have a full place in Dutch society. At 'chez Sourie', the group of Malian migrants in Amsterdam, this is not experienced so much as a problem. Their reasoning is: it doesn't matter, I don't need to become mayor after all.

Because of the different advantages and disadvantages of the Dutch and Malian community, people somehow find themselves in between. The contacts with other Malians and Africans are good for offering support and for spending time with, and somehow seem to be more self-evident than contacts with Dutchmen. Some women meet through the association, the men meet in smaller groups. At the same time, there is a limit. People do want the social, but not too much mingling with private affairs as might have been the case in Mali.

Sexual and romantic relations between Malians and Dutch

For the survey that was carried out in Segou (see the previous chapter), I have talked to many people about their migrated family members in Europe. It was seldom the case that they were married to a European, the marriages were usually between Malians (although I do remember the boy who told me: my

sister, she married a French man with a huge belly!). For the migrants in The Netherlands, this was different. Roughly estimating, more than half of them had a long-lasting relationship with a Dutch man or woman. There were also many stories of divorces and re-marriages, either to another Dutch partner or this time to a Malian.

From the men I first heard the word *Agnes*, like the main character in a book of the Dutch writer and drawer Peter van Straaten. One guy explained to me:

‘If you go to a concert of a well-known African singer, then look how many older women you see, all dressed up nicely. Perhaps these women are lonely, their *Jan* is not giving them a lot of attention, so they are looking for a charming young African guy. He will give her all his attention, and she will help him getting his papers.’

‘The Agnes’ was a phenomenon. Many African men aim for this kind of older Dutch woman. They think she is less demanding than a younger woman, you do not have to give her many presents that you cannot afford, she has a certain economic position and can help you getting your papers.

For Malian migrants, there are not many options to get a residence permit. A relation with an Agnes could be a concrete strategy. How can we look at these kinds of relations? Is it a form of ‘commoditization’ of relations, where the long-term payment is not financial but institutional? Or is it simply a romantic relationship that two people freely engage in, with the almost accidental advantage of a residence permit? How do people consider these kinds of relationships?

Once we were sitting together, hanging on the couch in the living room, me and a couple of African guys, as the subject of Agnes comes up.

‘A guy in my neighbourhood has an Agnes, and she is old! The majority of these women are in their forties, they can still be attractive, but this woman, she is old! Before, the guy always greeted me, but now he doesn’t greet you any more when you meet him, because he is so ashamed. He doesn’t want everybody to know, but she wants to go out with him all the time!’

We have to laugh, and one of the guys makes it even funnier.

‘And she is not embarrassed at all, on the contrary! You can see how she enjoys it. When this woman is living next door, first, she didn’t even greet you, but not since she’s got her African boyfriend! Now she starts to talk to you.’

He stands up and makes it really a play. He bends down to show how this woman is looking down at you and talking to you very slowly as if you are a fool who does not speak a word of Dutch.

“‘Are you from Africa ...? My boyfriend also comes from Africa ... He is very quiet ... His Dutch is not so good ... He doesn’t speak much. He has been through a lot ... But he is a good guy.’”

We are almost falling on the ground, it is so funny as one of the guys is playing Agnes.

‘Or she calls you! And she only asks for her boyfriend. “Did he do his shopping? Did he go to the Turkish butcher for his meat, and vegetarian for me, he knows that, doesn’t he?”’

We are laughing even more. But I don’t know if all the guys really find it so funny. Who is dating an Agnes?, I wonder, suspiciously.

Another night I was hanging out at ‘chez Sourie’. The guys were watching soccer, and Sourie himself was busy with answering my questions for my research. Then a woman who was in her forties came in, who was enthusiastically greeted by everybody. Charlotte!

In comparison with the guys, who are around thirty, she had something ‘mother-like’. She was wearing fine clothes with some Africa-prints on it and made an active impression. ‘Look, this is our latest project.’ She showed the guys a leaflet. ‘It is to help African girls who have to work as a domestic servant. They are from the countryside; they have no idea what they are getting into. Often they have no choice but to end up in prostitution.’ Charlotte talked to them passionately. ‘I have seen it myself in Ghana, these girls work from early morning until late at night!’

The guys all promised to support her project, without even needing to read the paper, because it was for Charlotte after all. After a while I realised who her boyfriend was, it was Madou. She was sitting next to him, leaning against him, being all cuddly while he was still focused on the green television screen. She seemed very relaxed, joking with one of the other guys. ‘Haven’t I seen you last Saturday running after the girls!’ After a while she put on her slippers and went into Madou’s room. He kept on watching the match without saying a word, just looking straight at the screen, but after half an hour or so, he followed her into the room.

Among the Malian women, a relationship with a Dutch man is also very common. For Malian women there is a kind of moral barrier to overcome when starting a relationship with a white. While men perhaps need to overcome a feeling of shame when going out with their Agnes, women are sometimes accused of behaving as prostitutes ‘back home’. They often take a lot of effort to stress that this is not the case, and then decide not to care too much about what the people say.

Kadi tells me about the beginning of her relationship with her Dutch husband. She met him when she was living in Burkina Faso. They have been living in different African countries over the years and have moved to The Netherlands a couple of years ago. They met through mutual friends and she told me how they got together and what difficulties she had.

‘He said: one day, we will go dancing. There was nothing strange about that. So we went, together with my cousin, not just me and him, but with my cousin. That is how it started. And also ... I had a boyfriend, but he cheated on me. It was my neighbour, he is a *metisse*. So I said okay, if he is cheating on me and he is a *metisse*, I will go out with a white just to show him ... Voila, I go out with a white! But then I started to love him. But I didn’t have the right, because if you go out with a white, they will immediately qualify you as a prostitute. So it was difficult. If I went out with my husband, I had to go out with his friends, and I would only meet him there. I didn’t want to show that we were together, you see. Because it is not good, if you go out with a white ... The problem is that in general, the majority of the women who go out with whites, they are prostitutes. So also when you are married to a white, people will immediately qualify you as such. In the beginning it was a problem. I come from a good environment; my father was a diplomat, so he had already taken me to Europe. I didn’t need my husband for that! And then? You marry a white and you become a prostitute. But later I told myself, it is my life, it is not the life of the people.’

Djenebu met her Dutch husband once she was in The Netherlands. Before telling me about how they met, she first took the effort to stress that she has nothing to do with prostitution. Her mother had warned her about becoming a prostitute and she stressed that it was not in her character to do that. Then she told me about her husband:

‘I met my husband in a bar one day. I was staying with family members at the time, they told me “Djenebu, you have to go out, you will find a boyfriend, you are all the time at home, no boyfriend, you don’t have anything ...” So we went to a bar and that day I met my husband. He was really nice to me, we went out ...’

Currently they have been married for four years and they have three children. In general, she seems to be satisfied with the marriage and she would not want to lose him. He has also fulfilled a function of obtaining a residence permit.

‘Before I knew him, I was with a man from Guinea Bissau. But I thought, he cannot get me papers, and at that moment, I needed papers! He even bought papers for me in Portugal, but they were false. So I left him, and my (Dutch) husband gave me real papers, so we got married.’

Nevertheless, she also mentions some problems. Her husband has never been to Africa and she says that he cannot understand her.

‘I want to travel and I want to trade. I want to tell my husband that he can stay working and I will do my commerce. But with a Dutch, and one who has never travelled ... He is a real Dutch man, he doesn’t even like to travel. Even from here to Rotterdam is a journey for him!’

Djenebu also encountered some difficulties with her relatives when she married a white.

‘I am the only girl who married a white. You don’t see that in my family. But I tell them, we are not the same. I can respect your tradition, but what I want, I will also do it. There were some problems, but luckily, my family is a bit modern. They have been to school, they know well, it opens up ... So there are many people who have understood, who didn’t make problems. The ones who didn’t understand, they are talking behind my back, I don’t even consider them.’

Conclusion

In this chapter, many stories from Malian migrants were told and many aspects of their social relations came up. I have looked carefully for ways to describe these social relations and used certain terms such as individualism, social distance and ‘the Agnes’. In all this, the term ‘family’ seems not always suitable.

Different kinds of distances were described. A distance is caused by a knowledge gap, but there is also proximity, because of a wish to go back and imaginations about life in the other country. The relationship with the extended family was described by an internal conflict between different values: the importance of taking care of the family in Mali and the freedom to distance yourself from that in Europe. Also considering Malian social contacts, people distance themselves. Integration in The Netherlands is partly an alternative, although many people have the feeling that full integration and acceptance is not possible. Concerning romantic and sexual relations, there are also options of individual (and practical) choices.

There is no doubt that (most) migrants stay attached to their families, they maintain contact over the phone and by internet, they visit and often send money. In addition to that, there is the dream of returning to Mali one day, although this dream becomes less and less probable over the years. What may be left in the end is a life in Europe and the idea to be buried in Mali one day. Yet there is a fundamental difference in the way people are part of their family while they are in Mali and once they are in another continent.

People do not look in the same direction. More than is the case for different generations, more than is the case for different sexes, more than is the case for

breadwinners and dependants, migrants differ from their family members who are staying behind. Many examples came up in these stories: no longer respecting Ramadan, marrying a European, (partly) withdrawing from the responsibility to support the extended family, taking a distance from the Malian community, not speaking Bamana with children, the valuing of making individual choices and not tolerating others mingling in, or the lesser necessity to maintain social relations because of other social security.

Family relations, therefore, become one kind of relations in which people are engaged, next to relations with Malian or African friends, Dutch partners or social organisations. These different structures or networks are not all situated in the same society, so they do not always connect in terms of values and practices. They are in different contexts. This is why the migrant is the one who can build bridges and make connections and in his individual manner can find a way between different societies, social contacts, sexual relations and sets of values. Family relations are part of that and have a place, but are not necessarily most important. In Mali, being part of the family is self-evident, although 'how' is subject to change. In Europe this is no longer the case.

Conclusion

This thesis contains stories of many different people. However, now it is time to get back to the main subject and to come to certain conclusions considering the changes in family relations in Mali. In the introduction, I formulated two main research questions. The first was in what ways family relations are transforming both in urban Mali and for Malian migrants in The Netherlands. The second was what insights this offers for the use of the concept of family in social sciences. This study has provided certain insights, which I would like to summarize in the three points that are explained below: the family as a dynamic process, increasing individualism and 'towards global kinship relations'.

Dynamic process

In fact, the family as a dynamic process is a very simple statement. The family is not a fixed category, the family is a changing entity, a dynamic process. From here, it is up to the researcher to investigate what form it takes in a certain place and for certain people, what values and practices are changing, and what 'family' means to people. All kinds of examples of such changes for the 'wealthier urban Malians' were given in this thesis, such as changes in sexual values and practices, loosening from the extended family, the central place of consumerism in social life, changes in the practice of marriage, the importance of the family as a social network and of course the normality of mobility.

In Chapter 3, I have shown the difference with classical anthropological research, where the family was seen as the 'organising principle of society'. Such

a perspective needs a critical look, even more because some contemporary research still builds upon this structural perspective of the family. For example, Therborn (2006) and also Findley (1997), discussed in Chapter 3, still distinguish between five main global family systems. This builds upon the way alien societies were categorized in classical anthropology on the basis of organisational structures invented by the researchers, which in the same way could make the difference between what was seen as traditional or modern. But by looking at the family as a changing process and dynamic entity, it can be seen that modernity is more a continuity of change that has always taken place than that being a rupture of a traditional history.

Family is not a fixed category, but it is constantly lived and negotiated. Such a perspective also creates space for new insights and questions. What new kinds of relationships are taking place? In the literature study presented in Chapter 3, attention was paid to the '3C phenomenon' (le Cheque, le Chic, le Choc) that describes how young African women are engaged in different relationships at the same time, all having their special use. In Chapter 5, there was a description of the phenomenon of 'the Agnes', meaning an older Dutch woman, having a relationship with a younger African man. Both are examples of relations of a nature that did not exist before and can only be observed and analysed by adopting an open view on transforming family relations.

In this dynamic process of family transformation, which has many facets and where values and practices are subject to change, two processes especially came to the surface in this study. I will discuss them separately: an increasing individualism and the globalisation of kinship relations.

Increasing individualism

The opposite of individualism is the social, which is of great significance in Mali. The importance is often stressed by people in conversations and also shows in practice. That is perhaps the reason that tendencies of individualism are so noticeable: they seem to be so much in contrast. Individualism is not self-evident, it comes into existence in negotiation and struggle. Throughout this thesis, many different examples of such struggles have been described.

In Chapter 4, Ami's story was told, who got mad by the behaviour of her husband's family. She described them as passive and dependent, but felt the obligation to lodge and feed them to prevent a divorce. In Chapter 5, we read about Adama, who returned for a visit to Mali after his father was deceased and had to face all kinds of family problems. He decided to turn his back on them and left them solve things by themselves. Another example that was given in Chapter 5 was Diallo, who consciously took a distance from his Malian social contacts in The Netherlands, so as not to become entrenched in a web of social control and obligations.

In fact, in the lives of all my respondents, there were these kinds of situations or dilemmas that have to do with loosening from certain social structures, which usually happens with some kind of conflict. Concrete issues were often the obligation to contribute financially or the mingling of family members in what were said to be private affairs.

It also often turned out that the only way to take a distance from the family and obtain more personal freedom was to physically move to another place, like migration from Mali to Europe or from France to The Netherlands. For many, the possibility for more individualism was perhaps not a main reason for migration, but surely an additional advantage.

On the other hand, a tendency towards individualisation is also increased by mobility, especially because some practices are not accepted in Mali but are possible for migrants. Think about the example in the article of Klein (2005) discussed in chapter three, where a couple started a relationship while she was of noble background and he was of slavery background. This was not accepted by the family and was only possible because they were staying in Paris. Migrants are living between different sets of values, of their countries of origin on the one hand and of their places of residence on the other. They have more possibilities to embrace or ignore certain aspects of either culture and can make individual choices more easily.

An example of this individualism is (once more) the relation with an 'Agnes'. This shows engagement in romantic and sexual relationships in a different way. The relation is not based on advice or a decision of the parents and it is not meant for reproduction or strengthening the ties between two families. It is merely a fulfilment of individual needs or desires of two persons.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the causes of an upcoming individualism. I assume that it is the increasing option of individual freedom that did not exist before. It springs from agency, from possibility, and not from impossibility and marginalization, as Marie (1997) argues. It mostly occurs when people have more options – they are wealthier, can make more choices – that they take some distance from certain social obligations.

What are the consequences? Should we draw the frightening image of the ultimate individualisation also for Africa, people who are lonely in their homes with no other social contacts than digital ones? The elderly who are withering because their children do not take care of them any more? As reassurance for those who think that the African family is in crisis: I did not find any proof of it. One could speak of a tendency to individualization, a broadening of possibilities, perhaps a certain emancipation. It might be a development that is necessary in the situation where family relations got so out of proportion in a changing economy that one person often has to support no less than 40 family members.

But in my observation, it is not more than a tendency. The 'social' occupies such a central place in Malian society that it will not fall away.

Towards global kinship relations

One of the things that surprised me when doing this study was the easiness and self-evidence in which family relations of this group of Malians stretch over several continents. Intercontinental mobility is very widespread. Reverting to the outcome of the simple survey in Segou: 73% of the wealthier families had at least one migrated family member, of which more than half have migrated outside Africa. In most of these cases, several members of the same family are spread over different countries. Also respondents in The Netherlands said they have family members in France, Mali, the US, Germany, Spain, etc.

In conversations with young people in Mali, it turned out that intercontinental migration takes a central place in their ideas about the future and the way of sustaining in their livelihoods. For many, it is not so much a question whether they want to leave in the first place but how to do it. They are waiting for a chance to occur. In chapters four and five, it was shown how images of the west as a paradise are fuelling this wish.

Another observation is the frequency of movement between different destination countries, especially for migrants who have not yet had the opportunity or wish to settle down. For example, it is nothing special when somebody has travelled around different countries in West Africa, tries his luck in France, ends up in The Netherlands, and then suddenly leaves to Belgium again. It is more important for people to estimate where a chance could occur and make use of it than what the actual (accidental) country of residence will be.

This all points to the normality of mobility. Though restricted by policy as a complicating factor, for those kinds of families there is nothing strange about intercontinental mobility; it is the normal situation.

In Chapter 5, it was explained in what ways migrants are still part of their families. The family relations were characterised by an increasing individualism. People take more distance from their family than they could have done in Mali, but the ties are hardly ever broken. In many cases, people maintain intensive contact over the phone and by internet, they send remittances and they visit when possible. The ties are strengthened by the idea to return one day, even though it is questionable whether this will ever happen.

All and all, when studying family relations in contemporary Africa, it is very important to take into account the aspect of intercontinental mobility. Hereby family has to be viewed separately from place. It is more a certain social group that can stretch over many countries. From descriptions of family relations that were specific for African peoples and tribes, as were done by anthropologists in

the last century, we get to a situation that for certain groups we can better speak of global kinship relations.

Suggestions for further research

A story is never fully finished; therefore, I would like to give some suggestions for follow-up. In fact, not very much is known about the subject of mobility and changing family relations in Africa. Many gaps can still be filled.

Closely related to this study, there are certain topics that I wanted to cover but was not able to because of limited time. The subject of transformations of social relations in contemporary Africa deserves much more attention. The changing processes around marriage, milieu, the family, raising children, consumption and many themes that have been touched in this thesis are the cause of a profound transformation of a society that will look very different socially and culturally within several decades. Hereby the perspective from rural areas is also very interesting. Will changes be even stronger there or is there also a kind of continuity, as one of my respondents stressed: ‘nothing will ever change there!’

Another issue that deserves more attention than was possible to cover for this thesis is the new kind of relationships such as the *Agnes*. Not only would it be interesting to find out the perspective of these women, studying these kinds of relationships more closely could also lead to new insights considering the possibilities and (sexual) taboos in different societies. It could give information about all kinds of other issues related to encounters between people of different origin, enacted in the most intimate situation.

This brings us to the more general issues. What does family mean? How do new kinds of relations come into existence? (Just think about issues like love through the internet, homosexuality and children, age differences, etc.). How to use the concept of family without misjudging reality and without giving it an intrinsic value as happens so much in policy discussions? How is it filled in by people?

The idea of global kinship relations becomes a very interesting ingredient in looking at the family. It would be good for further study – by looking at other groups of migrants and their social relations in a detailed way – to be able to compare these global practices.

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Appendix 1

Overview of economic activities of men and women in Medine
(n=74)

| | Poorer group | Wealthier group | All households |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Men working in commerce | 40% | 1% | 23% |
| Men working in other jobs | 33% | 7% | 16% |
| Men employed with fixed salary | 6% | 68% | 41% |
| Women working | 27% | 52% | 39% |
| Women working in commerce | 27% | 1% | 18% |
| Women employed with fixed salary | None | 51% | 28% |
| Agriculture | 63% | 22% | 40% |

Appendix 2

Number of migrants per country

| | Total | Poorer group | Wealthier group |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| France | 18 | 3 | 15 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 13 | 9 | 4 |
| United States | 7 | 1 | 6 |
| Senegal | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Gabon | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Morocco | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Niger | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Cameroon | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Spain | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Canada | 2 | | 2 |
| Congo | 1 | 1 | |
| Netherlands | 1 | 1 | |
| Burkina Faso | 1 | 1 | |
| Italy | 1 | | 1 |
| Tunisia | 1 | | 1 |
| Mauritania | 1 | | 1 |
| Cuba | 1 | | 1 |
| South Africa | 1 | | 1 |
| Germany | 1 | | 1 |
| Total | 67 | 23 | 44 |
| <i>Total Africa</i> | <i>34</i> | <i>17</i> | <i>17</i> |
| <i>Percentage</i> | <i>50</i> | <i>74</i> | <i>38</i> |
| <i>Total outside Africa</i> | <i>33</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>27</i> |
| <i>Percentage</i> | <i>50</i> | <i>26</i> | <i>62</i> |

Appendix 3

Contact with migrated family and remittances

Respondents with migrated family members always said that they are in touch with them. Sometimes the frequency is 'rarely' or 'not regularly', but mostly they are in contact every month, twice a month, every week or 'all the time'. In a few cases internet is used, but almost without exception people are in contact by mobile phones. There is no real difference between the different wealth categories, everybody uses mobile phones. There is also no difference between frequency in contact for migrants in Europe, Africa or the U.S. and Canada.

It seemed that everybody was in contact with migrated family members. However, later it turned out that there are also cases when somebody left and 'nobody has heard from him ever since'. If there are such stories within the family, people might feel reluctant to talk about it, which makes it very difficult to estimate how many migrants are not in contact with their family any more. Most migrants also still visit their family members, differing from once a year to once in five years. The frequency of visits does not differ much between migrants who are in Africa, Europe or the U.S. For the migrants to Europe, the possibility to visit their family clearly also depends on whether they have a legal status.

Out of 42 cases of migration, 32 respondents gave information about remittances. Out of those 32, two-third received a reasonable amount of money from their migrated family. In seven cases they did not receive anything, while in five cases they received smaller presents.

Ten respondents mentioned an amount. Six of them talked about sums between 50,000 and 250,000 FCFA (between €75 and €25), and four mentioned receiving around one million FCFA (€1500). It is not very clear how often they receive this money, for instance whether it is a monthly payment or for special occasions only. Nevertheless, compared to salaries of €300 as a maximum – and often around €150 – these are considerable amounts. In wealthier families, there are usually more migrants, so they also benefit more from remittances.

It seems that migrants to Europe send more money than migrants to African countries. For migrants to Europe, people could more often indicate a fixed sum, while I have very few data about remittances from migrants to African countries. Perhaps the ones in Europe regularly transfer a fixed sum, while the contributions of the ones in Africa depend more on the occasion.

Appendix 4

Migration background Medine

To get a general idea, the respondents were asked how long they had been in Segou, where they originated from and whether they had had experiences abroad. The large majority said that they (meaning the head, wives and children) either originate from Segou or had lived there for a *very* long time. Only six respondents out of 74 had come to Segou over the last ten years, mostly from Bamako.

Looking at the longer term, almost half of the heads and their wives originated from Segou or a town or village in its direct surroundings. Slightly more than half originated from other regions in Mali: Kayes, Tombouctou, Mopti, Bamako, Gao, Sikasso and several smaller towns. There were also a few people originating from Senegal, Burkina Faso or Côte d'Ivoire. Most people perceive their move as something from the distant past, between 20 and 50 years ago. When people were asked for their reasons for moving, the answer was without exception 'for work'.

When asked whether they had been abroad (meaning, the head of the family or his wife), it turned out that people who had never left Mali were still a minority of 30%. Most people had been to one or more African countries at least once in their life. Some continuously travel back and forth between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, for example, and to other West African countries for trade. Others have spent a longer time in Côte d'Ivoire, they grew up or worked there. Some people have tried their luck in countries such as Angola, Burkina Faso or Senegal. A few men have been to Algeria when they did military service. In some other cases, the travel had a religious purpose, like studies in Arab countries or a pilgrimage to Mecca. In the wealthier group, a few people mentioned to have been to another country on holiday, but this is still very rare as a reason for travelling.

About 10% had been on a trip to France (only people from the wealthier group), while two respondents had been to many different places including European countries. For the less wealthy people, travelling outside Africa was probably not an option.

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