

## Chapter 8

# Risk Positions and Local Politics in a Sahelian Society: The Fulbe of the Hayre in Central Mali

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## Introduction

Ecological variability poses enormous challenges for people inhabiting semi-arid regions all over the world, and for Sahelian pastoralists and cultivators in particular. The ensuing insecurity about ecological conditions for crops and pastures is the main problem with which Sahelian populations have to contend to ensure their survival.

Normally, ecological risks are treated either as an individual matter or as a stochastic phenomenon striking individuals or groups of people at random. People's individual strategies tend to be geared towards the aversion or minimization of risks by diversification of income sources and low-input production strategies, such as extensive cultivation and livestock keeping. Others have pointed to the necessity of developing collective strategies to counter risks and to the fact that societies have been deeply influenced by the extreme variability in ecological conditions. The French geographer Gallais (1975) coined the term *la condition sahélienne* to refer to a number of innate tendencies that react in a specific way to collective and individual risks in Sahelian societies. In earlier work we have argued that the strategies and cultural understandings people develop may be understood as being structured around the single most important problem, namely ecological variability (De Bruijn and Van Dijk, 1995).

In this chapter, we want to take the discussion further and argue that ecological risks are highly politicized phenomena. Historical analyses over the years have demonstrated that risks in the Sahel were not evenly distributed over the population (see Cissoko, 1968; Tymowsky, 1978; Iliffe, 1987; Gado 1993). Indeed political hierarchies and rules of access to productive resources acted to divert the consequences of ecological calamities onto other more vulnerable groups (see De Bruijn and Van Dijk, 1993, 2001; Van Dijk, 1999). In short, individuals and groups occupied structurally different 'risk positions' (Beck, 1992) with respect to their exposure and vulnerability to ecological and other risks, and were differentially excluded or included in networks mediating access to

productive resources and sources of capital necessary to mitigate the consequences of risk.

This chapter focuses on the changing risk positions of social groups since the beginning of the 20th century in the Hayre, a Sahelian region in central Mali where Fulbe pastoralists vested their power in the 17th and 18th centuries. It shows how a combination of changes in the political context, an ecologically unstable environment and internal politics have led to a new division of risk positions in society and to the exclusion of specific groups from certain environmental resources and amenities. The discussion is organized as follows: a short description of socio-political conditions in central Mali at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (placed in the context of the ecology of the Sahel and of the influence of French policies on local social and political relations); an analysis of changes after Mali's independence (trends after the political transition of 1991 and the impact of administrative decentralization on communities); and an assessment of the link between regulation of resource and changes in risk positions. A case study of the situation in Dalla, the capital village of the Fulbe chiefdom in the Hayre, highlights the changes in risk positions between the various social groups. In the final section we discuss the idea of collective action. It seems that individual differences in risk positions preclude the formation of political alliances to counter political, economic and ecological marginalization.

## The Sahel

### *The Ecological Situation*

The area known as the Sahel is a semi-arid region stretching in an easterly direction from the Atlantic Coast as far as Sudan and beyond. Located just south of the Sahara, the climate is characterized by high temperatures, high evaporation, and a rainy season of 3-4 months with an annual rainfall of between 200 and 600 mm. The amount of precipitation is highly variable in time and space. Annual rainfall in any given year may deviate by as much as 40% below or above the long-term average (Put and De Vos, 1999). Even higher deviations in biomass production have, therefore, been observed (De Leeuw *et al.*, 1993). Combined with variations in the physical environment such as soil characteristics, slope and topography, a large variety of production conditions can be observed in any single year.

Most inhabitants of the Sahel subsist on cereal cultivation, livestock keeping, gathering, or any combination of these activities. Other characteristics such as population density, main cropping system, type of livestock production system, and integration in the market vary from one Sahelian area to another (Raynaud, 1997). More recently, temporary or permanent migration to better-endowed areas in the Sudanic, Guinean and even to the humid forest zone on the coast has increased in importance. In order to make the best use of the variability in rainfall and physical conditions, migration is used by each group or individual as

a risk mitigation mechanism. However, the degree and the direction of this mobility may vary from one year to another and from one group to another. Even within one group, a large variety of strategies may exist depending on family situation, resource endowments, personal history and social position.

#### *The Political Ecology of Risk in the Nineteenth-Century Sahel*

At the end of the 19th century when the colonization of the Sahel by the French was a reality, Sahelian societies were hierarchically organized. The social strata were politically defined. A similar structure could be found in other West African regions: in the Futa Empire of Bandiagara, Segou and Kaarta, Fulbe empires in the Adamawa and Sokoto areas in northern Cameroon and Nigeria and in the Futa Jallo in Guinea. Polities of the Tamacheck and the Sonrai, though not empires at the turn of the century, were also structured in this vein due to the influence of earlier empires. At the apex of the hierarchy was a political elite alongside a religious elite (Islamic or animistic), then a large group of vassals among whom herders and cultivators were to be found. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the slaves who formed the class of non-free people as opposed to the other strata who were regarded as nobles. Between these groups were intermediary groups of ill-defined status such as merchants, bards and artisans.

These empires were built on the exploitation of a high-risk ecological environment through control over people. Land was available in abundance but according to historical sources (Cissoko, 1968; Gado, 1993; Webb, 1995), the ecological environment was, even throughout the 17th to 20th centuries, characterized by recurrent droughts and by irregular rainfall. The wealth of the empires had to be organized around the exploitation of the environment and of the people. The latter was done through organized labor in the form of slavery and the trade in people, the accumulation of livestock and people by raiding neighboring societies and the control over trans-Saharan and regional trade systems. This system of government can be explained as an organization to deal with the risks inherent in the ecology of the Sahel. Thus a specific political organization developed in which the raiding of other people, enslavement and the denial of their rights to own their own means of production were the most basic elements of control (cf. Reyna, 1990).

People were assigned a specific position in this political framework and were differentially exposed to risk. By the very fact that slaves had no control over the fruits of their own labor, and frequently not even over their own land, they were coerced into handing over most of the commodities they produced. In situations of scarcity they were the first to face hardship. Vassals, by the nature of their status, occupied an ambiguous position. In principle they had an independent position *vis-à-vis* the political apex. However, they were often forced to give in to claims by the political class and to hand over part of their production.

Risk was not evenly distributed within these groups. People varied in their vulnerability to risk depending on the number of livestock and the amount of land they owned, the size of their family, and social and political relations. Mere

chance, for example in the case of livestock disease, the incidence of pests, illness of family members or the localized nature of rainfall, could make the difference between poverty and a position of relative wealth.

Risk in the Sahel was also closely connected to mobility, which has always been the principal risk-mitigation mechanism in the region. Slaves were, in general, immobilized in villages to control their productive activities, whereas nobles and vassals were allowed to travel and move with their animals to look for better pastures and opportunities to ensure survival. Vassals, who were cattle herders, moved regularly with their herds to find the best pastures and water resources. Religious clerics traveled to administer religious services and organize instruction. With increasing control from the political center, the regulation of access to resources was centralized and the movements of herders became regulated (Van Dijk, 1999; De Bruijn and Van Dijk, 2001).

Over time, with French colonization, followed by the independence of African states, this configuration of risk positions changed fundamentally and led to transformations in the exploitation of natural resources. The two processes of changing risk positions and changing exploitation of the environment are closely linked and resulted in a situation in which new forms of coexistence, marginality and mobility developed.

#### **Nineteenth-Century Fulbe Society in the Hayre**

The Hayre is a region in central Mali that has always been on the margin of the Inland Delta of the Niger, a resource-rich region that has frequently been the object of contestation. The Hayre is located in the middle of the Niger Bend in central Mali, south of the mountains connecting the Bandiagara Plateau with Mount Hombori. The area can be subdivided into a zone covered with forest on clayey soils with laterite in the subsoil, and a zone of sand dunes covered mainly with annual and perennial grasses, herbs and sparse trees. Most of the cultivators and groups of sedentary Fulbe pastoralists can be found in permanent villages at the foot of the mountains in the north of the area, where the water table is closer to the surface. Towards the sand dunes, camps of mobile Fulbe pastoralists are to be found as well as hamlets of cultivators who moved into this area because of lack of space in their home villages near the mountains and on the Bandiagara Escarpment and Plateau. A more elaborate description of the area and its position in the regional political ecology can be found in De Bruijn and Van Dijk (1995, 2001).

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Fulbe gained control over much of central Mali and built the Maasina Empire. The Diina as it came to be known, was led by a pious Muslim, Sheeku Aamadou, who tried to turn it into a strictly organized theocracy. However, the influence of the rules and reorganization did not extend to the periphery. In the Hayre where another Fulbe group had gained power in the 17th-18th century (De Bruijn and Van Dijk, 2001) the Maasina influence was significant and contributed to the basic social organization of the communities.

Different population groups lived in the Hayre. Cultivators and herdsmen made use of the area but both livelihoods were clearly separate. The herdsmen were organized in loosely structured bands that also undertook mutual raids to accumulate cattle and people. The herders were Fulbe and Tamacheck. Why the Fulbe gained dominance in the area is not clear. It might have been due to the support they received from the larger Fulbe empires or to their need to ensure access to pastureland and to defend their herds against other invading or raiding Fulbe or Tamacheck groups. The fact is that they became the dominant political force in the region, and established Maasina with Dalla as the main village. Fulbe political leadership went hand in hand with the Islamization of the region (see Angenent *et al.*, 2002).

As to be expected, the cultivators in the region were sedentary. They lived in organized settlements with a high degree of central political control to minimize the risk of plunder from neighboring tribes. Most of the cultivators belonged to the Sonrai, Dogon, Kurminkoobe and Bambara ethnic groups.

### *The Distribution of Ecological Risk*

A number of divisions in social and political terms can be discerned at the end of the 19th century based on ethnic affiliation, modes of subsistence, religion (Muslims versus animistic groups), and raiding or non-raiding groups. Internally these societies were also divided into social categories based on power differences and on the notion of nobility that was linked to being a free person. Within Fulbe society this hierarchy followed the scheme outlined above including the political elite (the *weheebe*), the religious elite (the *moodibaabe*), noble vassal groups who herded cattle (the *jallube*), noble merchants and courtesans (the *diawaambe*), artisans (the *nyeeybe*) who are linked to the noble people, and slaves (the *maccube*) who are considered non-noble, non-free and of minor status at the bottom of the social order.

The slaves were the labor reservoir. Among them, a division was made between various categories of slaves depending on the status of their master and the slaves' internal organization or hierarchy. Within these social layers, further divisions were made in a hierarchical way between being more noble or more slave than the other. There were many former free cultivators among the slave population who were simply incorporated by the noble people to work for them. After all, all the land in the Hayre belonged to the noble Fulbe and the political and religious elite had most of the land under its control.

For the *Jallube* herders land had a different significance. They depended on access to pastureland and not to small cultivable plots. The herdsmen also possessed house slaves, but did not own slaves or estates as the elite did. In fact it was the political and religious elite who owned all the land and who decided who could have access to it. Being a slave may have been preferable to being a poor wandering herder because a slave at least had access to land through his master, who in turn wanted his part of the harvest.

During times of drought however, access to the produce of the land was reserved for the noblemen who sent their slaves away if times became too hard. These slaves migrated temporarily or simply died. Many herdsmen lost their cattle and became poor people and potential slave labor for the elite, or they migrated to see if they could find a niche elsewhere. In the political circumstances of the time, it seems highly probable that they then became slaves in another political constellation (see Iliffe, 1987).

Free cultivators were always prey to the warring Fulbe in need of labor for their estates and their houses and probably also for trade in order to generate revenue. To protect themselves against the Fulbe these cultivators built their villages on the escarpment and developed a warning system against raiding bands. The Dogon system is extensively described in this way (Gallais, 1965, 1975; Van Beek and Banga, 1992).

The assignment of risk positions was orchestrated by the political elites who favored the Islamic clergy because of their spiritual qualities, and some groups of artisans. The pastoral groups were largely left to their own devices as long as they handed in tribute and participated in raids and wars (but were exploited in the sense that they were the guardians of the herds of the noble elite). The elites defended the grazing lands of the pastoralists, but this service was of limited value in drought years. The slaves carried the largest burden during drought times. They often died, were sent away, or had to work hard in order to produce food for their masters.

On the other hand the social hierarchy worked as a safety valve for people who had lost their basic source of subsistence, for example a herder who had lost his cattle. A poor herder could be incorporated into the social system as a slave or in another lower group and thus survive difficult times. Nevertheless most poor would have opted to leave and become a slave elsewhere.

Thus the division of risk positions was in the hands of the political elite who were supported in this by the Islamic clergy. Herders as well as slaves had to live according to the whims of the elite who controlled all social relations and access to land and other resources.

### **Changes in the Twentieth Century**

French colonization brought fundamental changes to Fulbe livelihood structure. In the course of twenty years they established an effective monopoly on organized violence throughout the Sahel. This had a tremendous impact on the organization of the management of natural resources and the economy. The position of cultivators, who were contained within well-defined areas where they enjoyed relative safety and protection from raiding, altered fundamentally. Now protected by the French colonial administration, they were able to expand their area of cultivation and within forty years they had occupied most of the area of sand dunes south of the Hayre (See Gallais, 1975). Villages of Sonrai and Dogon descended from the cliffs to the plains.

For some time the Fulbe were able to prevent occupation of their pastureland because of the difficult water situation but in the end were unable to stop further encroachment on their land. The territorial control they exercised was based on military prowess, which acquired no legal recognition of the colonial state since it declared all the vacant and unoccupied land to be the private property of the state. Pastureland and forest were both regarded as vacant and unoccupied. This process continues today and gradually all the remaining open areas of the plains are being put under cultivation.

Though the French officially abolished slavery, it took much longer for the *maccube* to acquire some degree of independence. The liberation of slaves was not a top priority for the French administration and their span of control in remote areas such as the Hayre was so limited that they were not able to exercise daily control there. In fact they gave the political elite a free hand in maintaining control over the court slaves who were simply registered as family members of the noblemen. The name of the former slave group changed to *riimaybe*, which means 'liberated slaves'. Today the *riimaybe* group consists of all groups who had servile status (bondage) in pre-colonial times.

A major change in this field was triggered by the famine of 1913-14. In the absence of modern inventions such as food aid and labor migration, this famine, recorded as the worst of the 20th century, ravaged the Hayre. Whole quarters of villages were wiped out (see also Suret-Canale, 1964; Marchal, 1974). Slaves died in their scores or were sent away to more fertile areas around the lakes northwest of the Hayre, the available food having been seized by the nobles. Since slavery had officially been abolished, nothing obliged the slaves who went away ever to return to their masters and a large number seem to have broken with their masters during this period.

After the Second World War, French colonial policy took a new turn. Elections were organized and could only be held if all citizens were free and equal in the eyes of the law. This in effect dealt the final blow to the institution of slavery. Relations of dependence expressed in exchange of labor and resources continued to exist between noblemen and their former slaves but officially power could no longer be exercised.

The vassal herdsmen were gradually freed from their overlords. They were no longer needed as the basis of military power and they no longer had access to labor and cattle in the form of booty from raids. Unlike the slaves of the political elite, these slaves took their independence and their former masters lost a source of manual labor. They continued to herd their cattle and, compelled by lack of labor, had to undertake cereal cultivation themselves thus becoming semi-settled transhumant livestock keepers.

Their overlords, the *weheebe* chiefs, had to adjust to the new power. They became part of the colonial administrative system that intervened actively in their affairs and deposed traditional authorities when they were not performing their tasks according to their standards. The overlords were made responsible for the collection of taxes and became complicit in the colonial administration, since they were allowed to keep some of the taxes for themselves. As a result they were no

longer accountable to their subjects but instead to the colonial administration. Having lost their military function, they tried to maintain an image of importance by participating in the colonial administration's festivities, showing up with all their former military pomp (see Angenent *et al.*, 2002). In short, the extraversion of Fulbe society in the Hayre became a fact.

After independence many more things began to change and new players entered the field. Under the First Republic, headed by Modibo Keita, attempts were made to break the last vestiges of power of the traditional authorities regarding control over labor and over natural resources. State-run enterprises were made responsible for agricultural production, collectivization of land was promoted, and new government services were given the task of exercising control over all aspects of life, such as forest resources, land tenure, the development of livestock and cereal production.

After 1968 the pendulum swung back when the Second Republic was established. The socialist experiments were discontinued but attempts to modernize agricultural production were intensified. The reason for this was the beginning of a period of devastating drought, which lasted from 1968 until the mid-1990s. Aid money poured into the country to help reform the agricultural sector that was regarded as backward, unsustainable and ultimately responsible for the bad ecological situation and the desertification of the Sahel.

These efforts proved as futile and ineffective as the attempts at collectivization and modernization had in the early 1960s (see Van Dijk and De Bruijn, 1995; De Bruijn and Van Dijk, 1999a, 1999b) and only contributed to a further erosion of the socio-economic position of important sectors of the population. At the beginning of the 1990s, these policies were abandoned after the fall of the Second Republic. The Third Republic embarked upon an ambitious scheme of administrative and political decentralization with the aim of restoring local accountability for the welfare of the population (see Van Dijk and Hesseling, 2002).

This process of administrative decentralization could be potentially beneficial for local population groups because it brings politics closer to marginalized groups. On the other hand it is feared that the potential for conflict will increase since there is no longer a central power to quash these conflicts, and that processes leading to exclusion and decentralization will just be re-enacted at this lower administrative level (Van Dijk and Hesseling, 2002). Further research is warranted since these decentralized administrative structures only started to function recently.

### The Depastoralization of Natural Resource Management in Dalla

In this section the focus is on the specific changes that have occurred in the division of access to natural resources. It is the story of the gradual marginalization of the pastoral groups in the area over the 20th century. Their risk position has become worse than the risk position of the former slave groups. We turn our attention to the

situation in and around Dalla, the oldest capital of the chieftaincy of the Fulbe in the Hayre.

#### *Changing Risk Positions in the Chiefdom of Dalla*

Although the elite of Dalla lost all its administrative powers and was deprived of its former slave labor, it has kept a firm grip on politics and natural resource management around the village. Contrary to the situation amongst the Dogon, the *riimaybe* were not helped to acquire land, although their weak position *vis-à-vis* the Wehebe was noticed by the French colonial government. A French lieutenant wrote to his superiors: 'J'ai appris que les Bérébés (Wehebe: authors) *empêchaient les Riimaybe et Habe d'étendre leurs lougans, dans le but évident d'empêcher les malheureux se pourvoir jamais rachêter*'.<sup>1</sup> The *riimaybe* did not have the right to acquire land if they were directly put to work in their master's house. If a Dalla noble wanted to sell his land to a *diimaajo* (pl. *riimaybe*), the Chief of Dalla prohibited it and bought the plot for himself. This continued to be so in Dalla even after the *riimaybe* were completely liberated in 1946. The chief was also given the authority to patrol the bush to enforce the French Forestry Code and to exploit it with local labor for his own profit.<sup>2</sup> He could thus also prevent the clearing of fields in the bush.

The 1968-73 drought was bad in the Hayre but did not have a disastrous effect on the local economy. The harvests were poor and livestock perished but the population disposed of sufficient reserves to survive the dry spell. At least this is how the population remembers that period of drought today. What was new, however, was the aid in food and money from the international community, which made the situation easier even though part of this aid was siphoned off by corruption at the level of the administration. The drought of the 1980s had a much more profound impact. Livelihoods were severely affected by these droughts and a large proportion of the population was forced to seek refuge in more fertile regions, having lost their livelihood in the Hayre.

In the post-drought years, the problems have not decreased. Conflicts over natural resources have risen, and it is easy to see that, with the advancement of time and an increase in drought and poverty, the pastoral groups around Dalla have lost out to their competitors, the Dogon, *diawaambe*, *wehebe* and *riimaybe*. Cultivators from Dogon villages have started to clear fields in pasture areas and the *riimaybe* of Dalla have sought new opportunities to occupy the land. The *diawaambe*, some of whom grew rich during the droughts, have laid claims to both pasture and agricultural land.

*Competition between the Dogon and the Fulbe* The following case illustrates the process of changing positions in local politics. In 1964, even before the droughts, the Chief of the Dogon of Diamweli, Kansa Ongoiba, asked the Chief of Dalla for permission to clear fields on the Seeno-Manngo at Petil Camil. Yerowal Nuhum, the Chief of Dalla refused. But after Nuhum's death and after the 1968-73 drought, the Dogon of Diamweli began to clear land on the Seeno-Manngo at this site and established a cultivation hamlet, i.e. a hamlet only used during the

cultivation season. They felt they were in a strong position because one of Kansa's sons had become *attaché de cabinet* in the Ministry of Interior. Bukary Yerowal Dikko, who was chief at that moment united his most important Fulbe deputy chiefs from Karena, Nani and Sigiri and went to the *chef d'arrondissement*, who sided with the Dogon. The Fulbe attacked the administrator and were put in prison. A brother of the Chief of Dalla, who worked in Segou as teacher, was called to intervene on their behalf with the *Commandant de Cercle*, one administrative level higher. He agreed to arrange matters on condition that the Fulbe would not claim the tax money they were entitled to from the administration (as the American government compensated the Malian government for lost tax revenues provided they agreed not to levy taxes on livestock during the drought). The Fulbe agreed, the money was left with the administration and the Dogon were removed from the Seeno-Manngo. In 1976 the conflict flared up again. The district administrator, a Pullo (pl. Fulbe) this time, called all the parties together and decided in favor of the Fulbe. A covenant was signed agreeing that from then onwards no new cultivation sites would be allowed on the Seeno-Manngo and that the area would be reserved as pasture. However, in 1984 the Dogon of Boumban, just south of Dalla, bribed the *Commandant de Cercle* and obtained permission to cultivate on the Seeno-Manngo near Daajem.<sup>3</sup>

*Changing positions within Fulbe society* Another conflict over land, between Dalla and Karena and between various groups in Dalla, shows that the Fulbe were also divided internally. In the early 1980s the *riimaybe* of Dalla started clearing land on various occasions in the bush between Dalla and Karena. The Fulbe of Karena and three other pastoral settlements protested because the fields were located near a number of small ponds that provided water for livestock in the rainy season. Not only did the fields hinder access to the ponds but the Fulbe would also run the risk of having to pay compensation money if their livestock accidentally damaged crops in nearby fields. The *riimaybe*, on the other hand, appealed to ancestral rights to these fields. In the distant past there had been Kourminkoobe villages in this area and one can still find the remnants of blast furnaces. The *riimaybe* consider themselves, having become free, the rightful heirs of the Kourminkoobe who were captured by the Fulbe. The Chief of Dalla, Bukary Yerowal, backed them. However, under pressure from the pastoralists he turned down the claim by the *riimaybe*.

Later, after the drought of 1985 the Chief of Karena visited the Chief of Dalla, with a request to reconsider the occupation of these fields. After all, the Fulbe had lost their cattle and were eager to cultivate the more fertile land in depressions where water was available. At that moment the bard of Dalla and some *Diawaambe*, who cleared the land without anyone knowing about it, had already occupied the best parts of the area. The Fulbe of Bankassi, the settlement nearest to the fields, still regard this land as having been stolen from them. They considered the area as pastureland that should remain so, and given the provisions of the Land Tenure Code they were correct. Their ancestral claims were not recognized under the provisions of the Land Tenure Code with respect to the clearing of land because all

land that has been vacant for more than ten years automatically becomes the (private) property of the state. Fields in this area would restrict other activities and were too close to water resources. Permission to clear fields here would have to be refused given the regulations in force. The administration did not change this situation because the agricultural officer responsible was bribed. So, this encroachment on pastoral land was made in silence.<sup>4</sup>

In the end the Fulbe lost because they were deprived of their source of political power, cattle that had perished in the drought. They were also no longer necessary as political and military support for the *wehebe* because the Fulbe armies had ceased to exist. In the past the conflict of interest between pastoralism and cultivation, which is equally a conflict between flexibility and the centralized political organization of the Maasina Empire, was regulated by the management scheme of the Diina. Now even the Diina rules are left for what they are and the management of natural resources is being taken over by the Malian state, which represents sedentary and anti-pastoral interests.

*Changing positions in the village of Dalla* The last conflict to be discussed here is even closer to the heart of power of the chiefdom. It was a severe threat to social cohesion in the village of Dalla and concerned areas set aside as pasture way back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the *harima* and *burti*. The *harima* is reserved pastureland next to the village meant for small ruminants and *burti* are strips of land acting as passageways for animals during times of cultivation.

The *harima* is one of the most fertile pieces of land in Dalla. Animals have dropped their dung on the soil for ages and though in the past most was transported to the surrounding fields, a lot of nutrients have remained in the soil. With declining numbers of cattle and growing pressure on land around Dalla, as testified by the accounts of conflicts above, pressure on the chief to open the *harima* for cultivation also mounted, although this would militate against Diina rules and even modern legislation since customary rights were recognized in this body of law. The Chief of Dalla, Bukary Yerowal, and later on Hamidou Yerowal gave in to pressure but decided that it would be better to take advantage of the *harima*, and thus were among to first to occupy a field as near as possible to the village and a cotton garden where they could plant mango trees. As a result the whole village rushed to snatch their share of the available land. At the moment only the market place and degraded parts have escaped occupation.

Apart from the conflicts between villagers about the boundaries dividing their newly established fields, a major conflict arose in 1991 over the pastoral vocation of the *harima* and the *burti*. When the rush on land occurred around 1985 there were hardly any people with livestock but by 1991 some *diawaambe* had been able to reconstitute considerable herds and were confronted with the problem of where to leave their animals at night. All the land around the village is under millet cultivation and fields block all road access. They asked the chief to remove occupation of this land. The chief gave in and had his brother and nephew lay out the *burti*. The *Riimaybe* occupying this land responded by threatening to chase the animals. The *diawaambe* then put more pressure on the chief, declaring that they

would complain to the administration if he did not force the *Riimaybe* off the *burti*. This would mean the chief would be removed from office.<sup>5</sup> The chief consulted the former Imam, his father-in-law, as to what to do. The well-respected old man, who is regarded as a saint in Dalla, took the side of the *diawaambe* because it was closer to the Islamic doctrine of the Hayre. He called the *Riimaybe*'s spokesmen and told them to stop the conflict and abandon the fields on the *burti*, *harima* and some of the ponds that were in contested territory. Now the hierarchy has been turned completely on its head. The former subjects of the pastoralists, the *diawaambe* and the *Riimaybe*, are contesting hegemony over natural resources in Dalla. Nor is the chief any longer in control as he has to resort to the moral authority of the Islamic clergy.

From these conflicts it becomes clear that the influence of the *jallube* pastoralists in Dalla has become insignificant. In the first conflicts in the 1960s the *wehebe* defended their interests. Later on they supported the *riimaybe* who were looking for land to cultivate because of the declining harvests *vis-à-vis* pastoral interests. In the conflicts following the droughts there seems to be a return of pastoral power in Dalla but this power is not represented by the *jallube* pastoralists. Instead *diawaambe* entrepreneurs, who manage commercial herds, have become the champions of the pastoral way of life, and *moodibaabe*, defending what they believe to be Islamic orthodoxy.

Another important change in comparison with the past is the reference that is made to the modern state as the ultimate authority to appeal to in case of serious conflict. The extent to which people are able to win conflicts is closely related to their bargaining power in relation to the administration. In the first conflict, the chief was able to turn down the appeal without recourse to the state. After the drought in 1973, the administration had to be bribed, just as in the second conflict bribery resolved the conflict. In the third conflict, the threat of appeal to the state against the chief was sufficient to force a (temporary) solution. In this game of power the *Jallube* no longer play a role. In Dalla itself there are no *Jallube* families left. In the surrounding areas there are three small hamlets of *Jallube*, Boussouma about 2.5 km away with seven families, Hoggo Loro 1.5 km away consisting of one family, and Bankassi with four families. The rest have migrated to other parts of Mali or sought refuge on the Seeno-Manngo.

The parties in all these conflicts agree on nothing except for the fact that the power of the *Jallube* is at present negligible. With the droughts and the loss of their cattle they have lost their only source of power. Their political power has disappeared although they have often got their way by bribing the administration. In the absence of cattle they have no bargaining power left. This weak position is the result of a long historical process. However, the position of the *riimaybe* as a group of cultivators is developing in reverse. They are profiting from state policy and agrarian developments in the region. Although in ideology they are still regarded as the lowest stratum of society in economic terms and also in social reality, they have a much better position than the pastoralists.

### The Encroachment of 'Outsiders' on the Seeno-Manngo

To complete the history of the relations between the Inner Delta and the Hayre we will briefly recount the events concerning the pastures of the Seeno-Manngo. This history sketches the impact of policy with regard to natural resource use on a regional scale on the risk positions of the various groups in the Hayre. In regional politics, the influence of the Fulbe elites is negligible. So even if they wanted to defend the rights of their pastoral vassals they do not have the means to do so.

Until fairly recently this vast area of high-quality range<sup>6</sup> was only used during the rainy season and a short period afterwards by local herds from the Hayre in the north and from the Seeno-Gonndo and the Mondoro area in the south. The use of the area was dictated by the seasonal availability of water. After a period of deterioration at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, herds prospered once again in the colonial period and the French saw the danger of overexploiting the delta. At the same time they also wanted to develop the livestock sector. They appreciated the potential of the Seeno-Manngo, not only for pasturing animals in the growing season but also in the dry season. Their reasoning was that pressure on the pastures in the Inner Delta could be relieved (which they considered overexploited or converted to rice cultivation). The development of watering points on the Seeno-Manngo could primarily serve to keep the herds on the drylands for a longer period of time (Doutresoulle, 1952).

This policy was based on the assumption that all the herdsmen from the drylands would direct their herds to the Inner Delta of the Niger after the rains had stopped. This is, however, only true of the Fulbe herdsmen who have lost most of their pastures to the colonization of their territory by Dogon cultivators who descended from the Bandiagara Escarpment after the French conquest of central Mali in 1893 (see Gallais, 1975). For the Hayre, Seeno-Manngo and the area around Mondoro this is not the case. The herds in these zones remain as far as possible in their home region. Herdsmen and cultivators alike practice the cultivation of millet on permanent fields. This is only possible because of the manure that is produced by the cattle and goats that remain in these zones during the dry season. The watering points that they developed by themselves over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the basis for this shift to agro-pastoral land use (Van Dijk, 1995). The external policy to open up the Seeno-Manngo disturbed this system.

During the colonial period attempts were already being made to draw the Seeno-Manngo into the orbit of the delta herds. Between 1956 and 1958 seven boreholes were drilled and equipped with windmills to draw water. The exploitation of the pastures and agricultural land around these boreholes caused considerable strife among the region's inhabitants. As there were no provisions for the maintenance of the windmills, they were soon out of order again (around 1960) (Gallais and Boudet, 1979). After the 1969-73 droughts, another attempt was made to develop the Seeno-Manngo. The livestock service, with loans from the World Bank, started a well-digging program (see Gallais 1984) to make more permanent exploitation of the Seeno-Manngo possible. However, according to the pastoralists,

this also attracted cultivators to the area (ODEM, 1978). In addition there were more grandiose plans to drill a number of boreholes in the middle of the dune area and equip them with solar pumps that supposedly demand minimal maintenance. From this scheme only one borehole is still functioning (see Van Dijk and De Bruijn, 1995).

With the drought of 1983-85, the effects of the government wells became clearer. Enormous herds from the north and even from Burkina Faso were attracted to the Seeno-Manngo, one of the few areas where water and some range were still available. This led to enormous overstocking and, as a result, 75% of the local livestock perished. The herdsmen of the Seeno-Manngo were not able to ward off the outsiders because they had no say over the modern wells.<sup>7</sup>

Since then, every rainy season sees the arrival in the Seeno-Manngo of numerous herds owned by urban traders and civil servants from the Inner Delta, conducted by salaried herdsmen. They cause damage to the fields of the local inhabitants and use up the range. They try to stay in the area as long as possible because the pastures of the waiting areas near the Inner Delta are also overexploited. The pastures in the inland delta also have decreased enormously. The livestock service tried to promote this tendency by deepening the ponds, creating new wells and improving the old wells but when pastoralists wanted help to improve or repair their own wells their requests were turned down. Officials refused to discuss the issue of land tenure around the government wells. The local pastoralists want this issue to be settled before any new initiatives are taken. Specifically they are worried about their position *vis-à-vis* newcomers.<sup>8</sup>

### Decentralization in Mali

Since the political transition in 1991, the Mali government has embarked on a project of political decentralization. In 1999 the final stage was realized with elections for mayors and the establishment of rural communities. The idea of this process is to bring governance closer to the ordinary people so that they themselves may make decisions about their lives.

Dalla has become a small rural commune consisting of 18 villages. The constellation of this commune reflects power relations. In fact it consists of a large village of noble people: *weheebe*, *moodibaabe* and *diawaambe* and their *riimaybe*, separate *riimaybe* villages and some temporary hamlets of herdsmen. The *beweejo* mayor of this commune found his support among *riimaybe* and *weheebe*. He is a brother of the present chief of Dalla. The *jallube* pastoralists are invisible, living in camps on Dalla territory but having no say in this political game. It is clear that they were hardly involved in the election campaigns. For them the chief is another *beweejo* who is not prepared to represent them when necessary.

The *weheebe* retain a firm grip on all matters concerning land use and politics. Though the *riimaybe* are nominally free, they are entirely dependent on the *weheebe* for access to land since the land around Dalla remains in the hands of the latter. In return the *weheebe* rely on their votes in local municipal-council elections.

In another place inhabited predominantly by pastoralists, the pastoralists have claimed a commune of their own, having obtained permission from the government to establish it and to elect their own mayor and community council. This independent stance has its historical roots in pre-colonial times when this village claimed independence from the Fulbe chiefdoms in the region. However, over the past decades numerous Dogon agriculturalists have settled in hamlets on their pastureland and turned thousands of hectares into cropland. To secure their claim to this cropland they are trying to develop water resources with the help of outside agencies. The pastoralists have no way either of preventing these people settling on their village land or of forcing them to abandon their pastureland. Thus the ability to regulate access to territory, pastureland and cropland is dependent on the specific context and political organization of each community and the status of its inhabitants within their own society.

Finally the different groups in the Hayre have changed places in the hierarchy of risk positions: the *diawaambe* and *riimaybe* have become better off, while the *jallube* pastoralists have become worse off.

### Individual Differences and Collective Action

One wonders whether there is not a basis for collective action that may counter this kind of process. It is clear that the traditional socio-political hierarchy does not provide a basis for this and only when it comes to imposing state policies on local pastoral groups do these hierarchical relations serve a purpose. However, as was shown in the preceding section, the way these relations are operated only serves to deepen the marginalization of the pastoral groups. The rise in the political position of the groups surrounding the traditional political elite in Dalla (*diawaambe*, *riimaybe*, *moodibaabe*, *nyeeybe*) is not the consequence of their collective efforts and concerted action. They are carried on the stream of political developments in the region that favors their interests: the favorable policy for sedentary agriculture and the decentralization process, and their influence as electorate in the elections. The reverse is true for the pastoral *jallube*.

Of course these groups are not an undivided whole and not all members have the same risk position. In this chapter we have chosen to present the social categories as collectivities because, as social history shows, they have functioned and today still operate as such in local politics. People have a sense of belonging to a social category. It is part of their ideology.

However, this does not mean that these social categories are the basis for collective action as a number of structural factors inhibit the development of institutions or movements for collective action. In the past, collective action could only be set in motion by the political center through the vertical ties with subordinate social categories. The first is the fragmented nature of Fulbe political organization. Society is not only subdivided in status categories but, at the level of these groups, organization is highly segmentary in nature. Between the vassal pastoralists, the only group with sufficient people and status to challenge the authority of local leadership

and the administration, all kind of opposition exists amongst the various lineages composing this group, making it difficult to organize or even to envisage a unified group. For political leaders it is easy to play a game of divide and rule.

Another major factor inhibiting collective action is the covariance of risk, meaning that people in the same risk position have to face the same risks at the same time. For them it is more profitable to invest in their own enterprise than in collective devices for risk mitigation (Platteau 1991). This is clear when one analyzes collective mechanisms for the redistribution of productive resources such as land and livestock. These are all geared to the transfer of property to a restricted group of kin and do not involve a kind of solidarity or general reciprocity towards members of the community (Van Dijk, 1994; De Bruijn, 1999).

The third point follows on from this. Though groups of people may be attributed similar characteristics within a structural political framework this demonstrates little about a specific individual's particular situation or risk position. Differences between individuals and families in wealth and vulnerability to risk are so vast that they preclude the formulation of any common interest in relation not only to risk mitigation strategies but also to outside intervention and contextual changes. The image of an egalitarian pastoral society is a myth (Sobania, 1990).

### Conclusion

We have tried to show some aspects of the relation between a high degree of risk and the political ecology of pastoral societies in the Sahel. The concept of risk position was introduced to pinpoint the position of groups and individuals in relation to their exposure to risk and vulnerability. With the help of this framework we have shown how the structural position of the former vassals of Fulbe chiefdoms, leading a pastoral way of life, has eroded to such an extent that they have become the most marginalized group in Fulbe society. On the other hand developments have enabled the former slave groups to climb up the risk hierarchy.

During the colonial period the Fulbe political elite became detached from their following, the vassals. Today they are no longer accountable to their former vassals but rather to their former slaves who form the basis of their political power in the sedentary villages and are far more accessible for community council elections. The mobile pastoralists have lost their claims to land and, given their mobile existence, have moved out of the political centers to marginal areas beyond the reach of election campaigns to areas where no or only limited cultivation takes place.

A more detailed analysis of recent political change with respect to administrative decentralization reveals that this process is continuing unabated. However, the scope for collective action to counter these transformations is limited given a number of structural factors in the organization of Fulbe society, and the group of former vassals in particular.



## Notes

- 1 National Archives file 2E-4: Politique indigène: Correspondances cercle de Bandiagara: 1899-1907, Le Lieutenant Gateau à cercle de Macina, 18 April 1903.
- 2 National Archives file 3R-6: Foresterie au Soudan, Le Gouverneur des Colonies et le Gouverneur du Soudan Français à M.M. les Administrateurs Commandants des Cercles de la Colonie, 15 December 1927. National Archives file 3R-39: Eaux et Forêts: 1916-1918, L'Administrateur en chef de 1-er Classe à Ms. Les Administrateurs des Cercles et le Commandant de la Région de Tombouctou 15 April 1916.
- 3 This story was told by Moussa Yerowal Dikko, then a teacher in Segou, who intervened on behalf of his family members with the *Commandant de Cercle*. The other leading persons in this conflict, Kansa Ongoiba, Yerowal Nuhum Dikko and Bukary Yerowal Dikko, have all died. The administrators retired and moved out of the region.
- 4 This conflict was related to us by several informants, among whom the late bard, himself one of the people involved, Allay Jangiina, the former aid of chief Yerowal Nuhum, and several Fulbe from settlements around Dalla, Nu Saidu Jallo from Hoggo Loro and Hamma Ngarya Jallo of Bankassi.
- 5 Many more incidents occurred in the past that would have justified his removal. This last grave incident would tilt the balance.
- 6 Doutresoulle (1952: 66) estimates the potential area of the Seeno-Manngo, Seeno-Gonndo and Seeno Mondoro at 5,000,000 ha.
- 7 In addition a Tuareg chief got permission to equip one of the boreholes drilled in the 1950s with a motor pump and watered his own cattle and those of his dependents in this way for as long as he deemed necessary.
- 8 In our presence, a senior official at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Livestock Keeping asked local herdsman to cooperate with the Delta herdsman in order to manage the Seeno-Manngo. The local herdsman were very shocked. They felt they had lost their customary rights to the Seeno-Manngo.

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### PART III

## GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS AND CONSERVATION IN AFRICA