

# Families in Movement

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



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## Abstract

This thesis is about the transformation of family relations in urban Mali, with a focus on intercontinental mobility. The main question is in what ways family relations are transforming, both in urban Mali as 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, that 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 also 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. There should thus no longer be spoken about 'the African family' 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 clearer. On the one hand a distance arises between them and the 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 because of imagination, contact, and the eternal wish to return. Living in Europe, some migrants are totally covered in 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 that are drawn 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 be seen increasingly 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.

## Acknowledgements

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

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 couldn't find the vein. Exactly at that moment Mirjam, my guarding 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 has saved your life', is how 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 again into enthusiasm and inspiration so I could move on.

Further on I would like to express my gratitude to the Malian consulate in The Netherlands for kindly providing me with very helpful information, and also 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 kind suggestions and helping out at several moments during my research.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 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, at 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 persons I visited. I went to a house in the centre of Bamako where she lived with her uncle and aunts, and right away I stayed 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 for 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 office in the centre of Bamako is squeezed in between two crowded roads of the kind that can either be crossed with courage and creativity, or with a lot of patience. Fanta's uncle, monsieur Dabo, is the head of the police office. He was appointed the house next to the office. It is relatively quiet there, with a small path and stripe of park between the house and the big 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 run right across, the couch in the middle, the television in a corner on the ground. In fact the room is filled with nothing else, except for a cupboard with poshy China. What also catches attention is an enormous portrait that is hanging on the wall. 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 anymore, holds her in his arms. She is his second wife. The first one 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 case there is 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 anymore. 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. The rest of the day the atmosphere was even lazier

than normal, because the television could not provide distraction, and the van could not provide cooling anymore.

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 actually your uncle, 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 haven't seen her last time?' 'Yes, she is another aunt, she moved in and took her grandchild.'

In another room, Madame had installed herself. Her privilege 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-co.

Her daughters, some teenagers and some around twenty, and Fanta share another room. Every girl has a piece of wardrobe with their own key to prevent others from borrowing their 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, and 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 turned into 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 van 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 wouldn't, 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 of 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 smelling, 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 much 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. Also here the *bonne* comes 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, if there are no strikes. The other five days she is hanging on the couch, talking, or going around the house in the most beautiful outfits. I have never seen her look into a book. Fanta's aunt, also beautifully dressed, spends most of her days in her air-co room on 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 office, 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 about these kinds of households. Main research question: *What is going on here?*

Many different themes can be deduced 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. It was my intuitive remark, grounded in all kind of observations while I was staying in the country, such as in the household described above. Later on I saw it also confirmed in other studies, though these were scattered over different disciplines.

The domain of the family is one of the most personal parts of social life, and a description of it therefore 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 report 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 get to certain insights considering the use of the concept of family in social sciences.

Further on, this study has a focus on intercontinental mobility, specifically migration from Mali to The Netherlands. There are two reasons for that. The starting point of this study, as further explained in chapter two, is the idea that mobility is such an important part of the social life of many groups in Africa, and certainly this also

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 about social relations and family relations this is often not the case, so the special attention to the aspect of mobility can be seen as an addition.

Another 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, as for those interested in (intercontinental) mobility.

What is often lacking in migration studies, as argued more extensively in chapter two, is a profound interest in social relations and how they are experienced and lived by migrants. *If* attention is paid to family relations, it is usually at service of subjects as 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, that is of explorative 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 for the researchers. Also in that respect this study can hopefully provide additional material.

## 1.2 Main research questions

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

## 1.3 Explanation of concepts

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

Family is tricky. Although it seems not so difficult what is meant with it, 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 hasn't 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 who lodges her for months and where she lives as if it was her own house? Especially in an African context, the concept family can be stretched eternally, just depending on the enthusiasm of the researcher.

The concept 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 also this situation is 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, more the opposite. Because the aim is to study changes in family relations, a restriction could limit the possible outcomes. So as a guide, I have used how people themselves talk about their family. For the survey carried out in Segou (chapter four), people were asked about their migrated family members, they could decide for themselves whom to include. But also other social contacts were 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 so it seems obvious definition of migration is the one used by Held (1999): 'At its simplest, migration refers to the movement of people from one geographical location to another within and beyond a country of normal residence.' (p. 283)

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.', say van Dijk et al (2001). 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 to a wide diversity in migrants. Depending on the study, it should at least be made clear about what kind of migrants it is.

Another concept that is often used especially in social and anthropological studies, is mobility. Van Dijk et al (2001) prefer using the concept mobility over migration, because it encompasses other types of moving, such as mobility as a way of life. It also includes non-human and non-material things such as ideas and values. Another advantage to me seems 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 over intercontinental migration, because of the very nature of the mobile experiences of the people concerned. Although being in a position that would be labelled as 'labour migrant', they often have moved for various reasons, such as study, curiosity (just to look around), to gain experiences, or marriage, and these reasons often changed over time. (Described in detail in chapter five) Often more by coincidence than by choice they became labour migrants over the years, but do not always see themselves like that. 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 then, is voluntary migration from urban areas in Mali to Europe, particularly The Netherlands, both with and without residence permit. Different motivations can play a role, and the stay in Europe has a length of at least several years.

Another term is not used in literature, but it is used in discourse: 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 me the term.

‘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.

#### 1.4 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 The Netherlands, why Mali? The starting point of this research 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 and 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. Also in the lives of the people who are staying behind, the mobility of others has a considerable impact, and is thus omnipresent in Malian



society. Another reason for focussing on Mali was the fact that the researcher was familiar with the area. The Netherlands was basically 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 the 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 take another study.

The part of the population that this study specifically deals with is the wealthier part. What I mean with that is explained in the first half of chapter four, but roughly it means the 'kind of people' who have an office job, have finished higher education, and who can afford themselves some luxuries such as a television, nice furniture in the house, a car, etc. The kind of people who manage to get a sum of money together to be able to go to Europe by plane on a tourist visa. It does not mean 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. The reason to concentrate on the 'wealthier urban' in Mali was also that the community of Malian migrants in The Netherlands almost only consists of people who are grown up in urban areas, and come from the richer families.

This 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 other countries in Europe. In this thesis I will not claim anything like that, in lack of founded material. The reader who is known with other but comparable situations can draw his or her own conclusions.

### **1.5 Methodology**

In total it has taken almost a year to carry out this study. Two main periods were important for gathering data. First there was a stay of about two months in Mali (Bamako and Segou), and a couple of months later there was a period of about three months of gathering data among Malian migrants in The Netherlands. This multi-locational way of gathering data 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. Without doubt my stay in Mali has helped in making contact with Malian migrants, if necessary even by speaking some Bamana. From the beginning on, they have been very open in interviews.

The last and probably most important reason for a research in different places is that different kinds of insight become possible. By limiting a research area, also the kind of outcome is 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 a geographical spot, 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 on to the pre-set scientific categories too much.

This research has an explorative 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 in daily life, and how new kind 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, also a mostly quantitative survey was carried out. The different methods that have been used were:

- Literature research.
- Ethnographic research in Segou and Bamako. Observations and informal conversations with people in urban areas within the context of their household. 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 The Netherlands: informal meetings and conversations, going out, visits, etc. Making contact, observation of social life, personal relationships.
- In depth semi-structured interviews with seven migrants, that 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 quarter Medine. 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 for a larger area, but they are at least a rough indication for migration from other urban areas in Mali.

The quarter Medine 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 for Medine. I made an estimation of 1000 houses in Medine, of which 74 were part of a survey that was carried out in about two weeks time. 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 also gave cultural advices.

There were also some constraints. In chapter two it is explained how difficult it is to get reliable data about migration, and also this survey has its limitations. The most important problem that was encountered was trust, or rather, the lack of it. Many respondents had never taken part in a survey before, they were not higher educated, and could hardly imagine the aim of all the questions that were being posed. Although nobody refused to cooperate, some respondents were hesitant in

responding to questions. Apart from that, migration is also a difficult subject because 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 anything of that kind. Nevertheless we always got the answers to our primary questions, and part of the information has been gained by observation.

The main aim of the survey was to find out the characteristics of different kind 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 four.

### **Research in The Netherlands**

In The Netherlands I found my respondents through the Malian consulate, through the association of Malian women, through Dutch acquaintances who have been in Mali, and later via other respondents. In total I have met about 30 people, with seven I had in-depth interviews, and 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 (those are 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 for all Malian migrants in The Netherlands, be it only 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 in 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 a bit underrepresented, 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 otherwise would 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.

### **1.6 Contents of this thesis**

This thesis is divided in a part that is based on literature study, and a part that is based on own research. The second part is again split up in two chapters that are

based on fieldwork that was carried out in Mali, and that was carried out in The Netherlands.

Chapter two 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. Hereby attention is paid to the way family is used in these studies, and what insights about 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 chapter three and four.

Chapter three is also based on literature study, but from the angle of family and social relations in Africa, and 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 four 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 to processes of change like in marriage, relations with the extended family, consumerism, and the future ideas of the youth. In the end, the findings from the case study in chapter four are compared with the articles discussed in chapter three.

Subsequently we move on to The Netherlands, and to the lives of Malian migrants in particular, in chapter five. In many personal stories, mostly direct citations from interviews, they tell about 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'.

Enjoy reading.



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

### **2.1 Introduction**

For a literature review of the subject family relations and intercontinental mobility, I have 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, and it is impossible to be complete in this chapter. But to find some order in the academic chaos, this chapter provides at least an overview of some important approaches in migration studies: economic/structural, social/cultural, migration and development, and the idea of transnationalism. I have critically looked at these different approaches with the usefulness for this thesis in mind, considering the way they use the concept of family, or 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 numbers and statistics and a brief historical context.

### **2.2 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 and Gendreau 2007). In general no statistics are being kept of the number of migrants who pass at borders. The number of migrants known at consulates is usually under-estimated, because many migrants are not registered. Another difficulty is knowing a persons nationality, for people may be known under a different nationality as their own, especially when passing through transit countries. And finally a difficulty is how different studies define a migrant. 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 migration and its quantitative importance.

Starting with worldwide migration, Zoomers and 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, and 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 like this, 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 south-south. In West Africa for example, people

leave from 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 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 and van Naerssen 2006)

Many Malians migrate to countries out of Africa and the destinations are diverse. Groups of Malians are even living in for example China and Indonesia. But the main destination on top, after Spain that is gaining popularity, still remains ex-colonial ruler France. Paris is being called 'Bamako sur le Seine'. A study carried out for the Malian ministry (ministère des Maliens de l'extérieur et de l'intégration Africaine) last year revealed a number of 70,000 Malians in France, of which 40,000 unregistered. According to the ministry, the ideas that Europeans may have about overwhelming flows of migrants are being corrected 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, at the website of the Malian ministry.)

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. However, since the civil war started in 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 2.67 million Malians in total live abroad, while other sources even speak of 4 million. (Merabet and Gendreau 2006) This is considerable on a population of less than 12 million living within the country. The number of immigrants in Mali is quite small, less than 2% of the population, and mainly from surrounding countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Guinea. (Merabet and Gendreau 2006, data from 1998). A table shown by Black and 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 exact 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 moves to different countries within Africa. It also becomes clear that Mali is a real emigration country, with a considerable part of the population that has moved away, and only a small number of immigrants.

### **2.3 Brief historical context**

Migration is as old as mankind, is stressed in many articles, to point 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 p.3) Not so much as individuals but rather as tribes, people moved driven by conflicts and wars between ethnic groups, or simply 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 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century contacts were established between Africans and Europeans, 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 times, 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'. Rwezaura (1989) on the contrary 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 discussion about 'tradition' and 'modernity' is elaborated on page 28)

After independence, 'initial forced migration through force labour, taxes and compulsory cropping, later became institutionalised into regular migration in various African countries.' (Hinderink and Tempelman 1978, p. 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 or permanent, or anything in between.

Migration from Africa to Europe and the U.S. has started in the 60s on a larger scale, either because of guest worker agreements, or linked to decolonisation. The general trend at that time was welcoming and encouraging immigration to meet labour demands. When the economy got into a recession in the 70s and 80s, migration was no longer stimulated by western countries, which increasingly adopted a restrictive policy. 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.

## **2.4 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 draw some attention to it. There is a bunch of economic approaches and differentiations within them, so only some of the most common 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 about 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 has 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, the rural population is 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 to find work.

The 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 mostly to use the household as a profit-maximising unit of analysis in models.

Following on this, a model of push and pull factors of migration has been developed by Lee. (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 a (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. (For example Rubenstein in de Haan 1999)

Studies differ in 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 of 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 determinants 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, p.34)

In this kind of study, family relations are simplified to the household that is used 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 that it is reduced to a unit that maximises their profit. Thinking back for example at the description of Fanta's household in the introduction, this seems a view too simple 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 be too complex to describe just in a structural way, and this 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), about 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.

## **2.5 Cultural and social approaches**

The criticism that there is too much emphasis on economics in migration studies is also clearly shared by Klute and Hahn (2007). Anthropologists fight back. Their introduction of the book 'Cultures of Migration' immediately starts with four arguments that challenge the push-pull factor approach. First, 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 experienced as problematic as it is often presented. Second, it is a structural way of looking at migration, and the agency and creativity of migrants with their individual choices is not taken into account. The focus on push and pull factors tends to put an emphasis on economic reasons where non-economic motives may be just as important. And 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 peoples especially in Africa.

Enough reasons for a cultural and social view on migration. First I will give some examples of cultural studies that look at how migration can be seen as a 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, it can be understood why a group has a specific way of dealing with mobility.

A study about 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 about cultures of migration among adolescents migrating from villages in Burkina Faso to the capital or to neighbouring countries. Both for the ones that return as for 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, p. 195)

Martin (2007) describes a culture of migration in southern Ghana, that is most of all characterized 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 the anomaly. This point is stressed in a study of de Bruijn et al (2001) 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.' (de Bruijn et al 2001, p. 64) This 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 2001, p. 1) The idea of the normality of mobility is in fact the basis of this 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 sedentarity.

Sociological studies do not so much speak of a culture of migration, but address 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 Verdians, 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 is more important than a kind of objective situation. For example, many people see themselves as poor. If 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.

## **2.6 Transnationalism**

Lacking in this overview until now is the concept of transnationalism, introduced in migration studies in 1994 by Basch et al (Spaan and van Naerssen 2005). Transnationalism is opposed to the previous idea of migrants as people who are moving from one place to another, end of story. This reflected the political view, that migrants should either return to their home country, or adapt fully to the host society and not become partly-citizens who are still loyal to the country they come from. However, in reality this political wish was not the case. 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 still growing network of mobile phones and internet.

To describe that phenomenon, the concept of transnationalism is used, and still hotly debated. Glick Schiller (1995) defines 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.' (p. 48) 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.' (p. 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 differ between 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 emails 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 email 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.' (p. 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 flies regularly 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 them. 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 a small 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 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 next question could be until 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 and Mazzucato (2008) do 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. Hereby she adds that kinship and



family relations are under-researched in the context of African transmigration. A gap to fill, and to which this study hopes to contribute.

## **2.7 Migration and development**

Except seeking to describe and understand the phenomenon of migration, as in many cultural and social studies, a different bunch of literature is more linking up with policy. The main question in such an approach is what is the relation between migration and development, in order to make policy that enhances the developmental impact of migration. Values become more important in these studies, by explicitly questioning whether migration is positive or negative, and for whom. Note however that literature about migration and development concentrates on the question 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 60s and 70s, 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.' (Spaan et al 2005, p. 37) Migration can have some negative effects, but these are short-term. On the long term it is assumed that it leads to an improvement in resource availability and income distribution.

Contradictory is the asymmetrical growth approach, developed in the 70s and 80s. 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 merely seen as a failure of development. (Black and King, 2004) Policy was oriented on '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.' (Black and King, 2004, p. 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 and 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 that, family relations are also

an important factor for return migration. From the policy point of view, it is an interesting question when is exactly the impact of the family, so policy measures can be directed both to migrants and their families.

A study that is concerned with this issue is done 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 except for 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. So far so good. The study continues by trying to divide migrants (from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) on the basis of a survey into two categories: 'family-influenced migrants' and 'those whose migration decisions are not directly influenced by their families'.

The outcomes are in my opinion too much a simplification of reality. Demonstrating this is for example a man's quote about return migration. '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 and simple table. Does Tiemoko actually take his respondents seriously?

Tiemoko also gets 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 this thesis I found the opposite. For Malian migrants, family plays a very important role in the decision to move to a second country (see chapter five). People often want to take some distance from their family and the Malian community and therefore move to another country. Are these kinds of factors not at all important for migrants from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, or didn't they find their way into the table?

The reason I pay so much attention to this study is that it demonstrates to me that in an attempt to get to quantitative results, sometimes the outcomes do 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.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Then back to the main question of this chapter, how to value these different approaches and still get to new insights in this thesis? 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. It occurred to me, when going through endless piles of studies about migration: 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 surely think that it 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 said, in literature there is not enough interest in other aspects.

Studies as the one from Tiemoko 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 uses social factors as a starting point, such as the involvement of Ghanaians in The Netherlands with funerals in Ghana, but does 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 a space 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 to treat the aspect of family relations not 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.

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

### **3.1 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 purely at the situation in the African context. The main question that runs through these chapters is what kind of processes of change African families in urban areas are currently going through, and what this implies for the ways in which social scientists should look at the family. This chapter provides an overview of what is said in literature about this subject. I have gathered as much as I could find.

First it is explained in what way family was looked at in early anthropology, and the way we could see that now. Following, different studies are discussed that shine a light on contemporary processes of change in African families. Some of these specifically deal 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, 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. Comparing articles about for example Senegal and Cameroon with my observations in Mali, I would indeed agree that it seems that comparable kinds of development take place.

### **3.2 From the ‘traditional’ to the ‘modern’ family**

In what way did the first anthropologist 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 here to go back to a detailed report in the style of Gluckman who noted 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 the structuring of 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) 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.' (Rwezaura 1989 p.60)

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 logics of the market and within the household as forms of non-wage labour. Also in modern times, families on 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 cannot be described anymore in the same way as was done in the first days of anthropology mainly in 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. Put shortly, the traditional African family, once described so beautifully by anthropologists does not exist anymore in the same form, even the more in urban areas. The question is now, what do we see in urban areas, and how to look at it?

Before continuing a search for an answer to that question, first another point has to be made. The traditional African family, has it ever existed? In other words, what is actually meant with tradition and on the contrary, 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 and Long (1999) '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.' (Arce and Long 1999, p. 5) And '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.' (p. 5) 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 of the western superiority 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 nowadays associated with modernity or tradition 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 about 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. It is however currently a question what is left of that, because of all kinds of changes especially in urban areas. This counts even the more 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, 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 also certain contemporary studies still use 'the African family system' as was happening in the first days of anthropology.

Like 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.' (p. 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, men often have to pay a bride price, which stimulates economic migration. (Findley 1997)

However, as I have argued before, the African family is in constant development and describing it by these kind of systematic and fixed features, that often tend to stress the exotic much more than the normal, demonstrates rather a lack of understanding of the dynamics of a society. I will continue discussing different kinds of studies, that 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.

### **3.3 Family in crisis?**

A logical first step for this literature research 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 to the book 'African families at the turn of the 21st century', edited by Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi (2006).

Oheneba-Sakyi puts changes in African families in a historical context of influences by Islamic and Christian culture since respectively the 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, and thereby gives them a history. He also points 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' (Oheneba-Sakyi 2006 p.6).

Subsequently he refers 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. He points to all kinds of negative developments such as disorganisation and changes in family dynamics, an increasing number of divorces, the crisis of HIV, and that elderly support may be under stress. 'African families are confronted with a series of developments that are posing serious threats to the traditional family structure.'(Oheneba-Sakyi 2006 p.14)

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

Oheneba-Sakyi in the end concludes 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.’ (Oheneba-Sakyi, 2006, p. 276)

I think it is a strange remark. At first, why does he call the African family traditional, especially taking into account his critics concerning western scientists who, in their assumed superiority, have first come up with the idea of the traditional African family. Oheneba-Sakyi distances himself from descriptions of the traditional African family, and at the same time he pities that this assumed traditional family is threatened in its existence!

Second, one could wonder if all these social changes are really that negative. In the books of both Oheneba-Sakyi and Weisner, 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 in a way as open 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.

### **3.4 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 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, shows in a study of Fokwang (2006). She describes how many young people in Cameroon join a Presby group, 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, that 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, p. 81)

Looking at the family as a social network provides a certain view on family relations. It helps in getting an insight in the ways people might manage these relations strategically, in what ways people have access, and 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 truth. This network is not a fixed situation, and family relations may not in the first place be experienced by people in that way. Family relations are relations of intimacy and connection, but also of conflict, that have a meaning to people that is much deeper than just to function as a social network. The kind of conflict situations where the network is 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.

### **3.5 Family versus individualism**

Another way to look at contemporary family relations is by the angle of upcoming individualism. More and more people take their decisions out of an individual conviction rather than following the holding social norms, is the general idea behind such a perspective. A romantic story to illustrate 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, p. 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, of which people usually provided by 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, denied the right to get married in the village, and 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.' (Klein 2005, p.834)

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 kind of relationship between a person of noble background and a person of slavery background is also reality in Mali.

The story is an example to illustrate different things. First, there is the severity of social sanctions that can affect a person and his family in fact much more than official sanctions would. Hereby it becomes clear that certain deviating 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 the kind of social tensions and conflicts do not exist in Mauritania or let's say Mali, but they may come to the surface in a different and perhaps less radical way.

Second, it can be seen that a practice is changed that is commonly seen as traditional, 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, and then 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 is 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 employers, and the difficulties to separate their business budgets from demands made by the extended family. Here it becomes also clear what kind of struggles can be involved in family relations. One respondent explained, when it was asked whether his family members ask for support:

"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." (Vuarin 1997, p.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 when he 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, while this is in fact contradictory to their values. He points to all kind 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 become only more difficult with multiplying risks and misfortune (unemployment, degradation of grades, misery, marginalization). 'Affaiblit les mécanismes antérieurs de la solidarité et oblige les individus a 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.' (Marie 1997, p.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 in fact shows in both examples discussed before.

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

### **3.6 Women, consumption, and sexuality**

Yet another angle to look at changes in family relations I have found in studies of Schulz, van Binsbergen, and Nyamnjoh. 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 how she becomes a consumer there. First being unaware of urban consumption articles, gradually she gets 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 by sport 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 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.' (Van Binsbergen 1999, p. 200)

Schulz (2001) writes about the same subject, but from the point of view of women who were grown up in an urban area (Bamako). Also for these women there is a high attraction in 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.' (Schulz 2001, p. 355)

According to Schulz, this romanticising of life on 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." (Schulz 2001, p. 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. Only the explanation of 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. And as well it 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 a trios*, or also *ménage a 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)' (Nyamnjoh 2005, p. 303 – 304)

Nyamnjoh perceives increasing consumerism as an important and not exactly 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.' (Nyamnjoh 2005, p. 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 in their consumption needs, but at the same time are longing for the moral values as they are still supposed to be lived on 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 in a bit simplistic way, but what it is all about is the importance of consumption and the connection with changing family relations and sexual norms. At the same time, these three studies shine a different light on the subject, and also in Africa (and why just Africa?) it may manifest in many different ways.

### **3.7 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 for sure not lost its meaning, practices in urban areas have changed so much that such a perspective on the family does no longer hold. 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 and Weisner speak of a crisis of the family, which they see confirmed in all kinds of problems in society. I have argued that this reflects too much the values of the researchers, that it is put very negatively, and in fact draws away attention to the question what is actually changing in families. In different literature 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 to generally accepted values. Different from Marie, I have argued that this originates in changing values of young people, made concrete as they are actors with their agency, rather than that it is a negative effect of structural changes.

Yet another tendency that is pointed out by several authors are changing sexual norms under the influence of (or parallel to) the attraction of consumption and an urban lifestyle that people in all kind 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 the 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 here discussed, and this will lead to a perspective on the transformation of family in Mali.

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

### 4.1 Introduction

Segou. Imagine a place that is sandy, awfully 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 the carriages that function as taxis. The youth who can just about afford it goes 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 chicken are going around and somehow a troop of kids is always present.

For a while I was living in such a yard. In the morning I was sitting 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 a bit. 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 situation they find themselves in? By describing some of the situations and conversations I have 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 is used that is gathered in Segou. The family Samake and their social surroundings are taking a central place. The chapter specifically deals with relations with the extended family, marriage, consumption, and 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 on 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 what kind of households are living in that quarter, how they sustain in their livelihoods, and to what group the family that was used in this case study belongs. It is also used to better explain in a context what 'kind of people' this thesis is about, and special attention is paid to their options for migration.

### *4.2 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 is living in the quarter Medine. According to the inhabitants this quarter does not differ in a special way in terms of welfare, professions, age, ethnic groups or otherwise. Nevertheless within the quarter there is quite a wide variety of the ways in which people sustain in 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 some brief info about the composition of households. The average number of people living permanently in the household in this survey is 12 (excluding the maid or boy). This ranges from 3 to 40 persons, but usually around 10. The average number of children of a head and his one or more wives is seven. This does not necessarily equal the number of children of the household. Some of the biological children may live elsewhere, for example because of education or work, while other family members may be part of the household. One third of the heads of the family has a second wife, and less than 10% also has a third wife.

Households consisted mostly of the head of the family, his one or more wives, and several children and grandchildren, and sometimes included extended family members. There were also different situations. In some cases, a woman was living alone with their children, because the husband had deceased, had left, or lived elsewhere with another wife. In some 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 there are in family structure. The statistics of this survey show that the younger heads of the family do have less wives and children than the elder. Unfortunately nothing can yet be concluded from that, because obviously: the older the men get, the more children and possibly wives they get. If 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 are living, I will give three brief descriptions of households in terms of composition, activities, ties with their family, and migration.<sup>1</sup>

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, and 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 couldn't do anything because he was ill. His wives also didn't start any trade, because they were lacking even a small starting capital. They hardly had 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 got 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 didn't come to visit very often. There was no money in the village, and neither with this family in town.

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<sup>1</sup> For some impressions, also see the pictures on the front page.



When talking about adventure, Mr. Aidara tells that he has been in Côte d'Ivoire, and he knows some other family members who went there. They also say that they have heard about people who left, but nobody has ever heard from them again.

In another household are 25 people living together, the family Coulibaly. The head of the family is 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', is the way they speak about their situation, like many people do. They manage, but not much else than that.

Most children have finished primary or also secondary school and when they have reached the age, they somehow contribute to the household budget. One is repairing carriages, others do petty trade, but nobody has a fixed salary. One son is studying in Sikasso, in the south of Mali. The family is also cultivating rice and millet. Family members from the village often come for a visit, and to share in the benefits of those living in town.

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

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

Mr. Kanjasi is a 'functionary', to be more precise a financial inspector. He and his wife have six children, most of them have moved out already. Most children are studying in Bamako, and one daughter is married in France with a Malian man. She often sends sums of money, around €300, and also presents. A son has studied in France, and is now travelling a lot 'for business'. The son who is responding says that he knows many people who have moved for example to the U.S. or Spain. They have succeeded well, they have a house, they are married, and have 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 material from the survey.

In different households, people have different possibilities that are open to them. One of the most striking differences between households is whether 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 between 75,000 cfa (€112.5) and 200,000 cfa (€300), mostly around 100,000 cfa (€150) per month. It is also typical that if somebody in the family has an office job, also other people (brother, wife, son) have a fixed income and contribute to the household budget. In the quarter Medine, about half of the families belonged to this group. The family Kanjasi as described above is

an example. Mr. Kanjasi is working as a financial inspector, and all his children are 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 the 'wealthier' or 'richer', this does not at all mean that these people are living in opulence, especially concerning the large number of people that are often dependent on a salary.

The families that are not in this situation of having a fixed income, like Coulibaly and Aidara 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 this survey it turned out that except for a few cases, most people are in the position that they can get at least a small sum of money together 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 income will be less. Other 'non-fixed' occupations included artisans such as carpenter or shoemaker, working as a mechanic, in road construction, at a petrol station, a radio station, or as Islamic teacher. The people who indicated a salary said that it was between 25 and 50,000 cfa (between €37.5 and €75) a month. For many of these families, agriculture in the surroundings of Segou is 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 was 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. See appendix 1 for a table that shows the economic activities of men and women.

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 for example housing and schooling. For very successful tradesmen it might be possible to overcome the gap, but surely not everyone will manage. What illustrates this point is a question that was asked in the survey: 'Is there any member of the extended 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'.

### 4.3 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 good first 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 overstaying illegally. An investment has to be made, because for obtaining a tourist visa bribing is the most common strategy. In Bamako, a tourist visa is said to be €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 as we know is 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 together for a tourist visa and plane ticket belong to the wealthier group. The contributions of their migrated family member can add more to their income.

Based on their occupation, but also some other factors such as kind of housing, assets, and education, the households of this survey were divided in two groups (the 'wealthier' and the 'poorer') in order to clearly see their different migration strategies.

In total, 57% of all households has at least one migrated family member (meaning a parent, sibling, or 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 on the next page, three categories of migration are compared to each other: Africa (mainly Côte d'Ivoire), Europe (mainly France), and the rest of the world (mainly U.S.). In the poorer group almost all migration is destined to African countries, while in the richer group, Europe just about exceeds the African countries.

It should be noted that for the majority (about two third of the 'migration families') there were several members of the family residing abroad, often spread over different countries. Interesting was also that for a group that is relatively small but noticeable, (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.

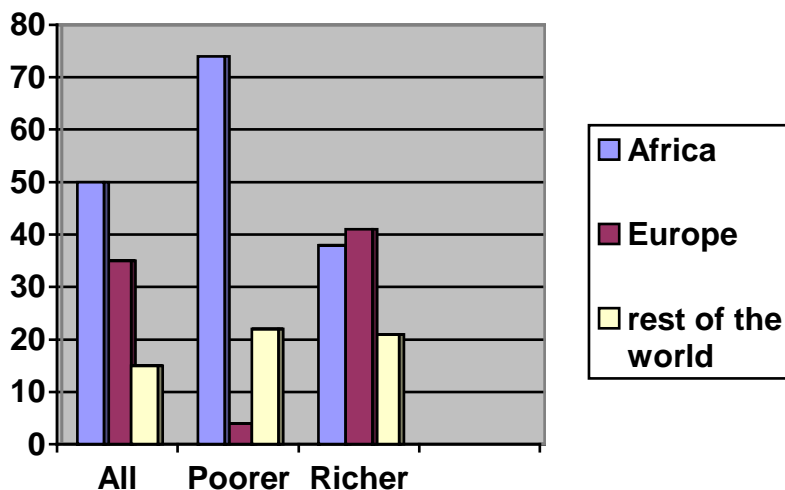


Figure 1 Destinations of migrants of different categories compared to each other<sup>2</sup>

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 appendixes 2, 3, and 4.

Hereby it has become clear that for the poorer families (without *fonctionnaire*), migration to Europe often has to follow the way overland, and often does not succeed in its attempt. This is reflected by a couple of statements about migration from respondents from 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.’

‘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, that 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.’

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

'There are those who left, and didn't bring anything back. Another 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 have at least 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. A bit less than half of the population of the quarter Medine were these kinds of families. The family Samake that is used for the case study also fits into that 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 kind of transformation processes of the family may be happening, but this is outside the realm of this study.

## **Case study family Samake**

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

When I first came at 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, that 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 chicken 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 without end, and once it bit a homeless boy in his arm.

In a corner of the yard, most important, 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 have worked more with sheep in the last half year than he has in his whole life, but I don't think he believed me. He made sure that I quickly returned him the soap and the bucket of water, 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 have a special meaning for Amadou. They are a symbol for everything he has achieved in his life, and how he owes it to his own effort. He told me how he has 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 if 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 is living a few hundred kilometres from his village, he does not forget his rural background and his family. When he has to travel to Bamako for work, about once a month, he always tries to combine it with a family visit. When he is in Segou, the first thing he does in the morning is calling his family from the office, to wish them a nice day and to exchange the latest news. Once in a while 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 visits villages in a wide surrounding of Segou. He feels very connected to the rural life, although he would never want to return to his village. Except for his father, who is the head of the family, he also has three brothers living there, all with several wives and many children. It must be a fertile family, because even his father still managed to procreate a child with a new wife he recently married, though he has already reached the age of 90. Amadou's wife Ami didn't like this at all, and she clearly showed. 'That wife of his father, she is my age! But what can you say? After all, he is still the chief.'

From the other side, Amadou's family also hasn't forgotten their successful member in town. 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 subjects. He has been studying in Canada and has travelled to France, and regularly this past came up as a subject. 'I remember one time when I was invited to a dish. There were enormous plates where all kinds of food was put down, 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.

Also many subjects 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 your 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 in 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 it 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.'

#### **4.5 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, and 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 were filled with the cold bags, and the girls were sent out on the street with their heavy load on their head to sell them. Ami was proud on her income that she made in that way, and that 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 of it would not be too expensive. 'Not so 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 anymore. On the other hand, he had registered his marriage as polygamous, which always left the option to take another wife. He explained 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 is longing 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...'

#### **4.6 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 watch pictures and listen to music and 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, it depends on his income whether he will get her or not. 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 took a motorbike, his younger sister Fatim used her scooter, and most of their friends had some kind of motorized transport. He told me it 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 is dependent on their parents. A motor or scooter can easily be around €300, a sum that is not so easy to attain. They explained me that parents give it as a present, for example for graduating, or the money comes from a family member in Europe. 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 important, the motorbike was a symbol of progress. I was explained that 'the previous generation was riding bicycles, we are driving motor bikes, and the next generation will be driving cars!' Bicycles therefore were 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 it was in my eyes 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 to 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, in fact 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 anymore!' a taxi driver once told me. Having a mobile phone is most practical in maintaining social contacts, and a symbol of status and progress.

How important it was for people to have a mobile phone, shows from a story that Moussa has 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 their credits 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 was living close by, because she wanted to show me the hens. The woman looked beautiful and tidy, just like her house. We talked about the difference of looks of European and Malian women. Malian women usually look very beautiful I think, 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 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.'

#### **4.7 Young people and Europe**

In the period I stayed with them, Moussa and Fatim were just preparing their final exams for the economic college. Every day they gathered together 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 each other. For the subject English there was nobody who knew enough to be able to explain 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 got so tired that you fell asleep, and that is why you could not be on time.'

We really tried, and there was surely 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 were hanging out together and chatting.

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 herself. 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.'

But what are the options to find work, we continued to discuss. 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 we had. 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*, how 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 were 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 frank 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 took the effort to explain that it is not obvious 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 housekeeping!' 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 driving 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 is 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 to 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 p.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.' (Foucault 1986 p.11)

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.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

It is important to take some time now and then to write, or read, a story like this case study about the family Samake. Many different story lines and many different persons come up. Hopefully it has become clear in this way 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. Generalities can thus be put in the perspective of the way they come to the surface in daily life. Nevertheless, also some general processes of changing family relations can be deducted. I will compare these with the articles discussed in the previous chapter.

##### *Individualism, extended family.*

It is interesting to compare the article of Vuarin 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 get his company bankrupt. In the case study of the family Samake, 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, such individualistic behaviour is due to structural changes that lead to the marginalization of people. They have no choice, but this individualism in fact is contradictory to their values. I would like to take a different point of view.

When looking at the family Samake 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 their field', Ami complains. Different kinds of values get mixed. The so important value of taking care of the family is still respected, but 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. 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 put a bit too strong to say that it is the most important thing in the lives of these urban young people, but surely not insignificant: money for credits and fuel.

Van Binsbergen 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 that it separates them. It is often the parents and other (migrated) family members who enable buying 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 and Fokwang 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 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 to 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, compare also the studies of Oheneba-Sakyi and Weisner 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 for 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'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). On 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 both in practice as in conceptualisation subject to change. Though the family used to be the main unit of analysis for anthropologists, now it has 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 elderly, obey 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. Intercontinental 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 of 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.



## 5. The African individual in Europe? – stories of Malian migrants in The Netherlands

### 5.1 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 got the chance. It turned out that there are approximately a few hundred, of which I have met about 30 people, and with seven I had in-depth interviews. 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 a kind of 'replacing 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, to then 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.

## 5.2 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*<sup>3</sup>, everything is difficult', somebody explained.

One man has been living without a residence permit for a while. When he had 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, as a welder. The women worked for example in childcare, care for elderly, or production work. Several women I have met were still working on their education, doing additional courses, and improving their Dutch skills.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

The table below gives an impression how my seven main respondents have 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 the driving license.

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

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 member 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 loose 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 leaves to Europe is coming from richer families. Without exception, the migrants here indeed 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, seem not to reach Netherlands. (None of my respondents knew such a person.) I suppose that Netherlands is too far out of sight for these people. All the Malians I have met were grown up in a city, either in Bamako or another urban area.

### 5.3 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, that 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 be really 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 anymore. 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. Also here life turns out to be a matter of hard work and survive, 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 advise 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, that are impossible for the migrant to give. Some migrants do not at all visit family and friends, 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 persisting 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 anymore.'

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 been only 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 anymore, he talks about his business over there. Now you have learned your lesson, I said, because your future is here and not there.'

#### **5.4 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. Once 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, 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 to take longer than expected to get a bit 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 most 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 wouldn't have been 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 symbolical. 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.

## **5.5 Imagination**

Remember the magic mirror of Foucault 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 would have 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 has 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 (region Kayes) to live with her mother's family. Back in Kenieba, Djenebu was largely raised by her grandmother. She has 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 whoever, but she married a rich merchant, Djenebu's grandfather. When her grandmother married she took four slaves with her, of which later only one stayed because of jealousy of the other wives. Also Djenebu's mother still had a slave to 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 couldn't 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, that seems to be free of sorrow, she went to Bamako for further education. Due to problems with the family she has never finished it, but 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 by a tourist visa. She has 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 had come 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 tells 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!'

## **5.6 Extended family**

In the previous chapter it was shown how different kind of values can lead to conflicting situations within families, such as the case of 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 on another continent. How are the relations between migrants and their (extended) family back home?

Well-known is the tragic image of the migrant being far away from his home country and loved ones. 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 they could not take when they would be living 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. Being further away from the family and the Malian community in general was for migrants also a reason to move away from France to The Netherlands, that 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 to 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 grounded. For many migrants it is a common issue 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, and 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, or in other cases people shrug their shoulders and decide that 'it is not my problem.' Some stories to illustrate this.

A Malian migrant tells 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 anymore! He said that he couldn't handle it anymore. 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. '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 solutions 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 especially in special situations such as a 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 has 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 in the same extent as when they went back to Mali. According to Kadi, her family has fallen 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 tells that she has 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, not 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 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 could bear the heat even worse 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. Also Adama's father had tried his luck elsewhere and went 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 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 has 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 a lot of 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, if food will 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 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 have to 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 that people are dealing with a similar issue. The family who moved back to Mali (from Burkina Faso) has 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, they have fallen into poverty themselves, is what the daughter tells. The woman in The Netherlands keeps in contact, 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.

### **5.7 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 have got to know Dutch society, and also got a different view on their own. In line with the general opinion and not very surprising, for them 'the Malian' represents the social, and '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 afterwards having obligations to a person.

Also negative sides of Dutch individualism were 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 Amsterdam west. 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 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 in television: 'I know that guy, he sold me my ticket!'

Proudly they tell me that I'm 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 don't show their face for months, others are regular visitors. From time to time, the place is like a phone shop. Everybody is calling with 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 happenings.

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 touristy 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 got 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. As one of the few Malians I have met he 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 almost reminds 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 now in Guinea and Sierra Leone. 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. 'A man on 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 on 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 has the dream of building a house in Mali, and tells about a beautiful spot in Bamako where he could buy land, nearby the river. If he would have 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 simple jobs as delivering newspapers and doing construction work, later it turns 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 has managed to get a Dutch passport within a short time. That 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 had 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 got 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 things won't work out anyway.' He told me about jealousy. 'There are all kind 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 oriented 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 consciously 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 totally oriented on Mali.

Diallo does have a special sympathy for old African traditions, proudly tells about African history, and he is the only migrant I have met who consciously 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 to steal his ideas for trade, instead of helping him. He also stresses that his friends are not welcome any moment at any time, 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 is 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 was already living in The Netherlands for a while, and had a residence permit. They started a relationship on a long distance to get 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 tells 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 got 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 got to a difficult point. '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 a camping gas.' After about four years of marriage, she wanted to divorce him. 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 got help from a social worker. With a proof from the police and a 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 bad... 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.'

I ask her, what about help from the Malian community? '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 anymore, 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. With her boyfriend she tries to arrange the situation.

Different situations occur concerning the social contacts of Malian migrants. They stretch from being very oriented on Mali and the Malian community, to being very oriented on The Netherlands and taking a distance from Malian contacts. Considering the Malian contacts, there are all kinds of positives, 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 for help.

Because of these negative effects of the Malian social, some migrants consciously 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 however a problem that the Dutch system is difficult as a real alternative, because even the ones who are most integrated have the feeling not to be able to really penetrate in 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 gets discouraged by the Dutch society, for example because he cannot get a promotion at work. A way of living that is somehow in between different countries is in his eyes most suitable, 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 very much experienced 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 contact with other Malians and Africans offer support and are for spending a good time, and somehow seem to be more self-evident than contacts with Dutch. 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 in private affairs as might have been the case in Mali.

### **5.8 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 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 me: 'If you go to a concert of a well-known African singer, then look how many elder women you will 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 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 to 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 are 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! Mostly 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 anymore 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 would be 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 being 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 get into. Often they have no choice but ending up in prostitution.' Charlotte told 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 was her boyfriend, it was Madou. She was sitting next to him, leaning against him, being all cuddly while he was still focussed 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.

Also among the Malian women, a relationship with a Dutch man is 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 'back home' sometimes accused to behave as prostitutes. 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 about the beginning of her relationship with her Dutch husband. She has 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 for a couple of years now. 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 has 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 for becoming a prostitute and she stressed that it was not 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 as well fulfilled a function of getting 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 Amsterdam 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 in 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.'

## 5.9 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 are distancing themselves. Integration in The Netherlands is partly an alternative, although many people have the feeling that

full integration and acceptance is not possible. Also concerning romantic and sexual relations, there are options of individual (and practical) choices.

There is no doubt that (most) migrants keep attached to their families, they maintain contact over the phone and by internet, they visit, and often send money. Adding to that there is the dream to return 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 the way they are part once they are on 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 dependents, migrants differ from their family members who are staying behind. Many examples came by in these stories: no longer respecting Ramadan, marrying a European, (partly) distracting 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 to mingle 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, sets of values. Family relations are part of that and take a place, but are not necessarily most important. In Mali, being part of the family is self-evident, although the way how is subject to change. In Europe this is no longer the case.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis has become quite a book, and it contains stories of many different people. Now it is time however 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 have announced two main research questions. The first was in what ways family relations are transforming both in urban Mali, as for Malian migrants in The Netherlands. The second was what insights this offers for the use of the concept family in social sciences. This study has indeed provided certain insights, that 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 it 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 at a certain place and for certain people, what values and practices are changing, and what family means to people. All kind 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 important of the family as a social network, and of course the normality of mobility. In chapter three 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 the more because some temporary research still builds upon this structural perspective of the family. For example Therborn and also Findley, discussed in chapter three, still distinguish between five main global family systems. This builds upon the way alien societies were categorized in classical anthropology on the base of organisational structures invented by the researchers, that 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 it is a rupture of a traditional history.

Family is not a fixed category, but it is constantly lived and negotiated. Such a perspective also makes some space for new insights and questions. What new kinds of relationships are taking place? In the literature study in chapter three, 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 five 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 that 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, and the social is in Mali of great significance. The importance is often stressed by people in conversations, and also shows in practice. Perhaps that is the reason that tendencies of individualism are so noticeable: they seem to be so much in contrast. Individualism is not self-evident, it comes to existence in negotiation and struggle. Throughout this thesis, many different examples of such struggles have been described.

In chapter four 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 five we read about Adama, who returned for a visit to Mali when his father had deceased, and had to face all kind of family problems. He decided to turn his back on them, and left them solve things out by themselves. Another example given in chapter five is Diallo, who consciously takes a distance of his Malian social contacts in The Netherlands, 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 got to do with loosening from certain social structures, and that usually happens with some kind of conflict. Concrete issues were often the obligation to contribute financially, or the mingling in of family members in what were said to be private affairs.

It also turned out that often the only way to take 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 to individualisation is also increased by mobility. First of all because some practices are not accepted in Mali, but are possible for migrants. Think about the example in the article of Klein 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 and of residence. 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, that shows in a different way of engaging in romantic and sexual relationships, is (once more) the relation with an 'Agnes'. This relation is not based on an advice or 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 three I have discussed the causes of an upcoming individualism. I assume that it is the increasing option of individual freedom, which did not exist before. It springs from agency, from possibility, and not from impossibility and

marginalization as Marie argues. It occurs mostly when people have more options, they are wealthier, can make more choices, that they take some distance of 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 anymore? As a reassurance for those who think that the African family is in crisis: I didn't 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 careful tendency. The social still takes a central place, and it is too much needed to fall away.

#### *Towards global kinship relations*

One of the things that has 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. Remind 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 to 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 to sustain in their livelihoods. For many it is not so much a question if they want to leave in the first place, but how to do it. They are waiting for a chance to occur. In chapter four and five, it was shown how images of the west as a paradise are a fuel for this wish. Another observation is the frequency of moving between different destination countries, especially for migrants who have not yet had the opportunity or wish to settle down. It is a general story let's say to have travelled in different countries in west Africa, to try in France, to end up in The Netherlands, and then to suddenly leave to Belgium again. It is more important to estimate where a chance could occur and to make use of it, than what is the actual (accidental) country of residence.

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 five 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 are almost never broken. In many cases people maintain intensive contact over the phone and by internet, they send remittances, and visit when possible. The ties are

strengthened by the idea to return one day, even though it is the question if 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 can be seen separate 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 was 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 that much is known about the subject 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 but was not able to cover 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 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 for this thesis, is the new kind of relationships such as the *Agnes*. Not only would it be interesting to get to know the perspective of these women, studying these kind 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 kind of other issues related to encounters between people of different origin, enacted in the most intimate situation.

Hereby we get to the more general issues. What does family mean? How do new kinds of relations come to existence? (Only to think of 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 for example in policy discussions? How is it filled in by people?

The idea of global kinship relations becomes a very interesting ingredient in looking at 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

	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%

Table 1 Overview of economic activities men and women in Medine. (n=74)



## Appendix 2

	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
Total Africa	34	17	17
Percentage	50	74	38
Total outside Africa	33	6	27
Percentage	50	26	62

Table 2 Number of migrants per country

## 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 stories about people who 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 anymore. 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 a lot between migrants who are in Africa, Europe, or the US. For the migrants to Europe clearly the possibility to visit their family 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 got a reasonable amount of money from their migrated family. In seven cases they did not get anything, and in five cases they got smaller presents.

Ten respondents mentioned an amount. Six of them get sums between 50,000 and 250,000 cfa (between €75 and €325), and four get around a million cfa (€1500). It is not very clear how often they receive this money, if it is a monthly payment, or for special occasions. 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 depends more on the occasion.

## Appendix 4

### Migration background Medine

To get a general idea, the respondents were asked how long they have been in Segou, where they originated from, and whether they had experiences abroad. The largest majority said that they (meaning the head, wives and children) are either originating from Segou, or living there for a *very* long time. Only six respondents 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 were originating from Segou or a town or village in its direct surroundings. A little bit more than half is originating from other regions in Mali: region of Kayes, Tombouctou, Mopti, Bamako, Gao, Sikasso, and several smaller towns. There are also 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 the reasons of their removal, 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 a minority of nevertheless 30%. Most people had been to one or more African countries at least once in their life. Some continuously travel back and forth between for example Mali and Côte d'Ivoire and 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, and Senegal. A few men have been to Algeria when they were in 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 in 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), and two respondents had been to many different places including European countries. For the less wealthy people, travelling outside Africa was probably not an option.