

CHANGING POPULATION MOBILITY IN WEST AFRICA: FULBE PASTORALISTS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH MALI

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ABSTRACT

Mobility is the most important response by the inhabitants of the Sahel to climatic adversity. This ‘condition sahélienne’, characterized by unstable climatic circumstances, irregular rainfall patterns and periods of drought, has an important influence on people’s decision-making processes regarding their livelihood. Migration studies mainly focus on labour migration to urban areas. Although mobility is part of the repertoire of Sahelian people, the form it takes varies considerably between social groups and individuals, and over time. In this article we focus on a neglected and almost invisible category of rural-rural migrants in the Sahel, more specifically on Fulbe pastoral people and their developments over the last three decades in the Sahel and the Sudan zone of West Africa and the economic and social conditions in which they find themselves. It concludes that these rural-rural migrations are deeply engrained in cultural patterns in West Africa, exemplified by specific institutions for dealing with hosts and strangers. However, mobility is often not a planned process, and all kinds of survival strategies are used in a very flexible manner. The phenomenon has given rise to a specific character of cultural dynamics and ways of defining identity for the people involved.

MOBILITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PRIME STRATEGY of the Sahelian population for dealing with the vagaries of climate and poverty. People move to look for natural resources to use and exploit alternative economic possibilities, and search for better shelter, more prosperity and greater security.¹ A large part of the West African population, notably in the Sahel and Sahara, leads a mobile existence as nomadic livestock keepers.

Over the past century migration has fundamentally altered the population distribution of West Africa. Between 1920 and 1970 the proportion of the population in the interior savannah region to that in the coastal

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1. Aderanti Adepoju, ‘Migration in Africa: an overview’, in Jonathan Baker and Tade Akin Aina (eds), *The Migration Experience in Africa* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1995), pp. 87–109.

regions changed in favour of the coastal countries.² This trend is expected to continue in the future. By 2020 the majority of the projected 430 million inhabitants of West Africa will be living in the coastal countries and more than 60 percent of these people will be in urban settings.³ Mobility within the frontiers of West African states is even higher than international migration and may amount to 30–40 percent of the population living outside their district, town or village of origin.

Particularly in the Sahel, which is known as a region where terrible droughts and famines strike the population, mobility plays a central role in livelihood strategies. The unreliable rainfall both in space and time leads to wild oscillations in food production and in the economic performance of the region, which is among the poorest in the world. Southbound migration may increase further if there is a continuation of the desiccation of parts of the central Sahel and the Sudan zone under the impact of global warming between now and 2050.⁴ As a consequence, large tracts of land may become much less productive or even unsuitable for agriculture.

Despite the fact that migration is mainly urban in orientation, there are indications that the relative growth of cities is decreasing, as employment is lacking and the weak infrastructure impedes economic growth.⁵ This means that in some parts of the region rural-rural migration will grow in importance, and pressure on natural resources will increase. Together these developments will change the whole set-up of West African rural economies in the coming decades.⁶ Knowledge about these processes may be relevant in view of the fact that population mobility is likely to increase and that a growing number of rural-rural migrants will exert an ever greater pressure on existing resources in a situation of rapid ecological change and decreasing rainfall.

In this article we look at the rural-rural migration of one of the most mobile groups in West Africa, Fulbe pastoralists who have spread across the sub-continent in the past. More specifically, we deal with the processes underlying the north-south movements of pastoralists in the countryside from the dry Sahel to the more humid Sudanic and Guinean zones, especially in the districts of Douentza, Bandiagara and Koutiala in Mali.

2. Samir Amin, 'Migrations in contemporary Africa', in Baker and Aina, *The Migration Experience*, pp. 29–40; Club du Sahel, *Pour préparer l'avenir de l'Afrique de l'Ouest: Une vision à l'horizon 2020* (OCDE/OECD-BAD/ADB-CILSS, Paris, 1994).

3. Club du Sahel, *Pour préparer l'avenir*, pp. 4, 11.

4. G.-J. van den Born, M. Schaeffer and R. Leemans, *Climate Scenarios for Semi-arid and Sub-humid Regions. A comparison of climate scenarios for the dryland regions in West Africa from 1990 to 2050*. ICCD Report No. 2 (CERES/DLO/WAU/RIVM, Wageningen, 1999).

5. Club du Sahel, *Pour préparer l'avenir*, p. 11; Cecilia Tacoli, 'Urbanisation and migration in Sub-Saharan Africa: changing patterns and trends' in Mirjam de Bruijn, Rijk van Dijk and Dick Foeken (eds), *Mobile Africa: Changing patterns of movement in Africa and beyond* (Brill, Leiden, 2001), pp. 141–52.

6. Club du Sahel, *Pour préparer l'avenir*, pp. 42–3.

The Fulbe pastoralists studied have moved southwards since the early 1960s. The article examines this rural mobility, its socio-cultural dimensions and more particularly the plight of these migrants and the ways in which they participate in the West African rural economy. The information presented was gathered over the course of a number of periods of fieldwork spanning more than a decade.

Population mobility in the Sahel

Population mobility in the Sahel manifests itself in a myriad of forms. The extremely varied patterns of mobility bedevil any attempt at classifying and defining types of mobility. On the one hand, there are the classic forms of 'modern' migration varying from seasonal labour migration to long-term international and intercontinental migration. On the other hand, there are all kinds of 'traditional' forms of mobility among nomadic pastoralists, and also among cultivators who move from one area to another in search of more fertile land.⁷ Often several forms of mobility are combined within the same social grouping, such as the household, with different individuals taking part in diverse sectors of the economy in various parts of the region.

Population mobility has recently gained a new momentum in many parts of the Sahel and the Sudan as a result of competition for land, urbanization, drought, uneven economic development, climate change, and economic depression. The general direction of these population movements has been southward to areas better endowed with rainfall and economic opportunities. Many migrants have been absorbed into the cities, in both the Sahelian and coastal countries. However, a considerable number must have found a place in rural areas. Many Dogon even migrate to rural areas outside the zones that they colonized over the past century.⁸ In a survey carried out in the 1980s in Mali it appeared that, of all the migrants, 22.5 percent went to rural areas within Mali and more than 49 percent went abroad, predominantly to the coastal countries.⁹ Given their low level of formal education (less than 10 percent had completed primary school), it

7. See Han van Dijk, Dick Foeken and Kiky van Til, 'Population mobility in Africa: an overview', in De Bruijn *et al.*, *Mobile Africa*, pp. 9–26.

8. Robert E. Mazur, 'Rural out-migration and labor allocation in Mali', in Calvin Goldschneider (ed.), *Rural Migration in Developing Countries: Comparative studies of Korea, Sri Lanka and Mali* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1984), pp. 209–88; I. Cissé, *Les migrations agricoles au Mali*. Cahiers du CIDEP no. 18 (L'Harmattan, Paris, 1993); Dolores Koenig, Tiéman Diarra and Moussa Sow, *Innovation and Individuality in African Development: Changing production strategies in rural Mali* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1998); Karin Nijenhuis, 'Migratory drift of Dogon farmers to Southern Mali', paper presented at the CERES summer school 'Pathways of Development', Utrecht, 26–28 June 2002. The latter found in the villages she surveyed that up to 20 percent of the population consisted of rural migrants, 50 percent of whom were Dogon.

9. Mazur, 'Rural out-migration', p. 231.

seems justified to assume that this migration is mainly to rural areas and of a cyclical nature.¹⁰

The importance of the rural orientation of migration is also confirmed by data from Senegal and Burkina Faso. According to a 1980 labour survey in Senegal, there were 360,000 rural-rural migrants compared with 175,000 urban-rural migrants and 616,000 urban in-migrants. In some parts of rural southwest Burkina Faso, immigrants from the central plateau make up more than half of the population in rural villages.¹¹ Burkinabe migrants were found to be no longer going to the capital of Côte d'Ivoire but to the cotton-growing zones and areas with good farmland, where they look for agricultural employment and land.¹²

The role of small towns and large villages as a place of temporary refuge is mostly neglected.¹³ In Douentza district, towns like Douentza and Booni, where the majority of the inhabitants cultivate their own food, swell to twice their normal size during crisis years. Even now, years after the last general food crisis in the Sahel, numerous rural immigrants are living there, subsisting on activities associated with rural areas, such as cereal cultivation, wood collecting, the harvesting of wild grains, agricultural labour, and food rations distributed by aid agencies.

The Fulbe

The changing mobility patterns of Fulbe pastoralists must be placed within this general context of economic weight shifting towards the coast and the growing importance of rural areas as the destination of migrants. 'Fulbe' is a collective term for a number of people who are culturally, linguistically and politically related and inhabit a vast area all over West Africa, mainly in the Sahel and the Sudan zone, but also in Ethiopia and Eritrea. They are known in the literature under a variety of names such as Fulani and Peul, Haalpulaar, Fellata, etc. Their main occupation is the herding of cattle, nowadays often in combination with the cultivation of cereals. Throughout the Sahel, they are regarded as expert cattle herdsman. In the popular image and mainstream ethnography, the Fulbe are a group of

10. See Adepoju, 'Migration in Africa', p. 92.

11. C. Howorth and P. O'Keefe, 'Farmers do it better: local management of change in southern Burkina Faso', *Land Degradation and Development* 10, 1 (1999), pp. 93–109.

12. Sally E. Findley, 'Migration and family interactions in Africa', in Aderanti Adepoju (ed.), *Family, Population and Development in Africa* (Zed Books, London, 1997), p. 111; Mark Breusers, *On the Move: Mobility, land use and livelihood practices on the Central Plateaus in Burkina Faso* (Lit Verlag, Münster, 1999), pp. 249–53.

13. See Jonathan Baker (ed.), *Small Town Africa: Studies in rural-urban interaction* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1990); M. A. Mohamed Salih, 'Pastoralist migration to small towns in Africa', in Baker and Aina, *The Migration Experience*, pp. 181–96.

nomadic pastoralists undertaking transhumance in response to seasonal and spatial variations in rainfall.¹⁴

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they created a number of emirates in which they formed the ruling elite. Within the political hierarchies of these emirates some groups, such as the political elite and the slaves who worked the land, became sedentary, whereas the herdsmen continued to be mobile with their livestock within certain limits imposed by the central power. The organization of pastoral movements was based on individual decisions, sometimes co-ordinated by the customary officials such as lineage elders or those appointed by the emirates.¹⁵ Mobility, not in the sense of seasonal transhumance movements but in the sense of a change in residence and/or orbit of transhumance, occurred in the form of 'migratory drift'. The latter phenomenon can be defined as the 'gradual displacement of customary transhumance tracks and orbits, resulting eventually in a completely new orbit, often in different surroundings in which many factors in the total environmental situation have altered'.¹⁶ Migration understood as 'a dramatic shift to different transhumance orbits' occurred only in response to intolerable conditions of a political and ideological nature,¹⁷ for example when they decided that the oppression by these emirates was unbearable and fled.

During the colonial period and with the penetration of the cash economy, the political hierarchies vested by these emirates were overturned, and this had an enormous impact on patterns of mobility. Deprived of the labour of their former slaves, noble herdsmen took up cultivation in order to avoid being forced to sell their animals to obtain basic food, whereas cultivators invested in livestock as a safety device for bad years. As a result, livestock keepers and cultivators have grown more and more alike. Although this phenomenon is not immediately connected with increasing mobility — on the contrary, it made them less mobile because they had to cultivate cereals for part of the year — it made the pastoral populations of the Sahel more

14. Derrick J. Stenning, *Savannah Nomads. A study of the Wodaabe pastoral Fulani of the Western Bornu Province, Northern Region, Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, London, 1959); Marguerite Dupire, *Peuls nomades: Etude descriptive des Wodaabe du Sahel Nigérien* (Institut d'Ethnologie, Paris, 1962); Marguerite Dupire, *Organisation sociale des Peuls* (Plon, Paris, 1970); Paul Riesman, *Freedom in Fulani Social Life. An introspective ethnography* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1977); Angelo Maliki Bonfiglioli, *Dudal: Histoire de famille et histoire de troupeau chez un groupe de Wodaabe du Niger* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988).

15. See Jean Gallais, *Le Delta intérieur du Niger: Etude de géographie régionale* (IFAN, Dakar, 1967); Jean Gallais, *Hommes du Sahel, espaces-temps et pouvoir. Le delta intérieur du Niger 1960–1980* (Flammarion, Paris, 1984); Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, 'Ecology and power in the periphery of Maasina: the case of the Hayre in the nineteenth century', *Journal of African History* 42 (2001), pp. 217–38; Dupire, *Peuls nomades*; Stenning, *Savannah Nomads*.

16. Derrick J. Stenning, 'Transhumance, migratory drift, migration; patterns of pastoral Fulani nomadism', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* LXXXIII 1 (1957), pp. 57–73.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

vulnerable to the consequences of drought, since they were less able to place the burden of drought and famine on their former subordinates. Thus, the decline of ethnic specialization undermined traditional exchange and dependency relations.¹⁸ In this way political changes contributed to changing patterns of population mobility.¹⁹

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Fulbe gradually started to migrate into the forest zones of the coastal states such as Ghana, Benin, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The number of Fulbe pastoralists moving south may be considerable. In the north of Côte d'Ivoire, Fulbe were responsible for around 400,000 head of cattle in 1990. Given a manageable size of 80 head of cattle per herdsman, this number of cattle would require at least 5,000 herdsmen. Considering that many of these herdsmen came on their own, it is reasonable to estimate the total number of Fulbe to be at least 10,000.²⁰ In the cotton zone of Mali there are at least 1,500,000 head of cattle, chiefly managed by Fulbe herdsmen and their families. A conservative estimate of the number of migrants would be at least 30,000–40,000 Fulbe. At the sending end in Douentza and Bandiagara, a small survey in two villages indicated that each remaining family had at least one male member who was away (temporarily or permanently), and that around 50 percent of all families had moved out of the settlement over the past two decades. In Boboïa, Burkina Faso, most of the Fulbe settlements have moved away in search of pasture and water.²¹

A major factor affecting this southward drift has been the uneven economic development of Sahelian and coastal countries in West Africa, notably Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. As a result, the demand for meat in these coastal countries has increased enormously. Numerous pastoralists from the Sahelian zone have consequently moved to the south looking for a more

18. Alan G. Hill, 'Demographic responses to food shortages in the Sahel', *Population* 13 (1991) (special issue), pp. 168–92.

19. Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, *Arid Ways: Cultural understandings of insecurity in Fulbe society, Central Mali* (Thela Publishers, Amsterdam, 1995) and PhD thesis, University of Utrecht and Wageningen Agricultural University.

20. Calculations are based on data from Thomas J. Bassett, 'Hired herders and herd management in Fulani pastoralism (Northern Côte d'Ivoire)', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* XXXIV, 1–3 (1994), special issue, Roger Botte and Jean Schmitz (eds), *L'archipel peul*, pp. 147–74. Others estimate the number of Fulbe between 10,000 and 50,000, see Claude Ardit, 'Les Peul, les Senufo et les vétérinaires: pathologie d'une opération de développement dans le nord de la Côte d'Ivoire', *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines* 26, 1–2 (1990), pp. 137–53.

21. Youssouf Diallo, 'Processes and types of pastoral migration in northern Côte d'Ivoire', in De Bruijn *et al.*, *Mobile Africa*, pp. 153–68.

prosperous and easier existence.²² The government of Côte d'Ivoire, for example, responded to this growing demand by consciously promoting livestock keeping in the relatively sparsely populated north of the country. This policy has been very successful and has attracted many pastoralists' families and individual herdsman, mostly of Fulbe origin, to this area. This situation has led to rising tensions between different user groups and increasing conflict between herd owners and herdsman, on the one hand, and the sedentary cultivating population, on the other.²³

These migratory movements, far from being recent, are thus part of a structural transformation process of the Sahelian and Sudanic rural areas.²⁴ Mobility is a fundamental feature of Sahelian societies. It is part of *la condition sahélienne*,²⁵ the ensemble of ecological and socio-political conditions imposed on the populations of the Sahel. Mobility is essential in order to survive. Pastoral groups of Fulbe have been mobile on a virtually permanent basis and in this way spread over almost the entire West African region. They only settled under the influence of pastoral empires such as the Fulbe states of Sokoto and Maasina in northern Nigeria and central Mali.

So, there is considerable cultural and historical experience with population mobility. All over West Africa host populations have been integrating strangers such as mobile livestock keepers and agricultural settlers for ages. Consequently, there are social and cultural ways of integrating them into society, of assigning them a position in the 'natural order' of things.²⁶ This has given rise to regional socio-cultural institutions regulating host-stranger relationships. An example of this is the *yaatigi* relationship that can be

22. Comparable research in northern Côte d'Ivoire and northern Benin and central and southern Nigeria indicates that in these areas extensive immigration of Fulbe is also taking place. For Côte d'Ivoire, see Philippe Bernardet, *Association agriculture élevage en Afrique: Les Peuls semi-transhumants de Côte d'Ivoire* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 1984); Youssouf Diallo, 'Dimensions sociales et politiques de l'expansion pastorale en zone semi-humide ivoirienne', in Victor Azarya, Anneke Breedveld, Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, *Pastoralists under Pressure? Fulbe societies confronting change in West Africa* (Brill, Leiden, 1999), pp. 211–36; Thomas J. Bassett, 'The political ecology of peasant-herder conflicts in northern Ivory Coast', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 78, 3 (1988), pp. 453–72; Bassett, 'Hired herders'. For Benin, see Antje van Driel, 'The end of the herding contract: decreasing complementary linkages between Fulbe pastoralists and Dendi agriculturalists in northern Benin', in Azarya *et al.*, *Pastoralists under Pressure*. For Nigeria, see Roger Blench, 'The expansion and adaptation of Fulbe pastoralism to subhumid and humid conditions in Nigeria', in Botte and Schmitz, *L'archipel peul*, pp. 197–212.

23. Bassett, 'Hired herders'; Diallo, 'Dimensions sociales'; Philippe Bernardet, 'Peuls en mouvement, Peuls en conflits en moyenne et haute Côte d'Ivoire, de 1950 à 1990', in Roger Botte, Jean Boutrais and Jean Schmitz (eds), *Figures peules* (Karthala, Paris, 1999), pp. 407–44.

24. Bassett, 'Hired herders'; Blench, 'The expansion'; Jonathan Bascom, 'The new nomads: an overview of involuntary migration in Africa', in Baker and Aina, *The Migration Experience*, pp. 197–219.

25. Jean Gallais, *Pasteurs et paysans du Gourma: La condition sahélienne* (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1975).

26. William A. Shack, 'Introduction', in William A. Shack and Elliott P. Skinner (eds), *Strangers in African Societies* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1979), pp. 1–17.

found in Mali. A stranger is always received in a village by a host called the *yaatigi*. This person provides the stranger with a point of social attachment in his new environment, gives the guest the means to survive, i.e. access to land or other resources, and takes care of him or her in case of difficulties.²⁷

These relationships give a form to, and considerably facilitate, all kinds of inter-village, inter-regional and inter-ethnic contacts that would otherwise be much more complicated. They render the process of moving and arriving in a new environment much more predictable. They also provide the 'stranger' with a well-defined position in the host society, and enable him/her to maintain their identity, being classified as 'different'. This host-guest relationship changes in relation to the ecological and social transformations in the Sahel, but its strict form as an integrating institution for strangers still exists. The Fulbe occupy a somewhat peculiar position as strangers. Even after a long period of residence in a host community, they do not seem to root territorially. Their 'otherness' is continuously reasserted and seems to serve as a counterpoint for the sedentary population.²⁸

During the 1980s, the principal individual strategy for coping with drought in the Sahel was to move. '(T)he survival of households owes much to chance dependent on the irregular and unpredictable distribution of small amounts of rainfall on the mortality of cattle and of key family members.'²⁹ This mobility is mainly confined to rural areas. Migrants stay in the countryside and take up jobs such as salaried herdsman, or just roam around the country looking for any opportunity that might offer short-term survival.³⁰

At the departure end of this southward drift, deeper structural changes are mentioned as a reason for increasing population mobility. There are '[m]any examples of new legislation disrupting older systems of tenure and rights, thus contributing to rural instability and local pressure of population on resources'.³¹ It is also argued that the effects of the expanding role of the state on local drought management systems may have been overlooked,

27. Mirjam de Bruijn, Walter van Beek and Han van Dijk, 'Antagonisme et solidarité: Les relations entre Peuls et Dogons du Mali central', in Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk (eds), *Peuls et Mandingues: Dialectique des constructions identitaires* (Karthala, Paris, 1997), pp. 258–60. Mirjam de Bruijn, 'Rapports interethniques et identité: l'exemple des pasteurs peuls et des cultivateurs *hummbeebe* au Mali central', in Youssouf Diallo and Günther Schlee (eds), *L'ethnicité peule dans des contextes nouveaux* (Karthala, Paris, 2000), pp. 15–36.

28. Mark Breusers, "'The teeth and the tongue are always together, but it happens that the teeth bite the tongue": Fulbe's social and political integration in Moaga society and their access to natural resources. A case study from Burkina Faso'. Paper presented at the seminar 'The Landed and the Landless? Strategies of territorial integration and dissociation in Africa', 27–29 May 2002, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle.

29. Hill, 'Demographic responses', pp. 173, 175.

30. These findings stand in contrast to those of Kate Hampshire and Sara Randall, 'Seasonal labour migration strategies in the Sahel: coping with poverty or optimising security', *International Journal of Population Geography* 5 (1999), pp. 367–85.

31. Hill, 'Demographic responses', p. 171.

as they coincided with a series of low rainfall years in the Sahel and neighbouring regions.³² Interventions in pasture management and expansion of cereal cultivation due to population growth in the Sahel have led to new patterns of exclusion from the use of resources. The technical inadequacy of these interventions even made matters worse in a number of cases.³³

Over the last three decades there have also been tremendous changes in property relations concerning livestock. The old family-based type of pastoralism we know from ethnography has given way to new forms of livestock keeping and ways of organizing livestock production and pastoral livelihoods. During the Sahelian droughts of the 1970s and 1980s many pastoralists were forced to sell large parts of their herds to obtain cereals for survival. Large numbers of these animals were bought by sedentary cultivators, urban merchants and civil servants who were looking for profitable ways to invest their cash earnings in the absence of a well-functioning banking system. As a result, pastoralists became impoverished. At the same time, there was a growing demand for cheap herding labour as these livestock owners of non-pastoral origin sought to manage and enlarge their 'capital on the hoof'. This has led to an enormous outflow of young men from the original herding family economy into the commercial sector.

This male exodus has had a detrimental effect on the position of women and children. In the first place, the separation of husband and wife leads to a decrease in fertility and high child mortality in these small single-parent households following the departure of the able-bodied family members.³⁴ Women are experiencing increasing difficulties in finding a spouse as there is a lack of young men, and they frequently have to resort to unions of their second choice (polygynous, poor husband) in order not to be dependent on their parents or brothers. However, the latter face a similar problem because their sons or younger brothers have also left to try their luck elsewhere and there is consequently a shortage of labour in all the family units.³⁵ There is a tendency among the Fulbe to split up into increasingly smaller units that may never re-unite after the droughts.³⁶ Young men disappear for good and do not send any remittances. This can create a second wave of destitute people leaving to go to the towns.

It has been argued that, contrary to our findings, many more individuals are participating in seasonal labour migration, and that this phenomenon

32. Hill, 'Demographic responses'.

33. Han van Dijk and Mirjam de Bruijn, 'Chiefs, pastoralists and bureaucrats: a grazing scheme in Central Mali', in J. P. M. van den Breemer, C. A. Drijver and L. B. Venema (eds), *Local Resource Management in Africa* (Wiley, Chichester, 1995), pp. 77–96; Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, 'Insecurity and pastoral development in the Sahel', *Development and Change* 30, 1 (1999), pp. 115–39.

34. Hill, 'Demographic responses', p. 175.

35. Mirjam de Bruijn, 'The hearthhold in pastoral Fulbe society, Central Mali: social relations, milk and drought', *Africa* 67, 4 (1997), pp. 625–51.

36. Hill, 'Demographic responses', p. 183.

is associated with wealthier households, and not with the poor.³⁷ However, these conclusions may be valid for the people sampled, who migrate temporarily out of the Sahel and have relatives present in the main settlements in their area of origin. The situation of families and individuals who have moved out of the area for good or have dispersed across the countryside and are residing or living a nomadic life beyond the confines of their normal habitation sites may be totally different.

Fulbe migrants in central and south Mali

The data underlying this section were collected over a period of fifteen years. In 1987 research was conducted in a number of pastoral settlements on the Bandiagara plateau in central Mali that had become impoverished following the 1984–85 drought. The huts were virtually empty of any household equipment, food was in very short supply during the pre-harvest season, and very few people had a herd of any significant size. Even after the harvest, when herd movements were no longer restrained by the presence of millet fields around the settlements, no herd of any importance was present in the village. Only later on did we realize that these settlements were in fact places that many people had already left.

Fieldwork in 1990–92 in other Fulbe settlements in the more northerly district of Douentza indicated that up to 40 percent of the pastoral population had left the area since the early 1970s and the onset of the droughts. Often their destination was unknown or known only in very vague terms. When we tried to visit some of these on a short trip in 1995, we were only able to find some isolated individuals who had settled in other pastoral communities on the Gondo Plain. It appeared that a number of these ‘migrants’ had returned, not to their former settlements, but to an area some 40 kilometres south of their original camps near a number of large villages of sedentary cultivators.

In 1997 we made a more systematic effort to investigate the dynamics of these population movements. We revisited all our former research sites and attempted to find pastoral migrants in a number of locations in the Bandiagara district along the border with Burkina Faso, in the Bankass and Yorosso districts, and around the town of Koutiala. A student continued this search for Fulbe migrants in 1999 and 2000.³⁸ In January 2002 we returned to the area for a few weeks in order to visit the migrant families we had met in 1997 and to hear about their experiences over the last few years. We also visited a camp in their home area to gather some stories of returnees. As most time was spent in the Bandiagara district, the main part

37. Hampshire and Randall, ‘Seasonal labour’.

38. Josée van Steenbrugge, ‘Reacties op onzekerheid: Fulbe mobiliteit en strategieën in Zuid-Mali’, MA thesis, African Studies Centre, University of Utrecht, 2001.

of this discussion is devoted to the research results in that area, with some digressions to other areas for comparative purposes.

Doing fieldwork in multiple locations has its methodological advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it inevitably leads to more superficial research in each of the localities, as it is difficult to grasp the complexity of the situations (to acquire situational knowledge) in a short period of time. On the other hand, multiple research sites help to put one's former observations in a larger perspective. No systematic surveying was done to count the Fulbe settlers in cultivators' villages. This task was simply too vast, because it took considerable time and effort to find these people as they camped on sites that were extremely isolated and difficult to access.

Despite the experimental character of this research method, a number of general observations can be made. The first is that Fulbe migrants are extremely dispersed. In almost every Dogon village on the Bandiagara plateau, we found several Fulbe families camping on village territory. In the Koutiala district, we encountered the same situation. Around the sub-district capital of Molobala there were at least seven families, and given the number of regular visitors to these families there were many more Fulbe in nearby villages.³⁹ Further south and east in the Yorosso district towards the Burkina Faso border where population density was lower and more pasture area available, there were many more Fulbe. Some were already long-time inhabitants of the region, and had even lost their own language, Fulfulde. Nevertheless, they seemed as mobile as the other Fulbe. We must therefore conclude that, even in areas not known as immigration areas, such as the north of Côte d'Ivoire and the cotton belt in Mali, the number of livestock is increasing and considerable numbers of Fulbe have settled, at least temporarily.

These rural migrants are invisible to the administration. When we were trying to spot Fulbe migrants along the border with Burkina Faso in the district of Bankass, no administrative traces could be found relating to them. The local sub-district administrator in Bay said that he knew nothing about them: 'They are there in the bush, they visit the market, they go away and we don't see them any more.' Obviously there were hundreds of families camping in the marshes and forests in this border area, some of them related to people we knew from more northern districts. Since we estimate that, at least among those we spoke to, most of them had been away from their home areas for many years, we can only conclude that they have disappeared administratively.

39. See also van Steenbrugge, 'Reacties op onzekerheid'.

Fulbe migrants on the Bandiagara plateau

The Bandiagara plateau is mainly inhabited by Dogon cultivators who comprise, according to the census data, 90 percent of the population. The remaining 10 percent are for the most part Fulbe pastoralists. The terrain is very rugged and consists mainly of rocks and extremely shallow soils (around two-thirds of the land surface of 9,090 km²).⁴⁰ Only 10 percent of the area is cultivable, the remaining land being unsuitable for cultivation due to the shallowness of the soil and the formation of crusts. The agricultural population survives by a combination of millet cultivation, market gardening (primarily onions) and labour migration. The pastoral population depends mainly on millet cultivation and the herding of livestock for the Dogon cultivators, in the absence of sufficient self-owned livestock to ensure their survival.

On the Bandiagara plateau, the Fulbe pastoralists have come to occupy a particular position in the land-use and cropping systems in place. The terms and ways in which they are integrated in the Dogon villages can be understood from this position. Over the past century the Bandiagara plateau has become hopelessly overpopulated, with 190,000 inhabitants now having to live off 48,000 hectares of land that is highly susceptible to drought and has a low productivity.⁴¹ Since the beginning of the twentieth century Dogon cultivators have been colonizing the plains east of the plateau,⁴² and in the more recent past large-scale labour migration with both rural and urban destinations has come to provide a large share of family income for many Dogon families. Labour productivity in areas where cereal cultivation is difficult, such as the northern part of the Bandiagara plateau, is so low that even in good years the population cannot survive without external sources of income.⁴³

After the 1972–73 drought, foreign donors started to invest in small-scale irrigated horticulture to provide employment and income to the villagers. Investments in this infrastructure have, however, been unevenly distributed and most areas of the plateau are not covered by these interventions.⁴⁴ At present, the plateau is a chronic deficit area in terms of food production. All the cultivable land has been put into production and most of it is cultivated on a permanent basis; no fallow is possible.

40. S. Cissé and P. A. Gosseye (eds), 'Ressources naturelles et population', in *Compétition pour des ressources limitées. Le cas de la cinquième région du Mali, rapport* (CABO ESPR, Wagenin-gen, Mopti, 1990).

41. République du Mali, *Développement régional du plateau dogon, schéma directeur rapport de synthèse* (Agrar- und Hydrotechnik GmbH, Essen, 1996).

42. See, for example, Gallais, *Pasteurs et paysans*, p. 11.

43. République du Mali, *Développement régional*.

44. Mamadou Diawara, "Dieu d'eau", eau du barrage: Les populations du plateau Dogon face aux contraintes: pluviométrie, terre et démographie', *Africa* 67, 4 (1997) pp. 602–24.

Given the shallow soils and their vulnerability to erosion, soil conservation measures have a high priority. To this end, Dogon cultivators are keen to have livestock on their fields after the harvest to restore the soil's fertility. Large investments are made in livestock, predominantly cattle, with the money earned from the growing of vegetables during the dry season and from labour migration.⁴⁵ Despite the weak resource base of the Bandiagara plateau and the low productivity of the pastureland, there are supposed to be 90,000 head of cattle on the plateau in the hands of both Fulbe pastoralists and Dogon cultivators.⁴⁶ Fulbe herdsmen often tend the animals owned by Dogon, as the Dogon regard the Fulbe as more skilled in animal husbandry. Dogon cultivators contract poor Fulbe migrants as a cheap source of herding labour.

The Bandiagara region seems to have become a transit area for most of the Fulbe pastoralists. From the beginning of the twentieth century, and probably even before, Fulbe started to drift into this area and then began to settle there more permanently. At present there is an outflow of Fulbe from the plateau to other regions, while new groups have started to enter the area.

Over time the motivations behind these movements have changed considerably, depending on the specific political, ecological and economic context in which they occurred. During the Futanke Empire (1862–93) some groups of Fulbe from the Seeno plains east of the plateau were settled by force near Bandiagara, the capital of the empire, because they revolted against Futanke rule. Later on, Fulbe from the area that is now Burkina Faso, and belonging to the Torodbe clan, migrated to central Mali, fleeing oppression by the Mossi in the Yatenga kingdom. During the colonial period, Jallube from the mountain area north of Bandiagara arrived to escape oppressive chiefs, forced labour and drought. With the colonization of the Seeno-Mango and Seeno-Gondo plains, and the onset of droughts, new groups of Fulbe such as the Gondonkoobe and Fittoobe started migrating to the Bandiagara plateau. With the clearing of the remaining cultivable soils on the plateau and the blocking of cattle routes by Dogon cultivators, the Fulbe resident on the plateau began a new round of movements, either on the plateau itself or towards more southerly districts.

In the second half of the twentieth century, notably in the 1970s and 1980s, new migrants — coming from such diverse areas as the Guimballa, the Seeno plains, and the Hayre — settled in the bush around villages of Dogon cultivators to tend the latter's cattle. Among those pastoral groups who settled a long time ago, similar patterns of migration have come into

45. Jacky Bouju, *Graine de l'homme, enfant du mil* (Société d'Ethnographie, Paris, 1984). However, a lot of the manure produced goes into the plots destined for market gardening, to the detriment of the cereal fields.

46. République du Mali, *Développement régional*, p. 13.

existence, namely, an extremely individualized movement of small family groups and individuals.

Thus, in the course of the last century the political motivations for migration were replaced by economic and ecological factors. This has led to a much more individualized pattern of migration, whereas migrants in the precolonial period and the first half of the twentieth century were either settled by force or clustered voluntarily in semi-permanent villages and settlements.

The situation of the drought migrants on the Bandiagara plateau is often extremely difficult. If measured only by the effort needed to find them, one can conclude that they were very isolated. In order not to imperil crop cultivation on their fields, Fulbe migrants were mostly settled by their Dogon patrons/hosts somewhere in the bush far from the centre of the village. Their feelings of isolation were enhanced by their extreme poverty and the fact that they were usually entirely dependent on their patrons for food and shelter. It must be said that the position of their hosts was not very encouraging either. In order to preserve their stock of animals, Dogon farmers often have to economize, since cereal production in this area is erratic and is rarely sufficient to feed the population.

With the growing poverty of the migrants, exchange relations and the contract terms for the herding of animals and the acquisition of land have deteriorated. Often the revenues from herding have not enabled the migrants to generate sufficient food and milk to survive. A herdsman and his family are rewarded with the milk produced by the cattle they herd and some millet every market day (although no more than a few kgs a week). Sometimes the millet is obtained only when the herd is corralled on a field to deposit manure. According to informants, in the past herdsmen were given a bull every six months or a heifer every year in return for guarding a herd, plus food and a field to cultivate. However, the land they were given to cultivate had infertile, rocky and shallow soils that produced very little. So, as well as being confined to the margins of society, they also had to beg for additional food and were dependent on the benevolence of others if they needed money for medicine, clothes or special events such as name-giving ceremonies for newborn children.

These conditions are extremely bad, compared with contract conditions in northern Côte d'Ivoire where herders receive a salary of FCFA 10–12,000⁴⁷ (or FCFA 75–100 per month per animal), the milk from the animals in their charge, clothes, a flashlight and batteries, a water container and food, even when they are on their own and do not have to feed a

47. €1.00 is about FCFA 655.00 (fixed rate).

family.⁴⁸ As the herds in Côte d'Ivoire are bigger, revenues from milk sales are much higher than in Bandiagara. Since most families were small, they had few opportunities to earn a living outside the pastoral sector because all available labour was needed to follow the herd, to process and market the milk, and to work the field, if there was one. Their situation was even worse when they were positioned on a field in the bush during the rainy season. Herding the cattle was then literally a round-the-clock occupation since their camp would often be completely surrounded by fields, with only a narrow corridor to the pastureland on the rocky plateau.

The presence of this group of migrants goes almost unnoticed. It was not uncommon that the villagers were not prepared to admit that there were pastoralists camping in their bush. They were probably herding cattle, for which no taxes were paid, or they regarded these settlers as a nuisance, or they may not have been aware of their presence. When their existence was established, it took us in some cases hours to find them, since camps were commonly at a considerable distance from the village and they relocated frequently, so that even the guide employed in the village was not always aware of their present location. The rugged terrain mostly precluded the use of a vehicle or motorbike, so most visits involved hiking over the rocks.

The migrants' housing was extremely simple, sometimes only a small loam brick hut constructed by the owner of the field where they were staying, or very small huts of grass, millet stalks, twigs and palm leaves, built with a minimum of material. Everything was in short supply or had to be paid for, on the Bandiagara plateau. The less fortunate were sleeping under overhanging rocks, a favourite site for snakes and scorpions.

Despite similarities in terms of poverty and isolation, their survival strategies were as remarkably varied as their attachments to the villagers and the region. The Fulbe of the Torodbe lineage, for example, who are long-time inhabitants of the Bandiagara area, have generally maintained fairly close ties with their kinsmen near Bandiagara, where they had a more or less permanent base. Some families were extremely mobile, going from one place to another every three months or so. Others had been camping for generations on the land of the same village, moving from one field to fertilize another owned by someone else, to the bush and back again to their own (borrowed) field.

For the earlier migrants who lived in semi-sedentary villages, one would have expected the situation to be more favourable. However, the Dogon cultivators contested their claims to the land on which they were settled. The Fulbe argue that the land was given to them by their former *yaatigi*, the Futanke who ruled the plateau at the beginning of the twentieth

48. Bassett, 'Hired herders', pp. 162–3; Bassett, 'Political ecology'; Bernardet, 'Peuls en mouvement', pp. 427–31. They regard these conditions as extremely exploitative and mention them as one of the reasons for cattle theft and conflicts between herders and herd owners.

century. The Dogon regard the Futanke as a foreign power, claim the oldest rights and have warned the Fulbe not to extend their pasture area. Instead, they have tried to clear fields on the pasturelands assigned to the Fulbe and on the cattle routes laid out in the past. At the same time, these Dogon are the owners of the cattle the Fulbe have been herding. They have been neighbours for more than half a century, have participated in each others' ceremonies, and have always exchanged livestock products such as milk and manure for occasional labour, cash and cereals. Moreover, the Fulbe often camped on the fields of their Dogon neighbours during the dry season to fertilize their millet fields.

The Fulbe of the Jallube lineage, on the other hand, who have three more permanent villages, have, against all odds and resistance from the Dogon, created two new semi-permanent settlements over the last few decades in a kind of no-man's land between villages. Nevertheless, almost half the population of the Jallube villages are absent on a temporary or permanent basis. Many of these migrants have spread over the plateau itself, more specifically to the southwest in the direction of the Inner Delta of the River Niger. Numerous Jallube families have settled in the bush around several of the villages. They regard their recently established camp as their new place of attachment, and only return to their original villages for funerals and weddings.

The families who have remained more formally attached to their village often follow a mixed strategy; part of the year they live in the village and part of the year, mostly during the dry season, they camp in the bush near Dogon villages to bring manure to the bush fields. These remaining families, and often also those who have taken up a nomadic existence, encounter many difficulties in maintaining their integrity. Since the onset of the droughts, not only have many family groups left, but also many young men. In a Jallube village we counted 41 young men in the 15–35 age group who had left their families more than two years earlier to try their luck on their own.⁴⁹ Their departure undermines the viability of the economic units to which they used to belong, and in the end the viability of the Fulbe villages. Many old people are left without care, and a growing number of young women remain dependent on their parents instead of starting their own households. If a young man leaves his wife and children behind, the woman often wants a divorce if her husband stays away too long. Obtaining a divorce is difficult, however, since the imam dissolving the union requires the family of the husband to give permission for it. The husband's family, on the other hand, will probably want to keep the marriage intact to encourage their

49. Of these 41 men, 21 were unmarried, 11 were married and had taken their wives and (young) children with them and 9 had left their wives and children behind. Over the past decades, 30 extended families (50 percent of the total) had left. In another village similar results were obtained.

son to return home. The ratio between dependants and economically active inhabitants is eroding, increasing the pressure on the remaining productive people and their desire to leave the village. Moreover, the men who have left often send very few remittances to their families.⁵⁰ A number of them disappear completely, and even the region where they are is not known. Despite our efforts to establish contacts with some of them, we were not able to trace them.⁵¹

New Fulbe families continue to arrive on the plateau. They have various reasons for trying their luck in this area. For some, the plateau is the next temporary settling point in their post-drought nomadic existence. Others deliberately search for a *yaatigi* and a herd to look after and to live off. Others have relatives already dwelling somewhere near a village. Yet others use the relations they have with Dogon farmers as their point of attachment to the plateau. A common characteristic of these people is that they were the last to arrive and thus are the ultimate strangers; they have difficulty in finding a permanent base and also have the least secure position. They are extremely mobile, changing village once every year or so, until they find a place to settle. Sometimes they split up the family. We found an example of a family with one brother with his children taking care of the family herd, a second brother looking after the herd of a Dogon cultivator, and a third brother who had remained on the Seeno plain to cultivate the family fields. Such families exploit resources over an area 100–200 kilometres wide. This strategy is designed to maximize the growth of the family herd by minimizing the burden on it from the consumption demands of the family.

Our last visit to the plateau and to the migrant families we know, in January 2002, confirmed the conclusions drawn in 1997, namely, that they have become a ‘travelling people’,⁵² people who are not bounded at all and are constantly on the move. In most cases this lifestyle is not freely chosen. One family originally from the north and headed by an old patriarch, all but one of whose sons had left after a quarrel, was now completely broken up. The head of the family, an old man, settled in the neighbourhood of Bamako, the capital of Mali, to work as a healer and diviner. His second wife was still in Bandiagara. His first wife had returned to her village of origin. The last son was still in the vicinity of Bandiagara. Another family had moved further to the south. In another case, a woman’s husband had died while quite young, and the owner of the herd he had managed had taken back his cattle. Having no alternative source of income, she travelled

50. This is confirmed by other research in Burkina Faso in the case of migrants who returned (see Hampshire and Randall, ‘Seasonal labour’).

51. One of our students who investigated the position of Fulbe migrants around Koutiala was also unable to find them (Steenbrugge, pers. comm.). For more information on this category of migrants in northern Côte d’Ivoire, see Bassett, ‘Hired herders’.

52. See Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, ‘Fulbe mobility: migration and travel into Mande’, *Mande Studies* 1, 1 (2000), pp. 41–62, for a report on the 1997 fieldwork.

with her four small children to settle with her brother far away. A baby, born in 1997, had died in the interval. A young family we had encountered in 1997 and that had been trekking for years had disappeared, and nobody knew where they had gone. Even the man's only sister, whom we met in Douentza up north, was not aware of their current place of residence. Most probably they went to the north of the plateau where there is still enough room. In this family a baby had also died.

The remaining families were still in the same or a worse position than in 1997. Two old ladies living in town with a Dogon family had lost their last relative in their village of origin. Moreover, the man who was their patron in the Dogon family had died suddenly. Incapable of any other work, they survived by decorticating cotton, and from the revenues of milk sold by their niece. The few families who remained around town were still camping on the fields. There was no visible improvement in their situation. Other people had arrived from elsewhere and taken the positions of those who had left.

If we compare the situation of the Fulbe migrants on the Bandiagara plateau with those in other areas, it is clear that they are worse off in the Bandiagara area because of the extreme competition for resources and the lack of possibilities to engage in activities other than agriculture. Nevertheless, a large number of Fulbe remain, because here they at least have a place to stay. They have gained some sort of 'rights' to the land and the space they occupy. This is especially the case for those with a place of attachment in some sort of Fulbe settlement, as their territorial claims make them somewhat more secure than recent immigrants. For them the only reason to stay is that they cannot be chased away. In another place their position would certainly be less secure. Some people also felt that they had no other place to go. They chose to stay for lack of an alternative. They also stay because of the close ties they have developed with Dogon cultivators. On the one hand, the latter pay very little for the work and services the Fulbe provide, but on the other hand, they are prepared to support the Fulbe in times of calamity.⁵³ This might not be the case in other parts of Mali.

Fulbe migrants in the forest of Bay and the districts of Koutiala and Yorosso

Though we know much less about Fulbe migrants in other parts of Mali, some comparisons can be made on the basis of our observations. On the Seeno plains, we encountered a number of isolated individuals living in Fulbe settlements that have long been present in the area. At the time (1995), we did not have the possibility to investigate villages of Dogon

53. See also De Bruijn *et al.*, 'Antagonisme et solidarité'.

cultivators on the plains thoroughly. In 1997 new visits were made to the forest of Bay, a marshy forest on a flood plain along the Burkina Faso border. This area was reputed to be a major destination for Fulbe migrants, and indeed we found many Fulbe migrants there. Most of them did not have any social attachment to the area, since very few people lived here in the past because of the area's inaccessibility. They predominantly herded goats, as the area was not suited to the raising of cattle, which is a major change compared with their area of origin.

Most of the people living there had made considerable detours all over the region before arriving in the area. Many had started without livestock after the drought, by looking after the herds of Dogon cultivators. When they had been able to rebuild a herd of goats, they left their patron to continue herding their goats in this marshy area in the hope of acquiring sufficient means to return to their village of origin. It was difficult to estimate whether they were genuinely intending to return to their home area. In contrast to the people we met in Bandiagara, the people we met here gave the impression that they were more adventurous and that, although they were poor and had to struggle hard to survive, they were perfectly at ease with the way they were living, as far as possible from sedentary society and the (administrative) constraints (taxes, forest laws, fields of farmers, administrative borders) this entails.

The Fulbe we encountered in southern Mali in the districts of Koutiala and Yorosso were definitely better off in terms of health and food, as confirmed by their own statements and their physical condition. They were better fed, better clothed and appeared more active than the people we met in central Mali. Some even seemed to be quite successful.

We visited the compound of a Fulbe family from the Bandiagara plateau that was completely surrounded by tall fields of maize, millet and sorghum. Behind the compound was a garden with all kinds of vegetables such as okra, pumpkin, beans and manioc. They were just collecting the maize harvest. The herd, which was owned by the imam of the Minyanka village and guarded by two sons, was at a safe distance from the fields. The imam loaned them the field on which they had built their huts several hundred metres from the village. They possessed all the necessary equipment — plough, weeder and oxen — for mechanized agriculture. The head of the family told us he would normally grow cotton as well, from which he earned as much as FCFA 200,000. Food was no problem, because the harvest was sufficient to feed the family for the whole year. His eldest son and first wife had returned to their village in Bandiagara district with their own herd because the cattle could not adapt to the feed and damp conditions in southern Mali. Another son lived in the town of Koutiala where he was a practising Koranic scholar, with his own Koranic school. His second wife and a small daughter were also living in the compound.

Here too, flexibility and mobility were central to the way of life of the Fulbe. On a visit the following year, the composition of the household had changed completely. The head of the family had departed on a pilgrimage to Mecca and his second wife had temporarily returned to her own family. Instead, two distant aunts had joined the household. The son with the Koranic school in Koutiala was now the head of the household, and he, his wife and baby and all of his pupils were living in the compound. Only the two sons herding the cattle remained from the first visit. However, since we had not seen these two boys on our first visit, there was, to our surprise, nobody there we knew.⁵⁴

Along the border with Burkina Faso, in the district of Yorosso south of Koury we encountered another family from Bandiagara consisting of two brothers and their families. They were camping in the forest outside the village and they too appeared healthy and well fed. Nevertheless, one of the women had died the previous year and the mother of the brothers had come to take care of the five young children. Relations with the sedentary Minyanka cultivators were good, and we were also received in the compound of their hosts in the village. Like the other family, they were not thinking of returning to Bandiagara. They found life much easier in their new environment and were busy adapting themselves to it. The women were having more problems with their new situation because their role in public life is much more limited. Consequently they feel more isolated from their kin and friends than the men do.⁵⁵

These kinds of strategies enable members of their group to exploit a vast area looking for work as herdsmen or some other occupation such as making charms, Koranic education or petty trade. A peculiar aspect of these migratory movements is that other parts of society are reproduced in this new environment. Members of the political elite of Fulbe chiefdoms in Douentza, who are skilled in Koranic education and the making of charms, use their network among the mobile herdsmen to make trips to the south of Mali. On these trips as travelling Islamic scholars they provide religious services to their own folk as well as to the settled rural population. *Riimaybe* (former slaves) and bards (*griots*, *nyeeybe*) have followed suit and come to provide their services too. *Riimaybe* often try to settle as farmers in cultivators' villages just as the Dogon have done.⁵⁶

54. See also van Steenbrugge, 'Reacties op onzekerheid'.

55. See Josée van Steenbrugge 'Voices from the Sahel', video film (African Studies Centre, Leiden, Impact of Climate Change on Drylands Project, 2001).

56. Van Steenbrugge, 'Reacties op onzekerheid'; Nijenhuis, 'Migratory drift'.

Conclusion

The material presented in this article indicates that there is a large group of rural migrants that has escaped the systematic attention of researchers into migration and rural poverty. These migrants, not only of Fulbe origin but also Dogon and Mossi, have moved into rural areas outside their home areas. As is clear from the description of the pastoral Fulbe families in this article, they belong to a group of people who do not fit into current models of population mobility and migration. They do not appear in statistics, have disappeared administratively, and have unpredictable patterns of mobility. Instead, a specific itinerary unfolds as decisions are taken by the herdsmen or by the family, in reaction to a diversity of ecological, social and political conditions and the events in their family lives, all of which offer constraints as well as opportunities.

These migrants operate in a very flexible manner. For example, in order to be able to exploit a specific area of pasture, they need some kind of social attachment in the form of a host (*yaatigi*). These points of attachment do not just serve as the entrance of a specific individual to a specific site, rather they seem to act as 'gateways' that facilitate the movements of a much larger group of people than the person who is formally attached to sedentary society. Furthermore, these rural migrants are extremely dispersed. People from one area of origin seem to be spread over a vast area. These patterns of movement and the creation of networks are anything but a planned process and seem to unfold from the logic of decision-making and the movement itself. Mobility has always been part of the cultural repertoire for responding to varying and often insecure and risky environmental conditions. This prerogative has been inscribed in specific cultural patterns, which can also be found in other cultures in this region but are taken to the extreme among the Fulbe. It has become part of their own self-definition as a 'wandering people', and they are confirmed in this by the attitude of their hosts who regard them either as an unreliable bunch of vagrants or as skilled Muslim clerics to be admired from a distance.

These specific cultural responses to changing and varying conditions give an enormous amount of flexibility and autonomy to individuals and small families in taking their own decisions. Their attachments to a network of kinsmen in their home area are weak and co-operation in the form of labour exchange, the redistribution of property or mutual aid is almost totally absent. This is far from being a crude functional Darwinian consequence of environmental instability. These organizational features of society are the result of a historical development in which environmental instability, economic fluctuations and political and military turmoil provided the background against which people had to secure their existence.⁵⁷

57. De Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid Ways*.

In the course of history the processes that serve as an impetus for this pattern of mobility have, of course, changed. In the past, the most important reasons to move were the agricultural seasons and political developments. Pastoralists were offered some sort of protection in a political hierarchy in which others (slaves) had to bear the risk of crop failure and drought. At present they are fully exposed to the vagaries of the Sahelian climate as well as the resulting economic fluctuations in the form of oscillating food prices. Despite these changes, their main response is mobility.

This is reflected in the way they define their identity. The Fulbe define their identity much less in relation to a specific territory than their sedentary neighbours do. Instead, they see themselves as Fulbe in reference to a specific ideology in which livestock (predominantly cattle), specific behaviour and their religious affiliation are the most important components. Depending on the conditions they encounter, they can stress one or more aspects of their identity. In this way they always occupy the position of the 'stranger' in the area into which they immigrate.

In recent years this position of stranger has become increasingly uncomfortable. Under the impact of population growth, increasing pressure on resources that has led to a scarcity of land, and the decentralization efforts under way in Mali and other Sahelian countries, relations between the indigenous populations and strangers are changing in character. There are indications that the 'strangers' — not only Fulbe, but also sedentary newcomers and women (who can be regarded as strangers in the lineage of their husband) — are progressively being excluded from access to resources such as pasture, water points, trees and agricultural land. In this struggle, new alliances and identities are being constructed to underscore the various claims on increasingly scarce resources. One of the results of this struggle is the extreme poverty some pastoral migrants are now encountering, while others are managing quite well and have been able to create a new existence in a new environment.

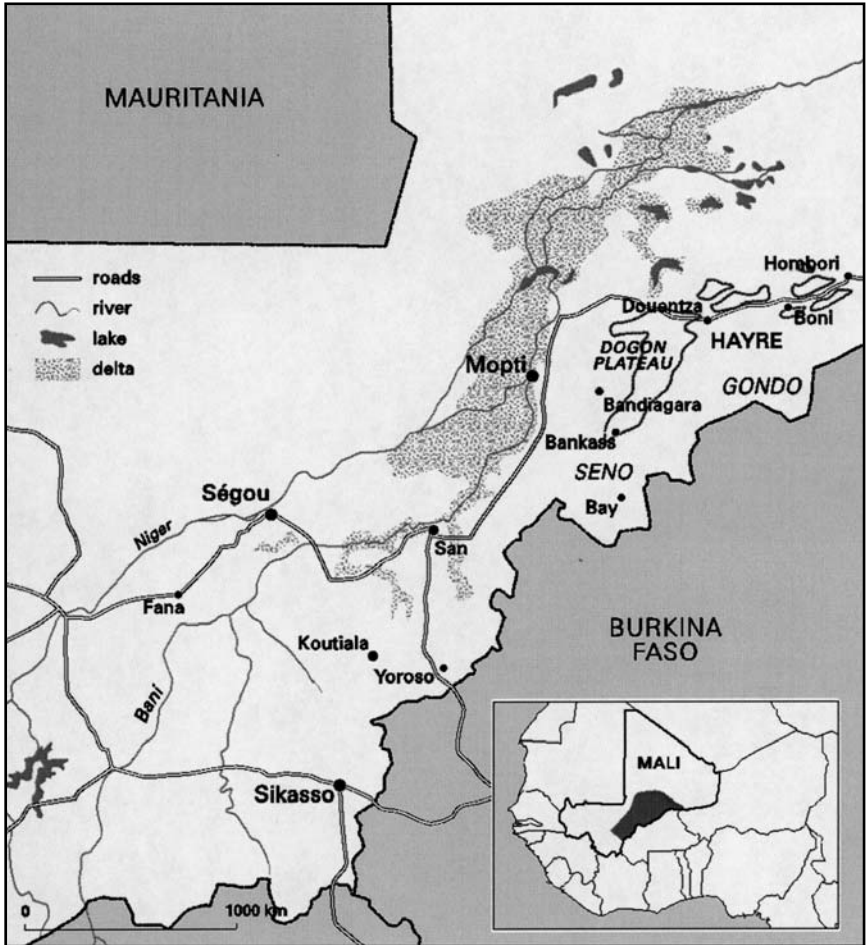


Figure 1. Map of Mali

