familial d'exploitation ? Ce processus serait irréversible, si le maraîchage spéculatif et parfois individuel promu par le *manan* n'existait pas. La famille telle qu'elle est succombera en se transformant, certes, mais elle a encore un certain avenir qui dépend d'une foule de conditions: le contrôle du grain et du bétail par le chef, l'aggravation de la misère urbaine qui renvoie les émigrés dans leurs foyers, la solution des problèmes de conservation et de commercialisation des échalotes, l'ouverture de la Plaine, exutoire pour les cadets en rupture de *manan* qui, à partir de leur nouveaux villages, font remonter sur le Plateau leurs excédants céréaliers. L'équilibre fragile mis en oeuvre par les Dogon résistera aussi tant que les barrages continuent à arroser ces décors verdoyants, perdus dans ce paysage gréseux.

ABSTRACT

Dogon society, readily described as traditional by a certain ethnology, holds within it the seeds of an extraordinary flexibility which enables it to retain the essentials: its apparent conservatism and its underlying internal dynamism. Thus, the relative individualisation of the market gardening system makes up for the shortcomings of a cereal economy that is chronically in deficit; integration into the market is essential to improving the food situation.

Dogon social structure is still withstanding the hammer blows of out-migration, monetisation, Islam and Christianity. Is it not the case that some who had left for good do sometimes return? Such is the case with some of the numerous peasants who were transferred by the Church during the drought years to southern Mali where the land was more fertile and the climate wetter. Conversely, the loss of population suffered by the highlands, the accelerated rate of Islamisation (or re-Islamisation) and Christianisation, together with the economic importance of dams are surely speeding up the break-up of the family as a farming unit. This process would be irreversible if the speculative and sometimes individual market-gardening promoted by the *manan* did not exist. The family as it is today will of course succumb by transforming itself but it still has some future which depends on a number of conditions: the control of grain and cattle by the chief, the deepening of urban poverty which makes emigrants return home, the solving of the problems of the conservation and marketing of shallots, the opening-up of the plain, an outlet for younger sons who have left the *manan* and send back the cereal surplus from their new villages to the highlands. The fragile equilibrium established by the Dogon will survive so long as the dams continue to water these green islands lost in a sea of sandstone.

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# THE HEARTHHOLD IN PASTORAL FULBE SOCIETY, CENTRAL MALI: SOCIAL RELATIONS, MILK AND DROUGHT

*Mirjam de Bruijn*

> To judge from the kind of set expression, haughty and distant, often seen on the women's faces, one would guess that the mystery it conceals is no easy one to pierce, and that this mask they wear is one way, not only of concealing their inmost thoughts, but also of preserving the independence they value so highly [Dupire, 1963: 48]

Scarcity has always been a dominant feature of the lives of Fulbe pastoralists in central Mali. The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s have left deep marks on their pastoral economy and have led people to highlight elements of their lives which in their perception are under stress. Milk plays an important role in their lives, and its loss brought with it the disappearance of the 'social glue of their society' as many women saw it. Old women were complaining of the little help they were receiving from the people who would 'normally' be taking care of them, and men were concerned much more with the loss of cattle and with grain prices. However, some were commenting on the loss of milk and on the accompanying changes in their society. Another striking event was the absence of wedding ceremonies. It appeared that wedding ceremonies and even marriage itself were being postponed as a consequence of material poverty: the ceremonies simply could not be held. Many women married without a ceremony and without the required exchange of gifts. Again it was women especially who were worried and concerned about this phenomenon. A wedding ceremony that was finally held at the end of our stay in December 1991 was dominated by women, and it was mainly women who had insisted on it being held. For them a wedding ceremony is confirmation of their position in society, of the establishment of their unit in society, where rights on milk and milk preparation are centred. Men would tend to agree to a marriage without any ceremony.

Were these the signals of deprived women who were eagerly trying to invent a glorious past in which their social and economic roles were more important? Or were they referring to and indicating a real and deep change in their society concerning the position and role of married women, a change induced and triggered by drought?

In this article I will argue that in Fulbe pastoral society in central Mali women indeed had, and still have to a certain degree, an important social and economic role, concentrated around the 'milk economy', which is organised in a special female-headed or women-centred unit: the hearthhold, called the *fayannde* by the Fulbe. In a society of semi-nomadic pastoralists, who live most of the year in small social units, social relations and networks are very important, probably even the centre of their main survival strategy: the transhumant cattle keeping. Women who organise social relations and maintain the social network are thus indispensable and one would expect them to have a prominent place in the social organisation of society.

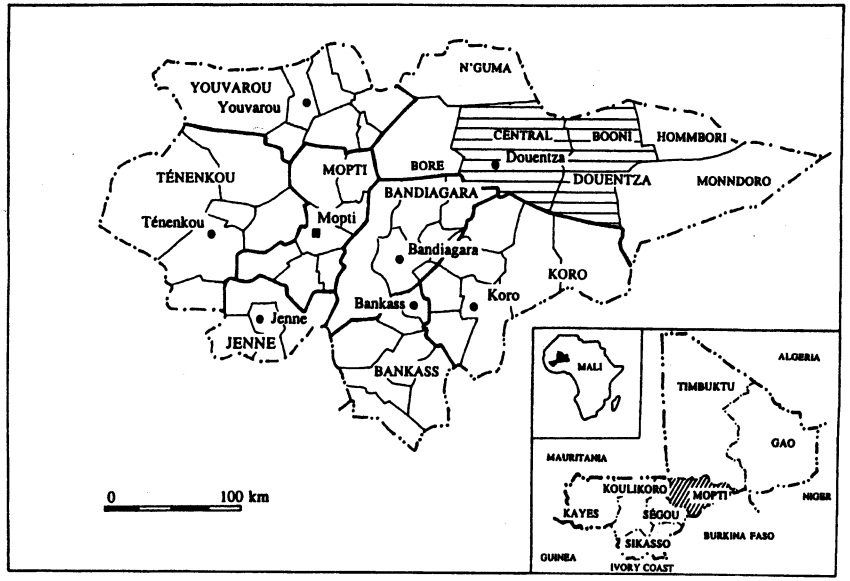


FIGURE 1 *The area of study*

In Fulbe literature this social unit has received little attention. The dominant picture of Fulbe social organisation fits into a segmentary lineage model, with a patrilineal organisation, male-headed units (households) dominating economic, social and political life at the local level. Women are seen as an (important) part of these male-headed units, but are given no independent role.

In this article I try to give some insight into the Fulbe's social organisation from a female perspective. The roles and tasks of women, with their central units in the society, give a different view of Fulbe social organisation in general. It reveals the importance of the hearthhold in the social and material security of its members and of society as a whole. The importance of the hearthhold also becomes clear from the way marriage is organised: gifts, the choice of marriage partners and the high rate of divorce can all be linked with the central role of the *fayannde* in society. In this constellation, matrilateral ties are as important as patrilateral ties, thus questioning the patrilineality of Fulbe society. The woman's perspective as explained in this article opens up a discussion on the dominant paradigm of Fulbe social organisation, giving more room to female-centred units and kin groups.

## THE FULBE IN CENTRAL MALI

The study region, the Hayre (see map), is situated in central Mali.[1] The rainy season is short, the rainfall irregular and the cereal harvest is further endangered by regular plagues and diseases. In good years pastures are abundant on the sandy plains, called the Seeno. The Fulbe who live in the



area are of the Jallube lineage, one of the four main Fulbe lineages in central Mali. In the seventeenth century the Fulbe became a dominant power in the region when a group of Fulbe warlords, originating from the inner delta of the Niger, migrated into the area and established nomadic chiefdoms. Today their descendants form the political elite of the Fulbe in the Hayre. The pastoral Fulbe, who had been living in the area for centuries, were incorporated into the political hierarchy of these chiefdoms. They provided part of the economic base, which consisted of raids, warfare and livestock keeping. Only in the nineteenth century did the political elite become settled under the influence of the Fulbe empire in the inner delta, Maasina (1818–62). With the increase in slavery in this period a political hierarchy developed in Fulbe society based on the division between free and non-free people. The period was also marked by the institutionalisation and active spread of Islam in the region. Islamic clergy became the religious elite beside the political elite. The pastoralists were free people but in the social hierarchy they submitted to the elite. Slaves were at the lowest level of the hierarchy.[2]

This social and political hierarchy implied elaborate codes of behaviour between and within the social categories. The pastoralists were the cattle keepers, and all work related to cattle was considered their work and thus noble. The slaves had to do the heavy work and were the cultivators. The political and religious elites were occupied with power and leadership, and Islam. With the changes under colonial rule in the twentieth century, such as the abolition of slavery and the expansion of agriculture, these differences in occupation vanished. Nevertheless they do still play an important role in the social ideology and in the rules of behaviour, leading to a strict demarcation between the social categories. This is clearly seen in the endogamy rules of the noble groups.

In daily practice this complex ideology has consequences for the division of labour between the social categories. A pastoralist feels shame when he has to gather fruits in the bush, as that shows his poverty and associates him with the slaves. Cultivation work, which has become part of daily reality for the pastoralist, is still considered degrading. For the former slave, on the contrary, hard work and cultivation have become elements of his or her identity and self-esteem (de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1994). Gender roles differ for the various social categories of society. Elite women are considered more noble than pastoral women and are often secluded in their husband's compound. Women from the group of former slaves are known for their hard work. Women from the pastoral groups are mainly associated with the processing and sale of milk (de Bruijn, 1996a).

I will concentrate here on the pastoralists, to be called the Jallube. Under 'normal' circumstances they are agro-pastoralists, combining the cultivation of millet with livestock keeping (mainly cattle and small ruminants) and they have a semi-nomadic life style. Their rainy-season camps are situated near their fields, and they transhume in an area with a radius of about 100 km maximum. Gender division of labour is very strict, in daily discourse and in practice.

Two important changes influence the life of the pastoralists and gender relations more specifically: the droughts of the last decades and integration

into the market economy. After the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s the pastoral Fulbe were very much impoverished. In 1985 75 per cent of their herds perished.[3] They had no chance of recovery because of the bad years after 1985. This situation had not really changed when I revisited the area in December 1995, although the herds had increased a little in size. Consequently the availability of natural resources has simply decreased. The land is in poor condition, so harvests are never very high. Grain is always in short supply, and it is difficult to improve the animals' condition. Herds have almost disappeared, and, what is worse, the milk production, on which pastoral women depend for their own income, has dropped dramatically (de Bruijn, 1996a). Recovery from the drought has been limited and women are not profiting from the improvement as much as they did in the past. An important reason for their deprivation is that their husbands increasingly emphasise the raising of cattle for meat. With the money they buy cereals to compensate for the lack of a cereal harvest. This change in emphasis has been promoted by government policies and development projects and deeper-lying changes in the economy. The role of women in the economy and consequently their social status have been reduced (see Waters-Bayer, 1988; Horowitz and Jowkar, 1992). The effects of this impoverishment are felt by women in their material and social well-being.

## THE PRESENTATION OF FULBE SOCIAL ORGANISATION IN FULBE STUDIES

There is a big difference in social organisation between the elite groups and the pastoral groups in Fulbe society. It is due not only to differences in life style with regard to cattle and power, but also to the integration of Islam (see de Bruijn, 1996a; de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1994). The literature used for this overview is mainly based on nomadic and semi-nomadic Fulbe, although it is not always clear which group is studied. Dupire (1962), Stenning (1958, 1959) and Bonfiglioli (1988) have studied the Wodaabe, nomadic Fulbe. Riesman (1977) and Dupire (1970) seem to include both elite and pastoralists in their studies. Waters-Bayer (1988) writes about non-nomadic Fulbe, Vereecke (1989) about urban Fulbe, and Bierschenk and Le Meur (1997) about urban and pastoral Fulbe in Benin. The difference between the social positions of these groups does not seem to have influenced the interpretation of their social organisation to a great extent. The work of Dupire (1962) and Stenning (1958, 1959) among Wodaabe nomadic pastoralists in Niger and Nigeria has laid the basis for this analysis. Their descriptions seem to fit semi-nomadic and settled Fulbe.

In the majority of the studies of the Fulbe much emphasis is placed on their patrilineal organisation. The patrigroups are especially important in the organisation of work and in political organisation. Dupire (1962: 169, 170; 1963: 73, 74) pays attention to matrilateral groups and their social roles in society. Other studies mention them in passing but do not give them a central role in their discussions. Among the Jallube in central Mali it appears that this part of the kin group plays an important role in social care and is centred around the hearthhold. Lack of attention to these matrilateral relations may



be the result of the focus on men and male organisations in pastoral societies generally.

On the (supra) local level, flexibility is the central feature of the social organisation of Fulbe pastoralists in social relations as well as in residence. Although the pastoralists are divided into many groups along kin or residence lines, the boundaries between the groups are not strictly defined. This flexibility is needed because pastoralists have to be free to move with their animals, especially in the dry season, and because they must be able to react flexibly to ecological and political insecurities (cf. de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1995). This has led to a focus on the 'smallest' social unit in most studies of the Fulbe. This unit was defined in relation to the control and division of cattle, the major resource of the Fulbe, i.e. the *wuro*. A *wuro* consists of a male head and his dependants. The term 'household' best covers its meaning. Cattle are controlled by the head of the *wuro*, and although women may own cattle they have no ultimate control over them. The composition of the *wuro* varies over time as all its members may leave through migration, divorce or as a consequence of life cycle events. Tasks within the *wuro* are strictly divided between the sexes: men, cattle; women, milk and the care of children. However, women's roles are mainly defined in relation to the men and their role within the *wuro*. They are part of the *wuro* of their father, their husband and in old age of their son or their younger brother. Women and women's roles and tasks are explained and described in relation to this male-dominated social unit. As the following citations indicate:

> . . . when we look more closely at the nature of the woman's submission, we discover that her obedience is much more an adherence to the culture itself than a conformity to the will of an individual, be it father, mother or husband. [Riesman, 1977: 85]

> That is tantamount to saying that the husband must appear to dominate his wife. But even if a woman actually possesses a stronger character than her husband, that does not mean the husband's authority is only a simple facade, for, in a society where such a great part of life is public, this facade possesses a reality which it would be a mistake to minimise. [Riesman, 1977: 89]

> [Pastoral Fulbe women's] status and roles are essentially secondary and subordinate to that of their husbands. A pastoral Fulbe woman is evaluated primarily by her obedience and subservience to her husband, which is subsumed under the concept of *dewal*, which means 'service', and which derives from *rew* (root), which means to 'follow or serve'. The word for women in Fulfulde is *rewbe* (singular *debbo*). [Vereecke, 1989: 5; see also Dupire, 1963: 50][4]

Explicit attention to women and gender roles taking a woman's perspective, i.e. the study of dairy products, appeared only in the 1980s (Waters-Bayer, 1988). Dupire (1963) was a positive exception. This tendency may be a result of the male perspective that was so dominant in earlier anthropological studies (Little, 1992).[5]

In some of the studies mentioned, attention is given to the female-centred unit, that is, the woman's domain, where milk is gathered and processed.

These descriptions emphasise the clear-cut division between men and women's economic domains (see, for example, Bonfiglioli, 1988: 150; Stenning 1958; Riesman, 1977; also Dupire, 1963). However, this woman-centred unit is not given much weight in the analysis of the social organisation of society. For instance, Bonfiglioli, who describes this unit extensively, omits it when he draws a diagram of the layers in the social organisation. He does not discern another layer between the individual and the *wuro* (1988: 50).

Waters-Bayer (1988), dealing with settled Fulbe women in Nigeria, shows that the economic domains of men and women are not divided strictly in all circumstances (especially the care of cattle and some agricultural work). At the same time she devoted a lot of attention to the social and economic independence of the woman-centred unit, as the core unit for the processing and division of milk and its products. Likewise Kuhn (1997) in a study of Fulbe women in northern Benin took milk and the organisation of its processing and division as the core of her analysis of women's roles. In a recent study of African women this female-centred unit, labelled the hearthhold, was given a central place in the analysis of gender roles and power positions in Africa (Ekejiuba, 1995).

## SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF THE JALLUBE PASTORALISTS IN CENTRAL MALI

### *Lineages*

The pastoral Jallube divide themselves into patrilineages: in the Hayre the two main lineages, are the Seedoobe ('those who separate') and Junngo Nyiiwa ('the trunk of the elephant'). The latter is a grouping of various smaller lineages. This division is linked with the relationship with modern bureaucracy, i.e. both groups pay taxes in a different *arrondissement*. In the past the organisation into patrilineages was important in warfare and in conflict resolution. Today those functions have disappeared, the wars and razzias are over and modern bureaucracy and Islamic institutions have assumed the role of resolving conflicts. Moreover this function was never very important because of the dominant role of the social hierarchy/elite in such situations (cf. de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1995; van Dijk and de Bruijn, 1995). Patrilineage is not dominant at the level of land division, either. Residence and linkage with the chief seem to be much more prominent (van Dijk, 1996).

Boundaries between these lineages are not clearly defined. Intermarriage is a regular phenomenon and endogamy is not defined within these sublineages, only within the Jallube. Furthermore female descendants play an important role in defining membership of a certain lineage. Matrilateral ties may be important for the recruitment of support and conflict mediation in disputes and conflicts.

It seems appropriate to say that the dominant discourse, or ideology, of the Jallube is patrilineal, but that in daily reality the Jallube use this ideology very pragmatically, and matrilateral ties are used as frequently as patrilateral ties. This is especially clear within the lower levels of social organisation. There the patrilineal ideology loses its importance.



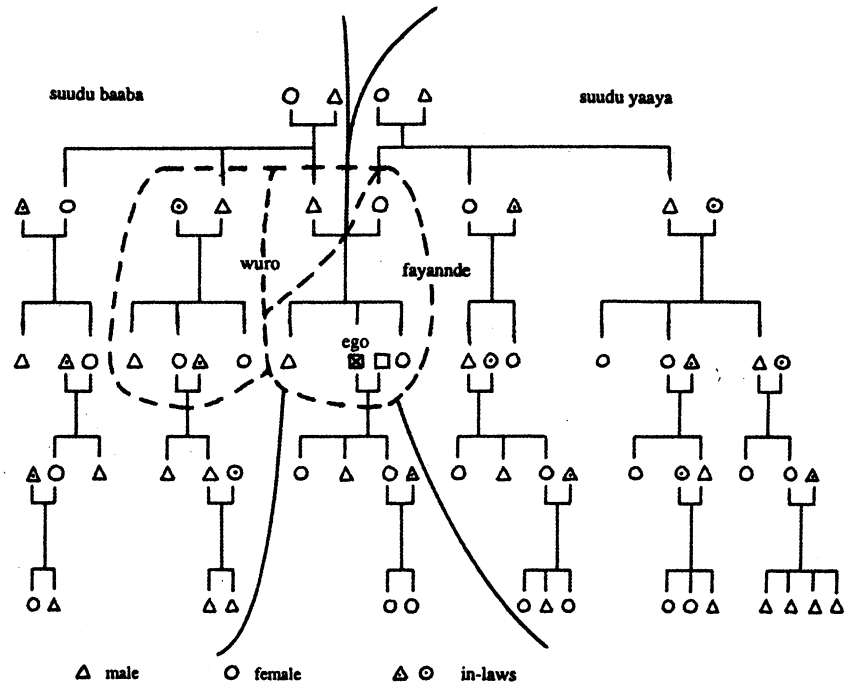


FIGURE 2 *Kin relations*

At the local level, organisation is guided as much by principles of residence as by kinship. Kin groups defined both through matrilateral and patrilateral ties are of crucial significance. As a consequence of endogamy rules, descent can be defined in different ways, so that one person can be both patrikin and matrikin at the same time. People will define each other according to the situation. The kin groups that were of importance are better labelled 'spheres of kin relations', because they do not form clear-cut lineages or descent groups, nor are they very static groups. The Jallube discern two spheres of kin relations: *suudu yaaya* (house of the mother) and *suudu baaba* (house of the father) (see Fig. 2). The *suudu yaaya* contains people from one's mother's kin groups. The *suudu baaba* contains people from one's father's kin groups.[6] The latter fall more or less under the patrilineage; the first may be called a matrilateral kin group. The relations existing in the *suudu yaaya* are characterised by care and pity (*yurmeende*) and are associated with milk and its social significance. The *suudu baaba* is associated with terms like force (*semmbe*) and related to cattle. These groups are not very strictly defined. People considered members can be traced through different kin relations, and one person can be part of a *suudu baaba* and a *suudu yaaya* at the same time. This complexity of relations is accentuated in an endogamous society where everybody is related. *Suudu baaba* and *suudu yaaya* can also be defined in relation to the *wuro* and

*fayannde*. The *suudu baaba* comprises people of the *wuro*, and the *suudu yaaya* those of the *fayannde*. *Fayannde* and *wuro* are also residential units.

*Wuro and fayannde*

In central Mali the Jallube spend the rainy season in cattle camps at some distance from the fields which they cultivate. A few families of former slaves live in a small hamlet in between the cattle camps. The cattle camps may consist of several families and are called *wuro* (pl. *ngure*). This is another level of organisation different from what is indicated in most literature by the term *wuro*. This larger *wuro* consists of several small *ngure*, previously mentioned as 'household'. The *wuro* is defined by the joint management of a herd of cattle. It is a male-headed (extended) family which also co-resides in small clusters of huts within the cattle camps. A *wuro* may consist of a man, his wife and children, of brothers and their families, or of a father and his sons and their families, and sometimes a cousin or nephew may join the *wuro*. Splitting up the herd automatically leads to the division of these groups. After the harvest the pastoralists leave the rainy-season camps to look for pastures for their animals or for villages where they can exchange milk products for cereals. Each family chooses the direction that fits its purposes best. The smallest unit that departs on transhumance is a man and his wife and a few children. It may be an independent *wuro*, but may also be part of a larger one, e.g. one of the sons with his wife and children belonging to an extended family whose members still herd their cattle together. In the latter case the rest of the family remain in the camp. So far the residential organisation overlaps in general with the descriptions in the Fulbe literature.

A *wuro* consists of *fayannde*, or hearthholds, symbolised by the huts and their equipment, the main part of which is the bed. In most cases a *wuro* contains only one hut, although polygynous households are not exceptional. A *fayannde* consists of a woman and the people living with her for whom she is responsible. Among the Jallube it is in most cases a woman and her children. Each married woman has her own *fayannde*. The *fayannde* is the basic unit of reproduction, and it is the unit of female production. For the Jallube the link between milk and the *fayannde* means that the *fayannde* has a central place in society. This is reflected in several ways: the children within a *fayannde* share their mother's milk, which is the basis of brother–sister care relations; the sharing of milk creates a bond of solidarity for their whole life. The relations between them imply an obligation towards each other of mutual help and support. In the *fayannde* the division of cows' milk and its redistribution is controlled by the woman, who is the head of the hearthhold. As such, a woman plays a central role in the establishment of social networks for the *fayannde* as well as for the *wuro*.

A *wuro* cannot exist without a *fayannde*. As Riesman (1977) argues, a *wuro* without a woman is no *wuro*; there must be a female part. A *fayannde* can exist without male participation. This indicates that the *fayannde* is the really basic unit. However, economically they are interdependent, which is reflected in the ownership of cattle. Both the *fayannde* and the *wuro* have their own part of the herd, which they exploit together. Furthermore this interdependence is reflected in the division of tasks to be done together. The management of the herd and the work in the fields are for the men, and the



processing and management of milk for the women. Men are responsible for the work in the fields, which is absolutely forbidden to women. Women may after the harvest, only fetch the millet stalks which are used as construction material for the huts. In some cases they are allowed to do some sowing of crops. When the millet, the main crop, is harvested women are responsible for processing it into food. Activities around cattle are in the hands of men as well as women, but again the spheres of action are strictly separated. Adult men herd the cattle, and look after them when they are ill. They also milk the cattle. The marketing of cattle is equally a men's affair. Women take care of calves, kids and lambs when they stay near the camp. However, a woman's most important task is the processing, selling and distribution of milk. This is an important economic activity for women, as the revenue is hers and she can enter into commercial transactions only when she has milk to sell. Milk is first and foremost a sign of a woman's social status.

Related to this division of labour are property relations. At different stages in their lives men and women receive the cattle of their kin, giving them both property rights in cattle (see van Dijk, 1994). Ownership of cattle and milking rights are divided between a husband and wife at marriage. Pastoral women own not land but jewellery and household equipment. A woman also owns her own hut, which she will often have built herself.

In the social organisation of the pastoral communities of the Jallube, women have a very central role as head of the *fayannde*. The *fayannde* is dominated by the woman and her *suudu yaaya*, in fact it is the domain of a woman's family in her husband's *wuro*. It relates to both social groups. The hut and its contents which symbolise the *fayannde* are the property of the woman and it is built by the female members only of her *suudu yaaya*. In all these roles it is the control over milk (breast milk as well as cows' milk), around which the social role of women is centred. The formation of a *fayannde* may be temporary, owing to the high rate of divorce, but that does not mean that established relations will vanish. On the contrary this flexibility of the *fayannde* may even be an advantage for women, because it enlarges their social networks and gives them freedom of choice (cf. Riesman, 1977; Stenning, 1958). Land is, in this regard, of no importance at all to women. In fact if a woman worked on the land it would lower her status to that of a slave. A woman's status is related to milk and cattle and not to land. It is especially through marriage that women achieve these roles. It is typical that the complementary aspects of the *wuro* and *fayannde* come so explicitly to the fore. A husband and wife will never become a tight unit. The ways in which the *fayannde* is established and embedded in the social organisation indicate the strong ties women maintain after marriage with their own parents and kin, with their brothers, sisters and mother's brothers, i.e. their maternal and paternal kin. All matrilateral ties are based in the *fayannde* of their own mother.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE *FAYANNDE*

During their lifetime men and women in Jallube society build up a social network of relatives and through these networks they also build up their ownership of cattle and other possessions, thus establishing a social and

material security network. For both men and women the *fayannde* plays a crucial role.

In their youth boys and girls belong first of all to the *fayannde* of their mother. There they receive their milk (from breast; from cows) and the relations formed in the *fayannde* are the most basic in their lives. When older, they can always count on the support of their sisters and brothers, and children will always take care of their mother. The relations in the *wuro* are differently defined. When he grows up a boy will more and more become primarily a member of the *wuro*, and, while his sister will move out to set up her own *fayannde*, the boy will take over the *wuro* of his father.

Marriage means, for girls and boys, a big change in their lives: they leave the close group, the *fayannde*, definitively to set up their own *fayannde* or *wuro* respectively. This moment is often seen as a break, especially for the girls. Women, in a patrilineal society, have to move, and leave their mother's environment. More fundamentalist groups in Fulbe society (the political and religious elites) who indeed follow a pattern of virilocality and of patrilineality (see also de Bruijn, 1996a) conform to this pattern. For the Jallube this may be so in their ideology, but the practice turns out to be different. A Jallo girl rarely separates from her mother's *fayannde*: she lives near by and she maintains regular contact. Furthermore the people with whom she comes to live, the relatives of her husband, are often her relatives too, and they may even be part of her *suudu yaaya*.

When a girl reaches maturity, around the age of 13, she gets married. In the first years she will move between her husband's home (her in-laws, *esiraabe* in Fulfulde) and the hearthhold of her mother. Only when she has given birth to a number of children will she settle permanently in her husband's household and her hearthhold become stable. Until then, the girl may divorce several times, if she does not like her husband or his family. The length of time during which the girl shifts between her husband's *wuro* and her mother's *fayannde* depends on her own will and the situation of her family.

In this transition period the girl gets more and more responsibilities *vis-à-vis* her own family and *vis-à-vis* the *wuro* of her husband and her own *fayannde*. The integration in the network of her in-laws increases, and gradually she will consider them as family (if they were not so previously). This relationship, which is characterised by tension and is full of shame and taboos, loses these characteristics to a certain degree. The in-laws eventually consider the girl as a young woman and part of their family, especially because of her economic and reproductive contribution to the *wuro* of her husband. But the girl will not leave nor even loosen the ties with her own family. If the husband's family is wealthy, the girl will start to help her own parents with small gifts. If they live in the neighbourhood she will visit them regularly, and will offer them milk, food or money if she can. In the same way the girl can ask her parents and brothers and sisters for support in case of need. Thus care for the woman and her children, i.e. the *fayannde*, may be divided between her in-laws and her own kin. If the woman falls ill and has no means herself she will first turn to her own family for support. They decide what will happen to her, and to which healer she will go. Should the girl fall seriously ill she will even move, with her small children, to her own



parents' house. Only if that fails will her own husband take care of her. Of course this also depends on the benevolence of her husband and the kind of relationship they have. A girl in turn may sell her jewellery and animals in order to help her father and mother if they are ill but she is not expected to do so for her own husband.

The care of the children is in the first instance regulated within the *fayannde*: the mother will take care of the children if they become ill and she will sell her animals if necessary. The father often also contributes, but if the children are still very young he does not need to do so.[7] This changes when the children grow older, i.e. older than five years of age.

A woman can have this position and play these roles only if she has enough cattle, or can dispose of a certain amount of milk. Her herd consists of the (pre-) inheritance from her parents and the 'gift' of her husband at marriage, i.e. the animals her husband has set aside for her and her children's subsistence (the *futte*). Nominally these animals become her property, but in practice she is expected to give them in pre-inheritance to her children (they become co-owners) and has to leave them behind in the event of divorce (van Dijk, 1994). In this sense Bonfiglioli's (1988: 176) explanation of property relations in Wodaabe society fits the Jallube in the Hayre well. Bonfiglioli describes the ownership of cattle as the shared property of people. According to him the important relationships in owning cattle are: husband and wife, father and child, and the individual and the borrower of cattle. The latter will be left out here.[8] As Bonfiglioli himself admits, he leaves out property relations as seen from the perspective of a woman. This is an unfortunate omission. I would also mention woman–child and woman–parent relations. These relations are defined within the *fayannde* or between the *fayannde* and the *wuro*. For the Jallube the co-property relationship of husband–wife is very temporary because the animals become the property of their children as soon as they are born. The *futte* never becomes the real property of the woman. This means that the most essential property relations are those between father and child and between mother and child.

A woman herself decides whether she wants to leave her own animals in her parents' herd, or whether she wants to take them into her husband's herd. The decision is related to various factors. She may consider her husband, who manages the herd, a bad herdsman and decide therefore to leave her own animals with her parents, where they will be more secure and reproduce more. She may already have sufficient milk from her husband's animals and may not need the milk of her own animals to live properly. She may wish to support her parents. She may also take all her animals into her husband's herd, because he has very few animals, or because her husband's animals yield little milk, or because she regards her father and brothers as bad herd managers, or simply because she wants all her animals around her. In this way a woman can manipulate the care of her animals and the yield of milk, and hence the social security she can offer her own children. It may also be a way to keep the relationship with her own family or her in-laws friendly in case she ever needs their help.

In the *fayannde* the milk of the animals of a *suudu baaba* and *suudu yaaya* (seen from the child's perspective) is pooled, and the rights to the milk and

the revenue from it are organised there. A woman gets milk rights from the animals that belong to her (her inheritance and her husband's gift) and from her children's animals, which they receive on various occasions. Furthermore her husband may give her the milk from his own animals. The income she gains from the milk and the way she likes to process it is completely under her control. Her husband has no say in it, not even in the amount of milk he receives himself, although he is the herd manager and milks the animals. The gift or exchange of milk is essential to the establishment or maintenance of social relations. A man depends on his wife for this. If she refuses to give a certain person some milk at his request, the husband can do nothing about it. Although a man has the power to give milk from his own cows to a stranger or relative, it does not equal the social significance of a gift of milk from a woman. Women, then, are able to keep good contacts with their own family, neighbours and a wider range of kin through the gift of milk and other small gifts. In fact it is the woman who keeps all these social relations going. This fact is of crucial importance for her own material and social well-being. Milk is first and foremost a sign of a woman's social status and symbolises social relations and hospitality. It is also a sign of a woman's beauty.

As long as the children have no *fayannde* or *wuro* of their own the milk yield of their animals is for their mother, and the children are looked after by her. When the woman grows older the roles are reversed, and the children, especially the sons, become responsible for their mother and father. In most cases old people decide to live with one of their sons, preferably the eldest. A mother will be provided with milk from the animals pre-inherited from her, and with food. She must, of course, share the milk with her daughter-in-law, who receives her part. The union with her husband may, from the point of view of material and social security, no longer be of any importance, although some couples continue to live together. If the sons cannot take care of an aging mother she may approach her daughters, but she is more likely to ask her brother for support, with whom she shared the *fayannde* as a child. For an old man this is more complicated and in general it will not happen that a son refuses to take care of his father who is in fact sharing cattle ownership with him.

Divorce, which is a frequent phenomenon among the Jallube, interrupts the life of women, but it does not disturb the relations she has built up through her *fayannde* and through the *fayannde* into which she was born. This is also due to the narrow kin relationship she often has with her in-laws, so that these relations are supported by bonds other than the marriage alone. After divorce older children will in principle stay with their father's *wuro*, although it is not always the case. Young children go with their mother. At a certain age children may choose for themselves where they want to live: with their mother's family or with their father's family. In old age a woman may always rely on the children from her first marriage. In between she will try to marry again, although she may live for a considerable period as a single woman with her own parents or with her brothers without being degraded in status. The same goes for men.



## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE *FAYANNDE* THROUGH MARRIAGE

### *Significance of marriage*

Marriage does not lead to a strong and inseparable bond between husband and wife among the Jallube. Economic and social tasks are clearly defined and interdependent, but can be established very easily in new units. The strongest relationships established through marriage are the relations between children and their mother, between siblings, and between children and their father. They form the core of society and can be established only through the *fayannde*. Another important relationship that is established is that between kin and in-laws. This relationship is important for the social security of women and their children. As such, marriage can better be characterised as a new phase in the establishment of the social relations that are so central for the Fulbe. The pastoral Fulbe depend heavily on social relations in order to keep their nomadic life going (see de Bruijn *et al.*, 1997; cf. Le Meur, 1997). Burnham's definition of marriage suits the Fulbe well: '. . . representing a bundle of interactional possibilities with associated political, economic, legal and other implications' (Burnham, 1987: 50). To which could be added the social security implications of these interactional possibilities. For the latter the establishment of the *wuro* and the *fayannde* with their social and economic roles is essential.

Marriage differs in its meaning for men and women according to their different roles and positions in the community related to the *fayannde* and the *wuro*. Marriage creates the basis for a woman to survive as it creates the relationship through which she gets her rights to milk (cf. Waters-Bayer, 1988; Dupire, 1963). Marriage enables women to establish new social relations and to have children who will ultimately take care of her. For men, marriage means the start of their own household and the conception of children (cf. Bonfiglioli, 1988: 150, 151). Thus for both the importance of marriage is to be found in the new set of relations opened up at marriage (kin, in-laws), and the future children. Both sets of relationships come together in the *fayannde*.

These basic relations are established through the marriage negotiations between families, or between the man and the woman, that are all centred around the establishment of a new *fayannde* in society. The types of gift and the number of gifts exchanged at the time of marriage, the choice of marriage partner, and the possibility of divorce are crucial to the continuity of the *fayannde* and its social networks. As Parkin and Nyamwaya (1987) stated, 'marriage payments [may] act as a grammar defining male and female roles'.

### *Marriage among the Jallube*[9]

#### *Gifts*

The Jallube have two marriage forms: the *cabbugal* and the *dewgal*. The first may be translated as 'betrothal'.[10] It is a marriage concluded by the families/parents when the bride and bridegroom are very young. Often such marriages are between close kin. The second form of marriage is to be translated as simple marriage; it may be a subsequent marriage or a first marriage that is not a betrothal.

There is some difference between the marriage gifts for a *cabbugal* marriage and those for a *dewgal* marriage. The exchange of gifts for a *cabbugal* marriage starts when the marriage partners are still very young. The spread of gifts over a long period of time results in a smaller amount of money (called *safannde*) being given to the bride's family than at a *dewgal* marriage, because, it is said, the exchange of gifts in the past replaces this money gift. Variations in the size of the gift depend on the wealth of the families concerned, on the beauty of the woman and on many other factors. In the past the *safannde* was paid in animals (cattle) but that custom has disappeared.

In the case of a *cabbugal* the money of the *safannde* is given to the bride's parents, who will invest it in household equipment for their daughter. In the case of a *dewgal* the money is given directly to the bride (as is prescribed by Islamic law). She will subsequently give part of it to her mother and to other members of her *suudu yaaya*.

The next important gift is the *hurto*, consisting of jewellery, a bed and household utensils. It is given to the bride by her mother and members of her *suudu yaaya*, who may help her mother to buy the *hurto*. The money of the *safannde* may also be used to buy the *hurto*. The *hurto* of the Jallube consists of a wooden bed, which dominates the woman's hut, pots and pans and calabashes, golden earrings and silver bracelets. The few animals given at this occasion may be considered a gift of both parents and also the last part of the bride's pre-inheritance. In fact the *hurto* is the material basis of the *fayannde*.

Another important gift is the *futte* (see above). The *futte* consists of the animal(s) given by the husband to his wife on the occasion of the marriage. In Islamic law it is a transfer of property rights over cattle from the husband to his wife. Among the Jallube this transfer is not total, because men retain property rights over the *futte*, and only when the animals have passed into the hands of the woman's children are they more or less transferred, not to the woman but to the children. But even then there are cases in which the men use the animals for their own purposes. This is against Islamic law.[11] Jallube women complain about the practice, but they can do nothing about it. Even the Islamic clergy would not protect their rights, but would always decide in favour of the man in conflicts about the *futte*. During her marriage a woman has milk rights over these animals, and if the husband dies when the children have not yet inherited the animals of the *futte* the woman will inherit them. As such the *futte* may be regarded as life insurance (van Dijk, 1994; cf. Dupire, 1970: 27). However, in the case of divorce, a Jallo woman never claims the *futte*, as she considers it her husband's property rather than her own.

A final exchange of gifts takes place a few years after marriage. A married woman always returns to her mother's house to give birth to her first child. Within a year of the birth of this child she returns to the *wuro* of her husband with many gifts. The gifts consist of couscous made from millet, rice (50 kg minimum), cooked millet balls for the millet porridge, butter and buttermilk. This is the only gift from the family of the wife to the family or *wuro* of the husband.



If the marriage gifts are considered from the perspective of the new *fayannde*, created by the marriage, it is striking that all the gifts may be regarded as investments by both the boy's and the girl's family to sustain the livelihood of the children who will be born of the marriage union. The gifts constitute the household equipment for a *fayannde* and the economic base in the form of milk rights over the animals of the *futte*. The exchange of gifts may therefore be regarded as an indirect dowry system (Goody and Tambiah, 1973). Equally remarkable is the fact that among the Jallube both families invest hardly any prestige in the marriage gifts. This is also expressed by the absence of any ceremony related to the giving of the gifts. It is mainly an affair between the parents of the couple, to get them started in life. The lineage, the *suudu baaba*, and *suudu yaaya* do not play a decisive role in the matter. Only the *suudu yaaya* of the girl is mobilised to build a hut for the bride.[12]

*Choice of Marriage Partner*

One important rule to which the Jallube adhere almost totally is endogamy by social category and residence. This custom is related to the former division of their society into free and non-free people, which is still expressed in status discourse. Nobles marry nobles, and the Jallube have restricted this almost entirely to pastoralists, preferably even from a certain region only. Such strict endogamy may be instrumental in the pastoral groups' claiming a 'purer' noble status than other social categories in society.

Within the endogamic group also the choice of a certain kin category is important. The Jallube prefer marriage between matrilateral parallel cousins, patrilateral parallel cousins and cross-cousins. There are, however, important differences between men and women in this respect. Women prefer marriage between matrilateral parallel cousins, because this relationship is likely to contain more compassion and care. Men prefer marriage between patrilateral parallel cousins, because such marriage ensures that cattle are kept within the agnatic kin group and add to its political prestige.

Control by the family over the choice of marriage partners is greatest in a *cabbugal* marriage. It could be expected that in this type of marriage the preferences would be most outspoken. In a *dewgal* marriage, which is more a decision of both partners than in *cabbugal*, preferences may be expressed differently. From data on marriage partners it became clear that there is indeed a preference for marriages between kin, especially in *cabbugal* marriages. So it seems indeed to be the case that in a *cabbugal* marriage parents have more control over the choice of the marriage partner. The three preferred marriages were not, however, dominant. All kinds of other kin relations between partners were recorded. A lot of marriages between further related kin (*reworbe* in Fulfulde) were recorded, which may be due simply to the fact that there are not always partners around from the 'right' category of kin at the moment of marriage, or betrothal. In fact any marriage seems to be permitted as long as it is within the Jallube social category. All kinds of kin relationship are possible.

Preference for a certain partner may thus not be due to kinship relations alone. The place of residence of the partner also plays a role in the choice.

Many Jallube mothers expressed the wish that their daughter should marry near by, so that, when the daughter goes to live with her husband, they are able to maintain close ties. If the daughter lives near her parents she also has ready access to help from her own kin group, and the mother may rely more easily on her daughter. From the marriages recorded, it appeared that distance between the 'homes' of the partners did indeed play a role. Over 90 per cent of the couples married a partner living within a radius of 15 km from their home village, regardless of whether a kin or non-kin relationship existed between the spouses. This same regional marriage cluster was found in other parts of the Hayre.

Dupire concluded that kinship, residence and considerations of wealth, especially the inheritance of cattle, play a major role in the choice of spouse (Dupire, 1970: 486). However, this seems to be mainly the male perspective. With regard to kinship, it appeared that Jallube men and women from the same union in some cases defined each other differently. The men were more inclined to use the patrilateral affiliations, whereas the women used their matrilateral affiliations more often. This lends support to the idea that men seek different things in a marriage from women. Men seem to value the economic aspect and children, and the establishment of a *wuro*, whereas women attach a high value to social security relations, and the independence of the *fayannde*. Thus a woman's position in the marital union and the provision of social care for herself, her kin and the children are important factors in her choice of a marriage partner. Marrying close kin or a neighbour is likely to result in a more secure position for the woman. She may expect more care from her husband's family because there will be more control over her situation by her own family, who also provide her with a fall-back option, resulting in a higher degree of independence for her *fayannde*. Conversely her mother may expect more care from her daughter when she is living in the neighbourhood.

*Divorce*

Divorce is a structural feature of marriage among the Jallube. Almost all *cabbugal* marriages end in divorce, and *dewgal* marriages are not very stable, either. Out of thirty-two Jallube women, aged 20 to 72, only six were living with their first partner at the moment of the research in 1991. The others had been divorced at least once and sometimes as many as seven times. Out of eighteen Jallube men all had been married between two and eight times. Marriage instability was high in the past and remains so.

Other Fulbe groups and pastoral groups in the Sahel also have a high rate of divorce.[13] Randall and Winter (1985) relate the high rate of divorce among the Tuareg to the close relations a Tuareg woman has with her own kin. Dupire (1970: 76) gives four reasons for the high rate of divorce among the Fulbe: lack of milk, i.e. too few cattle; the absence of children; a bad relationship between the couple, and between co-wives; and too great a distance between the married woman and her own family (cf. Stenning, 1958). All these reasons mirror the care of the husband for his wife, and reflect his capacity to fulfil his obligations towards her. Jallube women said that if their husband neglected them, i.e. gave them no clothes and only a little milk, they would leave him.



Dupire found that lack of children was a factor leading to divorce, but this is not directly confirmed by my data. However, children and especially the cattle property of a mother and her child may have the effect of stabilising the relationship between the *wuro* and the *fayannde*, especially when children are older but have not yet established their own *fayannde*. *Ngure* and *fayannde* with adolescent children were indeed the most stable units among the Jallube.

The nature of gift exchange at marriage among the Jallube is probably another reason for the high divorce rate. The value of gift exchanges is very low and non-reciprocal, and there is no need to return gifts in the event of divorce.

Behind these factors leading to divorce lies a deeper cause. A structural factor explaining the high rate of divorce can be found in the social organisation of the Jallube. The *wuro* and the *fayannde* do not become a very close unit; the core relations in society are mother–child, and they exist beyond the concrete *wuro* or *fayannde*. A woman can easily establish a new *fayannde*, which will give her access to cattle and milk, something which is even easier if she has cattle herself.

The way marriage is organised among the Jallube confirms the central role of the *fayannde* in social organisation. All gifts are directed at the establishment of a *fayannde*, providing its material basis. In fact marriage is a contract for the establishment of property relations in cattle that are the basis of the independent position of the *fayannde* and of its central social role. The preferences for marriage partners differ considerably between men and women, emphasising their different views of society and confirming the different roles they have within it and the fact that women are primarily part of a *fayannde* and men of a *wuro*.

## THE DROUGHTS AND ECONOMIC CHANGES: THE LOSS OF MILK AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s have had an enormous impact on the Jallube and on the way they perceive their social organisation. Women have realised that the independence of the *fayannde* from the *wuro*, and strong links with the *fayannde* of the woman's mother, are essential to the survival of 'the group' in times of scarcity. Then the child–parent relationship, more specifically the mother–child relation, is crucial. Women complained that these relations lose importance as a consequence of the general impoverishment of their relatives and their own social units. They were very well aware of the fact that their own situation was drastically changing and that their independence was at stake. For men there were other outlets. They were less tied to the Hayre, owing to social and moral codes. When men's social and economic position has deteriorated to a level which no longer allows them to look after themselves and their families properly, they simply leave their communities and migrate south in search of work. In many cases they leave their wives and children behind, hoping that relatives will take care of them. This option is not open to women, and they have to look for ways of surviving within their own society, however humiliating these may be if they

can no longer live according to the status of a noble pastoral woman.[14] Some women do transgress the endogamy rule and marry a cultivator or migrate and marry into another Fulbe group. This is a choice of a new life, breaking with the old social relations at home. Some women cultivate, but they are considered deviant and are accused of witchcraft. Some choose to go to town to look for seasonal work, but that is considered humiliating by most women. An alternative may be offered by Islamic networks (de Bruijn, 1994).

'Rich' men, with cattle for disposal, have other options. They will turn to the marketing of cattle, which ultimately leads to a reduction in the quantity of milk available to their wives. The women cannot have recourse to their own kin because they have lost most of their wealth. As long as the women have a little milk they will try to maintain their life style as a noble Jallo woman.

In rich and poor families, it seems clear, women are losing their power through the loss of milk and through the impoverishment of their own kin. This leads to the erosion of the position of the *fayannde*, which leads in itself to a loss of social care in society, and hence to further fragmentation, even beyond the limits of the *fayannde*. This tendency can be recognised in several changes in marriage gifts, in the freedom of choice of marriage partner, in the reasons for divorce and in the increase in polygynous unions.

As a consequence of the general decrease in material wealth, women can no longer maintain their *fayannde* properly. Nor can they any longer rely on their own kin, and so they become totally dependent on their husbands or on the *wuro* (their in-laws), which means an enormous loss of freedom and a deterioration in their social position.

A general trend in Jallube society has been that the number of polygynous unions is on the increase because many women are left behind when their husbands migrate because of drought and poverty. Such women often live in poor conditions, especially when their own family is also very poor. Wealthier men are encouraged by their fellow villagers or by their relatives to marry such a woman, especially if the woman is closely related to the man. In such a union the position of the woman is not very strong. The shortage of men may eventually lead to a situation in which the gifts exchanged at the time of marriage effectively become a bride price system, where rich men buy surplus women, a tendency that has appeared in other pastoral societies after droughts (Horowitz and Jowkar, 1992). This visible idea of giving a woman to another family is also caused by the poverty of a bride's family. The family gives its daughter in return for the help it will receive from its future family-in-law. Riesman's (1977: 92) remark that the incidence of polygyny has to do with the dominance of men over women may have some value in explaining this new situation. Before the drought a polygynous union might have been a woman's free choice, related to the wealth of the husband, or to love, but now a woman has no choice and no escape. This situation implies an erosion of the position of the *fayannde*.

For a woman with no cattle or any other wealth it is very difficult to get married decently and according to Jallube standards. This may not only be related to the shortage of men but mainly due to the fact that a woman's relatives may not want (or may be unable) to invest in her marriage. Furthermore, the choice of marriage partner is changing as an effect of the



impoverishment. It seems that the preference for a partner who lives near by is more explicit. People themselves argue that it is related to the fact that they can no longer give such big wedding parties, and that these marriages, which are also often between close kin, need smaller transfers of gifts. This indicates that today poverty plays an important role in the choice of marriage partner. The advantage for women of living near their own family so that they can rely on its help is no longer a true blessing for all women, simply because many families no longer have the means to take care of their daughters and their children.

If these poor women finally find a husband it is not at all certain that they will regain their independence and have a rich *fayannde*. This is related to the changes in the size of the marriage gifts, *safannde*, *futte* and *hurto*. To start with the first, there is no structural evidence that the *safannde* has decreased, but there were a number of cases where payment of the *safannde* did not exceed 500–1,000 francs CFA.[15] These were often marriages between poor people, or instances of a woman marrying for the *n*th time. There seems to be a tendency for women to get married more easily and to agree to a lower price, because being married is often better than staying with a poor brother or with poor parents. The *hurto*, which is in fact the start of the *fayannde*, has also diminished, partly because of the decrease in *safannde*, but also because the mothers and *suudu yaaya* have no means of buying their daughters sufficient household equipment and jewellery. Sometimes girls receive these gifts only after years of marriage, and in some cases never. The *futte* has decreased dramatically. Women who got married after 1985 received one cow as *futte* or no animals at all, whereas before then women received two to nine animals and there were only a few cases of a woman receiving only one animal. The *hurto* has almost disappeared, or consists of a few goats. In addition to this decrease in the number of animals given to women at marriage, their animals were also 'the first to die' during the drought, or to be sold. The women could not do anything about it. As they said, even the marabouts (Islamic scholars) did not adjudicate in their favour in the event of conflict.

It is clear that the loss of cattle and the diminishing production of milk has had devastating effects on the productive and reproductive functions of the *fayannde*. The existence of the *fayannde* is thus endangered in two ways, by the decline in milk production and by the collapse of social care relations owing to impoverishment. Furthermore, most women no longer have any property, or have only very little. A woman's own kin, parents and brothers, do not have enough wealth to sustain their daughter or sister, either. Although her husband will also have suffered from the droughts, he will be her last resort, but what can she expect from him in the circumstances? Dependence on her husband will then become a burden. The *ngure* that survive this situation of impoverishment do still have an economic basis: land and some cattle. Most *ngure*, however, do not have enough wealth to sustain their *fayannde* properly, and thus the *fayannde* loses its central social and economic role. Richer *ngure* offer their women some of this status, but they are very likely to be in a process of reorienting their economy, which deprives women of an independent economic basis.

The option of divorce as a strategy to diversify, or to move to a better union, is no longer as beneficial as it was in the past. Paradoxically my data indicate that the rate of divorce has not decreased, which suggests that the reasons for separation have changed. This is confirmed by statements from divorced women. At present the migration of men is an important reason for the dissolution of marriages. Another reason for divorce is the inability of the husband to sustain his wife properly. Disapproval of the marriage by fathers and mothers or conflict between the marriage partners themselves (e.g. in cases of polygyny) or mismanagement of the *futte* may still play a role but each has become a less important reason for divorce, because the woman's power to impose sanctions on her husband has dwindled.

Following Comaroff (1980: 33), who suggests that the marriage gift, as part of the transfer of material objects, '. . . represents a point of articulation between the organisational principles which underlie and constitute a socio-cultural system and the surface forms and processes which together comprise the lived-in universe', the erosion of the marriage gifts thus can be taken as a symbol of the deterioration of the *fayannde* as an independent unit. Women's rights to the *futte* exemplify their social position. Men try to gain influence over the *futte*, and in this are supported by the Islamic scholars. The ultimate consequence is that women no longer receive a *futte*. These developments indicate a tendency towards more control of the *wuro* over the *fayannde*, i.e. of men over women.

## A WEDDING CEREMONY AFTER THE DROUGHTS

The struggle by women to keep the *fayannde* is also expressed in the wedding ceremony. Here is a description of one of the rare wedding ceremonies we attended in 1991. Wedding ceremonies were hardly ever held because of the difficult times the people were living in.

> Since our arrival in the cattle camp there had been speculation about the marriage of the youngest daughter of our host, Mariamma. She would marry her neighbour Bana's eldest son, who was at the same time her classificatory son. The marriage had been arranged years ago. Because Mariamma's father and Bana were both among the richer inhabitants of Serma, I expected a big festivity with a lot of meat and food, with many people attending from other villages, and even from a small rural town where Mariamma's father had many contacts. I imagined that we would finally see a marriage such as the Jallube used to celebrate, in contrast to the ceremonies I had attended before. This fancy was fed by stories about the marriage of Mariamma's eldest brother ten years ago, at the beginning of the 1980s. This wedding is still remembered as having been very lavish. The festivities lasted a week and people from all over the Hayre were present. It is remembered as one of the last big weddings in Serma.
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> The first preparations for Mariamma's marriage were very difficult. Mariamma's mother had enormous problems collecting the bride wealth for her daughter. She had no bed or gold of her own because she had already divided them between her two eldest daughters, who had got married years before. A new bed, including the beautiful mats and the carved front plaques, would cost her at least 40,000 CFA francs. It had proved impossible to save that amount of money. All her animals were (pre)inherited by her children, and Mariamma's animals, which could have been used for the purpose, were all dead, or had been sold during the droughts. Furthermore, although it was never said to us directly, it seemed that part of the money paid by the bridegroom-to-be, which belongs to the mother of the girl, had been appropriated by Mariamma's father. Part of the little money Mariamma's mother did have, which she earned by selling butter and a goat, and a small part of the money paid by the bridegroom, were sent to Duwari, where Jallube women make beautiful mats. Another part was sent to woodcarvers who specialised in making the front plaques for beds. Mariamma's mother obtained only part of the bed, and it was not ready at the time of the wedding. Mariamma also entered her marriage with only a little gold and silver jewellery. Mariamma's mother went to Booni, where a smith was working on the gold earrings for her daughter. He asked for so much money that she could only afford small earrings. Mariamma's father had to buy her new clothes. However, he only bought her a *saaya* (dress), and it was too small. What he did with the bridegroom's money never became clear. Most probably he bought millet for his family, or tea for himself.
>
> Considering these problems, I began to wonder how they and the boy's parents would organise the marriage festivities themselves. Until the day of the marriage there was no sign that people had been informed of the festivities. The day before the celebration, when the Islamic ceremony took place, some women gathered in Bana's household to pound millet for the wedding meal. The next day big pots were filled with water and millet flour, and dough was prepared. That night the festivities started. Mariamma was prepared as a bride in her mother's hut. She was chatting with her friends, her eyes were blackened with charcoal, and she wore her new clothes. The friends of the groom came to take her to her husband's *wuro*. The groom himself was not present. He was looking after the family herd at night. Mariamma did not protest and climbed on the back of the camel which was to bring her to her future mother-in-law's hut. The visitors were already there, but the proceedings were not very animated and there were no guests from outside the camps. Most older men were lying in a corner. The girls and young married women were dancing. Later in the evening the young men who had no herding obligations joined in and sang their songs. Everyone was offered some food consisting of millet dough and a sauce of baobab leaves, the daily food. There was no meat; not even a goat was slaughtered. The groom's mother was nervous, as she was responsible for the correct division of the food. With the help of a couple of young men the food was divided among the various groups from the cattle camps present. The division between sexes, ages and households seemed somewhat surreal to me, because not all these groups were present at the marriage, and besides, nobody ate anything. Far too much food had been prepared. Furthermore, it did not seem a festive meal, because there were no delicacies of any kind. My husband and I were the only visitors being served butter. The kola nuts, and cigarettes, normally offered to the

singers were absent. Without meat, cigarettes and kola nuts the festivities were not complete. And indeed people went home very early.

The next day the preparation of millet dough started all over again. All the food which had been prepared the previous night and was left over was dried on the shelter outside the hut. Being preserved in this way it could be eaten later. It seemed enough for a few months. That night there was hardly any singing. The next day the food that was left over was preserved in the same way. The third day another 'ghost' meal was prepared. The fourth day Mariamma returned to the house of her parents, as if nothing had happened. They could not do without her labour yet, because one daughter-in-law was ill and the other, due to give birth soon, was unable to work.[16]

It was remarkable that these festivities and preparations were organised entirely by women, except for the Islamic part, which was arranged with the Imam by the fathers, in the presence of some witnesses. The women prepare the bride, try to collect her household equipment, prepare and divide the food (though often assisted by young men) and they are the main dancers at the festivity. This reflects the women's important role in social and symbolic life and their share in the establishment of a new social unit, the hearthhold. It seemed, however, that only the women attached any importance to this celebration and, by extension, the establishment of a new *fayannde*. Men have retreated from this part of the marriage ritual. In the past their role may not have been very extensive, but at least the maternal uncle of the girl would have been present and animals would have been slaughtered as a gift from the father. Nowadays they no longer slaughter animals, and they even use the money given by the bridegroom-to-be to buy food for their families. Women, on the other hand, cling almost desperately to their part of the ritual, because it symbolises the value attached to the *fayannde*. The presence of many guests is a symbol of the care and respect for this new unit in society. That is why the women pay a lot of attention to the preparation and division of the meals, which, in the absence of guests, appear to be ghost meals but still symbolise the establishment of the *fayannde*. And so they pretend that the *fayannde* is still important. This wedding was not exceptional. Other marriages were organised in the same manner, or with even fewer festivities and attention.

Against the context of impoverishment in which the Fulbe in this part of Mali lived at the time of the fieldwork these marriage ceremonies may be interpreted as an act of (hidden) resistance by the women, resistance to the deterioration in their situation. It was a way both of showing that they were still there and of claiming a place in their society.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of pastoral Fulbe social organisation from the perspective of the hearthhold sheds new light on property and gender relations in Fulbe society in general. Owing to the emphasis on cattle and on their produce in studies on the Fulbe, the role of the hearthhold is underestimated. This has also to do with the general orientation of the analysis of pastoral societies. In such



studies much attention has been paid to the circulation of property in the patrilineage, but again the property of women, or of women and their children, has received only minor attention. Studies of survival strategies have concentrated mainly on the relation between society and its natural resources. However, milk and social relations may also constitute important components of the survival strategy of pastoral groups. The analysis starting with the *fayannde* takes the focus away from the dominant organisational model of pastoral societies (segmentary, patrilineal). This model fits some practices of the Jallube and it is certainly important for the ideology of their social organisation and history. However, it hardly fits daily reality and practices. These may be better understood from the perspective of the *fayannde*.

In this article I have not delved very deeply into long-term changes like Islamisation, changes in 'national' politics and their impact on the social organisation of Fulbe society. However, a comparison and analysis of different social groups would probably reveal more insights into changes in Jallube organisation on a regional and higher level. The focus in this article has been only at the local level.

Drought has had an enormous impact on the situation of the Jallube. It seems obvious that it is mainly women who adhere strongly to the 'old' organisation of society. As described elsewhere (de Bruijn 1994, 1996a), women also keep more rigidly to social and moral codes as prescribed by society. This may seem contradictory, because those same codes force them into very poor positions and close alternative roads to survival. As such, being part of the nobility is enabling and constraining at the same time. For the women who stay in the Hayre it is, however, the only way to survive.

Women have a lot to lose if the role of the *fayannde* is eroded. The analysis of marriage gifts showed how important the *fayannde* is not only to the social organisation of Jallube society, but also to its economic viability. This may be the case more for women than for men in this time of stress.

For men too the *fayannde* plays a crucial role: without the *fayannde* there is no *wuro*, no production and no reproduction. However, economic changes, namely a shift to agriculture and to production for the market, have led to a shift in focus for men. To them milk is no longer essential in an economic sense and as a result the *fayannde* loses its strength. Concurrently the social role of the *fayannde*, symbolised by milk, is changing. Are these relationships becoming less important for men, and for the social organisation of Fulbe society in general? If so, it may indeed eventually lead to a transformation of gender relations, of the marriage ceremony, and of social security for women, which could not be reversed by the return of the rains or the re-establishment of the herds. Time and further investigation will tell.

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## NOTES

[1] The region derives its name from the mountains so characteristic of the landscape in the region. The mountains are called *hayre* in Fulfulde, the language of the Fulbe.

[2] The history of the Hayre and the establishment of its social hierarchy are described in de Bruijn and van Dijk (1994, 1995).

[3] The majority of families can be labelled poor by both indigenous and international standards. Only two families were classified as rich; they possessed more than 200 head of cattle. One family owned fifty head of cattle and there were twenty-two families (36 per cent) owning between five and thirty head of cattle. The rest, more than 59 per cent of the families, owned fewer than five head of cattle, or they owned only some sheep or goats, or nothing at all. (Data gathered by wealth ranking; see Grandin, 1988).

[4] A remarkable note can be added here on the translation of the word *rewbe*, meaning 'women'. The root of the word *rew* does indeed mean 'to follow', but the form of the word *debbo* ('woman') and its relation to the root *rew* gives it the translation 'the one who is followed', and not 'the one who follows' (Breedveld, 1995: 303).

[5] This was in general true of the study of pastoral societies (Dahl, 1987; Joekes and Pointing, 1992; Horowitz and Jowkar, 1992; Talle, 1988).

[6] *Suudu baaba* has two other connotations: it means the larger patrilineal group, and it is also a geographical term comprising all people who live together in one village or region.

[7] This may have to do with the fact that small children have a special position in Fulbe society. As an old woman assured us, 'They have no "use value" yet.' This may be explained by the general health situation in the area, where more than 30 per cent of children under 5 die (cf. Hill and Randall, 1984). Thus there is a high chance of losing one's children young. This may also explain the change in the attitude of men when the children grow a little older. I think women have a different attitude towards the lives of their children, to whom they themselves gave birth.

[8] In fact this form of co-ownership hardly exists in the Hayre (van Dijk, 1994).

[9] An extensive description of Jallube marriage can be found in our thesis (de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1995: chapter 11).

[10] Cf. the description by Dupire (1970), who named this type of marriage *koobgal*.

[11] Among the Jelgoobe in Burkina Faso animals become entirely the property of the wife, who even hands them over to her father to manage with his herd (Riesman, 1977: 81).

[12] The low value of the gifts and the absence of ceremony are characteristic of a nomadic life style, as Dupire explains: . . . *ce mode de relations . . . ne lie pas les individus et les groupes d'une manière continue et inextinguible comme le ferait un systeme de dettes et de créances que pratiquent autres sociétés. Il est adapté à une vie nomade où l'insécurité économique, l'instabilité résidentielle menacent chacun. Recouvrer des dettes en de pareilles conditions d'existence serait une entreprise sterile, vouée à l'échec* . . . (1970: 32). Although the Jallube are not as nomadic as the Wodaabe, this description suits them well—even better now that the maintenance of the principle of reciprocity has become extremely difficult as a result of impoverishment.

[13] The high instability of marriage is not exceptional among Sahelian pastoral populations. Among Wodaabe a one-in-two divorce rate is normal (Dupire, 1970: 75). Among the Tuareg the rate of divorce varies a lot, depending on the social organisation of the group. Worley (1988) found that among the noble Tuareg of Niger about a third of the men and women had separated at least once. Ten per cent of the people in her sample remarried a second time (*ibid.*: 274). Among the northern neighbours of the Jallube, the Tuareg of the Gurma, all the women married at least twice (Randall and Winter, 1985).

[14] For an elaboration of the situation of these people and the poor see de Bruijn (1996b).

[15] Before devaluation the French franc was equal to 50 CFA francs. After devaluation in January 1994 it was equal to 100 CFA francs.

[16] When I met Mariamma again, in December 1995, she had a one-month-old child. She and Bana's eldest son were still married, and Mariamma seemed to be happy. Of course, I met her again in the house of her mother, where the child had been delivered, and where she would stay for at least another ten months before returning to her husband's home and her own hearthhold.



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ABSTRACT

In pastoral Fulbe society in central Mali women had and in some degree still have an important social and economic role, concentrated on a milk economy organised through a special female-headed, women-centred unit called by the Fulbe *fayannde*, or 'hearthhold'. In a society of semi-nomadic pastoralists who live most of the year in small social units, social relations and networks are very important, perhaps even crucial to the success of their main survival strategy, which is transhumant cattle-keeping. In the literature on the Fulbe this social unit has received relatively little attention. An analysis from the perspective of the 'hearthhold' sheds new light on property and gender relations in Fulbe society in general.

Drought has had an enormous impact on the situation of the Jallube studied in this article. Economic change—a switch to agriculture and production for the market—has brought about a shift of focus for the men. Economically, milk is no longer essential for them, and hence the *fayannde* loses its importance; socially, too, the role of the *fayannde*, as symbolised by milk, is changing. For women the erosion of the *fayannde* is serious: an analysis of marriage gifts shows how important the *fayannde* is not only to the social organisation of the Jallube but also to their economic viability. In times of stress this importance may be greater for women than for men. The decline of the *fayannde* may lead to a transformation of gender relations, the marriage ceremony and women's social security—changes that the return of the rains or the re-establishment of herds may not reverse.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans la société pastorale Fulbe, de la partie centrale du Mali, les femmes avaient, et dans une certaine mesure ont toujours un rôle social et économique important, centré sur l'économie du lait organisée par une unité spéciale dirigée par des femmes et centrée sur les femmes, que les Fulbes ont baptisée *fayannde*, ou foyer. Dans cette société de pastoralistes semi-nomades qui vivent la plus grande partie de l'année en petites unités sociales, les rapports et les réseaux sociaux sont très importants, voire même plus cruciaux pour le succès de leur principale stratégie de survie, à savoir l'élevage du bétail transhumant. Dans la littérature consacrée aux Fulbes, cette unité sociale n'a recueilli relativement que peu d'attention. Une analyse du point de vue de la *fayannde* apporte de nouveaux éclaircissements sur la notion de propriété et les rapports entre les sexes au sein de la société Fulbe en général.

La sécheresse a eu un impact énorme sur la situation des Jallubes, étudiés dans cet article. Des changements économiques, à savoir une transition vers l'agriculture et la production destinée à la vente, a déplacé le centre d'intérêt des hommes. Économiquement, le lait n'est plus essentiel pour eux, d'où la perte d'importance de la *fayannde* ; socialement aussi, le rôle de la *fayannde*, symbolisé par le lait, est en train de changer. Pour les femmes, l'érosion de la *fayannde* est sérieuse : une analyse des cadeaux de marriage montre que l'importance de la *fayannde* ne concerne pas seulement l'organisation sociale des Jallubes, mais aussi leur viabilité économique. En période de tension, cette importance peut être plus grande pour les femmes que pour les hommes. Le déclin de la *fayannde* peut mener à une transformation des rapports entre les sexes, de la cérémonie du marriage et de la sécurité sociale des femmes, changements que le retour des pluies ou le rétablissement des troupeaux ne pourra inverser.