

# A pastoral women's economy in crisis: the Fulbe in central Mali

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## Introduction

The droughts of 1973 and 1985 have had an enormous impact on the local economies of the Sahelian countries. Especially pastoralists were hit very badly (Swift 1977, 1986, Franke and Chasin 1981). However, information on the repercussions on pastoral societies was not available until the end of the seventies (Baker 1977), and as these studies are in general male biased, information on the situation of pastoral women is almost absent (Joeke and Pointing 1991). Furthermore it is difficult to draw conclusions about changes in the position of women because pre-drought studies mainly concentrate on cattle keeping, which is a male domain in most pastoral societies. Women hardly enter the scene as active economic entrepreneurs (see Dahl 1987). Hence also, little is known about pastoral women and their situation after a drought. In this article<sup>1</sup> I hope to fill this gap a little by presenting data on the situation of Sahelian pastoral women after the droughts. For this a comparison is made between the economy of agro-pastoral Fulbe (English: Fulani, French: Peul) in Central Mali before and after the droughts. A distinction is made between women of various social categories. It is shown that the droughts had varying effects on women of these different social groups, depending on the access they had to and the use they made of natural and social resources, as defined within the normative frameworks of society.

When research on women was taken up in the social sciences in the seventies, the first studies concentrated on agricultural societies. In the majority of these studies women are presented as a uniform group, with the same goals and the same perspectives on life. Differences between individuals and groups of women within one society or within a village were hardly emphasized. As I will show in this article these differences are, however, crucial to understanding the pastoral women's economy in Central Mali and the reactions of pastoral women to changes in their society. Access to land is an important factor contributing to the position of agricultural women (Hafkin and Bay 1976, Davison 1988). The position of pastoralist women, however, depends mainly on access to livestock, and more precisely to milk, their main resource. There have been only few studies, mainly in East Africa, on the relation between milk and the women's economy in pastoral societies and the social position of women (Dahl 1979, Talle 1988, Waters-Bayer 1988, Kettel 1992). Rules governing access to milk vary a lot between different pastoral societies, and depend on the way social relations are defined and manipulated. For the study of the position of pastoral women it is therefore important not only to look at rules of use of and access to natural resources such as cattle, land, and water, but also to pay attention to control over social resources, *i.e.* social relations, networks, knowledge. These rules are

embedded in the larger normative framework of society, which consists of customary and religious rules and values.

The scattered information about the situation of pastoral women after the droughts gives the impression that the effects of the droughts on the economic and social position of pastoral women have been disastrous. With the loss of livestock milk has become a scarce good and consequently women have lost the basis of their economy. Alternatives for pastoral women in the economy seem remote, especially when looking at the access to natural resources only (Ag Rhaly 1987, Findly 1987, Smale 1980, Horowitz and Jowkar 1992). A closer look at the way women get access to social resources in these difficult circumstances seems essential to understand the dynamics of their present existence. Pastoral Fulbe women in Central Mali have likewise experienced the negative effects of the droughts on their economies and social life. A comparison between the situation before and after the droughts shows important differences. Life as lived before the droughts is documented for other regions in the West African Sahel and these studies (Stenning 1959, Dupire 1960, 1962, 1970, Riesman 1977), although they give little information on women's economies, are indispensable to complete the picture of the past, as it was told to me by different informants. Life before the droughts was not static either, but for the sake of brevity I will not occupy myself with the task of unravelling the dynamics of the past. Instead I will concentrate on the dynamics of the women's world today. The processes described in this article reveal some internal and external mechanisms of Fulbe society which influence the range of economic and social alternatives for women after the droughts. It is important to note that women in Fulbe society cannot be seen as one single group. They are not all

engaged in the same economic activities; they do not have the same interests or access to social and natural resources. These differences between women are closely related both to rules of behaviour, norms and values of Fulbe society and to rules concerning access to resources. These normative frameworks may constitute important constraints on the dynamics of women's economy and their room for manoeuvre. They may also open up possibilities for women in the social domain. These rules are confirmed and reconfirmed by society as a whole and by women themselves.

### Fulbe society in the Hayre<sup>2</sup>

The socio-political hierarchy of Fulbe society in the Hayre developed during the 18th-19th century when they became the dominant group in the Hayre. In the course of these centuries two Fulbe chiefdoms were formed, Dalla and Booni. Within Fulbe society we can distinguish the following groups: elite (Weheebe), merchants (Diawaambe), different castes (Nyeebye), herdsman (Jallube), ex-slaves (Riimaybe).<sup>3</sup> Cattle herding was in the hands of the Jallube, while the Riimaybe were cultivators. In this paper I will concentrate on Weheebe, Jallube and Riimaybe women. Jallube, Riimaybe and Weheebe do not share the same villages. Our fieldwork was carried out in Dalla, the capital of one of the Fulbe chiefdoms, and in Serma, a village of Jallube and Riimaybe. Dalla is nowadays an ordinary sedentary village of Weheebe and Moodibaabe and their Riimaybe, Nyeebye and Diawaambe. The chief of Dalla became a 'simple' village head after independence, and as such he has no power vis-à-vis the Malian administration. Islam has a very prominent place in Dalla. The power of the chiefs was always protected by Islamic

magic and confirmed by ritual. Nowadays half the village population consists of Islamic scholars and their followers, the village counts three important Koranic schools, and the most prominent *marabout*<sup>4</sup> of the Hayre lives in Dalla. The chief's family and the family of this *marabout* intermarry frequently. Jallube and Riimaybe from neighbouring villages also come to this *marabout* for his teachings and advice.

Slavery was abolished by the colonial administration (cf. Van Dijk, this issue). However, in Dalla slaves only got their own compound in 1945. In practice slavery continued to exist until 1960 when Mali became independent. Since then Weheebe men also have to work on the fields; their cattle are often herded by Jallube (now paid for this service). Although the administrative power of the chief of Dalla is now nil, the Jallube and the Riimaybe of the Hayre still recognize him as their chief, and every year he collects his dues ('presents') in the villages of his former realm.

Serma is part of the chiefdom of Booni. The relation between its chief and the Jallube and Riimaybe of Serma is about the same as in Dalla. The chief of Booni, however, still has power. As Booni became a subdistrict capital after independence, the chief managed to obtain influence on the modern administration. Serma consists of a sedentary hamlet, called Debere, inhabited by Riimaybe and some eight families of impoverished Weheebe, and about 70 families of Jallube in seven rainy season cattle camps, at roughly 3-7 kilometres from Debere.

The Jallube can be characterized as agro-pastoralists, as all families cultivate millet during the rainy season, and also keep cattle. After the rainy season the majority go on transhumance, leaving their millet stored in granaries in Debere. They migrate over a distance of 30-100 kilometres to settle for the dry season on

a field of a Hummbeebe<sup>5</sup>, or Riimaybe cultivator, and barter their milk for millet. Some families however stay the whole year around in Debere, and some old Jallube women have settled permanently in Debere. Before the rainy season starts all Jallube families return to their rainy-season camps to cultivate their fields.

The Riimaybe in Serma are sedentary cultivators; their main crop is millet. During the dry season they also invite a herdsman to camp on their fields, to get manure; in exchange they offer him some meals, sometimes a load of millet and water for the animals. The relation between herdsman and cultivators in the region can be considered symbiotic, and is often based on relations that have existed between families for generations (see van Dijk, this issue, for data on the land use system of the Fulbe in the Hayre). During the day older Jallube men can be found in the Riimaybe hamlet, chatting with one another under the hangars, playing games, often joined by Riimaybe men. Jallube women come into the village to sell their milk and butter and to buy spices from the Riimaybe women who run small commercial enterprises there. They also fetch millet from the granaries each day. Clothes are washed in the pond near the village or with water from cisterns in the bed of the pond, which fill up during the rainy season.

Consequently Jallube and Riimaybe women interact very regularly in Serma during the rainy season. For part of the year they use the same water reserves, and the same commercial networks. Contact with Weheebe women is very irregular for the Jallube, as they do not live in the same place<sup>6</sup>, but Weheebe and Riimaybe women do live together. Sometimes women from Serma meet Weheebe women on market days, when they go to Booni or Dalla. As Weheebe women live

very strictly according to Islamic rules they hardly leave the compound, especially not on market days. Only young unmarried women enter the market. Jallube and Riimaybe women visit Weheebe women they know, and there are ties of long lasting friendship between various Jallube and Weheebe families on the one hand and between the latter and Riimaybe families on the other. Although they may have only sporadic contact, the women of the different groups thus know one another very well.

### Women's rights and rules for behaviour in Fulbe society

In Fulbe society of the Hayre three normative complexes can be distinguished: the political hierarchy, Islam, and concepts about being a Pullo (pl. Fulbe). The cultural ideals contained in these complexes of rules are constantly confirmed, and reconfirmed, by all members of society, men as well as women, with the help of oral traditions and explicitly formulated norms and values. Islamic rules are safeguarded by Islamic scholars (*marabouts*). The rules derived from this normative framework govern daily practices, regulate relationships between different ethnic groups, and between men and women. They also mediate access to natural resources, labour, etc. They are essential for the understanding of womens' access to natural and social resources, and of the social relations implicit in these. Here only those rules which are important for the women's world and those relevant for the changes in their lives will be discussed.

The political hierarchy in the Hayre has developed over three centuries, from the time the Weheebe entered the region and established their power over the Jallube. Together they roamed the area

and fought wars with neighbouring peoples. The booty was divided among them, the Jallube being entrusted with the cattle and the majority of captives being taken as slaves by the Weheebe. Descendants of these captives are included in the social category of the Riimaybe. In the 17th or 18th century Islam entered the region and first developed as a religion of the court. In the 19th century it was actively spread over the Hayre, and at the beginning of the 20th century all Jallube and Riimaybe called themselves muslims. Villages that refused to be islamized were turned into slave-estates. These people (originally Dogon and Sonrai) are nowadays part of the Riimaybe. Thus Jallube and Weheebe held similar positions in the political hierarchy, but the Weheebe had the ruling power. They both owned Riimaybe, who cultivated and fulfilled all kinds of household tasks. During colonial times as well as after independence the Weheebe maintained contacts with the new administration and were thus able to reinforce their power. The Jallube on the contrary avoided all contact with the administration, while the Riimaybe became free people.

Although officially the old political hierarchy is abolished, it is still considered as real by everybody in the Hayre and some features of the normative framework like endogamy, the division of labour and concepts about nobility are still linked to this political hierarchy. All the three groups discussed in this paper are more or less endogamous. Weheebe men do marry women from other groups (Jallube, Riimaybe, Sonrai) as a political strategy, but Riimaybe and Jallube take women only from their respective groups. Jallube women consider it a shame to be married to a cultivator, e.g. a Kummbejo or a Diimaajo. Boundaries between different social categories of society are maintained and reconfirmed by

this endogamy rule. The division of labour is also related to the political hierarchy. Although nowadays Weheebe, Jallube and Riimaybe all cultivate and accumulate livestock, they regard themselves as respectively rulers, herdsmen and cultivators. The respective positions in the political hierarchy are linked to the concept of nobleness (*ndimu*); Weheebe and Jallube have much *ndimu*, Riimaybe have none. Because of their strict adherence to endogamy, the Jallube regard themselves as having more *ndimu* than the Weheebe. *Ndimu* is associated with power, cattle keeping, not having to work. It is also associated with specific kinds of food; milk, for example, is considered noble food, whereas millet is not. Jallube and Weheebe will never eat a bush animal except antelope and some birds (e.g. guinea fowl). *Ndimu* is also associated with adherence to Islamic rules. Things considered non-*ndimu* are said to be the domain of Riimaybe and especially that of Dogon and Hummbebe. Jallube and Weheebe women will never till the land, the domain of the former being milk, which is associated with cattle and thus part of *ndimu*. *Ndimu* is also associated with the physical appearance of people. Jallube women, for example, are considered more beautiful than Riimaybe women, as they have a lighter skin, and tend to be slight of build. This idea reflects ideology, because in many cases Riimaybe have the same physical features as Jallube.

Weheebe, Jallube and Riimaybe are related by ties of classificatory kinship, known as *enndam*. *Enndam* exists between families or groups of people who know each other for a long time and are interdependent. Basic kinship organisation in all social categories is patrilineal and patrilocal, yet aspects of cognatic organisation are present, especially among the Jallube. Throughout her life a woman depends in times of trouble on

the patrilineage of her father and on her brothers, but her mother's patrilineage also plays an important role.

Some kin relations are marked by a special behaviour and by emotions expressed in the concept of *yaage*, which I translate as "respect", "shame". *Yaage* is expressed in different ways; for example it is impossible to eat with someone with whom one has a *yaage* relation, nor can persons with a *yaage* relation bypass each other openly on the road. *Yaage* defines behaviour between husband and wife, men and women in general, between the young and the old, between children and their fathers. Typical of the relations governed by *yaage* is (hidden) tension. A newly married woman enters a new camp/village, where she must function as a good woman for her family-in-law. She must bear their children and work in the household of her mother-in-law. This is an arena full of tensions, and thus the relations between affines and between husband and wife are characterized by avoidance and guarded by *yaage*. Another example is the relation between a father and his sons, who are competitors for the same land and cattle. *Yaage* is also defined as a personal trait; some people have more *yaage* than others.

A Jallube cattle camp consists of several *ngure* (sg. *wuro*), a term which may be glossed as "households". A man is the head of every *wuro*, within which a woman has her own domain, the *fayannde* or hearthhold, consisting of herself and her children. The gathering and the processing of milk is concentrated in the *fayannde*. A woman establishes her own *fayannde* only after she has given birth to one or two children. This basic organisation can also be recognized in Weheebe and Riimaybe villages; there the role of the *fayannde* is less prominent.

Weheebe, Jallube and Riimaybe are all muslims and follow Islamic tenets. The Weheebe are very strict about these and

all their men study the Koran. The Jallube are less islamized, and only at the beginning of this century did some Jallube families men devote themselves to the study of the Koran, and become *marabouts*. Nowadays all extended families have at least one *marabout* among them. Until about twenty or thirty years ago Riimaybe were not 'allowed' to study the Koran; they only learned how to say their prayers. But after 1960 more and more Riimaybe have sent their sons to an Islamic teacher. Women do study the Koran, but only rarely do they become *marabouts*. *Marabouts* are the judges and notaries of society; they take part in all ceremonies such as those of name giving, weddings, and funerals. They are advisors in conflicts and they regulate inheritance. Women's rights are well defined in Islam. In the Hayre, women are officially not allowed to move about freely in public places, but only in Dalla do the Weheebe women strictly adhere to this rule. On their father's death, women have right to half the men's share. *Marabouts* who regulate inheritance must conform to this rule and defend women's rights. The 'marriage gift' given by the husband to his new wife consists of several elements: money, clothes, and the *futte* which is cattle among the Jallube, slaves among the Weheebe, and millet among the Riimaybe. These gifts are meant to help the woman building up her own 'house', which she is free to use as she likes. But the animals a Jallo woman receives from her husband do not become her property; she has only milking rights over them, and in case of divorce she will leave them with her husband. Only when he dies will she inherit them. Jallube women may also take cattle their parents gave them as pre-mortem inheritance into the herd of their husband.

### Fulbe women's economies

In the following paragraphs I will present a sketch of the economies of Weheebe, Jallube and Riimaybe women before and after the droughts. The changes that appeared in their lives after the droughts are not only caused by the ecological disaster, economic changes at the (inter)national level have also played an important role.

#### *Jallube women's economy*

As prescribed by the rules of the division of labour a Jallo woman is mainly concerned with the processing and selling of milk. But they did not always sell milk; as some old women told me, some fifty or sixty years ago things were different. The quantity of milk used to be so abundant in the rainy season that their families could not consume it all. Milk got spoiled, was given to the animals and thrown into the ponds. In the dry season they sometimes bartered milk against millet with farmers, or Weheebe. Women's jewellery and clothes (rough cotton cloth) were bought with cattle: one pair of big anklets cost one steer. Cotton cloth was woven by the Riimaybe-men, who were also paid with animals. Besides the processing of milk the work of Jallube women consisted of constructing grass huts, gathering materials for them huts in the bush, making calabash covers and weaving bed-mats. Rearing their children, preparing food and looking after small ruminants in the camp were also part of their tasks. Almost all this work is done in the camp, in contrast to men's work, which is always out in the bush (herding the cattle) or in the fields (cultivating) (cf. Riesman 1977). In principle the work of women has not changed, but one important change in their environment must be noted. This is the monetization of the economy in general and of the milk economy in particular; process-

ing and selling milk have become their most important income generating activity. When and how this monetization was introduced is not clear. The introduction of the weekly markets in Booni, Dalla and other rural centres during the colonial period may have promoted this change. During the dry season women are now expected to bring home at least one meal each day. The rest of the revenue from the sale of milk is invested in clothes, jewellery for daughters, small ruminants; etc. This monetization also had negative effects on the milk economy, for it entailed the introduction of cattle commerce. For men it became more profitable to fatten their animals and sell them, instead of preserving milk for their wives. This has had a negative effect on the quantity of milk a woman receives each day (see also Waters-Bayer 1988). Mat making (calabash covers and bed-mats) also brings in some revenue, but given the time spent on making these mats and the costs of basic material it is not a really profitable activity.

The importance of milk is emphasized during a girl's whole process of education. From the age of seven a Jallo girl is totally incorporated in the household and work of her mother. She learns how to behave like a Jallo woman, and she learns the ins and outs of the milk economy. At the age of 13-14 years she marries the husband chosen for her by her parents, and moves into another camp or *wuro*, where in the first few years she has no rights on milk herself. She is dependent on the decisions of her mother-in-law. After she has given birth to one or two children, and if the size of the herd allows it, a woman and her husband set up their own *wuro* and *fayannde*. This means that she becomes mistress of her own milk and that she cooks only for her own husband and children. As already mentioned, a woman is entitled to the milk of the cows which she brought

from her natal home, to that of the cattle her husband gave her at marriage as part of the "indirect dowry", *futte*, and to the milk of the animals her children receive from their parents and other kin at their name-giving ceremonies and at circumcision. The other animals in the herd are owned by her husband, or herded by him, for instance for a cattle-owner in town. In a polygynous union the milk of these animals must be shared with co-wives. In the morning and evening the cows are milked by her husband or by her sons; she gathers the milk in wooden bowls. Part of the milk is consumed by the family, the rest is reserved by the woman to make buttermilk and butter which she can sell or barter for millet. If the herd is not too small, every second day she has enough milk to buy food for one day. In the rainy season she sells her milk in Debere, where she stays in the house of a Diimaajo friend. If she has other things to do, she will leave her milk with the Diimaajo woman who sells it for her. The following day she comes back to take the money or the millet. As they are friends, the Diimaajo woman is not rewarded for this service. In the dry season, each family owning cattle goes its own way on transhumance. Milk is the guarantee for having a meal each day. Sometimes they live on milk only. In most cases the husband has to sell some animals to buy millet, because the barter of milk does not suffice.

It will be clear that a woman who brings a lot of cows to her husband's herd is more independent than a woman who has no cattle of her own. If she can bring cows from her parents it means her family is rich, and this is very important for her position. It is easier for a woman with a rich family to divorce her husband than for a woman from a poor family, because the former can easily go back and live at the expense of her family. A woman of a poor family cannot do this. If a woman

has brought some animals of her own and if she is given some animals as her *futte* she gives each of her children one or two animals at their name giving ceremonies, and these will form the core of their future herds. These animals also ensure her survival in old age, because it obliges her children to supply her with food and milk if she chooses to live with them.

#### *Riimaybe women's economy*

In the past many Jallube and Weheebe families had slaves: female slaves for work in the "house", and male slaves for work on the land and as herdsman. Whole slave villages such as the Weheebe exploited did not exist among the Jallube. Old Jallube women aged 70-80 years remembered that their fathers owned slaves, but they never owned any themselves. Among the Jallube slavery disappeared earlier than among the Weheebe, in the course of the 20th century. Nevertheless, a special relationship still exists between owner-families and owned families – they became "kin" (*enndam*); these families must help one another if necessary. Except for two old women, who are ex-slaves of two Jallube families in a neighbouring village, Serma's Riimaybe families are not ex-slaves of the Jallube in Serma. Their old masters live in Booni and Dalla and are part of the elite. Although the Riimaybe in Debere do not belong to the ex-slave families of the Jallube from Serma, their relations are defined by the bond between ex-slaves and masters. This is expressed in jokes, in the division of labour, in ideas about one another, in the role of Riimaybe in Jallube festivities and rituals, etc.

The life of Riimaybe women differs a lot from that of Jallube women. A Diimaajo girl is also married in a first marriage to the man her parents choose for her, but she is often older than the Jallube girl. Riimaybe women have tasks

which are centred on the household and the children, but besides these they have many income-generating activities of their own. Successful Riimaybe women can even live without the help of their husbands. At least since 1940, when the weekly market in Booni was organized, Riimaybe women entered commerce, and all women in the village now have some sort of trade of their own. They sell tobacco, cigarettes, tea and sugar, spices, millet couscous, cola nuts, salt, *makari* made from the seeds of the *polle* plant, soap made of goat-fat, or of the fat of wild date (*Balanites aegyptica*) seeds, or from butter and potash, etc. Trade is especially profitable in Serma during the rainy season, the time all Jallube are around.

After a Diimaajo woman has given birth to one or more children her husband gives her a piece of land which she can cultivate for herself, whose harvest is hers, and which her husband does not touch without her permission. Often she grows millet to sell or barter for milk, etc. Besides working on her own field she helps her husband on the family fields. The harvest from these fields is stored in granaries and each day the head of the family (her husband, or her father-in-law) gives her millet to prepare the meals. Riimaybe women also gather wild grains and fruits in the bush, and near Debere collect wild rice which grows there in the pond. If the rains are good, plenty of wild *fonio* (*Panicum laetum*) and *gigiile*, the fruit of a shrub (*Boscia senegalensis*), can be found in the bush. Some of these fruits and grains are eaten by themselves, but a portion is sold to Jallube women, who only sporadically gather in the bush. (A Diimaajo woman told me Jallube women gather *gigiile* only.) The gathering of perennial grasses is also something you seldom see a Diimaajo woman do, and the mats Riimaybe women make for themselves

are easily distinguishable from those made by Jallube women. Although Riimaybe men sometimes have large herds, which are kept near Debere, their women do not sell milk, which is destined entirely for home-consumption. It is, however, sometimes sold in the form of soap, made from butter.

#### *Weheebe women's economy*

The life of Weheebe women married to men who still have some political status in society, differs a lot from those of Jallube and Riimaybe women. This is partly the result of their interpretation of Islam, since Islamic rules govern their lives. The male and female spheres are totally separated. Men work on their fields (work slaves did in former times), herd cattle (or hire a Jallo herdsman), play their roles in the political arena, visit the mosque and go to the *marabout* each day, to greet him and to receive his blessings. Since they do not nomadise, Weheebe women also have a fairly fixed routine the whole year through. Married women stay in the compound (where they do the household chores of (cooking, and looking after the children). They never go to the fields or visit the market; only unmarried girls bring food to the fields, or go to the market. Women also weave mats using the leaves of the Doum-palm (*Hyphaene thebaica*), which are gathered in the bush and sold by Bella-women, ex-slaves of the Tuareg, in the market of Dalla. Traders from Burkina Faso came to the Dalla weekly market to buy the mats in large quantities. This mat-weaving has the scale of a domestic industry, and is entirely the domain of women. From the age of five a girl already starts weaving mats, and in Dalla it is impossible to enter the house of a Beweejo woman and see someone idle; it is only on Muslim holidays that they do not work.

In Dalla a Beweejo woman inherits from her parents following Islamic rules. If she feels unjustly treated she can go to the *marabout*, to whom she is related, and who will defend her rights. The slave (*kordo*) she gets at her marriage (as *futte*) will be hers her whole life. Money paid by the future husband at marriage is fairly high (about 50,000-100,000 FCFA, cf. Walker 1980).

#### *A comparison*

All women in Fulbe society have income-generating activities. For Weheebe women these activities are separated from the activities of their husbands, although for their daily food they depend entirely on their husbands. This may stem from the historical division of labour following which noble women did not work, while their husbands were occupied with politics and Islam, and Riimaybe did the other work. However, economic and political changes forced men to cultivate, but to retain prestige and demonstrate that they comply with Islamic rules, their wives are still kept in the house and are not allowed to do anything outside the compound. Thus Weheebe women have no access to natural resources. Neither Jallube nor Riimaybe women have direct access to the natural resources they depend on, but their cases are different. For the Riimaybe and the Jallube millet and milk are the most important products respectively, both as a food and as a marketable good. In principle Jallube men milk the cows, and divide the milk if they have more than one wife; Riimaybe men ration the millet for the daily meals. One difference is that Riimaybe women have millet of their own, because they have fields of their own. If Jallube women have their own cows, they own milk, but it is the husband who milks the cows, and decides on selling them. Although officially



he cannot sell his wife's animals, in practice he often does so without consulting her. Thus Riimaybe women are in principle more independent of their husbands than Jallube women and they are both more autonomous than Weheebe women. Jallube women are very independent if they have enough milk, but then they still rely on their husbands for the daily millet. They also have no milk if their husbands refuse to look after the cattle.

### Changing circumstances as a result of the droughts

In the Hayre the drought of the seventies had little direct impact, although people say things became worse after this period. Between the early seventies and 1984 some families lost their cattle and millet harvests were not as good as before. This climaxed in the drought of 1984-1985, when the Fulbe in the Hayre lost almost all their cattle; in the whole region 75% of the cattle died. Families who owned 50-150 animals at the beginning of 1984 found themselves left with 0-10 animals at the end of 1985. The basis of Jallube economy was ruined. In 1991 the situation was still very bad, restocking of herds had not been possible, because of bad years since 1985 and because of the disruption of the economy. Since 1973, and again with a climax in 1985, the bush in the Hayre degraded. Perennial grasses disappeared, trees died. Favoured trees for fuelwood could hardly be found any more. Bush products like wild fruits and grains had diminished in quantity, and except the elephants wild animals had disappeared. The degradation of the bush and the loss of cattle had severe repercussions on the economic activities of Fulbe women. The three groups of women responded in different ways.

### Life of Jallube women after 1985

Probably the impact of the droughts was most severe on Jallube women's economies. Their economic and social position being closely linked to the provision of milk and thus to herd sizes, the loss of cattle meant the end of the milk economy for many<sup>8</sup>. If a woman has no milk the family depends on the millet the men cultivate or on the cereals they buy at the market, and for this again animals have to be sold. Women who needed money for medicine or simply for food, and had no husband to look after them, had to sell their jewellery which they normally save for their daughters. Nowadays most women do not have the means to buy gold and silver to give their daughters at marriage.

Many people told me that the first to die as a consequence of the droughts were the animals of the women. Indeed many women were left without cattle and thus they can no longer give their children animals at birth and marriage. This means that as they grow older their sons' herds do not include any cows from their mothers' herds. As a result these sons may feel less responsible towards their mothers. At marriage a girl now gets a smaller dowry from her parents than she did earlier. The shortage of cattle has also led to their inheritance now being reserved for sons. Also the *futte* has become smaller.<sup>9</sup> If animals must be sold to buy millet, a man often takes animals of his wife's *futte* without consulting her. Women have no way to protest against this. In the past, an old woman told me, a woman could get her rights through the *marabout* who would help her in case her husband sold her animals (inheritance, or *futte*), but nowadays things no longer work like this.

Shortage of milk has clear repercussions on women's health. In the past girls married at the age of 12-14 and were already full-grown women. People said

that the marriage of these young children is no longer possible, because they are much smaller, physically, at this age than they were in the past. Pregnancy has become a real burden for women. Although it is highly probable that in the past women may have died at a young age due to child-birth and resulting infections, today many women die at or shortly after the birth of a child through sheer weakness. They suffer from anaemia and other illnesses.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays children do not get enough food and are also susceptible to illnesses. Women are responsible for the health of their young children, and as they have lost their wealth sick children are rarely cured. Perennial grasses have become scarce, so women have to walk a long way to find some, often in very small quantities. This has resulted in competition for these grasses, access to which is now *de facto* limited to strong women. If a woman has no chance to gather grasses by herself, she must buy them from another;<sup>11</sup> this makes the construction of huts increasingly difficult.

Because the economic base of society has collapsed many men go on labour migration to the Ivory Coast, to Bamako, the capital of Mali, to the Inner Delta of the Niger, or to Burkina Faso. They look for work in petty trade and as herdsmen, or in the goldmines of Burkina Faso. Although this may not be their original intention they often do not come back, leaving behind their young wives with children and their old mothers, often without anybody to look after them.<sup>12</sup> Young women go back to their parents or their brothers, and if their husbands do not come back they divorce them with the help of the *marabout*. Then they can try to find a new husband, but this seems very difficult as the following example shows:

• A young woman, with one child, lived with her brother in our cattle camp.

Her two marriages ended in divorce. One husband left, the second wanted to leave. As her father and mother died some years earlier, her brother and uncle had to look for a husband. But nobody wanted her as she was considered ugly after years of starvation, without animals and family.

There is no real demand for such women and they can be married rather cheaply. Older women have to turn for help to their daughters, if they are still in the region; often however they rely on the help of Riimaybe, or on strangers. In such situations, one could expect Jallube women to look for other income generating activities such as helping their husbands in the fields, claiming land and cultivating it for themselves, or gathering bush-products like wild *fonio*, rice and fruits. As they are used to bartering milk and participating in the market of Serma, they might also be able to develop other commercial activities. Let us now take a look at some individual cases.

#### • Ay Bukary

In 1985 Ay and her husband Lobbel, with their son and daughter, lost all their cattle. Although they were not very rich, the cattle they had allowed them to live quite well. Each year they went to Booni during the dry season, where Ay bartered milk for millet. Lobbel herded the cattle, and in the rainy season he worked on the land. They stored the harvest till the end of the dry season.

Now, in 1991, seven years after the drought they have only some goats. Their son has left (or did they send him away in order to have one mouth less to feed?) to study the Koran with an uncle who is a *marabout* sixty kilometres to the south. In the meantime Lobbel's widowed sister and her children have joined the family and Lobbel has to look after them too. Lobbel lost his left leg after a snake-bite; in spite of this handicap he works hard on his land together with his

dumb nephew. But none of the harvests after 1985 has been sufficient; the two men cannot till enough land, especially because they also do not have enough to eat. When asked why she did not help the men till the land Ay answered that working on the field is not done for a Jallo woman, just as the gathering of wild *fonio* or wild rice (as *ndimu* prescribes) is not done. Had her son been there, he could have gathered some wild *fonio*, although she was aware that he would not do it as well as the Riimaybe women did.

After the harvest, which they store in their granary in Debere, this family goes to Booni, as they always did, but now without animals. The goats are left with the family of Lobbel, which lives in the same cattle camp. Next year Ay's daughter will marry a young man from this camp. Ay cannot buy her daughter even household utensils and a bed, let alone gold and silver. In Booni Ay pounds millet, fetches water, goes into the bush to gather fuelwood, etc. for Riimaybe and Weheebe women. She only works for women she knows. Pounding three bowls of millet brings her 25 FCFA, fetching water in the dry season 25 FCFA a bucket. The price of fuelwood varies.<sup>13</sup> A Diimaajo woman in Booni told me she could not refuse her Jallube 'friends' some work each day, although it was rather expensive for her, since every day so many Jallube women came asking her for some work.

#### • Fatumata Aamadu

Fatumata is 72 years old. After the death of her third husband, last year, she did not move, but stayed in a cattle camp of Serma called Wuro Kaaral, where the son and daughter of her (deceased) brother live. Fatumata has two daughters. The younger of the two, Jeneba, left last rainy season for Tooti, a Dogon village 200 km from Serma where her husband herds cattle of Dogon and works on fields Dogon gave him. Aminata, the elder

daughter, lives in Ngouima, another cattle camp of Serma, four kilometres from Wuro Kaaral. Her husband has some cows left and in the dry season they always go to Booni to barter milk. Fatumata does not want to stay with her daughters, because she refuses to rely on her sons-in-law, with whom she has a *yaage* relation. Her brother's son has no cows himself; he has seven children and they live only on agriculture. He must also take care of his old blind mother; his sister's husband herds cattle of a Diimaajo of Serma.

One day when I and my assistant went to Fatumata's hut we found her lying on her bed with a bad stomach ache. She told us she was in pain, because she did not get good food (milk, hot millet porridge). After that I often took her some milk and this seemed to help her. It was clear that the people responsible for Fatumata could hardly survive themselves; they brought her the little they could afford, but to her it seemed nobody cared for her.

During the second rainy season of our stay one of her grandsons was with her. Fatumata stimulated him to gather wild *fonio* for her. She said she could not do that herself any more, but that if she had still been young and as hungry as she was now, it would not have bothered her to gather wild *fonio*. She went herself that year to gather some wild-rice; this was the food for next year's *layya*.<sup>14</sup> She also tried to cultivate the field her husband left her. Her grandson did some work, but was not very enthusiastic. Fatumata herself could not fight the birds, locusts, worms, winds, etc., so she did not have a harvest. Luckily that year other people harvested a bit and Fatumata was given *zakat* (a form of Islamic charity which functions here as a kind of social security) by some fellow villagers (Riimaybe and far-away kin). Other Riimaybe and Jallube were ashamed that Fatumata

worked her field herself, but they could not stop her. Finally she decided to leave for Booni, where she earned a little by saying Koranic verses which bring good fortune.

#### • Dikoore and Matta

Dikoore and Matta have the same husband, Sambo. Matta was married to him only a year ago. He was her fourth husband; one of her husbands left for Abidjan and never came back, one divorced her and the third died in Mopti after having spent many cows for the hospital. Sambo married her for a small amount of money (only 15,000 FCFA which is not much for a man considered as rich) and one cow as *futte*. Sambo is Dikoore's first husband, chosen for her by her parents. They have six children.

Dikoore and Matta both have some animals of their own in the herd managed together by Sambo and his four brothers. Each day the two women have milk. Although it is not as much as in the past, they can make a living from it. They sold their milk through a Diimaajo friend in Debere, from whom alone they buy spices. In the rainy season they take turns preparing meals for Sambo when he is working in his field, but they do not have much else to do, and I often found them in their huts sleeping. Matta complained that her body was not as beautiful as in the past, for she could not drink enough milk. When Sambo had just married her Matta would cook one day for herself and for Dikoore and her children, the next day Dikoore would cook for all. But as the portions Sambo gave them became smaller, they stopped this system and started looking after themselves, which was not that easy, especially for Dikoore with her six children. Gathering food in the bush was not on their minds; they behaved like real Jallube women, which they were because of the milk they still had. That year there were no *gigiile* near Serma, but Dikoore told me that if there

had been any she would have gathered some (in fact I never met a woman who really gathered *gigiile*). Both women still had their jewellery, but Dikoore was not sure if she could save enough money to give all three of her daughters jewellery. Dikoore saw a special future for her children: her sons would study to become *marabout*, her daughters would marry *marabouts*, and she wanted them all to stay near her.

These cases show that Jallube women hardly engage in non-traditional activities available to them in the environment of Serma. The reasons they give are: 'milk is our domain, without milk we cannot live', 'we Jallube women cannot work on the land', 'gathering is not our work', 'our husbands do not allow us to work on the fields, even not to chase the birds'. Arguments forwarded vary for old and young women, and for those who have no milk at all or only a little. Indeed the possibilities for these women are also different. Even if a woman has only a little milk she is as busy with it as she would be with large quantities of milk. In the case of Ay Bukary, a woman without any milk, working in Booni was her last resort. It seems that this work in a nearby town, where everybody knows you and is your friend, is less shameful than working on your own fields. At least the work in Booni consists of women's activities. Two women formed an exception to the general rule: one gathered and one worked in her fields; both were accused by other women of witchcraft.

#### Life of Riimaybe women after 1985

Riimaybe women have not lost their income generating activities due to the drought. Of course they have suffered from the drought, as commerce is not very profitable when customers are poor. Riimaybe women have had bad harvests in 1985, and the years after 1985 were not really good. They concentrated success-

fully on their other activities, *i.e.* on gathering wild grains and on commerce. Some Riimaybe women migrated temporarily to Hummbeebe villages, working there in the fields and transporting the harvest to the granaries. Despite all this most of them have lost their savings, which they had invested in small-ruminants. As a consequence nubile Riimaybe girls married without dowries. Normally a mother starts collecting the dowry of her daughter when the latter is still young. In bad years the saving for the dowry is postponed.

Since a few years, a new phenomenon in Serma is the inflow of large herds into the region in and after the rainy season. These herds belonging to big traders or civil servants are herded by young Fulbe who are relatively rich; they drink tea, eat and chat the whole day. They spend a lot of money in Serma and have become the main customers of the Riimaybe women, who sell almost all their stuff to them. Some Riimaybe and Jallube women also offer themselves as prostitutes.

#### • Kumboore

Fifty year old Kumboore lived with her old mother in Debere, Serma. Their master's family lived in a cattle camp about 9 kilometres away, but they never saw them and received no help from them. Kumboore's mother could still remember being a slave, but as she was growing senile, it was difficult to interview her about this. She had lost 9 of her 11 children. Her son left the region and they never heard of him, but Kumboore looked after her. Kumboore worked in the family field, spun cotton and repaired calabashes; she also gathered wild *fonio* and wild rice and all other bush products, not to sell but to eat. Kumboore's husband lived in Toula a Hummbeebe village, 40 kilometres from Serma, but she preferred to stay and look after her mother. Sometimes her husband sent them some food, or money. They had no

animals, no possessions except the family field. In the village they lived in a hut built for them by a Jallo woman. All work Kumboore can get she will engage in. If she would be able to save some money she would surely try to start a small business.

#### • Waddijam Saalu

Waddijam Saalu is an example of a Diimaajo woman who is absolutely independent of her husband. Her first husband died nine years ago, leaving her and her daughter and son two big fields, which Waddijam cultivated by herself each year. She was remarried to a man with whom she now has one little boy. She sent her elder son out of the village to study the Koran. Her daughter, Pennnda, is married in Serma and helps her mother, especially in looking after her business and in organizing the sale of milk by all Jallube women in her mother's house. This has enabled her mother to go each day to work in her fields and to gather wild *fonio* and wild-rice at the end of the rainy season and after the millet harvest. All Jallube who wanted to sell some millet did this *via* Waddijam. They gave her the millet, and as they did not want anybody to know about their possessions, Waddijam kept this anonymous. In richer times Jallube men gave her their money after they had sold some animals, if they did not want to spend the money right away. She worked with the money and functioned as a sort of village bank. This year Waddijam could even pay the dowry of her daughter Pennnda, which is much larger among the Riimaybe than among the Jallube. Due to the drought in 1985 she could not save money for this, but now after six years she has managed to fulfil her duty as a mother.

Riimaybe women undertake a large variety of economic activities aimed at income generation, as well as the provision of food: commerce, cultivating, gath-

ering bush products, repairing calabashes, spinning cotton, raising small-ruminants, etc. There are no rules in society forbidding them to enter new activities: for instance one woman started only three years ago to tattoo Jallube women. This enabled her and her children to escape poverty after the droughts. As they reacted more adequately and quicker than Jallube women, Riimaybe women have also claimed usufruct rights in the bush and a niche in the local market. The local market and the bush around Serma are now fully exploited, and although sporadically Jallube do gather they have no real access to or success in these activities.

#### *Life of Weheebe women after 1985*

The droughts have not had much impact on the daily life of Weheebe women, as they have no access to resources such as cattle or land and cannot enter the bush to gather wild products. Of course they too have also had less to eat and they do not live as well as before. The droughts have also had repercussions on their mat-weaving industry. The leaves of the Doum-palm became scarcer thus diminishing supply and increasing the price. I once made a budget with the Weheebe women of Dalla on their mat-weaving industry. The rough material they needed for one mat cost them in the dry season of 1990 200 FCFA; they worked one to two days on one mat. The price in the market then was 175-225 FCFA, which means they were working for nothing. The market for the mats changed dramatically after the droughts. Poverty in the Hayre had led to the loss of local customers, and for as yet unknown reasons the traders from Burkina-Faso also disappeared from the scene.<sup>15</sup> Thus the sale prices of the mats decreased, and often women could not get rid of their products. This meant an enormous loss of in-

come. Some women, such as Aminata, specialized in mats for ceremonies, however, suffered less.

#### • Aminata

Aminata is specialized in weaving marriage mats, which are part of a bride's dowry. She is from Joona, a Weheebe village 100 kilometres west of Dalla, where all women have this specialization. In the first year of our fieldwork I never saw Aminata making these coloured mats; nobody had the money to buy them. The following year, the harvest was better than in 1990 and some weddings were planned, so Aminata had some orders for these mats. She earned enough money that year to buy new clothes and to help her sister (their father died) to pay back the marriage gifts to her husband whom she wanted to divorce.

## Conclusion

In this article it has been shown that to understand the economic and social situation of Fulbe women the division of society into social categories and all the rules attached to it must be taken into consideration. This is required especially if one is to understand the diversity in the situation of women after the droughts. For each social category access to natural resources, labour and social relations (social resources) are defined differently according to Islamic, *ndimu* and *yaage* rules. Within these normative frameworks there is variation between old and young women.

Weheebe women's lives are mostly determined by Islamic rules, and this is related to their status as noble women from the political elite. For these women the droughts did not result in situations which brought them into conflict with their status and identity. Although the income mat weaving yields has de-



creased, they still weave them. They depend for their daily subsistence on their husbands, something that is acceptable in Islamic ideology. As they are closely related to the *marabouts* they are also more successful in claiming their rights.

Riimaybe women, belonging to the lowest group in the political hierarchy, are allowed to work hard and to explore every economic opportunity they want (except milk). They are not bound to very strict rules and norms. They associate themselves with hard work and millet in contrast to Jallube and Weheebe women. Thus Riimaybe women have explored many new avenues after the droughts, and they seem to have survived fairly well.

Jallube women are bound to norms related to *ndimu*, *yaage*, and to a lesser extent Islam. In this complex of norms milk symbolises them, and is considered important for their physical appearance and in their definition of being a Jallo woman. Due to the droughts milk has become scarce and this in turn has had major repercussions on their economic and social positions. With the milk they lost the cornerstone of their economy and identity, and of their power *vis-à-vis* their husbands. Rules derived from Islam no longer protect Jallube women's rights, because their men and their *marabouts* do not or no longer respect these rules. Women cannot protest against this. If they lose their wealth they have no relatives to rely on as in the past, since their families are also poor. According to Islamic rules and *ndimu* norms Jallube women are not expected to work hard. They follow these norms for behaviour as long as they have a little milk.

At the level of the community in Serma the differences between Jallube and Riimaybe may be explained in terms of the differential access to natural resources. If all women engaged in gathering bush products, these would soon be-

come scarce around the village. The same applies to trade. There are only limited opportunities for petty trade in Serma, and by taking advantage of these earlier than Jallube women, Riimaybe women closed off these avenues for the latter. However, this explanation was never offered by the women themselves, who described their situation in terms of status or identity. Now that they have lost their cattle Jallube women especially depend on access to social resources. They have a more autonomous position *vis-à-vis* their husbands, which means they cannot rely on them for help in these times of hardship. Access to other natural resources is denied them, and were they to transgress this norm they would lose their identity and their position in society, and would be considered deviant. This is much less the case for women such as Ay Bukary and Fatumata who leave the community. Ay was allowed to do all hard work, something which would be very shameful for her if done in Serma. However, even in Booni she did so only for people who were part of her existing network of social relations (*enndam*). It appeared that women who entered 'slave's work' for strangers did not return to Serma. Fatumata found another way to survive in town. She used her age and her knowledge of the Koran to gain a living. She too 'begged' together her subsistence mainly among acquaintances. This was not disapproved of because she helped people greatly by giving them Islamic blessings – an accepted activity for a woman of her age. The 'use' of social resources and of a person's knowledge and access to natural resources differs according to age. The type of social relations women have also varies over the life cycle. Older women depend on their sons, but if these are poor the women will rely on paternal kin, who explain the help rendered both as a part of Jallube custom and as their Islamic

duty. Relations of help have indeed, become formalized as *zakat* (de Bruijn 1994). Some women have special knowledge (of Islam or medicinal herbs) with which they may earn a living in a respectable way. Young women with young children have even less options than older women. If their husbands are poor, or do not want to care for them, and if their own parents or siblings (or paternal and maternal families) also cannot look after them, all they can do is to accept starvation. For some women this life is too hard and they try their luck in town.

This article showed that to understand the dynamics of the economic life of women, its diversity and changes, a very broad definition of economic activities, or coping mechanisms must be used, including culture in the form of social relations, political hierarchies, knowledge and related normative frameworks.

## Notes

(1) The fieldwork on which this paper is based was undertaken together with Han van Dijk from April 1990 to February 1992, and funded by The Netherlands Foundation for the advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO), grant W 52-494. Data used in this paper were gathered during this period by Han van Dijk as well as the author. This fieldwork resulted in a joint Ph.D. dissertation "Arid ways, Cultural Understandings of Insecurity in Fulbe Society, Central Mali" (1995) at Utrecht University and Wageningen Agricultural University. The article was first presented as a paper at the CERES Summer School Seminar 'World Systems and Ecosystems: Biological and Cultural Diversity in the Global Community', Utrecht, The Netherlands, August 24-27, 1992. I want to thank Han van Dijk, Marianne de Laet, Marjo de Theye, Frank-Jan van Dijk and Anton Ploeg and

an anonymous reviewer for their comments and discussion of an earlier version of this paper.

(2) The Hayre is the region that corresponds roughly with the cercle Douentza, Mali. Large rock formations and inselberge (= *hayre*) give the landscape its typical character. See van Dijk this issue (Fig. 1).

(3) In this paper I use the Fulbe (sg. Pullo) names for the different groups. Herdsmen in our area are all members of the Jallube clan, and here we call them Jallo(sg)-Jallube(pl); the elite are called Beweejo (sg), Weheebe (pl); the ex-slaves, cultivators are called Diimaajo (sg), Riimaybe (pl). See de Bruijn and van Dijk 1994 for details on the history of the Fulbe in the Hayre and the related social division of labour.

(4) *Marabouts* are Koranic scholars, and teaching is one of their most important occupations (Moreau 1982). They also provide charms, herbal medicine, and in some cases they even possess knowledge of black magic.

(5) Hummbeebe (sg. Kummbeejo): free cultivators who are said to belong to the Dogon.

(6) Except of course the impoverished Weheebe in Serma, but their status is not the same as that of the Weheebe who live near the chief. This latter group is central to this article.

(7) I shall use the neutral term 'marriage gift', because in Fulbe society one cannot speak of a bride price. All goods and money are directly used to buy the household equipment for the woman and as such are an investment in their future household. Furthermore the cattle given to the woman at marriage may be used by her (for the production of milk) but will not become her property. It is therefore better to speak of an indirect dowry system. This is less the case for Weheebe and Riimaybe, among whom it makes more sense to speak of a bride

price, as the amount of money to be paid is much higher than among the Jallube, and not all goods are invested in the bride's household.

(8) Data from a wealth ranking exercise held in Serma (see Grandin 1988 for the methodology) indicate that only 20% of the Jallube families of Serma possessed sufficient cattle to sustain their families in a good year.

(9) Women who married after 1985 (11 marriages were recorded) only received 1 cow as *futte* or no animals at all. Of the 68 recorded marriages which took place before 1985 only in 5 cases was a *futte* of 1 cow given, the other *futte* varied from 2 (4 cases) to 9 (2 cases) cows.

(10) Hill (1985) already mentioned the poor health status of Fulbe in the research area prior to 1985. After the drought the situation will surely not have improved.

(11) A bundle of grass cost 250 FCFA; 1-2 bundles make a sleeping mat; for a hut 3-5 bundles of grass are needed; a labourer earns 500 FCFA for a day's work in the field.

(12) For example in Wuro Kaaral, a cattle camp of Serma, of the 33 sons (of 27 family heads almost all of whom died) 14 have left the area, 7 without wives or children (they divorced or were unmarried) and 7 with wives and children. Many of them have left their old mothers behind, sometimes with a very poor brother, or even entirely without children to look after them.

(13) By this time 100 FCFA = 2 FF. In the dry season of 1991 a bowl of millet cost 100-125 FCFA in Booni. 1 bowl = two third of a kilo. Provided no other food is available, a hard working woman needs at least 1.5 bowl of millet a day, and a family of about 5 people needs 5 bowls of millet daily. Pounding three bowls of millet costs a young woman 1.5-2 hours of work.

(14) This is the Islamic festival of *Id-al-adha*, also called *tabaski* in West Africa. Literally 'the big feast' on which Abraham's offering to Allah is celebrated by slaughtering a sheep.

(15) On a revisit to the area in December 1995 I found out that the traders from Burkina Faso had started their commerce in mats again. This may be due to the devaluation of the FCFA in 1993 to 50 % of the FF.

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## Résumé

On a peu d'informations sur la situation des femmes pasteurs après une période de sécheresse. Cette étude compare la situation économique des femmes agro-pasteurs fulbés du Mali central avant et après une telle période. L'auteur démontre que pour une telle analyse il faut tenir compte de la catégorie sociale à laquelle la femme appartient. L'accès qu'elle a aux ressources, tant naturelles que sociales, dépend de sa catégorie sociale, qui est définie elle-même par les normes de la société des Fulbé.

## Resumen

Se sabe poco sobre mujeres pastores y su situación después de una sequía. El presente artículo compara la economía agro-pastoril de mujeres Fulbe en el centro de Mali antes y después de sequías. Teniendo en cuenta diferencias sociales entre mujeres, se muestra que las sequías no tienen los mismos efectos para mujeres de grupos sociales desiguales. El impacto de las sequías depende del acceso que poseen y del uso efectivo que hacen tanto de recursos económicos como sociales, así como son definidos dentro del contexto normativo de la sociedad Fulbe.

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# The role of women in the changing family and social organization of Ahamda pastoralists (Central Sudan)

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This paper is an attempt to analyse the changing role of women in the socio-economic organization of a Sudanese pastoral group<sup>1</sup>. In this context the process of sedentarization and of significant change in Ahamda society is examined through the role of women, from the point of view of their position as it relates to economic and social structures and with the necessary consideration to their change of status in the overall society. With respect to the analysis criteria, I find it quite legitimate to observe change through a gender approach. As most of the Arab and Muslim pastoral societies (Tillion 1966, Peters 1978, Asad 1970, Marx 1987, Oxby 1987), Ahamda society is founded upon a gender dichotomy which creates an opposition between private and public, domestic and extra-domestic domains. From the social (*i.e.* sexual) division of labour, the separation between male and female spheres (implying segregation and weak self-determination on the woman's side) fashioned the forms of economic and social organization, the political life of the group, up to its symbolic expressions – it could be enough to look at the dominant agnatic ideology, which provides the conceptualization of society, where the symbolic expropriation of women takes place. As some scholars pointed out (Nelson 1973, Broche-Due, Garfield and

Langton 1983, Oxby 1987), general research on pastoral peoples and, more specifically, about their ongoing processes of change, has often neglected to take duly into account the role of this gender diversification, giving priority to the analysis of the social system as a whole. Nevertheless, any detailed picture of pastoral socio-economic structures denotes a gender-based differentiation with respect to participation in both production and social reproduction (Dahl 1987a, b). Case studies show that males and females in pastoral populations are often affected by processes of change in different ways and degrees (Ensminger 1987, De Bruijn 1995). Since the gender distinction is so important, as a comparative analysis of field-research data shows, we can not avoid supporting a global view of socio-economic formations without a further analysis of the inner dynamics that ensue from what seems to be a common hinge of pastoral social structures.

After a general description of Ahamda socio-economic structure, I then get to the core of my topic by presenting a comparison between two patterns of the role of women in socio-economic life: the woman of the desert camp and the woman of the settled village. By analysing the changes of women's role in