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## « Jeunes migrantes et petites bonnes en Afrique »

*« Migrant girls and little maids in Africa »*

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**Titre : Youth mobility in an isolated population of the Malian Sahel: a mitigating factor to cope with new uncertainties or a dimension of the social disintegration**

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**Youth mobility in an isolated population  
of the Malian Sahel :**

**A mitigating factor to cope with new uncertainties or a  
dimension of the social disintegration ?**

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**Short Abstract**

Circular short-distance migration is part of the subsistence strategies that the populations of the Sahel have developed to survive in a particularly harsh environment. It is considered to become an important mechanism to mitigate the impact of global warming. We analyze here the role played in this respect by the new mobility habits of the young people of the Sarnyéré Dogon, a small population witnessing a brutal opening to the global world in a context of extreme aridity and precariousness. The issue is whether the youth mobility will enable this population to adapt to economic and social challenge or will precipitate the disintegration of this society already weakened by the start of social change, especially as refers to family values. The temporary individual migration of very young people is a new phenomenon of the present decade which distinguishes itself from previous migratory family strategies. We shall analyze to what extent these new mobility habits have an economic dimension, both as refers to the reason to migrate and in terms of their consequences for the individual wellbeing and the family subsistence, but also their socio-cultural impacts. We shall expand a previous analysis of the sexual transition and choice of spouse to consider inter-generational and gender relationships.

## Introduction

The Sahelian populations have developed impressive capacities to coping with recurrent droughts, however the present combination of population growth, increased aridity and negative impacts of economic policies, has made alternative to agriculture more and more necessary. The trend towards livelihood diversification is almost universal but the response of households is specific to each situation and context (Batterbury 2007, see also Ellis 1998). Different solutions can be given in a similar environment, due to the opportunities of the broader context, e.g. access to urban centers, labour and market opportunities. Mobility has turned to be a key strategy to reduce vulnerability, including social marginalization, and to increase resilience (Tacoli 2009). Studies in Mali and Burkina Faso shows that short distance temporary movements increases in periods of droughts, whereas migration to urban centers and abroad are rather to be found during normal rainfall year and among the better off (Findley 1994, Henry et al 2004). It is thus rather short distance and circular migrations that appear to be part of the diversification of the strategies and will become an increasingly important element of adaptation to change, including climatic change (Tacoli 2009). These economic transformations and the increased mobility of young people, are concomitant with a process of modernization and individualization (Marie ed, 1997) which profoundly transforms the familial behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa (Pilon and Vignikin 1996). As shown by Toulmin (1992), the raise of individual priorities makes the coherence of extended families more fragile and challenges their capacity to use the resources better than smaller households (Lloyd 1999). New types of partnership and parenthood develop. The release of control over the choice of spouse and more economic autonomy make the couple become a private unit (Locoh 1995, Locoh et Mouvagha Sow 2005, Hertrich 2007, 2009). The fragilization of former models and economic crises contribute to lessen intergenerational solidarities (Locoh, *ibid*).

We analyze here the role played by the new mobility habits of the young people in a small Sahelian population in Mali which is witnessing a brutal opening to the global world in a context of extreme aridity and precariousness. The overall issue is to analyze whether youth migration is to be considered as a “migration-structure” or a “migration-rupture” (Sauvain-Dugerdil and Preiswerk 1993), i.e. enable this population to adapt to economic and social challenge or precipitate the disintegration of this society already weakened by the decrease in natural resources and the spread of new values. We therefore examine what distinguishes the new temporary, more individualistic, migration of very young people, from the role that mobility has played during former times as family strategies. In a second step, we shall analyze to what extent these new mobility habits have an economic dimension, but also what are their socio-cultural impacts. On the one hand, we shall examine whether the reason to migrate is clearly economic. In particular, are young people more mobile in years of poor harvest ? Does their temporary migration have an impact upon the family subsistence and/or their own wellbeing ? On the other hand, we shall expand a previous analysis of the sexual transition and choice of spouse to consider the potential impact on inter-generational and gender relationships.

## Data and methods

The Sarnyééré population provides a unique, well-documented case of survival in a particularly harsh environment, presently challenged by the breakdown of its isolation, a rapid diversification of livelihood strategies and deep social mutations, especially in family relationships. Such as in the Dogon area in general (Petit 1997, Thibaut 2005), mobility has been an integral part of its history and adaptive strategies, but its meanings has been shifting from survival strategy, territorial expansion, family coping strategy to a recent more individualistic migratory habits of very young people (Sauvain-Dugerdil 1980, Sauvain-Dugerdil et al, 2008). As shown for instance by Batterbury and Baro (2005)'s case studies in Niger and Koro, a Malian Dogon municipality south-east of the Sarnyééré, these populations have an impressive capacity to coping with this harsh environment by diversifying their livelihood strategies, yet not without deep mutations of the social system. The Sarnyééré is in many regards an extreme case of such situation. It provides a well documented example of survival thanks to the extensive exploitation of the natural resources. The cost was however very high such as expressed in its history which has been marked by mortality crisis (disappearance of entire lineages), in and out migration of families and even villages (Sauvain-Dugerdil 1980, Gallay 1981). In the mid-1970s, children mortality rates were as high as during periods of epidemics in other areas (Hill ed 1985). This population remained particularly marginalized until very recently even in comparison with the other villages speaking the same Dogon language variety. They showed to exploit and consume a wider range of wild resources, but also had a higher fertility. The latter had been interpreted as resulting of the quasi absence of temporary migration that was already spreading in other Dogon villages of the same area in the early 1980s (Cazes et al 1993 ). It is now facing the bursting out of its isolation, in particular through the spread of temporary migrations of young people, increased commercial contacts in the local market, the first experience of the inference of development actions and new Islamic influence. These mutations are parallel with a re-location from compact villages on the mountain slopes to spread out smaller fractions in the lowlands, as well as the emergence of profound socio-cultural changes, including first signs of individualization and unequal share of the resources. Leaving the mountain location for vast plains has also opened new economic opportunities associated with more extensive agriculture and herding. Most of all, it has meant access to the “wheel revolution” – i.e. bicycles and donkey carts - and therefore the expansion of their functioning space, especially easier access to the markets in the neighboring towns and possibilities for young men to visit girls in surrounding villages.

Our study of the four villages of the Sarnyere Dogon dates back to the mid 1970s. In a perspective of what has been described as a comprehensive demography (Bozon 2006, Petit 2009), it relies on mixed survey methods. Our first studies pursued an objective of micro-evolution of isolated populations through the collection of oral history (long term genealogies and mobility history) and archeological surveys of all former sites on the mountains, as well as female genestic histories (Sauvain-Dugerdil 1980, Gallay 1981, Cazes et al 1993). The new phase is the rural side of the youth study developed as a partnership between the University of Geneva and The University of Bamako. We use here this information, collected in 2002, 2004 and annually since 2006. It is mainly qualitative data, except a questionnaire survey made in 2002 on a small sample of 200 young people which is providing detailed information on the emergence of this new youth mobility. At each field mission we made a census of the young people who in each village had migrated this specific year. The qualitative surveys were both

with small groups of people – females and males, young and adults, interviewed separately<sup>1</sup> – and some individual interviews of adults. In all, the material collected includes 96 individual and group interviews, completed by participatory observation. Interviews were focused on youth migration and its impact; however during the last field missions, other specific subjects were added : in 2007, family network, in 2008 choice of spouse and subsistence strategies, in 2009 socio-economic inequalities, in 2010 on the reasons why some young people do not move<sup>2</sup>. The family network and subsistence strategies have been the object of student's research thesis (Roulin 2007, Melo 2008) and the link between mobility and value change the topic of a paper at the AIDELF 2008 conference (Sauvain-Dugerdil et al 2008). On the basis of these first analyzes of part of the material collected and our field notes, we have formulated a first set of interpretative keys which are used as hypothesis to orient the more systematic analysis of the whole material collected since 2002, presented here. We refer to the Grounded Theory developed by Glaser and Straus (1967) and the usual principles of triangulation and saturation of the qualitative analysis, but in what Guillemette (2006) described as a “circular interaction” between the analysis of the people's discourse and the building up and verification of our interpretative keys. The interpretative model will be elaborated through open and axial coding – identification of the main concepts which are structuring the discourse and their logical links. The interpretative work will be illustrated through three partial models displayed in network views, built up with the computer assisted program Atlas-Ti (Fig. 2 to 4).

### **Youth migration as a subsistence strategy part of livelihood diversification and the path to modernity**

Since long, mobility is a survival strategy. Families or even entire villages have adapted to the limited water resources by moving temporary to permanent sources when water had dried up or to hire their work force while waiting for the new harvest. In spite of elaborated strategies to best use the limited resources, such as special reservoir hidden in the ground of the water pound as ultimate supply for subsistence during the sowing period, they did not always succeed in coping with the harsh environment. The population of the Sarnyé mountain has managed to survive since its first inhabitants came at the start of the 18th century, but pre-adult mortality was so high that the population barely reached the reproduction level. Moreover its history is a succession of foundation and abandonment of villages, as well as relocations of families until the last migration wave at the end of the 19th century (Gallay 1981). Yet, when the strategic advantage of the mountain dwelling became less obvious, as a result of more peaceful relations with neighboring populations, the inhabitants gradually moved to the mountain foot (“quartiers de piedmont” of the four villages Nemguéné, Koyo, Tandi, Djammaga). The first families moved in the early 1970s and by 1989 the last ones had left the slopes. In the last decade, the colonization of the lowlands witnessed a new phase. Whenever possible as regards water resources, some families settled permanently in what

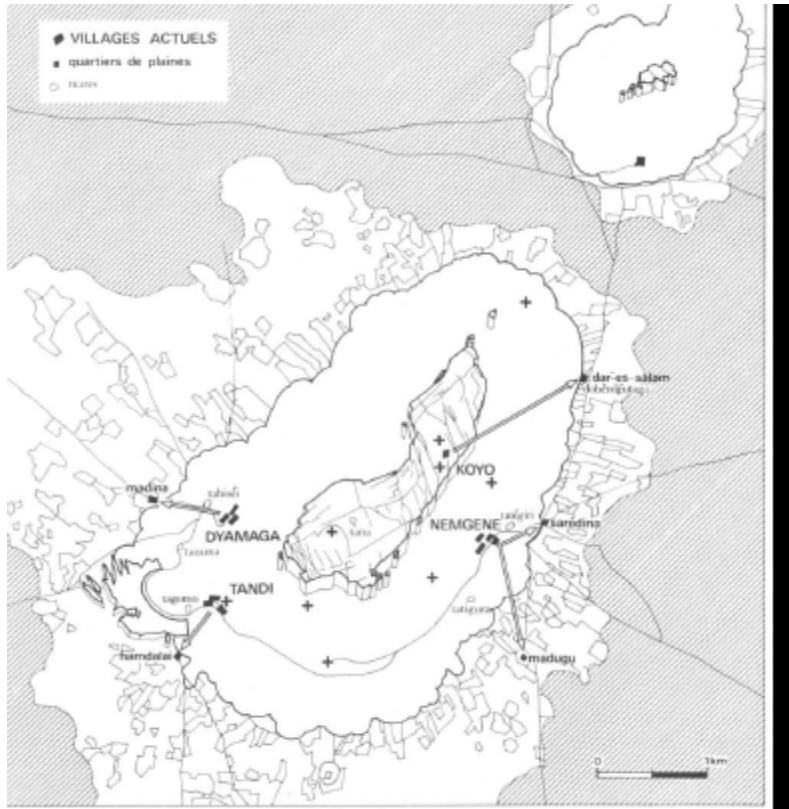
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<sup>1</sup> In the difficult field conditions, small groups of 3-5 persons appeared to be, especially for girls and women, the best way to over-run, through cross-interactions, problems of translation and of have confidence. We are facing thus the same limitations as for focus groups, i.e. we do not collect individual opinions but the perceptions of the group as such.

<sup>2</sup> The information has been collected by the author; in 2006 and 2008 with one assistant working with the LaboDÉmo (respectively E. Marsicano and X. Melo), in 2007 with most of the Suisso-Malian project team (M. Kiré, B. Gakou, Cheick B. Diallo for the Malian side and A.W. Dieng, E. Roulin for the Swiss side. Allan G.Hill took part to the 2009 field mission.

used to be temporary hamlets during the culture season. This is the case for two settlements from Nemguéné (Nebbé and Tillédamba), Nebbé becoming the largest of all settlements.

Figure 1. The 1970s move to the mountain foot (Quartiers de piedmont)  
From Gallay 1981



During the last decades, as a result of new pressures due to the decrease in natural resources and new outside influence, the economy has gradually shifted from an outstanding example of the maximum use of the local natural resources to a new trend in livelihood diversification. In the line of what has been described elsewhere (Batterbury 2007), this was both through the development of the agro-pastoral system and through the implementation of new strategies. On the one hand, the settlement in the lowlands allowed to have larger plots and space for animal rearing, as well as incipient mechanization. This shift from subsistence agriculture to an agro-pastoral system has also meant a start of capitalization and of economic inequalities among families. On the other hand, commercial contacts with the outside world increased and temporary migrations of young people became a source for monetary resources.

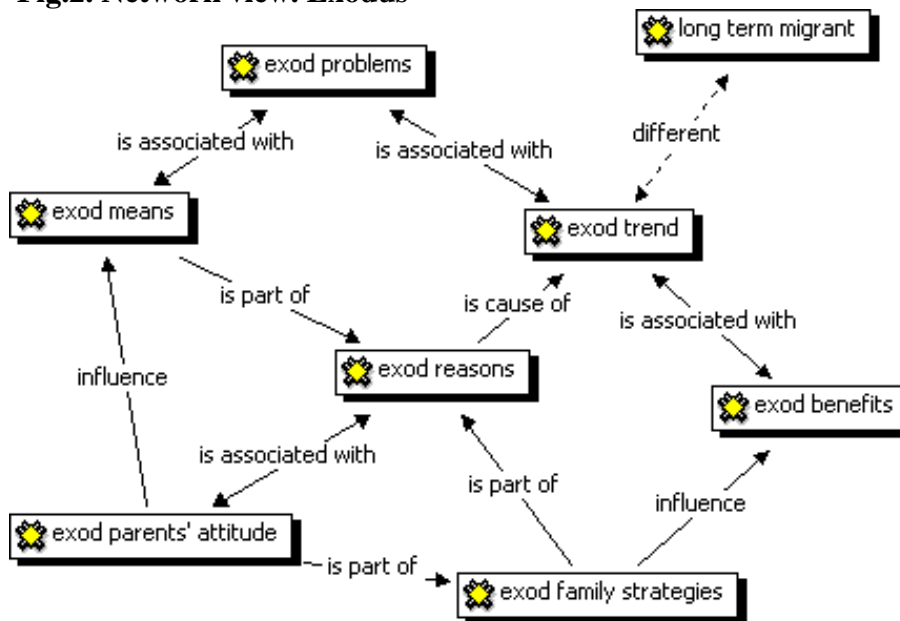
Since the 1990s, temporary migration has rapidly spread. Mobility is a pillar of family subsistence strategies, but is also the expression of deep socio-cultural mutations associated with the individualization carried by the modernization of the society. Therefore youth mobility has to be considered beyond its purely economic dimension and as both family and individual strategies. Our observation of the emergence and the spread of this new habit over eight years, has focused more on its meaning for the people themselves rather than on a detailed analysis of migratory flux. We examine the declaration of the young people as regards the benefits they gain from their migration, their overall experience and their positive

and negative outcomes. We also analyze the perceptions of the young people themselves and of older persons, men and women, about the broader impact of this new mobility, both economic and on family behavior, e.g. choice of spouse, as well as on the relationships between generations and genders.

Our analysis of the material collected will first focus on the discourse about “exodus” – exode, local term for temporary migration - and then how it can be related to the broader issues of subsistence strategies and transformations of the socio-cultural system.

### 1. Exodus, the revolution of youth mobility

Fig.2. Network view. Exodus



#### *Long term migrants*

Long term national or international migration remains very rare and usually concentrated in a few lineages. The few known examples give evidence that links with the village rapidly fade. During our 2009 and 2010 visits, informations converge to declare respectively that four men from the village of Nemguéné are staying out of Mali (plus 2 in Bamako, one with his wife), and 3 from their field hamlet, Tillédamba, 3 from Djammaga (one with his wife), but 10 from the neighboring village of Tandi (plus 4 in Mali). No case were mentioned in Koyo from where, however, one couple is now living in Bamako and, in 2004, they had cited the case of one man who started a coranic school in Douentza and since then disappeared. Very few of the migrants are sending something to the family who, often, has even lost track. The couple from Djammaga, resident in Ivory Cost, has stopped sending anything to the family despite of the fact that they have sent their children back to the village. One of the migrants from Tillédamba settled in Ivory Cost and is the only mentioned case of a marriage with a local woman; another migrant from the same settlement, an old man, has remained in Niger, whereas his two wives stayed in the village. The two cases of long term migrants who came



back illustrate the varying fate after returning: both had acquired language and technical competence, but one became an influent person in the village and has been elected in the new municipal council, whereas the other one although son of the chief, did not play any specific role and even died in mysterious conditions, described as the victim of witchcraft.

### *Exodus trend*

The exodus of young people is a quite distinct phenomenon which has spread during the last decade. The habit already established in the other Dogon villages of the same municipality, but closer to the chef-lieu, has only developed since the two last years of the 1990s. In 2002, among the 128 young people surveyed in the Sarnyééré villages, 60% had neither migrated, nor left their village the week before our visit (3/4 among girls), whereas the proportion was half in the other villages; from the Sarnyééré only 13% have lived more than one migratory episode (38% in the other villages). Five years later, in 2007, a poll among 91 young people seemed to indicate an important progression of the phenomenon, especially among girls who apparently have even become more mobile than boys : 94% of girls and 80% of boys declared to have left the village the week before and respectively 72% and 58% of girls and boys to have been at least once in exodus. The phenomenon especially concerned very young unmarried girls. The first case in Nemguéné, the village of Sarnyééré chiefs, is exemplary of this dramatic behavioural change. In 2006, for the first time, very young girls had left without informing anybody. Six girls, aged 14-15 years, went as usual in the bush to gather wood and wild fruits and instead of coming back home, they walked some 20 km to reach the road; they paid the cost of transportation with their modest jewels and went to Mopti, Mali's third town some 300 Km away. In Mopti, they started to help some women sellers in the market, than found houses to work as domestic servant. After ten days, one of their fathers came to take them back home. The same year, five others left from the plain village, Tillédamba, closer to the municipal capital, where the phenomenon was already mentioned during our 2004 visit.

In our 2010 visit, the four villages declared a total of 118 boys and 67 girls who left; in 2009 a similar number of girls (72) but a reduced one of boys (79), what may also reflect that, at the time of our visit some of them had first to finish their masonry work in the village. By 2010 what became rare is rather the fact of never having experienced exodus. Among boys, only those who are in charge of caring the herds have never left. Most of girls have been away, however with some variation between villages. Moreover, they do not go every year with the exception of the girls of the village of Tandî who, apparently, after their first experience, "have taken the habit to leave [the village] and wish to go again". Most of all, still only very few do not come back in time for the agricultural tasks. In each village, a few (very rarely girls) stay and come back after a couple of year when it is time to marry. In short, the habit of mobility has rapidly spread into the population, but its scope remains limited.

### *Exodus : reasons, means and parents' attitude*

The exam of the discourse about the reasons and the means to go highlights the importance of the attitude of the parents. At its initial stage, the exodus of very young unmarried girls was without the parents' consent and, anticipating their refusal, by fleeing away without even informing them. They were "going in the bush to gather wood or wild fruit as usual" or to the weekly market in Boni, the municipality head town, and flee away. As they may meet some acquaintance on their way, after a few days, parents would have identified where they went,

and usually would commission one of the fathers to make the trip and take them back home. However, even at this initial step of this new phenomenon, parents were aware that they cannot prevent them to go. In some cases, the mother was informed and even contributed to the costs of transportation. With the spread of the exodus habit, running away became less frequent. By now (in 2010), although still most of adult men consider that it is not a good thing for a girls to go, they tolerate the phenomenon as a new unavoidable evidence. In 2009, the ancients of the village of Koyo commented that young people “will go anyway” and that “if they inform you, this a sign of respect”. In most cases, when they leave for the second time, the girls asked the parents’ permission and even some declared that they did not go again because the parents did not allow them. In this respect, villages differ in their degree of acceptance. In the most reluctant ones, absconder is still a reality : during our 2010 field visit, people were commenting about a group of three girls having left during the preceding night who have been stopped by relatives in Boni. Apparently parents do not go any more to force them to come back, this except if they stay too long and, especially, if it has become time for marriage, an important point that we shall consider hereafter in more details. The varying degree of acceptance is also evidenced by the willingness to recognize or not the reality of the phenomenon : in Ankala, the most conservative sector and which has adopted more radical Islam, they declare that girls do not go, what is contradicted by testimonies in other villages.

In most villages, exodus has become a new reality that adults cannot control but have advantage to accept; this, even more because “when they go with the authorization of the parents, they come back with presents for them”. Large differences remain between villages in which parents do allow and pay the cost of the transportation and villages where they are more reluctant and abscond is still frequent. Young people may pay their transportation with some earnings - boys from hired work for some villagers and girls from selling some wild fruit – but most of times they do not have own means. Thus those who go without permission, and do not benefit from the parents’ help, are selling goods. Girls sell the jewels (given by the parents) and will replace them whenever they earn enough. Boys happen to steal animals from the parents’ herd and sell them on their way; they usually do not refund the parents when they come back.

Economic motivation is an important but not the only reason of young people to go. In 2002, when asked about the reason why they went, those who had already been in exodus, mainly refer to economic ones: for young men to earn money (52%), do agrarian work (19%) or compensate for poor harvest (14%); for young women buy kitchen tools (57%), or “earn money” (20%). For young men, clearly, the economic objective dominates. This was expressed for instance, in 2004, by a young shepherd in Tilledamba who explained that he does not go because he has the possibility to sell an animal to meet his individual needs. Obviously, the economic dimension is less central for girls. On the one hand, their earning remains very limited, one reason why villagers, especially men, do not consider it as useful. On the other hand, and most of all, the contact with the outside world, and the example of those who have already gone, are the main incentives to go, at least for the first time.

#### *Exodus : family strategy, benefits, problems*

Exodus, unlike mobility of whole families to cope with water shortage and poor harvests, is basically an individual project : “it is their decision”. In this respect, it is a totally new phenomenon. Yet, in this respect, there are important gender differences. Exodus of very young girls is clearly an individual project that most of males consider useless. “What they

bring back is not a relief for the family” (man in Koyo, 2008); girls’ exodus “does not bring any benefit and makes them take bad habits” (see point 3). “They become lazy and prefer to cook macaronis” [instead of the traditional millet meal which needs a very long preparation](Ancients in Tandi, August 2010). Yet women’ point of view is not so straightforward, reflecting the fact that mothers were often informed and in some cases contributed to pay the cost of transportation. Women, and some men, also recognize that female exodus may also bring some benefit : “they come back with clothes, sometimes something for the parents, women buy kitchen tools” (lamps, cups, plates, pots, case). In the most recent interviews, clothing is becoming first. The economic contribution appears to have increased : in our 2010 visit, in Tandi, it was mentioned that al girls came back with something. It is increasingly recognized that, although modest, girll exodus is an economic benefit for the parents. Apart from the small presents they may receive, parents will at least not have to pay all items that girls are buying on their own. Yet, the economic benefit of boys’ exodus is still more systematically seen by adults as useful for the family. They buy personal goods, first of all clothes and bikes (the better off moto), radio, watch, but also hoes, carts, donkey and even camel. However, the benefit is not always important. They sometimes became “tired”, that is to say had difficulty to find work or were hardly able to spare anything after paying their food and lodging and the trip back. Even in some cases they had difficulties to finance their trip back: one mentioned coming back by foot or another one having to stay longer. Problems are thus mainly those associated to difficulties to find a job, receive a salary sufficient and even, in some cases, being paid. Main men’s activity is helping in rice harvest what is paid in goods (one in ten bales), or preparing mud bricks, what may amount some 750 - 1000 cfa francs by day, about 2 to 2,5 \$); about twice as much as what a girl may earn by molding millet. What make a big difference is when they get food and lodging, e.g. for girls domestic work or few cases of boys’ gardeners. In this case, a girl declared to be very satisfied when earning 5’000 cfa a month (about 12 \$), whereas others declared to have only earned 2’500 without food (10’000 for gardener). Boys describe the work as hard, whereas for girls housework is much lighter in the urban context, especially thanks to easy water access. Also boys report about problems of violence or with the police, whereas girls comments are very positive about good experience.

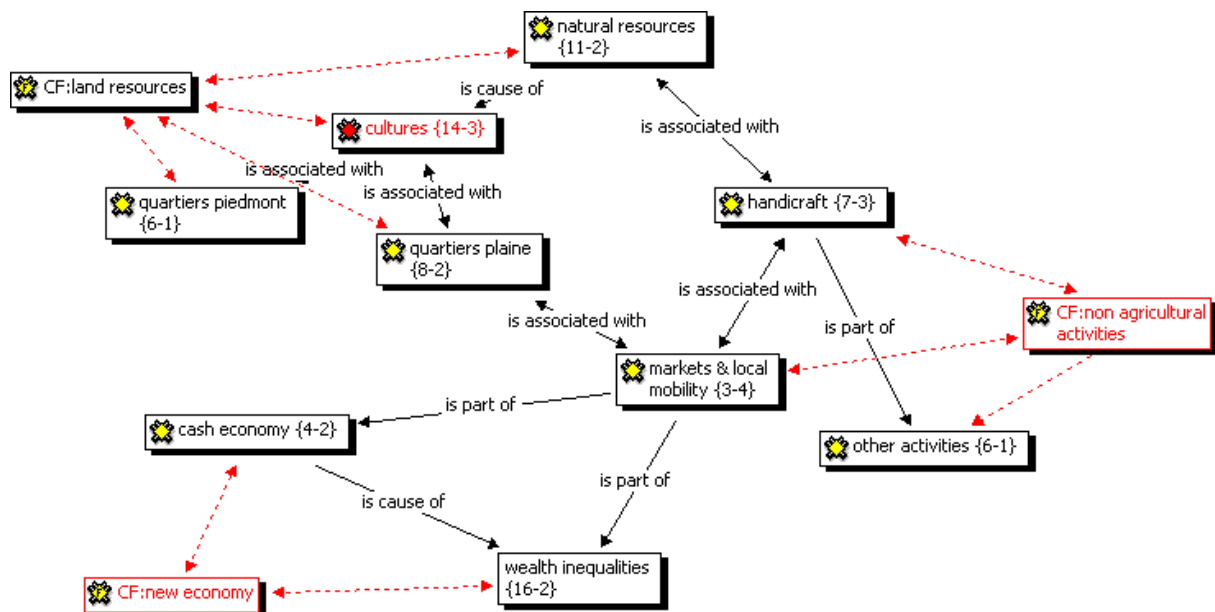
The decision to go is clearly taken by the young person, but it is in a varying degree embedded in family strategies. With the diffusion of the habit, girls’ abscond is less frequent, they consult the parents and parents’ refusal is one reason cited as a frequent female reason not to go. Boys and girls are expected to come back for the time of agriculture tasks and are not supposed to leave before harvest is over. Girls’ decision however remains more individual than boys. Family reasons are mentioned by boys in answer to the question about who are those who have not gone. First of all, the boys who do not go are those in charge of caring for the family herd. These young shepherds will have their turn to experiment the exodus when a younger brother can take their function. The same is true for the necessity to care for old parents. Also in February 2009, many young men had not yet gone because they had not finished the yearly task of repairing the mud houses; the task of repairing the house was also the main reason for not going in 2003/04 as it had not been done the very bad previous year.

In short, individual strategies are part of a process of livelihood diversification to cope with limited resources (see hereafter point 2), but is also the expression of in depth socio-cultural mutation (point 3).

## 2. Exodus : one dimension of livelihood diversification to coping with uncertainties

The analysis of the discourse related on livelihood strategies is made of three dimensions (FC, i.e. Family Codes on the network view, Fig.2.) – the land exploitation (cultures) and other types of activities (non agricultural activities) in a context of changing livelihood strategies (new economy) - which shall structure our comment.

**Fig. 3. Network view. Livelihood.**



In terms of livelihood strategies, we can clearly identify two types of exodus. Young people individual exodus has to be distinguished from temporary migrations to cope with bad harvest and/or lack of water. In the line of a long history of survival in a very arid environment, migration remains the main solution for the connection (soudure) before the new rainy season and the new harvest. All testimonies confirm that in a bad year everybody is moving, adult and young people. A one to two months move was for instance systematically reported in early 2003 after the very bad 2002 harvest. More broadly, water supply remains the most limiting factor and the main determinant of the location of the settlements and of the possibility to permanently settle in the plain villages. The most reliable source of water remains the hill ponds, although not being anymore cleaned out. This is the reason why the families settled in the plain may come back to spend some weeks in the piedmont villages. In turn, the exodus of young people appears to be independent from the agricultural production : they go even when there is a good yield and possibly even more as it is, then, easier to finance the transportation. This is testified by the fact that in 2010, after a harvest described as very good, young has left as much as the year before qualified as not very good.

Young people exodus is part of a broader phenomenon of diversification of livelihood which is to be linked with decreasing natural resources, demographic pressure and the entry into cash economy. The installment into the lowlands (“quartiers de plaine”) has given access to larger and more fertile plots and to incipient mechanization of agriculture. Increased relationship with the Peuhl herders, but most of all, their own new implication in animal

rearing, allows to fertilize the land with animal manure. But all testimonies converge to declare that the production, even in a good year, has decreased by about one third. More broadly, natural resources have been shrinking. Wild game present at the time of our field work in the mid-1970s – especially dear and guinea fowl, the most frequently consumed ones – are not seen anymore; by now, one can only rarely cross a rabbit or a partridge. The same is true for the very large number of wild plants that they used to consume. Women have to walk longer distance to find wild fruits; for instance “kiwa”, a kind of grape which oil is used for hair care, is nearly extinct. More visible is the disappearance of baobab trees and the inability to grow cotton any more.

The former system of living based on sole intensive exploitation of all natural resources is not viable anymore and agriculture intensification alone is not enough. Livelihood has to diversify and the autarchic economic system has to open to the market and the cash economy. The location in the plain villages, as well as the acquisition of bicycles and carts, makes it easier to frequent the weekly market in the surrounding towns. Commercial activities do increase. They go to the market for selling possible crop surplus; but surplus is rare as it apparently requires three successive good harvests. Women are selling wild fruits gathered in the bush or some homemade baskets and other wickerwork. Yet, animal breeding is the main source for cash. The shift from a purely agriculture society to an agro-pastoral system therefore opens the door to incipient capitalization. The abandon of cotton growing, as well as its spinning and weaving, is one of the main cause of need for cash. However, the requisite for cash is not only the outcome of the drying up of natural resources but also that of new necessities fomented by outside influence : industrial material is preferred to the crude homemade cotton suit, moreover, young people are entering the era of jeans and t-shirts. In the same way, traditional potteries – heavy and fragile – are substituted by plastic and metal pots. The increased mobility of young people allows them to go buying basic goods such as salt, onions, tobacco, tea, sugar, cloths - for themselves or for older persons -, in the places where the prices are lower, including for developing their own small business in the village.

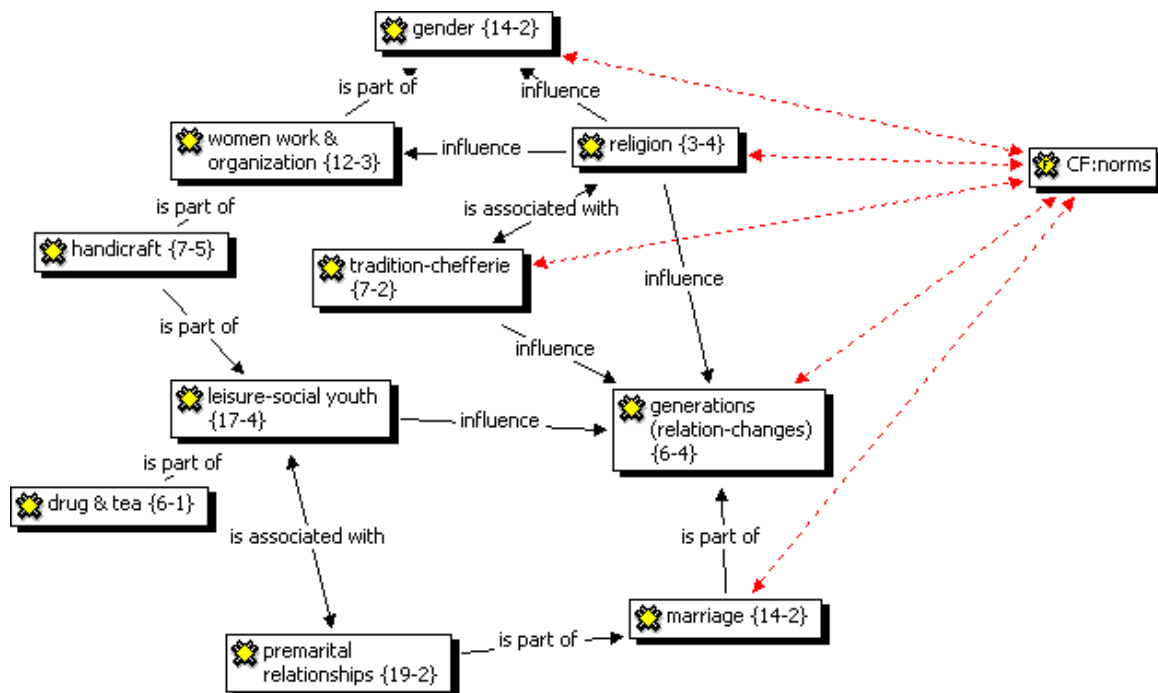
In this context, youth exodus appears as being part of family strategies to cope with food shortage, including because, as mentioned by Djammaga’s ancient in August 2010, “ the absence of young people allows to save food “. But, most of all, youth mobility and exodus is one dimension of the diversification of livelihood. As seen above, the benefits are not very large. Nevertheless, it is one new source of cash and contributes thus to increase emerging economic inequalities. The poorest ones use their earnings to buy food whereas better off, who have secured these basic needs, can capitalize in investing in livestock. Poorer people are also those who rely more on wild fruits. Wealth is mainly measured in cattle and crop surplus, therefore both linked with the possibility of capitalization, the size of the family labor force and therefore the ability to diversify sources of income.

Incipient economic inequalities are the consequence of the emergence of surplus, but also the expression of a more individualistic way of leaving. In the lowland settlements they are wealthier, but they also have a more individualistic way of living. Life in the compact mountain villages meant a strong solidarity and mechanisms of wealth redistribution that do not exist any more in the scattered lowland settlements. In extreme cases, yet, solidarity remains and recent testimonies converge to declare that this is why inequalities do not translate into differentials in children mortality.

### 3. Exodus : cause and consequence of deep socio-cultural transformations

The analysis of the discourse (see Network view, Fig.4) highlights the importance of three types of interdependent “norms” organizing the socio-cultural system : the long term traditions based on the power of traditional leaders (chefferie) and its complex links with new religious fundamentalism, the gender and the generation systems, and the marriage as a central social institution.

**Fig. 4. Network view. Socio-cultural system.**



Parents acknowledge that they cannot prevent young people to go, because they cannot give them in the village what they get thanks to the exodus. Therefore, they do not feel legitimate to prohibit them to go. More generally, they recognize that these new behaviors are the expression that “the world has changed” (ancients in Ankala, octobre 2002). The deepest change is that, by now, the outside world is part of their way of living, a powerful potential force of change in generation and gender relationships. Parents are worried that children may not come back, a reason inter alia why “they do not dare any more hitting their kids”. Men are afraid that the young women will consider men who remained in the village as “dirty” – i.e. who have not learned the modern urban hygienic habits (mainly because of the lack of water) - and will not marry them or take somebody else. This is why parents or husbands dare not “say anything” when the fugitive is back : most of all, they are glad that she / he returned safely.

The outside world is becoming part of everyday life. The process of modernization is expressed in a double process : incipient individualization of family members but also increased autonomy of family units in reference to the large family compound. The present youth is the first generation with personal belongings : bikes, radio, watch, but also own livestock. These new possessions are powerful bridges to new behavior and values. The row revolution – bike, donkey carts – enlarges the functioning space : other Sarnyé villages and

local markets have become part of the usual territory. Contacts with neighboring communities has developed beyond the former exchange of millet for dairy products with the nomadic herders, the stay of the blacksmith, and sporadic visit of merchants or marabouts. Tea drinking and occidental style clothing are more than just new goods but implies a mutation in the life style. As commented by an old man in Tillédamba in 2004, young men come back with money but also with bad spending habits, i.e. cigarette smoking and tea drinking.

The installment into the lowlands is also described as a way to become more independent from the traditional leaders, and the scattered household entities contribute to re-enforce each family's autonomy. Traditional leadership is losing power, but new conservatisms are emerging. More radical Muslim influence is replacing the prevailing long term traditions of marabouts roaming in the region, but having little influence on everyday life in the Sarnyéré villages, rather known for their witchcraft. Presently, there is thus a complex syncretism between tradition and modernity to which individuals adapt and even use for their own sake. Exemplary in this respect are youth leisure activities and, most of all, gender division of tasks and responsibility.

The new Islamic discourse spread by the religious leaders forbids tam-tam playing and dancing, considered as amoral. The wooden small drums, typical from Sarnyéré, are thus not produced anymore and the traditional bell dance ("danse des clochettes") is becoming a curiosity for foreign visitors and regional cultural contest organized by the Ministry of Culture. It has lost its ceremonial meanings of communication with the local spirits and of meeting occasion for young people of both sexes. These cultural mutations are incentives for young men to rather wander around with a cassette player on their bike. The new Islamic principles are also recommending to women to stay home. This has led women not to contribute any more to agricultural work in their husband's field, but to dedicating their time to their own field for their own crop. What seems an improvement in women autonomy and own resources however turned into increasing responsibilities upon women shoulders. Rather than providing the food for the family, men increasingly use their crop to capitalize, in part by buying livestock (for more on this point, see Sauvain-Dugerdil et al 2008).

The new exodus habit is thus part of more global socio-cultural evolutions, especially individualization and increasing women responsibility. As regards changes in partnership formation, we hypothesize that it has been possible because it is rooted in a tradition of relative freedom before marriage. For very young girls, exodus does not appear to have a very important economic dimension and can be rather seen as an important step towards adulthood, the experience of the opening to the outside world. Young girls go in groups; although performing individual activities, they remain in touch, meet at night and come back jointly for safety reason. Their testimony is of a wonderful experience although they don't earn much. Domestic work is not as hard as at home, they do not report bad outcomes (exploitation, violence) and declare to have learned a lot. In a way we find here another expression of the relative freedom that young people used to enjoy before marriage, such as we could witness in the mid-1970s. Exodus is tolerated by the society as long as it does not challenge the marriage, such as was frequentation among young people in former times. Girls are expected to come back when it is time for marriage and to accept the chosen husband. These basic conditions being respected, they can enjoy some freedom. They have to marry and go to the husbands' house, but if the union does not match well, they may come back home. Parents usually try to pressure them to remain at their husbands' but cannot oblige them. Afterwards they are free to chose among potential candidates. This is not new but, apparently, the number of these young women who "do not sit down" at their husbands' is increasing. Premarital sex

is a sensible topic, and at first, all people start by telling that it is not accepted. Yet, it appeared that ancient customs, following which young people enjoy freedom in this respect as long as it is not with the future spouse, still prevail. When pre-marital pregnancy occurs, the marriage has to be postponed after the birth. In most instances, the child remains with the mother's family but may also live with the mother at her husband's home. As ancients tell, "by then, life is going on".

In this sense, exodus does not seem to challenge the social order, yet indices show that it may be associated with dramatic changes. The chosen spouse is increasingly questioned. Young men wish to be consulted and more and more often parents rather confirm their son's choice than impose their own. Most of all, cases of girls' refusal of the chosen husband are getting more frequent; in particular, young women do not accept anymore to get married, as a co-spouse, to an old man. Exodus, in some instance, becomes the way to reject the planned marriage. Moreover, individual exodus appears to spread among married women. In many instance, they are leaving without informing their husband. The few cases of exodus of new mothers who leave their child behind are badly considered, whereas that of young married women not yet mother seems to be more or less tolerated. However ancients in Tillédamba were mentioning in 2004 their fear that this new habit would delay the arrival of the first child: "When a married women do not move, she will have rapidly a child and the family will be wealthy. It is more important to have children than earn money." In our data from the 2002 survey, such an effect could not be shown: the distribution of age at first birth (survival curve) was perfectly identical among those who had already migrated and those who never did (Sauvain-Dugerdil et al, 2008). Yet there appear to be a slight time trend of postponement of the first child among younger cohorts : 74% of those aged less than 17 years had not yet had a child at 16 years, whereas it was the case of 60% among those aged 17 to 20 years (Sauvain-Dugerdil et al, 2006).

## **Discussion**

Since the first cases in the late 1990s, the temporary migrations of very young people, especially girls, has rapidly spread. What was still a pioneer behavior at the time of our first interviews in 2002 and 2004, has now become the norm, a new kind of threshold along the transition to adulthood. Presently, the issue is rather why some young people do not go. The reasons not to go are various, between individuals, villages and gender. First of all they reflect the fact that the scope of exodus remains relatively limited in its frequency and duration and in the amount of economic benefits. Young people do not go every year and only in very specific cases they do not come back in time for taking part in the agricultural work and, as for girls, to come back for marriage. It has started in the villages nearer to the road and more in contact with the outside. By now, villages still differ in the intensity of the phenomenon and most of all the degree of adult agreement with girls' exodus.

Although modest, the economic benefit is worthwhile in this context of extreme destitution. It is part of the process of livelihood diversification necessary to cope with increasing pressures on declining natural resources. This new habit has however to be distinguished from survival strategies of temporary family migration in time of water shortage and/or poor crops. Moreover, the economic meaning of exodus – both as regards the reasons to go and the benefits – widely differ between young men and women.



Men's decision relies on an economic rationale. This is well expressed by the numerous examples of those who decided not to go out in 2003/04 because it was better to stay and repair the houses, an annual task neglected the year before while everybody had left; in less measure the same is the case in 2010. More broadly, exodus is often described by young men as an economic obligation. Although they increasingly give priority to personal goods, first of all clothing, they also contribute to family needs. Their bike becomes a communication mean for the whole family and, most of all, they acquire goods useful for the agricultural work. Their exodus is an individual decision but their needs are closely tight to the family strategies. Therefore it is seen by the whole community as useful. However the economic dimension is not any more the only reason to go and we can wonder whether the case of Tilledamba's shepherd who in 2004 did not see the necessity to go as he could meet his needs by selling an animal would be the case today.

In turn, the economic dimension appears to be less obvious for female's exodus ; it may however be taking a growing importance. The main reason to go was to discover the outside world rather than to meet material needs. The new habit has spread as the wish to experiment what the pioneers ones had lived. Let us recall that the pioneer ones were those most in contact with the outside - e.g. Tilledamba the plain village closest to the market place - and that they flew from there on a market day. The economic benefit of girls exodus is much lower than males', both because their earnings are smaller and their stay usually shorter. Moreover, the goods they bring back are not seen as useful as the male ones, because they concern the female sphere, i.e. kitchen tools. Young women never expressed exodus as an economic obligation. After having met the urge of the first curiosity which made them flew away without informing their parents, they wish to go again but with the parental consent. They do not go back every year and usually not after getting married. Exodus opens for them a completely new youth period of increased autonomy, described in all discourses by the fact that they became more awake ("éveillées"). They increasingly come back with new clothing and more modern kitchen tools, but their everyday life does not seem to change much. As described by ancients "after a few days [after their return], they behave as before". They do not spend time drinking tea or smoking cigarettes like young men, they do not have new belongings such as bike, hoes or carts and still walk to surrounding places and work their field by hand (or have to pay a man, e.g. their husband, to do it with their own hoe). There are however signs that the increasing economic contribution of women in the household, cited above, is also to be found in the exodus behavior. This may explain the fact that, in the village of Tandi, they apparently now go every year.

Youth temporary exodus participates to a global trend of modernization, characterized inter alia by giving up traditional clothing and handicraft and, most of all, through a fundamental shift towards individualization. It is affecting intergeneration relationships and questioning traditional power system and social institution such as the established rules of marriage. At the same time, conservative religious influences are also infiltrating some sector of the population and more broadly the value system, especially the gender system. In these societies, women have always enjoyed a large degree of autonomy, expressed for instance by their own hierarchy organization. (The female leader is not the chief's wife, but the oldest woman among the chiefs lineage). Women are apparently gaining more economic weight and decision power. Men are complaining about the increasing role of women in family decision, this referring particularly to mothers' connivance with girls' exodus. The special female link is however not specific to these new behaviour as was shown by the analysis of the 2002 data about the young people's confidants. For girls, the mother played the key role for all topics, except sharing secrets reserved to friends, whereas for young men the mother is the key

person only in matter of food (Roulin et al 2009). But most of all, as well described elsewhere, e.g. in reference with the new load due to decreasing natural resources (Tacoli 2009), women have increasing responsibility in the family wellbeing.

In conclusion, at this point of time, youth mobility appears thus to be more a “migration structure” than a “migration rupture”. It offers a new opportunity for this remote population to cope with economic uncertainties and to negotiate the transition to modernity. Yet, the central issue remains whether mobility empower the young people without provoking social disintegration. There is a delicate redistribution of power within the society but real generational conflicts seem to be avoided thanks to the realism of ancients towards the fact that “time is changing”. The issue is also whether exodus will help women to facing with their growing responsibilities in a context of pressures from new traditional Islamic values. Yet, a real danger is the possible adoption of risky behavior, such as apparent start of commercial sex. During the last interview of the last day of the 2010 field visit, ancients in Tilledamba acknowledged that sex during exodus is much more frequent than declared and so are premarital pregnancies (three recent cases in their village). Apparently it is not the result of abuse, but of a new habit of commercial sex with unskilled migrant laborer, an easier way to get more financial benefits from exodus.

The analysis of the discourse and its evolution between 2002 and 2010 has provided us with interpretative keys. At this point it would be suitable to investigate these keys in a more systematic ways through a questionnaire survey comparing the Sarnyere villages with other torotegou Dogon speaking villages from the same area that have a longer tradition of youth exodus. The main issue is whether this new window to the world will make young man and women able and willing to continue to make their living in their home population, or will exodus become a factor of social disintegration and the path to more definite emigration.

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