



Diaspora-Driven Development and Dispute: Home-Area Associations and Municipal Politics in Mali

Sten Hagberg | Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University

Bintou Koné | Researcher and PhD Candidate, Institut des Sciences Humaines (Mali)

ABSTRACT This article is about a rural municipality where the diaspora is supporting local development, while simultaneously fueling dispute. The Kiban municipality of Mali is dominated by Soninkés with a long history of migration and trade. Despite the presence of Bambara and Fulbe in villages, Soninkés are in the majority in Kiban, making municipal politics and local development is basically “a Soninké affair”. The *Kibanais* diaspora are engaged in trade in the Malian capital Bamako, as well as, in countries like Angola, Congo Brazzaville, China, France, Belgium and the USA. We elaborate on how two home-area associations in Kiban. First, the home-area association Soumpoun was founded in Bamako in the 1940s to invest and support people in Kiban. Second, the home-area association Soninkara was founded in 2000 after a conflict between Soumpoun and the then mayor; the latter considered that the diaspora should support “the municipality”, whereas Soumpoun wanted to support “the population”. Since then, these associations have been competing in municipal politics in Kiban. This article shows that while diasporas are certainly drivers of development, they are also drivers of dispute.

Keywords: diaspora, development, decentralisation, ethnicity, Soninké

Introduction

This article primarily revolves around a rural municipality in Mali and how the decision-making and the daily running of the municipal council are influenced by people living in the diaspora.¹ It is a study of municipal politics in a small rural town off the main road that is integrated to global migration and trade by means of a particularly active diaspora and their local involvement at home. The diaspora populations – and ‘their’ associations – are indeed supporting local development and social change, and in times of crisis they play a critical role to improve the socio-economic living conditions of the residents. Yet they are simultaneously fueling conflict and dispute by playing the role of initiated outsiders and critical friends. They are involved in municipal politics in various ways. The article revolves around the ambiguous role of people in the diaspora being both drivers of development and dispute.

¹ This article is the outcome of our joint scholarship on municipal politics in Mali, particularly in Kiban and Kalaban-Coro. First and foremost, we would like to thank Moustapha Diakit, the mayor of Kiban, for his willingness to share strategies and practices in electoral politics with us. Earlier versions were presented at Nordic Africa Days, Uppsala, in September 2014, at Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, in October 2014, and at African Studies Association, Washington, in November 2016. We are grateful for insightful comments and critical remarks made by several colleagues, particularly Maria Grosz-Ngaté and Rosa de Jorio, as well as two anonymous reviewers of *kritisk etnografi*.

Our ethnographic account is about the municipality of Kiban. It is part of the Banamba cercle – the Malian administrative unit above the municipality (*la commune*) – dominated by Soninkés, an ethnic group with a long history of migration and trade (Manchuelle 2004). Even though Bambara farmers and Fulbe agro-pastoralists also reside in villages of the municipality, Soninkés are in majority in the town of Kiban. Governing the municipality of Kiban is indeed monopolised by Soninké residents as few non-Soninkés are on the municipal council. Hence, municipal politics and local development are basically “a Soninké affair”.

Many Soninkés originating from Kiban are engaged in trade in the capital Bamako, as well as in all other regions of Mali. Some have also established themselves in countries like Angola, Congo Brazzaville, China, France, Belgium and the USA. The Soninké diaspora are well-known for being involved in business, mostly as talented big businessmen (Grégoire and Labazée 1993; Mbodj-Pouye and Le Courant 2017). The Soninkés are also well-known to preserve a strong bond back home as each family has members who continuously reside in Kiban. In general, the Soninké diaspora of Kiban are well-organised and maintain strong links with people in the hometown.

In the article, we describe how two home-area associations in Kiban are vehicles of development and dispute. First, the home-area association Soumpoun was founded in Bamako in the 1940s to invest in infrastructure and to support people in Kiban. Second, the home-area association Soninkara was founded in 2000 after a conflict between Soumpoun and the then mayor; the latter expected that the diaspora should support “the municipality”, whereas Soumpoun wanted to support “the population” of Kiban town. Since then, these two associations, both of which are led from Bamako albeit with local representatives in Kiban, have been competing, especially with respect to municipal politics. In other words, while the diaspora is certainly a driver of development, it is simultaneously a driver of dispute as well.

Two conceptual clarifications need to be made right from the outset. First, while the Soninkés are generally known to be traders and pious Muslims with a long history of migration, we do not wish to essentialise any Soninké identity. We focus on the Kiban municipality in order to explore how Soninké actors act and interact locally, nationally and internationally. Residents in Kiban are dependent on the connections with *Kibanaïs* in Bamako and abroad, but not all of them are individually supported by family-members outside of Kiban. Although many men are traders with rudimentary schooling in Qu’ranic schools or Medersas, there are also some civil servants and other people with a university degree originating from Kiban. In other words, not all Soninké men travel across the world and not all of them are wealthy traders. Second, a conceptual clarification is needed with respect to the *Kibanaïs* diaspora. On a general level, we find that the concept of diaspora applies quite well to the Soninkés of Kiban as a people scattered around the world with a strong sense of home/homeland and of ethnic/religious belonging (Cohen 2008). Yet to complicate matters a bit in the case of Kiban people do not use the concept of diaspora, but rather talk about *ressortissants*, that is, sons and daughters of Kiban who live outside of the town, but who continue to define Kiban as their home-area. The French term *ressortissants* implies urbanity and community bonds. But for people with whom we are working, no clear distinction is made between *Kibanaïs* living in Bamako, and those living abroad – they are all *ressortissants*. In this article, our use of the concept of diaspora is inspired by the fuzzy distinction between different *Kibanaïs* residing outside of Kiban, because for people living in

the municipality it makes little sense to distinguish between these different *Kibanaïs*. We use the term ‘*Kibanaïs* diaspora’ and ‘diaspora’ loosely to indicate those originating from Kiban, maintaining a sense of home and belonging to the town.

We have structured the article as follows. First, we describe the last 20 years of decentralisation policies in Mali to highlight the conditions under which mayors and councilors seek to run the municipal council. Second, we introduce the municipality of Kiban with particular emphasis on the role of the diaspora. Third, we provide an ethnographic account of the two associations – Soumpoun and Soninkara – and describe how they have come to co-exist in Kiban and Bamako. Fourth, we discuss the articulation between party politics and associational life in Kiban to demonstrate the ambiguousness of the *Kibanaïs* diaspora as a driver of development and dispute. In conclusion, we argue that the case of Kiban municipality indicates the importance of not confining local politics solely to the municipality but instead integrate national and international networks – here illustrated by the home-area associations – in the analysis of municipal politics and local development.

Democratic Decentralisation and Local Development

In the wake of democratisation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, African governments and international agencies manifested a renewed interest in decentralisation. Decentralisation would be a means to alter the over-centralisation of political decisions at the top of the state, and transfer power from the centralised State to local institutions and structures (Hagberg 2010). Decentralisation was referred to as ‘democratic decentralisation’ (Crook and Manor 1998) in contrast to previous authoritarian regimes’ attempts, including the decentralisation within the one-party state (Deridder 2019). Despite the vast literature on decentralisation policies and their political and economic implications (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Crook and Manor 1998; Hagberg 2010; Hagberg et al. 2019; Fay et al. 2006; Kassibo 1997; Laurent et al. 2004; Mback 2003; Sawadogo 2001; Seely 2001), detailed ethnographic studies of party politics and local development in West African municipalities are still needed. Empirically, decentralisation is best understood as a series of political, economic and cultural practices currently at work in local arenas and centered around the municipality and its council (Hagberg 2010). Hence, in villages and neighbourhoods the municipal council represents a new institution to which citizens must relate; for local political actors it represents access to power, development initiatives, and institutional mediation.

The research that we have been undertaking in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger seeks to study decentralisation practices by means of an ethnographically grounded analysis of how political parties reach out and are represented – and by whom – in municipalities (Hagberg et al. 2019).² While democracy does represent a breach with authoritarian regimes, an ethnographic analysis lays equal emphasis on political continuities and political ruptures.

² Within the framework of this research programme funded by the Swedish Research Council (VR)/the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in selected municipalities in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The specific fieldwork carried out in Kiban and on *Kibanaïs* in Bamako, Mali, has been conducted by the authors since 2008. Other team-members who have occasionally participated in the fieldwork in Kiban include Yaouga Félix Koné, Gabriella Körling, N’gna Traoré, Karin Elfving, and Bassidy Dembélé. Due to the security situation in Mali, we have also been obliged to change research strategy (Hagberg and Körling 2014; Hagberg et al. 2017).

The traditional chief may well still be very influential in the municipal council, and the former revolutionary leader may have turned into a democratic one. In other words, while working with formal democratic processes, one also focuses on other forms of power and political influence.

In Mali, decentralisation was a key policy for President Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992–2002) who came to power in the multiparty elections following the overthrow of President General Moussa Traoré (1968–1991) and the political transition led by General Amadou Toumani Touré (1991–1992). For President Konaré decentralisation was politically motivated by an urge to deal with “the Tuareg question” (Seely 1999).³ In the 1990s, democratisation in Mali became a prime example of a successful transition on the African continent, and decentralisation was in turn one of the building blocks of Malian democracy (Kassibo 1997; Fay et al. 2006; see also Hagberg 2010). A very interesting process of grounding local democracy in popular notions and concepts was initiated where decentralisation was described as “power returns home” (*mara ka segi so*, in Bambara). The very territorialisation of Malian municipalities meant that many micro-communes were established (Kassibo 1997; Koné 1997b; see also Hagberg 2010). Such municipalities were born more out of political attempts to get a municipality than of economic viability of the administrative unit.

The first municipal elections were held in 1999, followed by elections in 2004 and in 2009. Due to the political crisis in Mali resulting from the coup d’état in March 2012, the ethno-nationalist Tuareg uprising, and the subsequent Islamist takeover of the North (Hagberg and Körling 2012), the next municipal elections were postponed and took place on 20 November 2016.

Since the early 2000s, Malian municipalities have acquired three specific competences from the central State in terms of public services. They are in charge of primary and secondary education, of health and social services, and of rural water provision. Many civil servants like teachers and nurses are employed by the State but the daily running of the services is the responsibility of the municipality. In practice, however, municipalities do not have enough funding, including tax revenue, to run these services smoothly, and development projects, NGOs, home-area associations and well-placed individuals from the municipality living elsewhere are investing in these public services.

Decentralisation in Mali has led to widespread scholarly debate and many interesting studies have been published on various aspects (Kassibo 1997; Fay et al. 2006; Djiré and Dicko 2007; IIED and Uppsala University 2004). Many master and PhD theses have also been produced on Malian decentralisation (e.g. Deridder 2014, 2019; Hetland 2007; Koné 2017, Koné and Hagberg 2019; Traoré 2013, 2019). Thanks to these studies, we do know much better about the intricate workings of local politics in municipalities in Mali, even though specific ethnographic case-studies rather than comparative analysis, dominate. While there were lots of enthusiasm and energy, as well as funding available in the 1990s under Konaré’s presidency, the election of Amadou Toumani Touré (2002–2012) – at the time the hero of Malian transition 1991–1992 – slowed down the decentralisation process. It was no longer a central element in government policy. If one adds the fragile socio-political and security situation since 2012, it is safe to say that Malian municipalities ‘make do’,

³ The very dealing of the Tuareg rebellion in the North around 1990 had undermined Traoré’s regime, paralleling political developments that led to the coup d’état in March 2012 (Hagberg and Körling 2012; Lecoq et al. 2013; Konaté 2013; Brunet-Jailly et al. 2014).

rather than function well. In the following section, we will illustrate how decision-making and daily running may look like, by describing the rural municipality of Kiban.

The Municipality of Kiban

The town of Kiban is the centre of the municipality of Kiban in the Banamba cercle located some 165 km to the north-east of the capital Bamako. The municipality is composed of only six villages: Kiban; Dialakoro Bambara; Dialakoro Peulh; Bako; M'piabougou and Tiérôla. According to the National Census of 2009, the population was 12,389 inhabitants (INSAT-RGPH 2009). Even though, for good reasons, no "ethnic census" is done in Mali, it is well-known that the majority population of Kiban municipality is of Soninké ethnicity (also labelled Sarakollé or Maraka). Other main ethnicities are Bambara and Fulbe.

As already stated in the introduction, the Soninkés are well-known migrants in the history of West Africa (Manchuelle 2004), and the *Kibanais* are no exception. One way in which they maintain the links back home is through polygyny. It is often the case when a *Kibanais* man resides abroad that he has one wife living with him in the new locality and another remaining in Kiban. The most common case for a man is to have one wife in Bamako and one in Kiban. In that way a successful *Kibanais* keeps a very close and tightly knit bond back home. The other side of the coin is nevertheless that many young wives stay alone in Kiban waiting, as it were, for their husbands to return to Kiban.

The Soninkés of Kiban are not just migrants going on adventure, but many are very successful traders and businessmen. There is a lot of money available and invested by *Kibanais* in Bamako, and in Kiban. Investments in mosques are perhaps the most prominent feature, as there are several big, impressive and beautiful mosques in town.⁴ Some *Kibanais* are extremely wealthy and successful. In January 2014, we were invited to a kind of "house-warming-party" in one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods of Bamako. The owner of the newly built house was a man from Kiban, who allegedly was the second biggest gold trader of Mali. His house was of a great luxury with a three-floor villa for each of his two wives, and a third three-floor house for his mother. Another part of the house hosted a mosque, and there were big living rooms and film-rooms etc. The house-owner is the nephew of one of our key informants. As a maternal uncle of such a wealthy man, our key informant depends on the money provided by his nephew. At the same time, the maternal uncle takes care of the nephew's deeds and investments in Kiban.

In the first municipal elections in 1999, three parties entered the municipal council in Kiban. The seats were occupied as follows: eight councilors represented the *Parti pour l'Unité la Démocratie et le Progrès* (PUDP), eight councilors represented the then ruling *Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali/Parti Africain pour la Solidarité et la Justice* (ADEMA/PASJ) and there was one independent candidate. The majority (9 against 8) that succeeded in getting the position as mayor was obtained by PUDP with support from the independent candidate. It is worth noting that the PUDP's leader, Mamadou dit Maribatourou Diaby originated from Kiban, a fact that explains why this relatively small party at the national level had such a stronghold there. The mayor of Kiban 1999-2004 was Mandala Diaby.

⁴ In terms of beautiful mosques in the Banamba cercle the town of Touba seems to keep the record of big and expensive buildings. Islamic brotherhoods such as the Wahhabites (locally called *Sunnamogow*), the Tijjanyia, and the Hamalistes have built gigantic, impressive, clean and well-maintained mosques in the town of Touba, at the same time as roads and streets of the town are completely degraded and dirty.

In 2004 and following a law adopted by the National Assembly, the number of councilors in Kiban was reduced from 17 to 11. The reason was that Kiban was such a small municipality, and this meant increased competition as the council was shrinking. A few days prior to the municipal elections in 2004 some important political manoeuvres took place. The Kiban leadership of PUDP, including the mayor Mandala Diaby, changed political affiliation and joined the *Parti pour la Renaissance Nationale* (PARENA). This move was motivated by a rupture between the politicians of Kiban and the PUDP's leader Maribatourou Diaby. It seems that the rupture was linked to the funding of the electoral campaign. More precisely, the politicians of Kiban claimed that Maribatourou Diaby would not have invested much in his home town to get votes. Instead, he would have spent his money in other localities. This was badly received in Kiban, saying that he had neglected his own peers.⁵ After this rupture, three party lists of candidates were presented to run for the elections. Yet two of the lists were invalidated by the Court of Banamba, allegedly due to the fact that these lists had former councilors who had left the council prior to the end of the previous mandate. According to the law, candidates who had been councilors and had left – popularly called *démissionnaires* – could not present themselves in the subsequent elections. This decision nevertheless meant that it was only one valid electoral list that remained in Kiban, that is, the list of PARENA. Hence, the PARENA became the only party in the municipal council 2004–2009. But despite these party political manoeuvres, it was the same mayor during these two mandates, namely Mandala Diaby. He was mayor of PUDP 1999–2004, and mayor of PARENA 2004–2009. In 2009, he lost power to Moustapha Diakité.

In the 2009 elections, the PARENA was the only party that entered the council, even though other parties and independent candidates competed too. Hence, between 2004 and 2016, there was only one party represented in the municipal council of Kiban. Out of eleven councilors 2009–2016, nine were Soninkés, one Fulbe (from the village of Dialakoro Peulh) and one Bambara (from the village of Bako). The gender disparity was huge with only one woman councilor. The ethnic composition of the municipal council illustrates the statement that Kiban politics is a 'Soninké affair'. And, yet, the two non-Soninkés councilors represented other important populations: first, the Bambara councilor represented the hosts as the area's first-comers were the Bambara of the village of Bako; and second, the Fulbe councilor was mediating between the important Fulbe populations in the villages, and the Soninkés in the town of Kiban.

In the 2016 municipal elections, the PARENA won again and Moustapha Diakité remained the mayor of Kiban. This time, however, the number of councilors had once again increased to 17. The following parties entered the council: eleven councilors for PARENA, five for URD, and one for CNID.⁶ Interestingly, Diakité's defeat in the 2013 legislative elections did not impact his political career as such (Koné 2017; Koné and Hagberg 2019).

Thus, the mayor of Kiban since 2009 is still Moustapha Diakité, a successful trader and businessman, who for long time has been financing investments in Kiban: public health,

⁵ We documented a similar process when Moustapha Diakité was running in the 2013 legislative elections. Many *Kibanais* complained that Diakité did not "see" his brothers and sisters in Kiban but invested in other localities only. Diakité, on the other hand, considered that he should not even spend a dime at home, as he was to be supported there anyway (Koné 2017; see also Koné and Hagberg 2019).

⁶ The *Union pour la République et la Démocratie* (URD), led by Soumaïla Cissé, is the main opposition party at the national level. The *Congrès National d'Initiative Démocratique* (CNID), led by Mountaga Tall, is another main political party of contemporary Mali.

Franco-Arabic schools (*medersas*) and mosques. Diakit  was for longtime living in Angola doing business there and in the 1990s he was appointed honorary consul for Mali in Angola. But since 2002, he is back in Mali, and involved in politics. Diakit  is simultaneously living in Bamako and Kiban – or perhaps better, he spends every weekend in Kiban while doing business in Bamako during the week.

In the remaining part of the article, we develop a specific case of municipal politics in Kiban, namely the ways in which the home-area – or diaspora – associations intervene in the town and in the daily running of the municipality.

Home-Area Associations Soumpoun and Soninkara

The first voluntary association of people from Kiban is Soumpoun. The association was formed in 1945 following an initiative of *Kibanais* living in Bamako, and one of the founders was named Amadou Diallo. The name Soumpoun, meaning ‘children of the same mother’ in Sonink  language, came much later, because initially this was a home-area association of Kiban people in the capital, similar to what has been described elsewhere from that period (Meillassoux 1968; Little 1965). Soumpoun was established in many countries as people from Kiban travelled and settled across the world. But for some 50 years it remained an association without any formal legal State recognition. In fact, it was only in 1996 that Soumpoun became a formal registered voluntary association with a registration certificate (*r c piss *).⁷ “Previously, we did not need paper [to have an association], but things have changed. Today you may do nothing without the papers”, the Secretary-General of Soumpoun Mal  Diakit  asserted. Today, Soumpoun has representatives in Paris, New York, Brazzaville, Luanda, as well as in cities of neighbouring countries like C te d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso. People living there maintain bonds back home through Soumpoun. They also raise funding for specific support to Kiban. Soumpoun is not just present in Bamako and abroad but has representatives in all regions of Mali.

The basic idea of Soumpoun has always been that the *Kibanais* diaspora send money to people in Bamako who buy rice, sugar, salt, oil etc. there and then send the food stuff and other basic necessities to Kiban. The association then stocks the products in a store at the marketplace in Kiban. The products are to be sold locally. In that way, Soumpoun is making money, helping members to make ends meet and also diminish the vulnerability of fluctuating prices. Soumpoun is founded on the principle of *Kibanais* diaspora supporting their relatives back home. And the support has been substantial. For instance, as early as the late 1950s, Kiban had several telephone lines belonging to private individuals, whose better-off relatives lived in Bamako or abroad.

The association is truly a home-area association which made substantial financial investments in Kiban: improvement of the road linking Banamba and Kiban, the construction of *medersas*, and the closure of the cemetery, and the provision of equipment to the dispensary. When NGOs intervened asking the populations to make a contribution to a development investment, Soumpoun paid the village contributions, collecting money from members in the diaspora. However, things started to change with the creation of the municipality in 1999. For the then newly elected mayor Mandala Diaby, the association Soumpoun would

⁷ For a discussion on the importance of *r c piss *, see Hagberg’s (2004) study of the hunters’ association Benkadi in Burkina Faso.

naturally be a key partner in developing the municipality. Yet at some point things turned for the worse between the mayor and Soumpoun. A Soumpoun member explained:

Decentralisation arrived here. We entered it without understanding too much. We contributed to investments in Kiban. But the mayor wanted that all projects go through the municipality.

In other words, the mayor wanted to control the funding provided by Soumpoun, whereas the association wanted to stick to its autonomous status as part of civil society. Following these tensions, a second association named Soninkara⁸ started to take form. It was grown out of a specific conflict between the mayor and the Soumpoun. The mayor wanted Soumpoun to pay the community contribution (600.000 FCFA – approximatively some 915 euros) to the construction of a school sponsored by the international NGO, Plan International. However, due to the already strained relations with the mayor, Soumpoun decided to pull out and not pay the community contribution. This was seen as a treason by many. Therefore, individual *Kibanais* decided to mobilise funding and succeeded in paying the requested 600.000 FCFA. It was after this incident that the new association, Soninkara, was founded. The idea with Soninkara is to help the municipality to function effectively. A Kiban-based leader of Soninkara asserted: “The municipality is weak, and it is thanks to our association that things function”. Since the early 2000s, there are two main home-area associations – Soumpoun and Soninkara – that gather different groupings of Kiban, often on the basis of kinship relations.⁹

Even though these two associations are central to associational life in Kiban, the mayor since 2009 (Moustapha Diakit ) is not really involved in any of these associations. Diakit  is rather, a private donor who finances investments in the municipality. He is a wealthy trader who spends a lot of money to support Kiban. The most striking example of his generosity is that, during the two years, he privately funded the salary of the doctor at the public dispensary in Kiban. In other words, the mayor took a personal responsibility to cover the doctor’s salary. Due to political problems, the doctor nevertheless had to quit his function and nowadays there is no doctor in Kiban.¹⁰ Moustapha Diakit  is not alone in being a private donor, because Kiban is to a large extent built on financial contributions from the diaspora. But Diakit  is clearly the most well-known and biggest one in today’s Kiban.

Although these financial and personal contributions are easily referred to as ideal commitment of the diaspora, it is also evident that they complicate local arenas, and municipal politics. A complaint often heard by people in Bamako is that the relatives back home are just waiting for investments and do not take initiatives themselves. Another one is that those in the diaspora, through their active and sometimes patronising involvement, are actually putting people in Kiban against each other, and even dividing the town. In a very concrete sense, the diaspora of Kiban is clearly a driver of development. People living in the diaspora do provide substantial financial and food contributions both on an individual basis and also – as in the case of the two associations Soumpoun and Soninkara – on an associational one. But the *Kibanais* diaspora is also a driver of dispute, as representing people

⁸ The name Soninkara means the umbilical cord in Sonink  language.

⁹ Bintou Kon ’s Master thesis on kinship and politics in Kiban particularly focuses on the 2013 legislative elections (Kon  2017; see also Kon  and Hagberg 2019).

¹⁰ These “political” problems were allegedly due to the strained relationship with the former mayor Mandala Diaby, who had become president of the Health Management Committee.

who combine substantial contributions and socio-political involvement with local stakes grounded in family, household and neighbourhood belongings.

Municipal Politics and Associational Life

The political landscape in Kiban gives the impression of one party dominating municipal politics without any opposition whatsoever. Despite the transfer from the PUDP to PARENA just prior to the 2014 elections, the then mayor Mandala Diaby could stay in power. Similarly, between 2004 and 2016, there is no party other than the PARENA that is represented in the municipal council. Yet this impression is not entirely true, because there is indeed a socio-political opposition in Kiban, albeit articulated elsewhere than in party politics. In the following, we analyse the ambiguous role of the Kiban diaspora when it comes to municipal politics and associational life.

First, the cleavage between the associations Soumpoun and Soninkara is a clear articulation of a socio-political opposition. The active members of Soumpoun are generally in opposition to the municipality and the ruling political class in Kiban. Despite assertions from both Soninkara and Soumpoun that “today the problems are finished and now we understand each other”, the cleavage is articulated vis-à-vis infrastructure investment and political campaigning. Some actors hold that it was especially during the 10 years of office of the mayor Mandala Diaby (1999–2009) that people were divided. The public dispensary is one example where opposition is expressed. When Mayor Diaby lost power in 2009 he soon became president of ASACO – the Health Management Committee – and after a while he was accused of sabotaging Mayor Diakité’s rule by obstructing the smooth running of the dispensary. While such allegations could of course not be taken at face value, they do indicate the political stakes involved. In these allegations *Kibanais* diaspora is clearly central: on the one hand, they are financially mobilising resources to invest or at least pay “community contributions”; on the other hand, they are fueling conflict in the town, and give instructions to their supporters/relatives back home. Another expression of the cleavage concerns where to invest money. For Soumpoun members it is the town of Kiban – and thus the Soninké community – they would like to support, whereas the municipality is in charge of all the six villages, most of which have Bambara and Fulbe populations. Hence, the cleavage between the town and the municipality translates into a potential ethnic divide. There is a political continuity to be detected here: both Maribatourou Diaby (the President-founder of the PUDP) and the current mayor Moustapha Diakité, have been accused of spending too much money elsewhere and neglecting the town of Kiban. While this could be a variant of “no prophet is accepted in his hometown”, it is indeed interesting to see how investing substantial amounts of money also demands sophisticated political skilfulness.

A second clear articulation of the opposition follows from this and relates to Mayor Diakité himself. He has for long time been sponsoring infrastructure investments and is considered to be very rich. Diakité ran for MP in legislative elections three times without being elected, despite investing substantial amounts of money in his campaign. Some people claim that even though Moustapha Diakité is the mayor of Kiban he does not fund enough investments in the town; instead he supports water-points and mills and other activities in villages even in other municipalities, such as Madina-Sacko. When we interviewed him in January 2014, Diakité asserted that he is not interested in “buying voters” by distributing money to residents, but that he would like to invest in concrete development actions. In the

2013 elections when he was campaigning to become an MP, he disbursed some 60 million FCFA in his electoral campaign.¹¹ Some would argue that he had not invested the money wisely as he was also criticised for not supporting his core voters; and for not “considering” his own relatives enough (Koné and Hagberg 2019). To some extent, however, Diakité belongs to a typical *Kibanais* diaspora, who would like to support people back home and run for the elections, while grossly underestimating the real stakes and considerations among voters. So, even though Moustapha Diakité is leading PARENA in Kiban and is the mayor since 2009, there is an opposition to him, and it was particularly articulated in the aftermath of the 2013 legislative elections (Koné 2017; Koné and Hagberg 2019).¹²

A third articulation of political opposition in Kiban can be detected in women’s political participation and affiliation. While there was one woman municipal councilor in Kiban 2009-2016 (Masitan Diaby), at first sight illustrating a typical kind of female alibi for making politics, a closer look shows that women are important actors in party politics in Kiban and that Masitan Diaby is an important woman leader. There are many associations and women groups in town with a political affiliation. In Kiban, the PARENA has a number of women groups that are mobilized for any action to be undertaken by the municipality. For instance, when we did fieldwork in October 2013 some women groups were involved in sensitisation training on the theme “Wash your hands” funded by a foreign donor. The training took place in a school and the pupils attended the session. A group of PARENA women were involved and were paid allowance for participating. These women received financial compensation for participating in the training, thanks to their party affiliation. Just in Kiban there were 13 women’s associations supporting the PARENA in October 2013, one month before the legislative elections. Other women groups were affiliated to other parties, notably the URD. After the legislative elections in 2013 in which URD was part of the winning alliance some URD women groups were very angry. One women leader told us that they had not received all the funding given by their MP-candidate to their women’s group, because a male political actor had “taken care of” [that is, embezzled] the lion’s share of “women’s money”. This incident illustrates that candidates need women’s mobilisation – and their votes – but that the funding provided by electoral candidates to support women may well be deviated by other local political actors.

A fourth articulation of how the *Kibanais* diaspora intervene in municipal politics is linked to ethnicity. Kiban politics is very much a Soninké politics in town, because Bambara and Fulbe populations living in the villages are marginalised. Still, the political candidates need to ensure support from people living in all villages. In that way, the municipal councilor from the village of Bako (2009-2016) represented Bambara farmers’ interests generally, and more specifically the autochthons as people in Bako are the first comers and hence the ritually important masters of the earth. And the municipal councilor from Dialakoro Peulh is a Fulbe man with the primary task to mobilise the many Fulbe agro-pastoralists in the municipality. Both these councilors represented the PARENA, but they also represented the opposition to Soninké hegemony. Both these councilors ventured criticism about the mayor and his staff, and in the 2013 legislative elections, the Fulbe councilor left the PARENA for the URD. It is as if people living in the villages need concrete development investments rather than partaking in the running of the municipality. The Bambara and Fulbe councilors

¹¹ 91,600 euros

¹² In the 2020 legislative elections Moustapha Diakité was finally elected and became MP of the PARENA.

could well be ethnic “alibis” without real political influence, and ethnic opposition to Soninké power in the municipality of Kiban.

Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to demonstrate how the diaspora of people from the town of Kiban is simultaneously drivers of development and dispute. With very substantial funding from *Kibanaïs* living in Bamako as well as abroad, Kiban municipality enjoys a privileged position in comparison to other rural municipalities in Mali. They have “sons” and “daughters” working elsewhere with the capacity and willingness to invest back home. These *Kibanaïs* are tied together by a sense of home and belonging to Kiban, and also through religious networks. Yet they are also concretely linked to home through polygynous marriage; it is not rare that successful traders have one wife in Bamako (or in Lusaka, Brazzaville, Paris, Brussels), and another in Kiban.

But the tremendous influence of *Kibanaïs* diaspora is also engendering dispute and tension. Different families and groupings are naturally trying to influence the ways in which the diaspora intervenes. It was particularly with the creation of the municipality – and thus as part of the Malian democratic decentralisation – that open conflict emerged. The home-area association Soumpoun refused to be used instrumentally by the mayor and insisted instead to make independent decisions about what, where and how to support in the municipality. Soumpoun wanted to focus on the town of Kiban, whereas the mayor had a responsibility of the whole municipality. The association Soninkara was created in 2000 following the dispute and the subsequent breach between Soumpoun leaders and the mayor, Mandala Diaby.

In this vein, the *Kibanaïs* diaspora seems to be more prone to investing in the town of Kiban or in the Soninké community, whereas the municipal council must develop the whole municipality. On the one hand, the position of *Kibanaïs* diaspora appears to be unproductive and uncompromising. But, on the other hand, the home-area association Soumpoun is part of civil society and should be able to make its proper decisions. As such, the associations should not be dictated by the public authorities, such as the municipal council and the mayor. Hence, the difference in focus and scope is not merely a question of institutional level, but of accountability and of control. The association Soninkara was founded to counteract this position, and despite that assertions made by the leadership of Soumpoun and Soninkara that “we work hand in hand”, the cleavage between Soumpoun and Soninkara, and between the municipality and the *Kibanaïs* diaspora, is more fundamental than just a question of misunderstanding and temporal conflict.

The municipality of Kiban may be extreme in its financial and social dependence on the diaspora, but the case does indicate interesting stakes involved in municipal politics in Mali and Africa more generally. While the policy discourse promoted in the 1990s asserted that democratic decentralisation will bring local development because “power returns home”, the study of Kiban highlights the importance of not confining politics and political involvement to the municipality, but to integrate diaspora populations in our analysis of local politics and municipal democracy. Hence, the *Kibanaïs* diaspora is significantly present, but often physically absent, political actors who, taken together, are drivers of development and dispute. They are the successful sons/husbands abroad who not only support, but also dictate how investments should be made and money should be managed.

References

- Béridogo, B. 1997. Processus de décentralisation au Mali et couches sociales marginalisées. *APAD-Bulletin* 14: 21-33.
- . 2006. Processus de décentralisation et pluralité de logiques des acteurs au Mali. In *Décentralisation et pouvoirs en Afrique: En contrepoint, modèles territoriaux français* (eds) C. Fay, Y.F. Koné and C. Quiminal. Paris: Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD).
- Bierschenk, T. and J.-P. Olivier de Sardan. 2003. Powers in the Village: Rural Benin between Democratisation and Decentralisation. *Africa* 73: 145-173.
- Brunet-Jailly, J., J. Charmes and D. Konaté. (eds) 2014. *Le Mali contemporain*. Bamako: Editions Tombouctou; Institut de recherche pour le développement.
- Cohen, R. 2008. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Crook, R.C. and J. Manor. 1998. *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deridder, M. 2014. 'Ceux qui cherchent le pouvoir sont parmi nous': Décentralisation, transformations du politique et autorités traditionnelles dans le Delta intérieur du fleuve Niger (Mali). Thèse de doctorat en Sciences politiques et sociales. Université de Louvain.
- Deridder, M. 2019. 'À Bamako, on sait au moins que Youwarou existe maintenant': Invention du 'local', élites politiques et décentralisation de l'État au Mali. In *Démocratie par le bas et politique municipale au Sahel* (eds) S. Hagberg, L. Kibora and G. Körling. Uppsala Papers in Africa Studies 4. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Djiré, M. and A.K. Dicko. 2007. *Les conventions locales face aux enjeux de la décentralisation au Mali*. Paris: Karthala.
- Fay, C., Y.F. Koné and C. Quiminal. (eds) 2006. *Décentralisation et pouvoirs en Afrique: En contrepoint, modèles territoriaux français*. Paris: Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD).
- Grégoire, E. and P. Labazée. (eds) 1993. *Grands commerçants d'Afrique de l'Ouest: Logiques et pratiques d'un groupe d'hommes d'affaires contemporains*. Paris: Karthala & ORSTOM.
- Hagberg, S. 2004. La chasse aux voleurs : une association de chasseurs et l'administration de l'Etat dans l'ouest du Burkina Faso. In *Les raisons de la ruse: une perspective anthropologique et psychanalytique* (eds) S. Latouche, P.-J. Laurent, O. Servais and M. Singleton. La Revue du MAUSS. Paris : La Découverte.
- . 2007. Traditional Chieftaincy, Party Politics, and Political Violence in Burkina Faso. In *State Recognition and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: A new dawn for traditional authorities?* (eds) L. Buur & M.H. Kyed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . (ed.) 2010. 'Inventing and Mobilising the Local'. *APAD-Bulletin* 31-32. Münster: LIT Verlag.
- Hagberg, S. and G. Körling. 2012. Socio-political Turmoil in Mali: The Public Debate following the Coup d'État on 22 March 2012. *Africa Spectrum* 2-3/2012: 111-125.
- Hagberg, S. and G. Körling. 2014. Inaccessible Fields: Doing Anthropology in the Malian Turmoil. *Anthropologie & développement* 40-41: 143-159.
- Hagberg, S., Y.F. Koné, B. Koné, A. Diallo and I. Kansaye. 2017. *Vers une sécurité par le bas : Étude des perceptions et des expériences des défis de sécurité dans deux communes maliennes*. Uppsala Papers in Africa Studies 1. Uppsala : Uppsala University.
- Hagberg, S., L.O. Kibora and G. Körling. (eds) 2019. *Démocratie par le bas et politique municipale au Sahel*. Uppsala Papers in Africa Studies 4. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Hagberg, S. and B. Koné. 2019. 'Si tu leur donnes ma chair ils vont la manger': Ethnographie comparée des carrières des femmes politiques au Burkina Faso et au Mali. In *Démocratie par le bas et politique municipale au Sahel* (eds) S. Hagberg, L. Kibora and G. Körling. Uppsala Papers in Africa Studies 4. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Hetland, Ø. 2007. The Politics of the Decentralisation Reform in Mali: Democratisation, State-Society Relations and Local Governance. PhD-Thesis. Dept. of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo.

- IIED and Uppsala University. 2004. *Decentralisation in Practice. Power, Livelihoods and Cultural Meaning in West Africa*. International Workshop Highlights, Uppsala, Sweden, 4-6 May, 2004, IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development), London and Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University, Uppsala (brochure + CD-ROM).
- INSTAT-RGPH 2009. *4^{me} Recensement Général de la population et de l'Habitat du Mali: Résultats définitifs/ Répertoire par villages*. Bamako: Institut National de la Statistique. Accessed 27 August 2013: <http://instat.gov.ml/documentation/REPertoire%20DU%20MALI%20RGPH%202009.pdf>
- Kassibo, B. 1997. La décentralisation au Mali: état des lieux. *APAD-Bulletin* 14: 1-20.
- Konaté, D. (ed.) 2013. *Le Mali entre doutes et espoirs: Réflexions sur la Nation à l'épreuve de la crise au Nord*. Bamako : Editions Tombouctou.
- Koné, S. 1997a. La décentralisation face à l'ordre ancien. *APAD-Bulletin* 14: 67-75.
- Koné, Y.F. 1997b. Les micro-communes: expression des logiques locales. *APAD-Bulletin* 14: 59-66.
- Koné, B. 2017. Parenté et politique chez les soninkés : La campagne électorale des élections législatives dans la commune de Kiban, cercle de Banamba. Mémoire de DEA en socio-anthropologie du développement. Institut Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée, Université des Sciences Juridiques et Politiques de Bamako.
- Koné, B. and S. Hagberg. 2019. En quête de la députation: Parenté et politique dans une campagne électorale au Mali. In *Démocratie par le bas et politique municipale au Sahel* (eds) S. Hagberg, L. Kibora and G. Körling. Uppsala Papers in Africa Studies 4. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Laurent, P.-J., A. Nyamba, F. Dassetto, B. Ouédraogo and P. Sebahara. (eds) 2004. *Décentralisation et citoyenneté au Burkina Faso: Le cas de Ziniaré*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Lecocq B., G. Mann, B. Whitehouse, D. Badi, L. Pelckmans, N. Belalimat, B. Hall and W. Lacher. 2013. 'One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali', *Review of African Political Economy*, 40, 137: 343–57.
- Little, K. 1965. *West African Urbanization: A Study of Voluntary Associations in Social Change*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Manchuelle, F. 2004. *Les diasporas des travailleurs soninké (1848-1960): Migrants volontaires*. Paris: Karthala.
- Mback, C.N. 2003. *Démocratisation et décentralisation: Genèse et dynamiques comparés des processus de décentralisation en Afrique subsaharienne*. Paris: Karthala.
- Mbodj-Pouye, A. and S. Le Courant. 2017. Living away from Family is not Good but Living with it is Worse: Debating Conjugality across Generations of West African Migrants in France. *Mande Studies* 19: 109-130.
- Meillassoux, C. 1968. *Urbanization of an African Community: Voluntary Associations in Bamako*. Seattle and London: The University of Washington Press.
- Sawadogo, A.R. 2001. *L'État africain face à la décentralisation*. Paris: Karthala.
- Seely, J.C. 2001. A political analysis of decentralisation: coopting the Tuareg threat in Mali. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 39: 499-524.
- Traoré, N. 2013. *Formes et modes d'expression de l'opposition sociopolitique locale dans la gestion municipale des ressources: Cas de la commune rurale de Mountougoula (Cercle de Kati)*. Mémoire de DEA en socio-anthropologie du développement, Institut Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée (ISFRA), Université des sciences Juridiques et Politiques de Bamako.
- Traoré, N. 2019. La société civile dans l'espace communal de Mountougoula. In *Démocratie par le bas et politique municipale au Sahel* (eds) S. Hagberg, L. Kibora and G. Körling. Uppsala Papers in Africa Studies 4. Uppsala: Uppsala University.