

In Search of the State

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In Search of the State

An Ethnography of Public
Service Provision in Urban Niger



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Abstract

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This study explores public health and education provision in Niamey, the capital of Niger, by merging the ethnographic study of public services with an anthropological analysis of the state and of local politics. Based on anthropological fieldwork carried out in a group of neighbourhoods in the periphery of Niamey, the study highlights the political dimensions of public service provision in a local arena where international development interventions and national plans meet local realities and where a wide range of actors and institutions, discourses, meanings, and practices are mobilized in the offering of and the regulation of access to public services. It focuses on the political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of public service provision, too often hidden behind contemporary buzzwords of development such as community participation and decentralization that dominate global debates about education and healthcare in developing countries. The study brings forth the strategies of urban residents in dealing with daily challenges in the consolidation of service provision and in education and health-seeking trajectories. It shows that access to a satisfactory treatment of illness or a successful school career is premised on the ability to navigate on the medical and education markets, which are made up of a plurality of providers and of official and unofficial costs and transactions. Further, these public services engage different actors such as community committees, traditional chiefs, local associations, the municipality and elected municipal councillors, emergent leaders, NGOs, and international development aid. The study demonstrates that despite the uncertainty of state support in health and education provision and a widespread dissatisfaction with these public services, the image of the state as service provider is reproduced on a day by day basis through local efforts at securing public services.

Keywords: anthropology, the state, public services, healthcare, education, development, Niamey, Niger

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To Anders and Lydia, my parents

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	11
1. Introduction	13
Focus and objectives.....	14
The setting: The urban margins.....	16
Health, education, and the state	18
The urban privilege.....	20
Studying the politics of public service provision	22
The everyday state	22
Public service provision	27
Governance, public authority and local politics	29
Methodology	31
Field sites	32
Research process.....	33
Outline of the thesis	36
2. A historical overview of healthcare and education in Niger.....	39
Health, education, and the colonial state in French West Africa.....	40
Colonial rule, medicine, and education in Niger	43
Legacies of colonial education and medicine	47
The expansion of health and education after independence	50
Economic recession, the debt crisis, and structural adjustment.....	57
The consolidation of reforms.....	65
Discussion.....	70
3. Filling in the blanks: The politics of visibility	73
Colonial and post-colonial Niamey.....	74
Urban planning and urbanization from below	78
Zoning.....	80
The appropriation of land in the urban periphery	82
Saga.....	83
Pays Bas	91
Tondigamay	95
Discussion.....	98

4. The chieftaincy and the municipality	103
The administration of Niamey.....	103
Decentralization in practice	106
The trajectory of an urban municipality	110
The resurgence of the traditional chieftaincy.....	115
The traditional chieftaincy in Niger	116
The evolution of the traditional chieftaincy in the capital	120
Chieftaincy in practice in the urban periphery.....	123
The chiefs and the <i>yan banga</i>	126
The creation of a market.....	128
‘...a modern population wants a modern chief’	132
Revalorization of the chieftaincy.....	135
Discussion.....	138
5. The story of a peri-urban dispensary	141
The public dispensary in Saga as a political space.....	141
The visit of a Minister.....	142
The ‘ <i>ressortissants</i> ’ and the dispensary.....	145
The MP, a youth association, and the maternity ward.....	149
Local political stakes of public service provision.....	151
The rise and fall of a health committee	157
The election of a new health committee	158
Biographies of the management committee members	159
Community management in practice	162
‘It is your dispensary’: Community participation.....	165
The health committee and the free healthcare reform	166
The chiefs and the recruitment of a new pharmacy manager.....	168
Negotiating with the state	170
The ambulance and the MP	170
Discussion.....	172
6. Therapeutic encounters: Paying for care and ‘ <i>la gratuité</i> ’	175
From free healthcare to cost recovery	175
The daily activities of the public dispensary	176
Paying for care and prescriptions	178
Infant and child health.....	182
An inhospitable environment.....	184
Paying for care and the medical encounter.....	187
Therapeutic alternatives and itineraries	189
The medical market	194
The free healthcare reform and the public dispensary.....	196
Discussion.....	199

7. Public education provision in the absence of the state.....	201
A local history of schooling	201
The creation of a new public primary school.....	205
Community participation in practice: Making ends meet	206
The chief and the school	212
The municipality and the school	215
An elusive development project	218
School dues and the state.....	222
The absence of public schools: Local mobilization and the politics of visibility	227
An unsuccessful local mobilization.....	229
The creation of a kindergarten	230
Discussion.....	233
8. Schooling as a tombola: Great expectations, and uncertain futures ..	237
Representations of schooling: Education and social promotion	238
Public schooling in the urban periphery.....	242
Ibrahim's schooling trajectory	244
Precarious schooling trajectories	245
Hopes of success and fears of failure	247
The education market and education strategies.....	252
Private schooling	252
Private tutoring and private classes.....	255
Parallel recruitment.....	258
Religious schooling.....	262
Contract teachers and the disengagement of the state	263
Discussion.....	267
9. The politics of public service provision.....	271
Public service provision in a local context	271
Relations between urban residents and public services	274
Local processes of state formation	277
References	281

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of fieldwork in Niamey in August 2006 as I was interviewing one of the neighbourhood chiefs in Saga, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Niamey, he mentioned that a new public primary school would soon open. The school was to be built on one of the rare unconstructed plots of land in an otherwise fairly densely inhabited area in Saga Fondobon, a neighbourhood in Saga. The site, which was located behind a public dispensary and maternity ward and a confessional Catholic dispensary not far from the main asphalt road that passes through Saga, tended to collect stagnating water during the rainy season and had previously been used mainly as a site for household waste. Although the creation of the school had been announced, the lists of pupils to be transferred to the new school had been completed, teachers had been recruited, and the new principal had been appointed, at the start of the school year in October the area was still empty. Two months into the term, six classrooms were built of straw, two with the contribution of the municipality and the remaining four with the financial contributions of parents whose children had been transferred to the school. Blackboards, a few school benches, and a small number of schoolbooks had been borrowed from neighbouring schools. Thus, at the beginning of December 2006, the school was ready to receive the pupils and teaching could start. As the fourth public primary school in Saga, the newly established school was given the name 'Saga 4'. On what had been an empty piece of land there were now six straw classrooms which formed a semicircle. A wooden pole on which the Nigerien flag was raised and lowered at the beginning and end of the school day stood in the middle of the semicircle, a seeming reminder of the status of the makeshift school as a public, or state, institution.

On my return to the field for a second period of fieldwork in January 2008, the school had taken on a more permanent appearance. The six straw classrooms had become thirteen as pupil numbers increased. Fine-grained sand filled the school yard, a small house of *banco* (laterite mud) accommodated the guard, and young trees had been planted at the edges of the school yard. A water tap and waste bins had been installed by a

Canadian project which had also constructed four latrines and a garbage incinerator at the far end of the school yard. Nonetheless, a couple of weeks before the end of the school year and in anticipation of the arrival of the rainy period, the classrooms were taken down. The president of the parents' association of the school dismantled the straw classrooms with the help of a couple of young recruits. The wooden supports and straw mats along with the few school benches and blackboards were transported by the guard on a donkey cart to another primary school, where they were stored in a padlocked classroom to be reused the following school year. Only the latrines, the tap, the wastebaskets, and the guard's one-room house remained, as well as the placard raised by the Canadian project with the arrow painted below the name of the primary school pointing into a seeming void.

Focus and objectives

The title of this thesis – *In Search of the State* – refers to the attempt to understand manifestations and perceptions of the state through the prism of public health and education services in neighbourhoods on the geographical and political margins of Niamey, the capital of Niger. The overall objective is to analyse the interaction of the wide range of actors and institutions, discourses and practices involved in providing and offering public services, as expressions of the politics of public service provision and related political, economic, and socio-cultural stakes. In order to do this, the thesis brings together a detailed ethnographic study of public services and their provision with an anthropological analysis of the state and of local politics. More particularly, I want to delineate an approach to public service provision that integrates the analysis of the state's daily functioning, of local political actors' actions, and of citizens' expectations.

My approach in developing this detailed ethnography of public service provision in the urban periphery includes three specific objectives:

1. the identification of political, institutional, economic, social, and cultural processes that are put in motion in a context of scarce state resources and politico-administrative decentralization as a wide range of actors and institutions are involved in service provision at the local level. This means that I focus on the actors and institutions, discourses and practices involved in producing and offering public services to citizens.
2. the exploration of the question of access to public health and education services and urban residents' perceptions of these

services. This involves looking at both personal and family level endeavours, for instance in schooling trajectories (e.g. what happens when parents cannot pay school fees, when pupils drop out of school) or in the search for therapy (e.g. what people do when they get sick, mothers bringing their children to vaccination sessions) and so on.

3. the presentation of a nuanced and grounded account of various dimensions of the state in Africa different from often dichotomous understandings of the African state. This bottom-up approach to the state is related to the assumption that the state is heterogeneous and multifaceted and is continuously constructed in daily practices and representations.

The heart of the thesis is devoted to a description and analysis of the quotidian of public service provision, including the daily running of public schools and health centres (the piecing together of a budget, community management, the search for funds, the quest for the construction of a school) as well as one-off events such as public ceremonies (a donation ceremony, the visit of a Minister) and external development interventions. These one-off events complement the description of the quotidian as they crystallize some of the questions at hand, such as the manifestation of the state, the unpredictability of development interventions, and the positioning of local actors. Finally, the quotidian of public service provision also includes the relation between urban residents and these public services: people's access to, use of, and expectations of public services; in short, the ability (or inability) of state institutions to respond to the needs and expectations of urban residents from different walks of life.

I will return to the case of the school portrayed at the beginning of this chapter for a more detailed discussion in chapter 7. For the moment, it suffices to outline two main themes that will be addressed in the course of this thesis and that are illustrated in the case of the school. First, the case exemplifies the often uncertain conditions of public service provision and the related importance of *bricolage* for the daily running of basic public services, a situation which means that the configuration of public service provision constantly varies, both across cases and over time. This configuration includes a multiplicity of actors in different constellations which illustrates the blurring of conventional dichotomies such as the local and the external, state and society, the formal and the informal, and the public and the private. In the case of the school Saga 4 during its first two years of existence in the absence of material state support, the makeshift school became the arena of intervention by the traditional chieftaincy, the mu-

nicipality, elected municipal councillors, international development aid, and not least, the parents themselves. A second area of interest in the thesis is the image of the state as mediated through public services. The lack of material state support was visibly reflected in the construction of temporary straw classrooms that were taken down with the start of the rainy season and gave the school an almost ephemeral aura. In one sense, the precarious infrastructure is revelatory of the incapacity of the state; however, as I will show, the relation between underfinanced public services and images of the state is not so straightforward. In involving themselves in service provision, local actors could be said to carry out 'state-like' activities and thus contribute to the consolidation of the state. Moreover, health and schooling form an integral part of the idea of the state or of what the state is supposed to do in Niger. The ideal image of the state as service provider persists even though the state in Niger has never really been able to guarantee its citizens an adequate coverage of and access to healthcare and formal education even in urban areas such as Niamey. The thesis thus explores the contradictions between an often absent state and people's expectations of public service delivery.

The setting: The urban margins

The neighbourhoods in focus in the thesis are situated on the periphery of Niamey, the capital of Niger. Niamey is located in the south-western part of Niger. Originally a small village of little political or economic importance when it became an administrative centre during the colonial period, following its promotion to the capital of the French colony of Niger and at independence to the capital of the Republic of Niger, Niamey is today home of approximately one million people.¹ The river Niger runs through the city and divides it in two. The city has developed on the left bank of the river, where the first town centre was located. The urban development of the right bank of the river, now home to the national university and a hospital, accelerated with the construction of the bridge *Pont Kennedy* in the 1970s.

The area in which fieldwork has been carried out is located on the eastern outskirts of Niamey on the left side of the river and is part of Municipality Four. This part of Niamey is reached by taking the boulevard officially named *Boulevard du 15 Avril* but more commonly known as the

¹ 1,145,870 in 2009 according to the INS (*Institut National de la Statistique-Niger*). Source: *Annuaire Statistique des Cinquante ans d'Indépendance du Niger 2010*. See http://www.stat-niger.org/statistique/file/Annuaire_Statistiques/Annuaire_ins_2010/50.pdf

airport road (*route de l'aéroport*), which connects the city centre to Niamey's international airport, Diiori Hamani, and which continues to the eastern entry point to the capital. It is an area that is surrounded by the airport, military barracks, and the city's only industrial zone. The boulevard is also lined with various commercial establishments. The river Niger is distinguishable in the distance beyond and below the boulevard. Most of the neighbourhoods in this area have taken shape outside of urban plans through the sale of land by customary land owners and have been gradually regularized or formalized.



Figure 1. Map of Niamey.

In this setting, three specific sites have been in focus for my fieldwork. The first field site, Saga, is situated on the bank of the river Niger. It was originally a village and the *chef lieu* (capital or administrative centre) of the canton of Saga that has transformed into a group of peripheral urban neighbourhoods with the growth of the capital. The second and third field sites, Pays Bas and Tondigamay, were formed following the sale of land by customary land owners from Saga. Both are situated on the right-hand side of the airport road when coming from the centre. However, they are barely visible from the road; with the exception of a couple of houses, the rest of the neighbourhoods unfold on the uneven terrain below. Pays Bas and Tondigamay are both informal neighbourhoods; they

were created without the accord of the local authorities and they have not been zoned or recognized by authorities. Pays Bas is well known in the capital and is widely perceived as being a poor neighbourhood, whereas Tondigamay, which is smaller and more recently created than Pays Bas, is more anonymous and is more upmarket.

These neighbourhoods in the urban periphery, one officially recognized village or group of neighbourhoods (Saga) and two informal neighbourhoods (Pays Bas and Tondigamay), provide the local context for the exploration of the social and political stakes of public service provision. With their different settlement histories and urban trajectories – Saga being an officially recognized former village, Pays Bas a more or less poor spontaneous settlement on uneven terrain, and Tondigamay a spontaneous settlement that has mimicked formalization and is developing into a residential neighbourhood – Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay provide a fruitful comparative perspective on the conditions of public service provision in neighbourhoods in the urban periphery, where the state as manifested in investments, infrastructure and urban plans is often absent. They are also home to a diversity of actors and institutions that are involved in service provision alongside the state and that in different ways attempt to overcome the marginal position of the neighbourhoods in terms of investment and political influence. In the thesis, I explore the daily functioning of schools and of the one health centre as well as the emergence of different forms of local initiatives and external interventions in the area of service provision. Further, focus is placed on how urban residents deal with health and education in their everyday lives, for instance in schooling trajectories or in the search for therapy.

Health, education, and the state

Both the health sector and the education sector are intimately tied to the nation state, not only in terms of budget allocations to the health and education sectors and the degree of state control over the provision of health and education services, but also as a symbol of the presence of the state. Tidjani Alou has analysed the role of education as one aspect of state formation (*étatisation*) in Niger, through the territorial reach of schools and the imposition of particular norms via schooling, though with different degrees of success especially when comparing rural and urban areas (Tidjani Alou, 1992). The ‘modern’ healthcare and education systems in Niger, that is, biomedicine and formal education modelled on the French system, were introduced by the colonial power and to a limited extent by

missionaries. From their origin, then, health and education services were part of the colonial structure. Yet the coverage of health and education services was very limited during the colonial period and touched only a small portion of the population, mainly in towns (Arzika 1992; Tidjani Alou 1992). The role of churches and missionaries in health and education provision was tightly controlled by the colonial state (Cooper 2006), and non-state health and education services were thus few and far between. Colonial medicine and education were added onto already existing systems of healthcare and therapy (traditional medicine) and education (the education and practical skills a child receives in his or her home environment and Islamic education). As in other contexts, these systems and practices continued to prosper.²

At independence, the colonial health and education services were transferred to the newly independent state. Both were rudimentary and limited in reach. For instance, at 3.6 per cent in 1960, enrolment rates in Niger were among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. In Niger, as in other newly independent countries, the post-independence period saw a significant effort to increase the reach of healthcare and education services. Education and health infrastructure were extended both during the first regime after independence under President Hamani Diori (1960–1974) and during the military regime of Seyni Kountché (1974–1987) with the help of uranium profits and external support. The education supply was diversified, new primary schools were created in rural areas, and the number of secondary schools multiplied. Health services at different levels were created in urban areas and villages – from hospitals to health centres and village health workers. Health and education services were increasingly present in towns and villages, although their concentration in urban areas, a legacy of the colonial period, remained. In the 1980s, with the fall of uranium profits and the rise of debt, Niger was faced with economic crisis and recession. The 1980s and 1990s were marked by structural adjustment programmes, budget cuts, and worsening living standards, especially after the devaluation of the FCFA³ in 1994. The National Conference held in 1991 after an extended period of political contestation marked the transition to multi-party democracy. However, the years that followed

² The vitality of ‘traditional’ medicine in the face of the spread of biomedicine has been extensively documented in the literature on medical pluralism and syncretism (Janzen 1978; Leslie 1992).

³ *Franc CFA*. The Franc CFA is shared by Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinée-Bissau, Mali, Senegal and Togo which make up the UEMOA (*Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine*, West African Economic and Monetary Union). The currency for the member states of the UEMOA is issued by the BCEAO (*Banque Centrale des États de l’Afrique de l’Ouest*) where FCFA stands for *franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine*.

were marked by political instability and a series of *coups d'état*. During this period it became increasingly difficult for consecutive governments to finance social sectors such as health and education services. New forms of financing and managing public services such as the introduction of user fees, an emphasis on community participation, and the encouragement of privatization and decentralization were gradually introduced in both sectors. These reforms reflect the ascendance of neoliberal ideology at the international level that promoted the retreat of the state also in social sectors.

In Niamey, the period following structural adjustment was a defining moment in the relation between the state and citizens in marking a rupture with the post-independence period of relative prosperity, especially visible in the capital, and a seemingly strong state, especially evident in such traditionally state-centred public services as healthcare and formal education. The following period has been one of constant negotiations about rights and responsibilities with regard to service provision in a context of prolonged economic crisis.

The urban privilege

Today Niger is facing major challenges when it comes to poverty reduction and development. Niger has consistently occupied the bottom places in the Human Development Index published by the UNDP (in 2008 ranking 169th of 169 countries). Health and education indicators, although they have improved over the years, are correspondingly low, painting a bleak picture.⁴ Demographic growth increases pressure on the already insufficient public health and education systems. Improving access to basic education and health services are key targets of the Nigerien government's poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). Yet both the public healthcare and the education systems are facing significant difficulties. The increase in external funds in the education sector has led to a significant increase in enrolment rates in recent years, but the education system is suffering from a number of dysfunctions. Among the factors that are negatively affecting the education sector are the low level of remuneration

⁴ According to The World Bank in 2009 life expectancy at birth was estimated at fifty-two years, the under-five mortality ratio per 1,000 live births was 167 and the infant mortality ratio was 79 per 1,000 live births, the maternal mortality ratio was 820 per 100,000 live births, and there were 1.4 nurses and midwives per population of 10,000. The literacy ration was 28.7 per cent in 2005, the gross primary school enrolment ration was 58 per cent and the gross secondary enrolment ratio was 11 per cent in 2008. In 2010, 61 per cent of the population lived on less than one US dollar a day.

See: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/niger> (last consulted 14 July 2011)

of contractual teachers, the high number of classrooms made of straw, and recurrent social unrest and demonstrations (IMF 2008: 35). The same report notes that in the health sector, while there has been an increase in health units, equipment is not distributed in an equitable manner and the availability of drugs is limited (IMF 2008: 39–40).

When it comes to public health and education services, Niamey, like urban areas in general with a high degree of coverage in public health and education services, is privileged. In the public health sector, the city boasts a high concentration of public health services at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level. Two of the three national hospitals in Niger are found in Niamey: the National Hospital of Niamey, located in the administrative neighbourhood on the plateau overlooking the river, and the National Hospital of Lamordé, situated on the right-hand side of the river. There is also a district hospital, a regional-level hospital, and a maternity hospital. In 1999 the health coverage in the region of Niamey was estimated to be 100 per cent, compared to 47.7 per cent health coverage at the national level and 33.69 per cent in the region of Maradi, with the lowest health coverage (MSP 2002: 20). Moreover, the private health sector which emerged in the late 1980s is concentrated in urban areas (ibid. 19). The education system is likewise well developed in Niamey. Since the colonial period, Niamey as the capital city has been the centre (*'pôle central'*) of education characterized by an early establishment and concentration of schools and of higher levels of education (Tidjani Alou 1992: 341). There is a high concentration of public schools and a diversity of types of schools. The private schools on offer in Niger are concentrated in urban areas, especially in Niamey.⁵ In education statistics, Niamey, with enrolment rates reaching the 100 per cent mark in primary education, stands out. The disparity between boys and girls is also considerably less marked in Niamey than elsewhere.

This concentration of health and education services makes for easier access. Health and education indicators (enrolment rates, maternal mortality, etc.) are significantly better in urban areas in general and in Niamey in particular than in rural areas. In a study of health and living conditions in the town of Maradi in eastern Niger, Raynaut (1987) refers to an 'urban privilege' when it comes to health. This urban privilege is not due to better material conditions or living standards, which Raynaut argues has a limited effect on health, but rather to a superior health coverage (access to

⁵ In 2006–2007, 124 of 212 private primary schools were situated in Niamey. In terms of numbers of pupils, 100,596 pupils were enrolled in public primary schools and 29,342 in private schools, which equals 22 per cent. This can be compared to the national level, where 4 per cent of the pupils were enrolled in private primary schools (MEN, 2007).

public health centres and pharmacies), access to education, and economic opportunities (ibid. 50–52). However, not everyone does in fact benefit from the advantages the city has to offer. Moreover, health and education services in urban areas too are touched by the dysfunction of the public education and healthcare system, and there is demographic pressure as well on public services in the capital. A growing urban population and limited means of investment have meant that the construction of new additional health and education infrastructure is lagging behind the extension of the urban agglomeration. Urban poverty and declining purchasing power further hinders urban dwellers from accessing basic services.⁶

Studying the politics of public service provision

In the thesis I bring together a detailed ethnographic study of public services with an analysis of the state. In this section I outline the theoretical framework for studying the politics of public service provision developed out of scholarly works on the state and bureaucracy, public service provision, and local politics.

The everyday state

Anthropological interest in the state has increased significantly during the past decade as testified to by a number of recent publications (Das & Poole 2004; Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Fuller & Bénéï, 2000; Geertz 2004; Gupta 1995, 2005; Hansen & Stepputat 2001b; Khron-Hansen & Nustad 2005; Masquelier 2001a; Sharma & Gupta 2006; Trouillot 2001; Yang 2005). This ‘turn’ towards the state has been accompanied by debates about how to conceptualize and approach the state. As pointed out by Gould, the ‘rising anthropological interest in empirical states has been paralleled by a growing puzzlement about how “the state” should be theorized’ (2007: 240). The anthropological study of the state is multifaceted and encompasses various approaches, yet these are united by a concern to develop theoretical and ethnographic approaches which question reifications of the state. In doing so, they follow in the footsteps of the sociologist Philip Abrams, who in his influential article ‘Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State’, criticized the tendency to ‘take the state for granted as an object of political practice and political analysis’ when in fact it is an ideological construct (1988[1977]: 59). In anthropology, Radcliffe-

⁶ In 2007, 27.1 per cent of the population in Niamey was counted as poor compared to 59.5 percent at the national level (MEF 2010).

Brown (1940) had already warned against taking the state as an object of study at face value:

In writings on political institutions there is a good deal of discussion about the nature and the origin of the State, which is usually represented as being an entity over and above the human individuals who make up a society, having as one of its attributes something called ‘sovereignty’, and sometimes spoken of as having a will (law being defined as the will of the State) or as issuing commands. The State, in this sense, does not exist in the phenomenal world; it is a fiction of philosophers. What does exist is an organization, i.e. a collection of individual human beings connected by a complex system of relations. [...] There is no such thing as the power of the State; there are only, in reality, powers of individuals – kings, prime ministers, magistrates, policemen, party bosses, and voters. (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: *ibid.* xxiii)

In emphasising that the state is ‘an illusory general interest’ or a ‘myth’ (Abrams) and ‘a fiction of philosophers’ (Radcliffe-Brown) Abrams and Radcliffe-Brown both point to the reification of the state. However they propose different solutions to prevent this reification. While Radcliffe-Brown calls for abandoning the concept of the state and instead focusing on more concrete forms of political organization, relations, and actors Abrams argues for the need to critically analyze the ‘idea of the state’ (Abrams 1988: 75). For Abrams this entails to not ‘concede, even as an abstract-formal object, the existence of the state’ (*ibid.* 79) as ‘an entity, agent, function or relation over and above the state-system and the state idea’ (*ibid.* 82). Mitchell, further developing Abrams’s point about studying the state, argues for the need to pay attention to the state-system (the real material force) and the state idea (the ideological/illusory construct) in order to understand how the state is formed:

[T]he phenomenon we name ‘the state’ arises from techniques that enable mundane material practices to take on the appearance of an abstract non-material form. Any attempt to distinguish the abstract or ideal appearance of the state from its material reality, in taking for granted this distinction, will fail to understand it. (Mitchell 1999: 77)

Drawing on Foucault Mitchell points to the production of the state as an autonomous entity through disciplinary power techniques and argues that the appearance of the state ‘as an apparatus that stands apart from the rest of the social world’ is a ‘structural effect’ (Mitchell 1999: 89). Consequently the state should be conceived and analyzed as a ‘structural effect’, that is, not as an actual structure but as the powerful effect of practices of

institutions and everyday powers of government such as armies, schools, bureaucracies, legal process and frontiers (Mitchell, 1999: 89–90).

In anthropology a number of different analytical concepts have been formulated in the attempt to capture similar processes of ‘state making’, including ‘languages of stateness’ (Hansen & Stepputat 2001a), ‘the spatialization of states’ (Ferguson & Gupta 2002), and ‘state effects’ (Trouillot 2001). Hansen and Stepputat (2001a) point to the importance of the interaction of practical and symbolic ‘languages of stateness’ in the continuous construction of the state. Practical languages of governance include, for instance, territorial sovereignty, the monopoly of violence, knowledge of the population, and national resources (ibid. 7), while symbolic languages of authority encompass law and legal discourse, signs and rituals of the state and nation, and the notion of shared history and community (ibid. 8). In outlining their argument about the spatialization of the state, Ferguson and Gupta (2002) describe how the daily bureaucratic practices and structures in a government-run childcare programme in India, such as the bureaucratic hierarchy and the supervision visits of village workers, contribute to the construction of the state as separate from society and as encompassing the local. Trouillot argues that globalization has challenged the effectiveness of the nation state and that consequently the study of the state needs to go ‘beyond governmental or national institutions’ and identify ‘state effects’ in new sites such as projects run by NGOs and international organizations (Trouillot 2001: 126, 132). The anthropological perspective on the state thus implies that the state should not be treated as a natural and static entity but as historical, contingent, and constantly constructed. Anthropological studies further emphasize local experiences and understandings of the state.

However, in their concern not to reify the state, anthropological approaches have been criticized for not paying enough ethnographic attention to the actual workings of the state. Blundo and Le Meur point out that the emphasis has generally been placed on ‘the modes of embeddedness of the idea of the state into local societies and the expectations, representations and fantasies associated with it’ while ‘the machine of state remains a kind of black box’ (Blundo & Le Meur 2009a: 18).

In its approach to the state through the daily functioning of public services, this thesis takes its starting point in research which has placed a more pronounced focus on more mundane aspects of the state, the ‘everyday state’,⁷ which includes the functioning of state bureaucracies and institutions as well as daily interactions between state officials and citizens

⁷ The expression the ‘everyday state’ is taken from the book *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, edited by Fuller and Bénéï (2000).

(Bierschenk 2010; Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006; Fuller and Bénéï 2000; Gupta 1995; Olivier de Sardan 2004).

Local and street-level bureaucracies

The study of bureaucracy (like the study of the state) is historically the domain of sociology and political sciences; however as noted by Hoag ‘calls for ethnographic exploration of the everyday workings of the state have grown louder in recent years’ (2011: 81). This at a time when more and more anthropologists are ‘studying up’ carrying out fieldwork in academic institutions, NGOs, and international organizations (ibid.). One of the most well-known anthropological studies of bureaucracy is Herzfeld’s study of the *‘social production of indifference’* (1992), which focuses on the symbolic aspects of bureaucracy. Herzfeld’s analysis echoes approaches to bureaucracy which focus on knowledge production (such as classification and legibility) and the exercise of power as inherent qualities of bureaucracies that take different forms and are exercised with varying and sometimes contradictory effects as well as varying degrees of efficiency (Heyman 2004; Mathews 2004; Nuijten 2004). These studies represent an approach to bureaucracies that focuses on the internal logics of bureaucracies and mechanisms of power. An approach to bureaucracy which is more in line with that taken in the thesis, however, is that which is inspired by Lipsky’s study of ‘street level bureaucracy’ (Blundo 2006). Lipsky refers (1980) to schools, police, welfare institutions, and courts as examples of street bureaucracies. Lipsky emphasizes that street level bureaucrats ultimately shape public policy through their daily practices and interactions with citizens.

Citizens directly experience government through them, and their actions *are* the policies provided by government in important respects (Lipsky 1980: xvi).

Further, street bureaucrats mediate the relations between citizens and the state (ibid. 4). The study of bureaucracy does thus not only imply studying up to understand bureaucratic logics but can also include studying bureaucracies at the local level including encounters between teachers and parents and health workers and patients. The emphasis on the meeting point between officials and clients (users, citizens) easily translates into an ethnographic approach to bureaucracy and the state. A similar point is made by Gupta in his influential 1995 article, in which he points to the importance of paying attention to the ‘everyday practices of local bureaucracies’ in order to understand the state (1995: 375). Gupta writes:

Surprisingly little research has been conducted in the small towns...where a large number of state officials, constituting the broad base of the bureaucratic pyramid, live and work – the village-level workers, land record keepers, elementary school teachers, agricultural extension agents, the staff of the civil hospital, and others. This is the site where the majority of people in a rural and agricultural country such as India come into contact with ‘the state’, and this is where many of their images of the state are forged. (Gupta 1995: 376)

In the African context, such an approach to the state contributes an important alternative perspective on the state. In macro-political analyses the ‘African state’ is often represented as a monolithic, homogeneous phenomenon, characterized by patrimonialism and the informalization and personalization of politics (Chabal & Daloz 1999). Even in Bayart’s analysis (1993), which focuses on cultural dimensions and life worlds, in the end the ‘African state’ appears as more or less homogeneous. Copans (2001) argues that the social sciences in particular have paid little attention to the civil servants and to the actual daily functioning of state administration and bureaucracy in Africa. Similarly, Nugent points out that in accounts of the state, the institutions of the state are virtually absent and all focus is instead placed on themes such as notions of power and networks (2010: 35). The study of ‘street level bureaucracies’ (Lipsky 1980) and the ‘everyday practices of local bureaucracies’ (Gupta 1995: 375) provides a way out of such generalizations. This point is forcefully made by Olivier de Sardan, who argues for the need to address the ‘real’ everyday functioning of the state through the concrete analysis of administrations, public services, the bureaucratic system, and relations and interactions between civil servants (*fonctionnaires*) and users (*usagers*) (2004: 139).

Following along these lines there is an emerging body of work on public services, state administrations, and civil servants in Africa which gives a more empirically grounded and nuanced picture of the state and its institutions. These studies include ethnographies of the daily functioning of particular public services such as public healthcare services (Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan 2003a) and petty everyday corruption in state administrations and public services in West Africa (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006). Other authors have addressed the social, professional and political identity of civil and public servants (Anders 2009; Hagberg 2005; Olivier de Sardan 2001; Schroven 2010).

In focusing on public services as an entry to the state, I follow this current of anthropological research which focuses on the ‘everyday workings of the state’. However this approach does not exclude an interest in im-

ages of the state as underlined by Gupta. The thesis also focuses on the construction and contestation of ideas of the state in daily practices and representations. A multiplicity of images of the state are propagated through public services, from that of the strong state communicated in donation ceremonies and inaugurations broadcast to the general public on television, or the odd visit of a Minister to a school or a health centre, to the considerably more ambivalent images that arise from the daily functioning of and daily encounters with public services in which the absence of state support is palpable. Throughout the thesis I return to the question of the production of contradictory images of the state.

Public service provision

Studies of public service provision or delivery provide another important and more specific analytical framework for the thesis, as a significant part is devoted to the study of public health and education services and more specifically to the description and analysis of the daily functioning of these services.

Public services in both developed and developing countries are increasingly provided in new constellations. On the one hand, the diversity of different forms of service provision is an outcome of development policy and reform encouraging the withdrawal of the state. Public-private partnerships, privatization, decentralization, and the promotion of community participation have been leading models in public sector reforms during the past decades. And there seems to be a widespread consensus that complete control (management, financing) of provision by the state is ‘undesirable, unfeasible and old fashioned’ (Joshi & Moore 2004: 31). On the other hand, the diversity in forms of service provision is also driven by the inability of states to provide certain services, giving rise to new constellations of service provision involving a variety of actors (Joshi & Moore 2004). Joshi and Moore, for instance, list the following forms of service provision found in developing countries: ‘self provisioning through collective action’ (locally or spontaneously organized); ‘direct social provision through private associations’ (e.g. religious congregations, philanthropy); market driven (commercial) provision; ‘direct social provision through state agencies’; and ‘indirect state provision’ (e.g. subcontracting) (2004: 33–34).

The notion of co-production has been used to analyse various forms of ‘co-operation’, between different actors and institutions, in public service provision (Joshi & Moore 2004; Mitlin 2008; Ostrom 1996). Co-production emerged in the 1980s in U.S. cities when interest was directed

to citizen–state interaction and cooperation between state agencies and citizens in the delivery of public services such as policing, health, and education, as a route to improving those services through citizen engagement (Mitlin 2008: 344–346). It was introduced in the development field by Elinor Ostrom (Joshi & Moore 2004: 39). Ostrom defines co-production in the following manner:

By coproduction I mean the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not ‘in’ the same organization... Coproduction implies that citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them. (Ostrom 1996: 1073)

In Ostrom’s definition, focus is placed on the relation between government agencies/agents and citizens. Successful co-production is dependent on the involvement of citizens and can go either way, as exemplified by the successful co-production of sanitation and sewerage in Brazil and its failure in the education sector in Nigeria (Ostrom 1996). Joshi and Moore argue that co-production is useful in the analysis of service delivery in contexts where ‘state authority is weak, and public agencies struggle hard to fulfil the kinds of roles that we take for granted in OECD countries’ (2004: 32–33) and where ‘unorthodox organizational arrangements’ of public service provision represent ‘(smart) adaptations to prevailing local circumstances’ (ibid. 32). They use the term ‘institutionalized co-production’ to refer to such arrangements, defining it as the ‘regular long term relationships between state agencies and organized groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions’ (ibid. 40). They add that in these relationships there is room for informality and negotiation and that the boundaries between public and private are frequently blurred. This is exemplified with examples of policing in India and transport and tax collection in Ghana, both of which were unorthodox and also successful arrangements.

The literature on co-production or its variants like ‘institutionalized coproduction’ is useful as it provides an initial framework for studying public service provision which involves a diversity of actors in varying configurations. These different configurations originate from below in response to particular problems and do not derive only from reforms. However, the main focus in many studies of co-production is on the degree of success of service delivery, and there is little analysis of its political implications. As Mitlin points out, ‘co-production has been primarily considered as a route to improve the delivery of services’ (2008: 340). On the basis of studies of co-production initiated from below (by NGOs and

resident associations) in the areas of sanitation and housing in cities in Pakistan and Namibia, Mitlin argues that co-production is a way for social movements and grassroots organizations not only to increase access to services and goods but also to gain political influence and greater control over resources.

In the thesis I follow Mitlin's example in analysing the wider implications of different forms of co-production in the health and education sector for the relations between urban residents (citizens), the local authorities, and the state. For instance, in the case of local initiatives when people are attempting to solve daily problems of service provision, we need to understand what this reveals about the relations between citizens and the state. Moreover, public health and education services are arenas in which rights and responsibilities of the state and of citizens are negotiated on a daily basis, especially in a context where parts of the expenses of providing services are increasingly transferred onto the shoulders of citizens.

Governance, public authority and local politics

In a context in which a multiplicity of actors and institutions are involved in service provision, there are also other stakes at play. In the introduction to a collection of essays on public service delivery, Blundo and Le Meur point to the institutional and political processes that emanate from service provision (2009a: 2). Several essays deal with contexts in which public goods and services, such as health services, education services, waste management, and drinking water, are increasingly produced in 'new spaces' with the intervention of development actors, community organizations and private operators, traditional chiefs, and so forth in public service provision and what consequences this has for 'everyday governance' (ibid. 14). For instance, Fresia (2009), describing the process through which education and health services were provided in Mauritanian refugee camps in Senegal, shows how this was mediated by 'intellectuals' acting as intermediaries between the refugees, the Senegalese state, and UNHCR. For a while, this resulted in a successful provision of services and it also strengthened the position of intermediaries, who were given a 'de facto public authority' as representatives of/spokespersons for the rest of the refugees. The concept of governance that is used to analyse the consequences of the multiplication of actors and institutions participating in public service provision is far removed from the notion of 'good governance' used by the World Bank and others. Instead these authors make what they call a non-normative and empirical use of governance 'as a set of regulations emerging out of repeated interaction between actors and

institutions’ (Blundo & Le Meur 2009: 6). Eckert, Dafinger and Behrends define governance as ‘the administration of access to and provision of rights, services and goods’ in which a variety of organizations (such as donor organizations) participate (2003: 19). Similarly, Andrae points to the need to pay attention to the ‘power games around access to services’ and to the relation between ‘rule setting agents’ (the state, private owners, organizations of users) and users in a context of liberalization and decentralization of water provision in Nigeria (2009: 41). Working in Niger, Olivier de Sardan (2010) has analysed the ‘delivery configuration’⁸ of public goods (water and sanitation, safe motherhood, public security and markets) in a context in which they are delivered by a multiplicity of actors. Further, he identifies eight modes of governance at work in local arenas in Niger: chiefly; state; communal; project-based; associational; sponsorship-based; religious; and merchant (Olivier de Sardan 2009), that contribute to service delivery and to the shaping of particular delivery configurations.

In the thesis I will not analyse public service provision in terms of governance but will focus on the relation between public service provision and local politics, which also includes questions of legitimacy and public authority. This calls for a framework for studying local politics.

Local political arenas in Africa are often characterized by a plurality of actors and institutions. This plurality has been analysed in terms of the re-configuration of ‘local powers’ in the context of democratization and decentralization (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2003; Olivier de Sardan & Tidjani Alou 2009a). Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan argue that given that there are several sources of authority (apart from the state), the ‘study of local powers and politics must not be restricted to “formal” institutions but ought to take account of all “public spaces” and positions of eminence’ (1997: 441). Taking a similar approach, casting a wide net when approaching local political arenas, other authors have pointed to different institutional forms that emerge from this plurality or ‘institutional uncertainty’ (Le Meur 1999). For instance, Cleaver (2002) analyses the emergence of ‘institutional *bricolage*’ in local resource management (blending of the formal and the informal and the traditional and the modern), and Meagher (2007) points to the ambivalent role of informal institutions (e.g. home-town associations, vigilante groups, women’s organizations) in state building and service delivery. The notion of ‘twilight institutions’

⁸ The delivery configuration refers to ‘the totality of actors and institution, and of equipment and resources, which contribute to the delivery of its various components, under some form of other of co-production: collaboration (direct or indirect, episodic or permanent), substitution, competition, complementarity’ (Olivier de Sardan 2010: 6).

evocatively brings out the plurality of local political landscapes where relations of power and legitimacy are constantly being refigured and negotiated in day-to-day social encounters (Lund 2006b: 676).

Keeping this plurality in mind is an important starting point in the attempt to understand local political processes that surround public service provision. The peri-urban neighbourhoods in question are also home to a plurality of actors and institutions, including traditional chiefs, municipal officials, elected municipal councillors, community committees, and religious leaders. Their varied forms of participation in public service provision involve local political stakes. As Lund points out in an analysis of public authority just like ‘associations and organizations which do not appear at first sight to be political may also exercise public authority and wield public authority..., ostensibly non-political situations may reveal themselves to be active sites of political negotiation and mediation over the implementation of public goals...’ (2006a: 686). This is also true for public services. As pointed out by Olivier de Sardan, the form that the delivery of a particular public service takes has implications not only for the effective delivery of public goods but also for both power and legitimacy (Olivier de Sardan 2010: 6). Public authority and legitimacy are negotiated in the involvement of a myriad of actors in public service provision: from the traditional chief who engages himself in the daily running of the newly created school in his neighbourhood, at the same time reinforcing his legitimacy and popularity; to the members of a home-town association who augment their position of political prominence and seek to reposition their home village through the creation of a public dispensary; to the municipal advisors who seek both political legitimacy and small economic gains in constructing straw classrooms. However, public services are not only political spaces, public service provision is also economically and socio-culturally constituted. Public service provision involves not only political stakes but also economic stakes (money, official and unofficial profits), socio-cultural meanings (sense of belonging), and individual and collective aspirations. These aspects of public services will be explored in the coming chapters.

Methodology

The thesis is based on approximately seventeen months of anthropological fieldwork undertaken in Niamey. In 2004 I carried out three months of fieldwork in Niamey for my master’s thesis in anthropology, which focused on medical pluralism and therapy seeking (Körling 2005). I re-

turned to Niamey in 2006 for fieldwork within the framework of my Ph.D.-project⁹. This time for a period of fourteen months divided into two periods: a first period between July 2006 and February 2007, and a second period between January 2008 and August 2008. The division of the fieldwork into two periods enabled me to follow cases such as the creation of the primary school described in the opening pages for a longer period of time. It also enabled me to take stock of the material, and of what research directions to follow during the next period of fieldwork. Subsequently, while the first part of the fieldwork focused on education and healthcare and consisted mostly of interviews in households and with dispensary staff and teachers, the second period of fieldwork was more open ended in terms of informants and themes in order to get a better understanding of the local political arena.

Field sites

The choice of field sites was decided by the unfolding of circumstances as well as by the marginal position of the neighbourhoods in the urban agglomeration, not only geographically but also politically. Saga, situated on the periphery of the urban agglomeration, the city centre a short taxi ride away, is in a sense located at the meeting point between the urban and the rural. People in Saga could potentially access all of what the capital had to offer (job opportunities, trade, public services), but at the same time Saga was also turned towards the 'rural' (importance of agriculture, valorization of local history, home of a cantonal chieftaincy). Moreover, many people I met in Saga expressed a sentiment of marginalization in their relation to Niamey. It was during the fieldwork in 2004 for my master's thesis that I first came across Pays Bas. My time in the field coincided with a nationwide polio vaccination campaign. Volunteers who had been recruited by the health centre in Saga were going house to house in different parts of the neighbourhood to administer the vaccine, marking every house/compound that they had visited. The health centre was also responsible for carrying out the vaccination in neighbouring settlements. One day when a team was getting ready to set off for a vaccination 'round' to a neighbourhood called Pays Bas, I asked if I could join them and they agreed. We all got into the back of a pickup truck that had been borrowed for the occasion. The truck dropped us off and the team, one of the team members carrying the vaccines in a cooling bag, began their work. As I

⁹ The Ph.D.-project, entitled 'Seeking health and education: Experiences and imaginations of the state in urban Niger', was generously funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

accompanied them around Pays Bas I was struck by the size of the neighbourhood, by the defiant architecture on the ravined terrain, and by the lack of public amenities. For the Ph.D. project, Pays Bas provided a complementary perspective on the questions at hand, especially given that it is an informal neighbourhood with a very different community structure, the majority of residents having moved into the neighbourhood from Niamey and other regions fairly recently, in the mid 1990s. Moreover, in contrast to Saga there was little infrastructure and no public services in Pays Bas, complicating access to health and education services. I thus chose to work in both Saga and Pays Bas during the fieldwork for my Ph.D. thesis. During one of the interviews in Pays Bas someone mentioned that a school had just opened not far from Pays Bas (to the east) in a place called Tondigamay. Curious to find out more about the school, my assistant, Amadou Boubacar and I, set out to find the school. It turned out that it was a kindergarten that had been created on a local initiative. The kindergarten was located in an area which the residents referred to as Tondigamay. We returned to Tondigamay on several occasions. Created more recently than Pays Bas, and having attracted a more affluent group of residents, Tondigamay provided yet another perspective on the urban periphery and on the stakes of service provision.

Research process

In the formulation of my research questions and methodology I have been inspired by the work of researchers at the research institute LASDEL (*Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherches sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local*) in Niamey, in particular a series of studies on public healthcare services published in working papers and in an edited volume (Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan 2003a). These studies are grounded in the systematic ethnographic study of the daily functioning of public services and on the relation between state agents and users. In this approach, public services and state administrations are thus taken as an ethnographic object in their own right as part of a wider 'socio-anthropology of public spaces' that also includes the empirical study of development policies and actors and related themes (Olivier de Sardan 2005).

The fieldwork was focused on three main aspects the provision side of public services (the daily functioning of schools and health centres), the perspective of urban residents on public schooling and healthcare, and the local administrative and political context.

The part of the fieldwork devoted to public service provision centred on the running of two schools, one primary and one secondary school,

and one public health centre in Saga, and on the spaces of encounter and interaction with users and local residents. A large part of the fieldwork in the schools was devoted to following their daily operations, in a sense the nit and grit of service provision. Special attention was paid to the place of ‘community participation’ in the daily management of schools, a participation which in the public education system is channelled through the parents’ association (*association des parents d’élèves*, APE) and the school committee (*comité de gestion d’établissements scolaires*, COGES). Interviews were carried out with different members of the community committees, and I also participated in meetings. Spending time in the schools chatting with teachers and pupils during breaks and with the administrative staff gave me insights into the daily routines in the schools. I also carried out individual interviews with the principal and teachers in the two schools.

I proceeded in a similar manner in the public dispensary and maternity ward in Saga. I was already familiar with the dispensary from the previous fieldwork for my master’s thesis. In the years that had passed since then, the public dispensary had been provided with a maternity ward, and a new head of the dispensary was in place; apart from this, little seemed to have changed. In the dispensary I followed the daily activities – consultations, preventive activities, the sale of medicine in the pharmacy – as well as the daily management, focusing especially on the cost recovery system in which the health management committee (*comité de gestion de la santé*, COGES) played an important role. I also observed sensitization sessions, meetings of the community health committee, and public ceremonies that were held at the dispensary. In addition, I interviewed the staff – nurses, midwives, ward orderlies – and the members of the health committee. As in the schools, spending time in the dispensary gave me insights into the daily routines there and the encounters between staff and users.

An important part of the fieldwork was also devoted to interviewing neighbourhood residents in Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay. These interviews centred on the topics of education and health including schooling trajectories and therapeutic itineraries. Some interviews were fairly brief, others were in greater depth, and yet others developed into case studies and return visits to follow up on particular questions and to talk with other family members. This provided a necessary complement to the ethnography of the public services which crystallized the social stakes of service provision. People’s accounts provided insights into different factors which facilitated or hindered access to public health and education services and what their main concerns were when it came to health and education. During conversations, representations and expectations of public schooling and public healthcare emerged, as well as expectations on the state in

relation to the health and the education sectors. In Zarma the state is generally referred to as *gommati* which translates into government but which also refers to the more abstract notion of the state.

During the course of fieldwork I also mapped out local leaders and political actors/institutions present in the neighbourhoods, such as the traditional chieftaincy, municipal councillors, emergent leaders, and development actors. The purpose was to get a sense of the local political context of public service provision in the neighbourhoods, as most of these actors intervened in one way or another in either public education or healthcare provision or both. Understanding the local context also included tracing the 'settlement history' of each neighbourhood and its relation to the local administration. Finally, I also interviewed state officials at the primary and secondary school inspectorates in the city centre and at the head offices of the regional education services, at the office of the health district, and at different government ministries (the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Interior). I also interviewed officials in the local administration at the municipality and the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN) as well as NGO representatives.

The fieldwork techniques used were interviews (structured, semi-structured), informal conversations, group discussions, and observation. In the beginning, the interviews were carried out using an interview guide but without imposing a certain order of topics, each interview following its own course. Many but not all of the interviews were recorded; those that were recorded were transcribed. In all, I conducted around 270 interviews, a number of which included a second or third interview with the same person. Towards the very end of the fieldwork, a small survey (50 persons) with a questionnaire asking about health, education, and local governance (taxes, traditional chieftaincy, and municipality) was carried out by two sociology students to complement the rest of the material.

During most of the time in the field I was accompanied by an assistant who translated when the interviews were carried out in the local language (these interviews were done mainly in Zarma but also in Hausa). During the first period of fieldwork I worked with Fatimata Moussa, a student in sociology, and during the second period with Amadou Boubacar, also a sociology student with experience of doing fieldwork in different research projects. Working with an assistant was necessary, as I did not master a local language and many of the people interviewed did not speak French. Moreover, in everyday discussions in the neighbourhoods people often spoke Zarma (or Hausa). Working with an interpreter has methodological consequences in that some of the nuances of the local language such as local expressions are lost in the translation. It also creates a disruption in

the flow of the conversation. I tried to mitigate possible misunderstandings or mistranslations by involving both Fatimata and Amadou in the research process, going over each interview and discussing possible ways forward. There were also clear advantages in working with an assistant, such as having someone with whom to discuss impressions and think about how to structure the fieldwork. I thus want to underline the important role played by Fati and Amadou in the research process.

Outline of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, in chapter 2 I present a historical overview of public health and education in Niger from the colonial period up until today. I link the changes in the public health and education sectors to the political and economic history of Niger and to developments at the international level and I focus especially on the changing role of the state.

Chapter 3 introduces Niamey and the field sites Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay. In this chapter I present the history of Niamey in order to better situate the three neighbourhoods in focus and understand their relation to the rest of the city and to the local authorities. I then present the neighbourhoods focusing on settlement histories. I also analyse the claims to the city and to visibility that are being made in these neighbourhoods, in particular to land but also to public services.

In chapter 4 I focus on the administration of Niamey in general, and on the municipality and the traditional chieftaincy in particular. These are two important institutions which are present at the local level and which often intervene in neighbourhood affairs. Following chapter 3, this chapter provides a further contextualization of the local political arenas in which the rest of the analysis in the thesis unfolds. I return to the municipality and the traditional chieftaincy, among other actors and institutions, in the chapters that more specifically concern health and education provision.

The following four chapters focus on public health and education provision in the urban periphery. In chapter 5 I investigate public healthcare provision. More specifically, I focus on the public dispensary in Saga, starting with its establishment and development and continuing with the daily management of the health centre, focusing especially on community management. In this chapter, the public dispensary is approached as a window through which local political processes and representations can

be observed, ranging from the public rituals of the state to the intervention of local actors and institutions in the health centre.

In chapter 6 I turn to urban residents' experiences of public healthcare. This chapter provides another perspective on the public healthcare centre in Saga, namely, that of urban residents or prospective patients. It points to factors that limit the access of urban residents both to healthcare services and to the plurality of health providers that compete with public health establishments. The chapter also addresses the shift from the cost recovery system to a system of partial free healthcare 'for vulnerable groups' in 2007.

Chapter 7 addresses the local political stakes of public education provision. It thus picks up on the themes already addressed in chapter 5. I focus especially on the daily management of the newly established public primary school Saga 4, created with little in the way of infrastructure, and on the involvement of various sets of actors in the school as well as on the role of the community committees. In the final part of the chapter I highlight the local mobilization for the establishment of schools in Pays Bas and Tondigamay.

Chapter 8 focuses on primary and secondary education. In the chapter I show that people's relation to school, like their relation to public health services, is characterized by marked instability or precariousness. However, in this urban context this precariousness is less a question of access to education than of chances of succeeding in school in the context of an overcrowded and underfunded public education system, a situation which has led to the creation of an education market parallel to the public education system and to the diversification of education strategies.

In the conclusion I tie together the different analytical threads developed in the previous chapters in a discussion of three interrelated themes: the political dimensions of public service provision, relations between urban residents and public services and local processes of state formation.

2. A historical overview of healthcare and education in Niger

In this chapter I trace the development of the healthcare and education sectors in Niger from the colonial period up until today. I relate this development to the political and economic history of Niger. The purpose is to place current policy and practice in a historical context, thereby allowing us to understand present-day public health and education provision from a diachronic perspective. A special emphasis is placed on the role of the state in service provision during different periods and on the links between international and national levels. The first part of the chapter addresses colonial health and education policy. This is followed by an examination of the period following independence in the 1960s and 1970s, which was marked by the extension of health and education infrastructure. The chapter then goes on to address the economic crisis of the 1980s and the years of political liberalization and political instability in the 1990s. Finally, I analyse current health and education policy in the period since the end of the 1990s up to the present, marked by the start of decentralization reforms and a new generation of external funding programmes.

The historical review in this chapter starts with portraying colonial education and medicine. This is not to say that healthcare and education provision originated during the colonial period. ‘Traditional’ medicine and traditional medical practitioners catered to the population, and there were various forms of education already in place.¹⁰ Such forms of education and medicine have continued to prosper, making the state far from the only provider.¹¹ I will return to this in coming chapters. In this chap-

¹⁰ ‘Traditional’ medicine is here used to refer to those medical or healing practices which people themselves designate as traditional such as the work of healers or medicinal plants. ‘Traditional’ does not mean something static, a remnant of the past, because tradition is dynamic and changing. This is also true of traditional medicine in Niger.

¹¹ There are a number of ethnographic accounts of the dynamics of illness representations and of traditional medicine in Niger (Bisilliat 1982; Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan 1999; Luxcreau 1989; Rasmussen 2000). There are also several accounts of the religious and political dimensions of spirit-possession cults in Niger, which occupy an important place in the therapeutic field (for the *holey* Songhay-Zarma religion and possession cult see Rouch 1989;

ter, however, I focus on the development of state-run education and healthcare in Niger.

Health, education, and the colonial state in French West Africa

Health and education were central to the colonial enterprise. The provision of health services, both curative care and preventive actions, was closely tied to the economic interest of the colonial power in satisfying the need for a healthy workforce, while education provided the colonial power with much-needed administrative personnel. The provision of health and education services was also ideologically motivated. They were both at the heart of the civilizing mission (Conklin 1997) and a means of legitimating colonial rule (Young 1994: 169).

The first education policy in French West Africa was spelled out in 1903.¹² The education system put into place was extremely selective. For instance, a differentiation was made between rural, regional, and urban schools. Rural schools were destined to train local interpreters, regional schools to train local agents for the intermediate colonial administration, and urban schools to educate Europeans and ‘assimilated Africans’ following a metropolitan (that is, French) curriculum (Madeira 2005: 44). Education in the colonies was more or less limited to primary education, with the exception of two secondary schools in Senegal (in Dakar and Saint Louis) reserved for Europeans and residents of the ‘Four Communes’ (*Quatre Communes*),¹³ and specialized schools for training administrators, teachers, doctors, and veterinarians, which recruited pupils from all of French West Africa (Moumouni 1998: 47). This organization is reflective of the utilitarianism which marked colonial education policy in French West Africa. The education system was first and foremost ‘designed to meet pragmatic administration demands’ mainly that of the provision of local interpreters and administrative personnel (Madeira 2005: 44). Education was also meant to familiarize people with the French ‘language,

Stoller 1989; Vidal 1990; for *bori* see Masquelier 2001b). For an analysis of Islamic education in Niger see Meunier (1997) and for an analysis of traditional education see Hama (1968).

¹² French West Africa or A.O.F (*Afrique Occidentale Française*) was composed of Mauritania, Senegal, French Sudan (now Mali), French Guinea (now Guinea), Côte d’Ivoire, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Dahomey (now Benin), and Niger. The Governor General was seated in Dakar.

¹³ The Four Communes were Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, and Rufisque. Residents of these communes were granted citizenship rights.

institutions and methods' and to encourage economic and social progress (Moumouni 1998: 55). And 'to 'inculcate a deep and abiding respect for French civilization and its accomplishments in West Africa' (Gifford & Weiskel 1971: 697). For a long time, priority was given to the schooling of the sons of chiefs and nobles destined to rule alongside the administration (Moumouni 1998: 55).

The first health policy in French West Africa, directed towards the African population in the colonies, was formulated in 1902 (Bado 1997: 1249; Conklin 1997: 50). Previous to this, medical care had been limited to the military. The earliest doctors in most of colonial Africa were military doctors, like the medical corps of the colonial troops (*corps des médecins des troupes coloniales*) created in 1880 (Bado 1997: 1249). These doctors, as noted by Feierman, were mainly in charge of the health of soldiers and government employees, followed by other Europeans and Africans employed by the government, as well as prisoners (1985: 121). Indigenous Medical Assistance (*assistance médicale indigène*, AMI), 'the charter for African health care for the entire West African federation' (Conklin 1997: 49), was created in 1905. Free medical care and 'hygiene advice' were to be provided to African populations, and medical posts (*groupes d'assistance indigène*) were to be constructed in each colony (ibid. 49–50). Only small subsidies were set aside for the health sector, however, and medical assistance to Africans was a secondary concern (ibid. 68). Instead, health measures to eradicate yellow fever and malaria – the diseases most threatening to Europeans – as well as the amelioration of health conditions in cities were prioritized (ibid. 69–70).¹⁴ In the face of the 'chronic deficits' of health stations that, given their limited budgets, experienced a shortage of doctors and provisions, trials were made in the 1920s with mobile health services (Berche 1998: 66; Conklin 1997: 70). Mobile services were focused on preventive medicine for the 'masses' in the countryside as opposed to individualized and curative care, which was limited to the administrative centres (Bado 1997: 1249). The tasks of the mobile health teams included mapping diseases, immunizing, demonstrating prophylactic methods, collecting demographic statistics, and providing health education.

Analysts of colonial medicine have pointed to the link between the shifting focus on preventive mass medicine and the worry about depopulation due to illness, to which attention was drawn during the recruitment campaigns in the First World War (Becker & Collignon 1998: 412). In a

¹⁴ The concern with the amelioration of health conditions in cities led to segregationist policies in cities and the separation of European quarters and native quarters (Conklin 1997: 70).

study of health services in the Ivory Coast during the colonial period Lasker (1977) has pointed to the close link between the economic and political aims of the colonial power and health policy, from the creation of medical services for Europeans and the gradual expansion of medical care to the African population with the successive goals of survival, conquest, and pacification (winning over the African population) to the expansion of preventive medicine for the masses and curative services in areas with an important workforce.

The end of the Second World War marked a turning point in French colonial rule, which also affected colonial health and education policy. In 1946 the colonies, now called *Outre Mer* or 'Overseas Territories' and integrated into the French Union, were for the first time represented in the National Assembly (Fuglestad 1983: 147). Their representatives managed to push through important reforms. Forced labour was abolished and all residents of the French Union were granted the status of citizen with the end of the *indigénat* (the distinction between citizens and subjects) (Fuglestad 1983: 147). Furthermore, the Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development (*Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Économique and Social*, FIDES) was created for use by metropolitan funds for overseas investments in the area of development. Such investments had previously been made only with local funds (Chafer 2002: 63).

At the same time, increasing demands were made by African intellectuals for the expansion of effective social, economic, and political rights. Demands which were fuelled by the emergent political parties like the African Democratic Rally (*Rassemblement Démocratique Africain*, RDA), trade unions, and nationalist movements, as well as by anti-imperialist sentiments at the international level – at the level, for instance, of the newly created United Nations (ibid. 91). The demands of the emerging nationalist movement in French West Africa included the reform of the education system through the introduction of primary and secondary education on the metropolitan (French) model leading to the same diplomas as in the metropol as well as the extension of opportunities for higher education (Chafer 2002: 94–95). The education system in A.O.F was restructured in 1948. The indigenous primary education diploma (*certificat d'études primaires indigènes*) was replaced with the certificate of primary elementary education (*certificat d'études primaires élémentaires*, CEPE) and post-primary education was expanded and improved (Gifford & Weiskel 1971: 694; Moumouni 1998: 75). In 1949 a law made education, more specifically the first two years of primary school, compulsory for all children and not only for the children of civil servants and chiefs

(Meunier 2000: 68). According to Bierschenk, it was not until this time that education was 'defined as a public good provided by the state' (2007: 268, my translation). The number of pupils also increased significantly.

Increasing pressure was also placed on colonial powers to ameliorate living conditions, including the nutritional status of the population in the colonies (Becker & Collignon 1998: 414). More funds were allocated to the health sector and they were supplemented by aid from new sources such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF (Lasker 1977: 286). Health interventions were increasingly couched in terms of development (Packard 1997).

Colonial rule, medicine, and education in Niger

Colonial medicine and education in Niger to a certain extent mirrored that in the rest of French West Africa. However, the development in both sectors lagged behind that of other colonies. As noted by Mahaman Tidjani Alou, Niger occupied a marginal place on the colonial chessboard (*échiquier colonial français*) (1992: 28). Niger was first and foremost of political and strategic interest (Idrissa 2001: 18). The French saw little of value and few resources in Niger and hence investments were limited (Charlick 1991: 37). The only valued economic activities were the promotion of groundnuts as a cash crop and livestock production for sale to coastal colonies (ibid. 39). Hardly any investments were made in the road network, no railway was constructed, and little money was spent on social services. Even after the Second World War when investments in the colonies increased, they remained minimal in Niger. For instance, FIDES funds to Niger equalled half of the investments in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and one-fifth of the investments in Senegal (ibid.). This lack of investment is reflected in the limited health and education structure that was established in Niger during the colonial period.

The initial period of French military conquest which had started in the 1890s came to an end in 1908 (Fuglestad 1983: 80). The Military Territory of Niger attached to the 'central government' of A.O.F. in Dakar was established in 1912 (ibid.). The early colonial period saw the establishment of the first schools and health posts. The first schools in Niger were created in 1898 in tandem with the colonial conquest of new territories and were first and foremost 'political instruments' rather than educational institutions (Tidjani Alou 1992: 52–53). During this early colonial period schools carried out a rudimentary teaching, were run by untrained teachers and were poorly equipped (Salifou 1977: 1069, 1079). Meunier notes

that while the military had a hard time keeping the handful of schools running, Qu'ranic schools prospered (2000: 44). Primacy was given to the recruitment of the sons of ruling families in order to bring the traditional elite into the colonial administration (Meunier 2000: 43). However, instead of sending their own children to the 'white man's school', the traditional elite sent the children of slaves or low status families (Meunier 2000: 38; Salifou, 1977: 1041–1042).

The first health services accompanied colonial conquest as well. The first health posts were created along the routes used by the military (Niamey–Zinder–Agadez) (Arzika 1992: 30). Their primary role was to ensure the health of the troops, but the offer of care was gradually extended to the surrounding population, especially the workforce (ibid.).

Following the creation of the Military Territory of Niger in 1911, the need to create an autonomous administration necessitated the establishment of a more organised school or education structure (Tidjani Alou 1992: 58–59). The education system was divided into elementary primary education (*enseignement primaire élémentaire*) and professional training (ibid. 60). Two regional schools, which welcomed the best pupils from the village schools, were created in Zinder and Niamey and later in Maradi and in Birni N'Konni (ibid. 106–107). However, urban schools (following a metropolitan curriculum) were not created in Niger. Moreover, in contrast to other colonies such as Senegal, only elementary primary education was made available in Niger (ibid. 73–74). The school system was thus not capable of preparing candidates for the regional schools in French West Africa (ibid. 74). Salifou refers to this early period of colonial education as a period of improvisation and *bricolage* (1977: 1040). In 1922, when Niger became a colony, 695 pupils were enrolled in eighteen schools (Tidjani Alou 1992: 63–64). The health posts created during the same period were rudimentary and poorly equipped, and there was a general lack of personnel and financial resources (Arzika 1992: 39). In 1921 there were only six health structures (*formations sanitaires*) in the entire military territory (ibid. 39). The health structures in place were used mainly by Europeans and civil servants.

In 1922, the Territory of Niger was transformed into an autonomous colony administered by a lieutenant governor (Salifou 1989: 187). Education and health services broadened concurrently to include advanced primary education, mobile medicine, and more advanced medical structures.

The extension of education to train administrative personnel was necessary in light of the financial and administrative autonomy of the new colony. In 1924 the education system in Niger (like that in French West Africa) was reorganized, establishing an advanced level of primary educa-

tion (*enseignement primaire supérieur*) (Tidjani Alou 1992: 104–105). However, it was not until 1930 that a school offering advanced primary education (*école primaire supérieure*) was created in Niamey. The aims of this school were to add to the training of chiefs' sons, to prepare candidates for the schools at the federal level, and to train local administrative staff (ibid. 109). The pupils either pursued professional training for administration in accordance with the needs of the colony or continued their education in schools outside Niger (ibid. 110). During this period it was also made obligatory for the sons and, to a lesser extent, the daughters of chiefs and nobles to enrol in school (Meunier 2000: 49). In 1945 there were only twenty-five schools in Niger, a small number in comparison to other colonies (Tidjani Alou 1992: 41).

In the area of healthcare, increasing resources were allocated to the recruitment of medical staff and the acquisition of equipment and medicines (Arzika 1992: 58). Civilian European doctors and an increasing number of African doctors were recruited as well as midwives, 'visiting nurses' (*les infirmières-visiteuses*), and 'sanitation guards' (*gardes sanitaires*, in charge of hygiene) (Arzika 1992: 82–83; Salifou 1989: 243). However, medical personnel were insufficient in number, given the size of the territory and the dispersal of the population (Arzika 1992: 84). Moreover, healthcare services were mainly allocated to towns. The hospital in Niamey was founded in 1922 by Governor Jules Brevié, but it was not operational until 1931. The hospital beds were reserved for Europeans and African civil servants (ibid. 119–120). Hygiene services had been established in 1922, but they were active only in European neighbourhoods in urban centres, in Zinder and Niamey, where they attempted to ensure the purification of drinking water and the collection of garbage (ibid. 271). In 1933 hygiene services were reorganized to include mobile hygiene and prevention units for vaccination, hygiene, the fight against epidemics, and demographic studies. However, they soon encountered the problem of lack of personnel and transport and were mobilized only in the case of epidemics (ibid. 275–277). In Niger 'mass medicine' and the *assistance médicale indigène* (AMI) was operative only from 1936 (ibid. 11, 60). This necessitated the construction of rural health posts (*centres de consultation ruraux*), but such investments were interrupted by the war (ibid. 60). This period also saw the beginnings of an emphasis on maternal and child health (Salifou 1989: 225). However, in 1930 there were only five midwives in Niger, who were supplemented by officially recognized birth attendants (*matrones*), and only a small number of births took place in maternity wards (Salifou 1989: 225).

In sum, although both the healthcare and education systems expanded during this period, they were both still limited in reach. Despite a rhetoric of mass medicine and the promotion of maternal and child health and hygiene, health structures (hospitals and curative care) frequented mainly by Europeans and African civil servants concentrated most of the funds (Arzika 1992: 73, 77). Moreover, these health services were located mainly in towns. In the education sector, although a school system –with its attendant ‘annual recruitment, staff, buildings, organisation and school schedule’ – had started to take shape, it was very rudimentary and covered far from the whole territory (Tidjani Alou 1992: 139). Most schools were located in the southern part of the country in towns and large villages with an administrative role (Meunier 2000: 64). Consequently, Tidjani Alou points out, it is questionable to what extent school fulfilled its political role of contact with the local population (1992: 141). Moreover, parents continued to be reluctant to enrol their children in school (*ibid.*). Coercive measures were used to ensure enrolment (Meunier 2000: 55). However, given the few schools in place, these measures affected mainly people who lived close to a school, and of these, primarily chiefs and the nobility (*ibid.*).

As in other colonies in French West Africa, 1945 marked a change in the political structure as well as in health and education provision. The colonial education system in Niger was reorganized to follow the metropolitan model. The expansion of the school system accelerated, and secondary education was introduced (Meunier 2000: 65). In 1946 a lower secondary school (*collège moderne et classique*) was opened in Niamey; its four-year curriculum led to a school leaving certificate equivalent to that in the metropol (Tidjani Alou 1992: 180).¹⁵ Institutions for training teachers (*instituteurs adjoints*) were also created (Tidjani Alou 1992: 181). Compulsory education was extended in 1949 to all children, not only children of chiefs, nobility, civil servants, and military, in Niger as in all of A.O.F. (Meunier 2000: 68).

During the same period, the resources allocated to the health sector increased with the help of FIDES funds (Arzika 1992: 69). A significant part of these funds were allocated to the construction and maintenance of infrastructure, such as the construction of a hospital in Zinder and the maintenance and equipping of the hospital in Niamey (*ibid.* 71). In 1952 an ‘African’ hospital, open for the general population and not only to Europeans and administrative personnel, was created in Niamey (Arzika 1992: 71). Health centres were also created in different parts of the coun-

¹⁵ In 1959 classes at the lower secondary school level *collège* were opened in Agadez, Niamey, Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder (Tidjani Alou 1992: 180-181).

try at a greater pace than before (Arzika 1992: 130). However, colonial healthcare in Niger continued to be faced by a number of obstacles such as the large distances (the dispersal of villages), the population's mistrust, and the lack of medical personnel (Salifou 1989: 223). Yet, it was fairly successful in the fight against endemics such as smallpox and trypanosomiasis (Arzika 1992: 298).

Between 1945 and 1960 the number of schools in Niger increased from 25 to 274 (Tidjani Alou 1992: 195). Tidjani Alou refers to this expansion as the ruralization of school in the sense that schools were present in rural areas to a greater extent than before. However, in spite of this growth in the number of schools, Niger, alongside Mauretania, registered the lowest enrolment rates in French West Africa (ibid. 197). The colonial education system was still limited in terms of the possibilities for advancement on the academic ladder. In order to pass the baccalaureate and continue in higher education, pupils had to go to Dakar, Abidjan, or France (ibid. 182). It was not until 1960 that the first upper secondary school (*lycée*) was created in Niger, in Niamey (ibid. 243). Due to the weak and slow development of the education system, a great number of non-Nigerien professionals and administrators were recruited during the colonial period (ibid. 198).

One important impact of the education system was the creation of a new social category, the *évolués* or educated elite, who, through their mastery of the French language and codes of government, were to form a new dominant class (Tidjani Alou 1992: 202). The members of the political class that emerged during the end of the colonial period belonged to this educated elite. Many of the founding members of the first political party in Niger, the Nigerian Progressive Party (*Parti Progressiste Nigérien*, PPN), affiliated with the RDA and created in 1946, had studied at Dakar Teachers' College (*École Normale William Ponty*) (Ibrahim 1994: 22). Many but far from all were also of slave or commoner descent. If, during the first part of the colonial period, the nobility chose to send slaves to school, this changed with the realisation that a career in the civil service offered many privileges and new opportunities (Olivier de Sardan 1984: 208).

Legacies of colonial education and medicine

Colonial medicine and education have marked the post-independence period in different ways. The post-independence regimes inherited education and healthcare systems marked by inequalities in regional or geographic distribution, for instance between rural and urban areas. Health

services were concentrated in urban areas and catered mainly to the elite (Lasker 1977: 287–290). Schools were also more numerous in urban areas. Despite improvements during the last years of colonial rule, a very small number of children were in school, leaving sub-Saharan Africa far behind other regions in terms of enrolment rates (Bierschenk 2007: 265).

Moreover, post-independence policies were influenced by the colonial model of education and healthcare provision. Berche points out that colonial medicine imposed particular notions (that of an ignorant population), practices (coercive public health measures exemplified by the ‘sanitation police’ and the imposition of punitive fees), and structures (limited health coverage and a system of free and externally financed healthcare) (1998: 67–68). In addition, traditional medicine was devalued and suppressed especially when healers were too powerful and influential (Feierman 1985: 118). Post-independence education in former French colonies tended to follow the French system in form and to some extent also in content.

The close relation between health, education, and the state was one particularity of the French colonial system which was to have consequences on post-independence policies. One of the most defining features of French colonial education was the tight state control over education and the limited role of missionaries (Bierschenk 2007; Gifford & Weiskel 1971). French colonial education, in contrast to British colonial education, was entirely secular and state led.¹⁶ Bierschenk points to the ‘radical’ and uncompromising definition of education as a public state-controlled good as a particularity of francophone colonies which continued after independence (2007: 262).

The limited role of missionaries and other groups in education in French West Africa had consequences for the development of the education sector. The number of schools in French colonies increased much more slowly than in British colonies where missionaries and other private and voluntary actors participated in education provision (Clignet & Foster 1964: 194–195). This led to a difference in enrolment rates between former French and English colonies, enrolment rates being greater in anglophone than in francophone Africa in the colonial period, a tendency which continued during the post-colonial period (Bierschenk 2007: 267).

¹⁶ Following anticlerical developments in metropolitan France (related to the Dreyfus affair), a resolution was passed in 1903 calling for the secularization of all church-directed schools in (French) West Africa (Gifford & Weiskel 1971: 674). Hence, the colonial education system in French West Africa developed largely without the involvement of the church (missionaries). In contrast, in British colonies the government encouraged the activities of missionaries and other groups (Clignet & Foster 1964: 195).

Asiwaju (1975), in a study of the variable impacts of French and British colonial education policies in different parts of Western Yorubaland, in Nigeria and Dahomey (now Benin), argues that although both powers sought to limit access to education, the freer British policy led to a wider expansion of schools and a larger group of educated elite in comparison to French-ruled areas, as the French had a more restrictive education policy when it came to the establishment of schools.

In the domain of healthcare too, missionary activities were more important in British colonies than in French colonies (Lasker 1977: 284). MacLean has pointed to the reproduction of colonial patterns in both health and education provision in terms of the role of the state and other actors in Ghana (a former British colony) and the Ivory Coast (a former French colony) during the post-independence period:

[W]hile public financing of the health and education sectors was dominant in both countries, the supplementary role of private service provision continued to be relatively more important in Ghana than in Côte d'Ivoire. Churches continued to play a larger role in providing both primary and secondary school education and health care facilities in Ghana. (MacLean 2002: 76)

In Niger the colonial administration closely controlled the creation of schools and health centres and restricted the playing field of missionaries in both the education and health sectors. The first private school was created by the Catholic mission at the end of the 1940s (Tidjani Alou 1992: 179). Private schools in Niger, as in the rest of French West Africa, were required to follow the programme of public schools. For instance, a Protestant primary school created in Maradi, in which teaching was conducted in Hausa and which had opened in 1932 without authorization, was forced to close (Meunier 2000: 70). Before independence, in 1959, only 3.7 per cent of all pupils were enrolled in schools run by missionaries (*ibid.*).

In a historical ethnography of an evangelical mission (the Sudan Interior Mission, SIM) in Niger, Cooper describes the difficulties faced in attempting to set up schools in Niger, as the mission was unwilling to compromise and follow state regulations such as a secular curriculum and the requirement to teach in French, insisting on instruction in vernacular languages (2006: 260). This difficult collaboration was also evident in the area of health. Still, at independence SIM had been able to establish a leprosarium and the best hospital in Niger, in Galmi, as well as dispensaries across the country, 'becoming for a time the backbone of the medical infrastructure in Niger', filling the 'tremendous vacuum' left by the French

colonial administration's neglect during the colonial period (Cooper 2006: 295).

The expansion of health and education after independence

Niger gained its independence on 3 August 1960. Hamani Diori of the PPN became the first President of the newly independent nation and was the head of a one-party state from 1960 to 1974. The post-independence period was relatively stable, with the exception of the failed insurgency attempt of the Sawaba¹⁷. In terms of economic development, the groundnut economy expanded and new industries, including an agro-alimentary industry (in rice, millet, and groundnut oil), were created (Gervais 1992: 228–229; Idrissa 2008: 166). State monopolies were established for the commercialization of agricultural products and the import and distribution of basic foodstuffs (Gervais 1992: 229). Uranium was discovered in 1966, and the start of production in 1971 led to a rapid growth in export revenues (Maignan 2000: 39–40). This allowed for investments in infrastructure in rural areas and for a decrease in tax pressure (*ibid.*).

The promotion of different forms of participation and rural mobilization, such as a rural extension scheme, was an important part of the search for control and influence on the ground, at the village level, in all parts of the country (Salifou 2002: 185). Colin (1990) describes the period between 1962 and 1970 as a period of 'participationist zeal' (*ferveur participationniste*) aimed at unifying the nation. However, 'mass participation' in the agricultural sector, such as the rural extension (or animation) scheme meant to increase the productivity of farmers through agricultural modernization and the introduction of cash crops, Charlick argues, was not especially successful (1991: 58–59). Local power holders – the local elite and bureaucrats – saw the extension scheme and the networks of extension workers as a threat to their authority and sabotaged it (*ibid.*).

With regard to health and education, important investments were made in both sectors after independence. In Niger, as in other newly independent nations, both education and healthcare were seen as central to modernization and to the development of the newly independent nation

¹⁷ The political party Sawaba led by Djibo Bakary had pushed for independence in 1958 and had subsequently been outlawed. After independence its militants carried out a failed insurgency attempt against Diori's regime as well as a failed assassination attempt on the President (Charlick 1991: 56).

states. Feierman argues that the post-independence expansion of health services was related to a concern with improving the lives of citizens:

The greatest expansion of health services in most African countries came after independence...when new African governments needed to show that self-rule would improve the lives of citizens. (Feierman 1985: 124)

The centrality of education to development was at the heart of the 1961 Addis Ababa conference on education organized by UNESCO which brought together national governments and international development actors. At the end of the conference it was declared that educational development was a long-term economic investment and that investment should be made in secondary and post-secondary education in light of Africa's economic development needs. It was also stated that all states should aim to achieve universal primary education within twenty years. States should also work for adult education and vocational training. Niger was a signatory of the declaration, though the goal of attaining universal education was set for thirty years' time rather than twenty, considered a more realistic aim given the low enrolment rates (Tidjani Alou 1992: 212). At independence in 1960 the enrolment rate in Niger was only 3.6 per cent, one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (Meunier 2000: 108). Thus, the expansion of the school system was a pressing necessity for the newly independent regime along with the training of teachers for those schools and officials for the administration of the then newly independent nation state (*ibid.* 109). The development of education and the need to increase enrolment rates was one of the five principal objectives of the triennial plan (1961–1963) (Tidjani Alou 1992: 212).

During the first years of independence, the development of the education system in Niger was, as it had been during the colonial period, concentrated in urban areas (Meunier 2000: 112). However, in a three-year plan which stretched from 1965 to 1968, priority was given to the creation of schools in rural areas, which simultaneously halted the creation of schools in urban areas and led to overcrowding (*ibid.* 112–113). Between 1960 and 1968 enrolment rates increased from 3.6 per cent in 1960 to 10.6 per cent in 1968 and to 11 per cent in 1973 (*ibid.* 132). Secondary education was expanded and lower secondary schools were gradually created in important towns all over the country in the 1970s (Tidjani Alou 1992: 236).¹⁸ Other developments in the education sector during this

¹⁸ In 1969 there were two upper secondary schools (*lycées*), both in Niamey (one of these an all-girls school), and seventeen lower secondary schools (Meunier 2000: 115). It was not

period included the expansion of technical and professional training, the authorization of Franco-Arabic education and its integration into the Ministry of Education, and the regulation of the private school sector in 1970 (Meunier 2000: 116). In 1973 the University of Niamey was created.

The budget allocated to the health sector more than doubled after independence (Motcho 1994: 89). Educational institutions were established to train medical personnel, like the National Nursing School (*École Nationale des Infirmiers et des Infirmières*) in Niamey in 1962 and the Faculty of Medicine in 1972 (ibid. 98). If in the beginning the government set out to extend the health infrastructure, it soon opted for a focus on primary healthcare (Motcho 1991: 243), aiming to extend the reach of curative and preventive care to the population in remote areas as well (Fournier & Djermaakoye 1975: 128). The 1960s saw investment in prevention such as the creation in 1962 of a *Service des grandes endémies* (Séré de Rivières 1965: 279) present in all former French colonies, as well as the Nigerien Organization of Mobile Medicine and Health Education (*Organisme médical mobile nigérien et d'éducation sanitaire*, OMNES) in charge of the systematic surveillance of villages, preventive medicine (vaccination), the testing (*dépistage*) and treatment of endemics, curative care, and health education (Belloncle & Fournier 1975: 54–55). Disease control and prevention was thus a central aspect of health policy (and investment). In privileging technical solutions and in equating health with the eradication of disease, such policies reflected continuity with colonial health policies, which were also dominant at the international level (Packard 1997).

The most emblematic aspect of Nigerien health policy during the post-independence period was the system of village health workers. The village health workers were trained by the health and rural extension services and were responsible for basic treatment and hygiene in their village. The system of village health workers was incorporated into the national health policy, the main lines of which were formulated in Ten-Year Prospects 1965–1974 (*Perspectives décennales 1965–1974*), which emphasized the need for a ‘medicine for the masses’ and prevention (Belloncle & Fournier 1975: 54). Village health workers were recruited as volunteers from the population of the village, and they were trained to give simple treatments (administer medicines, clean wounds) and to facilitate hygiene measures and health education. They were also provided with a pharmaceutical box. In contrast to public health centres, the patients paid for the medicine,

until 1973 that a third uppers secondary school was created in Zinder (Tidjani Alou 1992: 242).

which allowed replenishment of the contents of the pharmaceutical box. The village health workers were accompanied by traditional birth attendants recruited locally, and together they made up the village health team. The village health team was supervised by staff at the nearest health centre and by agents of the rural extension services (Fournier & Djermakoye 1975: 132–133). The introduction of participation in the healthcare sector in Niger thus articulated with the more general politics of rural ‘animation’ promoted by President Diiori (Charlick 1991: 57). In 1974 there were 780 village health workers in 362 villages and 467 *matrones* in 179 villages in Niger (Fournier & Djermakoye 1975: 131–132).

The system of village health workers was seen as a successful part of national health policy (Belloncle & Fournier 1975: 61–62). Niger’s experience with village health workers became a model for other countries in the region (for instance, for Mali, see Berche 1998). In fact, the village healthcare project in Maradi figured as an illustrative example in a WHO report on primary healthcare that was very influential in the primary healthcare debate (Fournier & Djermakoye in Newell 1975). Niger was thus more than a decade ahead of the 1978 declaration of Alma Ata and the primary healthcare revolution. However, the system of village health workers also encountered problems. Volunteers frequently abandoned their role as health workers, given that they were unpaid. Village health workers were criticized for being incapable of establishing a diagnosis and treatment and for offering second-class medicine – *médecine au rabais* (Motcho 1994: 97). The programme was also criticized for merely being a minimal extension of health services in the face of insufficient health coverage and a lack of health workers (Berche 1998: 73).

In the 1970s the stability of Diiori’s regime was weakened by years of irregular rainfall and a severe drought in 1973 combined with a decline in rural incomes and persistent (and brutal) efforts to collect tax (Charlick 1991: 60). In addition, the regime was increasingly associated with corruption and nepotism. Faced with student protests, strikes, and accusations of corruption, the regime responded with repression and arrests (Idrissa 2008: 166; Salifou 2002: 198–199). In April 1974 Diiori’s regime was overthrown in a military coup. The coup was justified with reference to the economic and social difficulties and the institution of a regime of injustice, corruption, and oligarchy at the top of the state (Idrissa 2008: 126). The Supreme Military Council (*Conseil militaire suprême*, CMS) that took power was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché. The new regime pledged to restore social justice and to end hunger (Charlick 1991: 62).

The first years of the military regime were graced with improving climatic conditions (regular rainfall) and the intensification of uranium exploitation (Idrissa 2008: 174). The 1973 oil crisis had led to a dramatic increase in uranium revenues, which increased from 2 billion FCFA in 1971 to 11 billion FCFA in 1975 and to 102 billion FCFA in 1982 (ibid.). The uranium boom sustained a period of relative economic prosperity allowing for investments such as the building of infrastructure, including roads, airports, village water supplies and administrative buildings (Maignan 2000: 46). As noted by Idrissa:

The financial manna of uranium and external aid allowed the regime to integrate popular participation in public affairs by favouring distributive politics. It laid the foundations of an ambitious programme of rural development (roads, wells, rural dispensaries, hydro-agricultural schemes, productive projects, water provision), the modernization of cities (social housing and electrification), and the training of civil servants, principally in the domains of health, agriculture, and teaching. (Idrissa 2008: 176, my translation)

Gervais notes that the exploitation of uranium was accompanied by the rise of the modern economic sector and the increasing role or intervention of the state in the economy, in part through investments in the mining industry (1992: 231). However, few (and inefficient) investments were made in the agriculture sector, which was still very vulnerable to climatic variations, and the investments that were made, such as hydro-agricultural schemes, only touched a minority of producers (ibid. 233).

Like Diori's regime, Kountché's military regime set out to mobilize the population. The cornerstones of this mobilization were the *samariya* and the Development Society. The *samariya* was modelled on a traditional form of Hausa youth association (Charlick 1991: 65). Established in cities and villages, the *samariya* was mobilized for different forms of community work (Idrissa 2008: 170–171). The Development Society (*Société de Développement*), which was launched in 1979, was made up of a network of local development councils at different administrative levels. The members of these councils included representatives of the government, the *samariya*, pupils and students, traders, co-operatives, Islamic associations, women's associations, and trade unions, among others (ibid. 171). The local development councils were to be engaged in community work, the promotion of cultural and sport activities, and vigilance (ibid. 172). Robinson underlines that the establishment of localized, participatory structures were a means of legitimating the military regime (1992: 145). In

contrast to previous participation/mobilization schemes, it sought to mobilize local elites to try to bring them into the fold (Charlick 1991: 82).

The uranium boom had also set the stage for increasing investments in health and education. In the education sector, important investments were made in school infrastructure and in training teaching staff (Daouda et al. 2001: 171). Enrolment rates continued to increase, from 11 per cent in 1973 to 17.3 per cent in 1978 and to 21.3 per cent in 1981 (Meunier 2000: 143).

The end of the 1970s saw the breakthrough of the primary healthcare movement at the international level with the 1978 conference at Alma Ata. The Declaration of Alma Ata is an important landmark in international health, as it marked the ascendance of primary healthcare (PHC) as the preferred approach to public health at the international level. The tendency to invest mainly in tertiary health services – hospitals and medical and nursing schools, all concentrated in urban areas – had been identified as the reason for further exacerbation of already-existing inequalities between urban and rural areas and as an important obstacle to improved health in developing countries (Hall & Taylor 2003: 17; Van Lerberghe & de Brouwere 2000: 181). The change in approach to public or international healthcare was also linked to the realization of the limits of efforts at improving health through large-scale technical solutions such as malaria eradication, which had failed (Packard 1997: 111). At the same time, there was a general rethinking or critique of development and a growing preference for small-scale projects. Prior to the Alma Ata conference, primary or basic healthcare had been increasingly promoted by WHO and UNICEF, a number of reports highlighting successful primary healthcare experiences in different countries, of which the village healthcare programme in Niger was one (Cueto 2004: 1866).¹⁹ Primary healthcare was defined as including, among other aspects, the treatment of common diseases and injuries, the provision of essential drugs, maternal and child health, family planning, health education, food security and nutrition, safe water supply and basic sanitation, vaccination, and prevention and control of endemic diseases (Hall & Taylor 2003: 18). Emphasis was placed on the participation of the community operation and control of primary healthcare, including the use of village health workers recruited locally in

¹⁹ The WHO–UNICEF 1975 report, *Alternative Approaches to Meeting Basic Health Needs in Developing Countries*, criticized the transfer of Western medical systems to the developing world and examined successful primary healthcare experiences in Bangladesh, China, Cuba, India, Nigeria, and Niger, etc. (Cueto 2004: 1866). The report was supplemented by the book *Health by the People* published by WHO in 1975, which included accounts of primary healthcare projects in China, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Niger, Tanzania, and Venezuela.

the absence of other more qualified health personnel (*ibid.*). The goal set at Alma Ata was to attain ‘health for all by the year 2000’.

When Niger signed the declaration of Alma Ata in 1978, it thus reinforced the focus on primary healthcare and the system of village health workers. Further, a ‘National Programme for Health Self-Management’, *Programme National d’Auto-encadrement sanitaire*, which prioritized rural areas was implemented (MSP 2002: 6).

As the education system expanded, the need to reform the education system and curriculum was also raised. This had parallels in other countries where calls were made for the reform and decolonization of the education system inherited from the colonial period (Bianchini 2004: 151). Significant reforms of the education system were carried out in some countries; in Benin, for instance, the education cycles were reorganized and practical or productive work and the teaching of national African languages were introduced (*ibid.* 156). Attempts to rethink education in Africa were made by UNESCO as well. In the 1970s initiatives to ‘adapt education to African realities’, for instance through making it more attuned to rural realities, were taken by UNESCO and other institutions (*ibid.* 152). Other inventions included teaching with the help of ‘school television’ and radio programmes (*radiodiffusion*) meant to even out regional inequalities (*ibid.* 153). School television (*la télévision scolaire du Niger*, T.S.N) was experimented with in Niger between 1964 and 1979 in order to increase enrolment rates more rapidly (Egley 1986: 341).

In Niger a series of national seminars on education were organized to bring together different actors in the field of education. During these seminars the French model of education, inherited from the former colonial power, was criticized (Meunier 2000: 134–137). Reforms such as the use of national languages in teaching were proposed but were not implemented. Reasons for this non-implementation, according to Meunier, were a limited budget and the misgivings of government representatives and of France, which still played an important role in Niger’s national affairs (*ibid.* 137). In the end there was little reform of the education system, which was still focused on ‘traditional’ education following the French model (*ibid.* 154). However, the first experimental school in which teaching was conducted in Hausa was opened in Zinder in 1973–74 (*ibid.* 138–139).

In sum, in Niger the period following independence was marked by investments in the health and education sectors and the expansion of health and education services and infrastructure. As described above, ambitious goals for the expansion of access to education and healthcare were set at the international level and were shared by newly independent states,

the Declaration of Alma Ata of 1978 announcing the goal of attaining health for all by the year 2000 and the Addis Ababa conference of 1961 stating that universal primary education should be reached within twenty years (by 1990). Significantly, in the post-independence configuration in Niger, as in other countries, the state was seen as the main provider of health and education services for its citizens and the ideal of free health-care and free education was strong. Nugent argues that after independence (in newly independent African countries) ‘the promise of improved education, health and infrastructure’ was, alongside state-led economic development, part of the ‘productive contracts’ between states and citizens (2010: 57):

In the early years, the push for ‘development’ enabled regimes to claim legitimacy on the basis of the benefits that they would bring to ordinary citizens. This was typically married to the formal declaration of a one-party state, which was promoted on the basis that unity was a prerequisite for development... In the first decade and a half there was an impressive expansion of health and education facilities across national space. (Nugent 2010: 55)

In Niger this contract was sealed by the uranium boom and the relative prosperity that followed. Moreover, the assumption that the state should lead development was shared by international development actors and was part of the dominant development paradigm of a strong state that would guarantee economic growth. At the same time, parallels can also be drawn between the call of primary healthcare supporters for alternative solutions to healthcare provision such as village health workers and traditional medicine/healers, and attempts to adapt education to ‘African realities’. However, none of these initiatives really challenged the ideal role of the state as service provider. This was to change with the financial crisis of the 1980s and the questioning of the state’s suitability and capability to lead development.

Economic recession, the debt crisis, and structural adjustment

The military regime was faced with more difficult times when uranium prices started falling in 1979 following a decline in demand for uranium linked to the anti-nuclear movement and an abundance of petroleum on the world market (Idrissa 2008: 175). At the same time, continued bor-

rowing led to a rapid increase in debt (Maignan 2000: 46). With the fall of uranium revenues and the rise of debt, Niger was drawn into the economic recession and world debt crisis of the 1980s. At the global level, the economic crisis was attributed to interventionist and inefficient governments. To deal with the crisis, structural adjustment programmes were designed and implemented under the lead of the World Bank and IMF. The aim of these programmes was to promote budget reforms that would remove imbalances through cuts in government expenditures and the reduction of state intervention in the economy, meaning an increasingly liberalized and market-oriented economy and politics. Accepting structural adjustment became a condition for receiving financial support. Structural adjustment is generally seen as indicating the victory of a neo-liberal paradigm in development theory and practice, part of a neoliberal turn at the global level, a turn which altered the role of the state in public service provision, calling for its retreat.

In Niger the financial crisis became apparent in 1982, when debt servicing reached an unprecedented level (Idrissa 2008: 174). The first adjustment policies were subsequently adopted in 1982 with the support of the World Bank and the IMF, with the goal of 'cleaning up the economy' (Mathonnat 1993: 19), in part through 'balancing public finance, reforming the public and semi-public sectors, freeing market forces and promoting the private sector' (Gervais 1995: 31). More specific measures included the need to improve tax collection, control spending, and restructure the investment budget (*ibid.*). Gervais notes that the government was initially reluctant to implement (unpopular) measures directed towards the urban elite such as a wage freeze and a limit on recruitment to the civil service (*ibid.* 33). Hence, the government continued to recruit young graduates into the civil service (*ibid.*). While the wage bill increased, the budget for expenditures on equipment shrank, which resulted in a 'savage squeeze on spending' that 'particularly affected the social sector' including health and education (*ibid.*).

Expenditures on health and education stagnated between 1982 and 1989 (Azam et al. 1993: 148). Investment in both the health and education sectors slowed down and fewer classrooms and healthcare facilities were constructed (Chambas 1993: 141, 143). As it became clear that the government could not finance social services such as health and education, possibilities of different forms of cost recovery were discussed (*ibid.* 125). Hospital fees were re-emphasized and the system of prescriptions was extended (*ibid.* 126). Through the system of village health workers the state had already been relieved of certain expenses, but the system was far from effective due to a lack of motivation and training of the voluntary

health workers (Chambas 1993: 128). In schools, reluctant parents were asked to contribute to the costs of school materials; in the end, financial difficulties introduced a *de facto* system of cost recovery as there was a shortage of school materials (ibid. 126). During this period the steady increase in enrolment rates slowed down (Meunier 2000: 141, 155). In 1986 enrolment rates had even fallen, from 21.3 per cent in 1981 to 20.8 per cent in 1986 (ibid. 143).

The state had become increasingly dependent on external credit; if in 1974 internal resources made up 94 per cent of the state budget, in 1988 this had been reduced to 55 per cent (Idrissa 2008: 175). The military regime ran up against a number of difficulties in addition to the financial crisis, including growing poverty and a famine in 1984 (ibid.). The regime was further destabilized by student protests and became increasingly repressive (Maignan 2000: 48). Kountché died a natural death in 1987 and was succeeded by Colonel Ali Saïbou. Ali Saïbou loosened the grip of the regime by reducing police controls and granting amnesty to political prisoners (Idrissa 2008: 177), but he soon came under internal and external pressure to transform military rule to a more civilian regime. Saïbou created the political party the National Movement for the Society of Development (*Mouvement national pour la société de développement*, MNSD) in 1989 and in the same year a single-party constitution was approved by referendum (ibid.). The MNSD became the state party.

Saïbou's regime inherited a difficult socio-economic situation (Idrissa 2008: 178). The economic situation continued to deteriorate and the social effects of the measures taken to balance the economy – such as the reduction in the size of the public sector; a hiring freeze for the civil service; the privatization of parastatals (government-owned enterprises); and education reforms including the relocation of resources away from higher education, cuts in scholarships, and an end to the policy of guaranteed government jobs in predefined sectors – were met by protests (Robinson 1994: 600) by civil servants, teachers, students, and workers in the mining regions who refused to bear the costs of adjustment (Gervais 1995: 37). Trade unions and students were especially vocal (Idrissa 2008: 178). Social unrest and opposition movements grew, and calls were made for the organization of a national conference and the adoption of a multi-party system (Robinson 1994: 600).

In the end, a National Conference for democratic transition was held in 1991. This was one in a series of national conferences in Francophone Africa that ushered in democratic transition. In Niger, the trigger had been the brutality of the regime in response to a student demonstration on 9 February 1990 during which three students were killed by govern-

ment forces, and the retaliation of security forces against civilians in Tchintabaraden following an attack on an administrative post (Robinson 1994: 597). A transitional government led by Cheiffou Amadou was elected during the conference (ibid. 606). The transitional government, with the support of conference participants, rejected new structural adjustment programmes (Idrissa 2008: 179). As a result, budget aid was more or less suspended, a measure that had dramatic effects on public finances, making it increasingly difficult for the government to pay the salary of civil servants (Gervais 1995: 38). At one point the total sum in the national treasury was only 58 million FCFA (ibid.).

Education was one point of contention in this struggle against structural adjustment. During the 1980s the World Bank had become increasingly influential in education policy in Niger through a series of education projects. The first World Bank project in the education sector, *Projet Éducation I*, was initiated in 1981 and lasted until 1987 (Meunier 2000: 153). Its aims were to improve the planning of education development and training, to prepare coming education projects, and to train civil servants in the fields of education, agriculture, and livestock (ibid. 153). According to Meunier, it was the least extensive and demanding of the World Bank education projects carried out in Niger during the 1980s and 1990s (ibid.). The following project, *Projet Éducation II*, which started in 1988 (and ended in 1993) was inscribed in the structural adjustment programme. Its aim was to expand primary education through a more efficient and rational use of resources (ibid. 166). Meunier argues that this project ‘corresponds to putting the World Bank and the IMF in command of education policy in Niger’ (ibid. 171, my translation). The reforms included making more efficient use of teachers through the introduction of multiple grades in one classroom in rural areas and ‘double shifts’ (*double vacation*) – one class in the morning and the other in the afternoon – in urban areas; reducing construction costs through the use of low-cost techniques (using local materials) and through refurbishment and community maintenance; preparing schoolbooks and teacher manuals at low cost; and capacity building at the Ministry, such as management of teaching staff and resources (Cart & Verez 1994: 246; Meunier 2000: 166–167). Other measures included limiting teacher training to one year; recruiting teachers after a competitive examination (*concours*) open to secondary school leavers with a *baccalauréate*; blocking teacher benefits; reducing scholarships for higher education; making parents pay for school supplies; expanding private education; and increasing the contribution by local municipalities to the construction of primary schools (Cart & Verez 1994: 246–247; Meunier 2000: 169).

During the National Conference, the implementation of the third education project was contested (Meunier 2000: 167). It was demanded that a convention on education involving all partners be organized (ibid. 182). In 1992 an education convention or round table (*États généraux de l'Éducation*) was indeed organized. During this convention alternative education policies were formulated in an Education Charter that marked a return to suggestions made at the national seminars after independence, such as the use of national languages in teaching; an extension of general, technical, and professional teaching/training; and the re-establishment of boarding schools and scholarships which had been withdrawn (ibid.). The third education project was suspended for the time being but was re-launched in 1993 for a period of six years (ibid. 188). At this point, the financing of the education sector was dependent on external financial support since 'Niger's coffers were empty' (ibid. 189).

Following the National Conference, the country's first multi-party constitution was adopted and general elections were held in February 1993. The elections were won by an opposition coalition versus the MNSD, the AFC (*Alliance de Forces du Changement*), made up of the CDS (*Convention Démocratique et Sociale*), the PNDS (*Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme*), and the ANDP (*Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*). The CDS, PNDS, and ANDP divided the posts of President (CDS), Prime Minister (PNDS), and President of the National Assembly (ANDP) between them (Ibrahim & Niandou Souley 1998: 155). A multi-party democracy was finally in place, but the financial crisis reached new levels (Idrissa 2008: 181). The government had little choice but to enter into negotiations with the IMF for the signature of a new structural adjustment programme (Gervais 1995: 39). Social unrest was fuelled by the 50 per cent devaluation of the FCFA²⁰ in January 1994 and by unpaid salaries and student scholarships (Ibrahim & Niandou Souley 1998: 155). The devaluation of the FCFA was a condition on the part of the IMF and the World Bank to resume the suspended payments in the franc area which had been suspended (Gervais 1995: 39). Once again there were strikes by trade unions and students (Idrissa 2008: 181), the trade unions protesting the loss of purchasing power and demanding wage increases (Gervais 1995: 39).

Following internal conflict, the alliance in power fell apart and new elections were called in December 1994. These elections were won by the MNSD, now in coalition with the PNDS in a cohabitation government

²⁰ Before the devaluation 1 FCFA equalled 0,02 French francs and after 0,01 French francs. Since 1999 the FCFA has a fixed exchange rate against the Euro (1 euro= 655, 957 FCFA).

with the AFC coalition. Strikes in different sectors continued – protesting the declining standard of living – and salary arrears kept growing (Charlick 2007: 72). Once again, internal conflicts blocked the operations of the government and on 27 January 1996, Colonel Baré Mainassara carried out a *coup d'état*. The coup, which was presented as a ‘necessary evil’, was welcomed in light of the political and economic crisis (Idrissa 2008: 184). Idrissa points out that the worsening economic situation and political turmoil resulted in the equation of democracy with disorder:

In the urban milieu, and primarily in the group of civil servants confronted with the loss of jobs and revenues, the recklessness and greed of the political class caused a sense of regret for Kountché’s military regime. As a general rule, many preferred the illegitimate regime (*régime d’exception*) to this ‘democracy mess’ that starves and impoverishes. (Idrissa 2008: 186, my translation)

Mainassara sought to reassure the international community that a civilian government would be established (Idrissa 2008: 188). A new multi-party constitution was adopted, but the results of the ensuing elections in 1996, which were won by Mainassara, who, contrary to his promise, had run for president, were contested amid protests of fraud and a rigged election. The period between 1997 and 1998 was once again marked by strikes in the public sector and protests by students and opposition activists. On 9 April 1999, President Mainassara was killed at the command of Major Wanké. Wanké took power at the head of a transitional government and aid was very soon frozen. However, a new constitution was adopted and elections were organized in the same year. These elections were won by the MNSD (in coalition with the CDS) and Mamadou Tandja was elected President, marking the start of a period of relative political stability.

In the education sector, the reforms that accompanied the World Bank education projects had continued to be the target of protests by teachers, parents, and other actors in the education sector and had mobilized student protests as described above. The 1990s were marked by teacher strikes and annulled school years (*années blanches*). Teachers contested the limits placed on hiring and called for an end to the experiment of ‘double shifts’ and for privileging public education in contrast to a not very reliable private schooling; in this, ‘the unions defended the interests of teachers and a national conception of school’ (Meunier 2000: 193, my translation). They also called for the evaluation of experimental schools (teaching in national languages) to extend the system (ibid. 193). Meunier describes the 1990s as a period of crisis in the school system (2009: 24).

Enrolment rates stagnated at around 30 per cent during much of this period (ibid. 30).

As in the education sector, the structural adjustment period marked the increased influence of the World Bank in the health sector (Van Lerberghe & de Brouwere 2000: 188). The ambitious goals and holistic approach to health that characterized the primary healthcare initiative seemed all the more difficult to guarantee in the face of the debt crisis and economic recession (Packard 1997: 112). Hence, primary healthcare, which was considered too idealistic, expensive, and unachievable, was gradually replaced by selective primary healthcare (Hall & Taylor 2003: 18). Selective primary healthcare called for a focus on the most prevalent diseases and the use of 'low cost technical solutions' such as vaccination, oral rehydration, and endemic disease control (Cueto 2004: 1868–1869). Selective primary healthcare provided an alternative which was more cost effective than primary healthcare, returning to the 'old recipe' of the fight against endemics (Van Lerberghe & de Brouwere 2000: 185).

In a 1987 policy document entitled *Financing Health Services in Developing Countries*, the World Bank recommended the introduction of charges (user fees) for health services in developing countries. Other measures included the introduction of private insurance, the encouragement of the provision of services by non-governmental associations (NGOs, private providers), and the decentralization of government services (Pfeiffer & Chapman 2010: 151). Pfeiffer and Chapman point out that these prescriptions 'laid the groundwork for a generation of health and development policy in the adjustment era' (ibid.).

In Africa, the Bamako Initiative headed by UNICEF and WHO, which was adopted in 1987 in Bamako by African ministers of health, outlined a new model for primary healthcare provision. The aim of the Bamako Initiative was to deal with the lack of resources, the unreliable supply of drugs, and the insufficient and under-resourced public health facilities that plagued public healthcare systems. The main tenets of the initiative were the reorganization of health services, local self-financing, and the supply of essential drugs (Van Lerberghe & de Brouwere 2000: 187). As summarized by Meuwissen, the Bamako Initiative 'encouraged community financing and participation in health service organization as a means of mobilizing resources in order to increase the quality and coverage of health services' (Meuwissen 2002: 305). In the model adopted with the implementation of the Bamako Initiative, a stock of pharmaceuticals was given to a health centre or to the health committee (community representatives) to get the system off the ground. The pharmaceuticals were then to be sold to users, these revenues together with user fees al-

lowing for the replenishment of the stock, earnings which also could be used to the repair and upkeep of buildings and as bonuses (*primes*) for motivating the staff (Ridde 2004: 6).

Pilot tests of user fees or cost recovery were carried out in Niger in 1993 and 1994. Studies of the pilot tests showed that an increase in user fees, when accompanied by improvements in quality in terms of drug availability, training, and management, did not lead to a significant decrease in utilization but to increased equity and access to healthcare (Chawla & Ellis 2000). The positive outcome of these tests encouraged the adoption of a new public health policy centred on cost recovery as part of the 1995 Health Sector Policy Declaration (*Déclaration de politique sectorielle de santé*). The reform also included the decentralization of the healthcare system, the creation and strengthening of the health district (*district sanitaire*), the adoption of an essential drugs policy, and the creation of community health committees – to encourage community participation (MSP 2002). The decentralization of the health system was in line with the recommendations of another influential 1993 World Bank report entitled *Better Health in Africa*, which promoted the decentralization of health systems and the creation of health districts (Van Lerbegehe & de Brouwere 2000: 188). Meuwissen argues that the introduction of user fees was ‘seen as an opportunity to improve the health care services and even generate additional resources to pay for drugs and their administration’ in the face of a serious economic crisis (2002: 305). Cost recovery was gradually implemented in health centres around the country, marking the shift from free healthcare to the partial ‘self-financing’ of health services.

In sum, at the national political level, the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s were marked by economic crisis, instability, and political transformations, notably to a multi-party democracy. Gazibo argues that the democratic transition was hastened by the economic problems the country faced as people, mainly students and the unions, contested the reductions in social services, scholarships, and wages, a contestation which transformed itself into a struggle for democratization (2006: 75). At the same time, the continuation of economic problems weakened the democracy put in place:

In Niger, the retreat of democracy can be explained by the inability of different governments to complement early democratic achievements with gains in the economic sphere... On the contrary, the absence of financial resources has amplified political unrest. (Gazibo 2006: 81)

In the words of Idrissa, democracy had let people down:

Democracy disappointed because it was not able to face up to the increasing material insecurity of the population. (Idrissa 2008: 195, my translation)

With the financial crisis, investments in health and education slowed down. Further, important reforms were carried out in both sectors during this period, reforms aimed at making investments more effective in a context of economic crisis. The role of the state in education and health provision, already weakened by financial crisis, was further reduced with the ushering in of neoliberal reforms in Niger as in other countries marking a clear break with the ideology of state-led development that had characterized the immediate post-independence period.

The consolidation of reforms

The years preceding and following the turn of this century saw the consolidation of previous reforms in both the health and the education sector and a continued and also increased emphasis on decentralization and community participation reinforced by trends at the international level.

At the national political level, President Tandja's new government, which came to power after the elections of 1999, was soon faced with student unrest and trade union strikes, as it was unable to pay overdue salaries and grants (EIU 2001: 45). Donors that had frozen aid started returning in 2000 (*ibid.* 49). In 2000, Niger signed a poverty reduction and growth facility (PRGF) with the IMF. The first poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP)²¹ was formulated in 2002. Healthcare and education were important sectors. The PRSP staked out a 'ten year plan for improving health services, ensuring equitable access to essential healthcare, fighting HIV/AIDS, promoting family planning, and improving access to safe water and sanitation', and the sector was to receive 193 billion FCFA (EIU 2004: 16). In the education sector, priority was given to primary education. In line with the PRSP, 237 billion FCFA were earmarked for primary education, 15 billion FCFA for higher education, and 22 billion FCFA for vocational and secondary education (*ibid.* 15).

Education was at the top of the international development agenda following a series of international conferences in the 1990s. First, in 1990

²¹ Defined as 'the blueprint for spending the funds made available by debt relief and for the poverty reduction agreed with the IMF under the PRGF' (EIU 2004: 25).

the World Conference on Education for All was held in Jomtien, Thailand. Sponsored by the World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNESCO, the conference was attended by government representatives, intergovernmental bodies, and NGOs (Brock-Utne 2000: 4). One of the main concerns of the conference was to address the steady deterioration of the education sector in developing countries in the 1980s following the economic recession and budget cuts. In the account of Brock-Utne:

The overall aim of the main organizers of the conference was to get developing countries and donors to turn around the downward trend of falling enrolment rates, falling completion rates, and poor learning outcomes within primary education in developing countries. The aim was targeted to be reached by the beginning of the new millennium, by the year 2000. (Brock-Utne 2000: 4–5)

In the declaration following the conference it was stated that education was a fundamental right for all. The goals or strategies that came out of the conferences included universalizing access to education (e.g. ensuring access to and improving the quality of education for girls and women, removing educational disparities), broadening the means and scope of basic education, and strengthening partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups, and families. The declaration also pointed to the need for a supportive policy context, the mobilization of resources, and the strengthening of international solidarity.

King argues that before and during the conference there was a continuous debate about the very definition of education – pitting supporters (UNESCO) of ‘basic education’ (an inclusive term encompassing ‘early childhood, primary schooling, adult literacy, essential adult and youth skills’) against those (UNICEF, World Bank) promoting a focus on primary schooling (2007: 379–380). Even though the wider definition of education was incorporated in the ‘framework for action’ (Jomtien 1990), the setting of international development targets (IDTs and later the MDGs) privileged a narrowing of the education agenda to the achievement of universal primary education, which was more easily measurable (King 2007: 381–382). This left little room for alternative visions such as a focus on secondary, technical, and higher education and more inclusive or more holistic approaches to education (ibid. 388). The conference in Jomtien was followed by conferences in Amman in 1996 and in Dakar in 2000. During all of these conferences the ‘international community’ reiterated its commitment to ensure basic education for all. In the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), edu-

cation was further ‘embedded’ in ‘the global development agenda’ in that two of the goals directly addressed education (King 2007: 378).²²

The ‘global consensus’ on education led to the increasing interventionism of multilateral agencies and donors in the education sector in the financing and implementation of education programmes and the homogenization of education policy (Bierschenk 2007: 271; Lange 2003: 146, 150), policies which, in line with a neoliberal ideology, promoted the retreat of the state, the increasing role of civil society, and privatization (Bierschenk 2007: 272; Lange 2003: 147). Lange (2003) has referred to this type of international intervention in national education systems as the imposition of a new ‘world school order’ (*ordre scolaire mondial*), and Bierschenk as the transformation of education from being a public good (the responsibility of national governments) into a ‘global good’ (*bien global*) (2007: 271). Multilateral agencies recommended that investments be made in primary education and pointed to the need to mobilize public, private, and external resources in order to reach the education for all targets (Henaff 2003: 168–169).

An important landmark in education policy in Niger was the formulation of a new education act, the Law on Orientation of the Education System in Niger (*Loi d’orientation du système éducatif au Niger*) commonly referred to as the LOSEN, in 1998. The LOSEN states that education is a right for all Nigerien citizens and that education is a national priority. The government reaffirmed the commitments it had taken, such as education for all. The different cycles/levels of the education system were reorganized, the use of maternal languages in teaching was envisaged, and the law also divided education into formal, non-formal (literacy and adult education and religious education, e.g. Qu’ranic schools), and informal education (the responsibility of the community). The education act also stated that the financing of the education system should be divided between the state, local administrations (*collectivités territoriales*), families, and other partners. Meunier sees the LOSEN as an attempt to compromise between the will to reform the education system, for instance, in the emphasis placed on non formal education and on maternal languages in teaching, and the requirements of the World Bank education projects (2000: 197).

Following the establishment of the LOSEN, the period after 2000 was marked by increasing investments by international donors in the educa-

²² Of the eight MDGs, two directly address education. Goal 2 is to ‘achieve universal primary education’ and the target is to ‘ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling’. Goal 3 is to ‘promote gender equality and empower women’ and the target is to ‘eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015’.

tion sector in Niger. A large part of these funds came from the Fast Track Initiative (FTI)²³ that accompanied the goal of Education for All (EFA). Niger started benefiting from FTI funds in 2002, as a consequence of which international aid to education increased fourfold (Halais 2009: 45). Meunier refers to the period after 2000 as one of unprecedented investments in the education sector in Niger (2009: 30). It is also during this period that enrolment rates increased. Between 2000 and 2005 enrolment rates in primary school increased from 34 per cent to 52 per cent (ibid.).

The most recent education policy in Niger is the Ten-Year Education Development Programme (*Programme Décennal de Développement de l'Éducation*, PDDE). The programme is part and parcel of this increase in investment to reach the goal of education for all, and similar plans were adopted in a series of countries. The PDDE covers a ten-year period from 2003 to 2013. Designed and implemented in cooperation with international development agencies²⁴ it is meant to harmonize all intervention in the education sector (UNESCO 2005: 42). The overall aim of the PDDE is to achieve universal primary education of good quality and to reduce illiteracy by half by 2015. It is thus clearly inscribed with the Education For All logic. The PDDE is divided into three components: access, quality, and institutional development. Access includes the increased accessibility of basic formal and non-formal education through the extension of the supply and the stimulation of demand, for instance through the alternative recruitment of teachers (contractualization) and the extension of school infrastructure using local materials. Quality refers to the amelioration of efficacy and quality through the reform of teacher training and the provision of pedagogical support and tools. The final component, institutional development, refers to the decentralization of the education system and includes the reorganization and reinforcement of the capacities of the Ministry of Education for the improved implementation of the PDDE and the creation of community management committees (COGES) in all schools (UNESCO 2005: 43–44).

Tanjda was re-elected in 2004, in the first renewal of a government through multi-party elections since independence. The peaceful re-election ensured political stability. However the first years of Tandja's second period in office was shaken by social unrest and protests (in urban areas) against increases in tax on basic foodstuffs and on water and electricity

²³ The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is a 'global partnership' between civil society, developing countries, and donors and multilateral institutions created to ensure progress towards the goal of universal primary education.

²⁴ Including the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, Canada, France, Japan, Luxemburg, Belgium, and the European Union.

and by the poor handling of the food crisis in 2005 (van Walraven 2011b). In 2004 Niger was granted debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative of the IMF and the World Bank (EIU 2004: 12). Debt relief funds were also channelled into the President's Special Programme (*Le Programme Spécial du Président de la République*) (ibid.: 15). The money was used for 'poverty reduction projects' such as the construction of primary school classrooms, health huts, mini dams, and wells around the country, and including micro credit to women's groups, the sale of grain at moderate prices, rural electrification, and the provision of ambulances (Olivier de Sardan 2010: 21). The President's Special Program created a completely parallel structure that was 'entirely conceived and implemented in the office of the President', thus bypassing the regular state administration (ibid.). The investments gave Tandja support in rural areas among farmers (van Walraven 2011b).

Tandja's rule saw an important reform in the health sector, namely the abolition of user fees for children under five years of age and for pregnant women, together with hospital fees for caesareans. The measures which were declared in 2006 were implemented in 2007. At the international level, different strategies for achieving universal access to healthcare were being discussed in light of the persisting problem of access to health service for the poor. Support for the abolition of user fees had increased among both scholars and aid donors (Ridde & Diarra 2009). Previous to the free healthcare reform user fees had been abolished in two health districts in Niger under the coordination of an NGO, in response to the high rates of malnutrition and the food crisis in 2005 (ibid.). However, at the national level the decision to abolish user fees for a part of the population nationwide was taken abruptly (Olivier de Sardan et al. 2010: 5). That the decision was political meant that there was a lack of preparation and funding which had negative consequences for the implementation of the reform (Ridde et al. 2011: 224–5). The reform was introduced having secured neither the necessary finances nor having consulted actors in the health sector (Olivier de Sardan et al. 2010: 3). An emergency intervention of the French Development Agency helped ensure the implementation (ibid.). UNICEF provided essential medicines to health districts while the mechanisms for the implementation of the reform was being put into place (Ridde et al. 2011: 220). I will return to the implications of the free healthcare reform at the local level in chapters 5 and 6.

The elections that were supposed to be held in 2009 and for which Tandja was not eligible given that he had already served two terms were postponed several times. However, a movement in support of the alteration of the constitution to allow Tandja to stay in power emerged and

became increasingly vociferous. The campaign went by the name *tazartché*, meaning continuity in Hausa. Tandja's supporters justified the prolongation of his term with, among other arguments, the big development projects that were under way, like the construction of Kandaji dam, and popular will (Baudais & Chauzal 2011: 298). Finally, in 2009, Tandja dissolved the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court in order to push through a three year extension of his mandate, after the expiration of his second five-year term, by revising the constitution. Baudais and Chauzal note that in the period before the revision of the constitution, the 'neo patrimonial struggle for power and access to resources' had intensified, and the clique around the President had alienated most other parts of the political establishment (2011: 297). Political tensions and protests ensued, and in 2010 Tandja was overthrown in a coup d'état. Following the coup, a transitional government led by Lieutenant General Salou Djibo took power. The coup was justified with reference to widespread corruption, continued poverty, and political centralization (ibid. 299), echoing the justifications of previous coups. Following the adoption of a new constitution, national elections were held in April 2011. The elections were won by Mahamadou Issoufou of the PNDS, the former main opposition leader.

During the different democratic and military regimes, health and education have remained in focus on the political agenda, at least rhetorically. The health and education sectors were affected by political and economic trajectories and were sometimes at the centre, as during the disputes that led up to the National Conference in the case of education. At the same time, with the increasing intervention of donors and the increasing dependence on external support, reforms in the health and education sectors have followed international trends, independent of the regime in power.

Discussion

In this chapter I have attempted to give an account of the historical development of the healthcare and education sectors in Niger and to point to the links with developments at the international level. The colonial period in Niger was marked by very limited investments, and the colonial power thus left behind it a skeletal health infrastructure and education system that concerned only a very small minority of the Nigerien population. Significant investments were made in both the health and education sectors during the post-independence period, in line with the aim of working for development and modernization. For a time, the uranium boom al-

lowed for significant investments in both sectors. It is interesting to note that health policy in Niger, with its system of village health workers, distinguished itself early on as a model for primary healthcare. The education sector advanced significantly during the post-independence era, the school system started reaching rural areas, Franco-Arabic schools multiplied, and opportunities for secondary and tertiary education were expanded. In this sense, the development in Niger parallels that in other African countries, enrolment rates increasing rapidly between 1960 and 1980. The economic recession and the debt crisis had significant effects on the provision of public and social services. In the education sector, the steady increase in enrolment rates slowed and stagnated during much of the 1990s. Reforms in the education and health sectors, such as the introduction of user fees in public healthcare services and the hiring of teachers on temporary contracts and reductions of scholarships and school materials provided to pupils, were aimed at reducing the expenses of public health and education provision, ultimately shifting the responsibility for part of that provision from the state to parents and patients. Attempts to decentralize the health and education sectors and the increasing responsibility of local authorities were also part of this shifting of responsibility. Community participation became an important question in health and education with the creation of community committees in schools and health centres, committees which were given important responsibilities in managing the daily functioning of schools and health centres. The period after 2000 has seen the continuation of many of these policies. During this period, enrolment rates started increasing significantly following an increase in external financing. However, unrest in the education system has continued. In the health sector, the introduction in 2006–07 of free healthcare for pregnant women and children under five marked a partial break with the cost recovery logic and led to a sharp increase in user rates all over the country.

What emerges from this overview is first, the historically central role of the state in health and education provision, and second, the intertwining of national policies with events at the international level. Third, it is clear that the post-independence period, especially after the debt crisis, has been marked by the inability of the state to provide health and education services to all its citizens. In the rest of the thesis I will focus on the actual interactions and relations between citizens and health and education services in neighbourhoods on the periphery of Niamey. That is, in the daily unfolding of development policy, national planning and local initiatives on the ground.

3. Filling in the blanks: The politics of visibility

In this chapter I describe the development of colonial and post-colonial Niamey in order to set the context for the emergence of Saga, Pays Bas and Tondigamay. This contextualisation is important in understanding the marginal position of the neighbourhoods as well attempts to overcome this marginalisation. Since the colonial period, urban planning in Niamey has been centred on the progressive zoning and subdivision of land. However, urban planning initiatives have constantly been several steps behind the expansion of the city, a situation which became even more evident in the post-colonial period when the population of the capital grew exponentially. The inability of the authorities to keep up in terms of the provision of housing and public services became increasingly apparent. As a response the informal sector in land transactions, housing, and economic activities has expanded. Urban space in Niamey is thus being created and (re)appropriated by urban residents seeking to make a living and to secure a home in the city and who, in the absence of state investments, try to find alternative solutions to the problems they face (housing, public services, etc.). The expansion of Saga and the emergence of Pays Bas and Tondigamay are part of these processes whereby the capital is shaped from below and which engender conflicts over resources and political power.

In the first part of the chapter I trace the development of Niamey during the colonial and post-colonial period and I point to the different logics that have shaped the capital. In the second part of the chapter I present each of the neighbourhoods, focusing on their settlement histories and relation to the local administration. The comparison of the three neighbourhoods also illustrates a struggle for visibility. This provides an important context for understanding the very conditions for the delivery of services, which I will return to in coming chapters.

Colonial and post-colonial Niamey

Niamey, situated in the south-western part of Niger, was a centre of neither political nor commercial importance like the towns of Zinder in the east and Agadez in the north-east when it became an administrative centre in the early colonial period. Thus, the city of Niamey is frequently described as a colonial creation. Boubou Hama describes the area of present-day Niamey previous to the installation of the colonial administration as a 'no man's land':

The zone of Niamey, between the province of N'Dounga, the principality of Goudel, Zarma-Ganda, and Boboye, formed a space without natural defence, a sort of 'no man's land'... It was...from these regions that the zone of Niamey was to receive elements of its population. With the arrival of France and the installation of its administrative centre, Niamey became, through its geographical location on the river, an important centre competing with Dosso and Zinder. (Hama 1955: 4, my translation)

At this time, surrounding villages such as Goudel, Saga, and Lamorde, today integrated into the urban agglomeration, had long been established (Bernus 1969: 15). The settlement of Niamey was made up of a group of disparate hamlets of different populations, including Mauri, Kalley, Songhay, and Fulani ethnic groups (ibid. 213). Mauri and Kalley both claim the status of 'first comers' and founders of Niamey (ibid. 16). The transfer of the administrative centre of the *Cercle du Zarma* to Niamey, in 1903, marked the start of its role as a colonial administrative centre (Sidikou 1980: 16). Following the transfer, Captain Salaman, the *commandant de cercle*, took on the task of turning the small village into an urban centre (ibid. 18). The weak political status of Niamey led, albeit briefly, to the transfer of the administrative centre to Dosso, which was a considerably more important traditional political centre (ibid. 20). However, Niamey was chosen as the administrative capital of the military territory of Niger established in 1904. The choice of Niamey was motivated by its central position in relation to other French colonies and its proximity to the river Niger. These factors outweighed the fact that it was considerably smaller than traditional urban centres such as Zinder, Tahoua, and Agadez. In order to encourage the growth of the village, the population of Niamey was exempted from taxes (ibid.). The town grew slowly, however, and in 1911 the administrative capital was moved to Zinder. Zinder was much larger than Niamey, it was more strategically positioned in the vast territory, and it was an important traditional political centre. Niamey was hence demoted to the status of administrative capital (*chef lieu*) of the

cercle de Niamey and the head tax²⁵ was reinstated (Sidikou 1980 24–25). Water provision and living conditions for Europeans in Zinder proved difficult, however, and the town was situated far away from other, more densely populated and richer French colonies with greater economic potential (ibid. 27–28). In 1922, when the military territory of Niger was transformed into a colony, plans were already being made for the transfer of the capital from Zinder to Niamey on the initiative of Governor Brévié (ibid. 29). The transfer of the capital to Niamey was announced in 1926, and the colonial administrative services were gradually moved to Niamey. The transformation of Niamey into a colonial capital necessitated the construction of lodgings for administrators and the development of infrastructure and sanitation (ibid. 48–49). Investments multiplied. As noted by a colonial administrator cited by Hama:

This is when the first achievements in the domain of urbanism started: the seat of the government (*Hôtel de Gouvernement*), the *Secrétariat Général*, the first hospital wing, housing in residential neighbourhoods, the provision of water and electricity. (Villandre, cited in Hama 1955: 18, my translation)

Town planning was initiated with the aim of restructuring the town through the separation of European and African neighbourhoods and a square (grid) pattern of roads and land plots (Motcho 2010: 18). In one of the first urban plans, established in 1937, Niamey was divided into a ‘new European city’ (*nouvelle ville européenne*) on the plateau overlooking the river and a ‘new native city’ (*nouvelle ville indigène*). The two were physically separated by the valley called *Gunti Yena* that cuts through the city. The concern of colonial administrations with hygiene and sanitation based on fear of epidemics and prejudices about the unsanitary conditions of African quarters motivated the separation between African and European quarters, the valley forming a ‘natural’ *cordon sanitaire* (ibid.). This division along racial lines was a common design in colonial cities and was often justified with reference to health (Myers 2010a: 6). A fire in 1935 provided a pretext for moving the African quarters from their original place on the river bank to a location higher up on the plateau, as had been previewed in the urban plan (Bernus 1969: 22). Houses, in the new area, had to be constructed in *banco* (Motcho 2010: 18). A commercial zone which included the market was added to this urban configuration in proximity to the African quarters and the river. Subsequent urban plans divided the city into zones (*lotissements*) categorized according to their

²⁵ A fixed amount of tax per person, like a poll tax.

function, for instance, administrative, commercial, residential, traditional habitation, industrial, military, and green spaces (Sidikou 1980: 309). Investments in the capital were interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 but accelerated after 1947 with the support of external FIDES (the Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development) funds, made available in the new colonial order with the integration of the colonies into the French Union. This period saw the construction of additional infrastructure such as health and education services, a post office, a city hall, administrative services (treasury, custom office, agricultural services, etc.), a court house, an airfield, and so forth (Hama 1955: 18–19).

The predominant spatial organization of Niamey during the colonial period remained that of the division between a ‘European city’ and an ‘African city’, that formed the ‘historical skeleton of Niamey’ (Jambes 1996: 326). Residential and administrative neighbourhoods were privileged in terms of investments and the use of space. The plots in the European neighbourhoods were considerably more spacious (Motcho 2010: 19). Moreover, the few investments that were made were concentrated in the ‘European city’

Public investments were reduced to a minimum in order to assure proper facilities for the white city and to ensure the functioning of the colonial administrative services. As for the African neighbourhoods, they did not see any significant accomplishments, but were on the contrary the object of successive demolitions (*déguerpissements*) every time they posed an obstacle to the extension of the European neighbourhoods. (Dulucq 1997: 195, my translation)

During the colonial period the population of Niamey grew slowly and unevenly. The colonial administration’s imposition of a head tax and conscription of soldiers and forced labour dissuaded people from settling in Niamey (Motcho 2010: 27). However, the population grew exponentially during periods of famine, which resulted in large migrations from rural areas to Niamey where the colonial administration distributed food (ibid.). For instance, during the famine of 1931–32, the population of Niamey increased by a factor of ten (Alpha Gado 1998: 68). When forced labour (*travaux forcés*) was abolished in 1946, the constraints associated with the capital diminished and it was increasingly associated with opportunities (Dulucq 1997: 194). More investments were made and trading houses (*maisons de commerce*) were created. As the number of civil servants, traders, and expatriates increased, so did work opportunities. The increasing number of Nigerien wage earners provided a point of contact in the city for relatives in rural areas (Motcho 2010: 28). In 1950, when

the population had reached 12,000, Niamey finally caught up with and surpassed the towns of Tahoua and Zinder in terms of population size (Bruneau et al. 1994: 247). Still, Niamey grew slowly during the colonial period in comparison to other capital cities of French West Africa.²⁶

Independence had a significant effect on the evolution of Niamey, the capital of the newly proclaimed Republic of Niger, and marked the start of a period of sustained urbanization. Significant investments were made as much of the new economic and administrative infrastructure of the newly independent nation state was concentrated in Niamey (Sidikou 1980: 55). A new urban plan was drawn up in 1964. The plan designated different functions for different parts of the capital such as the placement of government services, embassies, commerce and business, military areas, the university, etc., as well as the density and type of habitation (Motcho 2010: 21). In 1970 a bridge (*Pont Kennedy*) was built across the river, opening the way to development of the other river bank, which came to accommodate the first national university, *Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey*. The population of Niamey grew and has continued to grow rapidly: in 1960 it was roughly 34,000; in 1977 243,000; in 1990 435,000; in 2000 650,000; and in 2009 1,146,000 (figures from Motcho 2010: 29 and INS 2010: 50–53).

The uranium boom that lasted from the mid 1970s to the early 1980s left behind it such markers as the Congress Hall and a luxury hotel (*Hôtel Gawaye*), parts of the creation of a *quartier vitrine* on the river bank that still dominate the cityscape (Dulucq 1997: 221–222). These constructions were preceded by the removal of the Gawaye neighbourhood situated next to the river (*ibid.*). These investments were part of the campaign to modernize the capital mainly through ‘monumental and prestigious urbanism’ and the construction of roads and administrative buildings (Dulucq 1997: 221–222; Seybou 1995: 30). The construction of such buildings and infrastructure gave the city a ‘modern façade’ in the 1980s characterized by:

...buildings with audacious architecture, a well-maintained road network (*voirie principale*), effective streetlights along the wide shadowy avenues, contribute to shaping an attractive and well-equipped city centre. (Dulucq 1997: 215, my translation)

The 1970s and early 1980s were a time of intense urban growth. Economic, commercial, and industrial activities in Niamey developed. The

²⁶ In 1953 the population of Niamey was 16,000 in comparison to 80,000 in Bamako and more than 200,000 in Dakar (Jambes 1996: 318).

city attracted rural migrants at a greater rate than it had during the colonial period, including progressive migration, periodic migration during the dry season during which the population of the capital could grow by as much as 20 per cent, and ‘catastrophe migration’ during periods of famine (Gilliard 2005: 75, 77). Niamey has continued to represent a refuge (*‘espace refuge’*) for the population of Niger during periods of drought and famine (ibid. 70). However, this period of architectural grandeur and relative prosperity was soon over, as uranium prices dropped and economic crisis ensued. Despite the economic downturn, migrants continued to come to the city, leading to the growth of the informal sector in housing and employment (Gilliard 2005: 78).

The growth of the capital rapidly altered the spatial layout. For a while, the division between the European city and the African city was perpetuated, the former European city on the plateau accommodating the administration, civil servants, and expatriates and being separated from the lower areas, the former African city, by the commercial area and an extension of the administrative area and the valley (Seybou 1995: 25). At the same time, as noted by Laval (1981), the segregation was overcome by the movement of people and the occupation of urban space by traders, who gradually re-conquered and subverted colonial designs. Today, more upscale neighbourhoods, usually referred to as ‘residential neighbourhoods’ (*quartiers résidentiels*), and poorer, usually more densely inhabited, neighbourhoods (*quartiers populaires*) are interlaced in the urban agglomeration. And formally subdivided neighbourhoods and informal settlements are found side by side.

Urban planning and urbanization from below

Critics point out that ever since the colonial period, the implementation of urban policies and investments in the capital has consistently favoured the elite. For Seybou, the focus on zoning operations and the construction of boulevards and administrative buildings meant that urban investments ignored a significant part of the urban population (1995: 16). Moreover, residential neighbourhoods were privileged in the provision of electricity, water, and sanitation services (ibid.). Similarly, Gilliard points out that with the exception of the creation of schools and health centres, government initiatives (investments) in the capital have been directed towards the elite minority, such as the construction of boulevards, the formal subdivision of land plots for civil servants, and half-hearted attempts to formalize spontaneously created neighbourhoods (2005: 79).

Urban policy in Niamey has consisted mostly of passing laws and formulating successive urban plans. The colonial legacy lived on in restrictive texts and laws concerning land use, urban planning, and building regulations. Often, the laws passed during the colonial period were merely altered or modified after independence. For instance, one of the most important laws regarding land tenure was passed during the transition to independence in 1959. With respect to urban land, the law spelled out the procedures to follow for zoning and declared that urban land would be progressively zoned in accordance with the regulations. Zoning or the subdivision of land thus became ‘the dominant instrument for controlling land use’ and the most important tool in urban planning and management in Niger (Njoh 2006: 549).

An attempt was made in the mid 1980s to establish an overarching plan for urban development, namely, the SDAU (*Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme*), which was to cover the period from 1984 to 1996 (Seybou 1995: 39). The plan included determining the use of urban land (habitation, infrastructure, economic activities, green spaces, etc.) and the extension of the city, improving the repartition of infrastructure, creating green spaces, restructuring villages, and so forth. Seybou sees the SDAU as a part of the authorities’ aim to modernize the capital (ibid. 36). The urban plan dedicated a central role to the state as the leader in and initiator of this modernization process (ibid.). However, the objectives of the SDAU were never achieved and the plan was soon obsolete, as the urban agglomeration quickly surpassed the borders established in the plan (Motcho 2010: 24). Following the reform of urban management policy in 1997, recent years have seen attempts at implementing new urban plans and land policies as well as an overarching strategy for urban governance and development, including economic and social development and integration.²⁷ Urban development is also part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which includes the development of infrastructure and facilities and the improvement of housing conditions. Little has changed, however, and few of the measures outlined, such as the improvement of access to housing for the poor, have been implemented. Instead the progressive zoning of land has remained a key aspect of urban extension and management while investments have lagged behind.

²⁷ The 1997 law outlined provisional (*plan d'urbanisme*, e.g. SDAU) and operational (*plan d'aménagement*, zoning exercises) city planning and the control of urban land (e.g. building codes). In 2004 a *Stratégie Nationale de Développement Urbain* (SNDU) was spelled out; this was more comprehensive than previous urban plans and included governance and urban management, local economic development, and social integration.

Zoning

Belko Maïga defines zoning (*lotissement*) as ‘a complex operation which consists of transforming the raw material of rural land into urban land’, resulting in the creation of land plots for housing, industry and commerce, and public facilities (1985: 61). However, zoning is not merely a technical operation but also mobilizes a number of political, economic, and symbolic stakes. First, it is the process through which not only is land transformed into urban land but urban space also becomes more legible to the state and easier to control (Scott 1998).²⁸ The concern with the legibility of space and of the population in that space runs through both the colonial and post-colonial periods. Second, zoning is a source of revenue and political leverage, especially given the value of urban land. Belko Maïga points to the use of zoning by authorities since the colonial period as a means of controlling access to urban land. The colonial administration distributed land to local notables and partners, and the first national political parties (Sawaba and RDA/PPA) subdivided and sold land to their political clientele (Belko Maïga 1985: 200). In Niamey zoning has also been systematized by the local authorities (the Urban Community of Niamey) as a way of raising resources (Motcho 2010: 32). This practice led to an overproduction of plots with no services far away from the city centre and inaccessible to the urban poor and to people of modest means (*ibid.*). Further, the sale of plots was also the source of corrupt practices (Seybou 2005: 28–29). Already in his 1985 thesis Belko Maïga points to the importance of personal relations in accessing a plot, the ubiquity of rackets, and the constant influx of people to the city hall where access to land plots was negotiated (1985: 229–232). So too, more than twenty years later, the front office of the CUN, located in the city hall next to the busy area around one of the central markets (*le petit marché*), was crowded on most days with people waiting to see one of the agents responsible for land matters, the entry into the back offices being guarded by men in uniform. Third, as described by Hilgers in the case of a mid-sized city in Burkina Faso zoning is not only the source of financial and social but also of symbolic resources (2008: 212). A legacy of the colonial period, zoning had become synonymous with urbanization and development in the minds of both the administration and urban residents (*ibid.* 216–217).

In Niamey, parallel to formal zoning there is also a long history of informal zoning or the ‘auto production of land plots’. Zoning and the sale

²⁸ Scott writes that states and city planners strive to overcome ‘spatial unintelligibility’ (a source of political autonomy) in order to make urban geography legible and cities more controllable in part through the imposition of straight lines and symmetry (1998: 53–54).

of land plots was already failing to keep up with population growth in the 1970s (Dias-Olvera et al. 2002: 3; Dulucq 1997: 226; Sidikou 1980: 319). Despite the creation of a significant number of new zoned neighbourhoods to accommodate the growing population, only one in three applications was granted (Belko Maïga 1985: 83). This situation led to the creation of a ‘parallel land market’ on the urban periphery as customary land owners from the villages of Goudel, Yantala, Gamkalley, and Saga started dividing land up into land plots which were put up for sale (Dulucq 1997: 226; Sidikou 1980: 320). Belko Maïga (1985) has referred to this phenomenon as a ‘zoning tombola’ (*lotissement tombola*). Tombola alludes to the uncertain outcomes of such operations as people, often with modest means, bought land from customary land owners, built a house, and hoped they would be granted a land plot or reimbursed once the official or formal zoning reached the area (ibid. 178). Belko Maïga describes the proliferation of ‘tombola’ neighbourhoods with the expansion of the city on rural land:

With each advance of the urban fringe, the rural fringe recedes and nearby fields are transformed into tombola land plots sold or given away to new city dwellers in search of a home of their own. From one generation of tombola neighbourhoods to another, the formal city tries to keep up with the unofficial city and sometimes, unable to catch up, inserts it by constraint and by force. (Belko Maïga 1985: 83, my translation)

Many neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Niamey were created in this manner, some finally imposing themselves on the local authorities (Gilliard 2005: 82). The neighbourhood of Talladjé is a well-documented example of this process (Poitou 1987). Talladjé emerged at the end of the 1960s when customary owners from Saga started selling land plots and was finally restructured and regularized at the end of the 1970s.

The sale of land plots by customary land owners has continued to play an important role in the development of the city and the creation of new neighbourhoods. It is not only the insufficiency and expensiveness of land plots but also strict regulations (zoning and building codes) and the irregularities and opacity of access to land plots, including corruption and speculation, which have driven people to buy land directly from customary land owners (Seybou 2005: 25–26; Sidikou 1980: 320). Large parts of the city have thus been ‘produced from below’ (Dias-Olvera et al. 2002: 3) outside of state intervention and zoning/subdivision plans. Consequently a two tier city has emerged:

[T]he first [city] is planned in respect of norms and regulations and receives an important part of public investments; the second city does not obey any norms and imposes itself through its population's dynamism and will of survival who in the absence of public investments settle for alternative local solutions to fulfil their needs... (Seybou 1995: 44, my translation)

Gilliard points to the emergence of a three tier city made up of the planned city which respects the norms and regulations of urban planning and the un-planned city fuelled not only by the needs of urban dwellers but also by the land speculation of urban elites (Gilliard 2005: 80).

The local authorities generally disapprove of the emergence of informal neighbourhoods. A stance which is unsurprising given the stakes involved in zoning, in terms of economic resources, authority, and symbolic capital. Yet, the response of the local authorities varies from case to case. In some cases, as in the case of Talladjé, the neighbourhood is regularized and people get their ownership rights formalized; in other cases, people are removed without any compensation (Belko Maïga 1985: 190–191). The differential outcome is in part dependent on the ability of residents to organize themselves and to state their claims (*ibid.*). The differing positions of informal or *tombola* neighbourhoods depending on personal and political relations and the capacity to mobilize will become evident in the description of the neighbourhoods in focus. This description will also tease out the different strategies, norms and logics at work in the urban periphery when it comes to the appropriation of urban land and the creation and consolidation of new neighbourhoods.

The appropriation of land in the urban periphery

In this section of the chapter I present in greater detail the neighbourhoods on which the thesis focuses. Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay are, in different respects, part of the 'un-planned' or 'second city' described by Gilliard (2005) and Seybou (1995). Saga, a village that has become part of the urban agglomeration with the growth of the city, has never been restructured or formally zoned. Tondigamay and Pays Bas are examples of the creation of informal or 'tombola' neighbourhoods formed through the sale of land by customary land owner. At the time of my fieldwork Pays Bas and Tondigamay often appeared as a blank space on maps of the city, an apparent break in the urban edifice between the industrial zone and the populated neighbourhood of Talladjé to the west and the airport and the adjoining neighbourhoods of Aéroport 1 and 2 to the east. Saga, located

in the southern part of this area, on the bank of the river Niger, was usually represented in uneven lines. This stood in contrast to the grid pattern of the zoned or subdivided neighbourhoods. ‘The blanks’ in the title of this chapter – Filling in the blanks – alludes not only to the absence of the neighbourhoods in cartographic representations of the city but also to their marginality in terms of state investments. Yet, at the same time, it is a space that is open for appropriation as urban residents filled these apparent blanks through their quest not only for a home in the city but also for public services and visibility.

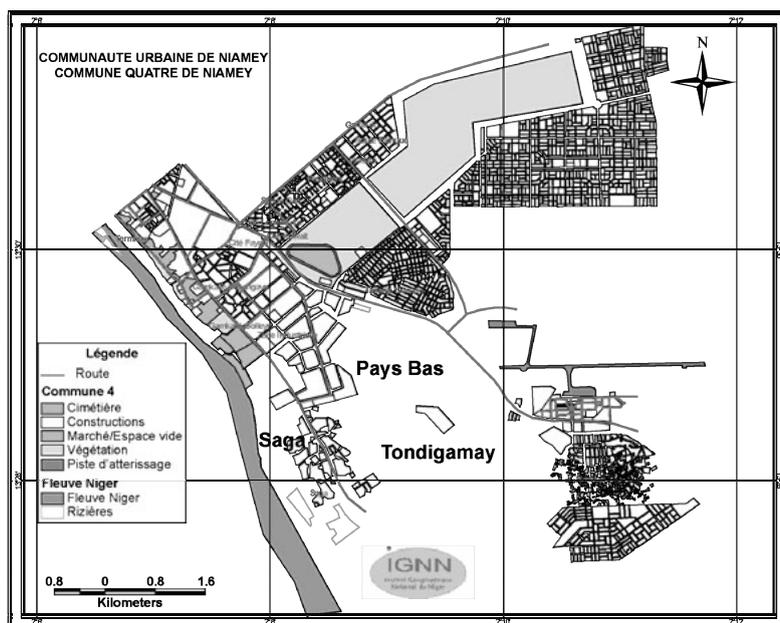


Figure 2. Pays Bas and Tondigamay inserted on a map of Municipality Four.

Source IGNN.

Saga

Saga is situated on the bank of the river Niger. A village located five kilometres from the centre of Niamey, with the growth of city and the extension of the urban fringe Saga has become part of Niamey’s urban periphery. However, it is still physically separated from the urban fabric by the capital’s only industrial zone and a green belt or buffer zone. Collective taxis and an infrequent bus service connect Saga to the city centre. The main access to Saga from the city centre is the road to Kollo, a town forty

kilometres south-east of Niamey. Cars, mopeds, minibuses, donkey carts, and trucks traffic the road. After a series of accidents caused by the minibuses (taxis) that speed through Saga on their way from Niamey to Kollo, three speed bumps were constructed. In the absence of a market, the sides of the road have become the main market area in Saga. The road is lined by small telecentres, photocopying services, and various stores and stalls selling food staples, fish and meat, condiments, vegetables, clothes, plastic wares and kitchen utensils. The area is busy with activity both day and night. On both sides of the road, the stores and the stalls give way to houses and unpaved roads. The roads, which are dusty and sandy during the dry period, fill with water during the rainy season, some of them becoming impassable. The older parts of Saga are located between the main road and the river. In these neighbourhoods, Saga's origin as a village is physically visible; extended family compounds in *banco* (mud brick) dominate and the streets are crooked and narrow. On the other side of the road, more recently formed extensions of the older quarters stretch out, provided with wider and straighter streets and a mix of houses in *banco* and concrete.

Several roads lead down to the river, the edge of which is lined by rice paddies and gardens. Saga is well known for its rice cultivation. The rice paddies have represented an important source of income and food staples for many households since the creation of the hydro-agricultural scheme (*aménagement hydro-agricole*) in 1966.²⁹ The gardeners also benefit from the irrigation canals from which they take water. Land for the creation of the rice paddies had been requisitioned by the state. In the words of the president of the cooperative, a man from Saga in his eighties, who had occupied that position since 1976, 'The land owners had no say, and if you said something they imprisoned you.' According to the president, in the beginning people did not want the rice paddies because they thought they would be forced to labour on the paddies. After the first harvest, however, when they realized that they could keep the yield, the rice paddies became coveted. In the distribution of paddies, priority had been given to land owners and later to people living (and paying taxes) in Saga. According to the president of the cooperative, paddies had also been given by the state to civil servants. Forty years later people were worried about the productivity of the rice fields. The dwindling of yields was attributed to the price of fertilizers and to the reduction of water levels.³⁰

²⁹ The cooperative that manages the hydro-agricultural scheme is made up of 1,011 farmers (with 1,349 paddies, some have two or three) from Saga and other surrounding villages.

³⁰ Decreasing returns is a general phenomenon of rice cultivation in Niger in hydro-agricultural schemes, many of which were created in the 1970s. Other problems include



Figure 3. The gardens and rice fields with the village in the background.

Saga was originally a predominantly Zarma village.³¹ The traditional political power in Saga is concentrated in the four founding quarters – Saga Fondobon, Saga Gassia Kwara, Saga Sambou Kwara, and Saga Goungou. According to local settlement histories, the village of Saga would have been founded by Moussa Zarmakoye, who, according to some accounts, was a warrior from N'Dounga. A group of Gourmantche and someone by the name of Abdou Wahab Sy (from Gao) had both left the area to Moussa Zarmakoye. Moussa Zarmakoye's three sons are said to be at the origin of the 'founding' quarters – Saga Sambou Kwara created by Sambou Moussa, Saga Gassia Kwara created by Gassia Moussa, and Saga

insufficient maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure and organizational dysfunctions in the cooperatives that manage the irrigation system (limiting provision of water and fertilizers) (Baron et al. 2010).

³¹ The Zarma are part of the Songhay-Zarma ethnic group which encompasses several sub groups (Kalle, Golle, Kado, Wogo). What unites these different groups is a common language (Songhay-Zarma) as well as certain cultural traits, for instance, the spirit possession cult, the cult of the *holey*. They are also traditionally sedentary farmers in contrast to Fulbe and Tuareg pastoralists and semi-nomads, and they share a similar social structure (Olivier de Sardan 1984: 25–26). Songhay-Zarma is held to be one language, although there are different (regional) dialects linked to distinct identities (ibid. 25). For more writings on the Songhay-Zarma see, among others, Bornand 2005; Gado 1982; Olivier de Sardan 1982, 1984.

Fondobon and Saga Gongou created by Mali Moussa. According to one of the neighbourhood chiefs, the definite establishment of Saga dates back to the sixteenth century (1572). In the text that accompanied the enthroning of the canton chief in 2007 it is claimed that the chieftaincy dates back seven hundred years. At the same time, only fourteen chiefs are accounted for. Nangou Sambou, who some say is the first chief of all of Saga, is said in the same text to have been the son of Sambou Moussa. The populations of adjoining quarters such as Saga Kourtey, by the river, and Saga Peul are said to have arrived later and cannot make claims to the cantonal chieftaincy.

During the early colonial period, the population of Saga exceeded that of the newly established administrative centre, Niamey (Sidikou 1980: 21). For a time, the colonial administration imposed a tax on the markets of Saga and other surrounding villages to encourage the growth of the market in Niamey (*ibid.*). During the colonial period Saga became the administrative capital (*chef lieu*) of the canton of Saga.³² In a colonial report from 1936, the canton of Saga is described as the smallest canton of the *cercle* of Niamey, covering a rectangular strip of land between Niamey to the west and the canton of Liboré to the east, the population being concentrated in the four villages (Saga Fondobon, Saga Gassia Kwara, Saga Sambou Kwara, and Saga Gongou) located on the bank of the river Niger on fertile land (Larrieu 1936). The area around Niamey was re-divided several times in the course of the early colonial period, and for a brief period, the canton of Saga was included in the canton of Niamey – created in 1904 to deal with the ‘seemingly intricate and bewildering situation’ of different villages, chieftaincies, and zones of influence in the region (Fuglestad 1983: 68). In addition to Saga, the neighbouring cantons and chieftaincies of N’Dounga, Karma, Liboré, Goudele, and Hamdallaye were also included in the new canton (Sidikou 1980: 19). However, the canton of Niamey was short-lived and the former cantons were reconstituted in 1908 (Séré de Rivières 1965: 240).

Cantons and the system of canton chiefs were maintained after independence and the canton of Saga is still in place today. All in all, thirteen villages and neighbourhoods are linked to the cantonal chieftaincy in Saga: the neighbourhoods in Saga (Saga Fondobon, Saga Gassia Kwara, Saga Sambou Kwara, Saga Goungou, and Saga Kourtey) as well as Saga Peul, Aéroport 1 and 2, and Talladjé; the villages of Saga Gorou 1 and 2,

³² Cantons, headed by canton chiefs, were created during the colonial period for administrative purposes. In creating cantons, the colonial power sought to use the authority and legitimacy of the pre-colonial chieftaincy, but the extent to which the canton mirrored local pre-colonial political structures and divisions varied greatly (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 141).

which were in the process of being zoned by the municipality in 2008; and the villages of Kongou Gorou and Kongou Gonga, situated on the outskirts of Niamey and reachable only by a dirt road. Following the most recent administrative division of the capital, the canton of Saga with the exception of one village (Kongou Gourou) is completely encompassed by Municipality Four. In the thesis, when I refer to Saga I am not referring to the canton but to Saga the *chef lieu* of the *canton* made up of the neighbourhoods of Saga Fondobon, Saga Gassia Kwara, Saga Sambou Kwara, Saga Gongou, and Saga Kourtey. This is also the common reference point in Niamey, the canton of Saga having fallen more or less into oblivion.

With urbanization and the expansion of the city, the area encompassed by the canton has rapidly transformed. It houses Niamey's industrial zone and the international airport, and following the sale of land by customary land owners, farmland has been transformed into residential plots, the new neighbourhoods consisting of a diverse urban population. Saga itself is increasingly being overshadowed by faster growing, more dynamic neighbourhoods better integrated into the urban agglomeration. Over time, Saga has grown from a group of quarters into a quiet and relatively poor suburb, hidden away on the eastern outskirts of Niamey, welcoming a diverse urban population who have bought land and constructed houses, or who rent. In 2007 the population of Saga was estimated to be around 30,000.

Saga has yet to be restructured or zoned. The urban development plan the SDAU had included the restructuring of Niamey's urban villages. Yantala was restructured and zoned in the 1980s. However, the restructuring of Gamkalley (located next to Saga), which was second in line, was never carried out due to financial difficulties, popular resistance, and the difficulty of finding a site for the relocation of people affected by the restructuring. The only zoned neighbourhood in Saga is Cité Olani, situated on the eastern outskirts of Saga, in which houses were still being constructed in 2008, many of them being built in concrete. When it comes to basic infrastructure and equipment, the neighbourhoods in Saga have been progressively provided with water and electricity. There are also public water taps. However, there are no gutters and there are frequent problems with flooding during the rainy season. Saga is well served by public education and health structures. The first school in Saga, a public primary school, was created in the early 1960s. In 2008 there were five public primary schools, including one secondary school. In 1996 a public dispensary had been established and in 2006 a maternity ward. There are also three private schools: one primary and two secondary schools. A

Catholic dispensary and hospice run by Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity has also been present in Saga since the middle of the 1990s. The establishment is well known and draws patients and visitors from the rest of Niamey and from other regions.

Yet, from the perspective of many natives of Saga, especially of the older generation, Saga has been marginalized in the urban agglomeration and has lost more than it has gained in becoming integrated into Niamey. Local leaders hold that Saga has been consistently overlooked by the local authorities; as evidence of this they point to the relatively late provision of public infrastructure and services in relation to neighbourhoods in the city centre. Some attribute the marginalization of Saga to the lack of influential people in high places. In the words of one man: 'Saga existed before Gankalley and Niamey, but they have people who are well placed.' That Saga was established before Niamey, and that the capital has expanded on the land of Saga while Saga itself has been marginalized, is a recurrent complaint. One old man pointed to the regression of Saga (and Goudel) with the growth of Niamey since the colonial period:

The people of Niamey are partly on [the territory of] Goudel and partly on [the territory of] Saga. Niamey is the centre because it has grown with the settlement of the whites and has gained the upper hand over Goudel and Saga.

Land is an important issue in Saga, especially for customary land owners. The urban agglomeration began expanding into the territory of Saga in the colonial period and has continued through the post-colonial period, both through state initiatives (from above) like the creation of the industrial zone, the airport, and the establishment of zoned neighbourhoods, and (from below) through the sale of land by customary land owners, transforming farming land into residential plots. Peri-urban land has become increasingly valuable with the expansion of the urban agglomeration. It is a common grievance, especially of the older generation, that their land has been and is being 'swallowed' by the city. As one man lamented, 'It is an area that mourns its belonging to the big city.' In the past, during the colonial period and after independence as well, despite the legal provision of compensation in the event of expropriation for urban development, zoning, and 'public utility', customary land owners were not always compensated for land taken by the state.³³ With the ad-

³³ See Sidikou on the arbitrariness of compensation given to often illiterate customary land owners in Niamey, unaware of their rights/the law, in the two decades following independence (1980: 322).

vent of democracy in the 1990s, customary land owners started demanding compensation (Seybou 2005: 26). Following their lobbying, the level of compensation increased from 6 per cent of the zoned land in 1992 to 25 per cent in 1995 (ibid. 37). Further, customary land owners in Saga have started to claim their rights to compensation for land already expropriated. These claims were led by leading figures with a background in the state administration who saw the defence of land as one of their most important battles for their village. One such struggle was focalized on the area around the airport and the joint squadron (*escadrille*), which has come into the spotlight as people had started to settle nearby. Large tracts of land around the present-day airport had been expropriated during the colonial period. At independence, the land deeds were transferred to the post-colonial administration and the land around the airport was allocated to ASECNA,³⁴ the air traffic control agency. The descendants of the customary land owners from Saga were now claiming their rights to compensation for the land taken. State representatives dismissed such claims, arguing that the customary land owners had already been compensated, referring to a document confirming that the canton chief of the time, Abdou Moumoni, had received a monetary compensation for the land included in the land deed in 1953. However, the representatives of the descendants from Saga said that authorities had never shown them proof of the compensation. They also argued that the borders of the land deed have been extended during the post-colonial period, extensions which they argued have little to do with 'public utility' and more with the interest of the authorities in earning money on the sale of land plots.

The progression of the urban agglomeration is viewed with ambivalence by customary land owners. One neighbourhood chief remarked that the zoning of land that accompanies the progression of the urban agglomeration is unavoidable.

Whether you want it or not, your field will be zoned, they will take the land that you have inherited from your ancestors... Deyzebon and Banizombou [old neighbourhoods in the centre of Niamey] have all passed through it and it was our turn. Later it will be the turn of Kollo and Liboré [villages to the east of Saga].

The fear that their land would be expropriated by the state as the urban agglomeration expanded caused many customary land owners in Saga to opt for selling land, fuelling the parallel land market. As a local leader

³⁴ The Agency for Aerial Navigation Safety in Africa and Madagascar (*Agence pour la Sécurité de la Navigation Aérienne en Afrique et Madagascar*).

noted, 'The peasants parcel out [land]...before the city comes to take it.' Sidikou described this fear among customary land owners in 1980:

...out of fear that they would be dispossessed of their land in the event of zoning, near or far away, customary land owners in the vicinity of Niamey sell their land as fast as possible to the numerous buyers in search of a roof over their heads. (Sidikou 1980: 322, my translation)

Land is still being sold today. Customary land transactions are recognized by the state. The municipalities in Niamey regularize customary land transactions by issuing a 'customary holding' (*détention coutumière*) upon presentation of a signed and testified certificate of sale (*certificat de vente*) and payment of an administrative fee. This is the first step towards the formalization of land rights. However, the local authorities in charge of urban planning are critical of the sale of customary land because it does not follow urban planning regulations. One official at the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN) commented that the streets are too narrow and no provisions are made for infrastructure and public services such as schools, health centres, and markets: 'They [customary land owners] coop people up like sardines, they make a maximum number of land plots, they sell them, and then they are off.' The sale of land involves a conflict between the interests of customary land owners and local officials not only over urban planning but also over land revenues. With the 'auto-production' of land plots, the local authorities lose out on (licit and illicit) benefits from land sales. For the buyers, purchasing land from customary land owners is advantageous because the land plots are generally cheaper and the procedures are hassle free.

Formal private zoning has emerged as a new and alternative strategy to the 'auto-production' of land plots for controlling the future use of one's land. The procedure for private zoning is similar in many respects to that for zoning performed by the authorities. According to the agent responsible for public land at the municipality, applications for private zoning have to include a proof of ownership of the land (*une attestation coutumière*), a topographic plan, a plan for the provision of water and electricity, the division of plots, and a map showing the location of the area. The application then has to be approved by the municipality's council on urbanism (*conseil d'urbanisme*), which is made up of the canton chief, the MP, mayor, deputy mayor, and other municipal (technical) agents (environment, education, etc.) before being transferred to the Ministry of the Interior. Initiating private zoning requires significant resources but is a potentially very lucrative investment, as significant profits could be gener-

ated from the sale of land plots. At the time of my fieldwork, one of the neighbourhood chiefs in Saga was in the process of zoning his family's customary land situated on the periphery of the capital. He had been advised by a relative who used to work at the municipality – 'who knows all of the circuits' – to submit a demand for private zoning. To put together the demand he had solicited the services of an expert at the Ministry who also worked for the municipality, to whom he had paid 1,000,000 FCFA (1,524 euros). In the case of private zoning it could be said that the tables were turned on the local authorities who benefited only from the transfer deeds (*acte de cession*) that had to be established before the land plots could be sold. When asked if the local authorities, in this case the municipality, did not ask for something in return, the neighbourhood chief replied that such requests were frequent and that certainly they would give land plots to officials of the municipality:

...it is always the case. Even the mayor has asked us. And, by the way, we cannot just leave them like that after all they do for us.

The private zoning plan included as many as 199 land plots varying in size between 300 and 500 square metres.

Pays Bas

Pays Bas is located north of Saga on ravined terrain that slopes down towards the river. It is framed in by the boulevard that leads to Niamey's international airport Hamani Diori to the north, and Saga to the south. From the boulevard only a couple of houses are visible, the rest of the neighbourhood unfolding in the ravine below, as suggested by the name Pays Bas ('low country'). Its precarious location, the seemingly anarchic construction of houses in *banco*, and the narrow winding streets have made Pays Bas an emblematic example of a 'spontaneous' or 'squatted' neighbourhood. The only routes of access by car to the neighbourhood are two dirt roads, barely visible, from the boulevard at two different ends of the neighbourhood. On foot, Pays Bas is accessible through a number of different paths, and minibuses that connect the neighbourhoods of Aéroport and Talladjé to the city centre drop off passengers headed to Pays Bas at several different points along the boulevard. The dirt roads trail down the steep slope that leads into the neighbourhood. The road skirts the quarries from which gravel and mud are extracted for the production of bricks used in the construction of houses. At the bottom of the slope smaller streets continue into the different parts of the neighbour-

hood, the widest street leading to what has developed into the commercial centre and public place around a water pump (*forage*), animated by ambulant water sellers, food vendors, butchers, small-scale retailers selling everything from flip flops to cooking utensils, hairdressers, and a chair rental for ceremonies such as marriages and naming ceremonies (baptisms). It is also where community meetings are held and is the meeting point for the neighbourhood chief, his representative, and other neighbourhood leaders as well as the starting point for ‘ambulant’ public health activities such as vaccination and public awareness campaigns carried out by the public dispensary in Saga.



Figure 4. Houses on the edge of an abandoned quarry. Photo: Henrietta Sterner

The population of Pays Bas has been estimated at around 10,000. However, despite a growing population there is little in the way of public services and infrastructure in Pays Bas. Water provision is limited to the water tower and wells. Ambulant water vendors provision themselves at the water tower. The electricity coverage reaches only certain areas through the extension of shared or ‘pirate’ connections. According to an agent of the national electricity company *NIGELEC*, in 2007 approximately two hundred households were officially connected. There are no public education and health services. There had been attempts to create private dispensaries but these were short lived. The population of Pays Bas thus fills up the ranks of patients in neighbouring health centres, and

the children are sent to schools in the surrounding neighbourhoods. The only school in Pays Bas, with the exception of Qu'ranic schools, is a small private Franco Arabic school. Created by a retired teacher in 2002, the school consisting of three classrooms in *banco* perches defiantly, like so many other houses in Pays Bas, on the edge of a small cliff. There are also several mosques in the neighbourhood.

Though Pays Bas is often referred to as a spontaneous or squatted neighbourhood, its development reveals a relatively long history of settlement, and the majority of residents in Pays Bas are either homeowners or lodgers. According to local accounts, Kourtey pastoralists from Saga and other Fulani pastoralists were the first to settle in the area in their search for pasture for their animals back in the 1930s or earlier. Three or four families settled in the area, living from farming and herding. One man in his seventies who was born in Pays Bas described the settlement of the area in the following way:

I was born in this field...it was the land of my father. He left Saga to settle in his field. It was really a 'bush' (*brousse*) [outback]... We kept livestock and we hunted...here, where we are right now, these were fields.

He said that his father had been asked to be the neighbourhood chief but had preferred to defer that role to the Kourtey, who were more numerous. Today, Pays Bas is administratively linked to Saga Kourtey and the chief of Saga Kourtey. The older generation describes the transformation of the area of present-day Pays Bas from an uninhabited 'bush' into farming fields, and from settlements in thatched huts dispersed in the fields into more permanent settlements and houses in *banco*. Parts of the area had apparently been used as a firing range by the colonial authorities. This area is called Lessi, according to the representative of the neighbourhood chief an imitation of the sounds that the bullets would make. It is also the site of one the first settlements of Pays Bas along with Hargaman and Tondigamay. One long-term resident emphasized that, before, no one wanted to live Pays Bas: 'They called us the people in the hole, no one wanted to come here.' The sale of land started in the 1980s, but it was not until the 1990s that people started buying land and settling in large numbers. One early resident remarked that 'it was during the time of Mahamane Ousmane [the President] that people came in large numbers and installed themselves'. The rapid transformation of the neighbourhood is very much related to the economic and political crisis of the 1990s. Land was cheap and easily accessible and so was building material, since bricks were fabricated in the quarries. As the neighbourhood grew, new sections

were inhabited and were given new names. Saga and Pays Bas are now connected, as an extension of Saga called Saga Sahara has developed. The most recent expansion of Pays Bas towards Saga was called *Lamba ga zaada*, which can be translated from Zarma as ‘hanging or leaning on (*s'appuyer*) to prosper’. As explained by one resident, ‘It roughly means staying close by in order to live.’ Others used the name *Lamba ka zaada* which changes the meaning to ‘to move way or withdraw to prosper’. Both expressions reflect the fact that Pays Bas was formed through peoples struggle to find a home and to make a better and life in the city.

Located on ravined terrain on which it is difficult to build, and devoid of basic infrastructure, Pays Bas has attracted a predominantly, although far from exclusively, poor population. Some residents have settled in search of cheap rents and others in the quest to become homeowners, and yet others have invested in large tracts of land and in vegetable gardens and quarries. The population of Pay Bas is ethnically diverse (Hausa, Zarma, Songhay, Fulani, Tuareg...) and is made up of both newcomers to the capital and urbanites who have moved to Pays Bas from more centrally situated neighbourhoods, enticed by the possibility of buying land or by cheaper rent. The growth of Pays Bas is thus part of a more general movement from the centre to the periphery, as observed by Gilliard (2005: 83).

The local authorities disapprove of the development of Pays Bas. An official at the urban municipality underlined that the area should never have been used for housing, as there is a risk of flooding and land slides. The proximity to the airport was also pointed out as a risk factor, since airplanes pass directly above the neighbourhood to land at the airport. The authorities have also claimed that parts of the land on which people have built houses belong to the state. The latent conflict over the status of the neighbourhood came to a boiling point in September 2006 when a couple of houses built on the plateau next to the boulevard were demolished, an action that was coordinated by the mayor of the municipality. The demolition led to a confrontation between residents, mainly youth, and the police, and several people were arrested. In a newspaper interview preceding the demolition, the mayor justified the action in terms of the risks the inhabitants are exposed to, adding that the architecture of the houses built along the official road to the airport, outside of any legal structure, and without any aesthetic considerations, hinders the modernization of the city (Le Temoin 2006a). According to the authorities, plans had been made to relocate the population farther east, but the first measure taken was to be the clearing of the plateau next to the boulevard to ‘contain’ the neighbourhood. In response, a neighbourhood committee

named 'The Committee for the Protection of the Interests of Pays Bas' was created. The committee was headed by the president and founder of a well-known NGO and former national human rights commissioner, who had bought a land plot in 1997 and had recently moved into the neighbourhood after finishing the construction of his house. Another key member was a long-term resident and retired civil servant, who said that he had been one of the first to buy land there and now owned several plots of land and houses. He had already defended the neighbourhood in the past in the face of the threat of demolition. The committee also mobilized an imam who had been born in Pays Bas, his family, who were herders from Tera, having settled there early on. The committee organized meetings in the neighbourhood mosques and approached the head of the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN), members of the National Assembly, and the mayor of the municipality. The actions of the committee and the visibility that it managed to achieve in the media were not appreciated by the municipality, which finally refused to deal with the committee, preferring to negotiate with the neighbourhood chiefs. The position of the local authority thus divided neighbourhood leaders into two camps, the chiefs and the committee.

The action of the local authorities was seen as unjust and especially callous, as it had been carried out during the rainy season, though some people said that those who had built their houses on the plateau had only themselves to blame. In the wake of the attempted relocation, the views of the inhabitants diverged as to the future of the neighbourhood. Some said that it was only the area on the plateau that the authorities wanted to clear out. Others held that the authorities wanted the land so they could sell it to private interests for their own profit. Most seemed convinced that although the state did not want them there the authorities could not remove them, not least because of their sheer number. Moreover, if they were to be moved they would have to be guaranteed compensation; as one resident remarked, 'It is true that everything belongs to the state, but we also have the right to a home.' The fact that there was no infrastructure and no public services in the neighbourhood – a frequent comment being that 'the state has done nothing here' – seemed to further galvanize the inhabitants in opposition to the authorities.

Tondigamay

Tondigamay is located in the same valley as Pays Bas; it is separated from Pays Bas by a stretch of gardens and a wide dirt road that leads to a public works centre that was created in 1983 and around which the neighbour-

hood started to take shape. Another fairly wide dirt road, closer to the airport, barely visible on the rocky plateau, leads down a slope, following an electricity line, to an open piece of flat land. Tondigamay is a neighbourhood under construction, with a mix of finished houses, walled-in plots, growing piles of bricks awaiting use, and plots with corrugated iron boundary markers driven into the ground at the four corners, bearing the initials of the owner. Fairly wide streets cut through the neighbourhood. The construction of houses in cement, and of a two-storey house, alongside houses in *banco* reveals that the neighbourhood has attracted a mixed and fairly well-off group of residents (e.g. a corporal, a professor, civil servants). Like Pays Bas, Tondigamay is connected to the city centre by the minibuses that stop along the boulevard that leads to the airport and continue to the neighbouring Aéroport. The neighbourhood itself is also easily reachable by car, as wide dirt roads lead into it.



Figure 5. Houses in Tondigamay.

Tondigamay means approximately ‘between rocks’ in Zarma and the terrain is indeed rocky. The area was first settled at the same time as Pays Bas by a family of Kourtey who still live there. In the early 1980s, two brothers from Saga (Saga Gassia Kwara) settled on their inherited land with their families following the death of their father. They cultivated the land

and kept livestock alongside their other activities. The older brother, El Hadji Idrissa, retired from his work as a cook and bell boy at the Grand Hotel in Niamey in 2004 after having worked there for thirty-five years. The younger brother, Ousseini, was one of the pupils in the first class to attend the first primary school in Saga created in 1962, but he never continued beyond sixth grade. He now made a living in trade after having worked as a bar man at the Grand Hotel and a warehouse keeper for a transport company. Today, the brothers live opposite one another, and the open square between the two compounds has become a public square to which visitors and potential land buyers are directed. The road that cuts through the square leads to the neighbourhood's Friday mosque.

The sale of land started in the years just before and after the turn of this century. According to one long-time resident, the land had been divided up between the descendants after one of the brothers had already started selling parts of the land. The sale of all land was handled by the two brothers who resided in Tondigamay. The older brother has opened a store and constructed a small building next to his house, and his mobile phone number was written on the wall, ensuring that he could be easily contacted. According to a resident who acted as an intermediary between sellers and potential buyers, in the beginning plots were sold for 50,000 FCFA, but ten years later the price of a plot had increased to 800,000 FCFA for attractive plots and between 400,000 FCFA and 500,000 FCFA for less attractive plots. Land is also being resold a first or a second time.

Tondigamay is more recently established than Pays Bas and is considerably smaller. However, the neighbourhood has developed quickly. The initial mosque in *banco* was replaced by a mosque constructed with Kuwaiti funds in 2006. A public kindergarten, housed in a classroom constructed of straw and occupying a flat but rocky escarpment, was created in 2007 on the initiative of a neighbourhood resident in cooperation with the two brothers and other parents in the neighbourhood. The proximity of the public works centre (*travaux publics*) connected to the electricity and water networks held the promise of possible access to water and electricity, which, as one resident points out, 'is what attracts people, it is more urban than Pays Bas'. The brothers were in fact eager to distance themselves from Pays Bas, which they cited as an example of bad planning. In parcelling out land, they had been careful to follow the standards of formal zoning, leaving room for streets.

We almost made a subdivision, a master mason made room for roads...
We have learned from the example of Pays Bas. We have to do better, and

without roads you cannot have anything, but today we have electricity, water...

One of the brothers kept a ten-metre measure in the small building in which he received visitors. Each plot sold was 'measured up' and markers were driven into the ground at the four corners of the plot. In this they follow a pattern strategy of mimicking urban norms of the 1970s and 1980s described by Sidikou in 1980:

Sometimes the parallel land market takes on the appearance of a veritable official operation. The sellers take care to make an approximate zoning of their land using the services of a topographer. (1980: 323, my translation)

The brothers also said that they had reserved land for a school, a health centre, and a mosque, infrastructures which they saw as essential for the development or evolution of the neighbourhood. The two brothers hoped eventually to form their own formally recognized neighbourhood:

We are in search of legitimacy, we want to create our own neighbourhood, my brother and I.

Tondigamay was still attached to Saga Gassia Kwara (and to its chieftaincy), from which the land owners originated. In talking about forming their own neighbourhood they referred to a future role as neighbourhood chief in the officially recognized neighbourhood.

Discussion

The cases of the three neighbourhoods, set against the backdrop of the development of Niamey, are revelatory of a plurality of sometimes opposing norms, logics and interests in the capital regarding the appropriation and use of urban land. It is also illustrative of the importance of urbanization from below to the expansion of the capital in the face of a limited and difficult access to land plots and the absence of government investments.

In the introduction to a collection of essays on cities, Holston and Appadurai argue that the struggles of the urban poor for rights to the city, including claims to access to housing, property, sanitation, health services, education, and so forth, can contribute to broadening the definition of citizenship as people claim entitlements as citizens 'to a measure of economic well being and dignity' (Holston & Appadurai 1999: 11). Following Lefebvre, the idea of the right to the city has been described as the

right of urban dwellers to directly influence and control the ‘production of urban space’ as well as the right to use and appropriate urban space (Purcell 2002: 102–103). The right to the city has been seen as a prerequisite for a democratic city and for urban citizenship (Amin & Thrift 2002: 142) and as a counterweight to the disenfranchisement of urban dwellers in the face of the neoliberal political and economic restructuring of cities that excludes urban dwellers from important decisions that shape the city (Purcell 2002). Other authors have pointed out that the search for a better life in the city does not necessarily lead to a political awakening or social movements. Bayat, working in Cairo, points out that such phenomena as ‘spontaneous’ communities and illegal construction as well as street vending are examples of a daily and silent struggle by the disenfranchised for survival and for better lives in the city through the ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ that can, but does not necessarily, lead to collective action (1997: 57). Moreover, people often prefer to live and work outside the constraints of the formal sector with its attendant social, cultural, and economic costs (social control, bureaucratic regulations) (ibid. 60).

In Pays Bas the conflicting interests of the inhabitants and the local authorities can be interpreted as a conflict over rights to shape the city, a conflict between people seeking somewhere to live, a home, in the city and the authorities who qualify such attempts as an anarchic and disorderly use of urban space. This conflict is not limited to Pays Bas. This is a recurrent conflict in Niamey and the object of a great deal of polemic. A propos the proliferation of spontaneous settlements in Niamey, one state official remarked:

A strong state is necessary. If not, tomorrow someone will come and settle behind the Ministry over there and the next day in the Seyni Kountché stadium... One has to create order.

A common argument of state representatives is that if you can’t afford to live in the city, within state norms, you should return to your village. Holston has referred to auto-constructed peripheries and squatter settlements as examples of ‘insurgent urbanism’, ‘that, in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas’ such as the modernist planning in cities and established histories (1999: 167). This could be applied to informal settlements of straw huts and houses in *banco* such as Pays Bas in Niamey which disturbed the order and prosperity (residential neighbourhoods) associated with urbanization and development striven for by officials.

Tondigamay, although it had the same unclear legal status as Pays Bas and was created through a similar process of land sales, had not (as yet)

been challenged by the local authorities. In Tondigamay, conscious efforts were made to mirror the layout of formal neighbourhoods to facilitate the eventual regularization of the neighbourhood. Although more recent than Pays Bas, Tondigamay was already better equipped to offer the comforts associated with urbanity – electricity, water, wide streets, a kindergarten. This can be seen as a strategy, a way of getting claims recognized. Belko Maïga notes that in Niamey, ‘irregular’ neighbourhoods (tombola neighbourhoods) were sometimes even provided with equipment and infrastructure such as water, electricity, schools, and dispensaries more rapidly than formal neighbourhoods zoned by the authorities (1985: 186). He attributes this to the need of residents in urban neighbourhoods to legitimate the existence of their neighbourhood (themselves) vis-à-vis the state:

For this they must simultaneously make claims and manoeuvre to attract the benevolent attention of the authorities. The desire of residents or non-speculating tombola owners is to be integrated as a regular urbanite with the same rights and duties as all other more or less fortunate categories in other urban neighbourhoods. For this reason, they are open to all political solicitations concerning the division (*quadrillage*) of the social space, the major worry of any authority... They simultaneously attract and reject urban plans. (ibid., my translation)

The difference between the two neighbourhoods illustrates that the appropriation of space and the negotiation of rights to the city can entail an opposition to the local authorities or the state just as much as it can take the form of an ambition to be integrated into the ‘formal’ city, thus strengthening rather than challenging state norms. In a study of house construction in peri-urban Maputo, Mozambique Nielsen (2009) points out that the illegal production of plots does not mean that people destabilize existing structures of power as house builders seek security and legitimation by the state and municipality through the mimicking and appropriation of urban norms.

In Saga, the most evident struggle was that which concerned land. In selling their land and in reclaiming their rights to land already expropriated, the customary land owners from Saga were also claiming their rights to the city, rights to land but also to recognition, both of which are felt to have been challenged by the growth of the city. As I will show in following chapters, these claims to the city (and vis-à-vis the state) were also made in terms of public service provision and infrastructure. The sale of land and claims for compensation sometimes led to conflict with the state, like in the case of the airport, and with the local authorities in charge of

urban planning, who had to deal with the informal and, in their eyes, unplanned settlements created through customary land sales. Moreover, the local authorities missed out on the revenues from formal zoning.

The cases of Saga, Tondigamay, and Pays Bas illustrate the point made by Myers that local dynamics and the possibilities of alternative planning in peri-urban (informal) neighbourhoods are very much dependent on their 'historical-geographical roots and social relations with the state' (Myers 2010b: 575). These factors also influence the strategies that are deployed in attempts of overcoming political and geographical marginalisation and gaining recognition and visibility. In Tondigamay the spatial layout on a flat piece of land and the number of influential residents in terms of their socio-economic status paved the way for a strategy of inclusion. In Pays Bas, by contrast, a number of aspects – the precariousness of the terrain, the poverty of the population, the proximity to the airport, as well as the market value of the land located alongside the boulevard – pitted the population against the local authorities. For instance, as described above the attempted demolition of a small part of the neighbourhood sparked a local movement in the form of the Committee for the Protection of the Interests of Pays Bas. The committee challenged the local authorities' interpretation of the neighbourhood as illegal. Interestingly, one of the key members of the committee pointed to the history of the neighbourhood and the early settlement of Kourtey and other families – information that had been gathered during an earlier conflict with the authorities – in order to strengthen the claims of residents who had bought land. Namely, that they had bought the land from customary land owners in good faith, hence shifting the responsibility for the situation to customary land owners. It is also significant for the organization of the committee and the success of the campaign that one of the leaders of the committee had long experience in social movements and human rights work and thus knew what registers to use and whom to contact. In Saga claims to the city and to recognition were mainly made with reference to customary land ownership and history. In the next chapter I illustrate the struggle for visibility, on the part of the chieftaincy in Saga. In the next and in following chapters it will also be illustrated that the different urbanisation trajectories and social composition of the neighbourhoods as well as their relations to the local authorities also influence the shaping of the local political administrative and political landscape and the provision of public services.

4. The chieftaincy and the municipality

This chapter provides an account of the political and administrative landscape in Niamey in general and in the three peri-urban neighbourhoods in particular, focusing on the relations between different institutions and actors. The administration of Niamey is marked by the overlapping of different administrative entities, the source of much contention in the past and today, especially following the recent decentralization reform. Further, like many other contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, and elsewhere, for that matter, peri-urban Niamey is characterized by the presence of a plurality of local and external actors and institutions that compete for public authority (Lund 2006a). This plurality is illustrative to the ‘hybridity’ of peri-urban areas, described by Trefon (2009) in the case of Central Africa, where different land tenure systems (state owned land vs. customary claims) and authorities (state agencies and traditional authorities) coexist. The chapter especially focuses on the municipality, in place since the implementation of politico-administrative decentralization in 2004, and on the traditional chieftaincy. Rather than outlining only the formal or official roles of the municipality and of the chieftaincy, the chapter focuses on what they actually do, on daily practices and interactions and how neighbourhood residents relate to them, soliciting their support at one time and avoiding them at another. This chapter thus provides an introductory description and analysis of the shaping and reshaping of the political and administrative landscape in the urban periphery, which will be further developed in coming chapters.

The administration of Niamey

Niamey has seen many different administrative regimes. In 1955, during the colonial period, it became the sole municipality (*commune de pleine exercice*³⁵) in Niger (Fuglestad 1983: 179), and subsequently, in 1956, the

³⁵ Niamey (and Zinder) had become *communes de moyen exercice* in 1954, ‘with a partly elected, partly appointed municipal council presided over by a mayor-administrator’ (Fuglestad 1983: 179).

first mayor, Djibo Bakary, was elected in the first municipal elections held in Niger (Fuglestad 1983: 183). However, the municipal council was dissolved in 1959 (Alpha Gado 1997: 74). During the colonial period, the five original neighbourhoods (Kalley, Maurey, Kouaratégui, Gawaye, and Zongo) and a system of neighbourhood chiefs who served as auxiliaries were the basis for the administration of the capital (Sidikou 1980: 235). This organization was maintained after independence, different neighbourhoods forming the core of different sectors³⁶ which were well-known political, cultural, and sporting entities (Alpha Gado 1997: 59; Sidikou 1980: 235). In 1967 Niamey and all urban communities with more than 25,000 inhabitants were given the administrative designation of city (Sidikou 1980: 56). In 1974, following a decree to devolve the administration of cities, the capital was divided into seventeen *arrondissements*, each to be run by a head of the *arrondissement* (ibid. 236). However, the *coup d'état* in the same year meant that they never took office. Still, the *arrondissements* were maintained until 1979 when the city was divided into five districts. These districts were given the same status as administrative posts and were headed by a district manager (*chef de district*) (ibid.). This reorganization was seen as necessary as the administration of the growing city had become unwieldy and inefficient (Sidikou 1980: 236). Sidikou points to the synonymous and sometimes confusing and contradictory use of different terms such as sectors, *arrondissements*, *lotissements*, and districts in the consecutive re-divisions that marked the administration of the capital:

...the terminology used varied depending on the period and the considerations which motivated it; neighbourhood, subdivision, sector, *arrondissement*, district would appear to be synonymous without always describing the same reality. (Sidkou 1980: 237, my translation)

In 1989, the Urban Community of Niamey (*Communauté Urbaine de Niamey*, CUN) was created in order to make the administration of the capital more efficient (Motcho 2004: 112). The CUN was divided into three municipalities (*communes*): Niamey I, Niamey II, and Niamey III. The CUN was headed by a *préfet* and the three municipalities were each run by a mayor designated by the government (ibid. 113). The mayors were members of the community development council of the CUN pre-

³⁶ The original sectors were Kalley (sector 1), Zongo (sector 2), Deizeibon-Koiratégui (sector 3), Banizoumbou (sector 4), Kalley-Est (sector 5), Lacouroussou (sector 6), Kalley-Sud and Nouveau Marché (sector 7), Gamkallé (sector 8), Gawaye (sector 9), and Yantala (sector 10). These were gradually extended to the peripheral neighbourhoods of Aviation (sector 11), Saga (sector 12), and Goudel (sector 13) (Sidikou 1980: 235).

sided over by the *préfet* (ibid.). In this administrative configuration despite the presence of mayors, the *préfet* was the key figure and concentrated all the powers, while the mayors merely executed orders (Motcho 2004: 122).

In 2004, the first step of politico-administrative decentralization at the national level was implemented following the election of municipal councils that would head newly created municipalities. Municipal councils took office in 265 newly created municipalities (52 urban municipalities and 213 rural municipalities). In Niamey there were five municipalities, each headed by an elected municipal council and a mayor. Several suggestions had been made for how to divide the capital. Of the five municipalities into which Niamey was ultimately divided, four were on the left bank of the river and one on the right bank. In one early proposal, the CUN was divided into as many as two departments, five *arrondissements*, and seventeen municipalities in an attempt to apply the general guidelines for division according to population numbers to the capital, leaving much doubt as to the viability of the municipalities (Giraut 1999: 70; Motcho 2004: 113).

At the national level, the run-up to the implementation of the decentralization reform was long in the making and was met by a number of setbacks such as ‘political instability, lack of state funding, tensions between villages and different ethnic and social groups, and political opposition from various quarters’ (Mohamadou 2009: 1).³⁷ The division into municipalities and the borders of those municipalities as well as the location of the administrative centre (*chef lieu*) was an especially contentious issue loaded with political as well as economic and social stakes (Hahonou 2010: 71; Mohamadou 2009: 7). Even at the level of Niamey with its long history of various administrative divisions as described above, there were conflicts over how the capital should be divided. According to one of the members of the commission set up to put forward proposals for implementing the decentralization reform, the traditional chiefs in Niamey were reticent in the face of the division of the capital given the difficulty of respecting the old cantons which had become integrated into the urban agglomeration:

...the particularity of Niamey is that the cantons are integrated in the urban space and it was difficult to say that we are going to communalize the canton of Saga, and the canton of Karma, Goudel, Kalley... They are old cantons that have become urban zones.

³⁷ For a detailed account of the history of decentralization in Niger, see Hahonou 2010.

Claims were made on the basis of the settlement history of Niamey by different groups from Goudel, Yantala, Kalley, Maurey, and the canton of Karma. Representatives from Saga had wanted ‘their’ municipality to be called the municipality of Saga. Some local leaders had also wanted the municipality to be detached from Niamey in order to have greater autonomy. Liboré, located to the east of Saga, which had been suggested as the sixth municipality in the CUN and which would have formed a zone of extension (*‘aire d’extension’*) for the urban community, opted out (Motcho 2004: 120). The same committee member said that in the final division, although history had been taken into account – ‘We also took history into account, every human grouping has its history’ – priority had been given to the population numbers of different neighbourhoods and the socio-economic infrastructure. However, according to Motcho, in the end the chiefs, with the support of influential political leaders, succeeded in asserting divisions that respected the traditional territories, with the aim of gaining control of the new municipalities (2005: 6).

Decentralization in practice

The stated goal of decentralization is to lessen the distance between the administrators and the administrated. Simply put, decentralization means that certain powers are transferred from the central level to lower (local) levels, closer to citizens. It is generally seen as a means of altering the ‘over centralisation of political decisions at the top of the state’ and is linked to democratization (Hagberg 2009a: 4). Decentralization has been promoted by international development institutions as an administrative form that opens the way to greater accountability, transparency, and efficiency. However, studies of decentralization in different countries and sectors have illustrated that this causal link is far from given. Decentralization processes have a variety of different outcomes. In an analysis of local political arenas in rural Benin, Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan argue that decentralization is likely to further ‘complicate political games at the local level’ in a context in which negotiations between political actors are omnipresent and the political arena is characterized by hybridity and fragmentation (2003: 147), making the outcomes of decentralization highly uncertain. What is certain is that decentralization has altered ‘the politico-administrative stakes in local arenas’ (Hagberg 2009a: 5) by introducing new actors into the mix.

In Niamey, at the level of the administration of the city, the putting in place of the new and elected municipal councils led to conflicts between

different administrative entities in the management of the capital. The Urban Community of Niamey (CUN) was still in place but its role had altered as power was transferred to the hands of the elected officials at the municipal level. Instead of a *préfet*, the CUN was now headed by a municipal council made up of delegates from each municipality and from which the president of the CUN was elected. At the same time, as in the past, Niamey centralized or encompassed several different administrative levels. It now had the status of a region headed by a governor, who represented the state. The many different, often overlapping levels of administration made for a complex situation. Following the installation of the municipalities, there were recurrent conflicts between the governor, the president of the CUN, and the mayors of the municipalities. The president of the CUN often espoused the role of the former *préfet* (Ahmet & Saadou 2008: 7) and trampled on the prerogatives of the municipalities:

He imposed himself as the de facto and only administrator of the space of all of the five (5) municipalities of the capital by organizing zoning operations and the sale of land plots, distributing land permits, and removing street merchants in order to make the circulation more fluid. (ibid. 12–13, my translation)

Officials of the municipality pointed to the difficult cooperation with the CUN, which they claimed acted like their superior when in fact there was no hierarchical relation between the two administrative bodies. They underlined that the CUN only had a coordinating function when it came to issues or investments that cut across the territory of several municipalities. In the words of one official:

...the CUN has no territory; on the other hand, it can coordinate public works initiatives that do not belong to one single municipality. For example, a road which is found in two municipalities, instead of one [municipality] doing something and the other nothing, we have to give that [work] to the Urban Community, which will do it with its means.

Motcho also points to frequent interventions by the governor (the representative of the central state) in urban affairs, such as his media outings clearing off street vendors (2010: 33).

The leverage of the CUN over the municipalities has stemmed in part from its control of resources. The common account (*compte commun*) which receives the taxes transferred from the state to the CUN and the municipalities (*impôts et taxes rétrocédés*) is controlled by the CUN. Apart from local taxes, the money from the state represents an important part of

the budget of the municipalities, but the municipalities had received the resources neither on time nor in the expected amount.³⁸ As testified by the mayor of Municipality Four apropos the municipal budget, ‘We hardly get half of it and in that half we have to pay the salary of the personnel.’

Overall, the new municipalities were created with few resources in their hands, limiting their scope to manoeuvre for action and investment. As described by Motcho:

The mayors and their councils have unfortunately inherited municipalities lacking the means to function, with the result that their actions are reduced to paying the salaries of their excessive staffs, inefficient and accustomed to finding ways to survive [*se débrouiller*], and to expunging the arrears owed to customary land owners. (2010: 33, my translation)

One municipal official complained that they were given responsibilities but not the financial autonomy to fulfil those responsibilities:

...they have given us the autonomy of management without giving us the means to reach our objectives.

While decentralization had introduced a new set or a new kind of actors – elected municipal councillors and mayors – in the management of the city, the first steps proved difficult, as the municipalities were unable to raise the resources necessary and were faced with conflicts over who should do what as well as a general unwillingness to decentralize the management of the capital, a management that involved high stakes and a high degree of visibility. This was also evident in the conflict between the CUN and the new municipalities over zoning, an operation which, as described in chapter 3, is charged with economic, political, and symbolic stakes.

In Niamey before the decentralization reform, zoning had been the prerogative of the CUN. After the decentralization reform zoning operations were supposed to be performed by the municipalities. However, the CUN contested the right of the new municipalities to carry out their own zoning, with the justification that there would be a lack of coordination. Officials at the CUN referred to a radio communication which had announced that the municipalities were not yet being allowed to carry out their own zoning even though it had been anticipated. As explained by an official in charge of urban land management questions at the CUN:

³⁸ After mediation by the governor, it was decided that each municipality would receive 14 per cent and the CUN 30 per cent. However, this was not applied; the president of the CUN only paid the salary of the municipal agents and continued to control the account at his own discretion (Ahmet & Saadou 2008: 13).

If we refer to the law on decentralization, the CUN has no territory. The CUN is only a coordinator of the totality of the municipalities, this is what we call cooperation between the municipalities (*l'intercommunalité*)... But to avoid abuse and exaggerations...you know, land is a source of monetary stakes. The state disseminated a message on the radio to all of the urban municipalities in Niger asking them to abstain from zoning operations. Until proven otherwise, the CUN carries out the zoning operations. It is the only cover we have, but the law is very clear, it is the municipalities who [should] do it [zoning operations].

The prerogative of zoning carried with it the possibility of raising important financial resources through the sale of land plots. For the municipalities, strapped for cash, zoning appeared as a golden opportunity. The potential conflict over zoning was clearly expressed when Municipality Four started planning to zone land situated between the neighbourhood of Route Filingué and the villages of Saga Gourou 1 and Saga Gorou 2 on the north-eastern outskirts of the capital. This initiative was contested by the CUN. An official at the CUN held that giving the municipalities the right to zone would lead to the overproduction of plots far away from the city centre:

Indeed it is a war. Municipality four wants to zone land towards the Filingué road [route Filingué]. Yesterday we wrote to them to tell them to adhere to the message given by the Minister of the Interior. This is the problem, the law gives them the right to manage the land but you have a radio message that says no, in order to ensure the harmonization of the use of land... And indeed if one lets the municipalities do it, taking into account the revenues that land represents, we would have reached Tillabery by now. There is really a lot of money made in zoning.

In return, the mayor explained that with time the municipalities had come to the realization that they would need to carry out zoning operations, especially given the unreliable resources at their disposal:

...since we have been installed there have been messages on the radio from the Ministry concerning the cooperation between the municipalities (*intercommunalité*) that forbade us mayors to initiate zoning operations. They reckon that it is the Urban Community that should do the zoning in consultation with the municipalities. Hence, since our installation we have not planned anything. But as time went by, we realized that it was a mistake to leave zoning to the CUN, which cannot solve the problems of the municipalities in return. Therefore each mayor, depending on the problem that he has to manage in his municipality, tries to make a demand for zoning op-

erations... I have sent a dossier that was put before the commission and it was approved.

The conflict over zoning involved both financial and political stakes, in the form of revenues (from sale of land plots) and authority (what administrative entity carries out this important operation). Hilgers has pointed to the importance of zoning (*lotissement*) for decentralized administrative entities not only in terms of revenues to finance the municipality and to extend electoral and clientelist networks but also to in terms of social and symbolic resources (Hilgers 2008: 212). As described in chapter 3 zoning and the sale of land plots in Niamey had for a long time been the source of illicit enrichment, which in part explains the reluctance of letting go of the ‘zoning prerogative’ and the sale of land plots. Moreover, according to one official even land plots reserved for infrastructure and public services, so called land reserves (*réserves foncières*), had routinely been sold off.

In the next section I focus on the daily operations of the municipality, which encompasses Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay and on the neighbourhood residents’ perceptions of and expectations on the municipality.

The trajectory of an urban municipality

Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay are part of Municipality Four (*Commune 4*), which, together with Municipality Three, was created from the former Municipality Two in the previous subdivision of Niamey. Municipality Four encompasses seventeen mainly peri-urban neighbourhoods and villages.³⁹ In 2010, the population of the municipality was estimated to be 278,691 (INS 2010: 57). According to an urban study published in 2007, it was the municipality with the greatest number of spontaneous settlements, and with respect to equipment and infrastructure – water provision, electricity, and drainage systems – it scored below average in comparison to other municipalities, with the exception of schooling (education services) (Laurant et. al. 2007: 198). The municipal office, a somewhat derelict two-storey building that had served the former Municipality Two and is now shared by Municipalities Three and Four, is situated near the boundary between the two municipalities. The municipal office as well as the area outside was animated with activity on most days,

³⁹ The neighbourhoods of Talladjé, Aéroport 1, Aéroport 2, Gamkalley Sebangueye, Gamkalley Gollé, Route Filingué, Saga Goungou, Saga Fondobon, Saga Sambou Kwara, Saga Gassia Kwara, Saga Kourtey, and Saga Peulh, and the villages of Bossey Bangou, Kongou Zarmagandeye, Saga Gorou 1, Saga Gorou 2, and Kongo Gongu.

people passing in and out of the municipal office and waiting outside or on the patio. Yet, municipal officials were not happy with the current arrangement, pointing to the dilapidated state of the building and to the inconvenience of sharing it with another municipality.

The municipal council (*conseil municipal*) was made up of twenty-five elected municipal councillors (*conseillers municipaux*) as well as four members by right with advisory status and no voting prerogatives; these were the canton chief from Saga, the MP (*député national*) who is also from Saga, and two representatives of the neighbourhood chiefs. The MNSD, the party in power, had the most municipal councillors. However, the mayor, a former high-ranked employee of a large private enterprise, represented the political party ANDP. In the face of the dominance of the MNSD, representatives from the other parties (PNDS, CDS, ANDP) had seen to it that a non-MNSD representative was elected mayor. As explained by one municipal official:

All the others united against the MNSD and chose the ANDP. It's pure politics. There is you know, the presidential movement (*la mouvance présidentielle*)⁴⁰ but here they didn't take this into account. They did what they wanted to do, since it is their own funds that they have invested to be elected.

For the MNSD, the choice of mayors in Niamey had been a source of frustration as only one municipality had chosen a mayor from the MNSD.

The municipality is responsible for the civil registry and censuses, hygiene and sanitation, and the management of public land (property) (*affaires domaniales*). It also intervened, with the support of state services and state agents seconded to the municipality, in community development, agriculture, rural equipment, environment, healthcare, and primary education. Examples of investments made by the municipality during its first years in office included the repair of roads, investments in school and health infrastructure (renovating buildings, constructing classrooms in straw, and equipping health centres), market infrastructure, and sanitation (taking care of gutters, street cleaning, public toilets), and so forth. Further, many of the auxiliary workers in health centres and schools (guards, ward orderlies, janitors) as well as the staff of civil registry offices were on the payroll of the municipality.

The resources of the district come from two main sources: state subsidies in the form of taxes given to the municipalities, such as property

⁴⁰ The alliance included the MNSD, the CDS and the ANDP. Together they secured 62% of all council seats in the 2004 elections (van Walraven 2011a)

taxes, and taxes that the municipality collects on its own. Local taxes include the *taxe de voirie* (a poll tax) as well as taxes on trade (market stalls, ambulant vendors), land transactions, advertising, and others. The municipality had also managed to get its hands on the salubrity or public health tax, which was especially important given the presence of the industrial zone in the municipality. However, the municipality was struggling to make ends meet. In its first couple of years, it managed to raise about half of the amount that had been projected in the budget. A large part of the expenses was reserved for salaries and running the services of the municipal office, which meant that the amount available for investments was limited. In 2005, for instance, the anticipated revenues were set at 556,727,340 FCFA; of this amount, the municipality had less than half (235,277,365 FCFA), at its disposal. It had received only 36.5 per cent of the taxes expected from the central government and had managed to raise only 55 per cent of the local taxes it had anticipated. Of the total amount raised, only 25,322,521 FCFA were devoted to investments, which meant that the municipality implemented only 10.71 per cent of the investments it had planned. Salaries constituted the biggest expense (Commune Niamey IV, 2006).

The municipality's main worry was the unreliable financial support of the central government, combined with the lack of cooperation from the CUN at the receiving end of state subventions. The other concern was how to increase local tax revenues, especially the poll tax (*taxe de voirie*), which was the most important in terms of potential revenues. The official responsible for tax collection noted that:

The poll tax...has been in place since the colonial time. Today not even 15 per cent is collected. It is deplorable. In Niamey there are municipalities that are not even able to collect 15 per cent.

Municipal officials pointed to the problem of 'fiscal disobedience' (*incivisme fiscal*), or the refusal of people to pay taxes. This situation was attributed in part to past promises of exemption from taxes made by politicians in order to get elected: 'They are off on their campaigns and they say vote for me and you will not have to pay anything [in taxes].' It was also attributed to the urban context, in which people were not 'afraid' of the administration:

Especially in the big centres, that's where it eludes us. More so than in the countryside [*en brousse*], because there people are still afraid. When they see somebody from the administration coming, they pay quickly.

‘Fiscal disobedience’ was to be countered through censuses – updating the list of taxable residents in each neighbourhood to facilitate the collection of taxes – and through sensitization. The person responsible for tax collection in the municipality underlined the need for sensitization and echoed the discourses surrounding decentralization in pointing to the importance of transparency and accountability, of being able to show in what ways the money collected would be used, in a context in which taxes were no longer collected under the threat of force:

You can follow this money and know where it is going. It has to be absolutely clear. It’s not that, because you are the mayor, nobody has the right to inspect what you do. Today, to take somebody’s money you have to convince them.

The transfer of taxation from the state administration to locally elected officials is a cornerstone of decentralization; it is assumed that local taxation will increase accountability and strengthen democratic structures at the local level since people (as taxpayers) will place demands on local representatives for better public services and for political representation (Juul 2006: 822). However, in a study of taxation in Senegal, Juul points to a decline in tax revenues with the transfer of taxation to the local level. Instead of using taxes as a means of putting pressure on the local councillors, people were reluctant to pay taxes because they feared the local councillors would squander the money (*ibid.* 836). They also pointed to the lack of public services as a reason for not paying taxes. This created a vicious cycle, as the local council was unable to carry out any investments, leading to further dissatisfaction and further undermining its legitimacy (*ibid.* 837). The other important point made by Juul is that other relations – to political patrons, for instance – are more valued than that to the local council, and that people invest more in such relations in order to access various resources, goods, and services (*ibid.* 844). Municipality Four found itself in a similar situation. When asked how taxes were used, people listed everything from salaries of civil servants, security, providing support for the poor, to health, education, and other social services. It was also generally held that in the past, people had been more prone to paying taxes than today. Like Juul’s informants, my informants also expressed doubts about where the collected taxes ended up; one man suggested that they probably ended up ‘in people’s pockets’. Some urban residents, especially in Pays Bas and Tondigamay, also pointed to the absence of equipment and infrastructure in the neighbourhood. The money paid out of pocket for education and healthcare – and other services, for that matter –

in the form of user fees and other kinds of contributions, was also used as an argument against having to pay taxes.

In evaluating the work of the municipality, although some people pointed to actions by the municipality such as repairing roads, cleaning gutters before the rainy season, and other maintenance activities, others complained of a lack of investments and pointed to the continued problem of the impassability of roads during the rainy season. However, people also pointed to the municipality's lack of financial resources as an extenuating factor. People's opinions of the municipal councillors were more critical. Four municipal councillors (one of whom was a woman) represented Saga, three from MNSD and one from PNDS. The municipal councillor from PNDS was also the second deputy mayor. Residents in Pays Bas and Tondigamay complained that the municipal councillors had never held a meeting or set foot in their neighbourhoods. The lack of investments was also seen as a failure on the part of the municipal councillors or as evidence of their incapacity to bring investments to the neighbourhood. The municipal councillors themselves described their role as that of intermediaries between neighbourhood residents and the municipality. They pointed to the thanklessness of their position in a context in which the municipality was struggling to raise funds:

There are problems with the roads, there are no gutters...garbage collection. The mayor should take care of this. Before, they were telling us there were no resources. We didn't believe them. Now that we are in the middle of it, we believe them. There really are no resources.

You have to see. Even in Niamey, decentralization has not been enough to solve the problems of the main roads. It doesn't worry them, and anyway decentralization is not as yet effective. Up to now it has only managed to reach a level of recovery [of resources] that enables it to pay the salaries. It isn't possible to make big investments.

The municipal councillors were not remunerated, except for the meetings or sessions of the municipal council, during which they received 7,500 FCFA per day. To the disappointment of municipal councillors, this sum had been reduced from 10,000 FCFA on the order of the Ministry of the Interior. One of the municipal advisors pointed out that it was only if you had the means necessary to receive contracts for cleaning gutters and constructing classrooms that you could earn some money.

On the whole, the municipal councillors were fairly anonymous in the local arena and seemed to be struggling to make their mark. Many neighbourhood residents, especially in Pays Bas and Tondigamay, did not

even know who the municipal councillors were. The councillors were often bypassed in attempts to solicit the support of the municipality, with people turning directly to the mayor or to the secretary general of the municipality, who lived in Saga. Moreover, they had little chance of asserting themselves alongside local big men like the MP from Saga, who, as mentioned above, had an advisory role on the municipal council. The MP ran a successful business and had an extensive political network and a reputation for 'helping out' in the neighbourhood.

The resurgence of the traditional chieftaincy

In the rest of this chapter I focus on the traditional chieftaincy and on its relation to urban residents as well as to other actors and institutions, including the municipality. Authors have analysed different aspects of the resurgence of 'traditional' authorities in local and national political arenas in Africa in the context of democratization, decentralization, and development aid (Buur & Kyed 2007; Perrot & Fauvelle-Aymar 2003; van Dijk & van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1999). In many countries in Africa following independence, traditional authorities were marginalized because they were seen as a hindrance to modernization and national unity, but in the 1990s, in an increasing number of countries in Africa, the position of chiefs was formalized by the state (Ubink 2007: 124). The resurgence of chieftaincy has been linked to three factors (Kyed & Buur 2007: 4–7; Ubink 2007: 125–127). First, the weakness of many African states, especially when there are conflicts, in which case the chiefs fill the gaps left by the absence of the state. Second, the opening up of new public spaces with democratization (multi-party democracy) and decentralization. And third, the withdrawal of the state initiated by structural adjustment programmes, leaving room for chiefs to intervene in everything from law enforcement and policing to service provision and development projects. The increasing visibility of chiefs can also be linked to the intensification of 'politics of belonging' in a context of globalization and decentralization, claims to resources and political power being increasingly made on the basis of autochthony, tradition, and ethnicity (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000; Hagberg 2009a).

Kyed and Buur outline three trends in the resurgence of traditional authority: (1) bottom up, through the organization of traditional leaders into associations, for instance; (2) top down, through legislation incorporating traditional authority; and (3) a more informal assertion of authority through the performance of state services (e.g. policing, justice, etc.),

competing with, replacing, or complementing the state (2007: 2-3). In Niger, all of these trends can be discerned, but they are not of recent origin. Chiefs in Niger have been part of the state administration since the colonial period, a role which is inscribed in state legislation. The chiefs have also regrouped in a national association. Finally, chiefs have been historically and are today involved in carrying out administrative tasks and contributing to public service provision (collecting taxes, signing customary land titles, providing security).

Donors are also showing an increasing interest in involving chiefs in development projects as a link to the population, with the capacity to mobilize people for development interventions, including community education and awareness (Ubink 2007: 127). This is also the case in Niger, where the Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger (*Association des chefs traditionnels du Niger*, ACTN) has been solicited in various development campaigns. In 2001 it started cooperating with UNICEF on questions concerning the schooling of girls, the prevention of diseases such as malaria and polio and the promotion of immunization, and the prevention of early marriage. UNICEF justified the involvement of the chiefs with reference to their influence in Niger and to the fact that communities trust the chiefs and listen to them (Delvigne-Jean 2005). According to one member of ACTN, the association's vehicle, a white jeep parked outside its office in the administrative and upscale residential neighbourhood of Plateau, was a donation from UNICEF.

The traditional chieftaincy in Niger

In Niger, as in many other colonies, chiefs were integrated into the colonial administration as a means of extending its reach. The territory of Niger was divided into *cercles*, *subdivisions*, and *cantons* (*groupements* in the case of nomadic groups). Each canton was headed by a canton chief who was designated by the colonial administration, and village chiefs were placed under the authority of the canton chief. The territorial division made by the colonial power at times nearly mirrored pre-colonial political entities but at other times divided them into different pieces and created new cantons from scratch (Abba 1999: 53). The colonial power also gave the chiefs new prerogatives and tasks, including the execution of coercive measures such as the imposition of taxes and recruitment for forced labour that had little to do with their former role (Olivier de Sardan 1984: 210). The importance of loyalty to the colonial administration as a criterion for appointing chiefs sometimes led to the appointment of chiefs

with little traditional legitimacy, such as interpreters and domestic servants. This was the case mainly during the early colonial period, however, since with time, the colonial administration became increasingly concerned with identifying noblemen so as to ensure that the traditional legitimacy be maintained. Chiefs needed to be loyal but also capable of exercising authority in order to be able to collect taxes, and so forth (ibid.). Olivier de Sardan points to the rupture caused by the integration of chiefs in spite of the deliberate veneer of continuity (ibid. 212–213). The chiefs were on the lowest administrative echelon and under the control of the administration; they were required to perform new tasks and could be dismissed by the colonial authority at any time (ibid.). Hence, Olivier de Sardan argues, pre-colonial chieftaincies were transformed into ‘administrative chieftaincies’ invested with ‘traditional legitimacy’. This was the case all over Africa as European colonial powers transformed chieftainships characterized by diversity into a ‘unifying administrative structure set up by the colonial rulers as part of a process of state building’ (von Trotha 1996: 80). In Niger, the remuneration of chiefs, in the form of an annual allocation, sealed their role as auxiliaries in rural areas, turning them partly into civil servants (Hahonou 2010: 97).

In contrast to many other African countries, the administrative role of chiefs was maintained after independence in Niger. Although consecutive regimes have maintained different relations to the chieftaincy ranging from attempts to circumscribe the influence of the chiefs, seen as an obstacle to modernization, to giving the chiefs a central role in political and social organization, chiefs have managed to keep an important position in social and political life throughout the post-colonial period (Abba 1999: 51; Lund & Hesselning 1999: 13).⁴¹

Following the democratic transition after the National Conference, the role of the chiefs was outlined in a 1993 law on the status of the tradi-

⁴¹ The first challenge to the chieftaincy was posed by the first political parties (RDA/PPA), which saw the chieftaincy as inimical to modernization. However, once in power following independence, the PPA was more conciliatory. Chiefs remained a part of the administrative organization and were also present in the government, although they faced competition from the rural extension scheme (animation rural), which introduced new local leaders (Tidjani Alou 2009b: 49). Under the military rule of Kountché, chiefs were accorded a central position in economic, social, and cultural development (ibid. 50–51). They were given an important role in the *Société de développement*, and the Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger was revived. The biggest challenge to the position of the chieftaincy was posed by the proceedings of the National Conference in 1991, during which some delegates pointed to the opposition between democratization and the political organization and historical administrative role associated with the chieftaincy (ibid. 52). Others, however, defended the chieftaincy and the defenders of the chieftaincy prevailed.

tional chieftaincy.⁴² The ordinance confirmed the existence of traditional and customary communities (*communautés coutumières et traditionnelles*). It also reinstated the election of chiefs, which had been suspended during the reign of Kountché and replaced by nomination by the authorities.⁴³ The responsibilities accorded to the chiefs ranged from collecting taxes (*impôts et taxes*), acting as the representative of the community in relations with the administration and third parties, ‘conciliating’ in the event of conflict, and managing the civil registry (*l’état civil*) in the absence of the administration, to ensuring harmony and social cohesion and acting as a development agent, actor, and partner. The chiefs were also given a central role in the extensive land tenure reform, the *Code rural*, drawn up in the late 1980s and adopted in 1993 (Lund & Hesselning 1999: 135). Previous to this, during the regimes of Diori and Kountché, attempts had been made to limit the power of the chiefs (and landowners) over land to the advantage of farmers (use-right holders) (*ibid.* 142–143). With the *Code rural*, the influence of the chiefs increased, as the granting of private (formal) property rights was made with reference to customary rights and to ‘collective memory’, which meant that an important role was given to the traditional chieftaincy – the canton chief – as the central authority (*ibid.* 136).⁴⁴

As these two examples, the 1993 ordinance on the traditional chieftaincy and the land tenure reform, illustrate, ‘the role and legitimacy of chiefs’ is clearly sanctioned ‘from above’ in state legislation (Lund & Hesselning 1999: 136). Tidjani Alou argues that traditional chiefs have provided a mediatory structure that is necessary due to the weak hold of the post-colonial state (2009b: 58). Similarly, Hahonou states:

⁴² *Ordonnance no 93-28 du 30 mars 1993 portant statut de la chefferie traditionnelle du Niger.*

⁴³ Village and neighbourhood (and *tribus*) chiefs are elected by a *collège électoral* made up of all of the heads of family (*chefs de familles*) in the village or neighbourhood; canton (and *groupement*) chiefs are elected by the village, neighbourhood, and *tribu* chiefs in the canton. Only patrilineal descendents of the chieftaincy are eligible.

⁴⁴ The formalization (codification) of customary land disputes, which are characterized by ambiguity and fluidity, led to the awakening of conflicts between competing right holders; men, sedentary agriculturalists, and people with status as first comers were able to make stronger claims (to customary land rights) than women, transhumant cattle herders, and so-called ‘late comers’ (Benjaminsen et al. 2009: 32; Lund & Hesselning 1999: 148–149). Moreover, once in place, the Rural Code opened the way to a massive demand for the formalization of land rights (Benjaminsen et al. 2009: 31). The authorities were not able to process all of the demands, causing people to turn directly to the chiefs rather than to representatives of the public administration’s land registry, which issued land deeds, extending both the source of income for the chiefs and their authority (*ibid.* 32).

[L]ocal governance is guaranteed by the ‘traditional chiefs’, who have remained the indispensable intermediaries between the modern state and rural populations. (Hahonou 2010: 100, my translation)

The chiefs have also been effective in defending their own interests, in part through their association, the ACTN. The association was created back in 1949 and was revived during Kountché’s military regime. It has proven to be a powerful national lobby (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 142). Moreover, the status of canton chief has retained, or perhaps regained, a symbolic strength, as evidenced by the number of people with a background in public administration, the private sector, and national politics who aspire to the position of canton chief as the final crowning step following a successful professional career (Tidjani Alou 2009b: 57–58). For instance, the majority of the board members of the ACTN have a career in the civil service behind them (ibid. 58), and the secretary general (in 2008) had occupied three ministerial positions – in the Ministries of Youth, Sports and Culture; Higher Education; and Research and Information. He had also been the *préfet* of the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN).

Against this background, chiefs in Niger can hardly be described as belonging to the sphere of ‘non-state’ actors and institutions. Chiefs in Niger have been an integral part of state administrations since the colonial period. In many rural areas, previous to the decentralization reform, chiefs have been the sole representatives of the state and the ‘unique mode of the exercise of local power in the countryside’ (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 141). However, this ‘legitimacy from above’ does not automatically translate into legitimacy at the local level. In an article on the relation between traditional chieftaincy and development in rural Niger, Olivier de Sardan (1999) points to its weaknesses, illustrated by the lack of a capacity to mobilize people and to respond to the problems faced by the rural population. Furthermore, the decentralization reform has posed a significant challenge to chiefs in introducing new actors into local political arenas with the installation of an elected mayor and a municipal council (Hahonou, 2002).⁴⁵ The position of the chiefs in the new institutional context created with the decentralization reform was a central dilemma and chiefs represented by the ACTN, saw decentralization as a threat (Hahonou 2010: 67). However, in the end, the interests of the chiefs in the division

⁴⁵ For an analysis of the reconfiguration of local political arenas in Niger prior to decentralization, see Olivier de Sardan and Tidjani Alou (2009a). And following the decentralization reform, see the collection of working papers on the functioning of municipalities published by LASDEL.

of the territory into municipalities was taken into account, the divisions being traced on the basis of the cantons, and the chiefs were included in the municipal councils, although in an advisory role (*ibid.* 88). They also maintained their role as tax collectors. In many localities, chiefs have also been able to keep their position as important actors in local politics, as members of the local aristocracies have been elected to the municipal councils (Mohamadou 2009).

The evolution of the traditional chieftaincy in the capital

During the colonial period, Niamey saw at least two attempts at the creation of a unifying cantonal chieftaincy for the town, but both were ephemeral. First, in 1905, Baginou was chosen as chief of the newly created canton of Niamey⁴⁶ in conjunction with the brief transfer of the administrative centre of the *cercle du Zarma* to Dosso (Fuglestad 1983: 68). The chief of the Mauri in Niamey, Baba Sekou, had been judged uncooperative and was dethroned by Captain Salaman, who chose Baginou for the position of canton chief instead (Bernus 1969: 22). According to Fuglestad, Baginou was a 'former guide of the Voulet-Chanoine expedition and a man without any traditional or legitimate claims to the position of chief' (1983: 68). According to Bernus, he came from the chieftaincy of N'Dounga (Bernus 1969: 20). The choice of Baginou as canton chief was contested by the local nobility, and being found to exercise poor judgement and to be extorting the population, he was soon dismissed (Fuglestad 1983: 68; Sidikou 1980: 19–20). Second, in 1931, after the influx of a significant number of migrants following a period of drought and famine, a chief of the 'independent village of Niamey' (a regrouping the different neighbourhoods), with the status of a canton chief (*Amirou Niamey*) was nominated (Sidikou, 1980: 51). Djibo Salifou from Kalley, a warehouse keeper and friend of Captain Salaman, was appointed chief (*ibid.*) in light of his loyal services (Bernus 1969: 22). This nomination, too, was contested. The chiefs of Maurey and Kwaratégui felt that the Kalley had usurped the chieftaincy of the town (Sidikou 1980: 51; Bernus 1969: 22). As is evident in the following extract from a colonial report, the colonial administration was aware of the questioning of Djibo's legitimacy as canton chief:

Djibo being only village chief, in spite of the rank of chef de canton that we have given him, and not even being the son of a village chief, has no

⁴⁶ For a time, the canton of Niamey encompassed the neighbouring cantons (and chieftaincies) of N'Dounga, Karma, Liboré, Saga, Goudel and Hamdallaye (Sidikou 1980: 19).

prestige in the eyes of the canton chiefs and is envied by some... The nomination of a former warehouse keeper as the village chief of Niamey, was it a mistake? – it is pointless to discuss this now – Djibo has been nominated by us. We have given him the rank of canton chief. Since his nomination Djibo has always conducted himself with honesty and loyalty. (letter, 11 Octobre 1937⁴⁷)

The administration also backed him up in conflicts with other chiefs, notably in a conflict with the canton chief of Saga over the border between Saga and Niamey, as people from Saga cultivating land that was part of the ‘territory of Niamey’ refused to pay the tithe (*dime*) to the chief of Niamey.

He has even in certain circumstances, notably in his quarrels with the chief in Saga, demonstrated great levelheadedness, and he has always shown a lot of goodwill towards ironing out difficulties. In these conditions we cannot but support the prestige and authority of Djibo against a chief who surely does not have his qualities and whose father, for that matter, has already been revoked (*ibid.*).

The chieftaincy of Niamey was finally abolished in 1948 during a period of political upheaval (Sidikou 1980: 54). The first national political parties were attempting to implant themselves in the capital partly through seeking the support of chiefs, which led to conflicts between different factions in the neighbourhoods (*ibid.*). Subsequently, the town, including the peripheral villages of Gamkalley and Yantala, was administered by the *Commandant de Cercle* with direct authority over the neighbourhood chiefs (*ibid.*). Continued political turmoil necessitated a more direct control over the administration of the town. In 1955, Niamey became a municipality and the first mayor of Niamey was elected in 1956.

With regard to the role of chiefs, Sidikou describes it in the following way during the colonial period and early independence:

The neighbourhood chiefs, and their delegates in the sub-neighbourhoods where they do not reside, are the auxiliaries of the administration. In their respective zones, they simultaneously represent the administrative power and the traditional power. They settle the minor disputes, of which there is no lack in any cosmopolitan society; they help in the establishment of tax rolls and municipal taxes. It is in their name that declarations of birth and

⁴⁷ A copy of this document was given to me by an informant. The letter is entitled *L'administrateur adjoint M Blanc chargé de la Subdivision de Niamey à Monsieur l'Administrateur Cdt cercle de Niamey* and dated 11 October 1937.

death are made, since they are supposed to know everybody. (ibid. 235, my translation)

In an ethnography of Niamey, Bernus points out that the rapidly changing composition of Niamey, with its population increase and its elevation to the capital of the colony of Niger, led to the decreasing relevance of chiefs, whose role became limited to

...relations between the municipal administration and the inhabitants. Rapidly, this title [neighbourhood chief] designated, without anything else, the one responsible for collecting taxes. (Bernus 1969: 22, my translation).

Chiefs might have been indispensable to the colonial administration in the rural areas, but less so in Niamey, since the administration was in more or less direct contact with the population.

Even so, chiefs have continued to play an administrative role in Niamey since independence. Like villages, urban neighbourhoods are defined as 'customary communities' (*collectivités coutumières*) headed by a chief who is elected according to the prescriptions of the ordinance on traditional chiefs (Alpha Gado 1997: 61). In contrast to the chiefs in rural areas, chiefs in Niamey and other urban centres are given an annual allocation (ibid.) on top of a percentage of the taxes collected. The number of chiefs in Niamey is constantly evolving as the city expands and new neighbourhoods are created. For a new neighbourhood to be formally recognized by the CUN, it has to be zoned and administered by a neighbourhood chief (Motcho 2005: 4). However, the process of the creation of new neighbourhoods is lengthy. Motcho argues that it is in the interest of chiefs that the extensions of old neighbourhoods remain extensions, as this means that they earn more money on tax collection in the extensions under their jurisdiction (ibid.).

However, there are neighbourhoods in Niamey that are not concerned with customary authority (Motcho 2005: 4). Ever since the colonial period began, Plateau (the former 'European city') has not had a neighbourhood chieftaincy; instead, residents pay taxes directly to the authorities (ibid.). This is also the case in newer neighbourhoods such as Kwara Kano, Riyad, and Recasement (ibid.), which are all very residential in character. This distinction, which most probably originated during the colonial period, mirrors the distinction between citizens and subjects analysed by Mamdani (1995), which meant that citizens (essentially, Europeans) enjoyed civil and political rights while the rest of the population was ruled by customary law (chiefs), further reinforcing the distinction be-

tween the European city and the African city on which the colonial structure of Niamey was based.

Chieftaincy in practice in the urban periphery

In Saga, in addition to the canton chief there are five neighbourhood chiefs, representing Saga Fondobon, Saga Gassia Kwara, Saga Sambou Kwara, Saga Gongou, and Saga Kourtey. These chiefs have been elected in accordance to the ordinance on the traditional chieftaincy and they have the administrative status of village chiefs and are referred to as *kwara koy* or *maïgari* (village chief) and not *kuray koy* (neighbourhood chief). The canton chief (*amiiru*) was from Saga Gongou and had been elected in 2006. The majority of the chiefs were over sixty years old, and their main activities were agriculture and herding. The chief of Saga Gongou, who was in his forties, was the youngest chief. He was the son of the deceased canton chief, a former gendarme who had been in power for seventeen years. The chiefs were responsible for their neighbourhoods and also the neighbourhood extensions, which included Pays Bas and Tondigamay.

The territory of the canton of Saga, with the exception of one village, is encompassed by Municipality Four. Of the seventeen neighbourhoods and villages in the municipality, twelve also belong to the canton of Saga. As already pointed out, the canton chief and representatives of the village and neighbourhood chiefs are part of the municipal council, although in an advisory role with no voting prerogatives. The chiefs are also on the payroll of the municipality and receive 30,000 FCFA a month. The mayor underlined that, with the municipality being situated in an urban centre, it had had no trouble with the chieftaincy, in contrast to certain rural localities:

At my place it is very good, our collaboration is perfect, but I know that there are problems in certain municipalities. But it's not in the big cities. In reality, the problems with the traditional chiefs exist especially in the rural areas.

In this urban context, the municipality and the elected municipal council was merely the latest in a series of local administrative powers. The municipality thus posed less of a threat than it might in many rural areas, since the chiefs were already accustomed to sharing the local arena with local administrative officials. In describing their own role as representatives of the population, the municipal councillors from Saga point to their

collaboration with the chiefs in discussions about neighbourhood affairs, what issues to bring to the attention of the municipality, and so forth.

The most frequently mentioned role attributed to chiefs by neighbourhood residents was to listen to the needs of the population and to act as a mediator between the authorities/the state and the population, to solve problems that arose in the neighbourhood, and to work for the improvement of the neighbourhood. Other roles mentioned included tax collection, conflict resolution (over land, marriage, fights, or disagreements) for neighbourhood residents, and certification of land transactions. People had clear notions of the role of chiefs; however, of the same residents, about one-third did not know who the neighbourhood chief in their neighbourhood was. The proportion of people who did not know the chief was greater in Tondigamay and in Pays Bas than in Saga, and it was greater among women than men. In sum, people residing in Saga and men were more likely to know the neighbourhood chiefs. This is not surprising, given the physical distance of Tondigamay and Pays Bas from the chieftaincy and the more heterogeneous population with weak ties to Saga. The difference between women and men can be attributed to the more frequent contacts of men as household heads with neighbourhood chiefs, for instance, when it came to land conflicts, questions, and the elections of the chiefs, in which only male household heads voted. Only four or five people said that they had consulted the chief on a specific matter. Those who had, had done so because of a land dispute or conflicts with a neighbour.

For the municipality, the most important role of the chiefs is that of tax collection. The tax collected by the chiefs, the poll tax (*taxe de voirie*) of 1,500 FCFA, was collected on behalf of the municipality. As described above, this was one of the most important local taxes for the municipality in terms of revenues. In compensation for their work, the chiefs received 10 per cent of the amount collected. The canton chief, who is not directly involved in the actual collection, was given a performance premium based on the tax collected in the neighbourhoods and villages belonging to the canton. All neighbourhood chiefs pointed out that tax collection was a thankless task, as people were reluctant to pay the tax. People who had moved into the neighbourhood said that they paid tax in their home village or town, and people who were employed in the formal sector did not pay tax to the neighbourhood chief, thus reducing the tax base. For the chiefs, the refusal to pay taxes had started with democratization, which meant that, in the words of one chief, 'people are no longer afraid of the government'. At one point, the fact that the chiefs in Niamey only managed to collect between 10 and 20 per cent of the 'tax base' caused the

Urban Community of Niamey to consider giving the task to a private company. However, this was rejected by the Ministry of the Interior (Motcho 2005: 7–8). Such a refusal is not surprising, given the centrality of tax collection to the administrative status of the traditional chieftaincy and to the benefits of the chieftaincy in terms of financial resources. In a rural context, the difficulty of collecting taxes has been interpreted as a loss of the authority of the chiefs (Hahonou 2010: 108). This point is also made by Motcho, who links the failure to collect taxes to the weakness of chiefs in Niamey:

In a society in full mutation, the multiple tasks of the neighbourhood chief are such that, today, he is judged as inefficient. He is, as a matter of fact, misunderstood by his constituents [*administrés*], as is evidenced by his weak capacity to mobilize and his weak performance in terms of collecting the poll tax. (Motcho 2005: 7, my translation)

Hahonou points to the refusal to pay taxes to a particular chief as a form of contestation of his power that is also used in conflicts between different factions to weaken the position of a particular chief (2010: 108). He also suggests that the failure to pay taxes is an indication of the link between the weakening authority of the state in the move to democracy and the weakening authority of the chiefs (ibid. 109). In this urban context, in which the power of the chiefs is relatively weak, it makes little sense to see ‘fiscal disobedience’ as a form of contestation against the chieftaincy, although it could be seen as a reflection of the already precarious status of the chieftaincy as argued by Motcho. However, not paying taxes was more a protest against what was seen as the failure of the authorities, variously referred to as the municipality or the state, to put the money to good use, rather than against the authority of the chiefs.

In addition to collecting taxes, the chiefs assist the municipality in gathering people for community meetings and cleaning sessions in preparation for the rainy season, etc. They are also solicited in the health and education sectors, as members of community committees, for instance, and in the organization of sensitization campaigns. Hence, even in this urban context the chiefs act mainly as intermediaries between the population and local authorities. Development projects also generally consult or inform the chiefs before or in conjunction with development interventions. Since the main part of this peri-urban area is not zoned, the chiefs are also involved in land sales. The certificate of sale that is established when customary land is sold is signed by the canton or neighbourhood chief, for which he receives a remuneration of around 5,000 FCFA. Motcho points to ownership of land (*le capital foncier*) as a source of influ-

ence or leverage for the chiefs in the local political arena, as it allows them to put pressure on the local authorities in demanding compensation in land plots whenever a zoning exercise is undertaken (2005: 6–7). This means that at the same time as they make money on land through speculation, they access land plots in the new zoned areas, which opens the way to their continued influence as traditional leaders in the new neighbourhoods (*ibid.*). However, as discussed in chapter 3 zoning was often seen as a loss by customary land owners, especially given the history of uncertain compensation. Nonetheless, the chiefs in Saga could draw on land ownership and custodianship over land, alongside a number of different tasks or functions, to strengthen their position in the neighbourhood and in the city.

The chiefs and the *yan banga*

In 2008 the chiefs were given yet another task when they were solicited by the local authorities to assist with security. The Governor of Niamey, with the support of the President, called for the resurrection of the *brigades populaires*, the neighbourhood vigilante groups commonly referred to as *yan banga*, to support the police in response to ‘increasing insecurity’ in the capital.⁴⁸ The initiative was taken following the explosion of a landmine in the neighbourhood Yantala. Vigilante groups have emerged during different periods in Niger, either from below through local initiative or from above (state initiated). Lund (2001) describes the emergence of the *yan banga* or *m’banga*⁴⁹ in Zinder following the National Conference in 1991, a period during which both the police and the military were largely absent and discredited, leading to an increase in petty crime. In Zinder, the *yan banga* was initiated by a businessman and developed into a ‘traditional’ police tolerated by the municipality (and the police) (*ibid.* 860). The *m’banga* patrolled the marketplaces and the bus station *gare routière* and received money from market stall owners and taxi drivers.

In this case, in Niamey, the initiative came ‘from above’, in the person of the Governor who together with the municipality summoned the chiefs to organize the creation of the *yan banga* and to recruit volunteers. Every volunteer was to be checked to ensure that he had no prior offences and was given an identity card (*carte professionnelle*) with his photo on it stating that he was part of the *brigade populaire*. The newly formed *yan banga* were to be trained by the police. They were also to cooperate with the

⁴⁸ There is a growing literature on the emergence of vigilante groups in Africa (Kirsch & Grätz 2010; Pratten 2008).

⁴⁹ Hausa adoption of the word ‘vanguard’ (Ya’u 2000: 170, cited in Lund 2001: 860).

police and bring suspects to the police station to prevent the ‘exaggerations’ (violence) that had characterized the activities of the *yan banga* in the past.

In Saga, the chief of Saga Gongou, the nephew of the canton chief, was given the responsibility of coordinating the *yan banga* and ensuring contacts with the municipality. Each neighbourhood chief was charged with recruiting ten volunteers to join the ‘*brigade populaire de Saga*’. Although the local authorities had targeted youth for recruitment, the majority of those recruited in Saga had already been active as vigilantes in the past, and the majority of men on the recruitment list were in their fifties and sixties, with only a handful in their thirties and forties. The older generation were seen as more reliable and better prepared for the task and as being capable of giving advice to the young: ‘If there are no elders it’s not good. They can advise the youngest.’ The chief of the *yan banga*, who was in his early sixties, emphasized the necessity of being brave, given that the *yan banga* patrol the neighbourhoods at night. Himself well known for his magico-religious powers, he underlined the importance of being able to use witchcraft and magic to carry out the work of the brigade (for protection against attacks, covering up tracks). Lund also points to the use of witchcraft and magic by *yan banga* members in Zinder (2001: 861). The brigade in Saga equipped themselves with bows and arrows as well. They imposed a de facto curfew of 2 a.m., after which they stopped all people found circulating in the neighbourhood.

People appreciated the resurrection of the *yan banga* and the promise of increased security. However, the contributions from the population which were supposed to finance the *yan banga* trickled in slowly. A request was made to the municipality via the neighbourhood chief for food, uniforms, shoes, and handcuffs; the brigades had already received whistles, flashlights, and badges or identity cards. The badges and the handcuffs and uniforms they had asked for represented ‘props of authority’ associated with the state (ibid. 862), symbolizing their official nature; as one brigadier noted, ‘The badges are made for the police to recognize that we are official.’ The head of the brigade underlined what he saw as the general interest that the *yan banga* represented in the following way: ‘It is a public service that we deliver’.

Motcho (2005) has pointed to the chiefs’ involvement in the *yan banga* during an earlier period as an indication of a return of the chiefs to a more influential position in the local political arena. In organizing the *yan banga*, the role of chiefs as neighbourhood leaders was reinforced. The municipality and the CUN were part of this legitimation, as they were at the origin of the renewed involvement of the chiefs in ensuring

neighbourhood security. On other occasions the position of chiefs were strengthened through local initiatives on the part of neighbourhood residents. In the next section I will describe one such initiative.

The creation of a market

In 2007 a market was created between Saga and Pays Bas in the area locally referred to as Saga Sahara. It was the only market in the densely populated neighbourhoods, otherwise serviced by stores and stalls set up along the main streets and meeting points. The market was located on a flat, dry stretch of land in a big open space surrounded by houses and unconstructed plots. On our first visit to the market, my assistant and I were guided by a gardener we had interviewed who had set up shop in the market. On this day, the marketplace, dotted by crooked straw-thatched stalls, was virtually empty. Those traders who were present had laid out their goods, mostly vegetables from nearby gardens, water kept in a cooling box and food staples such as rice and millet under stalls put up between the empty shops in *banco* along the sides of the small dirt road that passed by the market.

The market had been created on the initiative of a group of neighbourhood residents. They hoped that it would contribute to the increasing prosperity or economic development of the neighbourhood and that it would not only facilitate people's access to staple foods but also attract residents from surrounding neighbourhoods. The initiative was headed by Idrissa, a teacher at a Franco-Arabic school in the city centre who had moved to Pays Bas at the end of the 1990s. The land on which the market was founded was owned by a *marabout*⁵⁰ who was a former resident of Pays Bas and an acquaintance of Idrissa's and had lent the plot of land for the creation of the market. Idrissa was the head of the market committee, which was responsible among other things for the distribution and sale of market spaces and for security. Attempts had been made to get commerce started in the market. Well-established traders, some of whom traded in the markets in the city centre, were asked to pitch in by providing loans of market items and food staples. However, the market had failed to pick up speed and remained virtually empty. This was attributed to the poverty of both potential traders and buyers and to the market's inaccessibility, embedded as it was deep in Saga and Pays Bas and surrounded by uneven terrain, so that it was almost impossible to reach by car. Idrissa had hoped that the market would attract residents of nearby

⁵⁰ Qu'ranic scholar and religious leader.

neighbourhoods and contribute to the development of the neighbourhood by facilitating people's access to staple foods. The market would also, he underlined, give a good image of Saga, since everything that is being produced in Saga – rice, vegetables, and so forth – would finally be sold in the market in Saga.

The traditional chieftaincy in Saga had been involved in the market's creation. Both the traditional chief and the canton chief had been contacted beforehand, and they had given their approval for its creation. The market was on the territory of Saga Fondobon, and Idrissa emphasized that the traditional chiefs had been consulted because they 'know the secrets of the neighbourhood'. There had once been a market in Saga, but following a period of drought and famine in the 1930s it was never revived. The absence of a big market in Saga was explained with reference not just to the proximity of Niamey but also to local magico-religious beliefs. Local legend had it that the creation of a market in Saga would lead to the downfall or death of a chief. The opening of the market had been marred by the death of the chief of Saga Fondobon, a seeming confirmation of the local legend. Although most people scoffed at this belief as something belonging to the realm of pre-Islamic superstition, it was suggested that it made people reluctant to frequent the market.

It is difficult for our market, especially with the beliefs that say that if we create a market the chief will die...the neighbourhood chief is dead, people are afraid... The neighbourhood chief said that he was going to verify the occupation of the market stalls. This was just before the date when he died. People from Saga do not come to the market.

The creation of a market necessitates ritual practices (Masquelier 1993). According to the head of the *zimas*⁵¹ in Saga, before the opening of the market the neighbourhood chief of Saga Fondobon had only contacted the *marabouts* who had carried out the *fatiah* (blessing) and not the *zimas*. This was not the first time that he complained of the refusal of this particular neighbourhood chief to work with the *zimas*. The chief was also the neighbourhood imam and given that the activities of the *zimas* are cast as incompatible with Islam it is not surprising that he did not involve them in the inauguration of the market. However, an old man and friend of the neighbourhood chief, in talking about the creation of the market explained the need for different kinds of rituals involving both Islam and traditional religion (the spirit possession cult):

⁵¹ The *zima* is the priest of the cult of the *holey*, a spirit possession cult that lies at the heart of Songhay-Zarma religion.

To establish a market there are certain rules, traditions to respect, whether they are animist or Muslim. But today, people act as if they did not know all of this. They told them that they have to offer a black male goat so that the market will become perennial but they refused to do it. The *zimas* demanded the sacrifice but they refused to listen. But if you observe well, all authorities, they do these practices in secret. It is like for the inauguration of a new mosque. You have to follow the protocol; you invite one *marabout* here and another *marabout* there. They meet and they carry out '*la fatiah*' before the start of the prayers and after, they authorize the people to pray. It is the same thing for the market. These are beliefs you have to respect, everyone in his field.

Masquelier describes a similar conflict over the inauguration of a market in Dogondoutchi where the authorities in the concern to ally themselves to the Muslim leaders had invited them to inaugurate the market to ensure its prosperity but ignored the *yan bori* (priests of the *bori* possession cult) and the sacrifice that traditionally accompanied the creation of a market (Masquelier 1993). She analyses how the conflict over the market revealed attempts of the *yan bori* to position themselves vis-à-vis the increasing dominance of Islam in all spheres of community life. A deadly car accident in conjunction of the opening of the market strengthened the argument of the *yan bori* for respecting non-Muslim rituals.

In Saga the head of the *zimas* said that in the end he had been contacted by other people to carry out a ceremony:

The traders talked about bizarre manifestations and the chieftaincy concluded that it is because the sacrifice has not been honoured.

I realized that it is a public action. We collected money from our followers to carry out the 'locking' (*verrouillage*).⁵²

In their position as local traditional authorities, the chiefs had been involved in the creation of the market. The municipality, on the other hand, had not been consulted. Idrissa had judged that the involvement of the municipality would necessitate too much protocol and ultimately be constraining. Instead, the mayor was simply invited to the inauguration of the market, alongside the traditional chiefs and the media. According to the initiators of the market, the mayor had promised to help them with

⁵² The 'locking' or *verrouillage* is called *kangari* or *kanji* in Zarma and is carried out at the foundation of a village, a market, and even a home for protection. The word *kangari* refers to the stakes that are driven into the ground; this is accompanied by a sacrifice. (Olivier de Sardan 1982: 249–250)

the construction of a road connecting the market to Saga to the south and Pays Bas to the north and to encourage the creation of a taxi line to the market. When asked about the market, however, municipal representatives shrugged and complained that they had been presented with a *fait accompli* and were now faced with a non-viable market:

In Saga Sahara what help can I give them? They have built this market without the municipality and presented us with a *fait accompli* – ‘We have created a market and you have to come and inaugurate it.’ I said OK. I go there and there is no electricity, no water, and no road.

The problem is that in the creation of this market, people faced the municipality with a *fait accompli*. They went and did their own thing and afterwards they informed the municipality. The municipality had not done any study in preparation for the creation of the market. They informed the mayor via the traditional chiefs. The mayor was then obliged to be present at the opening. You don’t establish a market without a background study, but that’s what they did. What can the municipality do?

The initiators, on the other hand, pointed out that a functioning and busy market would ultimately be profitable for the municipality since it would be able to collect taxes, which should motivate the municipality to support the market:

With this market, the state is going to benefit more than us. We are going to sell our products and we are going to pay the taxes. They have to help us.

In the absence of investments on the part of the municipality, the initiators said that they would refuse to pay taxes to the municipality. A stance that, it was claimed, was supported by the canton chief.

It is the canton chief who said that as long as the activities in the market have not improved they cannot collect taxes... The municipality does not have the right to collect taxes. He also told me to inform him if I found a tax collector in the market. I have also informed the traders.

The municipality had tried to create a taxi line of *faba faba* (collective mini-buses) that would serve the market and would continue on to peripheral villages on the outskirts of Saga. The agreement between the municipality and taxi owners about the new taxi line was announced on television, but in the end, it never materialized. According to the mayor, it had ultimately fallen through due to the absence of a road, the difficult

terrain, and calculations on profitability (or rather non-profitability) by the taxi owners.

The role of the traditional chiefs was reinforced in the creation of the market. The initiators of the market associated them with local knowledge, history, and tradition, which was seen as necessary for the successful creation of the market. After the death of the neighbourhood chief, contact was maintained between the initiators and his son in attempts to revive the market. However, as I will show in the next section, the chiefs were also at times marginalized.

'...a modern population wants a modern chief'

With the sale of land and the creation of new neighbourhoods such as Pays Bas and Tondigamay, the reach of the chieftaincy in Saga has expanded as these areas are administratively linked to Saga through the traditional chieftaincy. The chiefs have recruited or designated representatives in these neighbourhoods. Pays Bas was not administratively recognized as a neighbourhood. In population counts, the residents of Pays Bas were assimilated to the population of Saga Kourtey, situated on the river bank in Saga. This connection can be traced back to the settlement of families from Saga Kourtey in the area as already described in chapter 3. Residents in Pays Bas paid taxes to the chief of Saga Kourtey, and the chief of Saga Kourtey had a representative who lived in Pays Bas. This representative, who came from one of the first families to settle in Pays Bas, recounted that when people started moving into the area in greater numbers in the 1980s and 1990s, they addressed him as *Maigari* (village chief). This caused a conflict with the chiefs in Saga, who accused him of having confiscated the title without consulting them. However, once he had made it clear that he made no claims to the chieftaincy, he was named representative of the chief of Saga Kourtey.

Both the chief of Saga Kourtey and his representative expressed marked resignation about their position in Pays Bas in the face of a continuously growing and heterogeneous population, saying that the population refused to pay taxes and that they were rarely consulted about neighbourhood affairs. This loss of influence became evident in the conflict with the local authorities described in chapter 3. The neighbourhood association – The Committee for the Protection of the Interests of Pays Bas – that had taken form during the conflict acted independently of the chiefs. Its leaders judged that the chiefs were in the hands of the municipality, the very authority that they were in conflict with. They also believed that the chiefs in Saga not only had little interest in the

neighbourhood, having already made money from the sale of land, but were afraid that Pays Bas would become an autonomous neighbourhood. The municipality, in turn, attempted to bypass the committee by insisting that it would only talk to and negotiate with the chiefs. The leadership of the neighbourhood was in a sense divided into two camps. It could be said that the committee prevailed. One of the committee leaders judged that it was their efforts which had saved the neighbourhood and claimed that he had been contacted by a Minister who had ensured him that no further actions would be taken. The committee leaders continued to involve themselves in the neighbourhood in various ways. One of them had provided several households with electricity, and they were looking into the possibilities of creating a school in the neighbourhood.

In Tondigamay which was still administratively to Saga Gassia Kwara, the two brothers, who represented the traditional land owners, had started to position themselves for taking on the role of neighbourhood chief in the future, drawing on their status as landowners and first comers and their kinship to the chief in Saga Gassia Kwara. This positioning was not appreciated by all residents, however. One resident, who himself was very active in the neighbourhood alongside the two brothers, pointed to possible challenges to their aspiration:

It is not necessarily because you are autochthonous that you can be a village chief, especially when you have sold part of your land to people who come and settle there. If the person settles next to you, he has the same rights as you do...a modern population wants a modern chief.

In his comment, a modern chief was contrasted with autochthony; emphasizing that autochthony was not automatically linked to legitimacy or public authority in this urban context. This sentiment was shared by other inhabitants and was fuelled by a conflict over the recently constructed Friday mosque. The neighbourhood *marabout*, a Hausa from the region of Zinder, claimed that he had been outmanoeuvred from leading the prayers by the two brothers. The supporters of the *marabout* underline that the autochthones had sold their land and had thus lost the right to 'command' the neighbourhood:

If I buy land from you and you give me a paper with your signature showing that the land is mine, you have no right to command me. If we want a chief here there will be no imposition. We will choose who we like.

Similar opinions were voiced by the members of the committee in Pays Bas, who also argued that in selling their land, the chiefs had given up

their traditional rights over the land and that people would not accept being administered by just anyone: 'People are conscious, it is not for nothing that they are next to Niamey.' In this statement, 'consciousness' is associated with urbanity and modernity is again placed in opposition to traditional authority and autochthony.

You have all ethnic groups here. It is a miniature version of Niger. Therefore you cannot say that you have the monopoly here. Otherwise, people will not follow you, ah! Yes, there is no question of talking about people that are autochthonous here. If you do this you will immediately be side-stepped.

In neighbourhoods such as Tondigamay and Pays Bas, the majority of the population had moved into the neighbourhood and had few or no ties to Saga and neither were they dependent on the chiefs. As Motcho has pointed out, with the gradual disappearance of customary land in Niamey, the population of *allochtones* is increasingly reluctant to be administered by an often physically distant customary chief (2005: 4). This point about the loss of influence by traditional chiefs in Niamey was also made by the secretary general of the ACTN:

Exactly, it's normal. The inhabitants of Niamey are people who have refused the traditional authority and gathered here...the city is the meeting place of those who have means. They depend more on their trade activities than on the traditional authorities. They hardly have any problems with the traditional authority. The traders of Niamey only have problems with the municipality. That is why the traditional authority has difficulties in imposing themselves in cities. That is the case in all cities, not just in Niamey.

In both Pays Bas and Tondigamay, the influence of traditional chiefs was challenged by residents, influential individuals with larger networks of relations beyond the neighbourhood, who were taking the lead in community development and who were often more effective than the chiefs in doing so. The chiefs in Saga were aware of these tendencies and feared a loss of influence if newcomers – 'people who are not really from Saga' – were elected as chiefs in the new neighbourhoods. One influential resident and native of Saga said that he had advised the canton chief to designate as representatives in the new neighbourhoods men from Saga who were capable of uniting the population and would thus be strong candidates for the neighbourhood chieftaincy once the neighbourhood would be recognized by the authorities. Once again, reference was made to the loosening

of traditional authority in a context of democracy and to the alteration of the relationship between chiefs and the population:

Today you cannot lead people with a stick (*baton*), you need arguments, communication, and also a strategy.

If the tendency was towards a loss of the chiefs' authority, residents in the extensions would be even more unlikely to adhere to the chieftaincy in Saga. However, the chieftaincy did have the firm support of the local authorities, who depended on them for tax collection and for mobilizing people as exemplified in the case of the *yan banga*. Regarding the election of chiefs, the Governor of Niamey, who was in charge of organizing the elections, maintained customary criteria of eligibility (autochthony, first comers, heritage). The diverging views over the position of the chiefs and the importance that should or should not be accorded to autochthony is revelatory of a conflict over different logics or 'social representations', according to which urbanity is associated with operations such as zoning that changes the status of land and makes it available to everyone as opposed to autochthony according to which claims to land and influence are based on history (Hilgers 2008).

Revalorization of the chieftaincy

In this context, the enthronization ceremony of the canton chief can be seen as an attempt to revalorize the chieftaincy. Held in May 2008 for the canton chief who had been elected in 2006, it was the first big enthronization ceremony held in the canton. The ceremony was conducted in an open space in front of a primary school, the only space big enough to receive the crowd. The ceremony, which filled the otherwise quite calm streets with cars, mopeds, and people, was attended by a large crowd that included the Prime Minister, national deputies, and the Governor of Niamey. Tents and plastic chairs formed a circle in which the ceremony was held, the dignitaries being seated in the front row in sofas and the rest of the audience on plastic chairs, with people who did not manage to get a seat jostling to get a glimpse of the proceedings. The list of speakers included the Governor of Niamey and the president of the ACTN, and the programme was punctuated by dance and singing performances and announcements of contributions donated for the organization of the ceremony.



Figure 6. The tent of the dignitaries.

The ceremony was covered by the media and parts of it were transmitted on the evening news. The reporting from the ceremony included part of the speech by the Governor, who emphasized the future role and responsibilities of the canton chief:

Amirou Ali, allow me to remind you, in your double function as holder of our traditions and auxiliary of the Republic, to work for harmony and the social cohesion of the community that is under your responsibility; to watch over the application of rules and administrative laws in leading the affairs of your valorous population. (Excerpt from the speech of the Governor of Niamey)

This was the part of the ceremony during which the authorities, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior, recalled the role and the place of the traditional chieftaincy vis-à-vis the state and its subjects. Other parts of the ceremony included religious ceremonies, a *fatiah*, and the recital of verses from the Qu'ran. This part also included the incantations of the *zima* as a protection. During the ceremony the *griots* (praise singers) traced the origin of the canton of Saga, acclaimed the lineage of the canton chieftaincy, and cited the persons and representatives who had contributed to the enthronization ceremonies. At the end of the ceremony

the canton chief was ‘turbaned’ by the canton chief of Simiri, an act that was protected by the *dogari* (traditional security) and the *marabout*, after which the chief was accompanied to his palace and residence, where he received people.

The ceremony was organized by a committee led by influential residents and natives of Saga with prominent positions in the civil service and private sector. In preparation of the ceremony it had been estimated that it would cost as much as 25,000,000 FCFA. The committee had set out to raise contributions from government authorities, political parties and local businesses. In conjunction with the ceremony, an ‘information folder’ on the canton of Saga was distributed, outlining the foundation of Saga and the succession of chiefs in a lineage tree tracing the ancestry of the canton chief back to Mali Bero, who is considered to be the ancestor of Zarma aristocracy. The information folder had been put together on the basis of a monograph of Saga written in preparation for the ceremony. A cloth decorated with a portrait of the canton chief and the plant (*sagay*) from which Saga was given its name was designed and sold at a discount (3,000 FCFA) in the neighbourhood.

The organization of the ceremony can be seen as an attempt to put the canton ‘back on the city map’, to redress the status of Saga as a traditional political entity, and to position Saga (the canton) and the traditional chiefs in the city. The chieftaincy was a fitting symbol for this purpose, as it is invested with historical legitimacy, as explained by one religious leader:

The chieftaincies of Saga and Goudel are older than the chieftaincy of Niamey, which started with the arrival of the whites...it is only recently... we were looking for means distinguish the chieftaincies, and enthronization seemed to be the best solution. This would allow the chieftaincy to recover its seniority and origins. That is why we did the enthronization.

The historical status of the canton of Saga had been re-actualized with the decentralization reform which had been accompanied by debates about the criteria for the division of municipalities. As mentioned above, local leaders had lobbied for the creation of a municipality that would mirror the canton of Saga and that would take tradition and history into account in a context in which the canton meant little for urban residents in general.

Discussion

In this chapter I have explored the administrative and political landscapes of Niamey and of the neighbourhoods in focus, which are both marked by plurality and a struggle for public authority between different sets of institutions and actors. This provides an important background discussion for the chapters to come that focus on the local political dimensions of public healthcare and education provision. The chapter has especially focused on the municipality and on the chieftaincy.

It is assumed that decentralization will lead to greater accountability and community participation. However, the first generation of municipal councils in Niger has been faced with a number of difficulties, including faltering state support in terms of funds as well as frequent accusations of mismanagement or misappropriation and factional struggles leading to the deposition (*destitution*) of several mayors (Olivier de Sardan, 2010: 23). Nonetheless at the same time the municipalites have become important and inescapable institutions in local arenas (*ibid.*). Municipality Four struggled to make ends meet. Moreover, in the neighbourhoods in focus, the municipal councillors had a hard time asserting themselves. The lack of municipal investments was a source of complaints by urban residents.

Chiefs have maintained an important position in the state structure since the colonial period. However, although chiefs receive legitimacy both from above (the state) and from below (their subjects), this legitimacy is not automatic. In an urban context, it can be assumed that the authority of the chiefs, grounded as it is in tradition and the local, is even more uncertain. However, as Motcho points out (2005), the context of a crisis of urban management and the financial weakness of the state has opened the way to the return of chiefs in the political game in the capital as development partners (e.g. UNICEF's fight against malaria, malaria, and polio) and in the organization of security (*yan banga*). Moreover, their role in the management of customary land, which the city needs for its expansion, has given them a certain degree of leverage in their relations with other authorities in the city (*ibid.*). In Saga, with its status of canton, the chiefs were visible in a number of different contexts, as is illustrated in this chapter in the case of the market. The visibility of traditional chiefs confirms the point made by van Dijk and van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal that although the 'imagined quality of chiefly power' might be limited in cities, where chiefs are confronted with 'immigrant populations which did not belong to the chief's social, political and cultural traditions in the past, and never will in the future', this does not mean that urban areas are 'modern' 'and thus unsuited to "traditional" chiefly authority' while the

village is ‘“traditional” and as such the playground for that authority’ (1999: 8). Instead, when it comes to ‘certain aspects of social life in both rural and urban areas, subjects imagine themselves as living under chiefly authority...’ (ibid.). Thus, just as chieftaincy can be called upon ‘for specific social purposes, moments of identification, specific needs’, people can also ‘opt out’ and turn to other expressions of political power (van Dijk & van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1999: 9).

The cases presented in this chapter, such as the creation of the market and the *yan banga*, are illustrative of the shifting relationships between the municipality, the chieftaincy, and neighbourhood residents. For instance, in the case of the creation of the market, the chieftaincy and not the municipality was seen as the most appropriate public authority. The area in which the market was created was not zoned, making the chiefs the most relevant public authority in the management of land. Moreover, the magico-religious beliefs surrounding the market reinforced this link. The initiator of the market also had good relations with the chieftaincy in Saga and promoted the initiative as being beneficial to Saga in general. Still, the municipality was contacted with requests for its assistance in improving the market infrastructure. The demands placed on the municipality are revelatory of a particular interpretation of the relation between the municipality and urban residents as one which involved the negotiation of rights and obligations. The initiators of the market, having already invested in the market, expected the municipality to contribute in turn, especially since the municipality would surely collect taxes in the market. The refusal or failure of the municipality to do so was met by the threat of refusal to pay the market tax to the municipality. This latent conflict never came to a head, as activities in the market failed to take off, making the issue of taxation void. Moreover, plans were being made by the municipality to create a market in the eastern part of Saga (in the only zoned neighbourhood or area). In the case of the *yan banga*, the chiefs were solicited by the municipality. This was not the first time they had been involved in security in Niamey. Ensuring security also reflected the prerogatives delegated to traditional chiefs in the past. In the case of the *yan banga*, the official attribution of chiefs was strengthened because they were involved in providing security. At the same time, in being delegated to the neighbourhood brigades, the provision of security was informalized.

While decentralization represents a new administrative form, the traditional chieftaincy has been a central part of local political and national arenas in Niger for several decades. The position of chiefs builds on a different form of legitimacy (history, traditional authority) than that of

the municipal advisors (election). However, they are both expected in different ways to contribute to the development of the locality that they represent. For instance, Hahonou points out that with democratization, chiefs have needed to find alternative sources of legitimacy as they could no longer rely on coercion (Hahonou 2010: 109). One of these sources includes the role of development broker or intermediary and political representative alongside more traditional roles such as the arbitrage of conflicts and disputes and protection of the community (ibid. 110).

Finally, both the chieftaincy and the municipality have to contend with and position themselves in relation to other actors and institutions that are present and active in the neighbourhoods, including emergent leaders, powerful individuals, NGOs, associations, and community committees, as will become evident in the rest of the thesis. Often, both the municipality and the chieftaincy are bypassed in favour of alternative solutions, as in the case of the conflict in Pays Bas. The relations and interactions between these actors and institutions take different expressions in different contexts, and consequently the political and administrative landscape is constantly shifting. As stated by Kyed and Buur:

[C]onstant reconfigurations of public authority emerge from everyday negotiations between local state officials, traditional leaders, and ordinary citizens when administrative and developmental tasks are carried out and when conflicts are resolved. (Kyed & Buur 2007: 10)

These reconfigurations will be further explored in the following chapters on health and education provision which involved both the municipality and the traditional chieftaincy alongside other actors and institutions.

5. The story of a peri-urban dispensary

In this chapter, the first of four chapters that address different aspects of health and education provision, I focus on the daily operation of the public dispensary in Saga, which was the only public health structure in the three neighbourhoods. Taking a number of episodes, events, and daily practices in the public dispensary as points of departure, this chapter will point to the local political, economic, and social dimensions of public service provision. These episodes and daily practices feature a motley group of actors and institutions such as the Minister of Health, the health district, the municipality, an NGO, the traditional chieftaincy, an MP (*député national*), local associations, and the community health committee. In analysing the interventions of these actors and institutions in the public dispensary the chapter engages with studies of public service provision that analyse the co-production of public services (Ostrom 1996; Joshi & Moore 2004) but it also goes a step further in that it pays attention to the political stakes, of the co-production of public services, for local actors and for the state.

The public dispensary in Saga as a political space

The public dispensary in Saga was created in 1996. It is located in the centre of Saga just off the main road. The dispensary is walled in, shielded from the bustling road outside lined with market stalls. The wall facing the road bears a sign with the inscription *Centre de Santé Intégré (CSI) de Saga* (Integrated Health Centre of Saga). The part of the dispensary wall that faces the main road also used to be lined with market stalls, but they were apparently removed on the order of the Governor of Niamey. A gate which is generally left open leads into a spacious courtyard. The main building of the dispensary houses the consultation rooms, the office of the head of the dispensary, and the pharmacy. A one-room building with a large veranda is located to the left of the building and a maternity ward to the right. The maternity ward is indicated by a sign bearing its name, *Maternité Alfari Seybou Saga*, and the slogan 'Welcome, Cleanliness, Good

Management' (*accueil, propreté, bonne gestion*). A civil registry office (*état civil*) is located right behind the dispensary. The office issues birth, marriage, and death certificates and serves Saga and other surrounding neighbourhoods. An agent from the civil registry office is also seconded to the maternity, where her presence is assured to facilitate the delivery of birth certificates. The buildings, which are all okra coloured, are built in the style characteristic of public buildings. Parts of the courtyard, which is otherwise covered with pebbles, are used for vegetable gardening by the dispensary guard.

The visit of a Minister

On the morning of the 27th of February 2007 the dispensary hosted a government delegation led by the Minister of Health on its tour of several public dispensaries in Niamey to mark the launch of the use of artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT) to treat malaria. In preparation for the arrival of the delegation, the courtyard of the health centre had been cleaned. The dispensary staff, midwives, nurses, and ward orderlies, had dressed up for the occasion. Local dignitaries, including the canton chief and neighbourhood chiefs, religious leaders, the MP, and municipal councillors were seated on chairs and benches that had been placed in the courtyard; a group of women were also standing there. Just as people had started becoming restless after having waited for more than an hour, someone received a phone call saying that the delegation would soon arrive, and the ward orderlies and the interns (nursing school students) took their positions at the gate to welcome the delegation. After a couple of minutes, the sound of car horns announced the arrival of the delegation. The Minister, followed by a group of people, entered the dispensary courtyard on foot. They were followed by about ten cars, which parked in the yard of the health centre: government-plated black and gray Peugeot and white NGO-plated Toyota Land Cruisers. Judging from the car park, the ministerial delegation was accompanied by representatives from the Global Fund, UNDP, UNICEF, and JICA.⁵³ A crowd gathered around the delegation and after a short speech, inaudible to those on the fringes of the crowd, the delegation continued into the dispensary, which was soon crowded with people, and on to the maternity ward. The head of the dispensary, the canton chief, the MP, and the municipal councillor maintained their position with the delegation. On their way through the health

⁵³ The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

centre, the Minister and the delegation were followed by a camera team from the national television, whose camera lights illuminated the otherwise sombre corridors of the dispensary. After a brief tour of the dispensary and the adjoining maternity ward the members of the delegation said their goodbyes, the Minister shaking the hands of the MP and the canton chief, got into their respective cars, and left, leaving a cloud of dust behind. Soon after the delegation left, so did the guests. The chairs and benches were put back into place and the boxes of medicine – which had already been in the possession of the dispensary but had been taken out and placed on a table in the courtyard for the ceremony – were taken back into the dispensary. In all, the visit had lasted fifteen to twenty minutes.



Figure 7. The delegation on its way through the health centre.

This visit or ceremony was one of several that had been held at the public dispensary in Saga. The health centre had seen a visit from President Mamadou Tandja's two wives on at least two occasions. Both First Ladies were especially active in the health sector. Fati Tandja was the honorary protector or sponsor of the national malaria programme and Laraba Tandja was the honorary protector of the national HIV/AIDS pro-

gramme.⁵⁴ Even the President had visited the health centre at the launching of a week-long mobilization against malaria. In comparison to previous ceremonies which had included the rental of chairs, sofas, and tents and entertainment and speeches, this ceremony fell short in the eyes of those present, who were disappointed by the brevity of the visit. Nonetheless, it gave people a chance to be seen. For the staff it provided a welcome break in the daily routine and a chance to voice some of the problems they faced in the health centre, such as the need for an ambulance. The visit also fed into local political configurations, as it brought attention to Saga and to local leaders in Saga. Both the traditional chiefs and the municipal councillors took the opportunity to be seen with the Minister and the MP. Moreover, the MP was credited with having managed once again to bring important persons to Saga. On another, more symbolic level, the visit of the Minister of Health to the peri-urban and poorly frequented public dispensary also brought forth for the moment the image of a strong, responsible, and caring state. In public ceremonies, and even in the brief visit of the Minister described above, the authority of the state, represented by its highest officials (the President, Ministers), is in a sense performed. This phenomenon or symbolic practice is not limited to Niger, or to Africa, for that matter. For instance, Abélès has analysed 'political rituals' such as the inauguration of a train station carried out by French President François Mitterrand as part of the symbolism of the modern state (Abélès 2005 [1990]: 59). Public ceremonies can be included in what Hansen and Stepputat have referred to as the symbolic languages of the state's authority which includes 'the materialization of the state in series of permanent signs and rituals: buildings, monuments, letterheads, uniforms, road signs, fences' (2001a: 8). They are part of a symbolic language which contributes to the continuous construction of the state and the reaffirmation of political power and authority. In a discussion of the circulation of ideas of the state, Lund vividly describes the image of a strong and capable state that is conveyed on (state) television night after night:

Watching the evening news in many African countries, one is struck by the irony of a systematic myth of the unity and coherence of the state. An idea of a powerful state with intention, a higher rationality and project is manifested in receptions, seminars and inaugurations, draped in the ineluctable banners with slogans of determination, designed to instil trust in its capacity to do what states are supposed to do. (Lund 2006a: 689)

⁵⁴ For an analysis of the political and symbolic role of first ladies in Africa, see 'Le Dossier: Premières dames en Afrique' in *Politique Africaine* 95, Oct. 2004.

So in Niger, donation ceremonies, government meetings, National Assembly sessions, and conferences about different development issues take up a large part of television news. The visit of the Minister described above was in fact covered by the state channel. The same day on the evening news, the state channel broadcast footage and commentary on the big launch of the malaria treatment held in the Congress Hall in the city centre followed by footage of the tour of the delegation to different dispensaries in the capital.

In the remaining part of this chapter I will focus on more mundane aspects of public health provision. Put in relation to the public ceremony described above, the contrast between the image of the strong state imparted in public ceremonies and discourse, and the ambiguities and uncertainties which characterize public healthcare provision becomes especially evident.

The ‘ressortissants’ and the dispensary

We came together and we said that we cannot continue to live like we were living. We will die, there is no dispensary and the only school is the school that was created in 1963 that I myself attended. There was nothing in the village, the village was truly marginalized.

Up until the mid 1990s there were no ‘modern’ health services in Saga. In the above quotation, one of the founding members of a local association was explaining the motivation for creating it. The association in question, which was created in the 1980s, would come to play an important role in the establishment of both the Catholic confessional dispensary and the public dispensary in Saga. The association was given the name the Association for the Amelioration of Living Conditions in Saga (*Association pour l’amélioration des conditions de vie à Saga*) or ACOVIS, and its goal, expressed in the quotation above, was to bring ‘development’ – a dispensary, more schools – to Saga.

The leaders of the association had similar profiles. They were born in Saga and many of them had attended Saga’s first primary school and had continued successfully through secondary school. They had then had the opportunity to go abroad on scholarships, to universities and institutes in countries like Mali, Togo, France, and Belgium. Following their studies they had returned to Niger to pursue careers in the public and private sector. One member had been the mayor of the municipality, someone else had worked at the national television station before starting to work for an international development agency. They identified, and were often

referred to, as '*ressortissants*', a French term which translates as a national or a citizen but which in this Nigerien context denotes someone who comes from or is born in a specific village or region, has moved out, usually to the capital or abroad, but still maintain links to the locality. The status of *ressortissant* is usually given to someone who has become influential or successful (civil servants, professionals, traders). In Niger, in a context of decentralization, *ressortissants* have become important political actors as local benefactors contributing financial support to the construction of village infrastructure such as mosques, health centres, and wells and as emerging politicians (Olivier de Sardan & Tidjani Alou 2009b: 5). ACOVIS could be described as an association of *ressortissants*. The association also had close links with the traditional chieftaincy. More than twenty years later, although ACOVIS was no longer active it was still very much remembered.

The first action of ACOVIS in the middle of the 1990s was the construction of speed bumps on the road through Saga. The minibuses that pass through Saga on their way to the towns of Liboré and Kollo had caused a series of accidents with deadly outcomes along the road, which was lined with market stalls and bustling with activity from early morning to late at night. At the association's first general assembly it was decided – to the surprise of the initiators – to prioritize the construction of speed bumps over the creation of a health centre. Members of ACOVIS then sent a letter supported by the mayor of the municipality to the Ministry of Equipment, and the speed bumps were eventually constructed. Following this, the first 'action' of the association, attention turned to the establishment of a dispensary.

When asked about the events leading up to the establishment of the public dispensary in Saga, former members of ACOVIS vaguely evoked scattered attempts to lobby the Minister of Health, and so forth. The general sentiment, shared by many others, was that unless they fought for the creation of a dispensary, Saga, having been sidestepped time and time again, would never get one. In the words of one neighbourhood leader, 'The CSI [dispensary], we had to mobilize to get the CSI to Saga.' Ali, a friendly and talkative man in his fifties who was born and raised in Saga, had been especially active during this time. Educated in urban planning in Mali and France, he had worked at the Ministries of Land Settlement and of Community Development before being seconded to the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN). The following description of the events leading up to the establishment of the dispensary is based on Ali's account of what happened.

In the middle of the 1990s ACOVIS put together a dossier for the construction of a dispensary with the help of a national NGO. France had allocated funds for the construction of social infrastructure to mitigate the social effects of the devaluation of the FCFA in 1994, and according to Ali, the Cabinet of the Prime Minister (*primature*) managed the funds. ACOVIS submitted the dossier to the Cabinet, but it was rejected by the commission that reviewed the requests. Ali believed that the decision to reject the dossier was based on party political considerations. This was during a period when political tension at the national level was high following the 1993 national elections that had been won by a coalition led by the PNDS in opposition to the MNSD – the former state party which, after losing the elections following the National Conference that marked the transition to democracy, had become the main opposition party. Saga, with few PNDS militants, was known as a stronghold of the MNSD. Moreover, the president of the NGO that had supported the dossier was an important MNSD personality. For Ali, the fact that funds had been given to Talladjé, which he claimed was a stronghold of the PNDS, for the construction of gutters (*caniveaux*), was an indication that the decision had been made along party political lines. A couple of years later, a public dispensary – in the words of Ali, ‘what we had asked for, which the others refused’ – was finally constructed in Saga. Ali attributed this change of fortune to the shift in the national political landscape, as the MNSD had now come to power in alliance with the PNDS.

By this time, a Catholic confessional dispensary had already been established in Saga. Shortly after the rejection of the dossier from Saga by the Prime Minister’s Cabinet, Ali had been contacted by a member of the commission that had reviewed the dossiers. The man put Ali in contact with the Archbishop of Niamey, who was in search of a locality to install a dispensary that would be run by Mother Theresa’s Missionaries of Charity and who had been directed towards Saga and Kwara Tegui, another peripheral neighbourhood. Ali accompanied the archbishop to Saga. On their tour of Saga, Ali especially emphasized the environmental hazards and sources of illness in Saga – the waterways and mosquitoes and polluted water, the absence of a healthcare structure and water provision – as well as the availability of a large plot of land.

I took the Bishop (*Monseigneur*) and I brought him to Saga. I showed him the river, the rice fields, and all of the waterways. And I told him that we are ill...we are surrounded by rice fields, the river, and mosquitoes, but the worst is that we are five kilometres from the centre of Niamey, the water from the hospital, the slaughterhouse, Sonitextil, Braniger runs out in the river.... We take the water and we drink it. We only have one water

pump... I told him that we have two hectares of land that has been reserved for a health centre because it is a priority for the village.

In the end, Saga was chosen for the construction of the Catholic confessional dispensary. This dispensary was built on land that had been reserved for public use and which was under the custodianship of the canton chief, given that area had not been zoned. ACOVIS, which had close links with the traditional chieftaincy, was able to facilitate the transfer of the land to the religious order. Moreover, Ali, given his position and contacts at the Ministry, was able to facilitate the otherwise lengthy administrative procedures required for the formal allocation of the plot of land, seven hundred square metres as requested by the religious order. Soon thereafter, the construction of the centre was under way, and in 1994–95 it opened its doors. The centre was to become well known and would attract patients from the capital and surrounding regions.

In the beginning, ACOVIS had played a mediatory role. One of the neighbourhood chiefs recounted that when the nuns first came to Saga people had worried that they would try to convert people but that the ‘intellectuals’ (the members of ACOVIS) had talked to the nuns: ‘They told them what they could and what they could not do in the village.’ For a period, a system of user fees (300 FCFA) managed by ACOVIS was put into place. This was justified with reference to the lack of a health centre in Saga and the pending introduction of a cost recovery scheme at the national level. Those identified as ‘destitute’ were given a yellow card and were exempted from the fee. However, the nuns eventually put a stop to the collection of fees, as they felt it was not compatible with their mission to help the poorest of the poor.

When the public dispensary was constructed in 1995–96 it was built right next to the confessional dispensary on the remaining piece of land, a cohabitation that was not without its problems, as I will discuss in chapter 6.

The actual role of the *ressortissants* in bringing the public dispensary to Saga, based only on Ali’s account of the submission of the dossier to the Prime Minister’s Cabinet and vague references to lobbying through personal contacts, is unclear. What is clear, however, is that the conjunction of the most active period of ACOVIS with the establishment of the public dispensary made it seem as if the members of ACOVIS – with their many contacts in ‘high places’ and with their knowledge of the state administration – had a hand in finally managing to bring a dispensary to Saga. They, in particular Ali, had also donned the role of development brokers in ar-

guing for and facilitating the establishment of the confessional dispensary in Saga.

The MP, a youth association, and the maternity ward

In 2002 another building was constructed on the grounds of the public dispensary. The building was destined to house a maternity ward and was built with the support of the French Development Cooperation, at that time a partner of the local health district. According to a neighbourhood chief, people in Saga were asked in a meeting at the primary school Saga 1 to contribute 500 FCFA each towards the construction of the building. However, following its completion, the building, with more than seven rooms and a spacious veranda, equipped with running water and electricity, remained an empty shell next to the functioning dispensary.

In March 2004 a donation ceremony was held on the grounds of the public dispensary to mark the donation of medicine and medical equipment by a French NGO. The donation involved a leading personality in Saga, namely the local MP, whose daughter, who lived in France, was involved in the donation and was present at the ceremony. The medicine had been donated by hospitals, pharmacies, and various foundations in France and the medical equipment by an American foundation. The ceremony, which was filmed and televised, was attended by one of the First Ladies accompanied by security guards, the Governor of Niamey, and officials from the Ministry of Health, as well as by the canton chief and the local notables and political leaders. The ceremony attracted a large crowd composed mainly of women and local secondary school pupils dressed in their uniforms, who were accompanied by the principal and teachers. The ceremony was held in the courtyard of the dispensary in front of the empty maternity building. Plastic chairs, with couches grouped in front, for the dignitaries, had been placed in the courtyard. A *fatiah* (blessing) was held at the beginning of the ceremony and it was followed by several speeches. The medicines and the medical equipment were presented to the dignitaries inside the maternity ward, people on the outside pushing to get in to see the donation. Rumour had it that the ceremony marked the inauguration of the maternity. In fact, in a brief report on its mission, the French NGO mentioned the possibility of opening a pilot maternity ward in the new but empty building in Saga, including a laboratory and a surgical unit, and staffed by midwives as well as a gynaecologist and a doctor, to ease the burden on the central maternity ward in Niamey (*Maternité Gazobi*). However, the maternity ward remained inoperational. The dispensary staff dismissed the ceremony as a

show for the galleries which was organized to benefit the political party in power, the MNSD, which was also the party of the MP. The head of the dispensary worriedly pointed out that it would only cause trouble, because people had been led to believe that a large donation had been made, when in fact they were left with equipment that was too technologically advanced for a neighbourhood dispensary.

The maternity was finally made functional in January 2006 after it was equipped through funds from a French Christian NGO that supported small-scale projects in the health sector. The project was set up and led by François, a Frenchman who had come to know Saga through a brief project intervention with a local NGO based in Niamey and a youth association in Saga. The youth association, ASANE – the Association of Former Pupils of CES Saga (*Association des Anciens Élèves de CES Saga*) – had been created by a group of the first graduates from the secondary school in Saga. The project to equip the maternity was very much a personal initiative of François, who had solicited the support of the NGO. In terms of funds and scope, it was limited to equipping the maternity – with medical materials and equipment, furnishings such as hospital beds – to make it functional.

A couple of members of the youth association participated in the project; Abdou in particular took on a leading role. Abdou, who was in thirties, was the secretary general of ASANE and one of its founding members. From one of the families related to the traditional chieftaincy, Abdou often talked about the need to work for the development of Saga. After abandoning his university studies following a series of cancelled semesters due to strikes, he had studied finance and accounting at a private institute. In addition to his membership in ASANE he worked with training women's groups in savings systems in Saga. He was also involved in an interest and lobby group of farmers, as a representative of the rice cooperative in Saga.

The project was concluded in December 2005 with the election of a new health committee. The actual ceremony for the inauguration of the maternity took place in January 2006, in the presence of First Lady Labara Tandja, the Minister of Health, the Governor of Niamey, the mayor and municipal councillors of Municipality Four, and the notables of Saga. The ceremony was organized with the support of the MP, who had donated money and had provided the furniture for the ceremony (plastic chairs and couches). The MP had also donated cots for the newborns. Other local leaders as well as various associations and women's groups had also contributed to the organization of the ceremony. In the project report it was noted that a lot of the women had dressed up in the cloth

(*pagne*) of the MNSD. During the ceremony, the sign bearing the name of the maternity ward was unveiled. The maternity was named after the chief of the canton of Saga Alfari Seybou who had passed away in 2005, just before the inauguration of the maternity. The sign had been donated by the MP.



Figure 8. The sign donated by the MP.

Hence, several years after the construction of the dispensary, the empty maternity building became the arena for the intervention of a new set of actors: an NGO project, the MP, and a youth association. The MP stepped up to play an important role, in his capacity as a local ‘big man’. The youth association, or particular members of the youth association through their relation with the project leader, also became actively involved in the daily affairs of the health centre, a role that was to increase with their involvement in the health committee.

Local political stakes of public service provision

Over a period of ten years, from there having been no ‘modern’ health services Saga became the home of one religiously affiliated health centre and a public dispensary and maternity ward, making it one of the best served neighbourhoods in the municipality in terms of primary public healthcare services (Laurant et al. 2007). The case of the public dispensary in Saga, its establishment and development, exemplifies the involvement of associations (ACOVIS, ASANE) in service provision as well as that of individual actors and influential individuals (the MP) in the production of public services.

More specifically, the involvement of associations fits into a larger, more generalized pattern of associative dynamics in Africa, where the 1980s onwards saw a multiplication or upsurge of different types of associations (women's and youth groups, village associations, peasant federations, unions) in the context of economic crisis, liberalization, and democratization (multi-party politics) (Jacob & Lavigne Delville 1994)⁵⁵. As an association that brought together individuals from the same village, ACOVIS bears many similarities to home villagers' or home-town associations. Authors have emphasized the persistence of 'urban-rural connections', continued links that urban migrants maintain to their home village and vice versa, in urban contexts (ibid. 310). The emergence of 'more or less formal unions of urbanites claiming a common rural origin' that provided support to migrants in the city and sought to maintain links to the village or home region was documented in early urban studies and represent the institutionalization of rural urban links (Geschiere & Gugler 1998: 311). Such connections, however, have taken on another meaning in the context of an 'increasing obsession with "autochthony"', a phenomenon that has been related to democratization and multi-party politics, which have seen a rise in the 'politics of belonging' as the village and region have gained importance as a source of political power, leading to the emergence of elite associations that use the language of autochthony to access power at the national level (ibid. 309). However while elite home associations that use autochthony as an instrument of power can be divisive (and exclusionary), studies of different types of home-town associations also show their positive aspects in asserting 'meaningful political rights' and in contributing to the delivery of goods and services, as well as in representing different more inclusionary forms of engagement with and meanings of 'home' (Page et al. 2010: 348).

ACOVIS did not have an overtly political agenda. Formed with the goal of contributing to the development of Saga, it could just as well be described as a village or neighbourhood association. However, the social composition of the association, the self-identification of its members and their identification by others as *ressortissants* or 'intellectuals', and their self-ascribed role of developing their 'home village', bears many similarities to home villagers' or home-town associations. Moreover, many of its members had spent a lot of time away from Saga, pursuing studies or careers. The members of the urban based regional 'youth (development)

⁵⁵ The role of associations in local urban and rural arenas in Africa has received a lot of attention in anthropology and other social sciences. For an overview, see the collection of studies on peasant associations by Jacob and Lavigne-Delville (1994); for the role of associations and NGOs in cities, see Tostensen et al. (2001).

associations' in Ghana described by Lentz felt a moral obligation to contribute to the development of the home region, having been educated and having acquired a particular kind of knowledge through working in the modern sector (1995: 409). Likewise, the members of ACOVIS, in their capacity as intellectuals and civil servants with knowledge of the workings of the state and development agencies and wide networks of personal contacts, expressed a moral obligation to work for the good of the village. They were critical of other *ressortissants*, who despite their numbers, did not contribute to the 'development' of Saga:

We have so many executives [*cadres*] in order for us to do something in Saga.... The last time we counted....there were about fifty persons.

ACOVIS eventually split up after personal conflicts along party political and family lines. However, many of the individual members continued to play an important role in Saga and maintained visibility in the locality, partly through their continued involvement in various development-related activities (for instance, supporting women's groups, the local sport association, the vegetable gardening association, and the rice cooperative). Their involvement first in ACOVIS and later in other contexts served to augment their position and legitimacy as local leaders. In an analysis of the creation of a home villagers' association in a township in Malawi by a prominent migrant with a history of assisting others and a proven capacity for patronage, Englund describes the initiative as 'a logical addition to personal prominence in plural arenas' (2001: 104). The creation of ACOVIS can also be analysed in this light, as a means of reaffirming a particular social status.

The other association that intervened in the health centre was the youth association ASANE which brought together the first group of graduates from the secondary school in Saga. As described by one of the initiators, many of them had found themselves unemployed and with little to do, and so they decided to create an association of graduates. They had received the support of the principal of the secondary school in Saga in creating ASANE. From the outset, it was focused on helping pupils in the secondary school in Saga by giving them extra classes and providing courses during the summer. This is also how they had come into contact with François, the initiator of the maternity ward project. The association also tapped into other activities in the neighbourhood directed towards youth, such as the creation of a community library in Saga by the French Development Cooperation and sensitization about HIV/AIDS. They also organized cultural and social events. The composition of the association

reflected the changing social composition of Saga, as the members came from 'autochthonous' families as well as from families that had moved into Saga. However, conflicts soon arose about the management of the association's funds. The social and ethnic origins of its members were also a source of conflict. The association fell apart, or splintered into several different associations. According to one former member, the association had already disintegrated by the time the maternity project got under way, though according to another member, the association was still intact in 2007–08 and continued mainly to provide education/tutoring support to pupils in the secondary school in Saga. In any event, many of the members of the association, in particular Abdou, took on important roles in the execution of the maternity ward project alongside François, their peer, with whom they had formed a bond of friendship and trust.

For the members of ASANE like Abdou, the involvement in the maternity ward project provided a platform for emergence at the side of their seniors. In contrast to the members of ACOVIS, to whom many in ASANE referred as their older brothers, the members of ASANE had not achieved an elevated socio-economic status and their future was couched in uncertainty. In an article on youth and public space Diouf (2003) cites the emergence of youth organizations or associations in Dakar that are active in the neighbourhoods organizing clean-up sessions, opening public libraries, offering education classes and security as one form of response to marginalization and a loss of status in the context of a sustained economic crisis. He argues that in the process youth also challenge the political power as they appropriate the management of urban space (*ibid.* 8). The involvement of the youth in the neighbourhood via ASANE can be seen as a search for social status which, although it did not directly challenge any political power at the local or the national level, certainly introduced the youth into the local political arena. In a rural Nigerien context Hahonou has pointed to the importance of associations and NGOs in as a political trampoline for youth (Hahonou 2010: 232)

The involvement of the members of ASANE and ACOVIS in the public dispensary can also be analysed or understood through the prism of brokerage. Both as individuals and regrouped in an association, they acted as development brokers (Bierschenk, Chauveau & Olivier de Sardan 2000; Lewis & Mosse 2006).

The MP was the third local actor involved in the public dispensary, an involvement that was to continue after the inauguration of the maternity ward. As a parliamentarian and politician, it was certainly in the interest of the MP to make himself visible and known as a benefactor and a 'bringer of development' and infrastructure. The MP was already a very

important and influential personality in the neighbourhood. The MP, who was from one of the families of chiefs in Saga, was a self-made man who had never been to school but had founded a successful local business. His company and workshop were located along the main road in Saga. The workshop produced furnishings in wood and in metal, including everything from couches to school desks and hospital beds. The business flourished, and the MP succeeding in accessing important public contracts. The MP had also become known as a benefactor – he had contributed to the construction of wells, the supplying of school desks, etc. – and he had supported the construction of mosques and was the founder of two private Franco-Arabic schools. The MP was an important and influential local political actor in Saga, not least in his ability to wield both economic and political influence and in his contacts with the President and the presidential family. In many respects, he fitted the image of a local ‘big man’ who masters important politico-economic networks and accumulates financial and political resources (Laurent 2000: 176), a status illustrated by the reception of a steady stream of visitors (*ibid.* 170), as was the case with the MP.

The term ‘big man’ is easily associated with corruption and is often understood as an expression of the logic whereby wealth is accumulated and redistributed to gain political support, the political position in turn opening the way for the appropriation of more economic resources (Daloz 2003). Lentz (1998) has pointed to the flaw in generalizations about political power and legitimacy in Africa on which such understandings of ‘big men’ rely, and offers a more nuanced picture of legitimacy and political morality. Lentz argues that legitimation is a continuous process which involves various actors, audiences and strategies, and in which different and shifting notions of ‘good governance’ and ‘legitimate wealth’ are mobilized (1998: 64). In the case of the MP his status in the locality was not only the result of his accumulation of political and financial resources as a well connected national politician and a successful entrepreneur and his ability to create clientelist networks but was also very much dependent on his public actions beneficial for the community such as his involvement in the public dispensary.

The link between political prominence and development is evident in the many examples of local elites who see to it that health centres, or other public services, for that matter, are created in ‘their’ localities (Gruénais et al. 2009: 107–110). As a way of demonstrating their capacity to bring ‘development’ (in the form of infrastructure investments, schools, health centres) to the locality (Hagberg 2009b: 177). For instance, Salem (1998), on the basis of fieldwork in Pikiné in Dakar, has

pointed to the link between the provision of infrastructure such as collective services, markets, water provision, schools, and health centres in particular neighbourhoods, and the political connections of local leaders, which meant that neighbourhoods with influential, well-connected leaders were often privileged in terms of service provision. This also meant that spatial marginality was not synonymous with political marginality, some marginal neighbourhoods being better equipped (with infrastructure and services) than more centrally located neighbourhoods thanks to political connections. The ability to bring a public health centre to a locality can thus be a means of confirming or creating a position of political influence in the local political landscape. For instance, in Bamako the creation of community health centres was shown to be the initiative of local leaders seeking to solidify their position of influence rather than of the population as envisioned from the outset when community health centres were introduced (Boré, Jaffré & Touré 2003). These tendencies can have negative effects in terms of development, since they sometimes lead to the creation of health centres in conflict with the 'technical norms' (Gruénais et al. 2009: 107–110; Hagberg 2009b: 177). In Niger, Oumarou has pointed to lobbying by *ressortissants* based in Niamey for the creation of health centres in their villages which in one case led to the establishment of a village health station (*case de santé*) in a village near an already-existing health centre (2009: 12–13).

In Saga, the establishment of public health services also took on a political and symbolic significance in relation to the city and the state. All local actors involved in the health centre couched their involvement in discourses about the need to contribute to the development of the locality. As pointed out in the beginning of this section, the long wait for public health services was seen as a sign of Saga's marginalization in the urban agglomeration due to negligent state administrations. This was also interpreted as a lack of recognition of Saga's historical status. When talking about the inauguration of the health centre, the president of the health committee expressed this sentiment in the following way:

People say that of all the buildings you see over there, the state has not contributed. Once in place, the state has played an administrative role. They have taken care of things once the means are there. But for everyone in Saga, the state has done nothing. At the inauguration of the maternity, people wanted me to say that in my speech but I avoided doing so. I only deplored the fact that after 257 years, it was only in 2006 that we received a maternity. It did not hinder us from being born, but in what conditions?

This comment is reflective of the ways in which local leaders in Saga talk about the establishment of the public dispensary. First, the president underlines the role of local initiatives, which is contrasted to the lack of initiative on the part of the state. Second, he also emphasizes that despite its historical status – 257 years referring to the time since the village of Saga was established – Saga was provided with public health services relatively late in comparison to other neighbourhoods in the capital. That the maternity ward was named after the canton chief, the symbol of traditional authority, is not insignificant against this background.

The rise and fall of a health committee

In this section I focus on the management of the health centre through concentrating on the health committee. In Niger at the end of the 1990s health committees (*comité de santé*, COSAN) were created in primary level public health services. The establishment of health committees was a lead in the implementation of cost recovery following the guidelines of the Bamako Initiative, which, among other things, promoted community financing and participation in public healthcare provision. The main role of the health committees was to manage the funds of the health centres generated by the cost recovery system as well as other resources (donations, state funds). Other roles outlined in the ordinance on the creation of health committees included the promotion of health (e.g. sensitization about public health issues) in the ‘community’ and the improvement of health services. The ordinance foresees the creation of health committees at the level of the village health station, and dispensary as well as at the district level.

In terms of the management of funds, the health committees took over part of what had previously been the prerogative of the state. As noted by Gruénais, the implementation of the Bamako Initiative partially introduced private management into public structures as public health structures managed their funds themselves through the community committees, thus denying the state a means of regulation (*la régulation budgétaire*) (2001: 79). The funds of health centres, which are composed of consultation fees and proceeds from the sale of pharmaceuticals – can be quite significant. However, the state via the Ministry of Health was still in control of salary expenses and staff management as well as setting the agenda and health policies and deciding on public health campaigns. In a context of financial difficulties, the transfer of part of the responsibility for resources or budget to the population is beneficial for the state, as pointed

out by Fassin and Fassin (1989: 889). They also rightly argued that to a large extent, the state still controls and supervises the provision and management of public health services (including the health committees), although now at a lesser cost (*ibid.* 891).

The election of a new health committee

The public dispensary in Saga was created at the same time that cost recovery became the national health policy. However, the person who headed the dispensary over the course of its first seven years or so, a male nurse with a boisterous personality who was on the brink of retirement after thirty-six years in the profession, had little time for many aspects of this reform, such as the requirement to stock only generic medicines, which he was convinced were less effective than brand-name medicines and merely a way for the West to cut down on cost. The management of the health centre was very much in the hands of this chief nurse, who dominated the public dispensary (Körling 2005). The health committee was more or less dormant, and the dispensary in Saga ranked last in the health district in terms of cost recovery measured on the basis of the amount 'recovered' (i.e. revenues) every month.

With the equipping of the maternity, the head of the dispensary was 'encouraged' to retire and elections were held to renew the health committee. This health committee election was seen by François, the project leader, as key to ensuring the restart and successful management of the health centre and the newly inaugurated maternity ward. New and very detailed bylaws for the health committee were drafted by François with the help of the municipal councillors and the health district. It was underlined that all 'social groups' and all legally recognized associations should be included in the health committee. The inclusion of women and youth was to be guaranteed through the imposition of a quota that at least one post in the management committee should be occupied by a woman and one post by a youth. The health committee election was preceded by a series of sensitization sessions carried out by François and members of the youth association in the different neighbourhoods to rally the population around the health committee and the opening of the maternity ward. In the end, the health committee was composed of forty-four members representing the traditional chiefs, different women's groups, youth associations, religious leaders, traditional healers, market gardeners, fishermen, the sports association, and so forth. The first general meeting of the health committee was attended by representatives from the health district, the municipal advisors in Saga, the MP, and the project leader. According to

the minutes of the meeting, the activities of the outgoing committee – represented only by the treasurer – were evaluated, the bylaws of the health committee were read aloud and adopted, and finally the management committee was elected through secret ballots. It was also during the general meeting that the decision to name the maternity ward after the canton chief was taken. Finally, it was also stated that the health committee wished the auxiliary staff (ward orderlies, etc.) to be recruited primarily from the population in Saga. The elected management committee (*comité de gestion*, COGES) was composed of four men and two women.

Biographies of the management committee members

In this section I will describe the biographies of some of the members of the management committee. This is important as it affords an insight into the logic animating the newly elected health committee. Significantly, the composition of the management committee reinforced the position of actors who had been involved in equipping the maternity ward.

The president, Seydou, a friendly grey-haired man in his fifties, was born in Saga and had been among the first graduates of the first primary school in Saga. Following university studies in France he pursued a career in the mining sector in Agadez. After twenty years in Agadez he returned to Saga in 2001 for health reasons and settled in one of the newer neighbourhoods in Saga, where he built a house. On his return he started to work for the MP, who was his uncle, as the administrative and economic director at the MP's workshop. Seydou had been a member of ACOVIS, and after the demise of the association he continued to be involved in 'local development', for instance in working with the women's groups in Saga helping them to apply for project money. He was also one of the founders of the sports association in Saga and of an association of market gardeners. He had also been the secretary general of the national federation of market gardeners in Niger. Seydou stressed that his experience with associations had given him necessary and valuable skills for guiding the health committee. At the same time, the election of one of the MP's closest men as president of the health committee held the promise of the MP's continued involvement in the health centre.

The vice president, Hamsatou, an energetic and outspoken woman in her thirties, had attended school until the tenth grade (*3ième*) but abandoned it after twice failing the examinations for the school leaving certificate (BEPC). Hamsatou was the village representative (*agent villageois*) in

CARE's women's group and savings project (MMD).⁵⁶ This meant that she had regular contacts with the women's groups (*groupements féminins*) in Saga that she supervised and trained in systems of savings and credit and also in economic activities, female leadership, and HIV/AIDS awareness. Hamsatou had volunteered to be a member of the health committee to ensure that there would be women on the committee:

I noticed that amongst the candidates only men had volunteered, Abdou and the others. The women did not volunteer, so I decided that I would have to be part of the board even if it meant that I would be the only woman on the board of the health committee...we train the women in leadership and we tell them that even if there are only two places on a committee one of those persons should be a woman, we cannot be telling that to the women without applying it ourselves. We have to fight so that women will have at least one position.

Hamsatou drew a link to her involvement in the health committee and her role as village representative for the women's groups. This involvement had provided her with a mastery of the language of development and gender equity. However all of her ambitions had not been fulfilled. She had wanted the post of president but said that she had been pressured to cede it to Seydou.

Three of the positions in the health committee were filled by young men. The head of the maternity ward had contended for the post of secretary general in the absence of the head nurse of the whole health centre, who had not yet taken possession of the position, but she lost to Adamou, a student of medicine from Saga in his thirties. Adamou had been a member of the youth association (ASANE) and had participated actively in the project to equip the maternity ward. However, his tenure as secretary general was short lived. After a number of consecutive absences, he was replaced by the head of the health centre. The treasurer, Ibrahim, was also in his thirties. After finishing secondary school, he had started studying science at the university but soon abandoned that and ended up studying accountancy and management at a private institute. When he finished his studies in 2006 he was called to do his civil service as a secondary-school teacher. He started doing his civil service in a school in Namaro, located between Tillabery and Niamey, but was transferred in 2008 to Liboré, only a couple of kilometres from Saga. This allowed him to return to Saga. His transfer to Liboré had been facilitated by the MP in order to enable him to fulfil his role as the health committee's treasurer, which

⁵⁶ *Matu Masa Dubara* (MMD), which means 'women on the move' in Hausa, is a savings and credit association led by Care International.

other committee members had had to fill in his absence. In addition to his role in the health committee, he was also active in politics at the neighbourhood level as a supporter of the MNSD, the political party in power, and as a member of the community committee of the neighbourhood library. Abdou, who had been elected to the position of auditor, said that at first he had not wanted to be part of the health committee because he figured he had been too involved in equipping the maternity and would hence 'monopolize' the committee. Ultimately, he was very active in the activities of the health committee and the health centre. However, his employment as a municipal tax collector in a village in 2007 put a halt to his involvement with the health committee. The position of auditor was then filled by a woman from one of the women's groups.

The quota of one woman and a youth representative had been more than filled, at least when it came to youth representatives. The management committee provided a space for the emergence of the younger generation, as pointed out by Tidjani Alou (2009a) in the case of rural water management committees in Niger. The biographies of the members of the health committee reveal a number of other commonalities. The members elected all had a background in the associational life of Saga and a subsequent visibility in the locality. It is also especially striking that in an otherwise increasingly ethnically heterogeneous urban neighbourhood, all of the elected members in the steering committee were originally from Saga and of Zarma ethnicity. All members of the health committee, when talking about their motivation for joining it, mentioned the importance of working for the well-being of the village and the canton. As expressed by the treasurer, 'It is something that I can do, that I should do because it is for the good of the canton.' In this they echoed the discourses on the need for the development of the village described above, which animated the associations in their involvement with the public dispensary. There was a clear sense of moral obligation in this. It was also underlined that being a member of the health committee necessitated dedication, conviction, and sacrifice in time and effort. The close association between the public dispensary and Saga (the village) constantly played on by local actors involved in the public dispensary left little room for people from other horizons.

Studies of health committees have illustrated that they are co-opted and used as a source of both monetary and political resources. Fassin and Fassin (1989) and Foley (2009) have pointed to the politicization of health committees in different contexts in Senegal. Foley argues that health committees in St. Louis, Senegal were seized by local power brokers and became arenas for political jockeying instead of for collective or

community decision making, with local elites profiting from monetary earnings and social capital. Similarly, health committees in Pikine in Dakar were monopolized by local notables seeking political influence (Fassin & Fassin 1989). Ridde points to the existence of a logic of monopolization (*accaparement*) in health committees whereby membership is one strategy for obtaining access to monetary resources (Ridde 2011: 122). The health committee in Saga was also a source of political and monetary stakes. The MP exercised a great deal of influence over the health committee via his ties with some of the key members – the president, Seydou; the treasurer; and Abdou, the auditor. The involvement of important local actors as well as external partners in the public dispensary heightened the stakes of inclusion in the health committee. Moreover, in contrast to other user committees such as the school committees (which I will discuss in chapter 7), the health committee was responsible for a cash box that was constantly being fed with funds.

Membership in the committee was also motivated by personal and political reasons. In the case of Abdou, his involvement in the maternity ward and the health committee, alongside other activities in various associations, provided him with something meaningful to do during periods of unemployment. But it was also a means of gaining a certain political influence or platform. For Seydou, who already had a more or less established position, the post as president of the health committee could be seen as solidifying or re-affirming this position.

Community management in practice

When the newly elected health committee took over, the bank account of the public dispensary was nearly empty. At one of the first meetings of the health committee after the inauguration of the maternity, held on the veranda of the one-room annexe next to the dispensary building, the treasurer announced that there had been only 24,500 FCFA in the bank account and that there were unpaid invoices for 200,000 FCFA when the new management committee took over. A surplus of the project money for equipping the maternity was used to pay off a portion of the debts and the rest was paid off with the revenues during the first month of activities. The poor performance or mismanagement of the previous health committee had placed the health centre last in the district in terms of cost recovery, but a couple of months after the installation of the new management committee it had managed to climb to the top of the ranking.

As in all health centres, the funds to be managed by the health committee were constituted by consultation fees and the sale of pharmaceuticals

in the dispensary pharmacy. These earnings were used to restock the pharmacy, to pay the salary of the pharmacy manager, to distribute bonuses or incentives to the dispensary staff, and to finance minor repairs and other smaller expenses. It had also been agreed that the president and the treasurer of the health committee, who bore the biggest workload, should be given 10,000 FCFA a month. According to the treasurer, the average profit per month was between 300,000 and 400,000 FCFA.

The use of funds was to be jointly controlled by the treasurer, the president, and the head of the health centre. The management of funds was a source of tension. The manager of the pharmacy complained of the absence of the members of the health committee whose signature he needed to deposit money in the cash box at the end of each day. According to the president, the absence of the treasurer, who had been posted in Namaro within the framework of his civil service as a teacher, posed a serious problem when it came to the management of the money. He claimed that the other members of the health committee who had taken over his tasks as treasurer had been ‘manipulated’ by the dispensary staff and the pharmacy manager and had consequently not filled out the papers correctly, making it impossible to check the accounts. Later, the treasurer was transferred from his teaching position in Namaro to one in Libore, a village next to Saga, so that he could serve as treasurer again, a transfer apparently facilitated by the MP. The treasurer said that when the amount in the cash box reached 80,000 FCFA he deposited the money in the bank account so as not to take a risk:

At 75,000 or 80,000 FCFA we deposit the money, because when the money is there...it’s a risk. That’s why I deposit it [in the bank].

The handling of money is often a source of tension and suspicion in community management. Ridde points to the ubiquity of suspicion and a lack of trust between actors in health services – for instance, between the members of the COGES and the rest of the population, between health workers and between NGOs and health workers – which is often centred on money (2011: 13). This complicates community management. For instance, committee members might fear using the money, as they might be accused of having ‘eaten it’ (ibid.). The president’s accusation that the dispensary staff had manipulated the members of the health committee also reflects a tension between the health committee and the dispensary staff. The members of the health committee underlined that the division of tasks between the committee and the staff was clear. In the words of one member of the health committee:

The work here at the CSI has been divided. There is the technical side which is dealt with by the health workers, and then there is the management side, which is entrusted to the population so that they are integrated in the management of the CSI.

The members of the management committee were reluctant to let dispensary staff interfere in the management of funds. From the outset, there had been no representatives of the staff in the health committee. It was common practice in health committees that the post of secretary general be occupied by a staff member, most often the head of the dispensary. However, as described above, a youth from Saga had been elected to the position of secretary general. This had created a distance between the committee and the staff, as the staff was not represented in the health committee. That the head of the dispensary was eventually given the post of secretary general was in some sense a defeat for the other members of the health committee. At some time after that, the president complained that the head of the dispensary was not sufficiently involved in the management of the health centre:

Since you became SG you have never once made a report, you have never convened a meeting, and you do not talk to the president about problems that arise. You only play your role of head of the CSI, that's not the COGES.

Other studies of the daily management of health centres have also pointed to conflicts and struggles for control, especially over funds, between community committees and health workers. Foley points to the ubiquity of conflicts between committee members and health workers, including accusations of mismanagement and theft, in public health centres in Senegal (2009: 63–64). And Ouattara (2002) describes how the health committee of a public health centre in Burkina Faso was co-opted for personal profit by the dispensary staff. Oumarou describes health committees in Niger that were either limited to one or two people chosen on the basis of their customary, religious, or economic status in the village or entirely run by the dispensary staff (2009: 16–17). In the dispensary in Saga, the health committee, composed of individuals with experience of associations and development brokerage and with important connections (to the MP, to François), could insert itself into the management of the dispensary.

'It is your dispensary': Community participation

At the beginning of its mandate, the new health committee set out to increase the use of the dispensary. The dispensary had suffered since its creation from low user rates. Increasing user rates was important for the functioning of the health centre in order to ensure the restocking of the pharmacy, minor repairs, and payment of staff incentives (*ristourmes*), all of which were dependent on the number of paying patients. During the first ordinary meeting of the health committee after the first general assembly during which the dispensary and maternity had been elected, the need to encourage people to use the health centre was emphasized. This was backed up by arguments about the possibility of improving services in the health centre using the profits that would be generated from greater numbers. It was also argued that a well-functioning health centre would make the canton proud. The management committee, in cooperation with the neighbourhood chiefs, also organized awareness-raising sessions for women in the neighbourhoods of Saga about the use of the maternity ward. One such session was held in Saga Fondobon in the compound of the neighbourhood chief. The session was led by Hamsatou and Abdou. The neighbourhood chief and other elders were seated on plastic chairs and a group of thirty young and old women were seated on mats on the ground. The session centred on three points: the behaviour of the midwives, user fees, and the low user rates. The behaviour of the midwives was a common subject of discussion and complaint, especially in the case of one particular midwife. During the meeting the women were encouraged to report any undesirable behaviour or bad treatment on the part of the dispensary and maternity staff to the health committee. It was even promised that such measures as the dismissal of staff would be taken:

When you encounter a problem, talk to the neighbourhood chief who is represented on the committee. If you cannot come and talk to us, tell the chief and he will then talk to us. If you don't want someone there, they will not continue to work at the maternity. It's like that. If you have something to say, say it.

Hamsatou and Abdou criticized the fact that women from Saga chose to go to other maternities and health centres for consultations and births. They argued that this not only gave the maternity bad publicity but also reduced their chances of being granted aid and other forms of support.

It's not normal that of five women who give birth in the maternity, three are from Gamkalley, one from Pays Bas, and only one from Saga. This will give us bad publicity and people will say that people in Saga do not want

the maternity... Do you know that when a woman goes to another maternity to give birth, she contributes to increasing their statistics? When there will be aid for maternities, the maternity with the highest number of deliveries will be the first to be served. The last time that material was brought to the maternities in Niamey, they brought what we had received in a small box! I am sure that if all of the women in Saga would stay here and give birth it would not be like that.

They also emphasized that the maternity had been built in Saga for them – the women of Saga – and not in another neighbourhood.

We received the financing for the maternity from the white people. We assisted at a meeting in Niamey... When the Minister said that a maternity would be created in Saga, people protested and questioned why a maternity should be created in Saga when there are neighbourhoods in the centre of town which have a greater need for a maternity. The Minister explained that it was an initiative of the people of Saga, that they had managed to get financing from the white people and now the white people are here. The white man even came to tell you that the maternity is for you, the people of Saga.

The sensitization session centred on conflicts with staff, with the health committee, siding with the ‘population’, even claiming to be able to get rid of unwanted nurses. It also revealed the monetary stakes in raising user rates. It is also interesting to note that the health committee members tried to rally the population around the notion of the local, of Saga. However, despite these attempts user rates remained low.

The health committee and the free healthcare reform

In April 2006 the President of Niger, Mamadou Tandja, announced the pending introduction of free healthcare for a part of the population. The free healthcare reform (referred to as *la gratuité des soins*) included the abolition of user fees for children from birth to five years and for pregnant women. This was a significant break with the logic of cost recovery and fees for all users. Although announced in 2006, the reform was not implemented until August 2007. The reform got off to a rocky start. The health centres started treating patients, including consultations and prescriptions, for free and at the end of each month they sent information about the number of patients treated and the prescriptions made in order to receive their reimbursement from the state (Ministry of Health, National Treasury), with which they could then restock the pharmacy. However, many health centres experienced long delays before being reim-

bursed by the state. As noted in a policy brief, ‘free healthcare’ was financed for a time by the users themselves as the health committees used their savings to restock the pharmacies (Olivier de Sardan et al. 2010: 4).

In the dispensary in Saga, the introduction of free healthcare led to a dramatic increase in the number of patients. Before the reform, in one given trimester the health centre had received 753 patients, a number which increased to 3,268 patients immediately after the introduction of the reform. In the maternity, the number of deliveries doubled. The reform was positively received by the patients and generally by the dispensary staff as well, but the members of the health committee were less enthusiastic. They felt that the reform had been sprung on them at the last minute, leaving little room for adjusting the reform:

It is a very sensitive question [the introduction of free healthcare]. What I can say is that when free healthcare reached us, even if it was developed before being applied, it arrived in a very abrupt way. It started the first of August but we were only informed about it at the end of July. This is when we learned that there would be free healthcare in all health centres. They came on a weekend and wanted to meet everybody, but as we were only informed very late they only met a few COSA [health committee] members.

With the implementation of the reform, the much-wanted increase in user rates was a fact. However, like many other health centres, the dispensary in Saga experienced delays in reimbursement several months in a row. During this time the health centre barely managed to stay afloat and to replenish its stock of pharmaceuticals. The few earnings came from patients over five years old, who now paid a one-off fee of 900 FCFA for consultation and the treatment (medicine prescribed), as well as the fee for maternity deliveries, which had been reduced to 1000 FCFA. In the words of the president of the health committee:

We treat people for free for almost a year, and we have only been reimbursed for three months. We have eight months’ worth of backlog. Thanks be to God we are still able to purchase medicines, there are CSIs that are not able to buy products any longer.

The management of the funds of the health centre had turned into a struggle to make ends meet. The introduction of free healthcare somewhat paradoxically led to a much-desired increase in the number of patients but a dwindling amount in the bank account. Consequently the activities of the health committee ground to a halt. In the words of one

management committee member: 'Free healthcare slowed down the activities of the COGES.' The salary of the pharmacy manager, which was paid by the health committee from the revenues of the health centre, was frozen. The free healthcare reform also meant that the health committee, which had occupied a central role in the cost recovery system, lost influence. As the monetary resources of the health centre dwindled, so did the influence or leverage of the health committee in charge of managing the funds, at least for the time being. If the user rates were to remain at the same level and the health centre were reimbursed on time, the monthly earnings would reach over 1 million FCFA.

The chiefs and the recruitment of a new pharmacy manager

The financial problems caused by the delay in reimbursement contributed to the resignation of the pharmacy manager in the dispensary. The pharmacy manager, a friendly and welcoming man in his late thirties, had occupied the post since 2001. A native of Saga, in addition to his work in the pharmacy he also practiced agriculture and tutored pupils. As the manager of the pharmacy, he was responsible for the charging and registration of consultation fees and for the sale of pharmaceuticals. In short, all that concerned the management of the pharmacy and the stock of pharmaceuticals. The manager was paid by the health committee, using the revenues from the cost recovery system. In Saga the salary of the pharmacy manager was 25,000–30,000 FCFA a month. However, with the delayed reimbursements exhausting the dispensary budget, the health committee was unable to pay his salary. The pharmacy manager had already started looking for a new job and found work in the gold mine in Samira. He thus quit his post in 2007, four months after the reform.

A new manager had to be recruited. The recruitment involved the health committee and the health district. The announcement of the recruitment of a new manager – including a description of the post and of the requirements – was made by the health committee in the locality with the help of the traditional chiefs. The applications for the post, which were submitted to the health committee, were then transmitted to the health district, which organized an employment test. In the end, the choice stood between three candidates. According to the president of the health committee, the results of the test ranked the applicants in a clear order and the top-ranking candidate passed the test with flying colours. However, to the great surprise of the president of the health committee, the test results were annulled by the mayor of the municipality on the

grounds that the applications were not eligible. One of the applicants was the sister of one of the neighbourhood chiefs and the daughter of the deceased canton chief whose name the maternity ward bore. The president claimed that she had the worst test results. However, her candidacy was supported by some of the chiefs, who the president suspected had persuaded the mayor to annul the results of the test. The annulment was contested by the president, who wanted to recruit the top-ranking candidate. This put him on a collision course with the chiefs. The chiefs argued that the other candidates were not from Saga, or rather had not been born in Saga, and thus should not be given the position. The top-ranking candidate, who had passed the *Baccalaureate*, was originally from Mali but had been living in Saga for several years. The president dismissed the argument promoted by the chiefs that the candidate was not from Saga:

I said that being from Saga does not necessarily mean that you have parents that have created Saga, he lives in Saga, his wife is in Saga. I don't understand why you say that he is not from Saga.

This conflict between the chiefs and the president of the health committee also came to include another *ressortissant*, whose wife was one of the other candidates:

The second person is a woman who is from Gamkallé. She was brought to Saga from Gamkallé upon her marriage. Her husband is one of the dignitaries of Saga. I don't see why you say that she is not from Saga. It was in front of the neighbourhood chief that I said this. If you say to this woman's husband that his wife is not from Saga, then you are going to have problems with him. That is exactly what happened. He heard what had happened and he came to us at the COGES and the neighbourhood chiefs and said, 'I have learnt that you say that my wife and I are not from Saga. If it wasn't for my respect for elders, if I set my sights on the position of canton chief no one else would stand a chance. I have the advantage of having inherited the right to that position and what's more I am an intellectual and I have money.' After this I had to calm them down.

The president was adamant that he would never sign the paper certifying the hiring. But the chiefs, with the support of the mayor, prevailed and the candidate they supported was hired, joining her sister, who worked at the civil registry in the maternity. This episode is illustrative of the stakes of community management even in the recruitment of auxiliaries such as the pharmacy manager. It is also illustrative of the influence of the chiefs, who made use of their relation to the mayor and an argument of autochthony.

Negotiating with the state

The public dispensary was under the supervision of the health district (*district sanitaire*). The health district provided technical assistance to the health centres in terms of supervision and training, it coordinated public health activities, and it organized meetings of the district health committee, which was made up of representatives from the health committees for each dispensary. The municipality played a part in the dispensary as well. The municipality paid the salary of the auxiliary staff, such as the ward orderlies, the guards, and handymen, in the health centres in its area, and contributed to repairs and renovations of the buildings. Following the inauguration of the maternity, as many as ten ward orderlies and two handymen were recruited by the municipality. The ward orderlies had already worked at the health centre as volunteers and were hired following a selection based on the appreciations by dispensary staff who had ranked all of the twenty ward orderlies. The selection had been carried out by the health committee. In addition to the ten who were hired, another three were later recruited on a temporary contract basis. Even those who had not been hired continued to come to the health centre. This gave them something to do, an opportunity to get out of the house, as well as the possibility of receiving a small amount of money now and then. They also hoped for future recruitment. Most were young women who lived in Saga.

The health district and the municipality were often referred to and contacted by members of the health committee. This fits in with the ideals of a decentralized (health sector) administration. However, other less formal connections, even to the highest levels of the state, were often more significant and not all interventions in the dispensary followed the official division of responsibilities.

The ambulance and the MP

Following the inauguration of the maternity ward, the acquisition of an ambulance soon became a priority. Saga's peripheral location made it difficult to find transportation in emergencies, especially at night when there were no taxis in circulation. Moreover, taxi drivers were often reluctant to transport women who were experiencing complications with labour, necessitating different sorts of arrangements when emergency transportation was needed. Numerous attempts were made by the members of the health committee to obtain an ambulance. At the inauguration itself, the need for an ambulance was presented to the First Lady. The

health committee also talked to the MP about the need for an ambulance in the hope that he could use his contacts and close relationship with the President to argue the case of Saga. According to Abdou, they wrote a letter with the support of the MP addressed to the office of the President, which, according to someone at the health district, had received a donation of ambulances. At the same time, the Lion's Club (Niger) and Caritas (Cadev Niger), which had both been involved in equipping the maternity, were contacted as well. The ceremony described at the beginning of the chapter also provided an opportunity to put forth the need for an ambulance.

The dispensary finally received an ambulance in August 2007. There were diverging interpretations by health committee members and dispensary staff of how the health centre obtained the ambulance. Some, notably the head of the dispensary but also members of the health committee, held that it had been given to the maternity via the Ministry of Health and the health district in accordance with the 'activity plan' established by the district. Someone else held that it had been donated through the President's Special Programme. However, it was also suggested that the members of the health committee had manoeuvred to ensure that Saga be given an ambulance. As described above, the dispensary in Saga had received a donation of medical equipment in 2004. This equipment was too sophisticated to use in the dispensary and was left in a storage room. The inauguration of the maternity raised anew the question of the equipment, which was still in the storage room. This is the account by one of the members of the health committee of what happened:

When the head doctor at Gazobi saw the material he said that they will take it. We asked him what he would give us in return. But we knew that we could not just keep the material in the storage room since it will decay and at the same time there is a need for the material in Niamey. Anyway, the doctor told us that he will take the material and that he will help use to get something in return. So we told him that we need an ambulance. The doctor said that we would carry out an exchange. As we had already sent a request to the office of the President, he would 'follow' the request.... He gave us a timeline of eight months. He took the material in January 2007 and we received an ambulance in August.

The story about the trade of the equipment for the ambulance is revelatory of the manoeuvring that accompanied the quest for material (financial) support. It is also illustrative of a reluctance to simply wait for the state. Instead, members of the health committee turned not only to non-state actors (Lions Club, Caritas) but also to persons in the vicinity such

as the MP with contacts in the higher echelons of the state administration, and even the First Lady and the Minister of Health when the opportunity presented itself. The MP was widely perceived as having direct access to the highest level of the state:

With the contacts that he has today, he is someone who if he wants to see Tandja [the President of Niger] he will see him. He doesn't need an audience.

The story of the ambulance also says something about people's perceptions of the state as working through an informal mode of functioning that necessitates bargaining and negotiation in order to access state representatives and state resources.

Discussion

In this chapter I have pointed to the links between the public dispensary, the state, and local politics. The analysis of the manifestation of the state in the visit of the Minister to the health centre is illustrative of the front stage or official side of the state as able and as caring for the health of its citizens. It is also illustrative of the politicization of public service provision and the appropriation of development aid by the state and its representatives. In a similar manner different donation ceremonies provided an occasion to display the symbols of the political party in power, the MNSD (that was also the party of the MP). However, in the main part of the chapter I focused on the backstage, on the everyday management of the dispensary. This analysis revealed the central role of local actors and institutions in the daily management and even in the creation of the dispensary. In a study of the daily operation of health posts in Dakar Foley argues that a decentralized health system and the introduction of community participation leads to the creation of 'an arena' in which 'players' such as health committees, medical staff, political parties and health district officials 'battle for status, power, and the social and material advantages of involvement in health posts' (Foley 2010: 94). Similar dynamics were also evident in the public dispensary in Saga where relations between the health committee and the dispensary staff sometimes took the form of a competition over the management of the dispensary and different local actors sought to position themselves and to gain influence in the local political arena via their involvement in the dispensary. While the public dispensary represented a potential source of financial resources (access to

the revenues of the dispensary, jobs), political capital and visibility, it was also a rallying point for collective action as local actors took on the role as intermediaries or brokers in attempts to bring investments to the neighbourhood.

Regarding the community management of the dispensary the health committee, headed by an influential resident with close links to the MP and made up of members already active in different associations, was relatively strong and dynamic. Having set out to create a sense of local ownership through community mobilization and to promote the interest of Saga through a well-functioning health centre, the health committee started out strong with the elections and the inauguration of the maternity as its first activities, prodded on by the project leader. The committee was successful in comparison to the description of health committees in urban West Africa that were inefficient, alternately non-functional or entirely co-opted by the dispensary staff or by notables or a political faction (Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan 2003b: 74–75). However, the committee's enthusiasm gradually petered out, and the members of the health committee dispersed. Moreover, the health committee had not succeeded in mobilizing a major part of the population around its activities. According to the president, overtime it became increasingly difficult to gather people for health committee meetings. As suggested by Boré, Jaffré and Touré, people go to the health centre to seek care, not responsibilities (2003: 433). And as Foley argues in the case of the promotion of community participation in public healthcare in a rural context in Senegal, there is a significant discrepancy between lived realities of illness and the 'kinds of civic engagement envisioned by the state and policy makers'; 'most people have neither the time, the ability, nor the inclination to partner with the state on a voluntary basis in the name of community management of the health system' (2008: 270). Despite these problems, the health committee continued to function, but the introduction of the free healthcare reform dealt a heavy blow to the management committee as it depleted the resources gained through the cost recovery system. In 2008 the president said that he wanted to step down. The introduction of the free healthcare reform and the delayed reimbursement hollowed out the legitimacy of the health committee, a legitimacy that in the end seemed to be based more on the management of the funds earned from the cost recovery system than on a role as representatives of the population or 'community'.

6. Therapeutic encounters: Paying for care and '*la gratuité*'

In this chapter I shift the focus to the place of the public dispensary in urban residents' search for care. Despite its being the only public health service in an area of fairly densely populated and peripheral neighbourhoods, the dispensary consistently recorded low user rates. Thus, while it was the focus of local political actors as described in chapter 5, within the wider context of therapeutic alternatives the public dispensary in Saga occupied a fairly marginal position. In the first part of the chapter I focus on daily interactions in the health centre, an analysis which focuses on people's access to care in an era of cost recovery. In the second part of the chapter I describe the surrounding therapeutic field and give a brief account of factors that influence the search for care. This account is important in situating the public dispensary in the surrounding medical field in which it maintained a fairly marginal existence. In the third part of the chapter I focus on the implementation of the free healthcare reform and I argue that it helped to reposition and strengthen the dispensary in the medical field and to increase its legitimacy as a place in which people sought and were given care.

From free healthcare to cost recovery

As described in chapter 2, public healthcare was free the first decades after independence, even though the system of village health workers had introduced a limited form of self-financing. The ability of the state to provide free healthcare to its citizens was severely challenged by the economic crisis of the 1980s. However, the extent to which healthcare actually was ever really free could be questioned, not only in terms of difficulty of access to healthcare services, especially in rural areas, but also in terms of the availability of medicines. Care might have been free in theory, but not always in practice. In her ethnography of a dispensary in rural Niger, following the economic recession and structural adjustment of the 1980s and previous to the implementation of the Bamako Initiative, Masquelier

(2001a) points to a lack of medicines, the practice of reserving medicines for people with connections, and the issuing of prescriptions for expensive medicines. Similarly, Motcho describes the uncertainty of accessing medicines in dispensaries in Niamey at the end of the 1980s:

If the patient is lucky, they will give her a piece of paper which will enable her to receive the medicine free of charge. If not, she will get a prescription. (Motcho 1991: 263, my translation)

From 1995, cost recovery with its attendant user fees was gradually introduced in health services in Niger in line with the Bamako Initiative. The system of user fees to be implemented and the amounts of the fees was to be decided at the level of the local health district but within a predetermined range; the fees were to be modest so as not to be too prohibitive for the great majority of the population. The pharmacies in health centres were also to be stocked with essential medicines.

With the introduction of the cost recovery system, portions of the costs of the healthcare system were transferred from the state to the users in a context in which many states were unable to finance public health services and international financial institutions sought to minimize the role of the state (Gruénais et al. 2009: 101). The introduction of user fees broke with the idea that had been adopted by the newly independent states in Africa that it was the duty of the state to provide free healthcare to its citizens (*ibid.*). However, as pointed out above, in many cases the state had never in fact managed to finance or guarantee free public healthcare. Fassin and Fassin (1989) thus argue that it makes little sense to talk about the disengagement or withdrawal of the state with the introduction of user fees. The introduction of user fees has also been analysed as part of the increasing marketization (commodification and monetization) of health alongside the charging of informal fees in public health facilities and the promotion of the privatization of healthcare (van Dijk & Dekker 2010: 1–2).

In the following sections of the chapter I analyse the functioning of the cost recovery system in practice through focusing on daily interactions between patients and staff in the public dispensary in Saga.

The daily activities of the public dispensary

In the absence of other health centres, the dispensary in Saga served more distant neighbourhoods, including Pays Bas and Tondigamay, and pe-

ripheral villages such as Koffa Kwara as well as the central neighbourhoods in Saga. As a primary level health centre, the public dispensary offered curative care – consultation for children and adults and treatment of infections and common illnesses, maternal and child care (prenatal and postnatal consultations), and preventive activities (vaccination and health sensitization). Since 2006, when the maternity ward was inaugurated, the health centre also performed deliveries and related care. In 2008, the dispensary was staffed by five nurses, eight midwives, one hygiene and sanitation or cleanliness officer, one social worker, ten ward orderlies, three handymen, and one guard. One of the nurses held a position as head of the health centre (*major*) and one midwife as head of the maternity.⁵⁷ On the directives of the health district, the public dispensary organized mobile (*foraine*) immunization sessions in Pays Bas and Tondigamay and other nearby ‘villages’ and covered these same neighbourhoods/villages during national immunization days (*Journée Nationale de Vaccination*).

Although the health centre carried out mobile vaccination activities in surrounding neighbourhoods, when it came to consultations the reach of the health centre to more distant neighbourhoods was limited. The dispensary was difficult for residents in the densely populated northern part of Pays Bas to access, as there were no roads that connected Pays Bas and Saga. Likewise, there were no means of communication that connected Tondigamay and Saga. Hence, for many residents in Pays Bas the dispensary and maternity in Talladjé, and for residents in Tondigamay the dispensary in Aéroport were much more easily accessible than the health centre in Saga. A 2006 health district report suggested that the current catchment area be divided into two: one that would cover Pays Bas, with an estimated population of 10,883, and the other that would cover the central neighbourhoods in Saga closest to the dispensary, with an estimated population of 18,822. It was further recommended that a public dispensary be constructed in Pays Bas. This recommendation stood in opposition to the dismissive attitude of the municipality and the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN) towards Pays Bas and their unwillingness to invest or even to sanction investments in the informal neighbourhood.

Despite the wide catchment area covered by this lone health centre in a fairly densely populated but peripheral zone, the dispensary recorded low user rates.⁵⁸ On an average day, a dozen patients passed through the gates

⁵⁷ The use of the term *major* reflects the military origin of the implantation of ‘biomedicine’ in Niger and the dominance of military doctors in the first health services established during the colonial period (Souley 2000: 17).

⁵⁸ In 2006 the population within a five-kilometre radius of the health centre was estimated to be 28,196.

of the health centre, usually in the mornings. According to the head nurse, the dispensary received an average of fifteen patients a day. The dispensary exuded an atmosphere of idleness and the staff complained of the tediousness of their workdays in the absence of patients. It was hoped that the situation would improve with the inauguration of the maternity and that the maternity would attract more users to the dispensary by encouraging women to use prenatal, maternity/delivery, and postnatal services in the same place, whereas before, they had had to go to health centres in nearby neighbourhoods. However, the maternity got off to a slow start, finally reaching two to three deliveries a day, and overall user rates did not significantly increase.⁵⁹

The low patient numbers were, for different reasons, a concern or source of worry for the health district as well as for the health committee and the staff of the dispensary. The health district had an interest in presenting satisfactory user rates in its reports to superiors at the Ministry of Health. The revenues from user fees and the sale of pharmaceuticals were essential to the daily running of the dispensary, including the restocking of the pharmacy and the minor repairs that were the responsibility of the health committee. The staff also had an interest in the user fees, for professional satisfaction and also for the opportunity to make extra money through the *ristourne* (a share of revenues divided between staff) and other parallel money-earning activities that are common in health centres in Niamey such as the sale of cold water and snacks and the lamination of health booklets (see e.g. Hadiza 2003).

Paying for care and prescriptions

User fees were charged for all curative care at the dispensary. More specifically, patients paid for services in two steps: first for the consultation and second for the drugs or treatment prescribed. The consultation fees were 350 FCFA for adults, 250 FCFA for children up to five years of age, 150 FCFA for newborns, and 100 FCFA for prenatal consultations.⁶⁰ In addition, patients had to be in possession of a health booklet (*carnet de santé*) in which personal information as well as details of the consultation and prescription were recorded. The health booklet was sold for 200

⁵⁹ At the end of the year the maternity had recorded a total of 581 births, whereof 471 were in the maternity ward and 71 at home (to be compared with 1,345 expected births).

⁶⁰ The FCFA has a fixed exchange rate against the Euro: 1 euro is equivalent to 656 FCFA. In a 2005 national survey on poverty in Niger it was concluded that 55.5 per cent of the urban population live below the poverty line set at 400 FCFA per day in urban areas (versus 290 FCFA in rural areas where 65.6 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line) (INS 2007: 6-7).

FCFA. The drugs were sold in the dispensary pharmacy, which stocked only generics in accordance with the essential drugs policy. The following description depicts an average path through the dispensary in the search for care.

The first obligatory step was the purchase or presentation of a health booklet and payment of the consultation fee at the 'ticket window' of the pharmacy, where all of the monetary transactions were concentrated. The pharmacy was located in a room on the far left side of the dispensary just next to a roof-covered entryway with benches on each side. The pharmacy manager, seated behind a desk, conducted the transactions through a small square window covered by bars. After paying the consultation fees, the patient would sit down in the waiting area made up of benches along the walls inside the main building and wait her or his turn. The consultation itself was usually very brief and consisted of a series of questions about the felt symptoms. Having established a diagnosis, the nurse would register the case, write a prescription, and tell the patient to go to the pharmacy.

This was a critical point. Not all patients were able to pay for the medicine prescribed, prescriptions which could reach a sum of several thousand FCFA. Patients without enough money to fill the prescription thus left the health centre with an unfilled or 'half-filled' prescription, having bought only some of the medicines prescribed. Some might be able to find the necessary money and return later to buy the medicine at the dispensary or at a pharmacy in a nearby neighbourhood or in the city centre. Others turned to informal drug vendors.

From the point of view of patients, leaving the health centre without a filled prescription, without medicine, meant leaving empty handed, without a palpable result. While they held the promise of treatment or relief, prescriptions also embodied an obstacle. Although people might be able to pay for the consultation, not having enough money to pay for the prescription made it seem as if there was little point in going to the health centre only to risk coming back empty handed. This was illustrated in the case of Hawa. Hawa was married to a mason and lived in a simple house of *banco* in one of the older neighbourhoods in Saga. She had taken her ill child to the confessional dispensary but had not been among the group of patients admitted that day. Instead of going to the public dispensary right next door, she returned home, planning to try the confessional dispensary again the next consultation day. She explained why she had not gone to the public dispensary by saying, 'They will give me a prescription and I don't even have 25 F today.'

Studies in medical anthropology have pointed to the importance of prescriptions in the therapeutic encounter between the doctor (or nurse) and patient as a form of contract between the prescriber and patient, something concrete, and, for the patient, as a form of legitimization of the sickness (van der Geest et al. 1996: 160–161). However, a prescription alone went a very short way in offering satisfaction if the patient did not have enough money to actually purchase the medicine prescribed.

The availability of essential pharmaceuticals has been identified as one of the successful or positive results of the Bamako Initiative (Foley 2009: 63). Yet although pharmaceuticals were sold at cheap prices and fees were set so that they would not be too prohibitive, the fact remained that access to public healthcare services was dependent on how much money people had ‘in their pockets’ (Foley 2010). In conversations about public healthcare, people often pointed out that without money it was impossible to receive care in public healthcare establishments:

If you go to a health centre they will ask you for money, and in the event that you don’t have any money you don’t get any treatment.

When you don’t have money you shouldn’t even bother to go to the CSI.

[First] We try a home cure. If it doesn’t help, you take the person to a health centre...you have to have money because if you don’t have any you receive no care and the person has to go back home without having been treated.

As Ridde (2008) has documented in great detail in the case of a health district in Burkina Faso, the provisions that had been made for the poor to ensure access to healthcare, such as the exemption of fees, had been largely ignored in the implementation of the Bamako Initiative. There were few discussions of how deal with permanent exclusion from health care and the medical staff were given no guidelines for how to deal with the ‘worst-off’ (ibid. 1373–4). Diallo notes that in health centres in urban West Africa the *prise en charge* for the poor concerned few individuals and varied between different health centres and between different health workers (2003: 197).

In the dispensary in Saga, according to the pharmacy manager, they had raised the problem of destitute patients (*cas sociaux*) with the health district but had been told that no provisions were made in the cost recovery system for such cases. Consequently, there were no standard ways in which patients unable to pay for care were dealt with. Some patients would disappear from the maternity without paying:

There are some destitute patients, women who disappear without paying. They take advantage of the absence of the guard. We keep their health booklets but they don't return to claim them...I only register the patients who have paid.

In the context of cost recovery, such cases were seen as a loss for the dispensary, since it missed out on revenues from the user fees and the pharmaceuticals. The problem was passed on to the health committee in charge of the dispensary budget:

If we treat them and they don't have the money to pay, I make a note and ask the midwives to give me the name of the products.... I show it to the COGES and they will see how to settle this.

In some cases, dispensary staff or members of the health committee would help out. The pharmacy manager mentioned one young woman, a ward orderly, as being especially kind-hearted and willing to contribute to the payment of fees or medicines. According to one of the health committee members, they had provided free treatment for two 'mentally ill' young women who had given birth at the maternity with the justification that they were not lucid (*'la fille n'est pas consciente'*). In contrast, they had remained indifferent to the pleas of the mother of a young woman who had given birth at the maternity, the boyfriend refusing to recognize the child, on the grounds that she had known what she was getting into. In these cases, the judgement of whether or not to help was made on moral grounds. In the following episode, which is based on the account of Abdou from the health committee, money was taken from the cash box to pay for a patient's emergency transportation:

On Tuesday night a woman had been transported from the maternity [in an emergency]. The midwife had called Abdou at one a.m. to ask him for help. Since she is not from Saga she doesn't have many other people to turn to. Abdou woke up a taxi driver he knew and negotiated with him to get him to take the woman to the central maternity in Gazobi. The taxi driver wanted 5,000 FCFA since it was the middle of the night, it was far away, and the car's upholstery might get stained. Finally he agreed to take the woman to the maternity for 3,000 FCFA. The woman who was to be taken [to Gazobi] and her husband paid 1,000 FCFA and Abdou contributed 2,000 FCFA taken from the safety box in the health centre in his name, commenting, 'Luckily, I have the keys to the safe.' (notes 25 Jan. 2007)

The offering of help in the form of medicines or money to pay for prescriptions or for emergency transportation as in the case above was circumstantial and most probably also influenced by personal relations.

Infant and child health

Prenatal and infant consultations were the areas in which the public health centre in Saga was the most ‘successful’ in terms of number of users. This is indicated in other studies of primary healthcare services in Niger as well.⁶¹ Also, these were areas closely related to maternal and child health, which were prioritized in health policies. The health centre, which was usually very quiet, came to life especially on mornings when infant vaccination and health check-up sessions were organized. These sessions, during which children were vaccinated and weighed, were regularly organized and were central to the routine prevention activities of the health centre as part of the effort to reduce child mortality and improve infant and child health. The immunizations were free during the child’s first year; the only charge was the purchase of a health booklet, which contained a vaccination calendar and a growth curve.⁶² As an introduction to daily activities and interactions in the health centre, I will describe such a session below. These sessions were commonly referred to as *la pesée* (weigh-in) or PEV (acronym for the Expanded Programme for Vaccination, *Programme élargi de vaccination*).

When my assistant and I came to the public health centre in Saga around 9:00 a.m. one day in October 2006 the annexe (a one-room building with a large veranda) located next to the main dispensary building was bustling with activity. When we arrived, at least thirty women with their children were waiting on the roof-covered veranda for their turn, some sitting on the benches that lined the walls of the veranda. The names of the children were called out by a nurse who had collected the children’s health booklets from the mothers. The booklets had been put in a pile in order of arrival, and when her child’s name was called the mother

⁶¹ In a study of childbirth in villages in rural Niger, Olivier de Sardan and Souley point to the high number of patient visits for prenatal consultations and suggest that this is due (in part) to the fact that people see this as an ‘access ticket’ to other valued services in health centres such as vaccination and consultations for newborns and consultation in case of fever or diarrhoea, etc. (Oliver de Sardan & Souley 2001: 33). At a national level, health statistics reveal greater user rates for prenatal consultations and infant consultations than for curative care. In 2008 the user rate for infant consultations was 105.90 per cent in Niamey and 64.28 in Niger as a whole (MSP 2008: 39).

⁶² Vaccines administered against diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough (DTP), measles, tuberculosis (BCG), and polio.

stood up and entered the consultation room. The room was minimally furnished with a desk, a couple of chairs, a small refrigerator for storing the vaccines, and a scale. The health worker in service that day, the health and sanitation officer, had stepped in to replace the midwife and social worker who was usually in charge of the sessions. The health worker, a tall, thin, gentle man in his fifties, was seated in front of the desk and alternated swiftly between weighing and vaccinating the children, each time making a note of the vaccination administered and the weight of the child in the child's health booklet. At the same time, he would chat with the women in Zarma, asking them about the child, if the child was in good health, if it had started smiling, developed teeth, or started to talk yet. If the child had gained weight he would tell the mother, who would respond with contentment. If the child had not gained weight he would ask if the child did not have an appetite. He also gave nutrition advice to all mothers, telling them that breast feeding should be supplemented with eggs and porridge (*bovilli*). If the child had been vaccinated, he advised the mothers to give the child one-fourth of an aspirin tablet to lessen the pain and fever following the vaccination. The health worker consistently maintained a calm tone of voice and seemed to put the women at ease. In conversations with women after the consultation, many pointed out that the health and sanitation officer was very nice and did not raise his voice. In the words of one of the women, 'He is nice to the women, he doesn't yell... The woman who is [usually] there yells too much.' The session, which had started at 8:00 a.m., ended at 10:00 a.m. During these two hours sixty-three children had been consulted, a turnout that was representative of the average number of women who usually attended the sessions. According to the health worker, attendance at the vaccination and health check-up sessions had been gradually increasing and the women respected the call-backs. He attributed this to the centre's efforts at sensitizing the women and to the fact that they feared the reprimands they would receive if they did not regularly attend the sessions. The sessions were also used as an opportunity to sensitize the women on family planning, routine vaccination, nutrition, or the importance of infant check-ups and vaccination. In the words of one woman on the subject of these sessions, 'They ask us to take care of the children and to feed them well.' However, when it came to detected cases of malnourished children, the dispensary staff said that all that they could do was to refer them to the nuns next door, who offered free care and nutritional supplements.

These sessions were an important point of contact with the public dispensary. The level of attendance at prevention activities directed towards infants is also illustrative of the fact that the majority of users of the health

centre were women and that the consultations concerned the health of children. Working in Guinea, Leach et al. (2008) point out that health centres have become highly feminized spaces. They attribute this to the introduction of cost recovery, which has reduced the place of curative care in health centres (in part because the supplies of drugs have faltered), while activities have focused on reproductive and infant health (e.g. pre-natal care, family planning, and vaccination), which are more financially viable due to funding flows (ibid. 2160–2161). The health centre in Saga, too, was a predominantly feminized space. In contrast to the health centres described by Leach et al., it did provide functioning curative care, although the level of use was low. However, children made up the most important group of patients, and men rarely seemed to consult in the health centre. Of 2,397 consultations in 2006, 1,208 concerned children from birth through four years of age, 340 children from age five through fourteen years, and 849 patients fifteen years of age and older. The dominance of children and women as users of the health centre was also visible, as the majority of patients in the health centre on any given day were women with their children when it came to curative care as well as to the infant health sessions described above. The health workers in the dispensary were, with the exception of the health and sanitation officer, all women.

An inhospitable environment

The uncertain access symbolized by user fees and prescriptions was reinforced by the sometimes strained relations between users and dispensary staff. In addition to criticizing the costs of seeking care in public health-care centres, people were also critical of the behaviour of health workers. Anthropological studies in primary healthcare centres have pointed to the internal dysfunctions and conflicts in health services that negatively affect the quality of care. *Une médecine inhospitalière* (An Inhospitable Medicine), edited by Jaffré and Olivier de Sardan (2003a), provides a detailed anthropological account and analysis of public primary healthcare services in urban West Africa (in Abidjan, Bamako, Conakry, Dakar, and Niamey). Similarly, there are detailed ethnographic studies on, or rather in, hospital services in Niamey in the national hospital (Hahonou 2001) and in the maternity hospital (Moumouni & Souley 2004). These studies describe public health services that are characterized by petty corruption, clientelism, and a ‘disregard for the anonymous user’, characteristics shared with other state administrations (Olivier de Sardan 2004). Daily practices create an inhospitable environment in which the poor, with lim-

ited financial means and without social connections, are especially vulnerable to being ignored or treated badly, whereas those who are better off or have personal connections with the staff/health workers receive preferential treatment (Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan 2003). Andersen (2004) argues that in Ghana, while differential treatment of patients is a question of social relations (kinship and friendship), it is also rooted in a dichotomy between poor and illiterate patients (villagers) and well-to-do patients that is grounded in the value attached to social status and connections and in the more general bureaucratic logic whereby a distinction is made between good (educated, compliant) and bad (irrational) patients. Jaffré and Prual have also pointed to the conflict-filled relations between midwives and their patients in Niamey, observing that while women complained of 'delivery practices and attitude of the midwives', midwives complained about pregnant women's attitudes and noncompliance (1994: 1070–1071). The relationship was felt by both parties to be dissatisfactory and often degenerated into frictions (*ibid.*).

Similar problems in the relations between health workers and staff were evident in the dispensary and maternity in Saga. The pharmacy manager saw the behaviour of health workers as contributing to the low user rates: 'You know, the midwives have a temper and behaviour that makes the women avoid the maternity.' Health workers were accused of being nonchalant, of making the women wait. In the words of one of the members of the health committee:

They [the women] come at eight, the midwives and nurses have not yet arrived. They don't arrive until nine, and when they come they don't start to work, they eat their breakfast first and they go into their office to chat and do this and that...the women complain about this.

In interviews people described health workers as unwelcoming and rude. A frequently expressed opinion was that 'poor people' were neglected while 'rich people' were treated well, as in the comment below:

They are not good nurses. If you are poor you should not go there... If you are rich you will be well received, but if you are poor they will neglect you.

These negative assessments also included accusations of petty corruption such as the imposition of arbitrary fees and the diversion of medicine and donations for personal profit. For instance, women claimed that they had been made to pay anything from 25 FCFA for the syringe and needle to

1,000 FCFA for vaccinations which were supposed to be free (Körling 2005).

The inauguration of the maternity ward in 2006 brought the sometimes difficult relations between patients and health workers to the forefront of discussions. As described in chapter 5, the health committee had set out to try to convince women to use the maternity in order to turn around the health centre's low user rates. During one of the first meetings of the entire health committee which I attended, a great deal of time was spent discussing the behaviour of the staff. Similarly, during a sensitization session led by members of the health committee, when the women were asked to share their experience of the maternity one of them recounted the following:

Last night I accompanied Kadi to the maternity, you cannot imagine how the women received us, they yelled at us as if we were their children. The midwife even refused to do the consultation; it was the ward orderly who came to help us.

During the same session the costs of delivery in the maternity were also clarified. The women were told to always ask for a receipt and were reminded that the midwives had been instructed to ask for the payment of fees after the delivery and not beforehand:

When a woman gives birth without any difficulties she has to pay 3,750 FCFA. Unfortunately, some women experience troubles and they have to receive injections or medicines. Then she has to pay more. In any case, there should always be a prescription. If...everything is carried out in the maternity, the bill should not be more than 10,000 FCFA. When a woman comes to give birth and she has nothing, we can help her, but before being released from the maternity her family has to pay.

The emphasis on the actual costs of services in the dispensary and maternity makes sense in the context of distrust that marked relations between patients, health workers and the health committee. The members of the health committee saw receipts as a way of ensuring that no extra fees were extracted from the patients, for instance through the parallel sale of medical material or medicines by nurses. These practices also meant that the revenues went directly into the pockets of the nurses, bypassing the cost recovery system and the control of the health committee. In fact, the fees themselves were also a source of negotiation between nurses and patients. I will return to this in the discussion of the free healthcare reform.

However, people also talked about encounters with welcoming and conscientious health workers. For instance, during the vaccination session described in the beginning of the chapter the women expressed their appreciation of the gentle manner of the health worker.

For their part, the staffs of both the dispensary and the maternity ward were frustrated with working conditions. Most of the staff members lived in neighbourhoods in the centre of the city and they complained about having to go all the way to Saga, which necessitated taking two taxis and thus paying 800 FCFA in transportation costs each workday. Furthermore, the low patient numbers meant that the *ristourne*, the percentage of the revenue divided between the staff at the end of the month as a bonus, a form of motivation, was equally low. Moreover, the majority of the seven midwives working in the maternity in Saga had been transferred against their will from more central maternities bustling with activity. Some also pointed to boredom, that there was nothing to do because there were few patients. Health workers in the dispensary pointed to the unfair competition with the confessional dispensary next door, which offered free consultations and medicine. Difficult material conditions such as resource deficiencies, poor working conditions, and being underpaid have also been identified elsewhere as contributing factors to the tensions in health centres (Andersen 2004: 2003).

Paying for care and the medical encounter

The introduction of cost recovery at the national level was accompanied by an emphasis on community participation in both the financing and the management of public health centres. However, in official discourses about cost recovery, which emphasized its positive effects on access to and quality of public healthcare, and in its implementation, little attention seemed to be paid to the capacity of people to pay for care.

Studies in Niger and in other countries have pointed to the adverse effect of the introduction of user fees in virtually excluding the poor from public healthcare. Foley, on the basis of fieldwork in Senegal, has noted that user fees have led to increasing health disparities (2009: 69). Even modest fees were a barrier to public healthcare and caused families to delay seeking care (ibid. 63). In a study of the implementation of cost recovery in a health district in Niger, Meuwissen showed that many patients stopped coming to the health centre, the use of health services dropped, and the health centre was frequented only in the event of severe illness, leading to a greater reliance on self-medication and a boost for the

informal sale of pharmaceuticals, putting pressure on the fee-for-service system in public health centres dependent on charging user fees and selling pharmaceuticals (2002: 310–311). Fassin, on the basis of a study of community participation in a primary healthcare project in Pikine (Dakar), Senegal, points to the different levels of exclusion caused by user fees:

Selection based on money has an effect on two levels. First because it rejects the poor who cannot pay the price of a consultation even if it appears to be relatively modest. Secondly, it authorizes full treatment only for those patients who can afford the costs of the prescription. (Fassin 2000: 218, my translation)

Taking the situation in the health centre in Saga as a point of departure, I have argued that user fees and prescriptions make access to public health services uncertain. This is compounded by the sometimes conflict-filled relations with staff and the disadvantageous position of people with few financial resources and no personal connections with the staff, thus lacking social and economic capital. The situation in the public dispensary in Saga is illustrative of the intertwining of factors internal (user fees, an inhospitable environment) and external (poverty) to the public healthcare system that make access to public health services precarious for a significant part of the population. A similar situation is described in a study of access to healthcare (and healthcare markets) in urban and rural Tanzania, where it is concluded that exclusion because of an inability to pay for care or self-exclusion, choosing not to seek care because of costs, were frequent, and even if patients could pay they struggled to access decent care (Tibandebage & Mackintosh 2005). In a context where abusive transaction and bribery were common, people attempted to ensure better care through reliance on personal relations and knowledge of particular health centres (staff attitudes, trustworthiness) (Tibandebage & Mackintosh 2005).

Foley has forcefully argued that discourses surrounding the implementation of the Bamako Initiative, decentralization, and community participation are de-politicizing, as they shift attention away from poverty and the political economy of health – from factors such as financial means which determine access to healthcare – to a notion of individual responsibility, that a person's health status is a reflection of personal behaviour (2009: 65). It has also been noted that the idea that care is something that should be paid for (invested in) and that health is an individual responsibility has been instilled at various levels of the public healthcare structure, including in the attitudes of health workers (Foley 2010: 106;

Ridde 2008: 1374). This was evident in the discourses of health workers in the dispensary in Saga who held that the low user rates were due to ignorance, for instance that women did not understand the importance of vaccination sessions, and to unwillingness, that people were too used to free care, to ‘easiness’ (*la facilité*). Women, as the main users of the health centre, bore the brunt of such disparagement.

Therapeutic alternatives and itineraries

Niamey, like other urban areas in the developing world, is characterized by a diversity or plurality of health providers (traditional and modern, formal and informal, private and public) (Harpham & Molyneux 2001). The public dispensary in Saga was merely one alternative on a larger medical market. Other alternatives include private clinics, retail pharmacies and the informal sale of pharmaceuticals, and traditional medical practitioners and plant vendors. Moreover, as the capital, Niamey enjoys a high concentration of public health services at all levels of care, including neighbourhood dispensaries, maternities, hospitals, and specialized medical centres. The private sector, although diverse – ranging from well-equipped, often upmarket polyclinics in the city centre to small and poorly equipped health offices in peripheral neighbourhoods – was well developed in Niamey.⁶³ However, most private clinics were concentrated in the city centre. In Saga there was only one modest private clinic run by a retired nurse located on the outskirts Saga. Attempts had also been made to open private practices in Pays Bas and Tondigamay without much success. The private sector also includes non-profit health providers such as NGOs and religiously affiliated health centres. In Saga this sector was represented by the health centre run by Mother Theresa’s Missionaries of Charity, which offered free healthcare and was well known in the capital and beyond. In Niamey there is a flourishing market of the unregulated sale of pharmaceuticals, commonly referred to as *pharmacie par terre* (pharmacy on the ground). Pharmaceuticals were sold in markets as well as in small shops or general stores that sell all kinds of goods, mainly foodstuffs, as well as a small amount of pharmaceuticals. Vendors with small mobile stalls sell cigarettes, sweets, detergent, sugar, etc., along with painkillers like efferalgan and paracetamol. More specialized vendors sell

⁶³ The private offering emerged in the late 1980s and has since expanded rapidly. On a national level, it has increased tenfold during a period of ten years, from 30 establishments in 1994 to 300 in 2003 (MSP 2005: 34). In 2008 there were 86 private health establishments in Niamey (MSP, 2008: 21).

mainly pharmaceuticals in a stall or shop. The ambulant medicine vendors, who roam the streets in Niamey in search of customers, are the most noticeable. They are easily spotted by the *tête de médicaments*, a cylindrical display covered with pharmaceutical packages in vivid colours, which they carry on an upraised hand above their heads. Others circulate with carts decorated with pharmaceutical packages.



Figure 9. Vendor of pharmaceuticals in the city centre. (Photo: Henrietta Sterner)

Ambulant medicine vendors were present in Saga, Pays Bas and Tondigamay, and pharmaceuticals could be bought from them or from stalls. In Saga a small metal sheet covered shop was dedicated to the sale of pharmaceuticals. The shop was located right across the street from the public dispensary. The business which was run by a young man prospered, besides selling directly to customers, the shop supplied ambulant medicine vendors in nearby villages. People would also come directly from the dispensary with a diagnosis or a list of medicines and purchase some of the products from the shopkeeper.

Medical practitioners also include a diversity of practitioners of different kinds of 'traditional' medicine and vendors of herbs and herbal remedies, which also prosper in the capital. They, too, were present in all neighbourhoods. The most frequently consulted was the *zima* – the priest of the Songhay-Zarma spirit-possession cult – and the *marabout* – an Islamic scholar and priest. Both have a number of religious, social, and

therapeutic functions. Finally, medicinal plants were both bought from ambulant vendors and picked in the surrounding nature, especially in the varied vegetation along the river bank. The use of plants was an important part of the home remedies which generally preceded the search for other forms of treatment.

It is by now well established in medical anthropology that people draw on different registers in interpreting and attempting to deal with ill health and illness and turn to different therapeutic alternatives in their quest for therapy (Benoist 1996; Janzen 1978). So too in Niger, people move between different alternatives in the search for therapy, as pointed out by Luxereau on the basis of fieldwork in Maradi: 'In town health seekers have a choice between all sorts of therapies and they make the most of this in a very pragmatic way' (1989: 320, my translation). And as pointed out by a group of older women in Saga, therapeutic itineraries or therapy seeking often involve making recourse to a number of different therapeutic alternatives: 'When one is sick one seeks medicines everywhere until one is cured.'

The low user rates in the public dispensary indicate that the dispensary, which was associated with user fees, prescriptions, and an unhelpful staff, was not an attractive alternative. Instead, people turned elsewhere for care. A number of different factors influence the choices people make in the face of ill health and in the ensuing search for care. Before going on to discuss these factors, it should be underlined that the mobility of urban dwellers makes it difficult to delimit the catchment areas of particular health structures such as the public dispensary in Saga. Delimitation of catchment areas might seem straightforward in rural areas, but it becomes complicated in urban areas (Grodos & Tonglet 2002; Gruénais et al. 2009: 110). As pointed out by Grodos and Tonglet:

Such a health structure may well know that they have 25.000 inhabitants of a specific neighbourhood under their charge, but the latter can choose to look for what they need elsewhere. (Grodos & Tonglet 2002: 984, my translation)

Urban areas are socially and spatially heterogeneous and there are a large number of modern private and public health structures, including a high concentration of national-level health structures such as hospitals, which make it difficult to predict where health seekers will turn in their search for care. In the words of Gruénais et al.:

This heterogeneity does not facilitate the organization or grouping of people from a neighbourhood in one and the same health centre. Moreover,

the greater purchasing power of some city dwellers makes it possible for them to use private clinics and select their health services independently of any health map. (Gruénais et al. 2009: 110)

In Saga, Pays Bas and Tondigamay, too, people used public health centres and private clinics in other parts of the city. The choice of public or private health centres was influenced by a number of different variables, reasons ranging from the assessment of the quality of care – for instance, that the health workers were welcoming and conscientious or that the medical equipment was advanced – to personal contacts with a health worker – a brother or sister, child, nephew or niece, cousin, neighbour, or friend – in a particular health centre. Others who had moved into the area recently continued using health centres in the area or neighbourhood where they had previously lived and where they had built up personal relations with the staff. Health insurance policies tied to employment also influenced the choice of health centre, for instance the use of military-run health centres. Thus, the choice of a public health centre other than the one in Saga could be seen in some cases as a way of accessing a higher level of care or ensuring a better reception through personal contacts. At the same time, proximity was highly valued.⁶⁴

Economic means were an important factor in influencing people's choice of therapeutic alternatives. For instance, seeking treatment in the private biomedical sector required financial means, since costs were generally higher than in the public sector. The population of the neighbourhoods in Saga, Pays Bas and Tondigamay was relatively poor, many families making a living from petty trading and agricultural activities which limited both their mobility and their choice of therapeutic alternative even in the public health sector, in which access to care was dependent on the payment of user fees and prescriptions. As forcefully argued by Fassin:

As trivial as financial constraints might appear to be (to buy the medicines prescribed you must be able to pay for them), they merit as much interest from researchers as the cultural aspects that are more easily used to explain the behaviour of the sick. (Fassin 1992: 45, my translation)

⁶⁴ In a small survey of fifty interviews, when asked simply what health structure they turned to in the event of illness, the majority of respondents, resident in Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay, named adjacent health centres. Of the fifty respondents, the public dispensary in Saga was mentioned as a health centre used by at least half of the respondents in Saga and Pays Bas, although not in Tondigamay. The health centre in Saga was followed by the confessional health centre in Saga, which was mentioned by twelve respondents, usually in tandem with the public health centre in Saga. Next came the public health centre in Talladjé, the district hospital and maternity in Poudriere, and the military-run public health centre and hospital *Garrison* ('garrison') near Gamkalley, located next to Saga.

The precarious socio-economic situation of many households contributed to the popularity of the informal sale of pharmaceuticals – the *pharmacie par terre* – and the Catholic dispensary in Saga. Van der Geest, working in Cameroon, points out that the drug vendors responded better to the needs of the poor than the formal institutions such as hospitals, health centres, and pharmacies. He describes four reasons for this, namely, affordability, accessibility, availability, and social proximity (1987: 297). This also applied to Saga, Pays Bas and Tondigamay. Pharmaceuticals could be bought without any other expenses such as consultations or transport to a pharmacy. They were also relatively cheap and could be bought piecemeal. The vendors were easily found in marketplaces and in the streets of all neighbourhoods and were available at most times of the day. Moreover, the quick market transaction stood in contrast to the costly, time-consuming, and sometimes hostile procedures of the public dispensary. The social distance between vendors and their customers was generally smaller than that between patients and medical staff in the dispensary.

Diallo notes that Christian or Muslim health centres in cities in West Africa occupy an important role not always played by public health structures, in that they treat the poor (2003: 193). So also, the very *raison d'être* of the Catholic health centre in Saga was to treat the poor. This centre explicitly directed its activities, which included a dispensary, a centre for malnourished children, a hospice for people with AIDS and the old and destitute, and the distribution of sacks of cereals, cooked meals, and milk to the 'poorest of the poor'. The dispensary received patients three times a week. On consultation days, the line of people from the area and surrounding regions seeking admission to the dispensary would start filling up early in the morning. The staff of the confessional dispensary would choose the people who were to be admitted. This selection seemed to be based on exterior signs of poverty (dress, physical state) and ill health. Children, especially those who displayed signs of malnourishment, were prioritized. Admittance to the confessional dispensary was coveted, and stories abounded about the lengths to which people would go to access not only treatment but also food aid from the nuns, such as dressing up as someone poor and claiming responsibility for more children than they really had.

Perceptions about the quality of care or treatment also influenced the chosen or desired form of treatment. When it comes to the public health centre and other public health services, the medical knowledge of the health workers was acknowledged and their services sought after:

At the health centre they diagnose well, they give advice, for example they tell the patients to take their pills with lukewarm water and not with ice cold water.

This was contrasted with the lack of medical knowledge, education, and training of ambulant medicine vendors: ‘Vendors that sell medicines in the street are neither nurses nor pharmacists.’ Ambulant vendors were also seen as selling sub-standard drugs that had been exposed to the sun and heat and had sometimes passed the expiration date, unlike the pharmaceuticals sold in pharmacies and health centres. People also differentiated among various public and private health centres; some health centres or services had better reputations than others in terms of quality of care. Personal contacts with health workers were also seen as ensuring a good reception and quality of care. The confessional dispensary was popular not only because it offered free care but also because it had a reputation for providing good-quality care and treating patients with more care and respect than they received in public healthcare centres. In a study of poverty in Dakar, Fall (2007) points out that the poor generally preferred confessional dispensaries to public healthcare centres. Whereas confessional dispensaries were praised for offering free or cheap treatment and a good welcome, public healthcare centres were seen as the preserve of the rich (*ibid.* 181–182). While in public health centres richer and better-connected patients tended to be treated better, in confessional and non-profit health centres the tables were turned. Instead, the poor fitted the role of good patients, a role that in public and private (for-profit) health centres was reserved for literate or well-connected patients.

The medical market

The concept ‘medical field’ can be used to analyse the relations between these different therapeutic alternatives. In an analysis of therapeutic itineraries in a village in rural Burkina Faso, Samuelsen defines the ‘medical field’ as:

... the social space where various types of healers and health care institutions coexist, within which they position themselves and are positioned by lay peoples’ choice of healer and health care institution. (Samuelsen 2004: 30)

In addition to being shaped by the choices people make in their search for therapy, the constitution of the medical field, as defined by Samuelsen, is also dependent on the forms of capital (social, cultural, economic, and

political) that different practitioners have. Fassin suggests that it is better to use the term ‘health market’ instead of ‘medical field’ in order to ensure that emphasis is placed on the role of the health seeker and the dynamics of supply and demand of therapeutic options rather than only on supply:

Whereas the medical field is situated exclusively in the offer of care, the health market allows for the introduction of the sick person and playing (*faire jouer*) the mechanism of supply and demand. On the health market, thus defined, the sick person can choose between ancestral plants, the magic remedies of the healer, the Qu’ranic writings of the *marabout*, the ambulant vendor’s modern medicines, the prescriptions prescribed by the neighbourhood doctor. Also, on this market, the members of the health committee can act as the representatives of the population, healers may try to associate themselves to defend their professional interests... (Fassin 1992: 340, my translation)

Fassin’s definition of the health market resembles Samuelson’s use of medical field in that it focuses on health practitioners and on health seekers (therapeutic itineraries) and their interaction. Fassin, however, places more emphasis on economic transactions and on competition:

These exchanges are made within the setting of a monetary economy where it is not only the diagnosis and the treatment that are the object of monetary transactions but also political power, health management, the pharmaceutical business (Fassin 1992: 340, my translation).

In contexts in which therapeutic alternatives, whether they are categorised as public or private, modern or traditional or formal or informal, are subject to commodification and monetization conceptualizing different therapeutic alternatives and relations between providers and patients as a market on which both patients and providers navigate is especially useful (van Dijk & Dekker 2010: 1). The notion of medical market also underlines the blurring of boundaries between these categorisations (ibid. 11) evident in phenomena such as the charging of informal fees in public health facilities and the formalization and regulation of traditional medicine. Moreover, given the ubiquity of economic transactions for the sick person access to care is increasingly premised on the ability to ‘navigate’ the medical or health market. Finally, in addition to involving economic stakes – such as competition for patients/customers, earnings from the informal sale of pharmaceuticals, licit and illicit (under-the-table) payments in public health services – the medical or health market also involves political stakes such as control over the management of the health centre as analysed in chapter 5. Moreover, in losing patients, and thus also

revenues from user fees and the sale of pharmaceuticals, the public dispensary occupied a marginal position. Its legitimacy as a healthcare institution where people sought care was thus challenged.

The free healthcare reform and the public dispensary

The situation in the health centre in Saga changed dramatically with the introduction of the free healthcare reform in 2007, as described in chapter 5. The introduction of free healthcare created parallel systems in public health centres as the state again bore the expenses of healthcare for the part of the population defined as vulnerable (children under five and pregnant women) while the rest of the population continued to pay for care. An official at the Ministry of Health was careful to underline that the reform was neither an indication of the failure of cost recovery nor a significant alteration of the cost recovery system, the only change being that the state pays for a segment of the population. However, this change was not insignificant, as it did in one sense mark the return of the state as a provider of free healthcare, if only to part of the population. Significantly, the reform was presented as the initiative of the President Mamadou Tandja. In Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay, the free healthcare reform was indeed widely perceived as due to the efforts of the President. Some people, however, held that it, like other policy reforms, was a donor-led decision ('the dictatorship of donors'). Others saw the introduction of free healthcare as an attempt to gain political points with a view to upcoming elections.

As described in previous chapters, the reform got off to a rocky start. The system had been designed so that the health centres, having compiled and presented 'free healthcare receipts', would be reimbursed by the state for the consultation and treatment of children under five. However, many health centres, after distributing free care (consultation) tickets and providing medicine (treatment) for free, experienced long delays before being reimbursed by the state. Despite the initial problems, the introduction of free healthcare led to important increases in user rates at the national level. According to an official at the Ministry of Health, in some health centres the user rates had quadrupled. As described in chapter 5, in the dispensary in Saga following the introduction of free healthcare, patient numbers increased almost six-fold.

People's comments about the introduction of free healthcare revealed relief. A frequent remark was that they now had the 'courage' (*courage*) to bring their children to the health centre, in contrast to the past:

Before, even if the child was sick if you did not have the money you did not have the courage to go to the CSI. But with free healthcare, even for a headache you hurry to the dispensary because you have an access to medicines.

Today if your child is sick you run fast to the health centre because you do not need a lot [of money]. Before, even if the child was in agony they did not take care of him if you did not have any money,

There also seemed to be a feeling of increasing equality vis-à-vis the health workers when there was no payment of fees involved:

With the 'gratuité', poor or rich can go to the same CSI and they will be treated in the same way... Before, people without money would suffer a lot.

The introduction of free healthcare seemed to a certain extent to lead to better relations between patients and health workers, at least in people's descriptions like the one above. For their part, the health workers in the dispensary in Saga were content now that they had more patients. The increase in user rates broke the usual monotony: 'With the *gratuité* we have work. Before, we had so little to do that we even slept at our desks.' The health and sanitation officer incredulously pointed out that they now had as many or even more patients than the nuns – at least immediately after the introduction of free healthcare:

You were here before the free-of-charge system and you have seen now... In the beginning, before seven in the morning and until eighteen [6 p.m.] in the evening there were patients. There is no comparison between the free healthcare system and user fees. Now, after the infant consultations, they go to curative care, they know that it is free of charge. Before, the nuns had more patients than us. Now it is the contrary. Before, you could have a whole day without a patient. It was only when the nuns turned them away that they came to us. Now we have become the centre of the nuns.

It is significant that he notes that the women who come to the health check-up sessions were also going to curative consultations since the free healthcare reform. And that people were now going to the health centre

even in cases that were not perceived as particularly serious. The free healthcare reform was also seen as positive because patients who, before, would not be able to pay for treatment could now access treatment:

For us it is a positive thing. There are people who come here with sick children and when they were told to pay they left without buying anything. And now with free healthcare, when you come, whatever the circumstances, we will always do something for you and that is a positive aspect.

However, the health workers also worried that the free healthcare measure would not last and that it would be difficult to go back to the old system of user fees, since people were once again used to free care.

Like other health centres, the dispensary in Saga experienced delays in reimbursement by the state several months in a row. Although the reform was welcomed especially by patients and also by the staff, the staff and the health committee were forced to deal with or palliate the shortcomings of the state: the health committee in attempting to keep the health centre afloat and the staff in facing the disappointment and criticism of users for the lack of medicine. There were breaks in the stock of pharmaceuticals which led to conflicts with the patients. According to one of the health workers, the breaks had made people turn elsewhere for care and the health workers were accused of embezzlement:

There was a general break in the stock of medicines. This led to a decrease in numbers of patients... They become used to it and now when there is a shortage they tell us that the President has said that it is free of charge and we tell them there is nothing [no medicines]... They accused us of either having 'eaten' or taken it for ourselves. You see, things like that are not easy.

He also said that patients were unhappy about the kind of medicine that was given to them, especially, but not only, those who were not encompassed by the free healthcare measure and now paid a set amount for the consultation and treatment. The lack of medicines was also frequently mentioned in interviews in discussions about the free healthcare reform. The age span of birth up to five years was another source of contention between users and staff. According to the nurses, the mothers would do anything to convince them that their children were less than five years old. To counter this, the nurses said, they had come up with a test to verify if the child was five or younger than five: if the child was able to touch its ear when it reached over its head with the opposite arm, the nurses

claimed that the child was five or older. However, according to the (by then former) manager of the pharmacy, some nurses misused the free care receipts by writing that the patient was under five, in exchange for a small fee which they kept themselves.

There are patients who pay 400 FCFA instead of 800 FCFA, the nurse puts the money in her own pocket and she asks me to write a free care receipt and she tells me to write that the patient is four years old to fit the criteria of free care. This means that I give a product for free to someone older than five years. The nurses say that it is a project, everyone has to benefit.

Thus, the introduction of free healthcare did not put an end to the negotiation of fees and corrupt practices but opened a new arena for such transactions. Both the dispensary staff and the health committee found different ways of dealing with the reform, in mitigating its shortcomings and coming to terms with the new working conditions, which also meant trying to benefit from the new system before the next reform or project came along. The patients in turn made use of the new possibilities opened to them.

Discussion

In this chapter I have focused on the relation between urban residents and public healthcare services, concentrating especially on interactions in the public dispensary in Saga. The chapter has illustrated that access to public primary services is precarious in various ways due to the costs of healthcare and to (sometimes) difficult relations with staff. Faced with these obstacles, many people turned elsewhere for care, as attested by the popularity of the *pharmacie par terre* and the confessional dispensary. People also frequented health services in other neighbourhoods and in the city centre. Proximity was valued, however, with people in Pays Bas and Tondigamay pointing to the hassle in terms of time and transport costs caused by the absence of a health centre in their own neighbourhoods. The dramatic change with the implementation of the free healthcare reform shows that there was an underlying demand for healthcare, especially for young children, which was hindered by the obstacles described above (prescriptions, user fees). In addition to representing a barrier for people with limited financial means (and social and economic capital), cost recovery, or the logic behind it, also presupposes a particular relation between citizens and the state in which citizens participate in service provi-

sion through financial contributions and through involvement in community participation. This model was contested by people in these neighbourhoods who criticized the fact that accessing care was dependent on financial means. As described in chapter 5, people in general displayed little interest in the daily management of the public dispensary, which was in the hands of the health committee dominated by men while the majority of users were women who were also the target of sensitization sessions and public health campaigns.

The free healthcare reform represented a change in the relations between users and public health services in exempting a part of the population from user fees. The introduction of free healthcare dramatically changed the situation in the dispensary in Saga as patient numbers increased nearly six-fold. It turned the otherwise calm and seemingly abandoned dispensary into a health centre animated with activity. The public dispensary stepped out of its marginal position in the medical market. I outlined the political stakes surrounding the creation and management of the public health centre in a previous chapter. Stakes of political influence and power and, not least, legitimacy were also in play with regard to therapeutic alternatives and therapy seeking as different alternatives competed for clients. In Saga, the low user rates in the public dispensary had contributed to its marginalization in the local therapeutic field in which it had maintained a fairly anonymous or quiet existence, overshadowed by the more popular confessional health centre and the ambulant medicine vendors. With the free healthcare reform, however, this situation changed as patients lined up at the dispensary, thus increasing the influence or at least the legitimacy of the public health centre as a place in which people sought and were given care. At the same time, people could now claim a right to healthcare, although within the limits of the free healthcare category. This also altered the categorization of patients as free healthcare exerted an equalizing effect, treatment being available for rich and poor. However, this also opened the way for new stakes and competing interests as well as new spaces of negotiation in accessing free care.

7. Public education provision in the absence of the state

In chapter 5 I analysed the local political stakes of public health provision in Saga. In this chapter I focus on education provision in Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay. This will provide another perspective on the political process involved in the co-production of public services. As in the case of the public dispensary in Saga, public education provision is to a certain extent co-produced by a diverse set of local actors and institutions. Two specific cases have been chosen to illustrate this: the state initiated creation of a new public primary school in Saga and the locally initiated creation of a kindergarten in Tondigamay. The local ‘education field’ in Saga and its history are described in the first part of the chapter. In the second part of the chapter I focus on the creation of a new primary school in Saga, the school described in the introduction of the thesis, which was created with next to nothing in the way of infrastructure, furnishings, and pedagogical material. I then discuss the problem of education provision in Pays Bas and Tondigamay, including the reluctance to create schools in informal neighbourhoods and the proliferation of local initiatives in the absence of the state. I describe these attempts focusing on the creation of a kindergarten in Tondigamay. Finally, I point to the connections that can be made between public education provision and images of the state.

A local history of schooling

The first public school in Saga, Saga 1, was created in 1962. The school stands in the middle of a large open space beside a wide stretch of dirt road that leads down to the river. The school is made up of fifteen classrooms divided into four blocks. The classrooms are okra coloured, with four windows and a sheet-metal roof, and are built in the standard style of public schools. Large, old trees provide shade in the open space between the classrooms, and a flagpole stands in an open space in front of the school. A house with a small yard enclosed by a straw wall, located in the

middle of the school yard, serves as the residence of the principal and her family. Saga 1 is the only school in Saga that offers accommodation for the principal. Recently, a house of *banco* was constructed for the school guard, who had inherited the position from his father, the first guard employed at the school.

Saga 1 is found in an area where the original quarters meet and which could be described as the heart or centre of Saga, both geographically and politically. The residence of the canton chief and the Friday mosque in which prayers are led by Saga's imam are located in this area, which thus concentrates traditional and religious power holders. Thus, the first school, like many other primary schools in West Africa, had been constructed in the centre of the village (Lange 2007: 640). Two other structures, now abandoned, built in the same area recall different periods in Saga's history, namely, a granary (*grenier de réserve*) from the colonial period and the remains of one of the headquarters of the neighbourhood *samariya*, youth organizations that were active in community development under Kountché's military regime during the 1970s and 1980s. The school is flanked by a community library created in 2000 with the funds of the French Development Agency in cooperation with the French Cultural Centre and the Ministry of Sports and Culture. Like the maternity ward, the library carries a name which recalls the traditional political elite in Saga. The library had been named after Nangou Sambou (*Bibliothèque Nangou Sambou*) who in some local accounts is named as the unifier of the different quarters and in other accounts as the first chief of all of Saga. Given the school's central location, it is often used for community meetings convened by the traditional chiefs. Hence, Saga 1 appears in many different contexts, such as public health campaigns and meetings organized to collect contributions for public infrastructure.

The primary school was the first public service structure built in Saga. This is not to say that it was the first occasion of state presence, both the colonial and the post-colonial state being represented by state agents or auxiliaries such as tax collectors and other agents who patrolled the village neighbourhoods. The granary, for one, evokes the surveillance of the colonial administration; the contents of granaries were recorded in colonial reports along with population counts, the number of taxable residents, the political and sanitary situation, etc.⁶⁵ However, the school was

⁶⁵ 'Reserve granaries' were created to mitigate the effects of famine and were given special importance following the devastating famine of 1931. They were equated with other coercive measures (tax and forced labour) and were resisted by peasants (Olivier de Sardan 1984: 162, 179). In a colonial report from 1936 it is stated that there were forty-seven 'reserve granaries' in Saga. The contents of the granaries were counted and recorded and it was stated that the population was informed that even if the contents remained their property, the

the first physical manifestation of the post-colonial state in the central neighbourhoods of Saga. It was built during the first years of independence when the expansion of education was at the top of the agenda of the newly independent nation state. At that time, the supply of public education in Niger was limited. In Niger as a whole, enrolment rates stood at only 7 per cent in 1964, while in Niamey they had already reached approximately 40 per cent (Meunier 2000: 109, 129). The first school in Saga was established fairly late in comparison to the rest of Niamey, in which the supply of formal education in Niger had been concentrated since the colonial period. For one of the first pupils of Saga 1, the late creation of a school in Saga had contributed to keeping Saga on the margin of the modernization that had been under way in Niamey – ‘We have remained at a distance from the modernization in Niamey’ – thus equating modernization with formal education.

After the creation of Saga 1, it was not until some twenty years later, in 1985, that a second primary school – Saga 2 – was created. This school was built in the eastern part of Saga in the neighbourhood of Saga Dababanda, an extension of the older quarters on the other side of the main road. Of the fourteen classrooms in place today, several were built by the *samariya*, probably during Kountché’s military regime when they were a cornerstone of collective mobilization, and several more by a Japanese development organization. Two more public primary schools were opened in 1996 in the new, zoned neighbourhood of Cité Olani on the eastern outskirts of Saga. The schools are located not far from each other on a vast stretch of empty land. Of the two schools, one, Saga 3, is a traditional public school and the other a public Franco-Arabic school.⁶⁶ It was the first and only public Franco-Arabic school in Saga. The first secondary school, a lower secondary school (*collège*), CEG 16, was created in 1987 and stands at the entrance to Saga when arriving from the city centre. In 2001 the secondary school was transformed into a combined lower and upper secondary school (*complexe d’enseignement supérieur*, CES) with the name CES Saga. Today it is one of three combined public preparatory and secondary schools in Municipality Four, along with those in Talladjé and Aéroport.

Since the late 1980s there have also been private schools in Saga. The private education sector in Niger is concentrated in the capital, Niamey,

reserves could be used only with the agreement of the administration and that any contravention of this would be severely punished (Larrieu 1936).

⁶⁶ The main difference between what are called ‘traditional’ schools and Franco-Arabic schools is that in the latter, instruction is conducted in French and Arabic and the curriculum includes the teaching of Islam.

but as a neighbourhood, Saga has remained at the margin of this trend, a testament to the variation between different neighbourhoods in the supply of education in cities (Gérard 1999a: 153). This is linked to purchasing power as a necessity for private education. Tellingly, the first private school to be started in Saga, in 1986, a primary level Franco-Arabic school, was created by someone from Saga, by the MP, Saga's 'big man' (as described in chapter 5). In 2002 the MP established another private lower secondary Franco-Arabic school. According to the MP, the schools had been created with the support of Saudi Arabian funds. In addition to these two private schools there was also a private secondary school named *Cheikh Anta Diop*. This school opened in 2002 in Cité Olani. Constructed in two blocks meant to house the lower secondary school (*collège*) and the upper secondary school (*lycée*) respectively, only the block for the lower secondary school was used as there were not enough students for upper secondary school. The other block was left half finished. The school was created by a retired teacher who had also founded a private school with the same name in Harobanda, a neighbourhood on the other side of the river. The principal emphasized that the school was created for 'social reasons', to 'contribute to the education of the daughters and the sons of Niger' as 'the state cannot manage to do everything on its own'. Saga had been chosen as the site of the school because there were no private schools there. It was hoped that parents with financial means would enrol children in private school in the neighbourhood instead of the city centre. The school also hoped to acquire pupils excluded from the public school system. However, it struggled to recruit pupils, something the principal attributed to the poverty of the neighbourhood. The sister school in Harobanda was prospering. For its founders, the choice of Saga for the location of the school had not borne the expected fruits; the school operated at a loss rather than a profit. For his part, the MP emphasized that he did not make a profit on his schools but on the contrary had had to invest significant amounts to keep them running. However, the MP could draw other benefits from the schools. The creation of the Franco-Arabic schools came in response to the demand for more religiously oriented teaching, casting the MP, who had also sponsored the construction of mosques in Saga and Niamey, in a positive light in a context in which Islam has an important place and religious education is highly valued.

Since the creation of the first school in 1962, the number of schools in Saga has gradually increased to accommodate the growing number of pupils. The presence of public primary schools and a secondary school made it possible for children in Saga to follow a full primary and secondary education cycle without having to go to the city centre or to other

neighbourhoods as previous school generations had had to do. The schools, with their square classrooms, school yards, and flagpoles, marked the physical landscape, and children on their way to and from primary schools in the morning, at the midday break, and in the afternoon were easily spotted walking along the dirt roads around the primary schools, as were pupils in uniform walking to and from the secondary school beside the main road that passes through Saga. Over the years, in addition to the gradual expansion of public education, new actors – the MP, the owners of the other private school – had entered the fray. Franco-Arabic schools offered a more religiously oriented education, and all private schools generally offered smaller classes and a school year uninterrupted by strikes. However, the vast majority of children were enrolled in public schools. For instance, of the pupils enrolled in schools in Saga during the school year 2006–07, 4,717 pupils were enrolled in public schools and 317 in private schools. The local education field was thus very much dominated by the state, which was the main education provider.

The creation of a new public primary school

The sixth public school in Saga, Saga 4, was created in 2006. As I described in the introduction of the thesis, the school was established with little in the way of infrastructure and equipment. The start of the first school year was delayed by a couple of months before the first classrooms of straw were in place. Saga 4 was created to take pressure off Saga 1 and Saga 2, which were becoming overcrowded. According to the school inspector, the lack of infrastructure, furnishings, and educational materials was due to the fact that the creation of a new school had not been foreseen in the budget. In this section I will describe how in the absence of (material) state support the makeshift school became the arena of intervention by a set of different actors including the school committee, the traditional chieftaincy, the municipality, elected officials, and international development aid. This account provides an introduction to the analysis both of the diversification of actors and institutions, logics and strategies involved in public education provision and of the relation between images of the state as a service provider and the daily realities of education provision on the ground.



Figure 10. One of the first classrooms of the school.

Community participation in practice: Making ends meet

At the creation of the school, three community committees were established: the parents' association (*Association des Parents d'Élèves*, APE) and the mothers' association (*Association des Mères Educatrices*, AME) were quickly put into place, followed by the constitution of the school committee (*Comité de gestion des établissements scolaires*, COGES). Parents' associations have existed for a long time in Niger. Niger is part of the federation of parents' associations of seventeen francophone countries created in 1995 (Comhaire 2010: 51–52). The creation of school committees (COGES), first introduced in 2003 in all schools in Niger, is more recent. School committees were to be the 'operational arms' of the parents' associations (MEN 2008: 4). The prerogatives of the school committees were extended in 2006 as part of the Ten-Year Education Development Programme's (PDDE) emphasis on decentralization.

School committees are composed of representatives from the school administration, parents, and the student body. The responsibilities of school committees range from practically and administratively oriented tasks such as acquiring, receiving, and managing schoolbooks and other teaching materials, managing school funds (state subventions and com-

munity funds), and maintaining school infrastructure, to more community-oriented tasks such as the promotion of schooling, especially the schooling of girls. Further, school committees are encouraged to raise resources through parental contributions in money or in kind and contributions from local NGOs, associations, or benefactors – an important task, given the impoverished state of the education sector. The establishment of school committees is posited as a central component of the decentralization of the education system and the participation of parents in education provision. The importance attached to these committees by the Ministry of Education and international donors is evident in the vast administrative organization from the national to the municipal level that has accompanied the implementation of the system of school committees.⁶⁷

The elections of the community committee members in Saga 4 were held outdoors on the school grounds in the presence of officials from the school inspectorate and the neighbourhood chief. A handwritten list of the members of the parents' association and the school committee was posted on the wall of the straw classroom that served as the office and classroom of the school principal. The elected members of the community committees were a motley group with diverse backgrounds, from illiterate farmers and traders to industrial workers and civil servants. In practice, far from all of the members listed were active in the school. The lead was taken by the principal, who was secretary general of the school committee, and the president of the parents' association, who also held the post of president of the school committee.

The principal, Rabiadou, was in her forties. Before taking the position of principal, she had been teaching in another primary school in Saga. Following her training at a teacher training college (*École Normale*), she had been recruited into the civil service, and her first teaching position had been in a village in the region of Gaya. Following her marriage, she had succeeded in being transferred to Niamey, where her husband was studying at the university. They moved to Saga in the early 1990s, where they bought a plot of land and built a house in one of the newer neighbourhoods. In her opinion, the fact that the school was so makeshift, so palpably without resources, made it possible for her to be promoted to the position of principal. She had not expected such a promotion, as she had no personal contacts in the administrative echelons of the school inspectorate, thus implying that opportunities for promotion were

⁶⁷ A coordinating unit – *Cellule de Promotion des COGES* – had been created, every regional departmental office was accorded a 'focal point' (*point focal*, PF) and every primary school inspectorate a monitoring officer (*observateur relais*, OR) responsible for supervising activities related to the COGES.

usually dependent on personal and clientelist relations. Given the unexpected opportunity that had been offered to her, Rabiadou was determined to get the school running smoothly and to make her mark as principal. In the beginning, Rabiadou had, in her own words, ‘to beg’ for the odd blackboard and tables as well as surplus teacher manuals and textbooks from the other schools in Saga.

The president of the parents’ association and the school committee, known as *‘le président’*, was a quiet, soft-spoken man in his sixties. He lived in the old part of Saga Fondobon, not far from the school, with his two wives and children. Although he had never been to school, he spoke some French after having worked at the airport as a luggage handler and waiter for almost forty years. He was now retired but continued cultivating rice and millet. People said that he was elected on the grounds of his wisdom and value to the neighbourhood. The president was appreciated by the other members of the parents’ association and the school committee as well as by the principal and teachers, who commended his dedication and frequent visits to the school.

The vice president of the parent’s association, a tall, solemn man in his sixties, also lived near the school in Saga Fondobon. Like the president, he had not gone to school. He had grandchildren but no children of his own in Saga 4. The vice president said that he had joined the parents’ association following the prompting of the president and the neighbourhood chief.

I don’t like the work to the point that I would invest myself for free, but as I was surrounded by these two people who advised me, I agreed to do it.

The secretary general of the parents’ association was also from Saga and lived in Saga Fondobon. He worked as a mechanic and welder in a textile factory in the industrial zone next to Saga and was the coach of the local football team. He had been elected to the post in his absence. He said that although he was happy to have been nominated, he had little time to participate in the activities of the parents’ association given his job and his involvement with the football team and the local sports association. But he said that he still tried to keep himself informed of the activities in the school. The deputy – but de facto – secretary general of the parents’ association, originally from Tera, had moved to Saga upon retiring from the army in 2003. He had already bought a house as well as a plot of land on which he hoped to be able to build another house, which he planned to rent out. The house in which he lived with his wife and seven children was located right across the street from the school. He had provided the

school with water during its first months, before it managed to access a water connection. He saw his own election to the parents' association as an indication of the openness of people from Saga.

I am not a native of Saga. I came here after my retirement but today I am a part of Saga. Everything that concerns Saga concerns me. I participate in every activity that takes place in Saga. We are citizens like them and they have understood this...they haven't excluded people who are not from here.

This comment underlines the equality of all residents in Saga: 'We are citizens like them.' At the same time, however, it indicates that a differentiation was made between people in terms of autochthony, at least when it came to the management of community affairs. Since he was literate, he took notes and kept the manuals distributed during training sessions organized by the inspectorate and supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for the school committees (and parents' associations) in the municipality.

The position of treasurer posed a problem early on. The person who had been elected was rarely available and was replaced by someone else. However, when she refused the other members access to the cash box in order to pay the guard's salary, she was accused of having embezzled money. After the problems with the treasurer, the money raised by collecting financial contributions from parents was entrusted to one of the teachers. Not very happy about this state of affairs, the teacher said she had accepted the task because the president was a relative of hers. She was reluctant because she considered handling money to be a 'dangerous' task. Being in charge of the cash box was associated with vulnerability to accusations and suspicion, accusations that could come from the members of the school committee and from the parents. As pointed out in chapter 5 in relation to the management of the funds of the health centre, spaces of suspicion often come with the management of community funds. The ambiguity or uncertainty surrounding the management of money is shown in the case of village water pumps in Niger, the suspicion of embezzlement (*détournement*) being omnipresent (Olivier de Sardan & Dagoobi 2000: 164–165). People like the teachers were acutely aware of this and thus wary of responsibilities related to the management of funds.

The community committees were faced with a fairly daunting task, given that the school lacked basic infrastructure and equipment, from classrooms to school desks, blackboards, and textbooks. The activities of the parents' association and the school committee centred on ensuring that classrooms were in place and that there was at least a minimum of

material and equipment for the daily functioning of the school. An illustration of this is the contents of the school's 'action plan'. 'Action plans' – lists of the activities to be carried out during the school year and the funds that would have to be raised – were supposed to encourage participation and transparency in the use of funds, as they were to be presented and discussed with the entire parent body. In Saga 4, the 'action plan' included the construction of four straw classrooms, the acquisition of twenty-five school benches, and the purchase of textbooks, notebooks, crayons, and a pharmaceutical box. The total cost of these 'activities' was estimated at 1,297,500 FCFA. With a total of 658 pupils, each pupil would have to contribute approximately 2,000 FCFA for the action plan to be carried out. However, the amount was set at 200 FCFA, considered more feasible. The money collected allowed for the construction of the four classrooms. In addition to the collection at the start of the school year, initiatives to collect money were also made during the course of the school year to cover smaller expenses such as purchasing crayons and notebooks, paying the guard's salary, and paying for trips to the municipality office on errands related to the daily functioning of the school. A bank account was opened in the school's name and could be accessed only by the principal and the president of the school committee. The highest balance recorded in the bank book was 94,000 FCFA, an indication of the meagre resources of the school. Most funds were used straightaway.

Despite attempts by the principal and members of the parents' association and school committee to solicit the support of local 'big men' and politicians, the money raised for the school came exclusively from the parents' financial contributions or school dues. The ability of the school committee to guarantee the daily functioning of the school thus depended on its ability to convince the parents to finance daily costs and investments in the school. In the context of a lack of funds and a plethora of tasks and responsibilities, overall interest in getting involved in the management of the makeshift school via the community committees was limited. Being part of a community committee was seen as a burden, as time consuming and thankless, and finally also as perilous, given the frequency of accusations of mismanagement of community funds. The president of the parents' association said that since being elected in 2006 he had wanted to quit the post but that the others had convinced him to stay on.

Parents were generally not very interested in the activities of the parents' association and the school committee. Policy and project documents about community committees in schools emphasized the need for transparency – namely, that the parents should be involved in decisions taken about the amount to collect and what to use the money for, and should

also be informed about what the money had in fact been used for. However, according to school staff, parent assemblies were poorly attended. The community committees could hardly be described as a locus of local mobilization.

In an analysis of community participation in schools in Malawi, Rose makes a distinction between ‘genuine’ participation – ‘ability to take part in decision making and governance’ – and pseudo or ‘extractive’ forms of participation – ‘limited to contributing resources for school construction and maintenance’ (2003: 1). In Saga 4, and in other schools, for that matter, the forms participation took could be described as ‘extractive’, since the participation of the parents (the community) was more or less limited to monetary contributions, to making ends meet. The parents and the community committees had little say in other matters related to schooling. This certainly limits the extent to which community participation can be a route to empowerment, local appropriation, and increased equity and equality, goals that are put forward in official and development discourses. Such assumptions gloss over the fact that participation – which most of the time translates into financial contributions – is a burden, especially for poor households, and thus risks causing further inequalities (Comhaire 2010: 71). Other activities of the community committees included organizing cleaning sessions in the school. Members of the parents’ association also stepped in to play a mediatory role between the school/teachers and parents in the event of conflict. However, their main role remained that of ‘fundraisers’, getting parents to pay the dues, a role which was essential to the daily functioning of the school.

Although the community committees did not entirely succeed in mobilizing the ‘local community’ – and not even their own members – they did function. Studies have pointed to the co-optation and monopolization of community school committees in Congo by the nobility and the local elite and to the dominance of clientelist rather than democratic logics (Mrsic-Garac 2010: 99). However, in Saga, the school committees, in contrast to the health committee, attracted little interest from the political movers and shakers with the exception of the neighbourhood chief and were not co-opted by political interests. The school committee in Saga 4 was headed by a couple of individuals, notably the principal and the president, who displayed a marked determination that ‘their’ school succeed. Having worked as a teacher in another primary school in Saga before being appointed principal of Saga 4, the principal was eager to show that she could shoulder the new responsibility. The president, on the other hand, with no previous experience in local associations, seemed to take the challenge in stride. His efforts in the school committee were applauded by

other members of the parents' association and the school committee as well as by teachers and the principal. He was also supported by the neighbourhood chief, who, as I will describe in the next section, had taken on an active role in the school.

The gradual development of the school – the acquisition of a water connection, the levelling of the school yard – and the results of the pupils – the school's sixth graders (CM2) achieving the best results (67 per cent) in the year-end exams at the examination centre in Saga – was a source of pride on the part of members of the school committee and the teachers. A success story was thus in a sense cultivated among committee members and teachers, and it was emphasized that the school had been able to make the pupils work and achieve good results even given the poor infrastructure and lack of teaching and learning materials. Moreover, it was held that the other schools had sent their 'worst' pupils to the new school:

They sent us the bad pupils from Saga 1 and 2, but thanks be to God, when these pupils came here they changed completely and started to study. Thanks to God and thanks to the efforts of our former chief, everything worked out well at the school. There are even parents who have come to thank us for having transferred their children as they are working better since they came here.

In the absence of state support, with the exception of the teachers and pedagogical support via the school inspectorate, the first two years were marked by *bricolage* and a struggle for resources. The greatest responsibility in ensuring the daily functioning of the school was shouldered by the community committees, in cooperation with the teachers, especially given the central role played by the principal. Community committee members also served as intermediaries in relations with local actors such as the neighbourhood chief and the municipality which were involved in the school.

The chief and the school

Saga 4 is situated in Saga Fondobon, one of the older neighbourhoods of Saga. The chief of Saga Fondobon, a tall, calm man in his seventies who was also the neighbourhood imam, was involved in the school from its creation. The land set aside for the school had been identified and donated by the chieftaincy. This area had been prone to flooding, and in the early 1990s it had been levelled out with the help of the municipality. According to one local leader, it was decided after this operation that the land, which had become more valuable, would be destined for public use and

thus it came under the custodianship of the chieftaincy, revealing the prevalence of rural logics of land use in Saga which give the chieftaincy an important role in land management and land transactions (as described in chapter 4). The public and Catholic dispensaries had already been built on the land and the remaining area was used mainly as a household waste site. The creation of Saga 4 raised anew the question of the land's status. According to the mayor of the municipality, the neighbourhood chief had promised that the land would be given to the school. However, following the creation of the school the mayor had been approached by people wanting compensation. By this time, the neighbourhood chief had passed away. The mayor's conclusion was that not everyone had been consulted about the donation of the land:

They said that it is a donation but they did not ask everybody. The problem in Saga is that if you find a small parcel of land, it belongs to at least twenty people. When the school was to be built, the village chief was still alive and he said, 'I have land that you can take and build on.' It was him and his closest allies. But they did not contact everybody, and afterwards the others said that they are not ready to give the land for free. They would like to be compensated.

Awareness of the right to reimbursement in the case of the expropriation or public use of land had clearly taken root. It is this that explains the claims to reimbursement which emerged, after the death of the neighbourhood chief, with the use of the land for construction of the school. Even in the case of Saga 1, the first public school in Saga, people laid claims to the land. The guard there brought up the fact that some people still saw the school grounds as their land and felt that they could use it as they saw fit:

The school is not fenced in and people pass on motorbikes. If we say something, they allow themselves to answer whatever they want because the land belongs to their relatives. But this school dates back to 1962. The state has taken this land since that date. How can anyone come and say that they have rights to this land? Look, there is a tree close to the latrines over there. I was asked to cut it down, that gentleman is opposed to it.

Once the school was in place, the chief frequently visited the school to see how things were going. According to school committee members, he also pleaded the cause of the school at the municipality and had contributed to the construction of the guard's one-room house on the school grounds. The support of the neighbourhood chief was welcomed by the school committee and the principal, who felt that they had been left to fend for

themselves. Moreover, the chief was seen as an important ally in mobilizing people around the creation of the school and in convincing parents to involve themselves in the school. As expressed by a member of the school committee:

They asked for land on which to build a school. They went to see the neighbourhood chief to inform him and so that he would inform the population. And he asked the population for help so that the school would be built. You know, the former chief is someone with patience and a lot of respect. People here approved of the project.

The neighbourhood chief passed away in 2008. The death of the chief was felt as a blow to the school: 'With the death of the chief things have become even more difficult for us.' The chief's son, who was the interim chief before new elections were organized, continued to handle questions related to the school. In fact, the son would later win the election for the position of neighbourhood chief.

A number of factors tied the chieftaincy, or rather the neighbourhood chief, to the school. The question of land involved the chieftaincy from the beginning through the allocation of land for the school. Further, the election to the parents' association of people such as the president and the vice president who were close friends of the neighbourhood chief facilitated his intervention in the school. The person of the chief and his personality was also important. The chief was charismatic and someone who was respected and well liked in the neighbourhood in his roles as both neighbourhood chief and imam. He had worn the mantle of community leader on other occasions and had a history of working for 'local development'. For instance, he had played an important and active role in the health committee in the public dispensary and had also been involved in the creation of the market in Saga Sahara (Pays Bas) as described in chapter 4. He thus fulfilled parts of the expectations people had of the 'ideal' role of neighbourhood/village chiefs, such as that of neighbourhood leader who contributed to the development of the neighbourhood.

In an article on traditional chiefs in Niamey, Motcho (2005) describes chiefs as disconnected and ill informed, and argues that the chiefs are generally weak in terms of their position in the neighbourhood and that they are generally left out of decisions that concern the management of the city. However, as described in chapter 4, while the chiefs were sometimes marginalized at other times they played an important role in the neighbourhoods, for instance in land sales and in the creation of the market. In the case of Saga 4, in contributing to or facilitating public service provision, the chief took on what Motcho (2005) describes as the elusive

role of an ‘agent of development’. I argue that this contributed to strengthening the legitimacy of the chief. It could thus be said that the legitimacy of the chief was reinforced by the absence of state support in the school which opened up a space that could be invested by other actors.

The municipality and the school

When Saga 4 was established, the municipality built two of the six straw classrooms. The following year it also contributed classrooms. The municipality was frequently approached for other forms of support as well, such as water provision, sand to level out the school yard, and money for the employment of the school guard, the principal’s relative, who was paid intermittently using school committee funds. In accordance with the decentralization of the education system, the municipality is responsible for giving material support to the primary schools and kindergartens in its constituency, a considerable responsibility given the number of pupils (Charlier & Pierrard 2000: 38). Examples of interventions by the municipality included the construction of straw classrooms, the provision of furniture for the schools (school desks, desks, chairs, blackboards and storage cabinets), the renovation of classrooms and school furniture and support for the primary school inspectorate in organizing the year-end exams. A ‘coordinator for education affairs’ was responsible for the coordination of activities related to education in cooperation with the school inspectorate. The education coordinator, an energetic man and retired teacher, literally worked out of his car in the absence of an office and sometimes borrowed someone else’s office, an indication of the low level of importance accorded to education by the municipal office despite its importance in the municipal budget for social services and infrastructure.

The construction of straw classrooms accounted for approximately one-third of the total education budget. It was also the most visible action of the district, given the constantly increasing number of straw classrooms in the capital. According to the official responsible for the education sector, at the beginning of the 2006–07 school year the municipality received requests via the school inspectorate for the construction of over a hundred classrooms, and in response the construction of eighty-five straw classrooms was inserted in the budget. However, the implementation of planned investments posed a problem every year due to the lack of financial resources. To cover the deficit, the municipality attempted to solicit support from local enterprises. The municipality had also formed an education council whose main task was to reflect on how to improve the

situation of schools in the municipality and to solicit financial support from NGOs and private enterprises. However, the education council was barely functioning. Nonetheless, in preparation for the 2006–07 school year, Celtel (a telecom company) and another private enterprise had built two classrooms each in schools in the municipality, in Talladjé and Gamkalley. The final responsibility for the construction of classrooms was placed on the shoulders of the individual schools and ultimately on the parents and the parents' associations. Or in the words of the 'education coordinator':

The municipality is obliged to call upon the parents' associations and certain local businesses...that's how we manage to juggle to prepare a start of the school year that is not satisfying but acceptable.

The deputy mayor of the municipality, who resided in Saga and was a municipal advisor for PNDS, lamented the municipality's failure to meet the requests of schools for the building of straw classrooms due to its financial problems. He was also critical of the fact that no new classrooms were being built, which he feared would reflect poorly on the municipality's performance:

Every year, one has to pay for straw classrooms [*pailloles*] for the schools. We will go nowhere with that and the council will leave without having accomplished anything. I make a plea to the government to help us do this work.

In Saga 4, the start of the school year was marked by uncertainty about the number of classrooms the municipality would build. The principal tried to submit the requests as soon as possible, hoping that this would increase the school's chances of being granted classrooms. The members of the community committees, however, suspected that other factors determined the allocation of classrooms as well as other forms of support. The fact that the mayor came from another neighbourhood was interpreted as a disadvantage for Saga, since it was assumed that the mayor would favour his home village or neighbourhood. As a member of the parents' association expressed it:

If the mayor had been from here, things would not have been like this. For example, if the mayor was from here, it [the wages for the guard] would have been taken care of. When they finance two straw classrooms for us, the mayor's village gets five.

Similar comments were frequent and reflect a pervasive understanding of politics according to which being granted aid and investments and infrastructure was seen as dependent on personal relations and priorities based on local and/or family connections.

Moreover, the straw classrooms that were finally financed by the municipality were the source of a competition for resources in the form of the building or construction contracts. Municipal councillors from Saga had been granted the contract for the construction of classrooms in the neighbourhood. This was done in a grey zone. The law that regulates public works contracts (*marchés publics*) stipulates that a contract for an amount less than 500,000 FCFA does not have to be made public but can be directly negotiated with potential contractors (a process commonly referred to as *les marchés gré à gré*, which means by mutual agreement). It also stipulates that an enterprise led by someone who is in charge of the contract and thus will benefit from it is not eligible. This places the municipal councillors in an ambiguous position, since they are part of the municipal council which examines the actions – the activities and investments – of the municipality and the contractors.

The members of the school committee in Saga 4 were critical of the fact that the contracts were given to the municipal councillors. They claimed that they would be able to build the classrooms at lower cost, thus a greater number of classrooms. While they estimated the construction of one classroom, using local material and workforce, at 62,500 FCFA, the official estimates ranged from 160,000 to 220,000 FCFA. Members of the school committee had in fact approached one of the municipal advisors who had been granted a contract and tried to negotiate a piece/part of the contract, but without success. Having once failed in negotiating with the municipal councillor, in preparation for the next school year they approached a municipal official who lived in Saga to suggest that the school (school committee) be given the contract for the construction of straw classrooms instead of the municipal councillors. However, this attempt was also unsuccessful. The job had already been given to two municipal councillors. The municipal official had also made them understand that their quest was more or less pointless.

The construction of classrooms allowed the municipal councillors to make a small profit as the budgeted cost of the construction and the real costs left a possibility (margin) for monetary benefits, a valued opportunity to gain something from their position as municipal councillors, often described as a thankless post. They could also refer to the construction as evidence of their contribution to the development of the neighbourhood by directing investments to the neighbourhood, even if only temporary

classrooms of straw. The arrangement was also beneficial for the municipality and for the mayor. First, it guaranteed that the classrooms would be in place at the beginning of the school year even if the funding was not yet in order. One of the municipal councillors who constructed classrooms emphasized that he built the classrooms for 175,000 FCFA instead of 200,000 FCFA or more, and that he and other municipal advisors built the classrooms on credit. The construction of classrooms in time was important for the credibility of the municipality, which still had a long way to go in convincing people to pay taxes. Second, the practice, as a form of bonus, allowed the mayor to keep the municipal councillors who had voted him into the position of mayor on his side.

In pursuing the contracts, the members of the school committee tried to access the resources of the municipality. Their arguments echoed the development discourse on using local resources and increasing efficacy which was emphasized in the training documents for school committees. However, given the political and economic stakes, there was little room for such solutions. This example illustrates the stratification at the local level as the interests of the school committee and the municipality and municipal councillors clashed.

An elusive development project

The tide seemed to change with the sudden arrival of a development project which, it was said, would construct as many as thirteen furnished classrooms. A delegation had come to the school accompanied by the then current school inspector to take the measurements of the area, and plans had been made with the neighbourhood chief about where to relocate the school during the period of the construction. The planned construction of classrooms in permanent material brought up the question of the legal status of the land, as the donors requested a document attesting that the land had been ceded to the school. According to local actors in Saga – the son of the neighbourhood chief and the president of the school committee – the paper had been signed by the canton chief. There were few details about the project, which people referred to simply as the Chinese (*Jes chinois*). Even primary school inspectorate officials said that they knew little about the project, as contacts always passed through the Ministry of Education. An official at the Ministry confirmed that ‘the Chinese’ would build classrooms in Niamey. But he saw it as a mere show for the galleries, a one-off investment.

After the first flurry of activities, months passed and the project was still nowhere in sight. Responses to questions about whether there was

any news about the construction became increasingly dejected. It was only during a visit to the primary school inspectorate on another errand that the principal of Saga 4 was told that the project had in fact been transferred to another school. This had been known for several months but no one at the school had been informed.

The explanation given by officials for this turn of events was that the Chinese had wanted a completely empty space on which to build the school, but a Canadian project had already installed a water tap, waste bins, a garbage incinerator, and four latrines on the school grounds of Saga 4. It was claimed that the Chinese demanded that the latrines built by the Canadians be removed if construction were to go ahead. The turn of events left local-level officials, apparently left out of the loop, perplexed. In the eyes of one municipal official, there must have been a mix-up at the Ministry of Education.

Me, I believe that there has been a misunderstanding at the Ministry of Education. Because it is only very recently that the Canadian cooperation financed the construction of the latrines that they want to destroy. The Ministry is not okay with that.

Most agreed that the destruction of the latrines was inconceivable. In the words of the school inspector: ‘If you destroy it, it’s like destroying the cooperation with the CGPE [the Canadian project].’

It was hoped that another school within the compass of the school inspectorate would be chosen. The school inspector emphasized that there were many – at least three – schools without any infrastructure whatsoever:

We will perhaps try to convince them, since we have schools in Talladjé, Talladjé Est, or Route Filingué where there are straw classrooms. We can direct them there without any problems. There is no infrastructure in those places. Talladjé 5 and Talladjé Est are recent creations, there is also Route Fillingué 2. If they want to invest we will bring them there.

People in Saga, however, were reluctant to accept this version of events, which seemed to confirm the already creeping worry that the project had been co-opted to benefit another locality. The conflict over the latrines was seen as providing a pretext for constructing the school elsewhere: ‘because of that, they want to hijack the construction to another school’. The news set off a flurry of activity in an attempt to ‘win’ back the project. A meeting was held with the canton chief. The principal also contacted an influential resident, a former member of ACOVIS (the Association for the

Amelioration of Living Conditions in Saga) with a long career in international development cooperation and the state administration. Great hopes were placed on his ability to influence the decision at the higher echelon of the state. People said that ‘he promised to follow the dossier all the way to the Minister’ and that ‘we think that if he follows the dossier the Chinese will construct here’. This *ressortissant*, who had been contacted, said that he had met with the secretary general at the Ministry of Education and was planning to follow up on the matter and was confident that the problem would be resolved:

It is only a problem of communication. People should sit around a table, discuss and find solutions to this...I know that they [the Canadian project] are not opposed to it [the removal of the latrines] because it is a more substantial infrastructure. But as people do not seek information they can always say, yes the Canadians will do this or that. Two latrines against the construction of a school. Who is going to be opposed to that?

He also believed that the real problem was that someone had diverted the construction to another locality:

But all of this, what is it really about? When there is a funding in this country there are always canny spirits who will try to divert it. Even if it is only a small thing, they want to bring it to their own area....You, a Minister, a funding to which you have not contributed even one franc. And you do not want it to be done in a particular neighbourhood even though the money does not come from your own pockets.

He also emphasized that all of the local leaders, including the traditional chieftaincy, in particular the canton chief, the secretary general – who resided in Saga, and the MP, needed to intervene to increase the pressure on those in power.

In the end, to the great disappointment of the principal, teachers, and members of the school committee, the efforts were unsuccessful. For the second year in a row, a couple of weeks before the end of the school year, in anticipation of arrival of the rainy period, the classrooms were once again taken down. On the placard raised by the Canadian project, which had supposedly caused them to lose the construction of the classrooms, the arrow painted below the name of the primary school pointed into a seeming void.



Figure 11. The school grounds after the dismantling of the classrooms.

This episode is illustrative of the sometimes complex and confused situation when there are many different development actors at different levels. The ‘Chinese project’ was channelled through the Ministry of Education with barely any contact with the municipality and school inspectorate let alone the school committee or the principal of the school. Given little information about the turn of events, rumours, mistrust, and suspicion proliferated at the local level. Although they had been left out of the process and seemed to have been the last to be informed about the suspension of the project, people in Saga who were involved in the school did everything in their power to alter the decision, the main strategy consisting of soliciting the help of an influential resident. The episode is also illustrative of the hopes that were attached to a development (that is, external) intervention in the face of faltering state support and the unpredictable support of the municipality.

What emerges from these episodes and descriptions of the daily life – filled with ups and downs, hope and disappointment – of one particular primary school is the sense of uncertainty and impermanence that characterizes the daily management of the school. In the case of Saga 4, the combination of a policy of decentralization and community participation with the lack of infrastructure opened the way for the intervention of a

number of different actors in the school. The case is revelatory of the logics that motivate these actors, such as the legitimation of the traditional chieftaincy and the political and financial stakes surrounding the construction of straw classrooms. It is also illustrative of the difficult mobilization of the so-called 'local community' and of the limited influence of community structures such as the school committee despite the emphasis that is placed on local participation in current education policy.

School dues and the state

Saga 4 was dependent in part on financial contributions or school dues from parents. This was the case in many schools, as school dues filled an important gap in school finances. The contributions or dues, referred to as *cotisations*, were in theory voluntary. Public schooling is free in Niger; however, school dues collected and managed by parents' associations and the school committees have been systematized as a way of raising money for the daily functioning of schools.

As there is no fixed fee, the amount of school dues is decided on at the level of individual schools. School dues might take the form of a fee at the start of the school year or several different collections of smaller amounts ranging from 25 FCFA to 300 FCFA during the course of the school year. In primary school, pupils in grade C1 paid 1,000 FCFA at the start of the school year. In the secondary school, CES Saga, a fee or financial contribution of 2,000 FCFA was introduced in 2000. The funds that were raised from parental contributions were used for everything from repairing infrastructure, photocopying, and paying the guard's salary, to the building of straw classrooms. The importance of school dues for the daily running of the school was underlined by the principal of the secondary school, who remarked that 'the school's main donor is the school committee'. The only marked drawer in the filing cabinet in this principal's office bore the label 'APE'. In the CES, funds were supplemented by a remittance on the sale of student cards (*carte scolaire*) which were required for taking the exams and by a fee/tax of 25 FCFA collected from the women who sold food and snacks in the school yard. According to the principal, the state also gave 60,000 FCFA to the secondary school for operating expenses: 'In any case, the actions on the part of the state have to be topped up'.

Collecting school dues was in general seen as a difficult task. The school dues were unpopular among parents and their collection necessitated prodding by community committee members and teachers, and

constant reminders. School actors – teachers and community committee members – deplored the ‘unwillingness’ of parents to ‘contribute’. Different explanations were given for this situation. On the one hand, members of the parents’ associations in particular pointed to the poverty of the neighbourhoods and the parents, many making a living in petty commerce and agriculture. For instance, in the opinion of one member of the school committee in CES Saga, the difficulty in collecting school dues was due to the poverty of some parents:

The big difficulty is the mobilization of resources. When we want to collect contributions we call together the APE (parents’ association). They fix the sum of the contribution, but not all pupils pay. Some parents are poor.

On the other hand, the situation was seen as an indication of the ‘ignorance’ of parents. Some teachers complained of the ‘village mentality’ of parents, by which they meant that parents do not see the value of investing in education: ‘They refuse to understand, there are few parents who understand, especially in this village.’ Teachers were generally critical of what they saw as parents’ lack of interest in school or in the schooling of their children. One teacher in the secondary school said that people were unwilling or reluctant even when it came to buying books and school materials and that instead they wait for/expect the state to pay:

There is a lack of didactic material, books and materials for the pupils...there are not enough means. The parents are reluctant to invest, they wait for the state.

Discourses around school dues were thus often framed in moralizing terms, parents being taxed with ignorance or passivity (waiting for the state). This is one indication of the frictions that fraught the collection of school dues. As mentioned above, the management of community funds in Saga 4 had been accompanied by accusations of embezzlement, accusations that were directed at the treasurer. However, teachers and the school administrations were also the target of suspicion over the handling of the funds. One pupil in the secondary school in Saga questioned both how the money was used and that they were expected to pay school dues:

For more than six years, every year we give 2,000 FCFA per pupil but we don’t know what happens with it. They say that it is with the 2,000 FCFA that they buy the straw classrooms and the tables. But it is the municipality and the government that do that. It is they [the municipality and the government] who should pay.

Teachers were aware of these accusations.

We collect the dues class by class. But there are few who give. Parents are reluctant. They always accuse the teacher. They say that it is the teacher who benefits from the school dues.

In the attempt to circumvent such suspicions, teachers preferred that the announcement and collection of contributions be managed by the parents' association.

Though the payment of school dues was supposed to be voluntary, a great deal of pressure was exerted on parents to pay the dues. The principal of the secondary school in Saga was careful to point out that the 2,000 FCFA was not an inscription fee, since education was free: 'The school does not demand any fee from the pupils, it's the state, it's free.' He emphasized that the collection of the money was entirely the responsibility of the parents' association and that the school did not penalize pupils who had not paid. However, according to the treasurer of the parent's association, who worked as a class monitor in the school, in the case of non-payment, the school withheld the pupils' report cards until the parents had paid the 2,000 FCFA. The most dramatic way pressure was exerted was the expulsion of the pupil from class as attested by a teacher:

It is only the fact of chasing away the pupils that brings the money in, but we don't want to chase them away. There are some who come back with the money the same afternoon or the following day. There are even some who are absent for a week. This is why it is not the best thing to do

Given the adverse effects of expelling a pupil and the voluntary status of school dues, most teachers and school principals denied that children were sent away from class. Parents, however, frequently mentioned that their child had been thrown out of class for failing to pay to pay the dues. Moreover, in a memo from the Ministry of Education, principals were called on to cease penalizing pupils, for instance by suspending them, for failing to pay the financial contributions. While saluting the work of the school committees and parents' associations in ensuring the daily functioning of schools, the memo underlined that such practices go against the children's right to education and might hurt the image of the school.

In a sense, school dues appeared as an informal tax as opposed to formal taxes like the head tax collected by the municipality. Prud'homme defines informal taxation as 'the mobilization of resources outside normal tax channels for the provision of public goods and services' (1992: 1). Informal taxation in Prud'homme's definition encompasses a wide range

of practices and forms of financial transactions, from extortions by public officials, to requisitions, donations and gifts from private actors that contribute in various ways to the provision of public services – for instance, through supplementing the low salaries of civil servants, providing a workforce for various construction projects, or the self-provision of public services. Prud'homme argues that the magnitude of informal taxation, although difficult to calculate, is often much higher than that of formal taxation, especially in contexts where government and taxation are incapable of producing public services. The school dues collected in schools in Niger resemble the 'donations' by parents to schools described by Prud'homme, which were central to the provision of education (building or improving classrooms, augmenting teacher salaries) (1992: 8–9). The use of the term donation is misleading, however, as the forms described by Prud'homme include examination fees, special contributions, operating expenditures, and bribes, and are not really voluntary (*ibid.* 8). Like informal taxation, school dues represented an alternate way of raising resources for effective education provision.

Many parents were critical of the demand for school dues on top of the other expenses related to schooling, such as schoolbooks, school supplies, and clothes (uniforms for pupils in secondary school). Adama, who was the wife of a former employee at SONITEX (a textile factory) and lived in a house of *banco* close to the river, brought up the difficulty of raising money to meet the demands of the school. The family, which received food aid from the nuns, had four children, who were all enrolled in school:

In the school they always tell us to give contributions – for the straw classrooms, the notebooks, the guard...when your child doesn't give the contribution he is thrown out of school... even the day before yesterday they asked the children to bring 1,000 FCFA. Our child stayed home for two days before we found the money...we don't earn money but the school doesn't understand that...last year I paid 6,250 FCFA for the four children...'

Another mother also pointed to the continual demand for money and the burden it represented on poor parents:

They are always asking us for money, either it's money for the guard or other things, things are not working. Sometimes they ask us for 50 FCFA and sometimes for 250 FCFA. It's too much for a poor parent...

Some parents, however, were more understanding of the demand for financial contributions in the face of faltering state finances. One mother, who had never gone to school herself, also criticized the reluctance of certain parents to pay the school dues and, like the teachers, described them as ignorant:

Before, to register a child in school we didn't pay anything but now one has to pay 1,000 FCFA in public school. The state cannot take care of everyone. The 1,000 FCFA that they ask for, there are parents who sulk, but I think that in relation to what they teach children at school 1,000 FCFA is really trivial. They still haven't understood anything about school.

Others pointed to the construction of straw classrooms as evidence that the money was at least put to good use.

School dues can be analysed as an arena in which the responsibility for public education provision was negotiated between the state, parents, and other actors in the education field – the municipality in the case of primary schools. In an era of community participation, school dues were framed as a means of making parents active and involved in education provision as an integral, or as argued above, often the only, part of participation. For parents, however, school dues were seen as a sign of the state's disengagement from school, a situation which was compared to the past, when the state 'took care of everything'.

You know, education was the responsibility of the state. Even the APE didn't exist. It is with the problems of the state that the population does everything.

The withdrawal of the state was palpable in the lack of infrastructure and school supplies and the increasing number of straw classrooms even in the capital. Parents were quick to point out that they, via the school dues, contributed to the maintenance of the public school system.

Today it's the parents that guarantee the existence of school. We pay everything, even the guard.

The school of today, there is need for a big effort to get it back on track... If it's straw classrooms that have to be built, it's the parents; notebooks, it's the parents; pens, it's the parents; slates, it's the parents; even the bag you buy. All of that is the responsibility of the parents.

Judgements or perceptions of the withdrawal of the state were based on an ideal image of education provision in the past, perceptions of the

state's disengagement that were further fuelled by what was seen as the deterioration of the quality of the public education system which necessitated further investments in school by parents in an attempt to guarantee a successful school career for their children. I discuss this in greater detail in chapter 8.

The absence of public schools: Local mobilization and the politics of visibility

While Saga was well served with public schools, they were, like other public services, completely absent in both Pays Bas and Tondigamay. The lack of public schools, like the lack of other public services and infrastructure, reflected the administrative void in which these neighbourhoods found themselves. Pays Bas, with a population of at least 10,000, clearly fulfilled the criteria for the creation of a public school in terms of the number of potential pupils.⁶⁸ However, the administrative logic that determined the creation of new schools left little leeway for the creation of public schools, or other services, for that matter, in informal neighbourhoods. The construction of schools and other infrastructure was seen as risky in neighbourhoods like Pays Bas and Tondigamay whose legal status was unclear. This point of view was expressed by an official in the urban planning office of the CUN:

Normally, in an area that is not zoned, one should not allow community infrastructure because there is no guarantee. For example, if someone builds only one school in Pays Bas. If they want to destroy the neighbourhood, the school will also be destroyed. What will become of the children?

The reluctance to create infrastructure in Pays Bas is linked to the unwillingness to recognize the neighbourhood, since public investments might be interpreted as tacit recognition of the neighbourhood, which was otherwise under more or less constant threat of demolition (forced removal). Like the existence of the neighbourhood itself, education provision was a long-standing issue. The education coordinator at the municipality re-

⁶⁸ The creation of new schools is planned using schooling/education maps (*carte scolaire*), and the need for new schools is determined on the basis of the distance to existing schools and the number of school-age children (*population scolarisable*) in the surrounding area. According to district and school inspection officials, the request for a new school is formulated at the local level – either by the municipality, the school inspectorate, or by the population. It is then channelled through the school inspectorate, which transfers the requests to the Ministry of Education for approval.

called an attempt to address the issue, at the end of the 1990s, when he had made common cause with representatives from Pays Bas. However, he said, each time initiatives had been taken they were blocked by the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN) on the grounds that the land belonged to ASECNA⁶⁹ and that the proximity of the landing strip made the neighbourhood unsuitable for habitation. This is his account of what happened:

They stop us and say no Pays Bas, it is land that belongs to ASECNA. The flight landing routes pose a risk. I said no. What risk is there? The fact of only living there? They already live there with their children. That is when we had problems with the *préfet*-president of the CUN... I told him. What if it were his relatives who lived in Pays Bas? He said that I had insulted him.

In this story of the conflict with the *préfet* of the CUN the education coordinator made a point of having insinuated to the *préfet* that if the inhabitants of Pays Bas were better connected, things would have been different and they would not be encountering the same resistance. A causal link was thus made between the limited number of residents who could potentially make use of political or other personal connections to work for the improvement of living conditions in the neighbourhood and the absence of public services and infrastructure. That Pays Bas was an informal neighbourhood and that parts of the land belonged to ASECNA was a recurrent explanation given by representatives of the local authorities – the municipality and the CUN – for the lack of public services in the neighbourhood. The mere mention of Pays Bas provoked a shrug and a quick dismissal. Yet, according to the school inspector, there were plans to create a ‘provisional’ school with the help of the municipality to alleviate the strain on parents and children. A revealing logic of temporariness which characterized the authorities’ handling of Pays Bas stood in clear opposition to the long-term investments that had been and still were being made by inhabitants in the neighbourhood.

The only school in Pays Bas, apart from the numerous Qu’ranic schools, was a private Franco-Arabic school. The school, which consisted of three classrooms made of *banco*, was situated on the edge of a small cliff in the heart of Pays Bas. The school had been created by a retired teacher and *marabout*, a long-time resident of the neighbourhood. In the absence of schools in their neighbourhood, children in Pays Bas and Tondigamay

⁶⁹ The Agency for Aerial Navigation Safety in Africa and Madagascar (*Agence pour la Sécurité de la Navigation Aérienne en Afrique et Madagascar*)

were enrolled in schools in nearby neighbourhoods such as Gamkalley, Talladjé, Saga, Rhodesie, and Aéroport. Early in the mornings, at midday, and in the afternoon, children walked between Pays Bas and nearby neighbourhoods on their way to and from school. In one much-frequented school in Gamkalley, located near the industrial zone and separated from Pays Bas by a stretch of ravined terrain, as many as 80 per cent of the pupils came from Pays Bas, according to the president of the parents' association of the school, who also lived in Pays Bas. Many children, especially from the northern part of Pays Bas, were enrolled in schools in Talladjé, which was on the other side of a boulevard. The children thus had to cross the big road, which is frequented by accident-prone mini-buses, to get to school. This was a source of worry for parents. For local leaders, the number of children from Pays Bas enrolled in surrounding schools more than justified the creation of a school. The president of the parents' association of the school in Gamkalley cast the dominance of pupils from Pays Bas in terms of the school's survival if Pays Bas were demolished:

If you are going to demolish this neighbourhood you will close the school Gamkalley 4. Oh yes ! All the teachers will be out of work and the classrooms will be empty.

In this statement, the school was made to represent the participation of the population of Pays Bas in the daily life of the city, justifying the existence of the neighbourhood through the role of its population as users of public education services.

An unsuccessful local mobilization

In the face of state support and investment that did not materialize, efforts were made by residents themselves to create a school. People recalled different attempts to collect money from neighbourhood residents for the school. These collections were organized by neighbourhood leaders. According to the neighbourhood chief and his representative, several years before, the municipality had said that all that was needed for the creation of a school was a plot of land. The chief, together with his collaborators, had initiated a collection (1,200 FCFA per head of family) in the neighbourhood to raise money for the purchase of a fairly centrally situated plot of land for the school. However, the collection fell short and the owner of the plot of land they had wanted to buy eventually sold it. The chief was frustrated that they were required to buy the land plot:

The people from the municipality said that if we managed to buy the land plot they would really build the school. But if we do not buy it, they will not buy it either. Finally the owner sold it to someone else. You know, in the past people took [land] by force, but since the coming of democracy even if it is only a question of a small plot of land, you have to buy it.

The failed – some would say botched – attempt was the object of different interpretations. According to some, the money collected was redirected to the building of a mosque in the neighbourhood. However, according to one local leader active in the neighbourhood committee (‘The Committee for the Protection of the Interests of Pays Bas’), the money collected had been misappropriated by the organizers of the collection. The organizers claimed that they had used the money to build a mosque which, according to the local leader, had in fact been built with funds from a private benefactor. The same local leader said that he and others were investigating other possibilities of bringing a school to the neighbourhood. The accusation of misappropriation of collected funds and the independent lobbying for the creation of a school can be understood in the light of the schism described in chapter 4 between the traditional chiefs and new emerging leaders in the neighbourhood.

The creation of a kindergarten

In 2007 a kindergarten was created in Tondigamay on the initiative of a group of local residents. Consisting of one straw classroom, it stood on one corner of a large plot of rocky land. The land belonged to customary landowners who had set aside a plot of land, the estimated size of which varied between 400 and 1600 square metres, for the kindergarten and for the possible future construction of a primary school. The classroom, a flimsy straw construction, was built using funds collected from neighbourhood residents. The only equipment it contained was a couple of mats and a chair brought by the teacher.

The main actors involved the creation of the kindergarten included the two brothers, who represented the customary land owners, and people who had moved into the neighbourhood. Of the people who had moved into the neighbourhood and were participating in the initiative, the majority were landowners. One was a former accountant in a state company who had spent a long time in prison on charges of embezzlement and who now made a living mediating public works contracts. Another was a retired army officer who had moved to Tondigamay in 2004 upon retirement. The leading figure of the group, Seyni, was an employee of an international NGO, who had bought a plot of land a long time ago and

had moved to Tondigamay a couple of years before, after being transferred to a position in Niamey. Seyni had met with the inspector from the kindergarten inspectorate who had visited the site. He had also seen the mayor and informed him about the creation of the kindergarten in case there was a chance of receiving support.

In the end, the kindergarten did not receive any material support from the inspectorate or the local authorities. The kindergarten inspectorate had warned that it would be difficult to recruit or transfer a teacher to the makeshift school. But the position was filled by Seyni's wife, who was already teaching in a private kindergarten. This was the source of suspicions or misgivings. Someone claimed that there had been several candidates for the post in the surrounding area but that Seyni had succeeded in getting his wife the position. And Seyni commented defensively that the school had been created because of popular demand and not because he wanted his wife to have her own school: 'It is not because I wanted a school for my wife.'

The two brothers and the teacher had visited the families in the neighbourhood to inform them about the opening of the kindergarten and to recruit children and, in Seyni's words, to 'sensitize' the parents about the importance of school and to dispel rumours that it was a Christian school. They had succeeded in recruiting forty pupils. However, the inscription fee of 6,000 FCFA had dissuaded parents from sending their children to the kindergarten. Once teaching was under way, the class numbered about twenty children, even fewer during the cold and windy season, as the classroom offered poor protection from winds and dust.

Yet, the initiators hoped that the creation of the kindergarten would be the first step towards the establishment of a public primary school. Moreover, the creation of the school was seen as a means of getting the attention of the local authorities:

A school can make the administration take an interest in the population of Tondigamey. This was an opportunity to grasp. In a place where there is no administrative infrastructure...

This attention and visibility might lead to future investments, especially in a context in which much emphasis is placed on the importance of community initiatives. This was something which Seyni, as a development worker, was well aware of, and it was also a discourse he made use of himself:

You know, the best school, it is when the initiative is taken by the population itself. If there is support for the materialization of the idea, it is wel-

come. But when someone comes and says that he will establish a school, this means that you have not taken the priorities of the population into account. The school might not be their priority.

The ambivalent status of both Pays Bas and Tondigamay did not favour the establishment of public schools. This was most evident in the case of Pays Bas, which was negatively viewed by the local authorities, who had more or less declared the neighbourhood illegal. Tondigamay, which was more recently established, had remained outside conflicts with the local authorities and it seemed likely to remain that way given the socio-economic status and professional position of many who had bought land there. In Pays Bas, local mobilizations had not been successful and were marred by accusations of embezzlement, providing a further indication of the weak position of the traditional chiefs who had initiated the collection of funds. In Tondigamay, the successful local mobilization which resulted in the creation of a kindergarten had been carried out on a smaller scale and had involved a diverse group of actors representing both the traditional chieftaincy and new emergent leaders in the person of the development worker (Seyni).

The two examples also say something about the relation between schools and the state, or, more specifically, the local authorities. In a sense, the absence of public schools crystallized the ambivalent status of the neighbourhoods. In Pays Bas, many residents expressed frustration with the absence of public schools, something they saw as an indication of neglect by the state vis-à-vis the neighbourhood. Although the mobilization failed, it is still significant. The willingness of people to organize is revelatory of the creation and articulation of a common interest around public service provision in the absence of the state. In Tondigamay, hope was placed on the possibility that the establishment of the kindergarten would make the neighbourhood visible to the local authorities and the state, a first step in acquiring more public infrastructure and an accompanying recognition. In any case, as one resident jokingly put it, the one classroom already gave Tondigamay an advantage over Pays Bas:

If we have a school here, that's it. Thanks to this school we can make fun of the people of Pays Bas and say our neighbourhood is better because at least we have a school.

In these neighbourhoods with an uncertain legal status, investments in the neighbourhood can also be seen as a strategy (as discussed in chapter 3), as a quest for recognition, and as a way of dealing with the state. At the same time, these local actions feed into local political processes and the

configuration of the local political and administrative landscape and thus also reveal local political stakes through the involvement of local actors and institutions such as traditional chiefs, including aspiring traditional chiefs in the case of the two brothers, and emergent leaders.

Discussion

In this chapter I have addressed the question of education provision in the urban periphery. I have described the creation of two new schools, a primary school created on the initiative of the state in Saga and a kindergarten created on a local neighbourhood initiative in Tondigamay, as well as the attempted mobilization for the creation of a school in Pay Bas. In Saga, as described at the beginning of the chapter, although the first public school was created fairly late, public education provision had developed during the past decades, leaving a clear physical imprint on the landscape in the form of school buildings and a social imprint in fostering new generations of school leavers.

Saga 4 was the latest addition to this education arena. The detailed account of the daily functioning or management of the school revealed the formation of a particular ‘delivery configuration’ (Olivier de Sardan 2010) that covered the lack of resources. In this case, the ‘delivery configuration’ mobilized neighbourhood chiefs, the municipality and elected municipal advisors, and community committees as well as individual actors. This could be interpreted as a successful example of the co-production of a public service.

The involvement of local actors and institutions in the school also carried with it political and economic stakes as in the examples of the chieftaincy and the municipality. It also contributed to the (re)configuration of the political and administrative landscape described in chapter 4, as the role of the chieftaincy was reinforced while the legitimacy of the municipality was challenged through its handling of the construction of classrooms. Political stakes were also evident in the creation of the kindergarten in Tondigamay, where the involvement of the two brothers contributed to positioning them as neighbourhood leaders, a role which they hoped would be formalized with the future administrative recognition of the neighbourhood.

However, all actors did not engage in the school on equal footing. This is most evident in the case of the parents’ association and the school committee, as many of the responsibilities but few prerogatives were shifted onto their shoulders and ultimately onto the shoulders of parents.

Moreover, the school dues were in some instances extracted through coercion, social mobilization quickly transforming into social pressure backed up by the threat of the expulsion of pupils (Comhaire 2010: 59). On a general level, school dues, which took on the form of informal taxation, were central to the financing of public education provision in all schools. They were also an arena for the negotiation of responsibilities between the state and citizens.

Finally, these examples also say something about the symbolic relation between education provision and the state. Schools, through their physical presence, demarcate the territory or space of the state (Wilson 2001: 313). As pointed out by Bierschenk, in many African villages the state is embodied by the school, 'which distinguishes itself from neighbouring constructions by its localization and its appearance, if not by the presence of a flag in the school yard and the uniforms of the pupils' in the absence of other administrative buildings (2007: 269, my translation). This point has also been made by Lange:

In numerous African countries like Bénin, Burkina Faso or Togo, the school is often the only administrative building in villages, materializing the presence of the state. (Bierschenk 2007: 641, my translation)

The extent to which this observation can be translated to a contemporary urban context might be questioned. In an analysis of state formation and education Tidjani Alou points out that the physical presence of schools in urban areas in Niger is much less charged than in rural areas, since in the city, school buildings blend in with other official buildings:

In the city, spaces in concrete or durable structures are part of the normal universe. The school is thus not particularly distinct. (Tidani Alou 1992: 346, my translation)

In villages, however, the school might be the only building constructed in concrete. Nonetheless, although the symbolic power of schools is weaker in an urban context in which schools are not the sole symbol of the state, schools are still very much associated with the state in their form, function, and history.

In the case of Tondigamay and Pays Bas, the symbolic link between school and the state was clear. The absence of schools was interpreted as an absence of the state, and the local mobilization for the creation of a school took the form of a struggle for visibility vis-à-vis the local authorities and the state. In neighbourhoods such as Saga where there were schools, the proliferation of classrooms made of straw instead of the con-

struction of new classrooms in concrete made the withdrawal of the state physically visible and very palpable.

8. Schooling as a tombola: Great expectations, and uncertain futures

In this chapter I focus on the relations between school and urban residents. The chapter thus continues along the same lines as chapter 6, which focused on people's daily experiences of public health services, in the attempt to elicit different aspects of the relation between citizens and the state as mediated by public services. This chapter provides an alternative perspective on public education provision, namely, that of parents and pupils and, to a lesser extent, also of teachers who deal with the public school system on a daily basis. In the first part of the chapter I focus on representations of education and, more specifically, on the historical role of education as a path to social advancement. In the second part of the chapter I provide more ethnographic context by focusing on the daily realities of schooling from the point of view of parents and of pupils. I argue that the analysis of common education trajectories or itineraries in the neighbourhoods in focus reveals a crystallization of inequalities in education opportunities, not so much in terms of access to school as in the possibility of succeeding in school in the context of a poorly functioning education system in which investing in education can be likened to playing the tombola (the lottery). In addition to making education itineraries increasingly precarious, the poor state of public schooling has also fuelled the emergence of a formal (the private education sector) and an informal (private tutoring and 'parallel recruitment') education market. Success in school is increasingly premised on the financial ability to participate in the education market. In the final part of the chapter I focus on teachers, more specifically on contract teachers, whose precarious status has transformed and weakened the position of teachers and also, in the eyes of parents, pupils, and teachers, crystallizes the partial withdrawal of the state from public education provision.

Representations of schooling: Education and social promotion

The relation between families and school in Niger has been ambivalent throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. Formal education represents both the chance of social ascent through employment and, at the same time, a rupture with the socio-cultural environment. As described in the previous chapter, the first school in Saga, Saga 1, was created in 1962. Of the approximately thirty children who were finally enrolled in the first class in the newly established school, many were children of the village nobility and chieftaincy as well as children of civil servants and military officers. According to the first pupils of Saga 1, now in their fifties, some parents in Saga had been reluctant to send their children to the newly created school. Negative perceptions of the ‘white man’s school’ (*annasaara cam*) rooted in the colonial period still remained, and school was associated with ‘non-believers’:

School was not important, it was even seen as cursed.

At that time, school was for non-believers. It is for the white man, it is not for them. There were even people who went to see the *marabouts* or the *féticheurs* (‘witch doctors’) to give [sacrifice] a bull the day when the child was to be enrolled in school so that he [the child] will not leave.

In addition, the prevalence of agricultural activities made education less important. In the words of one older woman who was born in Saga Kourtey, situated on the river bank:

Before, the sons of the rich did not go to school. It was said that school is not good for the child... Before, when they saw a white man, people fled. For us, it is cattle breeding, agriculture, and fishing.

Pressure was placed on parents to enrol their children in the newly established primary school. This was the case all over Niger as following independence when the education system was extended coercive measures were taken to ensure the recruitment of pupils which had proved to be difficult (Meunier 2000: 113). The army was even sent out to villages to oversee the recruitment of children (Wynd 1999: 104). This is the account of two of the school’s first pupils:

When they summoned my sister, she had died and they needed someone from the family. Me, at the time, I was seven and a half, almost eight years

old. My parents did not want to. They wanted to take me to the Say [a town] but I think that they were threatened and they ended by accepting it.

In the past it was a bit difficult [the recruitment of pupils], they contacted the village chiefs to tell them to present their children.... They also took children from the families.

One former pupil, however, pointed out that the school was created after the time during which the ‘sons of slaves’ rather than of the nobility were sent to school:

Well, Saga [Saga 1] was not created during the time of Boubou Hama...when one brought the slave’s son to school.

Boubou Hama was a prominent Nigerien writer and historian as well as one of the first political figures and a leading figure of the first national political party (PPN-RDA) that emerged in the run-up to independence. At independence he was named President of the National Assembly and Minister of the Interior. Like many other members of the first national political party, he was of slave or commoner descent. As described in chapter 2, during the colonial period the administration privileged the enrolment of the sons of chiefs in school. The nobility had initially preferred to send the sons of slaves or commoners to school, as a way of resisting colonial schooling. This meant that children of low-status families were able to gain access the new social positions created through colonization. However, if chiefs and the nobility had been hostile to colonial education initially, their realization of the potential economic and political benefits of education (in the form of administrative functions) eventually made education attractive also for the traditional elite, not least as a strategy for maintaining privileges (Meunier 2000: 75). In contrast to many other countries, the nobility did not reject colonial schools outright (Tidjani Alou 2009b: 57).

The first pupils to graduate from the school in Saga formed a peer group commonly referred to as the first graduate class, *la première promotion*. Of these pupils, some continued their studies in one of the two existing preparatory schools in Niamey (CEG 1 and CEG 2). Others did not continue their studies. For instance, the younger of the two brothers in Tondigamay had been part of the first class but had dropped out in the final grade of primary school and instead found work in a hotel in the city centre. Those who successfully finished lower secondary school continued their studies at the upper secondary school in Niamey (*Lycée National*). In

1971 only 392 pupils were enrolled in upper secondary school in Niger (Tidjani Alou 1992: 244), and at this time, in the early to mid 1970s, advancement through the school system opened the way to many different opportunities. Some joined the army and others were sent abroad on state scholarships to continue their studies in Europe or in other African countries, returning to pursue careers in the public and private sectors. Thus, they formed a first generation of ‘intellectuals’ who had attended school in Saga. As recounted in chapter 4, many of the founding members of ACOVIS, the home-town association created in the 1990s and involved in many local development initiatives, were part of this generation and had made careers in public administration and private enterprises. They had clearly made their mark on the village and were often referred to by the older generation, who had not gone to school, as ‘the pupils’ (*les élèves*, or *lokolize* in Zarma) or ‘the intellectuals’ (*les intellectuels*), a group which from the beginning was relatively small in Saga despite its proximity to Niamey.

The first group of graduates from Saga I is illustrative on a small or local scale of the link between education and social advancement that characterized the first decades after independence. During this period, graduates were more or less guaranteed employment in the civil service upon graduation. In the beginning, even the completion of primary school was enough, but with time increasing levels of qualification were needed (Wynd 1999: 107). Education represented a potential route to power and influence through entry into the state apparatus and to economic privilege symbolized by formal employment. Meunier talks about the ‘mythification’ of school, which he argues started with the creation of a political and administrative elite through formal education during the colonial period and which continued after independence, a myth which cast the school as the principal engine of economic, social, and political mobility (2009: 22). This pattern continued from the 1960s to the 1980s and was further fuelled by the uranium boom, during which the economy quickly expanded, as did the public and private sectors, providing a number of job opportunities. However, the uranium bust and the economic crisis of the 1980s hit the economy and the education sector hard. Whereas before, pupils had been fairly privileged, drastic cuts were now made in the education sector with the redirection of resources away from higher education, cuts in scholarships, and, as the government was forced to put a halt to hiring, an end to the policy of guaranteed government jobs (Robinson 1994: 600).

This was the case in many countries in Africa during the same period. Employment opportunities being radically reduced after cuts in the public

sector at the same time as the quality of public school systems deteriorated with ensuing budget cuts (Lange & Martin 1995: 565). Lange and Martin describe the earlier link between education and employment as one of a consensus between pupils, students, and their parents on the one hand, and the state on the other, a consensus that was called into question with the financial crisis (*ibid.*). It has also been argued that the ensuing crisis had a significant effect on relations with school. Lange and Diarra argue that in Mali, the phenomenon of '*déscolarisation*' – decreasing school enrolments and increasing numbers of pupils withdrawn from school – was a consequence of economic crisis, budget restrictions, and structural adjustment, parents protesting that social advancement was no longer possible through school (1999: 165–166). Meunier (2009) points to a similar response in Niger. The bleak employment prospects further discouraged people in rural areas from enrolling their children in school, leading to a refusal of schooling and the withdrawal of children from school, since the negative consequences of schooling – disconnection from a rural way of life and loss of labour in the family compound and fields – were no longer counterbalanced by the potential benefits of employment (*ibid.* 25). Career opportunities were definitely curtailed with the stop to automatic hiring of university and professional school graduates into the civil service in 1991 (Wynd 1999: 106) and the introduction of a competitive examination (*concours*) for recruitment to different parts of the civil service, a measure which greatly reduced the chances of being hired, especially for pupils from less privileged and from rural backgrounds (Meunier 2009: 32).

If the 'myth' of the school was perpetuated during the 1960s and 1970s, the period from the 1980s onwards could be described as one during which school was to a certain extent de-mythified, at least in terms of the link between education and formal employment. Further, the public education system in Niger has been described as being in a state of crisis in the 1990s (*ibid.* 24). Teacher and student protests contested the reforms and austerity measures that were introduced with structural adjustment, and strikes interrupted the school year, leading to several annulled years (*années blanches*). One young man, now in his mid thirties, who was in lower secondary school during this period, referred to his generation as the 'sacrificed generation' who had been caught up in the political instability of the 1990s, which had delayed their progression through school by several years. In Niger as a whole, enrolment rates stagnated during much of the 1990s. Following the crisis of the 1990s, significant investments were made in the education sector by international

donors, and access to education and enrolment in primary school increased significantly.⁷⁰

Public schooling in the urban periphery

In Niamey, education is a subject that engages people in everyday conversations and in public debates. In the public debate the state newspaper, on the one hand, announced new investments and emphasized initiatives to improve the quality of education,⁷¹ and the televised news transmitted countless conferences and workshops of international donors and government representatives drawing up strategies for the attainment of education for all and evaluating education projects. Private newspapers, on the other hand, proclaimed the crisis of the Nigerien school.⁷² And at times, the streets of the capital were filled with demonstrations related to education: teacher, student, and civil-society movements marching under banners, such as the ‘march in the defence of the public school’. The start of the school year in 2006 was proclaimed a success in state media, while other media outlets decried the lack of school materials and infrastructure which obstructed an effective start to the semester. In 2006, the ‘*affaire MEBA*’ animated the press and public and political debate for several months. This was a revelation of extensive fraud (involving fraudulent billing and unjustified expenses) in the Ministry of Primary Education and Literacy (MEBA) in the handling of funds for the Ten-Year Education Development Programme, the PDDE. The *affaire* led to the resignation

⁷⁰ At the national level, enrolment rates increased from 34 per cent in 2000 to 54 per cent in 2005 (Meunier 2009: 30). However, in some regions (Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua, and Diffa) enrolment rates remained stagnant and the schooling of girls was still limited (Meunier 2009: 31). In 2009, according to the World Bank, the gross enrolment rate in primary school had increased to 62 per cent, in secondary school it was 12 per cent. See <http://data.worldbank.org/country/niger> (last consulted 14 July 11).

⁷¹ Examples of article titles: ‘Awards given to the most merited pupils in the region of Zinder: Merit is rewarded’ (Saidou, 2006); ‘Message of the MEBA [Ministry of Primary Education and Literacy] on the occasion of the start of the school year: Under the banner of the quality of teaching’ (Le Sahel, 2006); ‘Start of the school year: The pupils return to school’ (Yousoufou, 2006).

⁷² Examples of article titles: ‘A catastrophic start of the school year’ (Le Temoin, 2006b); ‘Hama Amadou [the prime minister] wants to starve the teachers’ (Le Temoin, 2006c); ‘Declaration of the SNEN [teacher union]; Education the victim of bad governance’ (Le Temoin, 2006d).

and arrest of two Ministers and other officials as well as the temporary suspension of PDDE funds by donors.



Figure 12. The front-page of *Le Républicain* in June 2006 entitled 'Embezzlement at the MEBA confirmed by the audit'. The caption under the photo reads 'The innocent victims of MEBA: a class without school materials'.

Everyday conversations about school and education – with pupils and parents and also with teachers – often ended in discussions about the deteriorating quality of the public school system. People pointed to the continued deterioration of material standards (lack of schoolbooks, poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms) while the costs of education borne by parents increased (financial contributions, the purchase of school materials – pens, books, notebooks). School years were frequently interrupted by strikes. It was also widely held that the quality of education (and discipline) in public schools had worsened and that the knowledge level of pupils was lower than it had been in the past. However, despite

the negative perceptions about the quality of the public school system, the uncertainty of school careers, and the meagre employment prospects afterwards, people – parents and pupils – continued to invest in education. As Gérard argues on the basis of fieldwork in urban Mali, although people expressed ambivalence about schooling, such as its utility and quality, school is part of people's daily lives and thoughts: '*on ne pense plus sans l'école*' (1999b: 102).

In the following parts of this chapter I describe the daily realities of education in Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay. As an introduction to this section I present the experience of one young man and his siblings with public schooling.

Ibrahim's schooling trajectory

Ibrahim was in his early twenties. He lived with his extended family, including his parents and siblings, his uncle and his wife and their children, the three widows of a deceased uncle and their two married sons, in a compound in one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Saga, very close to the river. One- and two-room houses built of *banco* and which each have a small enclosed outdoor space form a circle around a shared yard. Livestock was kept in a pen in one corner of the yard. Ibrahim shared a room with his brothers. Ibrahim's father, who was in his sixties, was born in Saga and is related to the family of the neighbourhood chief of Saga Fondobon. His mother is from a nearby village and came to Saga upon marrying Ibrahim's father. Neither of his parents had gone to school. The family made a living mainly on agricultural activities; his father had a rice field and his mother grew vegetables on a borrowed plot next to the rice fields together with the other women of the compound. She also sold food from the family compound and on a quiet street corner. Ibrahim and his brothers helped with cultivating the rice field and did their own gardening and fishing as well.

Ibrahim, the next to youngest child, was in his last year of upper secondary school (*terminal*). He was the only one of his siblings to have continued his education beyond primary school. His older sister, who was married and lived in a village not far from Saga, had been excluded from the public school system after twice failing the final exam at the end of primary school. Ibrahim's older brother, Ousseini, dropped out of school in fifth grade (*CMI*) and so did his younger brother, Yacouba. Both Ousseini and Yacouba had cut a lot of classes to go fishing and to work in the rice fields. Ousseini was finally excluded and Yacouba dropped out of his own accord before the final exam in primary school.

The first time I met Ibrahim he was repeating the final grade in secondary school after having failed the final exam the previous school year. Ibrahim's time in school had been filled with ups and downs. He said that in primary school, which he had attended in Saga 1, he was left to his own devices but that he learned quickly and easily: 'I was like a devil, things were easy for me.' He even had the second best results in the examination centre on the final exam in primary school, a feat for which he was rewarded with gifts. After successfully finishing primary school, he continued to lower secondary school at CES Saga. Similarly, in the first two years of lower secondary school he was among the best in his class. However, in ninth grade (*4ième*) he started slipping behind. When he did not achieve the average needed to continue to the next grade, he was held back and had to repeat ninth grade. Ibrahim attributes this to the teacher strikes that interrupted the school year and to an interlude of adolescent carelessness (*la voyoucratie a commencé, la fougue de la jeunesse*) which made girls and having fun seem more important than school. In tenth grade (*3ième*) he got back on track (*j'ai pris conscience*) but failed the final exam (*brevet*). At this stage, he should have been excluded, since he had already repeated a grade, but the school administration let him repeat the year, according to Ibrahim, because his grades were above the class average. He finally passed the exam and could join the tenth grade in upper secondary school.

When I returned to the field the following year, Ibrahim had failed the final exam a second time. When I asked him if could we sit down and talk, he declined, saying that he had something to do, and as we left he returned to his group of friends sitting on a bench further down the street.

I have chosen this case as an entry point to the discussion of public schooling because there are many aspects of Ibrahim's and his family's experiences of and relations to school that are widely shared in these peripheral neighbourhoods. In the following section I will discuss questions in greater detail, including the precariousness of schooling trajectories and notions of success.

Precarious schooling trajectories

As described above, all of the children in Ibrahim's family had been enrolled in public school, but with the exception of Ibrahim, their school careers had ended prematurely and they had left school without a school leaving certificate. In conversations and interviews about education, it was striking how many school careers or trajectories ended early as children dropped out of school either after being excluded from the public school

system⁷³ (after repeating a grade twice or after failing a final exam twice) or abandoning it for various reasons such as a difficult family situation, marriage, and economic difficulties. Parents and former pupils would also point to ‘lack of motivation’ as another cause of dropping out. In such cases, it seemed that parents would not always insist on their children’s returning to school, especially in a context of financial difficulties and when prospects of the child’s success were small. The reason for dropping out was a sensitive topic. This is not surprising in a historical context in which parents have constantly been told by the authorities to send their children to school, directives that were backed by force in the past. This ambiguity is illustrated in the case of Ibrahim’s brothers, who said that they had dropped out more or less of their own accord, and also in the case of the former pupil Yacouba. Yacouba had dropped out of school in the sixth grade. He said that he had been a troublemaker in school and that he had finally simply refused to go to school when he had classes, preferring to work in the fields and do other things. He said that his parents had tried to make him return to school but he would pretend to go off to school with his backpack and return at lunchtime. Soon after that, his father, who worked as a driver for one of the first enterprises to be established in Niamey, died and they moved to the maternal family in Saga from a more centrally located neighbourhood. Yacouba now made a living gardening on family-owned land. He regretted having dropped out of school, as it limited his future employment prospects. However, he was able to make ends meet through gardening and was hoping to install a motor-pump to increase his production and to supplement gardening with animal husbandry. Of his siblings, three had a school leaving certificate and one, like Yacouba, had dropped out of school. For Yacouba, it is the parent’s responsibility to ensure that a child does not drop out of school, at least at the level of primary school:

Children in CI, CE1, CE2, CM1, CM2 who drop out, it is the fault of the parents. A child that refuses and you let him, that is not normal... one has to advise a child, tell him do this and not that.

⁷³ At the national level, completion rates are low. For primary school the completion rate is about 40 per cent and for secondary school only 5 per cent. See <http://data.worldbank.org/country/niger> (last consulted 14 July 2011). In urban areas the figures are significantly better: 73 per cent for primary school and 24 per cent for secondary school.

See the World Bank Education Statistics (EdStat) on Niger <http://tinyurl.com/3b9v9pl> (last consulted 11 August 2011).

He also accused parents of preferring that their children work in the gardens or fields instead of going to school:

They want the person to work... if it is needed, to go to the gardens or the fields... they prefer you to go to the garden rather than school. If you don't go to school they don't say anything. But if you refuse to go to the garden, then it's a problem. On workdays, they should let you go to school, on weekends you can go to work in the garden, but for them it is not like that, it is the other way around.

As already pointed out, school enrolment is a sensitive topic and few parents would openly question the utility of schooling altogether, although they would readily criticize the public school system.

Enrolling children in school when they reached school age was the norm. Yet enrolling a child in school was one thing; being able to provide the child with good study conditions, such as schoolbooks, a place to study, electricity, giving the child a solid breakfast and money for recreation was another matter. Moreover, parents who had never gone to school themselves had less of a possibility to help their children with their schoolwork. Some mothers would follow their children to school to make sure they did not skip class and would make sure that the children sat down with their homework after school. Illiterate parents were also reluctant to engage with the school and the teachers. What was seen as the low engagement of parents in school was a source of complaint on the part of teachers. One teacher complained of the 'village mentality' of illiterate parents, which she contrasted with the easy relations with civil servants. Such attitudes did not facilitate relations between teachers and parents. In Ibrahim's case, both parents were illiterate. Although this meant that he had not received any help with his schoolwork, Ibrahim said that his parents, especially his mother, had supported him both morally and financially during his studies. In her turn, Ibrahim's mother said that she was grateful that her children had never demanded too much from their parents (such as money and clothes). Parallel to his studies, Ibrahim had helped out in the gardens and the rice field, and he now had his own garden plot, which allowed him to cover his own expenses, such as clothes and school costs.

Hopes of success and fears of failure

Ideas about the value of education and notions of success in relation to education were diverse, and varied between parents and pupils and between parents of different socio-economic backgrounds. For parents with

a steady income or formal employment, education represented a means of social reproduction. For parents who had not gone to school, education represented a means of social ascent, access to a new sphere of opportunities and knowledge. For Ibrahim's mother, contributing towards the costs related to schooling also meant contributing to the future success of the child in life and to the child's ability to economically support his or her parents and future family. As discussed above, schooling was historically linked to employment; employment and a steady income were a central part of notions of success though formal education. Even though for the past several years employment had been far from guaranteed, even with a university diploma, the hope that education might lead to social advancement and a more secure future still remained and could take many different forms and strategies. In order to increase the chances of securing a future income, Ibrahim's mother had encouraged him to sign up for a police recruitment test once he finished lower secondary school, with the justification that studying for too long (*les longues études*) is not for the children of the poor, who need to double their chances in order to succeed. The police force represented a steady and diversifiable source of income in contrast to the uncertainty of higher education. However, despite Ibrahim's performing well, his mother said that all of the places had gone to the children of the rich and well connected. This stayed in the memory of his parents, both of whom saw it as an example of the small chances 'the children of the poor' have of succeeding in a system replete with corruption, favouritism, and clientelism.

In any event, education was valued. Although Ibrahim's parents were not very hopeful about the chances that their children would in fact be able to succeed through schooling – their other children, with the exception of Ibrahim, had all dropped out already in primary school and were struggling to make a living – they had continued sending their children to school. As described above, school was part of people's daily lives, and learning to read and write and count – numeracy and literacy – was considered to be an invaluable skill, one that could be used in many different contexts and day-to-day situations, such as reading and writing letters and dealing with bureaucracy, and for activities not necessarily linked to formal education, such as trade. Such concerns were also raised by urban residents in Ouagadougou where reading and writing skills were increasingly needed for a number of different professions and not only the public sector and formal employment (Baux 2007: 77). School thus appeared essential to getting by (*se débrouiller*) in life. As in other urban areas in West Africa, school was important as a 'means of social integration', non-

schooling leading to isolation and a vulnerable position of dependence on literate persons (Baux 2007: 75).

Still, the potential benefits of education were offset by the risk of the child's neither succeeding in school nor picking up another skill such as agriculture or trade and thus being left empty handed. This worry was voiced by Ibrahim's father:

When a child attends school for all these years and in the end does not succeed, it is really a heavy loss. Because he will have wasted his time in school and he has not learned any trade at home.

Hagberg described a similar feeling in rural Burkina Faso, where whether or not children 'learn to live' (improve basic capabilities) or 'learn to leave' (leave the traditional way of life, cultivation) through formal education was a central concern (2006: 169). The break with the home environment and with tradition (traditional education) and cultivation that schooling represents has been identified as a reason parents in rural Niger do not send their children to school, especially in a precarious economic context when education does not seem to lead anywhere (Meunier 2000: 226–227; Wynd 1999). In this peri-urban context, the break that schooling caused was cast in other terms and not as a break with the village or with tradition *per se*. Still, negative comments abounded about 'drop-outs' and school-leavers as well as university graduates who 'did nothing' and who refused to do manual labour in the rice fields or gardens. They were also seen as a potential threat, people pointing to the increase in delinquency in the capital.

For pupils themselves, the hope of social ascent or a future career was central. Ibrahim, who, despite a number of setbacks, continued to invest himself in school, underlined that the children of the poor, from villages like Saga, were better motivated and thus more likely to succeed than the children of the rich in the city centre. When asked what he planned to do upon finishing school, Ibrahim said that he would like to go on to study in a private professional school (administration, business diplomas). However, since a private professional school costs too much money, he said that he had resigned himself to the idea of studying at the university. For many young school-leavers, the national university in Niamey, which was overcrowded and underfunded and plagued by a series of unfinished semesters, was seen as a not very attractive option upon finishing upper secondary school. Private professional schools offering degrees in accounting, marketing, administration, or management offered one- or two-year programmes and the promise of quick entry into the formal (although saturated) labour market. When asked what he wants to do in the future,

Ibrahim said that the future is in the hands of God – it is a question of destiny – but that he wants to be someone in the government so he can ‘stop all these unfair things going on’ (*pour arrêter toutes ces choses inégales qui se font...*).

Schooling was seen as a way of ‘becoming someone’. When it came to Ibrahim’s brothers who had dropped out of school, Ousseini made a living market gardening and had worked on and off in a factory in the nearby industrial zone, while Yacouba fished in the river and helped out in the gardens and rice fields. However, fishing had proved to be not very lucrative and Yacouba was considering joining a relative living in Cotonou to try his luck in trade. When asked about his future, Yacouba saw few alternatives open to him, asking rhetorically, ‘Now that you haven’t studied, what can you become?’ This comment is revelatory of the centrality of education to imaginations of the future and the subsequent disappointment that follows on an interrupted ‘school career’. As one girl commented when talking about having dropped out of school to take care of a sick aunt in a village away from Saga:

School is important, I regret having quit. When you succeed you can have a good job. You can have everything if God is willing. You can have a beautiful car. You can become a teacher, doctor.

One pupil in lower secondary school explained why he had invested himself in school, making reference to very material aspects of success:

Me, I hung around singing for a while but eventually I left all of that. I was the only one among my friends who did not have the BEPC [*brevet*]. All the others were preparing the Bac [*baccalauréat*]. We all started school the same day. That’s what encouraged me to stay in school. All the civil servants who have luxury cars and all that, it’s because they have gone to school, isn’t it. Can someone who is unemployed have a luxury car or put his mother in a luxury car? He’s only going to sell or cultivate the land.

Another pupil, active on the pupil committee in the secondary school, remarked with sarcasm that the government does not invest in education because it does not want more graduates because of unemployment: ‘There are no offices for graduates, no air-conditioned offices.’

Such comments reflect the equation between education and employment and subsequent social advancement which, for many in these peri-urban neighbourhoods, remained but a dream. Some observers have identified this as a source of exclusion and a problem for the institutionalization of school, a challenge to its capacity for social integration:

The dropouts (*déscolarisés*) (Proteau 1999) and those with diplomas (*les diplômés*) who are unemployed reveal a new form of exclusion or social marginalization which poses the problem of the durability of the institutionalization of school based on its power of social integration. (Baux 2007: 83, my translation)

Such an analysis echoes the interest in the consequences of the precarious position of youth in the context of a prolonged economic crisis (Abbink & Kessel 2005; Cruise O'Brien 1996; Diouf 2003). Observers have pointed, for instance, to the marginalization of youth in the 1980s and 1990s as young people have finished school but are unemployed and unable to set up an independent household, in contrast to the youth who 'grew to adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s' (Cruise O'Brien 1996: 57–58). Masquelier, working in a rural town in Niger, describes the tensions caused by the inability of (male) youth to marry (and thus achieve social maturity) in a context of few economic opportunities (Masquelier 2005). More generally, Masquelier points to the disconnection between education and social advancement in a context of a prolonged economic crisis in Niger where opportunities are reserved for a select few:

Even schooling, which had originally produced a literate Nigerien elite ready to take the reins of government or fill the ranks of an emerging bureaucracy at independence, now seems to provide few rewards, save for a wealthy minority able to draw on private resources and personal contacts. (Masquelier 2005: 64)

In the face of an uncertain future when it came to success in school and to future employment, pupils were quick to emphasize the (non-material) social differentiation that came with education. For instance, in emphasizing that education led to a different mentality:

Those who drop out in preparatory school or in primary school are those who do not think about their future. Otherwise, even if you don't succeed in becoming what you want to become, you can have a different mentality than the others. You cannot compare someone who has the BEPC or the Bac to someone who has only reached the level of fifth grade [*CMI*].

As described by Proteau in a study of educations strategies and itineraries in the Ivory Coast education represents both a route to material benefits (employment) and gaining symbolic capital (Proteau 1995: 651). The uncertainty of employment is thus offset against the prestige associated with education, which motivates parents and pupils to continue to invest themselves in education despite an uncertain future.

The education market and education strategies

In this section I analyse alternative education strategies that are related to the emergence of an education market in the wake of the crisis of the public education system. This education market engages a number of different actors and consists of practices with different degrees of formality. These are, first, the sector of private formal education, schools that have developed into an important alternative to public education in the capital; second, the (informal) offering of private tutoring as a supplement to instruction during class hours; and third, the illicit practice of ‘parallel recruitment’, which meant that pupils who had been excluded from the public school system were re-admitted. These different practices represent different strategies on the part of parents, pupils, and teachers in their attempts to deal with the vagaries of the public education system.

Private schooling

The private school sector, which emerged essentially after independence, has steadily expanded, particularly in Niamey. Initially, private schools were run by Catholic and Protestant missions and were attended mainly by Christians. However, the good results attracted a wider clientele of civil servants and merchants who wanted to give their children a good education (Meunier 2000: 221–222). The private offerings gradually diversified. In 2006 more than half of all private primary and secondary schools in Niger were located in Niamey.⁷⁴ The private school sector has been fed by the faltering quality of and disturbances (strikes) in public schools, which cause people to turn away from the public education sector, and by the selectivity of the public education system, which produces a large number of excluded pupils.

The crisis of the public education system made private schools an increasingly attractive option. Many parents said that if they had the means to pay the inscription fees they would send their children to private school instead of having to deal with the vagaries of the public education system.

⁷⁴ In 2006–07, 124 of 212 private primary schools in Niger were situated in Niamey. In terms of the number of pupils, 100,596 pupils were enrolled in public schools and 29,342 in private schools, which equals or 22 per cent. This can be compared to the national level, where only 4 per cent of pupils were enrolled in private primary schools (MEN 2007). In secondary education, half of all private schools are located in Niamey (61 of 120). In all, 40 per cent of pupils in Niamey, 16,834 pupils, were enrolled in private schools and 41,744 in public schools, versus 18 per cent at the national level, with 32,139 in private schools and 179,351 in public schools (MESST 2007).

Private schools had a better reputation than public schools, mainly because there were no perturbations (strikes) during the school year but also because classes were generally smaller and it was believed that the quality of teaching was better. Some private schools with a reputation for quality and excellence were more sought after than others.

Fatimata, who was married to a civil servant and lived in a small villa in Saga, sent all of her children starting from first grade to well-known private schools in the city centre. She herself had a background in education and was now continuing her studies at university. Fatimata was very critical of the imposition of policies and reforms like double shifts and the introduction of new education programmes that she believed had led to the current crisis of the public education system. When asked why she had enrolled her children in private schools, she replied:

It is from my concern to end up with something good. Those who have the means don't even leave their children here in Niger. They send them abroad where the schools are more consistent.

That the elite send their children abroad was a common comment, often linked to accusations that because the political elite send their children to private schools and to schools abroad they do not care about the condition of the public school system. Private schooling was an ambition that was not easily accomplished in the absence of financial means. One family in Pays Bas had sent two children to nearby private schools with financial help from relatives. The third child was in public school because they could not afford to send three children to private schools.

Private schools also drew pupils who had been excluded from the public school system. Private schools had played this role of recuperating pupils excluded from the public school system since the mid 1960s with the creation of the first private schools (Meunier 2000: 222). The selectivity of the education system, especially in secondary school but also in the passage from primary to lower secondary school, meant that many pupils were not able to continue their studies. Private schools provided a second chance for these pupils, a means of prolonging a pupil's school 'career'. This function or niche available to private schools is clearly illustrated in the case of the only non-Franco-Arabic private school in Saga, Cheikh Anta Diop (CAD). About half of the total number of pupils enrolled in the school had been excluded from the public school system. Moreover, of a total of seventy pupils in lower secondary school, fifty pupils were in the final year and were hoping to pass the final exam to receive the *brevet* (marking the end of ten years of schooling). The principal even men-

tioned the ‘recuperation’ of pupils excluded from the public school system as one of the purposes for establishing the school.

The case of Mamadou is illustrative of the use of private schools as a ‘last resort’ in the quest for a school leaving certificate. Mamadou had spent one year at Cheikh Anta Diop (CAD). He had been excluded from the secondary school in Saga after having repeated the eighth grade (*5ième*) twice. Mamadou’s father, a policeman, was posted in Zinder and Mamadou lived with his mother, who made a living in trade, in Saga. When he was excluded from the school in Saga, his mother had paid the tuition fee of 52,000 FCFA for him to enrol at Cheikh Anta Diop. According to Mamadou, the greatest difference between private school (CAD) and public school (CES Saga) was that the teachers did not go on strike. In fact, most of the teachers who taught at the school also taught at the public secondary school. In the end, Mamadou failed the final exam for the *brevet*. Instead of trying a second time, he started a training course in welding which cost 20,000 FCFA per year at the National Museum in the city centre, saying, ‘It’s me who wanted to go and learn something. It’s better than doing nothing.’ Mamadou hoped to find a job eventually as a welder in a company, factory, or workshop and eventually to open a business of his own. After investing himself in education in public and private school without success, welding was an attractive option and promised a more easily accessible and financially secure future.

In Mamadou’s case, his year in private school had been a last attempt to get a school leaving certificate from lower secondary school; on failing to do so, he opted for a professional training. Private schools represented both an alternative to public school and a last recourse. For children from families without the means to enrol children in private school, the possibilities of a continued school career were bleak. As one mother in Saga expressed it, without money you have few options if your child is excluded:

When you have money, even after two failed exams you can pay for private schooling for the child. But if you don’t have money you can only cross your arms and look at him/her.

In the context of a weak and competitive public education system, the private school sector attracted private entrepreneurs who became important actors in the education sector in offering an alternative to the public education system. Private schools catered to a diverse clientele – from pupils from more well-to-do families whose parents (like Fatimata) sent their children to private school all the way from primary through secondary school, to families (like the family in Pays Bas) who sent one or two

children to private schools depending on the means at their disposal, to parents who, as in the case of Mamadou, invested in private school in the hope of prolonging an interrupted school career and attaining a diploma.

Private tutoring and private classes

Private tutoring is a common phenomenon in Niamey and has developed into an important supplement to the teaching the pupils received during school hours to ensure that they kept up with the progression through the curriculum. Researchers have analysed private tutoring as part of an informal market of education (Hartmann 2008) and as a system of 'shadow education' (Buchmann 1999, 2003). Buchmann defines shadow education as consisting of 'tutoring and after-school classes that are intended to improve academic performance' (1999: 106).

In schools in Saga, some primary school teachers organized extra lessons on weekends, for free or for a small fee. Secondary school teachers also organized private lessons for groups of students for a more substantial fee, ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 FCFA. The tutoring for larger groups was generally held in the classrooms in the schools. One pupil who attended such tutoring lessons underlined the difference between private lessons and class, in that during private lessons the teacher would take his or her time to explain things properly, which, he said, they do not do in class:

I have really learned during these classes because we see things that we don't see in class...It's the same teacher who holds the classes. The difference is also that in the private classes, when you haven't understood the teacher is obliged to explain until you understand. In class, it's really 'shap-shap' to finish the programme... When you say that you have not understood they tell you to seek [help] somewhere else.

Individual tutoring – parents hiring a teacher as a private tutor who would tutor one or more children a couple of times a week – was another form of tutoring which was a more expensive alternative. Tutoring was seen as a way of ensuring that the child would succeed in school. In the words of one parent in Pays Bas:

It [school] is a good thing. Only, the children don't have the willpower. You also have to have the means to monitor the child, to take a home-teacher for the child, for instance, who is better able to supplement what they learn in school.

Private tutoring was seen as an efficient supplement to public schooling. Malika, a mother of three daughters who lived in a large compound made up of rented houses in Saga, had hired a private tutor for her children, who were all enrolled in the public primary school Saga 1. Malika had recently finished her training as a midwife and was waiting to find an internship in a maternity ward, and her husband worked in the office of a branch of the national electricity company, Nigelec. She sold cold water and ice from home to add to her savings. The three daughters were all tutored by a teacher in Saga 1 who lived a couple of houses away and was the head teacher in the eldest daughter's class. A blackboard which was used during the sessions had been attached to one of the walls in the small courtyard in front of the house, where the tutoring lessons were held.

Both private classes and private tutoring represented an important source of additional income for teachers, especially for contract teachers faced with low salaries and little job security. One contract teacher in secondary school said that he earned 32,000 FCFA a month through tutoring, which equalled approximately half of his monthly salary (66,000 FCFA). Hence, teachers would try to take on as many pupils as possible for private tutoring. Teachers based in Saga complained of the weak local demand for private tutoring. In these peripheral neighbourhoods, attending private lessons, especially in secondary school, was more common than individual tutoring, which was more expensive.

Private tutoring attracted many different actors. One of the first activities of ASANE, the youth association whose involvement in the public dispensary I described in chapter 5, had been to organize extra classes during school breaks at CES in Saga. ASANE had been created by graduates of CES with the initial goal of giving support to the pupils in the school, later expanding to include more general development-related activities. The extra classes were taught by the members themselves. They had all graduated from secondary school and were pursuing their studies at the university or in private institutions, studying administration and management, medicine and sociology, as well as teaching, among other subject fields. From the start, ASANE had received the support of the principal of CES Saga in setting up the association. They had also been allowed to use the classrooms for courses during school vacations. The courses were given at a very moderate fee. However, when the principal was replaced, a conflict arose between the teachers in the school and ASANE, the teachers also wanting to organize classes during the break:

Last year we did not do it at the CES but here in the Franco-Arabic school because we had problems with the teachers from there. They say that we prevented them from gaining something. We are not looking to gain

something. It is to help the children. They, they are looking for money. We preferred to leave the establishment [CES] to them.

This episode is illustrative of the competition over the money that could be earned from extra classes. The members of the association contrasted their organisation of vacation courses to that of the teachers which they claimed was only motivated by money. They underlined that unlike the teachers they organise courses at a moderate price for the benefit of their ‘younger brothers and sisters’ and not to earn money. Half of the profits went to the association and the other half was divided among those who had taught the classes. Having been denied the use of classrooms in the CES, ASANE had had to look for an alternative school. After discussions with the principal of one of the private Franco-Arabic schools, he had agreed to let them use the school although he had been reluctant, as girls and boys would be taught in the same classroom.

Access to private tutoring was dependent on financial means, creating a situation in which some pupils could benefit from private tutoring and its advantages and some could not. Buchmann, on the basis of fieldwork in Kenya, has pointed to the downsides of ‘shadow education’ as the expense that it represents for parents, which leads to unequal participation, and the danger that teachers might devote less energy to regular classes (Buchmann 1999: 106–108). In these neighbourhoods, too, teachers were accused of putting less energy into regular teaching. In a memo from the National Directorate of Secondary Education addressed to principals of secondary education establishments, the Ministry of Education denounced abuses (*dérappages*) related to the organization of private classes by teachers, such as handing out assignments and schoolwork beforehand to privately tutored pupils and the pressure placed on pupils who did not pay for private classes.

As in other contexts, the emergence of private tutoring can be analysed in terms of an informal education market, though one considerably less developed than the informal education market in Cairo described by Hartmann (2008). The emergence of this ‘informal market’ is intimately related to the shortcomings of the public education system. While the demand is created by the poor quality of education (frequent strikes, large classes, lack of school material and infrastructure, sometimes unmotivated teachers) and a competitive system leading to high drop-out rates. The supply of tutors is created by the need of teachers to earn a living, by making money on the side to fill out their salary in order to support the high living costs in the capital. Buchmann’s observation in Kenya that shadow education is an example of creative strategies ‘used by parents, teachers,

and students to survive in an educational system rife with problems' (1999: 108) also rings true in Niamey.

Parallel recruitment

The euphemistically named practice of 'parallel recruitment', which is also referred to as irregular or fraudulent recruitment, meant that members of the school administration let excluded pupils re-enter the public school system in exchange for an informal fee or bribe. This practice went against school regulations and was part of other corrupt practices in the education sector, along with exam fraud, the sale of fake diplomas, and the distribution of scholarships through personal networks. In a report on corruption in the education sector, the amounts paid for parallel recruitment were said to vary between 1,500 and 3,000 FCFA for the reinsertion of an excluded pupil in the same school, and between 10,000 and 30,000 FCFA for inscription in another school (ANLC-TI undated: 76). According to one teacher at the secondary school in Saga, the amount paid for a pupil not to be excluded (or even to continue to the next grade) was negotiated with the principal:

What happened was that the pupils were not expelled. There was a lot of corruption in the education sector, which meant that the parent of a pupil who had to repeat a grade only had to go to the principal of the establishment with 10,000, 20,000, 30,000 FCFA, depending on the situation and the relationship they have with the principal. This means that the principal does not expel the student. They make proposals of expulsion and repetition but you are going to see the same pupils in the next grade. Instead of being expelled, the pupil even passes to the next grade.

'Parallel recruitment' bloated student numbers in many public schools in Niamey. According to an official at the regional directorate, a general crackdown on parallel recruitment in secondary schools in Niamey in 2007 led to the discovery of as many as 2,400 irregular pupils who had been recruited informally. According to another official at the school inspectorate, parallel recruitment had initially been a strategy for augmenting school budgets by accepting a small number of 'paying' students, but the practice had spun out of control. He also said that there were people who forged transfer papers for 50,000 to 700,000 FCFA. Parallel recruitment was a profitable business.

In only one secondary school, when they say that there are 230 irregulars... even at 50,000 FCFA that means millions in return for the principal.

It was at this moment that we understood that people were making millions from this. It's not easy to make them stop, but they will stop In-sha'Allah. There are also principals who are not happy; they say that the DRESS⁷⁵ keeps people from 'eating'.

In the words of another official, parallel recruitment had transformed some public schools into semi-private schools:

Everyone has transformed their establishment into a semi-private one. There are some that have more than five hundred kids that they recruit for their own account.

The principal of the secondary school in Saga had taken over the position following the suspension of the previous principal on charges of corruption as part of a general crackdown on exam fraud which led to the suspension of twenty teachers from different parts of the country.⁷⁶ He underlined that the pupils were now being excluded in accordance with school regulations, which had led to a sharp decrease in the number of pupils compared to previous years. In the school year 2005–06 2,083 pupils had been enrolled in the school. This figure had decreased to 1,050 during the school year 2007–08. The principal spent long hours in the computer room that had been equipped by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) typing school reports containing pupil numbers in each class, average grade, best and worst grade average, success rates etc., which in the eyes of the principal served as a confirmation that things were now in order in an otherwise discredited school system.

The end of parallel recruitment was in the interest of private schools, which had lost 'business', given that a significant part of the recruitment base for private schools consisted of pupils who had been excluded from public school. In the words of one official, 'When a child leaves the system he becomes an element of the private sector.' The principal of the CES also pointed to the conflict of interest between parallel recruitment and private schools:

⁷⁵ Regional Direction for Secondary and Higher Education (*Direction Régionale des Enseignements Secondaire et Supérieur*).

⁷⁶ The government had announced that it would clamp down on examination fraud during the final exams (2006–07). The final results were disastrous, as only some 12 per cent passed the exam for the *brevet* compared with about 40 per cent previous years. This was seen by many as reflecting the 'real' level of the pupils and as confirming the frequency of corruption during previous exams. At about the same time, the government arrested twenty teachers and school administrators on the charge of corruption (exam fraud in conjunction with the baccalaureate in 2005).

...like the fact that in Niamey there are more than 3,000 irregular pupils in public establishments. That is why the founders of private establishments are making a fuss.

In Saga, the only traditional secondary school, CAD, was more or less dependent on the pupils who were excluded from public school. As pointed out by a teacher at the CES who also worked in the private school:

For example, you have an establishment here, the Cheik Antha Diop. In 2004, for instance, they had a total of seventeen pupils because the CES did not expel any pupils. They have to expel so that private schools find pupils.

In interviews with parents and pupils, not many people admitted to having taken recourse to parallel recruitment. However, parents, pupils, and teachers did mention the facilitation of transfers and re-inscription after having been excluded as examples of corrupt practices that occurred in school alongside the most frequently cited example of corruption, exam fraud. The fact, though, that a lot of pupils had been able to continue in the public school system after having repeated a grade several times indicates that they had benefited from someone's bending the rules, as was the case with Ibrahim. This enabled them to continue their education without having to pay for private schooling. Ibrahim's mother recounted that she had been offered the opportunity to have her daughter reintegrate into another school for a fee of 50,000 FCFA after she had repeated a class and failed the final exam (*brevet*), an offer which she referred to as playing the tombola:

I have a daughter who has done it only once but they told me to pay 50,000 FCFA and they will transfer her to another school. I was told to play the tombola. It is Djamila, she had taken the exam for the *brevet* and failed and she had already repeated and did not make the average. They said that they could let her repeat the grade and take the exam. If she was to be admitted I should pay 50,000 FCFA, but she will change class.

Oumarou, who was studying marketing at a private professional school in Niamey and was preparing to present himself as an 'external candidate' (*candidat libre*) for the *baccalaureate*, had been enrolled in several private schools. He recounted that during his school career he had always been unlucky when it came to exams despite being one of the top students in the class. After failing the exams for the *brevet* (BEPC) twice, he enrolled in a private school, after which he finally passed. The same thing hap-

pened with the *Bac*; after two failed attempts he enrolled in a private school but failed again. He felt that he has always worked hard and remembered the frustration and anger he felt at not passing the final exams. He emphasized, however, that he had never taken recourse to fraud (like parallel recruitment) to be able to stay in the public school system: ‘Even if I could make an arrangement so that I could stay in public school, it would be fraud, I prefer being honest and pay for private school’. During his entire school career he had been financially supported by his uncle and by his older sister, who lived in Belgium, who had paid for his school fees and expenses for the past two years.

Parallel recruitment is an example of the informal functioning of the public school system. It also involved high economic stakes in the money that was earned on the practice. For parents and for pupils, it was also in some sense an education strategy, like private tutoring or enrolling a child in private school. Ibrahim’s mother’s comment about the tombola in relation to parallel recruitment can be interpreted as a more general comment on the public education system, given the uncertain outcome of investment in education. While families with financial means can diversify education strategies – through enrolling their children in private schools or hiring private tutors – families without means are left to navigate a public school system plagued by strikes, insufficient financial support, and overcrowded classes. The economic stakes involved in these strategies become especially evident if these different options are conceptualized as an education market on which services are sold and bought and in which people are not equal players. Proteau’s observation on the basis of fieldwork in Abidjan in the early 1990s also rings true for Niamey.

Schooling itineraries, uncertain and unstable, are subject to ‘rules’ of a market on which access and ‘success’ in school remain determined to a great extent by the social capital and economic capital of the family group. (Proteau 1995: 650, my translation)

Similarly, Boyle (1996) has noted that in Cameroon the inability of the state to finance schools led to a differentiation between parents with means to exit the school system through the creation of private schools and parents who were confined to a faltering school system increasingly dependent on the support of parents’ associations. In Niamey, in the context of a faltering public education system, the possibility of succeeding in school was to a significant degree dependent on the ability to take part in the growing education market, whether it be through enrolling a child in a private school, paying for private tutoring, or even bribing a school administrator or teacher for a child not to be excluded from school.

Religious schooling

Finally, I want to point to one last form of schooling that could also be seen as a form of education strategy and as part of the education market; that is, non-formal religious schools such as Qu'ranic schools, an important form of schooling (education) in this Islamic context. Observers of the Nigerien education system have argued that the crisis of the public education system and an increasing number of school drop-outs has led to increasing numbers of local initiatives for religious schools, from Qu'ranic schools to Franco-Arabic schools, arguing also that this is a response against the alienating effects of secular-based French education (Alidou 2005; Meunier 1995). As argued by Alidou:

Since parents could no longer afford to educate their children in formal Western schools, it became important for their children to have access to an alternative source of literacy skills: the alternative that was acquiring renewed legitimacy was the Islamic school. (Alidou 2005: 80)

At the national level, it has long been planned to regulate and to valorize Qu'ranic schools, for instance as a form of pre-school education, but not much has been done. Alidou points out that the authorities have paid little attention to Qu'ranic schools despite the noticeable community support for such schools, because of the privileging of French-based schooling (2005: 76). This, she argues, is part of a general tendency not to value Islamic education, but despite this, Islamic education is thriving in the context of the crisis of Western-style education.

Qu'ranic schools dotted the neighbourhoods in the study area. In Pays Bas and Tondigamay, they were almost the only schools present. As described by Souley (1997), Qu'ranic schools fill many different roles. Young children who had not yet reached a school age were often sent to Qu'ranic school. It was common for pupils, particularly in primary school, to attend Qu'ranic school on Wednesday afternoons, weekends, and during school vacations. These are usually organized with *marabouts* who live in the same neighbourhood. Parents saw Qu'ranic school as an essential complement to the 'modern' school, as it enabled the child to become a good Muslim and to acquire different kinds of knowledge. Attending both a secular and a Qu'ranic school was a way of doubling chances of success:

People here enrol their children in two schools to give them the chance to succeed in at least one of the two schools.

Non-formal religious schooling also played an important role if a pupil's career in public school ended early. Qu'ranic schools provided a means of continuing one's education, but now with a focus on religion and religious learning. Religious schools thus filled the void left after a failed school career.

Contract teachers and the disengagement of the state

In the final part of this chapter I will address the question of the 'contract' or contractualization which has been a bone of contention between successive governments, teachers, and parents (and pupils) since the 1990s. From having been a more or less privileged group of state employees, teachers in Niger, as in many African countries, have experienced a progressive decline in status. The recruitment, salaries, and benefits of teachers have been the target of reforms seeking to reduce public spending on education, the burden of salary expenses having been identified as a major obstacle to the attainment of education for all in sub-Saharan Africa (Murphy 2005; Welmond 2002). To palliate this, reforms have included suspending the practice of hiring new teachers as civil servants in favour of hiring teachers on temporary contracts with significantly reduced salaries and benefits. This is a strategy which Murphy says has largely amounted to the recruitment of large numbers of young graduates facing unemployment 'at one-third the salary levels of permanent teachers, with neither benefits nor job security' (2005: 363).

In Niger, the recruitment of teachers on short-term contracts started in 1998 with the introduction of the *volontariat* (volunteering), which was eventually replaced with the contract. Moreover, starting in 1999, teachers were forced to retire at the age of fifty to make room for teachers hired on short-term contracts to reduce costs (Halais 2009: 51). At the time of the *volontariat*, these teachers were paid a salary of 35,000 FCFA (Murphy 2005: 365). The subsequent change to the contract was said to ameliorate the situation of non-civil servant teachers. However, according to a union member, it was the industrial actions and demands of the association of 'voluntary' teachers which caused the government to end the *volontariat* and to replace it with the contract, accompanied by a salary increase from 35,000 FCFA to 40,000 FCFA. The change was met with protest by 'voluntary' teachers, who demanded to be integrated into the civil service, but the government ultimately prevailed and the contract was introduced in 2004. Contract teachers now make up the majority of the corps

of teachers in Niger. In 2005–06 there were 28,048 primary school contract teachers, representing 61.6 per cent of all active teachers (*craie en main*, ‘chalk in hand’) in primary schools in Niger (Halais 2009: 49). In 2006–07 there were 4,206 secondary school contract teachers, representing 75 per cent of all teachers in secondary school (MEN 2007).

Contract teachers are organized in three trade unions unified under a national umbrella organization.⁷⁷ For a long time, these unions were not recognized by the government:

At first they told us that it is a contract and that it is individual. Thus they denied us even the right to have a union. But somehow we managed to impose ourselves... We realized that it is only taking on the fight that will pay off, you don't have a choice, and to fight you have to be organized. Little by little we succeeded in getting organized, first in Niamey and then in the rest of the country.

Contract teachers are made up of a heterogeneous group with diverse backgrounds. Some have no pedagogic training or have received a forty-five-day training after being selected on the basis of a recruitment test, while others have graduated from teacher training colleges (*École Normale*) (Halais 2009: 51). The recruitment of contract teachers is considered by education analysts to be one of the main reasons for the significant increase in enrolment rates in Niger since the year 2000. It has also been argued that the hiring of contract teachers has not had a significant effect on the quality of teaching. Other researchers, however, note negative consequences of the increasing reliance on contract teachers in terms of, for instance, the motivation and presence (absenteeism) of teachers in the classroom, the impoverishment of teachers, and the de-professionalization of the teaching profession (Bierschenk 2007: 277; Henaff 2003: 174; Murphy 2005: 363; Welmond 2002). Welmond points to contractualization and the ushering in of policies like the reduction of benefits, creating cohorts of lesser-paid teachers, as factors that contributed to the delegitimation of teachers and the devalorization of the status of teachers (2002: 59–60).

In Niger, the period since the initiation of the contract has been marked by frequent industrial actions by contract teachers seeking to improve their employment, working, and living conditions – demanding a salary increase, benefits, and the opening of recruitment into the civil

⁷⁷ SYNACEB (*Syndicat National des Contractuels de l'Éducation de Base*), SYNASES (*Syndicat National des Contractuels de l'Enseignement Secondaire*) and UNACEPT (*Union Nationale des Contractuels de l'Enseignement Professionnel et Technique*); coordinated by the CNCE (*Coordination Nationale des Contractuels de l'Éducation*).

service. The sheer numbers of contract teachers meant that strikes paralyzed significant parts of the education system. As an illustrative example, in the secondary school in Saga during the school year 2006–07, of seventy teachers, fifty-eight were contract teachers and only twelve were civil servants. Contract teachers pointed to their strength in numbers in making their demands:

We are conscious of our strength. We know that we represent at least 60 per cent of all teachers. There is no reason why we should accept being dragged in the mud.

According to the general secretary of one of the unions, during the school year 2006–07 industrial actions lasted a total of two months, at the end of which contract teachers achieved a salary increase of a bit more than 10 per cent. The remuneration of primary school teachers increased from 40,000 to 45,000 FCFA and of secondary school teachers from 59,000 to 66,000 FCFA.

The initiation of the contract has increased employment opportunities for young graduates who would otherwise be faced with unemployment or with making a living in the informal sector (Halais 2009: 52). However, for many, the ‘contract’ (*le contrat*) was an unattractive prospect. It was associated with thankless work for low pay and was seen as a temporary solution to unemployment. One university graduate who worked as a contract teacher said that it was frustrating to be paid one-third of what someone who has the same or even an inferior diploma receives, and that he finds it difficult to convince his pupils to go to university because they respond that it only leads to the ‘contract’; that is, nowhere. Another teacher talked about the stigma attached to the status of a contract teacher:

Without taking into account the stigma of being a contract teacher, it seems that when you are a contract teacher they say that you haven’t received any prior training and that you are parachuted [into teaching]. Even the pupils use this as a justification for their bad results. It is because they are taught by contract teachers.

It is widely held that contract teachers are part of the reason that the quality of education has deteriorated, because of their lack of pedagogical training and their lack of motivation.⁷⁸ The irregularities of recruitment to

⁷⁸ According to Meunier, this was also the case during the rapid expansion of education in the immediate post-independence period that necessitated the rapid (three-month) training

the contract had also cast a shadow over contract teachers, since people without the necessary credentials, sometimes without a school leaving certificate, were recruited. Recruitment was decentralized to regional directorates and some teachers were hired without even the minimum requirement of a BEPC (Halais 2009: 61–62). In the words of an official at the secondary school directorate:

At a certain moment, disorder took hold and anybody was recruited. Today the results are there, it is reflected in the teaching... There are examiners for the *brevet* who are not capable of correcting the exams. Where are we heading? This means that there is a risk of our letting the young generation sink. It was a mess. People wrote contracts in order to find a job for their children, and there are even people with fake diplomas. One should not hide the facts.

Pupils and parents made a distinction between permanent public servants (*titulaire*) and contract teachers (*contractuel*), pointing to the lack of qualification and experience and the youth of contract teachers and to their lack of commitment. However, many people expressed empathy with regard to the precarious socio-economic situation of contract teachers, saying that it is not surprising that they are not completely dedicated to their work:

We need qualified teachers. Contract teachers are poorly paid and thus not able to make sacrifices to do a good job.

This situation was blamed on the state. A member of the parents' association in one of the schools in Saga pointed to the absence of the state and the difficult situation of contract teachers:

The state is absent, people are not in the right conditions. They cannot work when they are not in the condition to work. They have to buy slates, chalk... if the teacher doesn't even have breakfast before going to school, how is he going to teach? For things to function, the state has to pull itself together, regularly pay the salaries of contract teachers...It also has to recruit because when you are not a *titulaire* you do not do the work like you should. You have to feel that you are responsible. When you are not, you are not obliged to do things well. You're there for a limited time, after two years you are thrown out into the street, how are you going to be motivated? Even when you want to work for your country, if you know that

of teachers before the expansion of teacher training institutions, lowering the status of teachers (Meunier 2000: 128).

tomorrow you're going to find yourself in the street why should you work yourself to death to do good? They want to do the work well, but on the other hand you can't work when you are hungry.

The precarious economic and job situation of contract teachers and the lack of support by the state in terms of a decent salary and job security was seen as justifying the lack of commitment and absenteeism. Many (mainly male) contract teachers carried out parallel activities to supplement their salary; examples of such activities include private tutoring as discussed above and supplementary hours in private schools. In Saga, many teachers at the CES also taught at the private school CAD as temporary replacements or substitute teachers (*vacataires*). Private tutoring was an important source of income, some earning considerably more through private tutoring than as a contract teacher.

Working in Benin, Welmond argues that teachers in an era of contractualization no longer fulfil the 'cultural' expectations of being conduits of knowledge, civil servants, dedicated and efficient; instead, they are untrained and unqualified, often not integrated into the civil service, and are accused of lax morals and lack of commitment (2002: 54). This situation reflects back on the state as well. In Niger, the situation of contract teachers in many ways crystallized not only the crisis of the education system but also the withdrawal of the state. Indeed contract teachers had become symbols for the deterioration of the public education system and of the disengagement of the state.

Discussion

The relation between school and 'community' has been a central theme in literature on education in Africa. What is clear is that relations between families and school are not stable and vary in time and space. As argued by Lange and Martin:

From a refusal of schooling, through moderate acceptance, to total commitment, links to school are continually negotiated and can vary within the same society depending on the time period. (Lange & Martin 1995: 568, my translation)

Historical, economic, political, social, and cultural factors come into play in influencing this relation. Lange emphasizes that relations to school are constantly negotiated and dependent on the experiences of education of

families themselves and on socio-economic and political circumstances (2003: 158).

At the beginning of this chapter I pointed to different ways in which the relations between school, parents, and pupils have altered since independence. The idea of social advancement was and still is central to people's representations of school, and for a long time it defined and shaped the relations between parents, pupils, and the state. However, this link was challenged with the economic crisis of the 1980s, which curtailed employment opportunities, and the ensuing 'education crises' marked by protest, annulled school years, reforms, and cutbacks, the repercussions of which are still being dealt with today. The period following the year 2000 saw a dramatic increase in donor funds and in enrolment rates, mainly in primary school, with the extension of education infrastructure through the construction of schools and classrooms in rural areas. However, despite these improvements in education development indicators, the public education system is still seen as being in a state of crisis due to perpetual underfunding. In Niamey the effects of increase in funds dedicated to education were not very visible given the constant demographic pressure on schools in the capital. Moreover, support and public spending has been geared largely towards primary education, given that investments in that level are considered the most efficient and cost-effective way to expand access to public education and increase enrolment rates. Enrolment rates in secondary school have increased only slightly. Welmond has pointed to the tension between mass education for economic development (promoted by international donors) and perceptions of education related to social mobility (2002: 57–58). In Niamey, many teachers as well as pupils and parents were critical of the 'policy of mass education', which was associated with a continued deterioration of the quality of education.

In general, views and experiences of education were highly ambivalent. Despite a widespread conviction that 'children of the poor' have few chances of succeeding either in school or upon graduation, peri-urban residents – parents and, not least, secondary school pupils themselves – continued to invest themselves in education and held high expectations of education as a means of social ascent. The analysis of education trajectories in the neighbourhoods in focus is revelatory of the crystallization of inequalities, not so much in terms of access to school as in the possibility of succeeding in school. Countless school careers ended abruptly and prematurely. In the context of an overcrowded and underfunded public school system, success in school was to a large extent dependent on financial means and an ability to invest in the emerging education market. While people with financial means could diversify education strategies –

through private schools or hiring private tutors – families without means were left to navigate the meanders of the public school system. Finally, like the emergence of the education market, the introduction of the ‘contract’ has altered relations between the different actors in the education sector, in this case between teachers and the state. Contract teachers crystallize what is seen as the disengagement of the state and have become the symbol of the deterioration of the public school system.

9. The politics of public service provision

This thesis has shone the searchlight on health and education services in neighbourhoods on the periphery of Niamey. It has addressed fundamental political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of public health and education provision beyond their institutional, technical, and managerial aspects. These multiple dimensions are part of a 'politics of public service provision' which refers to the wide range of actors and institutions, discourses, meanings, and practices that are mobilized in the provision and offering of public services. The political dimensions of public service provision are often hidden in a technical language of development and an organizational set-up of community participation and decentralization. However, decisions that are made at the national and international level about what aspects of education or healthcare to prioritize – for instance, primary education or secondary education, preventive or curative healthcare, the introduction of user fees and the form they take, or in what village or neighbourhood to build another school or health centre – have important socio-economic and political consequences. Although the analysis of the politics of public service provision could potentially also concern national and international levels such as international policy making, which is often where decisions and priorities are made, the main focus of this thesis has been on local-level dynamics, where national reforms and development interventions meet local realities. Ethnographically, the thesis has chronicled daily life, struggles, and events – including the quest for visibility at the level of the neighbourhood and local initiatives for the amelioration of living conditions, as well as personal and family-level endeavours in the search for care and in education trajectories – in neighbourhoods at the geographical and political urban margins of Niamey.

Public service provision in a local context

Following the budget cuts of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s, the past twenty years in health, education, and other public service

sectors in Niger have been marked by policy reforms, aimed at making service delivery more efficient, following the neoliberal model. The decentralization of service provision, alternative forms of resource mobilization, and the promotion of community participation are important components of these reforms. At the same time, the inability of the state to ensure public service provision and other responsibilities also leads to ‘decentralisation by default’ – ‘a situation in which a variety of non-state organizations filled the void left by the absence of state institutions in the production of goods and services’ (Oluwo 2001: 11, cited in Hagberg 2009a: 9). A significant part of this thesis has been devoted to what happens on the ground in this context of both the implementation of a policy of decentralization and ‘decentralization by default’ as a number of different actors and institutions take over when the state seems, for different reasons, to be absent.

The thesis started off with a description of the establishment of the primary school Saga 4, seemingly created in haste to cater to the growing number of pupils in Saga’s neighbourhoods. The school was built with straw classrooms financed by the municipality and the parents through school dues. Different actors and institutions – including the principal, the community committees in the school, the neighbourhood chief, the municipality and municipal councillors, and international development actors – contributed over time to ameliorating the material conditions of the school. The contribution of the state, represented by the Ministry of Education and the school inspectorate, included transferring teachers to it and providing pedagogical support. Given this configuration, involving a wide range of actors and institutions in the daily running of the school, the case of Saga 4 can be seen as an example of the co-production of public services as defined in literature related to development policy (Joshi & Moore 2004; Ostrom 1996). While definitions of co-production may vary, the common denominator is the fact that a specific public good or service is provided not by one but by several institutions or groups of actors. Other examples of public goods and services that were to some extent co-produced in the neighbourhoods included public health services in Saga, the kindergarten in Tondigamay, neighbourhood security, and market infrastructure.

The specific forms of co-production of public services in the urban periphery of Niamey mirrors a more general phenomenon in Africa and beyond, which consists of the involvement of a wide range of actors in the delivery of public goods and services, in a variety of configurations (Blundo & Le Meur 2009b; Joshi & Moore 2004; Mitlin 2008; Olivier de Sardan 2010). On the one hand, the diversity of different forms of

service provision is an outcome of development policy and reform encouraging privatization (public-private partnerships), decentralization, community participation, and the withdrawal of the state. On the other hand, it is also driven by the inability of states to provide certain services, in which case other actors step in to cover for the state. In both cases, new spaces are opened up and are invested locally.

In a context of shifting responsibilities and multiple forms of appropriation of arenas previously, at least in theory, dominated by the state, it becomes especially relevant to focus on the political dimensions of public service provision and not only on its technical and managerial aspects. Public services are political arenas, especially in contexts where co-production is an important part of their provision and where institutional pluralism prevails, as in the case of Saga, Pays Bas, and Tondigamay. The political arenas under study resemble those in other African contexts characterized by the presence of a number of different institutions that attempt ‘to exercise public authority’ (Lund 2006b: 686). In this context like property (Lund 2008) and security (Kirsch & Grätz 2010) public health and education services also become local arenas for the negotiation of public authority and legitimacy. Actors and institutions engaged in these arenas range from state representatives to municipal advisors, traditional chiefs, *ressortissants*, various kinds of associations and community committees, ‘big men’, and external development actors (international development aid, NGOs). In the quest for legitimacy through involvement in public service provision, different logics – like that of the traditional chief acting as a community leader, *ressortissants* working for the development of their home village, and municipal councillors capable of bringing investments to the locality – are at work. Involvement in health and education help to position actors in the local political arena. For instance, in the case of the members of the youth association ASANE, their involvement in the maternity ward and subsequently in the health committee opened up a space for them and gave them some visibility and a stepping stone to other projects. Thus, it becomes clear that non-state or community actors such as different kinds of neighbourhood associations and local NGOs, often lumped together in the categories ‘civil society’ or ‘community representatives’, are often highly political.

Yet in addition to political stakes mobilized in such actions, public service provision at the local level also involves economic stakes, socio-cultural meanings, and individual and collective aspirations. In a context of scarce economic resources for the operation of public services, the question of financial resources is central. The revenues raised locally through various user fees and managed by community committees were

central to the daily running of public services and were the object of conflicts and suspicion when it came to the management of money. In the case of Saga 4's straw classrooms, a seemingly small investment was loaded with political and economic stakes and soon became the object of competition between the community school committee and municipal councillors. For the members of the youth association, involvement in the maternity ward project and in the health committee was an outlet for their personal aspirations of social advancement or of doing something 'useful', which was especially important given the difficult situation for many youth, school-leavers faced with unemployment. In Saga 4, the principal's dedication to getting the school on its feet and making it successful was driven to a large extent by a professional aspiration to prove her capability, having been given the unexpected opportunity of being promoted to the position of principal. Personal aspirations were also expressed in terms of the need to work for the locality. This was the case for the *ressortissants* who pointed to the need to give something back to the community, of making use of a particular social and political position and knowledge by 'helping out'. Moreover, in Saga many of the initiatives taken to ensure public service provision were framed in terms of local history, as symbolically expressed in naming the maternity ward after the canton chief.

Relations between urban residents and public services

The analysis of the stakes of public service provision and the mechanisms behind them provides an important perspective on public services, especially as it focuses attention on how local actors solve daily problems related to the provision of public services in the face of unreliable state support. It does not, however, directly address another critical issue of the political dimensions of public service provision and the intertwining of policies and local realities, namely, how public service provision is lived by users in daily encounters with public services in their search for care at the neighbourhood dispensary or in sending children to school.

Public health and education services are the source of diverse experiences that need to be integrated into the analysis. This might include daily dilemmas such as the choice of whether or not to seek care at the neighbourhood dispensary in the face of user fees and prescriptions, or how to handle that a child is sent away from school upon failing to bring the school dues. Or the feelings caused by the exclusion of a pupil from school, such as the disappointment of parents but also of pupils faced with

few future prospects; or, on the other hand, by being granted a favour or credit at the neighbourhood dispensary, like being provided with a taxi for transportation in a medical emergency; or seeking a better quality of care at a private clinic or public dispensary in the city centre due to personal connections; or sending children to private school. All of these experiences are revelatory of different aspects of the relation between urban residents, from different walks of life, and public services. They shed light on such important questions as how access to public services is negotiated, what processes of inclusion and exclusion are at work, how health and education services are perceived by citizens, and what expectations they have of service provision.

Among urban residents in Niamey, public healthcare and formal education were objects of expectations and ideas about what the state should offer. For instance, public healthcare services were associated with a particular kind of medical knowledge that was sought after; when it came to the level of primary healthcare, it was especially valued for the care of infants and children. Public schools were expected to offer an education of good quality, effectively imparting valued skills such as reading and writing (and mastery of the language of bureaucracy), and to open the way for new opportunities such as a path to employment and social ascent. However, these public services often failed to live up to people's expectations. In the public dispensary, patients were often met by dismissive and unhelpful staff. Relations between users and staff were, like those in other public health services in West Africa (Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan 2003a), full of frictions, with a couple of notable exceptions. Moreover, the public dispensary was associated with unavoidable user fees and prescription costs. In an era of cost recovery, access to treatment was dependent on the ability to pay for care, with the exception of prevention measures for infants, which drew more patients than curative consultations. The analysis of common education trajectories revealed the precariousness of school careers: pupils frequently dropped out. This was due in part to the selectivity of the school system, in which each education cycle ended with a competitive examination, thereby excluding many pupils from continuing in school. To a significant extent, success in school was premised on the ability to participate in the education market which had emerged in the context of a poorly functioning public school system. At same time, the traditional link between education and social advancement had been increasingly tenuous since the 1980s due to the economic crisis, cutbacks in the public sector, and growing numbers of graduates. Getting ahead through scholarships to study abroad and jobs was dependent on personal contacts.

State-run healthcare services and schools were part of a wider medical and education market. In these peri-urban neighbourhoods, access to satisfactory medical treatment or a successful school career depended largely on the ability to navigate these markets, which are made up of a plurality of providers and of official (user fees) and unofficial (corruption; informal privatization) costs and transactions in state-run services.

With user charges, and given the widespread corruption in the public sector, the relation between urban residents and public services was mediated by monetary transactions (user fees, school dues, bribes, and arbitrary fees). State-run health and education services both contained some form of user fee. The cost recovery system at work in public health services was based on charging of user fees for consultations and requiring payment for pharmaceuticals. In schools, dues served as a mode of informal taxation. Though they were voluntary, a great deal of pressure was placed on parents to 'contribute' (pay). Failure to do so was met with the threat of temporary exclusion of their child from school, or other punitive measures. The practices of charging user fees and school dues were both framed by a moralizing discourse: parents were taxed with being accustomed to 'easiness', being 'irresponsible', being 'ignorant', 'not understanding'. User fees/voluntary contributions were part and parcel of the promotion of community participation, with the stated aim of mobilizing and empowering the population by making them more involved in healthcare and education. However, for the majority of people, their experience of community participation was reduced to making financial contributions. User fees or co-financing at the local level are thus revelatory of the contradictions that surround the promotion of community participation.

Rights to education and healthcare are at the top of the international development agenda. Yet policies, reforms, and projects aimed at increasing access to education and healthcare are dominated by categories such as communities, clients, and beneficiaries. These fairly neutral and non-political categories are also tacked onto urban residents in Niamey in their role or position as patients, parents, and pupils. When translated into the local context, the title of community member, client, or beneficiary entails a set of obligations and the fulfilment of responsibilities such as the payment of user fees, voluntary payments, and participation in community management in order to access education and healthcare – and other social services or public goods, for that matter. In contexts in which public service provision is often cast in non-political terms like community participation, it becomes especially important to conceptualize the relation between people and public services as one of citizenship, which is inher-

ently political and which not only contains obligations but also the negotiation of rights to healthcare and education.

Local processes of state formation

Differentiation between image and practices facilitates bringing the ambiguities and contradictions of state domination to the fore. For example, it is possible that the image of the state can persist through long periods in which practices contradict that image. (Migdal & Schilchte 2005: 35)

The thesis has approached health and education as arenas in which ideas about the state are articulated. The title of the thesis, 'In Search of the State', evokes these processes. On the one hand, it refers to the attempt to identify manifestations of the state at a particular moment in time in a specific place, in neighbourhoods on the periphery of Niamey. As has been illustrated in the course of the thesis, the state is at the same time present and ephemeral. On the other hand, the title also evokes urban residents' expectations of the state when it comes to public health and education provision. From a historical perspective, consecutive governments in Niger have mainly failed to fulfil the role which Nugent argues was central to the social contract between citizens and the state based on 'state-led development and the promise of improved education, health and infrastructure' formulated at independence in many African countries (Nugent 2010: 57). Furthermore, the role of the state as service provider has been challenged in development policy and practice after the structural adjustment programmes and in an era of decentralization reforms. In a rural Nigerien context, Masquelier uses public healthcare in the form of a public dispensary as a concrete instance of the state in order to explore 'how the Nigerien state is discursively constructed and deconstructed by rural dwellers' in a situation of state decline and withdrawal from public services and welfare institutions which challenged the entitlement of citizens to healthcare (2001a: 270). She links the malfunction and emptiness of the refurbished dispensary behind its façade of prosperity to the 'regime of pretence' and the formation of spaces of fantasy and desire that characterizes the post-colonial state.

Starting from a similar situation of malfunctioning state services, the detailed ethnography of public health and education services in the urban periphery of Niamey shows, rather, that public services are invested with multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings. The visit of a Minister to

the neighbourhood dispensary in Saga, displaying the strength and capacity of the state to care for its population, did, like the newly painted walls of the empty dispensary described by Masquelier, take on the appearance of pretence, given the dire straits of many public services. Moreover, statements which pointed an accusing finger at the state such as 'The state has abandoned school', 'We have done everything and the state has done nothing', and 'Without money you will receive no treatment' abounded in discussions about school and health services. At the same time, however, public services also conjured up ideal images of the state as service provider, and of public services open and accessible to all.

Furthermore, the investment of local actors in service provision and local efforts to secure and consolidate health and education as well as other public services contributed to the reproduction of an ideal of public service provision with the state as the ultimate model. Many local initiatives for the 'amelioration' of Pays Bas and Tondigamay, which were classed as informal, followed state norms as a strategy for gaining visibility, such as the care taken to follow the design of urban zoning in dividing land plots in Tondigamay and the establishment of public goods and services, including the creation of the market in Pays Bas and the kindergarten in Tondigamay. As Nielsen (2007) has argued in the case of a relocation process in Maputo, people continued to invest themselves in the idea of the state even in its relative absence and the failure of the authorities to regularize and to equip the neighbourhood.

The involvement of different local actors in service provision in the absence of state support might at a first glance appear to be undermining the state, since it is revelatory of its weakness. However, the intervention of 'non-state' actors did not challenge the state as such. Instead, in contributing to service provision, these actors in a sense carried out 'state-like' activities. The local actors that invested themselves in the provision of public health and education services contributed to state making from below in buttressing schools and a health centre faced with a constant lack of funds and resources. Moreover, the state maintained its prerogative and its primary control over public health and education provision. It follows that in contributing to effective service delivery and the development of the neighbourhoods, local initiatives could be seen as feeding into a form of 'bottom up state building' (Doornbos 2010: 757).

As pointed out by Migdal and Schilchte, standard models of the modern state that assume the autonomy of the state and its detachment from society are ill-equipped to handle the blurring of lines between 'state and society, public and private, legal and illegal, formal and informal' (2005: 3-4). Instead, there is a need for an open, less normative and more proc-

essual analysis of the state that recognizes the ‘complexities of empirical statehood’ (Hagmann & Péclard 2010: 542). This becomes especially evident in contexts in which the provision of ‘traditional’ state services is ensured by a plurality of actors in different configurations that defy the conventional binaries of public and private, formal and informal, and state and society. This thesis has demonstrated that there is not always a direct correspondence between these ‘realities’ of public service provision and images of the state. Rather, what we see is a mismatch between people’s experiences and expectations of the state that is filled with ambiguities and contradictions. The implication is that the weak and sometimes almost even absent state is not necessarily eroding its local legitimacy as public authority. In urban Niger, at the same time that the state is unable to provide well-functioning public health and education services due to a combination of lack of funds and mismanagement, ideals of the state as service provider remain. Widespread criticism of the state coexists with ideal images.

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