



Politics in a Sahelian town; Dori and the art of alliance

Christian Lund

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the process of politics at the local level in and around Dori and the ways the micro political economy is configured in the present conjuncture of formal political democracy. In order to understand what is often termed 'local politics' it is necessary to move beyond 'the local'. The article focuses on processes and practices by which political power in a Sahelian town, Dori, is asserted and legitimated through the political elite's capacity to control processes which connect various zones of state or public authority. Specifically they control the connections between the capital, Ouagadougou, and Dori, and between Dori and the villages surrounding it. Two case studies of politicised land tenure disputes are analysed.

Keywords

Burkina Faso, Dori, Sahel, local politics, patronage, clientilism, brokerage, land conflicts, land tenure.

Christian Lund: International Development Studies, Roskilde University, Denmark.

Email: clund@ruc.dk

*Geografisk Tidsskrift, Danish Journal of Geography
Special Issue, 2: 15-25, 1999*

Situated some 260 km to the north east of the national capital, Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, Dori was the capital of the Liptako Emirate and is now the *chef lieu* of the Seno province. The political control has been in the hands of the *Fulbe* since they conducted a victorious jihad against the Gourmantche in the early 19th century (Delmond, 1953; Irwin, 1981; Pillet-Swartz, 1993). The society of the region of Dori is segmentary and hierarchical. People identify themselves as *Fulbe*, free men, and *Rimaïbe*, descendants of the slaves. A particular division of labour evolved between the two groups: the masters, the *Fulbe*, owned cattle and controlled the land, and while the *Fulbe* tended the cattle themselves, their slaves, the *Rimaïbe* cultivated the land. Although this division has been increasingly effaced, ethnic identification is significant in social and political life. The *Fulbe* furthermore fall into a number of clans with different political and occupational histories. The *Ferrobe*, who are the descendants of the warriors of the jihad, constitute the uncontested aristocracy among the *Fulbe* and it is always from their midst that the Amiirou (Emir) has been chosen and around this group that 'politics' has gravitated. Historically, the

Amiirou held a number of functions. He controlled immigration of larger groups to the area and settled disputes which exceeded the competencies of the village chief, the *jooro* (Kintz, 1986).

This paper is concerned with the process of politics at the local level in and around Dori and the ways the micro political economy is configured in the present conjuncture of formal political democracy. The general argument that I wish to make is that in order to understand what is often termed 'local politics' it is necessary to move beyond 'the local'. Or more radically: maybe 'local' does not make much sense because it suggests a spatial dimension of a range of phenomena which may not have a distinct spatial dimension. James Ferguson (1998) argues that the verticality of state and society is often treated as a 'taken-for-granted-fact', and we should explore how local, regional, national and even global 'levels' are reproduced - how the verticality is a precarious and challengeable achievement. What should be in focus in our analyses is rather processes and practices by which power is asserted and legitimated. And in particular how such processes connect various zones of state or public authority. In their work on local

powers and the state in the Central African Republic and Bénin, Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan argue that the central state has a very limited capacity for institutionalised regulation at the local level in rural areas (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1997:462; 1998:49). This provides local powers with significant room for manoeuvre. The argument I will pursue in this article is that the room for manoeuvre for political actors in a town like Dori and in villages surrounding it not only depend on the relative absence or incapacities of the central state authority but indeed on the processes which connect these zones of authority. That is, village politics are in part conditioned by the way village powers connect with and invoke powers in Dori, and town politics in Dori is conditioned by the way political forces in the town connect with village politics and the political processes in the national capital, Ouagadougou.¹

Background

A historically significant event for the structure of politics in the region and in particular within the aristocracy took place already around the time of the arrival of the first French expedition to the area in 1891 headed by the French officer, Parfait Louis Monteil. The incumbent Amiirou, Amadou Issa, was dying and the competition for his succession had begun. The Amiirou's son, Issa, was in line for the throne, and Monteil began to negotiate a treaty with his group of followers. However, the Amiirou's nephew, Sori, managed to drum up support for his own candidature, and the royal family tree took an irreparable twist and left Issa's line at the margins of royal status while Sori's line thenceforth issued the Amiirous (Irwin, 1981; Merlet, 1995; and interviews).

On the one hand, it led to a chronic grudge borne by the members of Issa's line against the members of Sori's. And on the other hand, political jealousy within Sori's line became lit since the different factions within Sori's line now saw the position of Amiirou within reach. The two houses of their descendants have been the nuclei of emirate-wide political competition ever since. With this rivalry between members of the elite, a competition for village alliances has always been a significant feature. In his work on the historical development of the Liptako polity and politics, Irwin (1981) keenly emphasises the relative volatility of such alliances. The Amiirou was

rarely, if ever, in a situation in which he could rule at will. Hence, an Emir's reign, from accession to the throne and onwards, was conditional on his skills at forging alliances with leaders of the important villages around Dori, most of which were ruled by other *Fulbe* clans. Some of these alliances lasted longer than others, but they were all fundamentally circumstantial and temporary.

This socio-political structure was modified during the colonial and post-colonial period. When the Liptako became a French protectorate in 1891, the Amiirou was no longer an independent political authority but now a chief enrolled in the colonial administration; from 1963, at the death of the present Emir's father, the institution of the emirate was formally suspended by the independent government and not later reinstalled (Kintz, 1985:101). However, despite his formal demotion, the Amiirou and the *Ferrobe* clan remain tremendously influential and enjoyed widespread popular authority. But they have had to operate in ways that take into account the wider political context, in particular politics as it emanates from the country's capital, Ouagadougou.

Another significant change brought about by French colonisation was the emancipation of the slaves, the *Rimaïbe* which made them free to migrate and sell their labour, and especially in the wake of the Second World War young and more mature men travelled to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire to work. On their return, many of them bought the land they had cultivated from their former masters and became land owners despite the fact that the present legislation did not accommodate such arrangements.

The revolution from 1983 to 1987 led by Thomas Sankara abolished the chieftaincy and traditional land ownership. Moreover, a new hierarchic system of revolutionary committees (CDR, *Comité pour la Défense de la Révolution*) was put in place, going from the village over the province to the national level. In Dori the political climate was such that the Amiirou, Dicko Nassourou, left the country for Canada. In the villages the *jooros* were dethroned, but in many instances the leading figures in the village CDR were adult sons of the chiefs and the new political power was in fact legitimised by their participation. In certain villages, however, the revolution was seen as an opportunity not only to get rid of the *jooro* but of his entire clan, and new figures gained the political leadership. However, cutting through the revolutionary rhetoric of social transformation and the birth of a new nation, the reform led to a rejuvenation of the political

structure in most parts (Otayek, 1989; Labazée, 1989). Alliances between the villages and the new political elite - the revolutionary cadres - were established along side the discrete kindling of ties with the Amiiro's relatives and rivals within the aristocracy. In short, alliances multiplied and their volatility was hardly reduced.

With the accession to power of President Compaoré in 1987 a certain measure of political pluralism was allowed, culminating with the adoption of the new constitution in 1991 and general and presidential elections in 1991/2. The CDR structure was abolished. At village level a *Représentant Administratif du Village*, RAV, basically stripped of formal powers was (s)elected to represent the village to the outside world. In some villages, the role of RAV was assumed by the former *jooro*, in others he was not of chiefly family. In a number of speeches in 1991 President Compaoré encouraged reconciliation between the state and its former enemies, notably the chiefs, and Compaoré probably owes much of his electoral success to his symbolic rehabilitation of the traditional power structure in the country (Loada, 1996:260). While the rehabilitation of the chieftaincy was a recognition of the chiefs' cultural role and not a delegation of any formal political power, its interpretation in Dori was somewhat different. Here it was not only made possible for the aristocratic family to return to a central position as mediators in land and other disputes parallel to the formal legal structure, the way was also paved for their re-entry into the formal political scene; a scene which offered important posts as Member of Parliament and mayor of Dori town.

Factions and the style of politics

The political elite in Dori falls into a number of factions headed by the members of the aristocracy. The most important ones are the Amiiro, Dicko Nassourou's, faction and his cousin, Dicko Sanda's. While Dicko Nassourou and Dicko Sanda are both issued from the historically victorious family branch of Sori, a third faction is headed by Birabia, issued from the defeated Issa's line. Birabia is known as a very wealthy local businessman - his popular reputation ranks him among the two or three richest men in town, which is the case for neither Dicko Nassourou nor Dicko Sanda. Thus, while his pedigree prevents him from ever becoming Emir himself and while it reduces the likelihood of him ever gaining any formal public office, his

capacity as patron enables him to rally support in the villages around Dori, and he has often turned the scales in the perpetual struggle between Dicko Nassourou and Dicko Sanda.

With the long absence of the Amiiro during the Sankara period Dicko Sanda had become the man in Dori who people saw as the Amiiro's substitute and to whom they would turn when in need of help. Moreover, his influence grew as he gained a seat in parliament for President Blaise Compaoré's party, CDP (*Congrès pour la Démocratie et Progrès*) in 1992. Ironically however, he did not gain the seat without assistance from Dicko Nassourou and Birabia. As the elections approached it became obvious that Blaise Compaoré's party (then ODP-MT, *Organisation pour la Démocratie Populaire-Mouvement de Travail*, now CDP) would win, but no one from the inner circles of the aristocracy was in a favourable position within the party, partly due to its hitherto anti-chief policy. Nonetheless, with the assistance and backing from Birabia and Dicko Nassourou, Dicko Sanda was manoeuvred into a position as the first candidate's substitute, and when the elected candidate received an overseas appointment shortly after the election, Dicko Sanda became Member of Parliament.

But this, by no means, signified that Dicko Sanda could monopolise power or public offices in Dori. The Amiiro returned from Canada in 1991 and after Dicko Sanda's election to parliament, the rivalry between them became obvious. As time approached for the municipal elections in 1995 Dicko Sanda tried to become the candidate for the CDP, but this time he could not count on the support of his close relatives. Instead, Birabia backed Dicko Nassourou and hence the Amiiro was elected mayor. Apparently Birabia and Dicko Nassourou did not cherish the thought of seeing the man they helped to become an MP's substitute as full MP and mayor of their town. In fact, when it became clear to Dicko Sanda that he could not count on Birabia's support and that CDP headquarters in Ouagadougou tried to promote a candidate from outside the aristocratic family in Dori, Dicko Sanda campaigned for his cousin. However, much to his dismay, Dicko Nassourou seized the day and also managed to become party secretary of CDP for the Dori section.

The seat in parliament gave Dicko Sanda many influential contacts in the capital, Ouagadougou. A local MP has a major influence on the judges and prefects in Dori. Their appointments, promotions, transfers and demotions are decided by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the

Interior, and Dicko Sanda would make sure to be well informed about a judge or prefect's mistake such as acceptance of a bribe or the making of a 'wrong' decision. Dicko Sanda could easily pass this on to the ministries and influence the civil servant's career. To what extent the MP, Dicko Sanda, actually influenced the decisions of the judges and the prefects is uncertain. But the important thing is that this was the widely accepted popular understanding of the relations between 'la justice', the capital Ouagadougou, and Dicko Sanda, shared by judges, prefects and CDP party cadres as well. Hence, Dicko Sanda was increasingly seen as a central person to appeal to for people in dispute.

Dicko Nassourou's position as Amiirou, Mayor and *Secrétaire Général* of CDP provided him with partly different and partly overlapping means of patronage. As not only part of the aristocratic family but Amiirou himself, Dicko Nassourou wielded significant authority in the rural areas. As the principal heir to the historical land owning family his involvement as mediator in land litigation implied, overtly or tacitly, a potential 're-confiscation' or 're-allocation' of land from the Emir despite his non-existence in the legislation and hence the absence of feudal land rights. As a Mayor, he had contacts with the higher echelons of the Ministry of the Interior and was, not unlike Dicko Sanda, able to communicate professional misconduct (real or not) to the national capital. Thus the outcome of disputes involving public civil servants was, as in Dicko Sanda's case, seen as susceptible to influence from the mayor. Moreover, as Mayor, Dicko Nassourou was able to favour certain entrepreneurs and others with contracts with the municipality. Finally, as *Secrétaire Général* of the ruling party, Dicko Nassourou had a virtual 'hot-line' to the power centre in Ouagadougou, a situation that rivals Dicko Sanda's political contacts. However, just as the party channels could be used by Dicko Nassourou to reach and influence Ouagadougou, they could be used to reach, influence and control Dori from Ouagadougou. The most influential party cadres of CDP in Dori were civil servants, originally from other regions in the country over whom Dicko Nassourou as Amiirou or Mayor could exercise little social control. Thus, rather than being under Nassourou's control, they acted as informers to Ouagadougou headquarters of his partisan conduct, reporting whether he worked for the party or engaged in sordid alliances with no gain for CDP as such (See the monthly *La Voix du Sahel* no. 43, March 1998). Some of these civil servants, in particular at the

Palais de Justice often 'reminded' judges and prefects as well as the aristocratic family of the reach of 'Ouagadougou'.

The third major political figure, Birabia, actually held no formal political leverage, but his wealth enabled him to corrupt civil servants, and the occasional support he was requested to offer to Dicko Nassourou or Dicko Sanda would sometimes make them back down if their support in favour of their own clients ran counter to the interests of Birabia's clients.

The competition between the three tenors of Dori produced situations where the interest in patronising clients could be overridden by the interests in keeping the tension between one's own camp and the two others at a tolerable level. Consequently, a villager appealing to either of the three 'big men' in Dori would get his case promoted to the extent that it was not incompatible with the wider set of interests. These interests were, however, as all three of them concurrently explained, circumstantial. As a measure of precaution many village representative from around Dori would try to pay their respects to at least two patrons whenever in Dori. Many men head for Dori on Fridays to attend the prayer at the mosque in the afternoon, and most would leave in the morning in order to have time to pay their respects to one, or better, two of the three 'big men', to vent and enjoy various gossip, and to visit the market for a possible good deal. Many would try to time their visit to Birabia to lunch time since his magnanimity included offering a decent meal to people. Only rarely were less than some forty people fed like this on Fridays. As a result, the three 'big men' were remarkably well informed of the situation in the region, the state of old struggles and the emergence of new fields of contestation and competition such as development projects (See Nielsen, 1998).²

Brokers

To make sure a court or administrative decision was favourable to one's interests, very few people would contact Dicko Sanda, Dicko Nassourou or Birabia directly, however. Anybody from the region around Dori with a problem involving the authorities would contact a certain Souley or another of a handful of brokers first.³ Obviously, each of the brokers had a different history, but Souley's had some characteristic traits. Souley was between 50 and 60 years of age and his family had been the *Rimaibe* of

Dicko Sanda's family, Souley's father being the 'valet' of Dicko Sanda's father, and Souley had become the helper of Dicko Sanda.

Souley's career as a broker started when he in the mid-1960's worked as a driver's assistant and since 1970 as a driver himself at the prefecture in Dori. His job got him acquainted with the different authorities, their personnel, their different administrative routines, and how malleable they were. Facing the confusion of institutions and rules and the French language, of which only a minority of rural dwellers have some notion, most of them would solicit help from Souley or a similar broker if they had the misfortune to have to engage with the authorities of Dori. Due to his political dexterity and his association with Dicko Sanda, Souley stands out as one of the 'best' brokers and has for a long time been used as an interpreter at the *préfecture*, the *gendarmérie* and the court. Describing himself, Souley would say: 'I'm just a simple man, I can't even read and write properly. My French is very poor. That's why people trust me - I know what to do in court'. Others were less modest on Souley's behalf: 'Souley is the man who works, who really works, at the court, he will win your case for you'. At other times, Souley himself would explain his role along these lines: 'People come to me, not because I am "Souley", but because I do politics', referring to his participation in Dicko Sanda's political campaigns. People were constantly coming to Souley's courtyard for assistance and advice. During a 19 days absence prior to my interview with him, more than 30 people from all over Liptako had come to see him in vain.

Souley was able to influence particular cases significantly; maybe not to the extent of his reputation, but still. First, often translating for both adversaries he had ample opportunity to present the case in a way in which the result would be given. Second, he would often cause critical delays in the proceedings advising one party not to show up at the court hearing and cause postponements either until a new cultivation season has started and the case would have to wait until next year or until Souley's favourite had had sufficient time to persuade the judge or prefect. And since both adversaries often appealed to Souley for help, the eventual loser would accredit his loss to his adversary's more ample financial means rather to Souley's inability to swing the case in his favour. During the Sankara regime, corruption of government servants was allegedly non-existent; the political climate was such that it usually would be more beneficial for a public servant or CDR-

militant to disclose political crimes, of which bribery was a prominent one, than to accept a bribe. With the 'relaxation' of the political surveillance and control, this became much less evident during the Compaoré regime from 1987. Hence, the gendarmes, the rural police, had a firm reputation for harassment, capricious arrests and blackmail for dropping groundless charges. In fact, people had a simple faith that anybody, if he was approached in the right way and with the right sum, might be bought. This was corroborated by prefects and judges alike who confirmed that this belief is general and, while carefully excluding their own particular selves, often well founded. There is a local saying used to appreciate a person's wealth in money or cattle: *A jogi ko njaada Doorri handen*, meaning 'you have the means to go and win your case in Dori today'. Stories were also told about a certain judge who was incorruptible. He went under the nickname '*Monsieur la Loi* [Mr. Law]' and was halfway ridiculed for 'not understanding the ways of the region'. His brief career in Seno was concluded by a transfer to the south of the country, and in the local interpretation of things, it was the result of repeatedly not complying with the 'instructions' of Dicko Sanda.

The reputation for corruption of the judges, prefects and gendarmes was moreover zealously fed by Souley and the other brokers operating in Dori. When someone addressed Souley for his help in bribing an official and turn a case in his favour, Souley would generally express sympathy with the person, but he would also let him know that 'this was a particularly difficult case'. Souley would have no trouble in outlining an interpretation of the case, say a land dispute, in a way which was most unfavourable to the villager because of the ambiguous and contradictory legislation (Lund, 1997; Lund, forthcoming). As he made the unfavourable position and the absolutely crucial need for his services abundantly clear to the villager, the state's interest in and capacity to enforce the law contrary to his interests would be vividly depicted. And since the examples of other people's 'trouble' with the authorities are legion, it was not difficult to convey the impression that people were in more trouble than they initially thought themselves. Hence, the outcome of any such dispute was presented as open but likely to be unfavourable if a special effort, in terms of bribes, was not made.

Two cases

I shall now move to two different cases of political manoeuvring in and around Dori in order to depict the ways alliances were established. In the first case, the protection enjoyed by a certain *Représentant Administratif du Village* (RAV), Daouda, enabled him to operate unchecked by the law or other social sanctions. However, circumstances changed and brought an end to his field days, and the competition for his replacement could begin. In the second case, alliances proved circumstantial, and here efforts were exercised to prevent a possible future patron from emerging.

Case 1. Despotism protected - despotism exposed

The area around Dori is relatively densely populated and the pastures are in demand, as are the cattle corridors linking them and the village settlements. One such corridor linked five smaller villages and a sixth, somewhat bigger village Yeire, to a pasture. The six villages were linked like pearls on a string, Yeire being closest to the pasture. The problem arose when villagers from Yeire began to cultivate the corridor and block the access of the others in 1990. This of course pitted the five smaller villages and their leaders against Yeire and its leader. While the five 'smaller' village leaders were the *jooro*'s and hence village leaders from before the revolution, the village leader of Yeire was a *Rimaïbe*, a former slave, Daouda.

When the corridor was blocked at first in 1990, it was because Daouda had sold land in the corridor to his fellow villagers. The five *jooros* called upon him to refrain from blocking the corridor but Daouda ignored their request. They then reported it to the prefect, who came to the corridor and fields in question. It soon transpired that the fields were indeed situated in the corridor, and the prefect ordered the farmers to abandon their fields and Daouda not to allocate land in the commons. This led to a heated debate where Daouda argued that he, as the new village leader, RAV, had exactly the same prerogatives as the *jooros* had had before the revolution; he was the controller of the village's land and could do with it as he pleased. He had even taken the name 'Dicko', the name of the noblest *Fulbe* cast, to substantiate it. Now both the five *jooros* of the smaller villages and the prefect protested. The *jooros* claimed that Daouda never could become a *jooro* since he was a *Rimaïbe*, and that taking a 'noble's' name only befell honourable *Rimaïbe*. And even if Daouda had been such an honourable person, he could only take the name of

his former master, a 'Barry', and not just the name of whom he wanted. Taking the name 'Dicko' was 'plain evidence that he was mad'. The prefect argued differently, he said that the comparison between the position of the *jooros* and the RAV was entirely irrelevant since the prerogatives of the *jooros* had been annihilated with the revolution. Daouda then argued that the revolution was over, and that Blaise Compaoré, the president, and the local UNDP-environment-development project argued for 'local participation and management of resources' and hence, the 'state' had no business in his village. And besides, when people in Yeire had paid him for the fields in the corridor and the pasture, they had in fact recognised his authority. The prefect then arrested him and took him to Dori. Rumours would have it that he was beaten up several times in custody.

Released after 10 days he nonetheless returned to Yeire and authorised people to continue cultivation of the fields blocking the corridor. He furthermore contacted Souley and managed to be received in audience at Dicko Sanda's house. All he wanted, as he put it, was to reassure Dicko Sanda of his village's political support before the impending elections, and then of course to report on the general situation in the village. Probably as a result of this, it became impossible for the *jooros* to mobilise the prefecture again to inspect the corridor. The prefect would procrastinate and after two years the *jooros* apparently resigned themselves to the fact that the corridor was dead-ended.

Daouda was obviously a fearless man with great ambitions of becoming rich and recognised. Asserting himself as the village leader able to sell land held promise of both. However, his ambitions were such that he did not consult the people whose peer he wished to be, considering the worth of his esteem and earning within the village to exceed what he would get by paying respect to the five, not very significant, *jooros*. The response from the *jooros* was to label Daouda as shameless and mad, if not in a medical at least in a social sense. The *jooros* were in a serious dilemma; if they responded directly they would in fact recognise Daouda's position as a peer - maybe even as a superior considering their own inferior bargaining position - but if they did not respond, he would probably 'get away with it' and maybe over time become recognised more generally in the region. Since much depends upon how an act and its intention is interpreted, the socio-political position of Daouda was characterised by a certain nervous ambiguity.

The *jooros*' efforts to delegitimise Daouda's actions were meant as a means to make him undo them, but they also served a secondary purpose for the eventuality that he did not. Labelling him as shameless also meant that a challenge by this man of one's own property could not be considered a challenge of one's honour since he, as a shameless person, was not one's peer. And since the abuse and correction from the prefect and even the beating by the gendarmes were lost on Daouda, it may at first have appeared to be a fruitful strategy. The *jooros* all expected the authorities to intervene, either the prefecture, as before, or even better, the Amiirou, Dicko Nassourou or Dicko Sanda, whose ranks were indisputably superior to Daouda's and whose contact to him could not be mistaken for a peer-contact implying recognition. However, a person's social rank is always negotiable to some degree and Daouda's moves to block the cattle corridor, to confront the five *jooros* and to take a noble's name were all such acts of negotiation. At first, they were dismissed by the *jooros*, but due to Daouda's swift move to contact Souley and thereby Dicko Sanda, he maintained a favourable position from which he could continue to negotiate his position over time. Daouda's submission to Dicko Sanda established a patron client relationship where political support was traded for protection and immunity. Whether Daouda had worked it all out in advance is unlikely, but the fact that he contacted Dicko Sanda in an election year probably did not damage his cause, controlling a large village like Yeire as he did.

After his victory, Daouda increased his activities. First he began to frequent the gendarmes of Dori himself instead of passing through Souley. Daouda would indicate minor incidents in the area and receive a cut of the gendarmes' black-mail earnings when they made fake arrests; a line of work hitherto reserved for Souley or one of the other brokers immediately connected to one of the 'big three'. Second, Daouda made sure that the village pen for keeping straying animals was rarely vacant. Animals were seized and kept there until their owners paid for crop damages etc. Daouda was zealous and people would argue that he seized animals on their way to the pasture and kept the fines for himself. However, the last straw was Daouda's seizure of 15 sheep. He reported to the prefect only later that they had escaped, despite the fact that numerous witnesses had seen him dispose of them at a nearby market. Again, Daouda was summoned to the prefecture.

Meanwhile, however, Souley had become displeased with

Daouda's independent arrangements with the gendarmes, and with the trouble brewing in Yeire due to the proportions of Daouda's abuse. Dicko Sanda, having been assured his election, decided no longer to shield his *protégé* and he let him fry. The prefect had Daouda dismissed as RAV and consulted with Dicko Sanda and Birabia before appointing the son of the *jooro* that Daouda had once pushed aside, Modia.

Modia, a man of 35, had been careful to nurse his relations with Dicko Sanda as well as Birabia since his early manhood and it was impossible to determine to whom his loyalty was primarily owed. That it was not to the Amiirou, Dicko Nassourou, was, however, quite clear. The whole operation of replacing Daouda with Modia had taken place during one of Dicko Nassourou's prolonged absences from Dori, and on his return he realised that he had missed an opportunity to manoeuvre his own man in Yeire into position. Nonetheless, Dicko Nassourou did not hesitate to put pressure on the prefect to recall his nomination of Modia, but since Modia had been in office too briefly to be successfully accused of mishandling it, and since his appointment had been made with the consent of Dicko Sanda and Birabia, the prefect let the matter lie. Dicko Nassourou, on the other hand, had no such intentions and brought the matter to his and the prefect's superiors in the Ministry of the Interior. At my departure from Dori in the spring of 1998, this was the state of affairs.

The events from the five *jooro*'s protest against Daouda's behaviour to his demotion and Modia's contested succession are by no means extraordinary in Dori. They illustrate how the issue of the cattle corridor was taken away from the village chiefs and Daouda to the *préfecture* and Dicko Sanda and how their mutual relationship impinged upon the course of events. And again, their social relations are not satisfactorily explained within their own locality but must take into account both parties' relations to yet other politico-legal institutions. Likewise, the appointment of Modia was followed by competition between Dicko Sanda and the *préfecture* on the one hand and Dicko Nassourou on the other with the threat by the latter of transferring the contest to an entirely different field of state authority, namely the Ministry of the Interior. Thus, social relations in one locality crucially depend on the parties' socio-political relations to other zones of public authority. And while the initial move to 'displace' the dispute was actually made by the five *jooros* in their appeal to the *préfecture*, Daouda's political knack soon neutralised his adversaries'

move by introducing Dicko Sanda into the fabric. There are several ways of connecting one field of authority to another but in this case political loyalty was the currency Daouda paid, and later failed to pay, in connecting with a field of superior authority. Daouda's move to legitimate his actions by asserting chiefly identity, on the other hand seemed not to work, and probably in the end undercut the support from Dicko Sanda as it developed into a challenge.

Case 2. Weeding out potential competition

Two distinct chains of events twine in this case: the re-establishment of a pasture and the nomination and election of Dicko Sanda as candidate and ultimately MP.

The village of Wuro Nagge, some 15 km outside Dori, bordered a pasture. Over the years the village *jooro* and his son, Ousseini, an educated man of 30, had been rather lenient when the villagers had extended their fields into the pasture, and encroachment and outright settlement in the pasture was gaining momentum until 1995 when the pasture became completely inaccessible to the herders. The *jooro* and his son then began to campaign to re-establish the pasture. This proved quite difficult, as most of the encroaching farmers were *Rimaïbe* of the village who saw little point in giving up their fields so that others' cattle could graze, and it appeared even more unjust when it was considered that the *jooro's* family had ample land outside the pasture and would not have to sacrifice anything to re-establish the pasture. The main problem was, however, that nobody would let go of their fields in the pasture unless they could be sure that all others would do the same and that nobody else would cultivate there. The *jooro* and Ousseini made contact with the UNDP-environment-development project. The project would assist in getting the authorities' official recognition of the pasture if the village would reach a consensus. This was all but reached at a meeting boycotted only by a single village neighbourhood. As a result, the pasture was officially recognised and the fields abandoned. And now to the second chain of events which took off some years earlier.

After the death of President Sankara and the relative political pluralism from 1987, many intellectuals, among them members of the chieftaincy, enrolled in political parties. Ousseini thus joined ODP-MT and quickly rose to become the *secrétaire provincial* of Seno. Dicko Sanda, on the other hand, had initially run for MDP (*Mouvement pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*), but as the general elections of 1992 approached, it became clear that ODP-MT

would clean up at the elections, and Dicko Sanda approached Ousseini with whom he was related as his senior and who controlled the list of candidates for the party, to join. A number of meetings were held to discuss Dicko Sanda's candidature. Basically, those in favour argued that he would help to consolidate the imminent victory since many people would like to vote for a powerful member of the *Ferrobe* family. Those against argued that it was not necessary in order to win, and here was a chance for 'others' to get political power. However, Dicko Nassourou and Birabia campaigned to have Dicko Sanda admitted to have at least one senior family member on the list of candidates. As a result he was admitted and within a short while manoeuvred himself to the position of first substitute for the party. ODP-MT won comfortably in Dori as in most of the country, and as ODP-MT's first candidate received an overseas appointment, Dicko Sanda became MP. Open rivalry between Dicko Sanda and Ousseini gradually transpired; Ousseini who had initially been opposed to Dicko Sanda's membership of ODP-MT but had been obliged to assist a senior relative, saw his power erode and Dicko Sanda felt it embarrassing that he should be indebted to his junior and moreover to someone from a village. In 1995, at the municipal elections Ousseini had a chance to cut Dicko Sanda down to size. Dicko Sanda attempted to become the ODP-MT candidate to become mayor, challenging his cousin, the Amiirou. Ousseini helped to turn the scales in favour of the latter, humiliating Dicko Sanda. Soon after Ousseini left ODP-MP for PAI (*Partie Africain pour l'Indépendance*).

Two years later in 1997, ODP-MT had changed its name to CDP (Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès), and new general elections were due and the campaigning was intense. Though no official opinion poll was conducted, information about the probable outcome was not in short supply. Souley would circulate among the different villages, and people loyal to Dicko Sanda would frequently report on the 'atmosphere' in the villages. Dicko Sanda had resigned and left the candidature to another, but he was still the centre of information. If the village seemed inclined to vote for one of the competing parties, the CDP militants would mobilise. In a convoy of 4-wheel drive trucks the entire '*État-major*' or 'high command' of CDP in Dori would pay the village a visit and hold a political rally. As in other parts of the country, gifts in cash and kind, mopeds, bicycles, food, and clothes would be offered to the village leaders and often footballs to the young.

Approaching the election day most villages were under the control of CDP, but a few villages seemed inclined to have a majority in favour of other parties, and in Wuro Nagge PAI, Ousseini's party, enjoyed strong support. To Dicko Sanda it was a thorn in his flesh and he orchestrated a campaign in the village to turn the mood around. Souley paid the village a visit and made it clear that 'the confiscation of the land by the UNDP project and the PAI' was a misdeed whose correction was high on the agenda of the CDP. A few days later, the entire 'État-major' arrived, including Dicko Nassourou and Dicko Sanda, and speeches were held. Dicko Sanda did not himself speak about taking back the land in the pasture, but other speakers made it clear that this was within reach with the village's vote for CDP⁴.

A few days after the meeting the 'atmosphere' had not changed markedly, and to defeat Ousseini in his home village, Dicko Sanda and CDP took to gerrymandering. The head of the local election committee (*Président de la Commission Communale d'Organisation des Élections Législatives*), a CDP militant, had the voting boundaries changed. Referring to errors during the last census, it was decided that a neighbouring pro-CDP village should vote in Wuro Nagge and that two families in Wuro Nagge should vote in Dori town. This way the PAI support would be diluted and 'hopefully' reduced to a minority. Ousseini protested but to no avail. However, the final result of the voting in Wuro Nagge remained in favour of PAI while the result of the entire province gave CDP its seat for five more years. The gerrymandering would have had no impact on the overall result anyway since all votes cast were counted together. It only made sense as an attempt to humiliate Ousseini and make it clear to everyone in Wuro Nagge that Ousseini, not even capable of looking after himself, could hardly offer suitable patronage in competition with powerful foes like Dicko Sanda. Shortly after the elections and despite having participated in the campaign against him, Dicko Nassourou invited Ousseini to join his faction by asking him to act as his messenger on a number of occasions.

The events in this case also demonstrate how social and political relations do not respect boundaries of locality and how such boundaries even become objects for negotiation and reconstruction. What happened either in the village of Wuro Nagge or in Dori does not make sense without connecting the two and even connecting them to the way the 'politics machine' of the CDP (again a trans-local entity)

orchestrated the election process. In these cases, actors did appeal to fields of superior authority; rather actors from one such field attempted to establish its superiority by first pressurising and later deconstructing a village constituency. This was first legitimated through a virile display of cars and dignitaries trumpeting an ornate political discourse laced with subtle threats, and subsequently asserted through the political control of the election committee.

Conclusion

One of the features of 'local politics' in Dori, and I will suggest in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, is its trans-local character where 'the village', 'Dori' and 'the capital' seem to emerge as various fields of public authority which are linked in various ways and establish a verticality or hierarchy of power. When we look at Dori, the degree of personalisation of politics is what first catches attention. At the centre of things, it had a peculiar character of a public family row. And there is no doubt that strong feelings fed by deceit and public humiliation as well as ambitions of wealth and esteem strongly conditioned the style of politics. However, the positions held by the three 'big men' depended on the resources they control as patrons. This had changed over time from protection against raids and wars, ending much around the time of the French colonisation, over protection and recognition of certain land use rights, challenged first by the emergence of an effective land market and later by land reforms denying chiefs' property, to the new, recent situation: now the crucial resource seems to have become access to the various zones of public authority, namely the magistrates and prefects in Dori, important for village politics, and the central ministries and polit-bureaus in Ouagadougou important for the control of such politico-legal institutions.

In the current verticality of power in Dori the instruments of legitimation and assertion of power are to a large extent based on patron-client relations where people in villages and in Dori recognised, and duly so, the capacity of the patrons in Dori to protect and expose clients. Being a client is not a bad deal in view of the possible alternative: not being someone's client, which exposes one to the predatory actions of others who enjoy protection and back-up from their patrons. In short, it is quite necessary for most to be someone's client. However, being someone's client is not necessarily a safe haven. The cases illustrate that

everyday politics of competition and circumstances may oblige people to engage in *alliances contre nature* only to rearrange them when circumstances change. This works much to the detriment of predictability for the individual client but is generally anticipated. Under special circumstances when the entire group of patrons was challenged - either by the political elite in Ouagadougou wishing to get another mayor or MP elected, or by a hotspur yokel like Ousseini - the three closed ranks and co-operated. In fact, this seems to be a part of a compromise between the elites in Ouagadougou and Dori. Instead of competing from different political parties, the elite in Dori had gone for the leading party, CDP, which had emerged as the *de facto* single party. In fact, seen from within CDP, multi party democracy may well entail the occasional campaign, but 'everyday politics' is a matter of forging and betraying factional alliances, a process of politics mastered by the town's elite, and most of the time it can be done without provoking interference from the capital. From the point of view of Ouagadougou, securing political support in the Liptako could be done rather smoothly and efficiently by relying on the old elite in Dori in its competitive and factional totality.

The position of the 'big men' as political patrons in these cases depend on their ability to master the vertical topography of power, to use the words of Ferguson (1998). This elite was through clever political strategies to a large extent able to connect - and disconnect - the various zones of public authority. As Geschiere & Gugler argue, 'democratisation' has had quite confusing implications in many parts of Africa. Thus, they state that 'democratisation seems to encourage the emergence of a particular form of politics centred on regional associations, as some sort of alternative to multi-partyism' (Geschiere & Gugler, 1998: 309). The process of politics in Dori displays a variant of this. The local elite in Dori was, despite its chronic factionalism, relatively successful in securing the 'lines of political communication'. However, in contrast to cases where 'sons of the region' attract state funds to 'home', it is noteworthy how patronage in Dori was used to protect clients against abuse or control from public authorities. What was on offer from patrons was not goods or spoils as such but rather shielding from nasty encounters with different public institutions. In exchange, village representatives and ordinary villagers offered unreserved political support in times of election.

Dicko Sanda and Dicko Nassourou thus offered 'exemp-

tions', offered 'to make an exception in this particular case'. The ability to 'exempt' was not based on their capacity as MP or mayor. Rather, it was explained as something which was possible because they were honourable men who put their person and prestige behind somebody's case in a long tradition of protection. On the other hand, as MP and mayor, as 'big shots' in the formal political system, the patrons were also capable of un-doing the exemptions and expose opposition to the un-diminished power of other public authorities.

If we wish to analyse the local political arena in places like Dori, then we are not only obliged to recognise the multiple agencies who each constitute some form of public authority and the processes of negotiation between them, we also have to investigate the political processes which link various zones of public authority in 'village', 'town', and 'capital', and the strategies of the actors orchestrating and thriving from them.

References

- Bierschenk, T. & J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (1997): Local powers and a distant state in rural Central African Republic. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35(3):441-68.
- Bierschenk, T. & J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (1998): Les arènes locales face à la décentralisation et à la démocratisation. Pp. 11-51 in: Bierschenk, T. & J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (eds.): *Les pouvoirs au village. Le Bénin rural entre démocratisation et décentralisation*. Paris, Khartala.
- Boissevain, J. (1974): *Friends of friends - Networks, manipulators and coalitions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Campbell, J.K. (1977): Honour, family and patronage: A study of institutions and moral values in a Greek mountain community. Pp. 250-63 in: Schmidt, S., Scott, J.C., Landé, C. & Guasti, L. (eds): *Friends, followers and factions. A reader in political clientilism*. Berkeley: University of California press.
- Delmond, P. (1953): Dans la boucle du Niger: Dori, ville peule. *Mélanges Ethnologiques, IFAN, Mémoire*, 23.
- Ferguson, J. (1998): Trans-national topographies of power: Beyond "The state" and "Civil society" in the study of African politics. Pp. 45-71 in: Marcussen, H.S. & S. Arnfred (eds.): *Concepts and metaphors: Ideologies, narratives and myths in development discourse*. Roskilde University, International Development Studies Occasional Paper, 19.
- Geschiere, P. & J. Gugler (1998): The urban-rural connection: Changing issues of belonging and identification. *Africa* 68(3): 309-17.

everyday politics of competition and circumstances may oblige people to engage in *alliances contre nature* only to rearrange them when circumstances change. This works much to the detriment of predictability for the individual client but is generally anticipated. Under special circumstances when the entire group of patrons was challenged - either by the political elite in Ouagadougou wishing to get another mayor or MP elected, or by a hotspur yokel like Ousseini - the three closed ranks and co-operated. In fact, this seems to be a part of a compromise between the elites in Ouagadougou and Dori. Instead of competing from different political parties, the elite in Dori had gone for the leading party, CDP, which had emerged as the *de facto* single party. In fact, seen from within CDP, multi party democracy may well entail the occasional campaign, but 'everyday politics' is a matter of forging and betraying factional alliances, a process of politics mastered by the town's elite, and most of the time it can be done without provoking interference from the capital. From the point of view of Ouagadougou, securing political support in the Liptako could be done rather smoothly and efficiently by relying on the old elite in Dori in its competitive and factional totality.

The position of the 'big men' as political patrons in these cases depend on their ability to master the vertical topography of power, to use the words of Ferguson (1998). This elite was through clever political strategies to a large extent able to connect - and disconnect - the various zones of public authority. As Geschiere & Gugler argue, 'democratisation' has had quite confusing implications in many parts of Africa. Thus, they state that 'democratisation seems to encourage the emergence of a particular form of politics centred on regional associations, as some sort of alternative to multi-partyism' (Geschiere & Gugler, 1998: 309). The process of politics in Dori displays a variant of this. The local elite in Dori was, despite its chronic factionalism, relatively successful in securing the 'lines of political communication'. However, in contrast to cases where 'sons of the region' attract state funds to 'home', it is noteworthy how patronage in Dori was used to protect clients against abuse or control from public authorities. What was on offer from patrons was not goods or spoils as such but rather shielding from nasty encounters with different public institutions. In exchange, village representatives and ordinary villagers offered unreserved political support in times of election.

Dicko Sanda and Dicko Nassourou thus offered 'exemp-

tions', offered 'to make an exception in this particular case'. The ability to 'exempt' was not based on their capacity as MP or mayor. Rather, it was explained as something which was possible because they were honourable men who put their person and prestige behind somebody's case in a long tradition of protection. On the other hand, as MP and mayor, as 'big shots' in the formal political system, the patrons were also capable of un-doing the exemptions and expose opposition to the un-diminished power of other public authorities.

If we wish to analyse the local political arena in places like Dori, then we are not only obliged to recognise the multiple agencies who each constitute some form of public authority and the processes of negotiation between them, we also have to investigate the political processes which link various zones of public authority in 'village', 'town', and 'capital', and the strategies of the actors orchestrating and thriving from them.

References

- Bierschenk, T. & J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (1997): Local powers and a distant state in rural Central African Republic. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35(3):441-68.
- Bierschenk, T. & J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (1998): Les arènes locales face à la décentralisation et à la démocratisation. Pp. 11-51 in: Bierschenk, T. & J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (eds.): *Les pouvoirs au village. Le Bénin rural entre démocratisation et décentralisation*. Paris, Khartala.
- Boissevain, J. (1974): *Friends of friends - Networks, manipulators and coalitions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Campbell, J.K. (1977): Honour, family and patronage: A study of institutions and moral values in a Greek mountain community. Pp. 250-63 in: Schmidt, S., Scott, J.C., Landé, C. & Guasti, L. (eds): *Friends, followers and factions. A reader in political clientilism*. Berkeley: University of California press.
- Delmond, P. (1953): Dans la boucle du Niger: Dori, ville peule. *Mélanges Ethnologiques, IFAN, Mémoire*, 23.
- Ferguson, J. (1998): Trans-national topographies of power: Beyond "The state" and "Civil society" in the study of African politics. Pp. 45-71 in: Marcussen, H.S. & S. Arnfred (eds.): *Concepts and metaphors: Ideologies, narratives and myths in development discourse*. Roskilde University, International Development Studies Occasional Paper, 19.
- Geschiere, P. & J. Gugler (1998): The urban-rural connection: Changing issues of belonging and identification. *Africa* 68(3): 309-17.

- Irwin, P. (1981): Liptako speaks; history from oral tradition in Africa. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Kintz, D. (1985): Archétypes politiques peuls. *Journal des Africanistes* 55(1-2): 93-104
- Kintz, D. (1986): Peul majoritaires, peul minoritaires. Pp. 319-25 in: Adamou, M. & Kirk-Greene A.H.M. (eds.): *Pastoralists of the West African savanna*. Manchester University Press.
- Labazée, P. (1989): Discours et contrôle politique: Les avatars du sankarisme. *Politique Africaine*. 33:11-26
- Loada, A. (1996): Blaise Compaoré ou l'architecte d'un nouvel ordre politique. P. 277-97 in: Otayek, R., Sawadogo, F.M. & Guingané, J.-P. (eds.): *Le Burkina entre révolution et démocratie (1983-1993)*. Paris, Karthala.
- Lund, C. (1997): Land tenure disputes and state, community and local law in Burkina Faso. IIED Dryland Networks Programme Issue Paper, 70.
- Lund, C. (1998): Law, power and politics in Niger - land struggles and the rural code. Hamburg/New Brunswick: LIT Verlag/Transaction Publishers.
- Lund, C. (forthcoming): A question of honour - Property disputes and brokerage in Burkina Faso. *Africa*.
- Merlet, A. (1995): Textes anciens sur le Burkina (1853-97). Paris/Ouagadougou: Sepia.
- Nielsen, H. (1998): Politics and development in northern Burkina Faso. Presented at 'Journées de l'APAD, Décentralisation, pouvoirs locaux et réseaux sociaux', Cotonou, November 1998.
- Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. (1995): *Anthropologie et développement - Essai en socio-anthropologie du changement social*. Paris, APAD/Karthala.
- Otayek, R. (1989): Burkina Faso: between feeble state and total state, the swing continues. Pp. 13-30. in: O'Brien, D.B.C., Dunn, J. & Rathbone, R. (eds.): *Contemporary West African states*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Otayek, R. (1992): Burkina Faso: Les raisons d'une victoire. *Marchés Tropicaux* 31 Juillet:2034-37.
- Otayek, R. (1996): "Voter, ca veut dire quoi ?" Sur les élections législatives du 24 mai 1992. Pp. 43-58 in: Otayek, R., Sawadogo, F.M. & Guingané, J.-P. (eds.): *Le Burkina entre révolution et démocratie (1983-1993)*. Paris: Karthala.
- Ouedraogo, J.-B. (1997): Dori - a town in the Sahel. Pp. 130-49 in: Baker, J. (ed.): *Rural-Urban Dynamics in Francophone Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Pillet-Swartz, A.-M. (1993): Systèmes de production, identité ethnique et qualité de survie dans l'ancien Liptako - Génèse d'une région sahélienne. Paris/Ouagadougou, CNRS-EHESS/CNRST.
- Pillet-Swartz, A.-M. (1996): Etnisme et régionalisme dans l'ancien Liptako: un effet de la sécheresse ou de la révolution ? Pp. 23-41 in: Otayek, R., Sawadogo, F.M. & Guingané, J.-P. (eds.): *Le Burkina entre révolution et démocratie (1983-1993)*. Paris: Karthala.

¹ The field work on which this paper is based was carried out during two month long visits in May 1997 and March 1998. Data on disputes was in part gathered through archival searches with the local *préfecture* and interviews with active and retired members of the civil service as well as staff from various development projects in the region. Interviews were, moreover, carried out with local political notables and brokers; for the most part, several interviews and discussions were undertaken. Finally, 12 concrete disputes were investigated. Both parties of these disputes were interviewed inde-

pendently, as were all relevant persons mentioned during the interviews to the extent it was possible to locate them.

² For an analysis of rural-urban links in Dori, see Ouedraogo, 1997.

³ For a theoretical discussion of brokers, see Boissevain, 1994, Campbell, 1977, Olivier de Sardan, 1995.

⁴ For an analysis of the elections, see Otayek, 1992, 1996.