Original Research Article

From the Relationship to Nature and Space, Towards the Recomposition of the Social Status of the 'Head of the Family' in a Flood Context

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Abstract: The issue of risk and the maintenance of people in risk areas is a major concern in the occupation of urban spaces. From the institutional approach to the scientific approach, the definition of risk remains marked by the nature of unpredictability and dangerousness. The current study constitutes an epistemological break in the sociological understanding of risk in the framework of hydrometeorological phenomena. Therefore, how do the changing properties of the status of the head of the family inspired by contact with floods restructure social relations within the social unit of consumption? Starting from an empirical study on floods in the commune 5 on the right bank of the Niger River in Niamey between 2012 and 2018, the status of the head of the family is at the heart of the reflection. Based on a qualitative methodological approach, centred on biographical interviews, this paper puts back at the heart of the scientific debate, the risk of downgrading and loss of preferential position in a given space or social institution.

Keywords: Risk; head of household; social downgrading; flooding; Niamey.

INTRODUCTION

Hydrometeorological phenomena [1] have become more than commonplace in the daily life of the African continent, as evidenced by the 300 stations that meet the observation standards of the World Meteorological Organization (World Bank, 2017). Flooding, one of the facets of these disasters in Niamey/Niger, is the basis of this scientific contribution. Indeed, in the context of a flood, a management and assistance mechanism for families in difficulty is set up. It is characterised by the passage of disaster-stricken families into specially equipped regrouping centres. They function as transit centres, thus marking the temporary nature of these dwellings. Appeals for solidarity follow with the support of the government and humanitarian partners for housing assistance. In the Niamey region, for example, 8,000 people found refuge in a host family in 2012. These host households receive support consisting of a bag of rice, hygiene and household kits and a financial contribution for a period of two (2) months (OCHA report, September 2012). The loss of homes, the passage through the assembly centres and the landing in host families constitutes a process marked essentially by relations of assistance [2]. For a reminder, calls for solidarity for rehousing operations are made on the basis of family affinity. The family as a social institution is undergoing structural changes. The status of the head of the family appears to be one of the most questioned positions.

This is core of the current study. During these periods, statuses are confused. The child, the woman (wife) and the man (husband) all benefit from the same treatment without any real difference. Moreover, the head of the family is thus temporarily relieved of his responsibilities against his will. Anyway, he has no choice because in such a context, it is no longer the defence of any status that is the major concern but rather the struggle for survival. Thus, one wonders how the changing properties of the status of the head of the household, inspired by the contact with the floods, restructures the social relations within the social unit of consumption?.

In this context of economic depression, L. Nguimeack *et al.*, (2010, p.30), consider that the status

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[1] Flooding, drought, erosion, landslides, high winds, tsunamis, desertification, etc.

[2] During the period of care in the assembly centres, the victimised population lives only on aid and assistance, field survey, September 2015.

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of head of household, even if it does not disappear completely, is emptied of its essence because of the inability of people involed to claim it. At this point, it is worth noting that the families living at-risk neighbourhoods of the commune 5 and who are forced to follow the care route described above have a relatively precarious standard of living, with relatively low purchasing power. The types of houses (mud house, housing dominated by entrenchments, lack of drainage, etc.), the nature of economic activities (small businesses, shops, 'aboki', rice farmers, small livestock breeders, etc.) and consumption patterns (cooking with firewood, family meals, existence of traditional water wells, etc.) are all socio-economic markers that uncover the relatively low standard of living of the families in this situation of dependency.

During the process of caring for families in flood situations, the status of the head of the family is devalued and the roles are gradually reversed to his disadvantage. This is because in both the zerman and the Hausa traditions, once the dowry is paid, the husband is not only responsible for his wife and their children, but also for the family-in-law. Thus, the man (husband) who gets married plays at least three (3) roles. The role of father (which requires him to protect and provide for the members of the family); the role of brother (which requires him to provide assistance to his wife) and the role of husband (which requires the fulfilment of marital obligations). All these functions fulfilled give meaning to the status of "head of the family" and brings about respect, consideration and loyalty. On the other hand, the perpetual opposition between traditional values and the various demands of modernism leads to a weakening of the balance at the level of families and provokes a deep desire for change.

The notion of the decomposition and recomposition as stipulated by R. Yao Gnabéli (2015, p.18), of the status of the head of the family in the context of flooding, with regard to the scientific literature, allows us to identify four (4) perspectives. These are, i) sociological approaches to family structure in Africa. At this level, J. Barou (2017, p.37); D. Cordellet & V. Piché (1997, p.62); emphasise the evolving dynamics of the family structure and the institutions within which it takes shape and evolves, ii) social identity and position in the context of social breakdown. On this axis, V. de Gaulejac (1987, p.178) reveals two aspects of the construction of the social identity of a person in the family structure. The process of social construction and loss of identity, on the one hand, and the strategies of recovery or social reconstruction of this same identity, on the other hand; iii) socio-anthropology of the family structure in Africa. B. Akotia (2014, p.70) and Eliana La Ferrara (2008, p.62), have conducted work that points out that in Africa, the family is prior to the individual. The systems of relationships that arise from the family structure emphasise a form of pre-eminence of the family over the individual.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The current study is based on a qualitative approach using directional and semi-structured interviews. The collection of information is part of an overall research process on the problem of maintaining people in the context of flooding in commune 5 of Niamey.

In the process of flood management, people are gathered in the assembly centres. This work is based on the heads of families who have been registered on the attendance lists in the said centres and those who have benefited from intermediate housing through the mediation of management structures.

The interviews, which were essentially biographical in nature, were conducted with a group of eight (08) persons concerned, consisting of heads of families (residents of commune 5 of Niamey) and managers of care and assistance services. To this end, taking into account cultural and religious realities as well as symbolic affiliations, we gave nicknames to the respondents during the processing and exploitation of the database. These interviews enabled us to identify three successive sequences in the persons concerned's discourse. The first, relating to the previous situation (the status of the head of the family and its attributes). The second reveals the disruption event (the presence of water and the loss of homes). The third looks at the strategies for maintaining, recovering and claiming the status of head of the family (the process of regaining the status). The data collected was processed using discourse analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
1. Diachronic and synchronic synthesis of household head status
1.1-Synchronic synthesis of the status of the head of the family

In most traditional African societies, the family is subdivided into entities that differ in role and status. Thus, according to the zerman tradition, the head of the family occupies a privileged position. He is perceived as the custodian and moral guarantor of the family. This perception is observed in a form of recognition of this status by the other members of the family. For example, the fact that they do not systematically, and especially in public, turn down the decisions taken by the latter. This example takes on its full meaning in the words of the respondent Haïssa, according to whom:

Since I left my parents, my husband has always taken care of me. He does everything for our family. Often when I say I want to work to help him, he

forbids me? He tells me to stay at home to look after the children [3].

Such a statement clearly unveils the ideological effort for the person-head of household to make his status inaccessible. Keeping other family members in a relatively unburdened position consolidates his position of choice within this entity. Moreover, the fact that this order and status are taken into account in the community organisation systems at work in the social space under consideration also manifests its importance in the local management system.

Indeed, in the same neighbourhood, there are several zones representing the large families. These are what we might call sub-neighbourhoods. These social entities are headed by zone chiefs chosen on the basis of their status in the various family social spaces that make up the zone. The mode of designation clearly indicates some of the attributes of power that the head of the familly possesses. A zone chief is first and foremost a head of the family and is appointed not by open support but rather by his peers, heads of families. Describing the role of the head of the family in the general management of the neighbourhood, one head of a family, interviewee Hamadou, explained in these terms:

> When we have an assembly for important decisions concerning the neighbourhood, it is the heads of the family who are present; when it comes to representing the neighbourhood at the commune 5 town hall, it is the heads of the family who are invited. Here, in our neighbourhood and according to tradition, the head of the family is the husband. Once we have finished appointing him, he goes to his office to work, while reporting to all the heads of family [4].

From these statements, it is possible to state a remark, namely that the status of the head of the family in the zerman tradition markedly crosses the relationships between the different families social spaces.

Such a remark points out the idea that everything is built on a hierarchical basis in the functioning of consumption units. As stated, J. Barou (2017, P.35), describes it as a family transformational dynamic. For him, unlike those he called the pioneers of the independence of African nation-states, the family has transformed not from the extended family to the nuclear family but by retaining hierarchical positions such as the place of the progenitor over the children. He

considers that filiation, which was to be restricted to its undifferentiated expression, agnatic and uterine kinship, has gone through a transitional phase. A phase during which customs should still apply.

This position is not challenged by the work of J-P. Dozon (1987, p.160) when he deals with family institutions in Africa. For him, African society, which is composed of several family units, is certainly evolving, but it contains within itself the necessary features for its transformation and mutation. He affirms that the nuclear family exists in Africa but is merged into larger groups such as the ethnic group and the clan within which the pre-existing order refers hierarchically to membership of a common ancestor.

1.2-Diachronic synthesis of the status of head of household

In the high-risk neighbourhoods of Niamey the commune 5, the mode of consumption, the mode of production and the mode of organisation manifest the reproduction of an order socially identified as traditional. For example, the use of firewood, the construction of 'traditional fireplaces', family meals (around the father), the cultivation of rice and market gardens, and the rearing of livestock in each family unit without modern enclosures all indicate the reproduction of the traditional village social order.

In contact with urban realities, it is possible to notice transformations in traditional rites. In the case of the social status of the head of the family, it continues to have a considerable influence on intra-familial and, further, intra-community relations. To explain such an evolution, a head of a family from the Nongaré district tells of the settlement process in the following way:

> On the right bank, there were no houses, it was the passage of pastors and itinerant traders. Some of them often rested here. This is how they built the first 'Marangbo' [5] and little by little people started to come and settle. At that time, we didn't have too many flooding problems here. It was from the 1980s onwards that there were tough houses here, otherwise everything was like in the village [6].

This statement sheds light on the origins of the organisational system, which is essentially based on village social realities. According to these realities, it is

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[3]Mrs. Haïssa, wife and inhabitant of the Zermangandey neighbourhood on the right bank of the Niger River, who participated in the data collection, September 2015.
[4]M. Hamadou, chief of the village of Nongaré on the right bank of the Niger River, September 2015.

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[5]Traditional buildings made of intermediate materials, essentially based on black plastic and sacks (boro in the Zerman language), which serve both as roofing and as a plastering method for the whole building. This type of house is mainly found in makeshift concessions and among transhumant people. The specificity of these houses is that they are less expensive and easily movable.
[6]Mr Hassan, chief of Zermangandey village on the right bank of the Niger River, September 2015.

the husband who remains in charge of the family and takes the important decisions concerning it. The inhabitants of the commune 5 remain attached to their traditional way of living. Further, they ensure its reproduction from a generational point of view.

The commune 5 as a living place socially invested with meaning and significance is the product of the relationship between traditional realities and the multiple contemporary urban transformations driven by the high demography and the likes. To this end, it is legitimate to ask about the differentiated capacity of the people involved in the demographic change to adapt. This adaptation requires the capacity to respect the mode of production, consumption and transformation of the urban spaces concerned.

At this level, it is clear that certain neighbourhoods such as Nongaré appear to be a revival or even more so a reproduction of the village in the city. Moreover, at this level, the scientific literature does not say otherwise. Several studies in the field of urban space science show this clearly. In a sort of analogy between the individual and society, M. Blanc (2009, p.28) states that in the relationship to space, a questioning arises which underlies an epistemological break. He argues that from this analogy a phase of decomposition emerges that leads to a new recomposition, with social changes and innovations. This clearly indicates the emergence of a new social figure of space in which the characteristic features of the basic social structure can be found.

Clearly, just as society evolves in response to multiple shocks, so too does the status of the head of household evolve in response to floods and the accompanying management process. As argued, the work of B. Akotia (2014, p. 72) captures the evolving dynamics of African society when he explains:

> In the village, the courtyard is the common space where some welcome others; opposite the courtyard, there is the bush. The street replaces the bush, the dangerous space, the home of wizards and genies. In Central Africa in particular, we are witnessing a dramatic new phenomenon in the cities: children are accused of witchcraft. This is an urban version of traditional village witchcraft. The place of fear is moving, it is no longer the bush as in the village, it is now the street. On the one hand, the relationship between the village and the bush is reproduced in the relationship between the city and the street. The place where one goes to look for food, the correspondent of the village fields, is the street of the African city which shelters the vendors, markets and shops. This street is just as full of dangers as the forest. It is above all the environment beyond the house; the outside of the village is the bush, the outside in town is the street.

By questioning the position of the ancestor "Akebu" in time, he explains how the village social order is reproduced in the city. From the traditional order to the modern order, the village becomes the city and the bush/forest becomes the street as a new place for the production of fear and danger.

It then becomes easy to make an initial synthesis that reveals the evolution of the family and its components in time and space, not by abandoning the traditional order but by adapting to the modern social order. The trajectory that the status of the head of the family undergoes as a component of the family in a flood situation is a justification of the reproduction of the village social order.

2. Family relationship: towards a relationship of declassification
2.1-Basic relational principle of the family structure

The social frameworks of emergence and recourse to the status of the 'head of the family' evolve within a broad, open and transversal relational framework. Thus the recognition of the authority of the 'head of the family' within the family unit gives a specific configuration of family relationships and beyond. In the social organisation in place, the father of the family or the actor designated as such places the other members of the family in a position of subordination through his functioning. Being responsible for the whole family in a form of superiority over the other members of the group. It is also a gateway to intra and inter neighbourhood relationship systems. In the sense that the latter represent the showcase of each social entity considered. In this way, any form of gathering defines a position of choice for the person who fulfils this function. On this issue, a local resident (a wife) from a polygamous household recounts the organisation of a naming ceremony in these terms:

> At the naming ceremony of a friend's child in the neighbourhood, we finished cooking and everything was ready. But her husband's older brother who is the head of the family was not yet present. We waited from 10am to 5pm. All the other men left but we stayed because without his blessing we cannot do anything. And when he arrived, he didn't even last and then he left. There are several cases like that here. But it is our tradition and we respect it (...) [7].

Such a discourse sheds light on the concrete relational framework between the members of the family unit, marked by coercive relationships that lead to a form of subordination and superiority.

Still on the principles of relating, respect appears to be both a principle and a foundation of

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[7] Mrs Sadio, wife and resident of the Saga neighbourhood, September 2015.

family and community organisation in the neighbourhood. Relationships are built on respect for the status of the head of the family. Indeed, meeting the needs of the family and being active in the family's affairs cannot be taken for granted. It is a way of building and earning the respect of one's own and wishing further submission. At this level, respect as a determining variable in the relationship between persons in the same family network is sometimes sought in defiance of the person designated as head of the family.

To highlight the importance of respect in family organisation, one respondent, the head of the family, recounts his experience:

At home, my wives and children respect me at all level required. There are a total of 12 people in our family. I don't have much to do other than the small herd and the small coffee stand. All I earn is to provide food and for the children to go to school. I don't want my wives to go to work because they get bad advice from there (...) [8].

The fact that the 'head of the family' assumes his responsibilities appears to be the mobilisation of a social resource to keep on the back burner any desire to challenge the other members of the family. It is also a way of avoiding any questioning of his status and, beyond that, of strengthening his power. The head of the family ensures that everything is respected in the pyramid of power hierarchy within the consumer unit. Ensuring that the power of the head of household is built and maintained is a form of claiming a position of choice. Re-specifying the barriers to entry to the status of head of the family is seen as a lever for balancing the family structure at work in the Nongaré neighbourhood, according to traditional zerman-speaking realities.

Such a situation of loss of balance in the family structure is similar to the de-socialisation and disaffiliation noted in the work of J. Damon (2003, p.59). Indeed, based on the work of Robert Castel, he defines vulnerability as an intermediate, unstable zone where uncertainty of work and fragility of social relations are grafted on. Starting with the case of the homeless, J. Damon explains the state of vulnerability in which this category of actors, described as de-socialised and disaffiliated, finds themselves. This postulate is used in the framework of the floods to show how the absence of a safe shelter and of real economic activity places social relations within the family structure in a state of disarray.

2.2-Declassification of the head of the household in the context of flooding

The contact with floods creates a situation of general social vulnerability which affects "head of the family". As a result of the flood management process, the victim people are placed in situations of aid and assistance. This leads to the assistance of the different families. In this assistance, the head of the family is also part of it. The loss of homes, the cessation of economic activities and relocation are all factors that contribute to the social vulnerability of the people involved. In this list of affected people, heads of household are hit by a loss of all material and financial capacity to continue to perform their duties. From that moment on, the person designated as head of the family is subject to a double depreciation of his status.

At the level of the external gaze, i.e. the gaze of the members of the large families and that of outsiders constitutes the first level of depreciation. The second level relates to the individual's own perception. The fact of not being able to carry out one's duties in real time constitutes a kind of embarrassment in itself which reinforces the state of vulnerability of the actor-head of household. This vulnerability is described in this way, through the itinerary of perceptions in the words of a head of household:

The situation of water presence is something that is difficult to live with. Before I found myself in the assembly centre, I had never imagined that I could find myself here. They give me rice, money and I can't even sleep with my wife. Because in the centre, the women and children have the same headquarters and the men have their own headquarters. It's a difficult time because during this time I didn't even know if I was a man. Here in the centre we are all the same, without any difference, we no longer know who is a husband, who is a child and who is a woman (...) [9].

Such an experience as lived contains the seeds of depreciation and leads to the destruction of the social status of the head of the family. In the context of flooding, the family structure is disintegrated. It moves from a state of total independence to a state of total dependence. A dependence on the management and care system in place. The passage of heads of families to the assembly centres, where they acquire the status of ordinary members of a group of people affected by the disaster, produces a trigger. The head of the family experiences this as a loss of dignity as a leader and a privileged position within the family unit. This way of interpreting the situation leads to the reaction of this category of actors. They are involved in a process of regaining the privileges linked to their status.

In concrete terms, they do not wait for the end of the reunification process to join other fields that are favourable to the reconstitution of their status. This manifests itself in a resumption of economic activities and the reclaiming of destroyed housing. On this

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[8]Mr Sir, head of household and resident of the Nongaré neighbourhood, September 2015.

[9]Mr Sidibé, head of household and resident of the Nongaré neighbourhood, September 2015.

subject, a person in charge of the reunification centres said:

> Before, in the assembly centres there was no such thing as an attendance list. The women's group is complete, but there were too many absences among the men. That's why we introduced the attendance lists. Despite these lists they always find valid reasons to be absent. During a large consultation we had with them, we realised that others had already started to rebuild their homes and were doing so in the form of a self-help group. Others had to make it clear that staying in the centres was unbearable. And that they would prefer to stay in the "marangbo" and receive aid and assistance [10].

This discourse sheds light on all the strategies set up by the heads of household to rebuild their social identity within the family and the community. As a result, it is clear that in the context of hydro-meteorological disasters, in addition to the perceptible risks (presence of water, loss of habitat, displacement of populations, loss of goods and services, etc.), there is a questioning of hierarchical positions in the family social sphere. A kind of breaking of the social link. And this is what C. Guibet-Lafaye (2012, p.18) refers to in the dialectic of socialisation/disocialisation, integration/non-integration, decomposition/recomposition of identities quoting J. Damon.

He shows how the field of decomposition, non-integration, de-socialisation is at the same time that of the recomposition of identities, integration and re-socialisation. What is at the heart of such an analysis is not social cohesion but the social link that is lost, unravelled and ultimately found again, reconstituted in another way. This position is reinforced by the work of L. Nguimfack *et al*., (2010, p.29), in which they perceiv the family as a system characterised by a tendency to change and homeostasis [11]. They argue that just like a living organism, the family is born and evolves, going through stages of development and trajectory change. In any case, the family as a social institution adapts and readapts to different shocks, which can be of various kinds, as in the case of the floods in the Nongaré district. Clearly, what most frightens people, and therefore heads of household, is the social risk of being downgraded from an existing preferential social order in which the attributes of the status of head of household are guaranteed. From this perspective, it seems legitimate to question the way in which the social sciences in general and sociology in particular apprehend the question of risk in the context of hydro-meteorological disasters.

3. Reclaiming the social status of the head of the family
3.1-Reconstructing the social identity of the head of household

As a result of the vulnerability of the heads of household due to the flood, the first response to regain their lost identity is the rebuilding of their living quarters. To achieve this, they organise themselves into self-help groups. They are helped by the inhabitants of the areas that were not really affected by the action of the waters. The aim of these self-help groups is to rehabilitate habitats in a consensual order according to their state of degradation. The fact that the response to vulnerability starts with the recovery of habitats manifests the constraining nature of the cluster centres. The transition from the assembly centre to a family home functions as a space for claiming a repositioning in the family order.

Indeed, bringing the family back into a private home confers the status of leader, of person in charge, and remains a form of recovery of the attributes that derive from this. This posture is supported by the words of Hidou [12]:

> My biggest prayer was to take the family to the assembly centre because the conditions are not always good there. At least at home I can look after them. We are not going to build the house all at once, but we will settle down and we can build a little bit. The most important thing is to come back home first and the rest we will work little by lttle.

This discourse reveals in concrete terms the strategies set up by the heads of household to return to their initial position. An original position that places the head of the family at the centre of intra-family relations. It is in this capacity that the balance of the social order seems accessible.

Beyond the inability to fulfil their role as head of household and to be out of the private home, the desire to always assume responsibility governs the thinking of heads of household. Certainly because they are convinced that the respect linked to their status is strongly dependent on this reality. In such a context, the priority is no longer necessarily the struggle for survival of oneself as head of the family and of the family unit. It is more to create a social framework in order not only to regain the status of head but above all to continue to enjoy the privileges that come with it. This implicit motivation for returning to the places of origin manifests the concrete relationships that circulate within the family structure. These are sometimes relationships

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[10] Mr Bacho, member of a non-governmental organisation, in charge of a centre for the gathering and reception of flood victims, who participated in the care and assistance process, September 2015.
[11] No change

[12] Mr. Hidou, Head of household and resident of Tondi neighbourhood, September 2015.

of domination and submission to an established social order, which gives the head of the family full power to set the actors of the family unit in motion or not.

This way of reconstructing and claiming identity has already been the subject of scientific reflection according to the work of G. Francequin & C. Valmorin (2017, p.141). In their work they underline the central concern of the analysis of psychological, or intrapsychic, conflicts generated by changes in social position. By proposing a new edition of Vincent De Gaulejac's book on "La névrose de classe. Trajectoire sociale et conflits d'identité suivi d'une lettre d'Annie Ernaux", the authors bring out the central thesis of the book, namely that the change of social position leads to a conflict of identity. Thus, the head of the family, whose status is undergoing a real change, finds himself plunged into an area of uncertainty in which the only existing certainty is the loss of his identity.

The result of managing the flood is linked to immobility. And it is at this level that L. Chauvel (2001, p.321-329), concludes to the persistence of structured inequalities and of the existence of social classes. Contrary to G. Francequin & C. Valmorin, he goes further by explaining the possible levers for the reduction of social classes. He considers that in order to reduce the class struggle and participate in the rebuilding of the lost social identity, it is necessary to reduce economic and educational inequalities, weaken social boundaries and increase mobility. From this position, Chauvel does not limit himself to a simple description of the loss of identity through the maintenance of inequalities fed by the existence of social classes, but invites us to grasp the reaction of the head of the family in the context of flooding. Instead of remaining immobile (presence on the regrouping sites), in the position justified by economic and educational inequalities (loss of activity and income, partial de-schooling of children), he launches into the reconquest of the attributes of his status.

3.2-Repositioning strategies in the family relationship field

The vulnerability in which people find themselves as a result of their stay in the assembly centres is widely explained. This necessarily influences intra- and extra-family relationships. Faced with these difficulties for heads of family to assume their status, strategies are developed to claim this status.

Participation in the care system functions as a strategy for repositioning the family in the social space. Indeed, participating in the care process means benefiting from help and assistance to help rebuild the family unit. The aim is to continue to benefit from this assistance and to use it as a basis for the revival of economic activities. Indeed, the aid and assistance to the disaster-stricken population continues right up to the accompaniment in the resettlement process. In concrete

terms, taking part in the management and care of the affected populations makes it possible to guarantee the interests of each family. This is what Mr Ginko [13] says:

> During the presence of water, which lasted for more than 10 days, all my goods were spoilt, even though I had just filled my shop. With the small business that we do, we do not have much savings, so it is very difficult to get help to replace them. And I don't even have anything left to support my family, we all sleep in their school now. Fortunately, I have a brother who works with the whites there, and when they said they were going to help us to resume our activities he put me on the list. It's true that what I got was not much, but it enabled me not to close the shop completely, because it is my only business that brings in money and allows me to meet my expenses. And, thanks to him, I am one of those who distribute food and whenever we are needed we go to the place. Today in'challa we are in the staff too.

This experience clearly points out how the flood crisis management mechanism is recuperated, transformed into an opportunity and reversed in the relations of the heads of household as an instrument of repositioning in the consumption units. The flood is no longer seen as a threat but rather as an opportunity to improve the living and working conditions of the affected populations. The transformation of the threat into an opportunity is not always obvious, as not all the victims succeed in this transition. It is clear that this is a socially constructed process that relies on networks of familiarity and the ability of each actor to effectively participate in a necessary type of network.

In this perspective, the question of risk is revealed in another dimension. The risk of disaster in this case, flooding, no longer appears with a connotation of danger generally constructed by institutional systems. In the context of a flood, all television, radio and other public information channels are on alert. The story built around the event allows it to be identified as an alarming situation and of high risk for the victim people. But this social figure of the disaster is challenged by the target populations through the serenity with which they build up their resilience by finding strategies to face the disaster in the disaster itself. The risk here is not only the irregular presence of water and its damages, but the loss of different positions on the social space of life, which appears as the major risk.

As discussed, the neoclassical conception of risk is not called into question. Indeed, the work of U.

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[13]Mr Ginkô, head of household, resident of the Lamordé district and having participated in the process of care and assistance in the context of flooding, September 2015.

Beck (2008, p.335) on the risk society was inspired by the Chernobyl disaster that occurred on 26 April 1986 in Ukraine. This shows that he is interested in a wider range of risk. As S. Callens (2015, p. 2), U. Beck deals with industrial, scientific and natural risk. By defining risk as an anticipation of disaster, he understands it as an instrument for regulating post-industrial governance relations. The present study is situated in this perspective by insisting on taking into account the social conditions of production and management of hydrometeorological disasters. It evokes the preponderant place of the social and sociological risk of downgrading the heads of families in the family structure in the context of flooding as a major element in the management of the disaster.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an empirical study based on field experiences in the context of flooding in Niamey/Niger. It deals with the problem of risk in the context of a disaster from a questioning of the deconstruction and downgrading of the preferential position of the head of the family. It starts from the analysis of heads of household within their family entity in the context of flooding. Through the life experiences of the persons concerned in the commune 5 of Niamey/Niger, most of whom are placed in situations of vulnerability and assisted people, the heads of families are stripped of the privilege conferred by their status. The power and responsibility to set their family members in motion or not. In this period of precariousness, heads of household develop strategies for repositioning themselves in the family sphere. This involves reconstituting the means of subsistence by transforming the centre of the family into a strategic social space for rebuilding the identity and attributes of the head of the family. Everything works for these people as if the main concern is not only to deal with the material and physical damage that serves as a narrative for the institutions in charge of managing the disaster, but the fear of being downgraded in the family structure and beyond in the community. This implies, scientifically, pointing out the existence and preponderance of social and sociological risk in the objective analysis of risk. It no longer appears merely as an anticipation of modernity in the sense of U. Beck but also and above all as an integral part of it.

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