occasions for collective festivity in the residential areas of the city since the end of World War II. Weddings, in particular, have become increasingly important, while circumcision celebrations, which were traditionally considered to represent festivity *par excellence* and were celebrated at great expense all-nightlong, have become less significant.[3]

Wedding celebrations in Bamako are in principle open for everyone. There are no spatial, commercial, or social boundaries such as fences, entrance fees, or norms excluding noninvitees that restrict access to the situation. However, urban celebration culture is a heavily gendered framework which generally keeps males from participating. While the urban marriage ritual (*kònyò*), like ritual culture as a whole, is predominantly controlled by men (Brand 1995), the corresponding wedding celebrations have emerged as an almost exclusively female public domain. First, the festivities are organized by women, namely by the so-called honorary mothers (*denbaw*), who are recruited specifically for this purpose from among female relatives of the bride's mother,[4] with financial and other assistance from their kin, neighbors, and friends. Second, participation in celebrations, too, is mainly female. Almost no men attend, except for some professionals in the service industry, who I will deal with later.

A typical celebration attracts a gathering of one or two hundred and up to three hundred people (Fig. 1). Participants can be roughly classified into four categories according to their different connections to the social occasion: First, there are the *denbaw*, responsible for the situation and embodying the occasion,[5] and their close relatives. Second, the organizers personally invite several dozen or, depending mainly on financial resources, even hundreds of guests from among their kin, neighbors, friends, and professional colleagues. The third category consists of professionals who are engaged and paid for diverse performance and service activities such as instrumental music,[6] singing, and the video recording of the ceremony. Whereas most singers, like the organizers and guests, are female, drummers and filmmakers are exclusively male. The fourth category consists of participants without a direct connection to the social occasion. These are passersby and residents of the neighborhood, typically children and young women, who are spontaneously attracted by the music, the dancing, the splendid gowns, or the joyous crowd.

Celebrations usually take place in the open street just outside the family's compound. An awning and 50 to 150 small chairs are rented from specialized celebration outfitter microenterprises. The awning is put up across the street between roofs, trees, masts, or improvised pillars in order to shield the celebration or the better part of it, at least, from the sun. The chairs are put up neatly in a wide circle or rectangle some time before the event is ready to start. The participants take their seats or stand behind the row of chairs. Thus a basically circular spatial arrangement is set: The circle of participants, all looking inwards, outwardly bounds the gathering and internally structures interaction, as I will describe below.

This situation certainly is not prearranged as rigidly into regions which predispose the participants' positions, orientations, and action roles as is the case with audiences sitting in front of a stage at, for example, the Palais de la Culture or the Centre Culturel Français, where concerts, plays, and ballets are held in Bamako. However, the circular situation of celebrations, too, is clearly differentiated, as I will briefly describe.

The drummers usually show up first. When they sit down and put down their instruments, they define a front side within the circle where the central action and main focus will be. Aware of this, they estimate the reach of shadow of the awning and close buildings, because they need to protect themselves and their extremely sensitive goatskin drumheads from the sun all-daylong; they survey the ground in terms of evenness,

3 A survey in Bamako during 12 months in 1997/98 showed weddings to account for as much as 90% of professional drummers' engagements. This development might correspond, first, with the process of the marriage-based nuclear family beginning to succeed larger kin groups as the basic unit of social organization in urban colonial West Africa (Little 1970: 87), and, second, with the fact that various propagandistic campaigns by (para-)statal institutions against the conspicuous consumption of material resources at celebrations specifically addressed circumcision festivals in the late 1960s and 1970s.

4 *-w* marks the plural form of nouns in Bamanankan, the vernacular language of Bamako. *Denba* literally means "child-mother." In order to distinguish the role of *denbaw* in celebration culture from biological and classificatory mothers, who are also called *denbaw* in other social contexts, I borrow the term "honorary mother" from Modic (1996: 110).

5 Brides and bridegrooms, and those responsible for the marriage proper, i.e., male family heads and ritual and legal specialists, do not play any role, and indeed do not even show up at the celebrations.

6 In the following, I will focus on *jembe* drumming, which has been the most popular form of instrumental celebration music in Bamako since the 1960s.