the HEALTHY MOTHERHOOD JOURNAL

Practices, Prompts, and Support for Women

Inspired by Aoua Keita

BECOMING A MOTHER

Dear Mother-to-Be,

With heartfelt joy and a deep sense of purpose, I welcome you to this sacred space—a pregnancy journal born out of compassion and the desire to accompany you on the transformative journey of motherhood. My name is Aoua Keita, and as a midwife, I have had the honor of standing witness to the miracle of childbirth countless times. Today, I embark on a new voyage, not only as a guide through the labor of your bodies but also as a fellow traveler through the complexities of your heart and mind.

Within these pages, I aspire to weave a tapestry of shared experiences, hopes, and aspirations, binding us together as we navigate the challenges and triumphs of bringing new life into a world filled with uncertainties. In the embrace of our ancient land, where traditions intertwine with the winds of change, we will explore the essence of motherhood, embarking on a journey of empowerment, resilience, and sisterhood.

You hold the promise of a future generation, and it is with great humility that I take up the role of guardian to your dreams, fears, and joys. As we delve into the wonders of pregnancy, I hope to share with you the wisdom of generations past, while we seek to redefine the future for our daughters and sons.

Together, we shall celebrate the beauty of your growing belly, the rhythm of your heartbeats, and the strength of your spirit. We will also confront the challenges posed by a society still awakening to the power of women—women who, like you, long to be heard, cherished, and respected.

May this journal serve as a testament to your courage and resilience, capturing the essence of this extraordinary journey. In this unfolding chapter of your life, know that you are not alone—I am here, a midwife and a comrade, committed to witnessing your blossoming motherhood and fostering a bond that transcends time and place.

With hope and anticipation, Aoua Keita, Your Midwife

Week 1-8

- Placenta begins to form.
- The brain and spinal cord begin to form.
- The tissues that will form the heart begin to beat. The heartbeat can be detected with ultrasound at around 6 weeks of pregnancy.
- Buds for limbs, with paddle-like hands and feet, appear.
- The eyes, ears and nose begin to develop. Eyelids form but remain closed.
- The genitals begin to develop.
- By the end of the eighth week, all major organs and body systems have begun to develop.

Being a mother, as far as I can tell, is a constantly evolving process of adapting to the needs of your child while also changing and growing as a person in your own right.

What does “becoming a mother” mean to you?

Herbal Teas for Morning Sickness

Mint Tea:

Ingredients:

- Fresh mint leaves (a small handful, about 8-10 leaves) or 1-2 teaspoons of dried mint leaves
- Water (2 cups)
- Honey or sugar (optional, for sweetening)

Instructions:

1. In a teapot or a small saucepan, bring 2 cups of water to a boil.
2. Add the fresh mint leaves or dried mint leaves to the boiling water.
3. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and let the mint leaves steep in the water for about 5 minutes. If you prefer a stronger flavor, you can steep it for a bit longer.
4. After steeping, strain the tea to remove the mint leaves. You can pour the tea into teacups or mugs.
5. If desired, you can sweeten the tea with honey or sugar to taste.

Ginger Tea:

Ingredients:

- Fresh ginger root (about a 1-inch piece), thinly sliced or grated
- Water (2 cups)
- Honey or lemon (optional, for added flavor and sweetness)

Instructions:

1. In a saucepan, bring 2 cups of water to a boil.
2. Add the sliced or grated ginger to the boiling water.
3. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pan, and let the ginger steep in the water for about 10-15 minutes.
4. After steeping, strain the tea to remove the ginger pieces. Pour the tea into teacups or mugs.
5. If you like, you can add a teaspoon of honey or squeeze a little lemon juice into the tea for extra flavor and sweetness.

Remember, dear mother, that embracing relaxation during pregnancy is not a luxury but a necessity. Nurturing yourself and finding moments of tranquility will not only benefit you but also create an environment of love and serenity for your baby.

What do you need to make your home a welcoming place for you and your baby?

Motherhood is not just the labor of giving birth, but the art of nurturing hearts and minds. It is a sacred dance of love, patience, and resilience—a journey where we hold the dreams of generations within our embrace and set them free to soar beyond the horizon.

What dreams do you have for your little one?

In the fervor of our fight against imperialism, it is essential to remember the strength that lies within each of us, and the power of unity as we stand shoulder to shoulder. As we struggle together to create a Mali suitable for our children, I invite you to reflect on our shared mission of liberation.

How do you envision a free and sovereign Mali?

The West African country of Mali has been the home of a number of historic African empires, notably the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai empires. A center of knowledge and religious studies, for centuries scholars flocked to the city of Timbuktu to attend its vast network of universities or access the hundreds of thousands of books housed in its many libraries.

In the mid-to-late 19th century, European powers began a bloody competition for the conquest of African land known as The Scramble for Africa. France expanded inward from their extensive array of slave ports along the coast, including much of West Africa which they ruled as French West Africa. Mali was called French Sudan under the colonial regime.

In 1946, the French 4th Republic established a new constitution that gave African colonies the right to elect representatives to the National Assembly. That same year, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) was formed to represent West Africa. In French Sudan, the recently created Sudanese Bloc joined forces with RDA and changed their name to US-RDA. Despite having only one month to prepare for the elections, the RDA was able to win 10 seats in the National Assembly, 2 of which were won by US-RDA.

Pressure from independence movements in their African colonies led France to grant universal suffrage in 1957. 57 out of 70 of French Sudan's seats in the National Assembly went to the RDA.

In 1958, French Sudan voted to become an autonomous region within the newly created French Community, calling itself the Sudanese Republic. In January 1959, they united with Senegal to form the Mali Federation, declaring independence from France in June of that year. In August 1960, political differences between the major political parties of each country led to Senegal's withdrawal from the Mali Federation.

Mali declared its independence as the Republic of Mali on September 22, 1960.

Modibo Keita, leader of US-RDA, was elected president.
Unfortunately, independence in West Africa has not spelled the end of imperialist meddling in the region on the part of France and the United States. The two countries have used a large military presence in the region and the imperialist front group Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in order to maintain a grip on natural resources and political influence in the region.

In the years since independence, Mali has experienced several military coups, most recently in 2021. The interim government has taken a number of steps toward curbing imperialist influence in Mali, including expelling French troops from the country, leading to sanctions and UN condemnation.

In July 2023, Niger, Mali's neighbor to the east, experienced a military coup, the 7th coup in the region in the last three years. Deeming this one coup too many, the imperialist-backed ECOWAS has imposed sanctions on the country and is threatening military action if the former president is not reinstated. The interim governments of Mali and Burkina Faso have since issued a joint statement condemning the threat of military action, warning that it would be seen as a declaration of war.

The history of Mali is still being written, and the people of Mali should be the ones holding the pen.

We say: NO to sanctions, NO to military intervention, NO to imperialist interference in Mali or the rest of the African continent!

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

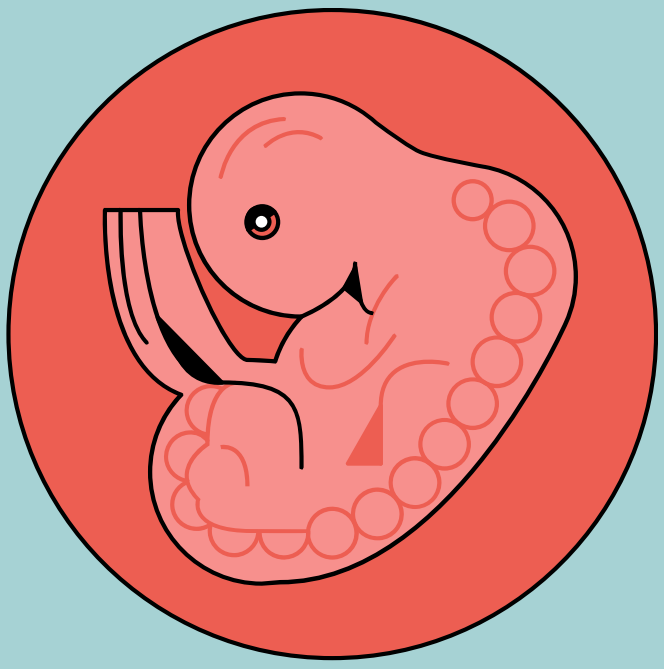
-Karl Marx

How has the history of Mali impacted the circumstances of your own life?

How will you teach your little one about the history of Mali?

Reflect on recent events in Mali and in West Africa as a whole. What are your hopes? What are your reservations? How do you think these changes might impact your child's future?

Week 9-12



- Buds for future teeth appear.
- Fingers and toes start to form. Soft nails begin to form.
- Bones and muscles begin to grow.
- The intestines begin to form.
- The backbone is soft and can flex.
- The skin is thin and transparent.
- The hands are more developed than the feet.
- The arms are longer than the legs.

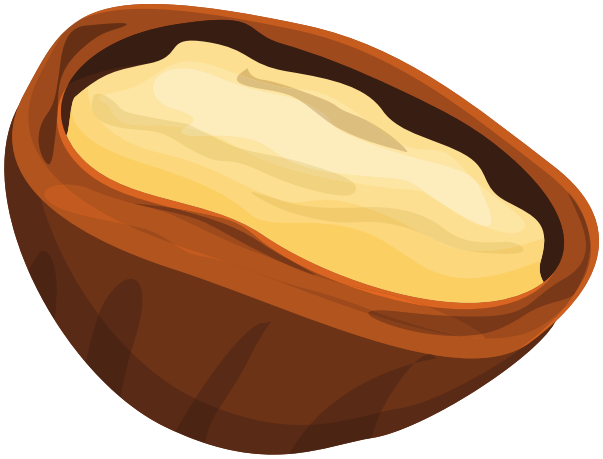
Shea Butter to Minimize Stretchmarks

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup of raw, unrefined shea butter
- 1/4 cup of coconut oil
- 1 tablespoon of jojoba oil (optional, for added moisture)
- 10-15 drops of lavender essential oil (optional, for a pleasant fragrance)

Instructions:

1. In a double boiler or a heat-safe bowl placed over a pot of simmering water, melt the shea butter and coconut oil together until they are completely liquefied.
2. If you're using jojoba oil, add it to the melted mixture and stir well to combine. Jojoba oil is known for its moisturizing properties and can further enhance the cream's benefits for the skin.
3. Once the mixture is well combined, remove it from the heat and let it cool for a few minutes.
4. If you're using lavender essential oil, add the drops to the mixture and stir again to incorporate the fragrance.
5. Transfer the mixture to a clean and sterile container, like a glass jar or a small container with a lid.
6. Allow the cream to solidify and cool completely at room temperature. You can speed up the process by placing it in the refrigerator for a short time.



To use the shea butter cream, simply apply a small amount to your belly and any other areas prone to stretch marks. Massage it gently into the skin using circular motions. Using the cream regularly can help keep your skin moisturized and supple, minimizing the appearance of stretch marks.

Remember that stretch marks are a natural part of pregnancy for many women, and while shea butter cream can help moisturize and nourish the skin, it may not completely prevent stretch marks. Embrace your body's natural changes during this beautiful journey of motherhood.

Your body is a vessel of strength and resilience, adapting to the incredible feat of nurturing new life. In every stretch mark, every curve, and every flutter of life within, there lies a story of courage and love. Embrace these changes with awe and gratitude, for they are a testament to the miracle you are embarking upon.

What practices or rituals help you connect with your body during pregnancy?

Dear mother, as you nurture life within you, may you also remember the importance of fanning the flame of women's rights and body autonomy. Together we carry forward the torch ignited by our predecessors, illuminating the path to a future where every woman's voice is heard, her choices respected, and her body honored as her own.

How can you advocate for yourself and the women of Mali?

Week 13-16

- Arms and legs can flex.
- External sex organs are formed.
- The outer ear begins to develop.
- The fetus can swallow and hear.
- The neck is formed.
- Kidneys are functioning and begin to produce urine.

Packing for Travel with Baby

As you prepare for the exciting arrival of your little one, let's take a moment to plan what essentials to pack in the diaper bag. This bag will become your trusty companion, holding all the necessities to care for your baby's needs while we are on the go.

Diapering Essentials:

- Diapers: Pack an ample supply of disposable or cloth diapers, depending on your preference.
- Wipes: Keep a travel-sized pack of baby wipes to keep your little one clean and fresh.
- Diaper Rash Cream: Carry a small tube of diaper rash cream to soothe any irritation.

Feeding Essentials:

- Bottles and Formula/Breastmilk: If you're bottle-feeding, pack enough pre-measured formula or expressed breastmilk for your outing.
- Burp Cloths: Bring a couple of soft, absorbent cloths to use during feeding times.

Comfort and Safety:

- Extra Outfits: Pack a few extra sets of onesies, baby socks, and a lightweight hat in case of spills or weather changes.
- Blanket: Include a soft, lightweight blanket to keep your baby cozy and comfortable.
- Nursing Cover: If you plan to breastfeed in public, consider bringing a nursing cover for added privacy.
- First Aid Kit: Include a mini first aid kit with essentials like band-aids, antiseptic wipes, and baby pain reliever.

For Mom: Don't forget to pack water and some nutritious snacks for yourself, especially if you're breastfeeding. You might also consider toting your identification card and money for emergencies. With the country and in fact the entire West African region in unrest, it is wise to be prepared. Let your diaper bag be a symbol of our preparedness and love for your baby and yourself.

Reflect on the support and love you received from family, friends, and your community. Who was there to greet you and your baby as you returned home? Who are the people in your life that share and support your vision for motherhood and life in a liberated Mali?

Imagine the first moments you will spend with your baby at home. Write about a special ritual or bonding activity that you would like to experience in the space below.

Week 17-20

- The sucking reflex develops. If the hand floats to the mouth, the baby may suck their thumb.
- The skin is wrinkled, and the body is covered with a waxy coating (vernix) and fine hair (lanugo).
- The baby is more active. You may be able to feel your baby move.
- The baby sleeps and wakes regularly.
- Nails grow to the tips of the fingers.
- The gallbladder begins producing bile, which is needed to digest nutrients.
- In females, the eggs have formed in the ovaries. In males, the testes have begun to descend.
- It may be possible to tell the sex of the fetus on an ultrasound exam.

How to Tie Your Bogolan Baby Wrap

- Choose the Right Wrap or Cloth:
- Use a long piece of sturdy fabric, often a traditional African baby wrap, a shawl, or a piece of fabric that is at least 5-6 meters long.
- Preparation:
- Before starting, fold the fabric in half widthwise to locate the center point. This will be placed at your baby's back.
- Place the Fabric:
- Hold the fabric horizontally and place the center point at your waist level, just below your navel. Allow the two ends of the fabric to hang over your shoulders.
- Secure the Fabric:
- Cross the fabric ends over your chest and bring them around to your back. The fabric should cross over your baby's future position.
- Seat Your Baby:
- Gently place your baby on your back, with their legs straddling the fabric and their back against your chest. Make sure your baby's head is supported by the fabric.
- Spread the Fabric:
- Use one hand to spread the fabric across your baby's back, ensuring it reaches from the base of their neck to their knees.
- Cross the Fabric:
- Cross the fabric ends over your baby's chest and bring them around to your front.
- Tie a Knot:
- Tie a secure double knot in front of you, creating a snug and supportive seat for your baby.
- Adjust and Secure:
- Gently adjust the fabric to make sure your baby is seated comfortably and their weight is evenly distributed. The fabric should support your baby's head, neck, and upper body.

- Check Baby's Position:
- Make sure your baby's face is visible, their airways are clear, and their head is supported against your chest or shoulder.
- Secure the Knot:
- If desired, you can secure the knot further by tucking the fabric ends under the fabric strands on your back.
- Practice and Comfort:
- Take a few steps to ensure both you and your baby are comfortable and secure. Practice walking and moving around to get used to the back carry.
- As you become more familiar with this method, you can adapt and adjust it to suit your baby's age, size, and your own comfort. It's a beautiful way to carry your baby while staying connected to traditional practices and promoting a close bond between you and your little one. Remember, safety and comfort are key, so always monitor your baby's well-being and adjust as needed.

The Mali mudcloth ia handmade Malian cotton fabric traditionally dyed with fermented mud. It has an important place in traditional Malian culture and has, more recently, become a symbol of Malian cultural identity. The cloth is being exported worldwide for use in fashion, fine art and decoration.

How does the tradition of using the bologan cloth for babywearing connect us to the wisdom of our ancestors? How do you envision carrying forward this tradition to honor those who came before us?

Mao says women hold up half the sky. It is true: women are so often asked to carry the world on their backs, yet without any say on how heavy that world might be. Women, mothers, comrades, let us hear each other's voices. In doing so, we strengthen our own.

What does solidarity mean to you?

"We seek to become free as the wind, and this freedom cannot be achieved without the participation of all the children of Sudan. Women being daughters of Sudan, just as men are sons, we will do our duty according to our modest means."

What role do you see yourself playing in the fight against colonial oppression and imperialism?

How do you hope to inspire your child to carry on the fight for freedom in Mali?

Week 21-24

- The baby may hiccup.
- The brain is rapidly developing.
- Tear ducts are developing.
- Finger and toe prints can be seen.
- The lungs are fully formed but not yet ready to function outside of the uterus.

Family Planning and Mother's Right to Choose

In Mali, access to birth control and family planning resources is important for promoting maternal and child health, empowering women, and ensuring that families can plan and space their pregnancies according to their preferences and needs. While I do not have access to real-time information, here are some organizations and resources that have historically been involved in providing birth control and family planning services in Mali:

- Association Malienne pour la Protection et la Promotion de la Famille (AMPPF): This Malian organization focuses on family planning, reproductive health, and maternal and child health. They offer services such as contraception counseling, family planning methods, and sexual health education.
- Réseau Afriques Jeunesse (RAJ): RAJ is a youth-led organization that promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights among young people in Mali. They provide information, education, and resources related to family planning and contraception.
- Marie Stopes Mali: Marie Stopes is an international organization that offers a range of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, contraception, and safe abortion services.
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): UNFPA works in Mali to improve access to family planning and reproductive health services. They collaborate with government agencies and local organizations to provide training, resources, and support.
- Public Health Centers and Hospitals: Public health centers and hospitals in Mali often provide family planning and reproductive health services, including contraceptive methods, counseling, and education.

- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Various NGOs in Mali may also be involved in promoting family planning and reproductive health. These organizations may offer resources, counseling, and services to individuals and communities.
- **Community Health Workers:** Trained community health workers play a vital role in delivering family planning information and services at the grassroots level. They provide education, distribute contraceptives, and offer counseling.
- **Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene (Ministère de la Santé et de l'Hygiène Publique):** The government of Mali, through its Ministry of Health, is involved in promoting family planning and reproductive health as part of its public health initiatives.

How can knowledge about family planning and birth control give you agency over your reproductive choices, even in a society where such discussions may be sensitive? Share your thoughts in the space below or with your trusted circle of loved ones and friends.

Consider the family you grew up in. Was it large or small? What size family do you desire? How does your upbringing influence your desired family size?

Describe your relationship with your partner. What are the highlights of that relationship? What supports and resources do you need to make the relationship even stronger?

It is not always easy for mothers to foresee the best path for their children, but our own past can be a guide. Reflect on how your childhood made you the person you are today. What helped nurture your growth? What didn't?

What lessons can you take from reflecting on your own childhood to help you as you guide your child through their young life?

Week 25-28

- The eyes can open and close and sense changes in light.
- The baby kicks and stretches.
- The baby can make grasping motions and responds to sound.
- Lung cells begin to make a substance that will enable breathing.

Healthy Foods For Baby

A healthy natural baby diet in Mali, as in many other places, focuses on providing nutrient-rich, locally available foods that promote the baby's growth and development. It's important to introduce a variety of foods to meet the baby's nutritional needs. Keep in mind that breastfeeding or formula feeding is crucial in the early months, and solid foods are gradually introduced as the baby grows. Here are some tips and ideas for a healthy natural baby diet in Mali:

Breastfeeding or Formula Feeding (0-6 months):

- Breast milk or formula should be the primary source of nutrition for babies under six months.
- Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months of life.
- If formula feeding, choose a formula that is appropriate for the baby's age and nutritional needs.

Introducing Solid Foods (6 months and beyond):

- Consult a healthcare provider before introducing solid foods to ensure the baby is ready.
- Start with single-ingredient, easily digestible foods such as rice cereal, cooked and mashed sweet potatoes, or mashed bananas.
- Gradually introduce a variety of foods, one at a time, and wait a few days before introducing a new food to watch for any allergic reactions.
- Use locally available fruits and vegetables, such as mangoes, papayas, bananas, carrots, and leafy greens.
- Incorporate protein-rich foods like well-cooked lentils, beans, groundnuts (peanuts), and fish (if appropriate).
- Include iron-rich foods like lean meats, fish, and iron-fortified cereals.
- Offer small, soft, and finely chopped pieces of food to encourage self-feeding as the baby becomes more skilled.

General Tips:

- Wash hands thoroughly before preparing or handling baby's food.
- Prepare and store food in a clean and safe environment to avoid contamination.
- Avoid adding salt, sugar, or spices to the baby's food. Babies have delicate taste buds and don't need added flavors.
- Use clean, safe water for cooking and preparing food.
- Continue breastfeeding or formula feeding alongside solid foods to ensure adequate nutrition and hydration.

Sample Meals:

1. Breakfast: Cooked oatmeal or rice cereal mixed with breast milk or formula, mashed banana or mango.
2. Lunch: Mashed sweet potatoes, well-cooked lentils, and finely chopped leafy greens.
3. Dinner: Soft-cooked rice, boiled carrots, and small pieces of cooked fish.
4. Snacks: Small pieces of ripe fruit (e.g., papaya, avocado), plain yogurt, or unsalted crackers.

Describe the emotions and thoughts that welled up within you as you witnessed your baby's first encounter with solid foods. How did it feel to witness their expressions of curiosity and perhaps, surprise? What was the first food you introduced, and how did your baby react?

Reflect on the daily routines and rituals that have emerged during your mealtime journey. How do you prepare yourself and your baby for these special moments? Are there any songs, stories, or gestures that have become a part of your mealtime routine?

"This courage which inflames you has been inoculated in you by the blood of your fathers and the milk of your mothers. So we elders are not afraid of anything either. Only, because of our age and our experience, we are required to give you advice of wisdom, advice of prudence."

What sort of advice were you given as a child?
What advice do you wish you'd been given?

Week 28-32

- With its major development finished, the baby gains weight very quickly.
- Bones harden, but the skull remains soft and flexible for delivery.
- The different regions of the brain continue to form.
- Hair on the head starts to grow and the fine hair (lanugo) begins to disappear.

As you prepare to welcome your baby, how has the nesting instinct kicked in? What physical and emotional changes are you making to create a nurturing and welcoming space for your child?

Reflect on the evolving relationship between your and your baby. How do you feel their movements, kicks, and hiccups? What emotions arise when you think about holding them in my arms for the first time?

Explore the mix of emotions as you approach motherhood. What excites you the most? What fears or concerns do you have, and how are you addressing them?

Week 33-36

- The baby usually turns into a head-down position for birth.
- The brain continues to develop.
- The skin is less wrinkled.
- The lungs are maturing and getting ready to work outside of the uterus.
- Sleeping patterns develop.

Traditional Naming Rituals and Ceremonies

An African baby naming ceremony, also known as a naming ritual or naming ceremony, is a culturally significant event that celebrates the birth of a new child and bestows a meaningful name upon the baby. These ceremonies vary across different African cultures, each with its own customs, traditions, and rituals. While I cannot cover the specifics of every African culture, I can provide a general overview of what an African baby naming ceremony might involve:

- Gathering of Family and Community: The ceremony often brings together extended family members, friends, and members of the community to celebrate the new addition to the family.
- Choosing a Name: The naming ceremony is an opportunity to choose a name for the baby that carries significance and meaning. The name might reflect family lineage, the circumstances of the birth, or the family's hopes and aspirations for the child.
- Elders and Ancestral Blessings: Elders within the community or family may play a prominent role in the ceremony. They might offer blessings, prayers, or words of wisdom for the baby's future.
- Rituals and Traditions: Different cultural rituals may be performed during the ceremony, such as pouring of libations, lighting of candles, or tying of symbolic items. These rituals often connect the baby to the ancestral lineage and offer protection and blessings.
- Cultural Performances: Music, dance, and storytelling are common elements of African celebrations. They infuse the ceremony with a sense of joy, cultural identity, and unity.

- Feasting and Sharing: A festive meal is often shared with guests. Food holds cultural significance and brings people together to celebrate and bond.
- Gift-Giving: Gifts may be presented to the baby and the parents as a gesture of goodwill and support for the new family member.
- Community Blessings: The naming ceremony serves as an opportunity for the community to collectively bless the baby and offer their well wishes for a healthy and prosperous life.
- Symbolic Items: Items with cultural or spiritual significance, such as traditional clothing, beads, or jewelry, may be gifted to the baby. These items may be worn or kept as treasured heirlooms.
- Future Hopes and Aspirations: Parents and family members may share their hopes and aspirations for the baby's future, reflecting on the qualities they wish for the child to embody.

Reflect on the significance of ancestral lineage and the role it plays in choosing a name. How do you connect with the stories, values, and wisdom passed down through generations? What aspects of your family's history do you hope to honor through your baby's name?

Consider the meanings and symbolism behind different names that resonate with you. How do these meanings align with the qualities and aspirations you have for your baby's future? How does the name reflect the unique journey your baby is embarking upon?

A note on childbirth customs in Mali

Excerpt from Auoa Keita's autobiography

During my time as a midwife in Nara, I had the opportunity to realize the fundamental difference that existed and still exists between the customs and mores of the multiple ethnic groups in my country. Our Sarakolée sisters were almost abandoned at the very moment when women needed consolation. They came to the maternity ward under the guidance of a relative experienced in the matter. Their husbands came to see them after the deliverance. Better still, I had the opportunity to see some of them, who came to hear from their companions and children, flee as soon as a woman in labor arrived.

Certain Bambaras of the former Coton canton, true bearers of the occult sciences, covered with amulets, never set foot in the maternity ward. It was claimed that seeing a woman in labor or a baby with the first hair was a cause of misfortune for the mother and death for the child. So, as soon as their wives first suffered, they would go to the bush and only come back after giving birth, shaving and burying their hair in the ground. The same phenomenon occurred among the Moors, but not for the same reasons. Some spouses of this ethnic group, fearing the violence of their companions “in labor”, left the camps as soon as the pregnancy was over, only to return after the delivery. Parents or carers always took care to warn the lucky fugitives.

The Sonrais, Bambara, Ouolof, Malinkee, Kassonkee, Serer, Samoko, Peulh, Diola, Sarakolée and Bobo women have all had the same behavior in the face of labor pains, with a few rare exceptions. All these women bore the pain caused by uterine contractions admirably. Very often, we noticed the onset of labor in these women, either by the contraction of the muscles of the face, or by the perspiration which became abundant at the time of the uterine contractions, or by abnormal agitation or even by the slow and noticeably heavy gait in those who were still moving. I say those who moved, because others avoided walking in front of people, all in order to give birth in silence and discretion. Without sustained vigilance from the midwife, this category of women gave birth without anyone knowing. Also, the parents said with pride that the midwife had been awakened only by the cries of the child, even if the latter was not asleep.

Why did these women act and still act thus ?

It is because of the instructions received from the families who made it a point of honor. To preserve this honor without blemish, young women received training accordingly, from the first months of pregnancy. Aunts and other relatives provided this training. They did it with care and persistence, illustrating it with examples of all kinds.

So, to prevent dishonor from falling on the family, each aunt, each more or less distant relative, each friend of the family, strove to make the woman believe that all cries and lamentations were banished by the society. Thus educated, all the women of our African countries made it and still make it their duty and a point of honor to give birth without major external events.

It cannot be said enough that the vast Sudan was and is populated by a population of several ethnic groups, with different customs and mores. While for some ethnic groups, foreseeing the arrival of a child and preparing accordingly was sacrilege, for others, this forecasting and this preparation were considered a necessity.

This is how the Bambara, Malinke and other women, whom I have approached the most, without being able to prepare European-style layettes, remained neither inactive nor carefree in the face of the happy event of a birth in the family. This is why, from the end of the eighth month, they took their precautions, and of course, with the greatest discretion.

During each wash, the old clothes that could no longer be used were carefully washed, well folded and put in fairly flat bundles on which to sit for several days. Before the end of the pregnancy, these old fabrics became smooth as if they had been ironed. The finer ones were destined. to the child's crib, while the rough, especially dark, served as a garnish for the mother.

Manners and customs were very different depending on the diversity of Sudanese ethnic groups. While Bambara, Malinke and Dioula women were preparing for this new event that constitutes a birth in the family, their Sonrai, Arma and Tuareg sisters avoided the slightest preparation. For the latter who were very religious, the increase of the family being a phenomenon for which God alone is responsible, it would be contraindicated to undertake anything to receive it. It was thought that the slightest act undertaken in this direction or even the fact of thinking about it, could attract divine wrath on the family, the death of the child, that of the mother or both, or even permanent misery. in the family.

Other differences: in Bambara and Malinke circles, we insisted and we still insist on the first washing of the newborn. The boys were soaped three times and rinsed as much. The girls were four times over, because, it was said, a child whose first baths were badly made, would have an unpleasant odor all his life.

Describe customs around childbirth within your culture. What are their origins? What is their purpose? Do you plan to practice these customs as you prepare to deliver your child?

How are you prioritizing self-care during these final weeks? What activities or practices help you feel grounded, relaxed, and nurtured as you prepare for labor and motherhood?

Week 37-40

- The baby drops lower into the pelvis.
- More fat accumulates, especially around the elbows, knees and shoulders.
- The baby gains about half a pound per week during this last month of pregnancy.

Important Documents for Baby and Mother

How to Get a Birth Certificate for Your Baby:

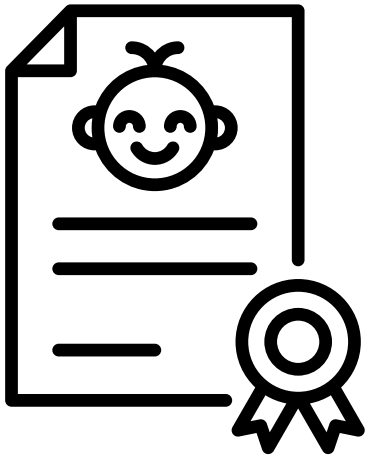
1. **Hospital or Clinic Registration:** After the birth of a baby, parents should register the birth at the hospital or health center where the delivery took place. The medical staff will provide a certificate of birth notification.
2. **Visit the Local Civil Registry Office (Mairie):** Within a certain timeframe (usually within a few weeks of the birth), parents should visit the local civil registry office (mairie) or relevant administrative office to officially register the birth. This involves submitting the birth notification certificate provided by the hospital, along with required documents.
3. **Required Documents:** The exact documents required may vary, but typically you will need to provide:
   - Birth notification certificate from the hospital or health center.
   - Identity documents of both parents (such as national ID cards, passports, or residence permits).
   - Marriage certificate of the parents (if applicable).
   - Witnesses (witnesses are usually required, and their identity documents may also be needed).
4. **Provide Information:** During the visit, you'll need to provide information such as the baby's name, date of birth, parents' names, and other relevant details.
5. **Fees:** There may be fees associated with obtaining a birth certificate. Be prepared to pay any applicable charges.
6. **Process Completion:** Once you've submitted all the required documents and information, the civil registry office will process your application. If everything is in order, they will issue a birth certificate for your baby.
7. **Obtaining the Birth Certificate:** You will need to collect the birth certificate from the civil registry office. Make sure to inquire about the timeline for processing and collection during your visit.

How to Get a National ID

Go to the Identity Card Section of your local police station, gendarmerie, or sub-prefecture. The officer in charge records the following information about you:

- fingerprint card
- height
- complete address (street, number), name of landlord as the case may be.

The identity card template is filled out by the officer who affixes your photograph and sends it to the Chief of the Section.
The Chief of the section verifies the information on the template, records it and sends it to the Chief of Police for his approval and signature, and returns it to the Identity Card Section where it is laminated and given to the applicant.



What to Bring to the Office

- 3 identification photographs
- the identity card that is about to expire (or a copy of the birth certificate excerpt, family booklet, marriage certificate, or the applicant may bring 2 witnesses known to the neighborhood, along with their valid identification documents)
- fiscal stamps (500 + 200 CFA francs) [approximately $CDN1.10 + $CDN0.10]
- Legal fees:
- 1,000 CFA [approximately $CDN2.20] when picking up the card, along with a receipt.

Delay necessary to obtain the card: 24 hours

How to Register to Vote

1. Visit the Local Administrative Office: Begin by visiting the local administrative office, often known as the Commune, in your area. This is where voter registration takes place.
2. Complete Voter Registration Form: Obtain a voter registration form from the Commune. Fill out the form with accurate and complete information.
3. Provide Required Documents: Prepare the necessary documents, which may include:
   - National ID card or other proof of citizenship.
   - Proof of residence, such as a utility bill or residence certificate.
4. Submit Application: Submit your completed voter registration form and required documents to the Commune. The staff will review your application and documents.
5. Verification and Processing: The authorities will verify your information and eligibility. Once your application is approved, your details will be added to the voter roll.
6. Issuance of Voter Card: If your registration is successful, you will be issued a voter card. This card confirms your voter registration and provides information about your polling station.

In the midst of Mali's courageous stride to assert its identity and reclaim its voice by ousting French as the official language, you are now contemplating the name you will bestow upon our baby. This act of naming is a profound declaration of our child's individuality and connection to your culture and heritage.

What legacy do you hope to pass on to your baby through the name you choose?

In what ways does language connect us to our roots and heritage? How can the name you select for your baby honor your linguistic heritage and the many languages spoken in Mali?

The name Aoua Keita is a reflection of a family history. Aoua was my maternal grandmother's name. Those who share the surname Keita carry with them the lineage of Sundiata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire.

Are there names or naming traditions that have been passed down through your family? How might these names reflect your family history, and how might you share this history with your child?

Dear mother, you are nearly there! It has been a joy to be with you through this journey, to share in your reflections of the past and hopes for the future. While the hardest work may be yet to come, do not fear: there are few joys as great as that of guiding a child through the world.

What has the journey of pregnancy taught you about yourself?

Use this page to share and reflect on anything else that may be on your mind in these final days of pregnancy.

Aoua Keita was a remarkable figure in Mali's history and made significant contributions to the advancement of women's rights, education, and political activism. Here are some of the key things Aoua Keita did during her lifetime:

1. **Midwifery and Healthcare:** Aoua Keita was a skilled midwife, providing essential maternal and healthcare services to women in Mali. Her expertise in midwifery allowed her to support expectant mothers during pregnancy, assist with childbirth, and provide postnatal care.
2. **Women's Rights Advocacy:** Aoua Keita was a passionate advocate for women's rights and gender equality. She played a key role in organizing and mobilizing women in Mali, encouraging them to be politically engaged and participate in decision-making processes.
3. **Co-Founding the Union of Sudanese Women (USF):** Aoua Keita was one of the co-founders of the Union of Sudanese Women, an organization focused on advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality. The USF became an influential force in advocating for women's education, political participation, and social and economic empowerment.
4. **Political Activism:** Aoua Keita was an active participant in the political landscape of Mali during the 1950s and beyond. She was a member of the Sudanese Union – African Democratic Rally (US-RDA), a political party that fought for the country's independence from French colonial rule. She held leadership positions in the party, and her activism helped amplify the voices of women in the struggle for self-determination and sovereignty.
5. **Championing Birth Control and Family Planning:** Aoua Keita was a vocal advocate for birth control and family planning methods, promoting their use as a means for women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and family size.
6. **Education and Literacy:** Aoua Keita recognized the importance of education in empowering women and fostering societal progress. She worked tirelessly to promote women's education and literacy, aiming to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to be active participants in their communities and the nation's development.
7. **Inspiring Future Generations:** Aoua Keita's dedication to women's rights and political activism inspired future generations of women in Mali and beyond. Her legacy continues to be a beacon of empowerment and social change, encouraging women to stand up for their rights and contribute to their communities and nation.

Aoua Keita's commitment to midwifery, women's rights, and political activism left a lasting impact on Mali and the broader African continent. Her tireless efforts and leadership have paved the way for greater gender equality, improved healthcare for women, and increased women's political participation in Mali. Her work continues to be celebrated and serves as an inspiration for those advocating for social justice and empowerment worldwide.