Meeting 2: “Ten years after the fire” and chapters 10 to 19

Songs of Dust and Water, by M.J. Hydara. This meeting covers pages 81 to 150. Each question gives the pages it is about.

1. On the walk home, Fatou teases Kadiatou that asking to see the machine work is “yes with its sandals still on”. What sort of friends are these two? (pages 89 to 90)
2. When the test machine overheats, Bakary, the master weaver, has it covered in wet jute, the way the women cool their dye pots. Water from the old well saves it. How is that different from the day in Madina when Aisha brought a box of sisal, charcoal and woven grass to filter the plant’s air? (pages 93 to 95)
3. Ousman, an elder who has farmed all his life, asks Dr Arramata to teach him in front of everyone. He waits until they are alone to tell her, “The water is yours. The soil is ours.” Why does he say that only when they are alone? (page 105)
4. Isatou, head of the women’s kafo, wants the ledger to record the women’s cooking for the road crews, in millet, oil, water and hours. What is she afraid will be lost if it isn’t written down? (page 111)
5. Demba, a young road-builder, joins the night watch with his father’s machete at his side, angry at whoever has been wrecking the road. When two new guards chase a figure into the dark, he is at the next post and could have called them back. What does he learn about himself? (pages 121 to 122)
6. Mamadou wants a new rule to bind everyone, himself most of all: no large sum can leave the village fund without three signatures. That way the rule can say no for him. Is there a rule you would want your friends to hold you to? (pages 126 to 127)
7. A supplier Fatou has traded with for twenty years has overcharged the mill. She makes him pay back the difference, and he never speaks to her again. That evening she goes to sit with Kadiatou, though the two have not sat together since they took opposite sides in committee. What passes between them? (pages 141 to 142)
8. Ousman sees his son’s family off on the bus. When his son puts the sleeping baby in his arms, Ousman takes care that his fingers never touch her. There is still earth in the cracks of his hands. Why do you think he holds her like that? (page 147)