

Masculinities in conflict in Casamance

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Abstract

This paper proposes an engendered picture of one of the oldest low intensity conflicts in Africa, the conflict in Casamance. Reflecting on how gender affects the conflict and how gender has been affected by the conflict this paper search for opportunities to be explored for current peace initiatives that focus on the combatants.

Introduction

The conflict in Casamance, Senegal, is one of the oldest low intensity conflicts in the continent. Atika, the armed wing of the MFDC, Movement of democratic forces of Casamance, claims the independence of this territory between the Gambia and Guinea Bissau. After several contradictions, internal and external conflicts its forces fragmented¹. Today one of the main wings of Atika is based in the Guinea Bissau border under commandment of Cesar Atout Badiate, a Christian / Animist Diola from Oussouye district. The other, based in the Gambia border, is under the commandment of Salif Sadio, Muslim Diola from the Fogany zone. Both are reliant of external direct or indirect support, the one from Bissau allegiances, and the second from Banjul loyalties.

President Abdoulaye Wade administration from 2000 to 2012 failed to install a definitive peace process. The Peace agreement signed in 2004 only permitted to comply with donor exigencies in order to get funding for development and reconstruction (Marut). Combats between independentist and Senegalese troops kept

¹ In 2006 the Guinean army engaged several "clean up" military operations close to the border resulting in the defeat of Salif Sadio, one of MFDC-Atika commanders who escaped capture under intense fighting through the Senegalese lines and arrived to the Gambian border. The tacit support of the moderate MFDC-Atika wing under commandment of Cesar Atout Badiate consolidated their internal discrepancy. In 2009 during the failure of the attack to Ziguinchor, the main Casamancese city, by Cesar A. Badiate a new group separated under commandment of Niantang. Since then the conflict has entered in a relatively lower intensity phase

on. After Wades defeat, the new administration of President Macky Sall (April 2012) opened room for international negotiations as an alternative of considering the question as a domestic problem, and sat up a major procedural improvement to assemble a definite peace process.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how gender has been affected by this conflict and to search for opportunities to be explored for current peace initiatives. We are not pretending to study the conflict as such in its protracted dimensions (Pugh), but proposing a focus in topics related to the combatants, that is, the armed movement. Scholar's discussions if the Casamancese independent political movement is historically an ethnic movement, where Diola people play a centered role, or not are copious. We are not entering in this discussion, but we are considering the fact that the Casamancese MFDC Atika armed forces belong in its majority to the Diola groups.

The first part of the paper will interrogate about patriarchy in Diola culture. Albeit we are aware of the specificities of other Diola groups, we will consider here that there is a major strong cultural break between the Animist and Christian Diola, whose majority are in the left side of the river: that is, the Floup (Oussouye), Diamat (Youtou, Effoc), Dyiwat (Djembereng), Her (Kabrousse), Brin (Bandial) and Karone, and the Muslim Diola, that is, the Diola Fogny² whose majority is particularly influenced by the Mandingo cultural colonization during the end of the XIX siècle of the right side of the river Casamance. Although there is room for discussion in this topic we here consider that Christians Diola are culturally closer to Aninimists and share their same space. Generally speaking Cesar Atout Badiate MFDC-Atika wing is leaded by a majority of people belonging to the first group, while Salif Sadio MFDC-Atika wing is identified with the second group.

The particular role of women in the Diola Animist environment will be one of our center of interest as well as how this role is different within the Diola that have received the Mandingo and Islam's cultural influence. We will analyze how men's power over women is expressed in two arenas: public patriarchy, or every thing

² Following Louis Vincent Thomas, *Les diola, Essai d'analyse fonctionnelle sur une population de basse casamance*, IFAN Dakar 1958

“referring to the institutional arrangements of a society, the predominance of males in all power positions within the economy and polity”, and domestic patriarchy referring *“to the emotional and familial arrangements in a society, the ways in which men’s power in the public arena is reproduced at the level of private life”*³. At the same time, we will have a particular interest about how women relate to land heritage and property. Besides we will think about masculinities in Casamance, trying as well to differentiate between both cultural spaces exploring in both cases the model of masculinity against which each man measures himself.

We will then analyze how gender has been influenced by the conflict and particularly the impact of conflict on men and masculinities. We will focus on combatants, men affected by poverty as a result of the conflict, youth unemployment, the phenomenon of the new young combatants and the effects of disempowerment. We will analyze as well the role of women in the conflict. Under this chapter we will study how women have engaged in peace building and also why they have not reached the confidence of combatants.

By splitting the two identified main cultural realities we expect to find different masculinities. We will then identify hypotheses of action and opportunities to be explored for peace initiatives.

Patriarchy and masculinities in the Diola of Casamance

The everyday living of the Animist Diola is embedded in culture and tradition. Traditional Diola society is patriarchal: filiation is masculine, that is, children take their fathers name who is the chief of the family, but the type of family life is strongly maternal. Until our days the mother’s brother, the mother and the sister’s son constitute the main triangle of the Diola society, being the mother the central element (Ki Zerbo). The *Asampul*, that is, all men from the mother’s family, have significant missions like supervising children education, building the coffin in case of death, digging the grave, carry the cadaver for interrogation and bury (Thomas). Finally

³ Kimmel Michael, *Global Masculinities: Restoration and Resistance, Gender Policy Review*

Diola women, who keep the fathers name, have more authority in their role as sister and mother than in their role as wife.

Even if their position is significant, Diola women do not participate in the transmission of the land, which is the first resource of the group. Women don't have big responsibilities in the management and transmission of the resources of its parental original group. Nevertheless they will ever be linked to their original family. When married, they bring with them their labor force, particularly the capacity of planting rice and in many cases they are in charge of the management and protection of the household granaries. In one of the Animist Diola groups, the Bandial, women receive a part of their parents rice fields. Women are considered as linked to the land, the rice fields, where in collective working journeys men labor and women plant.

In case of divorce Diola women can always turn back home if they don't want to rest in their husband family. Widows can reside on their husbands family: one of the husbands brother, the one she will choose, will take care of her. In any case they can decide to turn back home to her parental family.

Diola women, due to her particular functions linked to the land, are placed in a paradox situation of autonomy / dependence from her parental family and her husband family. Without participating to the sharing and transmission of the rice fields, they actively contribute to the prosperity of their husband lineage. In a global societal perspective they have a concrete economic and juridical role in terms of land management (Ki Zerbo). Furthermore Diola women possess powerful shrines, faired and respected by all men, this representing as well a significant dimension of their particular position. Their maternal role being as well culturally emphasized, Diola women have a relatively high degree of personal, social and economic autonomy.

This whole picture shows a societal environment characterized by solidarity and certain horizontality, where the role manifests the status through functions that are complementary in the community.

Mandinga peoples invaded the Diola Fogny, situated between the Gambia border and the Casamance River, during difficult wars resulting in Islamisation. In Fogny villages, following Hesselin, “Islam hasn’t offered a new society model “complete enough”, coherent and efficient to substitute the ancient social and related to land tenure structures”⁴. The result is a complex system where the traditional mechanisms are contested and conflicts arise with frequency. This new system, embedded on Islamisation, has particularly affected the traditional women position, resulting in improved insecurity, less shared labor responsibilities and a stronger patriarchy. An important change experienced by mandingised Diola is a progressive hierarchisation of the society. Inequalities are stronger between elders and young’s, chiefs and clients, and also between original families and immigrants (Hesseling). This had inevitable consequences related to domestic patriarchy.

In the Animist theater masculinities are manifested in collective demonstrations like agriculture works during the rice labor, organized by age generations groups. Strength and talent are demonstrated in the yearly wrest competitions between villages as well as during the traditional *Ekonkon* dancing’s preceding and announcing them. The religious initiation of young men, the *bukut* and *kahat*, two similar but opposed customary rules, are as well needed stages. Those important moments are determinant for the affirmation of Diola masculinity and identity; they are always lived as events of participation and contribution in the group.

The Diola Fogny experience of young men has not the same collective background of agricultural labor. Furthermore some of the traditional ceremonies and events have disappeared, like the wrestling or the *bukut*, other remain but its sense has been strongly transformed by Islam influences. Diola Fogny masculinity is much more embedded of modernity, this meaning, been manifested in stronger individuality.

Both environments nurture the maquis. Combatants of different origins are mixed within both wings; they share their similarities, and are confronted with their contradictions.

⁴ HESSELING Gerti, La terre, à qui est-elle ? Les pratiques foncières en Basse-Casamance, *Comprendre la Casamance*

Men and masculinities in conflict in Casamance

Combatants are absent head of families. Their women had to lead the family and take care of the field works. Depending the degree of collectivization of the village, their sons, the men in the husband family and the village itself will take care of the household rice fields. Indeed, Fogny women will probably experiment stronger difficulties. Women being mother and father of the family at the same time this bring strong frustrations and anxiety to their combatant husbands and imply more charges resulting in enhanced poverty in their brothers and relatives. The more the women take responsibility the more the position of men is challenged.

Other damaging impact of the conflict is consequence of the absence of the father as protector. The family is vulnerable to bandits and girls are more vulnerable to sexual aggression or offence, particularly from military elements. As a result of wanted and non-wanted intercourse with soldiers affected in Casamancese villages, the number of under-aged mothers have increased, this being source of frustration and disturbance for number of families⁵.

As a consequence of the conflict, for young Diola men to be able to marry, found a family and become social adult after having being initiated in *bukut* or *kahat* is becoming a huge challenge. They face the scarcity of economic opportunities and unemployment. The image of a prosper Senegal enhances their sensation of exclusion. The difficulties for school attendance have improved during the conflict resulting in significant failures in secondary school. This painful situation has promoted migration and also encouraged engagement in the maquis.

However for Casamancese young men migration to Dakar is challenged by two major inconvenients: on the one hand, they are called rebels and are stereotyped there, on the other hand, they are confronted to the fact that Casamancese women are much more adapted to the labor market than themselves. As a consequence of their known honesty and dedication Diola women are preferred as house staff by medium class

⁵ World Bank, *Gender and conflict in the Casamance Analytical Report*

Senegalese and expatriates families in Dakar. On the contrary young Diola men in Dakar are confronted to economic exploitation or unemployment, and consequently, to be supported by their sisters.

Consequently one of the alternatives is illegal migration to Europe through adventurer boats to the Canary Islands, or through the desert to Libya. Other alternative, finally the most sensate, is to be engaged by the MFDC Atika. This implies to adopt a severe way of life in the barracks of the liberated forests, and to employ the capabilities acquired in the villages since children-hood, abilities that are based in the traditional heritage. As a result young Casamancese men persist at risk of engaging in violent conflict. Incredibly or not number of young men join the combatants –themselves disempowered- as their only way to reveal against disempowerment and frustration. These new recruited men belong to a different generation; a much more globalised one. The thirty-year-old maquis is then confronted to a clash of generations. Following our interviewees, discipline and resignation within the new recruited seem to be lost values, and difficult to inculcate.

We have found some of the cleavage of the two main Diola environments we have presented in the leadership styles of the two main big wings of the Casamancese maquis. Salif Sadio is a strong leader, known by his violence and cruelty, having severely executed several of his men. Bearer of a strong education he has a clear discourse, and a penchant to use his personal charm in media interventions⁶. He acts as a star, a vedette, a visible uniqueness able to eliminate any adversary by all means. In his maquis his leadership is unquestionable, he is on the top of a hierarchic military scale.

Cesar Atout Badiate stile is quite different. He is a commandant of commandants, a speaker who doesn't decide without appealing their men in conference. His decisions seem to be taken in joint meetings. He is not eloquent, he has not the ability of facing the media; he is a soldier. Cesar Atout Badiate has his own political wing in charge of relationships and declarations remaining in the maquis. His management style seems

⁶ From Sud FM Ziguinchor media during the release of Senegalese military hostages in 2012

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