

Masculinities in conflict in Casamance

By Tomas Serna Salichs

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 Bandal, 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, Fogy 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

to imitate the traditional collective way stressing in complementarities and horizontality. He states what has been stated.

Both personalities translate different masculinities, that is, different ways against which each measures himself as a man in the maquis.

Women and the conflict in Casamance

Women are in the origin of the Casamancese conflict. The violent and counterproductive repression by Senegalese authorities of a pacific women's protest march in 1982 in Ziguinchor points the beginning of the armed struggle. Women were attacked, elders mistreated and holy places invaded. In Diola culture neither women nor children shall be harmed. This explains the immediate organization of the violent reaction. Women have been since then involved in the armed struggle, providing moral support to combatants and performing quite a lot of tasks from logistics to rituals, but never as combatants. Diola women social position allows them to participate in family decisions whether or not to support one or other side in the conflict. This has contributed to the fact that combatants remain socially attached.

Women and children are the main victims of the conflict. Women remain responsible of their household. If they are the new head of the family they have to take care of the field works. As relatives, they have to receive their refugees and displaced parents in their homes. Scarcity of economic resources has unavoidable impact in children scholarisation.

Diola Animist women, who manage the household granaries and participate in family decisions, acquired a new empowered dimension when affected by the conflict. Faced to the same challenges, receiving their refugees and displaced relatives, the Fogny society reacted with different elements, it motivated enhanced polygamy and consequently, disempowered women.

Casamance has an important problem of mines and women and children are the most common victims. Recent misunderstandings between Senegalese officials and the Cesar Atout Badiate wing during negotiations for demining resulted in the capture by

the combatants of twelve civilian operators of a demining enterprise. Three women⁷ from twelve hostages operators were promptly released. Women shall not be harmed, so they were considered separately during the discussions that led the release of the other nine operators. During what has been called the crisis of the hostages of Casamance⁸, seven elder women -between them some priests- were designated to mediate in the release. This recent event clearly showed that being considered life-givers and sisters / mothers / daughters referring the *Asampul* law, Diola women are culturally placed to play a decisive role in mediation for peace.

Civil society women's organizations have been strongly promoted and fuelled in Senegal. In Casamance they have become influent stakeholders, including in a political level (Foucher). Women organizations like *Usoforal*, *Kabonketoor* and their umbrella organization the *Platform of the Women of Casamance* have got an important weight resulting in strong activism for peace building initiatives. Their campaigns have reached the attention of political leaders. President Sall entitled explicitly the Casamance civil society and in particular the women's organization to engage themselves in peace building (Mane).

But women's organizations, plenty of legitimacy and capacity, haven't been able to explicitly contribute to an agreement or to a cease-fire till now. In fact their activities have integrated the post 2004 agreement NGOs peace building agenda, stressing on community development, ignoring any political program and not being able of working to promote direct dialogue with combatants. Several scholars highlight that the current local peace-building agenda in Casamance is accountable of the peace process impasse (Marut). The Peace building "package" in Casamance has been imported and forced, financed by Senegalese government partners - particularly the USA- planned by international NGOs and delivered by local NGOs and civil society that mobilized local leaders and what's more, traditional leaders (Tomas). This model has tried to press on the combatants, under the pressure of the population, to accept the Senegalese state solution and has clearly participated to the implementation of the

⁷ MFDC Atika Communique de presse Mai 8th 2013 Situation des prisonniers

⁸ Infoafrique <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHFqBJCHh2g>

Senegalese government objectives. In fact the peace-building agenda has jeopardized the capacities of civil society and the traditional power as well as other possible neutral initiatives (Marut). Women organizations have participated of this agenda acquiring large funding in some cases. This has constituted a major obstacle to reach the confidence of combatants, the needed confidence to engage in facilitation / mediation.

Hypotheses and opportunities for peace initiatives

Reflecting on gender and the conflict in Casamance this paper search for opportunities to be explored for current peace initiatives that focus on the combatants. We have seen that the leadership traits of the two MFDC Atika wings translate different masculinities. Generally a self-assertive leadership, motivated to master his environment, aggressive, independent, self sufficient, forceful and dominant is associated with masculinity. A selfless leadership, concerned for others, cooperative, helpful, understanding, sympathetic, aware of others... is associated with femininity. Obviously people of either biological sex can have masculine, feminine or both characteristics. Different masculinities result in different leaderships. The case of both opposed leaders of the MFDC Atika is a visible example of different styles and a possible reason of its disconnection. Both Diola leaders, presenting high masculinity to significant femininity, represent the extremities of a continuum between whom all Casamance sensibilities probably adhere from the Muslim Fogany to the Animist Kassa. As fragmentation is one of the main MFDC challenges for engaging in negotiations for peace, efforts for reconciliation between these different armed wings are suggested to take advantage of the limits and opportunities arisen from this portrayal.

We have observed different types of Diola patriarchy with variations of male power positions as well as with variations in familial arrangements. We have noted how the conflict has impacted Diola women, empowering or disempowering them according with patriarchy modes and cultural environments. Diola gendered constructions of Casamance women as life-givers and sisters / mothers / daughters referring the

Asampul, provide them a status of deference and value appropriate to play a decisive role in facilitation / mediation for peace. Their strength in the sacred dimension as owners of powerful shrines reaffirms this vocation. But the appeals of the international community to the main women organizations and the factors that influence the international support of these groups have in fact jeopardized their capacities (Davis, Marut). Today women organizations in Casamance are deemed as similar to other NGOs in the development industry. Yet they are still present in the scene and keep their influence with authorities at the highest level. However they face the challenge to retrieve the combatant's confidence in order to play a facilitation / mediation role.

Women civil society organizations members and particularly the *Casamancese Womens Platform* members reflect Casamance diversity, including the whole range of existing sensibilities and identities. This value hasn't been analyzed nor exploited properly in the concrete endeavor of creating the needed confidence for playing a facilitator / mediator role. It is suggested to particularly empower Diola women from women's organizations in that endeavor in a first stage. They can bridge the scene addressing with success the challenge of contributing to improve dialogue and negotiations including combatants. They can address it in its practice by choosing profiles and cultural elements including degrees of power distance, collectivism and masculinity, taking advantage of the limits and opportunities that offer in each case the engendered picture we have mirrored.

Tomas Serna Salichs
tsernasa@gmail.com

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About the author

Holder of a Master in Conflictology in UOC Catalonia and a Master in History of International Relations in Paris I Sorbonne Tomas Serna has worked in the development sector for over 17 years. He provided capacity development services related to local & state governance, value chain and organizational development for different international development agencies and served in management positions in organizations like Action Against Hunger in Angola and SNV, the Netherlands Development Organization, in Guinea Bissau. Recognized trainer & facilitator he combines a practitioner profile with the development of additional knowledge in peace, conflict and governance issues with a particular focus in Guinea Bissau and Senegambia. At the moment he provides advisory services on conflict management within the Defense & Security Sector in Guinea Bissau as WfD project advisor in the framework of the German world peace service. The contents of this article are reliant of the participation on meetings and interviews as project advisor.