

RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF THE CASAMANCE CONFLICT AND FINDING A PATH TOWARDS ITS RESOLUTION

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Religious roots of the Casamance conflict and finding a path towards its resolution

This article examines the root causes of the Casamance conflict, focusing on issues related to the religious significance of the land. Understanding this dimension of the conflict is essential for the achievement of a peaceful settlement. It begins with a brief discussion of geographical, historical, cultural, and political factors. While rejecting a sectarian approach to religious aspects of Diola secessionism, I examine religious dimensions of land, property rights, and conflicts over the land. These became particularly intense after the abrogation of Diola property law in 1978 and the nationalization of land throughout Senegal. This threatened a sense of Diola autonomy as well the religious basis of understanding Diola property law and conflict resolution. The article concludes with a discussion of some of the difficulties of incorporating Diola land law into a local Casamance legal process.

Keywords: Diola (Joola), property law, religion and land law, Senegal, land nationalization, Casamance secessionism

Raízes religiosas do conflito de Casamansa e encontrar um caminho para a sua resolução

Este artigo examina as causas fundamentais do conflito de Casamansa, focando-se em questões relacionadas com o significado religioso da terra. Compreender esta dimensão do conflito é essencial para a realização de uma solução pacífica. O artigo começa com uma breve discussão sobre fatores geográficos, históricos, culturais e políticos. Embora rejeitando uma abordagem sectária dos aspetos religiosos do seccionismo diola, examino as dimensões religiosas da terra, os direitos de propriedade e os conflitos sobre a terra. Estes tornaram-se particularmente intensos após a revogação da lei de propriedade diola em 1978 e a nacionalização da terra em todo o Senegal. Isso ameaçou o sentido de autonomia diola, bem como a base religiosa de compreensão da lei de propriedade diola e da resolução de conflitos. O artigo conclui com uma discussão sobre algumas das dificuldades da incorporação da lei da terra diola no processo legal local de Casamansa.

Palavras-chave: Diola (Joola), direito de propriedade, religião e lei da terra, Senegal, nacionalização da terra, seccionismo casamancês

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Since 1982 an organization known as the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance* has struggled for the independence of the southernmost region of Senegal. Compared to many insurgencies in Africa, this secessionist movement has been marked by a relatively low level of violence either by the insurgents or by the government. Still, it is the longest running insurgency on the African continent. It is a particularly troubling case because of the vibrancy of Senegalese democracy and the relatively low level of ethnic conflict prior to the insurgency. For most of the 60 years since independence, Senegal has conducted relatively free elections. In 2000, it became the first West African nation to vote out of office an incumbent president and pass the presidency on to his opponent who garnered a majority of the popular vote. The military has never intervened within Senegalese political life. A vigorous free press has provided a variety of political perspectives throughout the post-colonial era. Yet, Senegal has not been able to expand its economy rapidly enough to create an adequate number of new jobs to meet the growing number of increasingly well-educated young people entering the national labor market.¹

Until recent decades ethnic conflict has not played as significant a factor within Senegalese society as have regional conflicts between peripheries and the center. Casamance ethnic groups have played important roles in the national government and the military throughout the insurgency. A more diffuse form of regionalism has dominated Senegalese political conflicts, focusing on the lack of employment opportunities in the northern, eastern, and southern regions in comparison to the central area of Dakar and the groundnut growing regions in its hinterland. These peripheries have been relegated to the role of labor reservoirs for the more economically dynamic area around the capital. Given that a Roman Catholic ruled this predominantly Muslim nation for its first twenty years and that the second president, a Muslim married to a Maronite Christian, ruled for the second twenty, religious cleavages were of limited importance until recent years. President Wade's solicitation of the Mouridiyya Islamic brotherhood, however, exacerbated relations with Tijani and non-Sufi Muslims, as well as with Christian and African traditionalist religious minorities, who feared his compromising of the secular state. It should be noted that Diola traditionalists (*awasena*) have long complained about employment discrimination against them if they did not have

¹ This paper reflects field work with a broader focus on the religious and social history of the Diola of the Casamance region, conducted over nearly five years, intermittently from 1974 until 2018. Research was conducted with the support of the Thomas J. Watson Foundation, Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, Social Science Research Council Foreign Area Fellowship, The Ohio State University, the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Religion, Iowa State University, the University of Missouri, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Dartmouth College, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. All translations from French texts are by the author.

Islamically-derived or French Christian, first names. The Casamance too is predominantly Muslim and there are practicing Muslims in the leadership of the MFDC, as well as a substantial number of Catholics. This is not a conflict that pits Muslim against Christian or either group against traditionalists.

This paper examines the origins of the Casamance secessionist movement, focusing on cultural and religious factors, with the express goal of advancing the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Rather than it being a sectarian religious conflict, I contend that a more subtle type of religious dimension underlies the secessionist movement. It is a shared attachment to land that is deeply rooted in the traditional religions of the Casamance region and in a system of religious authorities who arbitrate the complex system of land law.

The Gambia marks another kind of boundary, a climatic one. South of the Gambia is an area in which forested savannah gradually merges into the northern limits of the Guinean forest, an area receiving between 1200 and 1800 millimeters of rain per year. North of the Gambia, rainfall decreases rapidly, reaching as little as 500 millimeters near the Mauritanian border. North of the Gambia upland crops of millet, sorghum and groundnuts predominate; to the south swamp rice is the staple crop for much of the lower and middle Casamance. In most of the Casamance, lush vegetation offered suitable environments for the tsetse fly and the African sleeping sickness it carried, effectively barring the use of animal transport in the region. This insulated the region from the cavalry-based militaries of the great Sudanic kingdoms which dominated the north, and allowed them to pursue substantially different paths of political development. Most of the Casamance resisted the expansion of West African kingdoms, preserving their independence from external rule until the nineteenth century.

The difficulties of a terrain divided by salt-water marshes and estuaries and covered by thick forests also impeded the development of local kingdoms such as the ones found in the north. While the Mandinka and Peulh of middle and upper Casamance shared a hierarchical system of caste with northern Senegalese, the peoples of the lower Casamance did not. Like many of the peoples of the Upper Guinea coast, for long periods of their history, they had social systems that anthropologists have described as acephalous (Baum, 1999, pp. 25-34; Thomas, 1994, pp. 71-73). Indeed, any pretensions toward hierarchical forms of social organization were associated with witchcraft, rather than socially legitimate forms of social organization.² Thus, in many ways the Gambia was a cultural frontier as well.

² Descriptions of the forms of social organization of witches stress their hierarchical nature, dominated by chiefs. See Baum, 2004; Darbon, 1988, p. 35.

These profound ecological differences also influenced economic and political development during the colonial era. Whereas northern Senegalese states were relatively easily pacified, once their rulers and armies had been defeated, the occupation of most of the Casamance required a village by village or township by township effort. The township of Seleki, for example, was shelled by French gunboats and destroyed half a dozen times before resistance ceased. Once occupied, the peoples of the lower Casamance engaged in passive resistance to taxation, forced labor, and military conscription (Baum, 2004; Roche, 1976, *passim*). During the Second World War, the Vichy French encountered armed resistance at Efock and some neighboring townships and near violent encounters at several other townships in the lower Casamance. This led to their decision to arrest the woman prophet, Alinesitoué Diatta, who was exiled to Timbuctou, where she died within the year.³ Small wonder that the French preferred to concentrate their efforts at “*mise en valeur*” in the relatively peaceful areas of the north, where an Islamic brotherhood was becoming increasingly central to the production of Senegal’s major cash crop, the groundnut. Closer proximity to one of West Africa’s best ports and two railroad lines reinforced this tendency to concentrate economic development in the north. Under French rule, the *Cercle de Casamance* became an isolated region, whose inhabitants, European and African alike, felt neglected by planners in the distant capitals of St. Louis (Senegal), Dakar (French West Africa) and Paris.

Independence did little to change this sense of isolation. Senegal’s first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, established a carefully constructed alliance with long-standing elites in northern Senegal, most notably the Muridiyya Islamic brotherhood. Economic development projects and political patronage continued to be concentrated in the north. Senghor’s own version of an earlier “politics of race” led him to appoint northern Senegalese, often Tukulor, to serve as local officials – *préfets* and *chef d’arrondissement* in Casamance, while appointing Casamançais to serve along the Mauritanian border in the *Région du Fleuve*. This policy focused more on inhibiting the development of regional power bases by local politicians than the encouragement of effective local governance (Boone, 2003, pp. 94, 96, 99). Strong differences in leadership styles rendered these administrators largely ineffective. As Dominique Darbon noted:

In Casamance, where the public officials were largely foreign not only to the society but to the region, it produced a massive phenomenon of rejection.... The public officials could not.... integrate themselves in a less formalized social structure. The

³ This period has been portrayed in a film by Ousmane Sembène, *Emitai*. Robert M. Baum, 2016, *passim*.

bureaucrat thus became excluded, incapable of assuming the administrative direction of his district.... This is what explained the failure of rural animation in the 1960's, in Casamance. The agents, especially Tukolor, could not bring themselves into the diffuse social system of the Diola. (Darbon, 1988, p. 161. See also pp. 166, 185)

Indeed, the more hierarchical concepts of leadership style that predominated in northern Senegal and which were brought south by northern administrators led many people in Casamance to refer to local government officials as the "white man" (*ehlouloumo* in Diola). This was true as recently as 1979, when I heard the governor of Casamance being referred to as the *ehlouloumo*, when he was coming to visit the Esulalu townships where I lived.

Political influence by entrenched elites as well as significant advantages in transportation infrastructure continued the process of concentrating economic development in northern Senegal. Even where the well-watered south enjoyed ecological advantages in such areas as sugar cane and rice production, agricultural development projects continued to be concentrated in the north. Social networks which provided access to many types of jobs tended to marginalize the relative newcomers from the Casamance. In turn, they often perceived of their difficulties in finding jobs as a result of discrimination rather than a northern system of patronage and social networking.

No issue, however, fueled the fears of northern domination like the changes in land laws which began to be enacted in 1964, but were not fully implemented in the Casamance until 1979. The nationalization of all indigenous African land claims while according full legal recognition to private land titles registered under a European system, raised the specter that the most skilled wet-rice farmers in West Africa would lose control of their land.⁴ Indeed, government policies encouraged northern Senegalese immigrants to take possession of rich lands that had not been farmed during the prior three years, but which were still regarded as owned by local people (Boone, pp. 133-134). This applied not only to the rice paddies but to forests that were also subject to complex local legal systems of land ownership.

In December, 1978, as the rice harvest was beginning, I attended a meeting at Mlomp, in the Department of Oussouye. It was called by the local *Préfet* to begin the process of creating a *Communauté Rurale* and to extend the new land laws, under the rubric of the *Domaine Nationale* to the rural areas of the lower Casamance. The *Préfet*, a Tukolor, used an interpreter to inform the predominantly Diola

⁴ On the skills of Diola rice farmers, see Pélissier (1966); Linares (1992).

community that their system of land law had been superseded by this new national program and that they no longer owned their land. Their lands belonged to the State. He reassured the people in attendance that they would have full use of their rice paddies and that they could pass them on to their children, as long as they continued working them. He added that all of this, of course, would be subject to the approval of the *Conseil Rural*, which was being established at the same time. People expressed concern that the likely president of this council was an active member of the ruling *Partie Socialiste*, despite the fact that the area had voted decisively for the opposition *Partie Démocratique* earlier that year. People worried that the leaders of the council would play politics with land distribution, a sentiment which showed a lack of confidence in the new government structures. Within three months of the death of the registered user of the lands, he explained, the heirs of the deceased would have to petition for the right to use rice paddy land and other lands within the community. Fueling local concerns was the recent memories of confiscations of Diola land in Ziguinchor and Kabrousse to support expatriate hotel complexes.⁵

As the interpreter finished translating for the local citizenry, the response was immediate. A young man from Mlomp, in his forties, so not of elder status, quickly challenged the decision. I remember it now as clearly as I did over forty years ago. Stepping out of the crowd, he said, in Diola: “We are not monkeys. We are not pigs. We are people like you. We have our traditions (*makanaye*) of dealing with the land.” There was silence. The interpreter declined to translate what was said until the *Préfet* insisted. At the mention of the word “pigs” the Muslim *préfet* took offense and ordered the immediate arrest of the man, who was then taken to Oussouye, the center of local governance, and badly beaten.⁶ He was released the following day since he had broken no law and Senegal had maintained a long tradition of freedom of speech.

The new laws of the “*domaine nationale*” extended beyond rice paddies to include plots of land within the Diola townships which could be suitable for houses, shops, or vegetable gardens. Within the new system, unfarmed land was not owned by individuals. It extended government control over the forest areas and individual trees. In Diola property law, individual trees were owned by the descendants of those who planted them or the owners of the land where they grew. Under the new law, one needed a government permit to cut down a tree regardless of local views of ownership. Any walk in the forest with a Diola elder

⁵ Within Esulalu itself land had been granted to an expatriate developer of a hotel near Pointe Saint Georges and to an expanding Catholic mission in Mlomp. On land disputes in Ziguinchor, see Deets (2017).

⁶ He was said to have been beaten until he shit (*datekol masan*). Field Research Notebook, December, 14-16, 1978.

could lead to him or her pointing out individual silk cotton trees (boussana), oil palms, or other trees and who owned them. Government permits to cut trees were sold in Dakar, often to people who had no connection to the local community. In the period beginning in 1978, there were several violent confrontations between northerners armed with permits to cut trees and local villagers determined to protect their patrimony. Local people blocked roads to keep outsiders from hauling away logs without the consent of the local communities. Permits were sold primarily as a revenue source, justified by the need to protect the environment and limit the pace of deforestation. Dominique Darbon noted similar reactions, most notably in the predominantly Muslim Baila area of Fogny, where local chiefs refused to accept the new land laws “by recourse to force and to the fetishes [*ukine*]” (Darbon, 1988, p. 169). Presumably these *ukine* focused on land or on the protection of the community. Despite the predominance of Islam in most of Fogny for over a century, they still invoked the authority of spirit shrines in regard to the land. Jordi Tomàs reports a similar meeting at Oussouye, where elders met in a sacred forest associated with the priest-king, to discuss the new land law. They too, declined to participate (Jordi Tomàs, Personal Communication, Lisbon, February 22, 2019).

In 1981, two years after the abrogation of Diola land law in the region, the Casamance cities of Ziguinchor and Oussouye erupted in anti-government riots. The initial spark was the misappropriation of student scholarship monies for local students and allegations that northern bureaucrats were involved. Issues of property rights and land law, however, were just below the surface. The following year the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance* called for an independent Casamance. The region has endured demonstrations, armed struggle, and uneasy cease-fires ever since. I will return to the religious significance of these events shortly.

Before talking about the question of Diola religious traditions and the land, I will describe the religious landscape as it affects the Casamance secessionist movement. The most visible leadership of the MFDC is either Christian or Muslim. *L'Abbé* Augustin Diamacoune Senghor had been the official leader of the movement from its founding until his death. Salif Sadio and Mamadou Nkrumah Sané, both Muslim, played important leadership roles in the military leadership and in France.⁷ Other leaders, in less public roles, follow Diola religious traditions, the *awasena* path. The secessionist movement cannot be reduced to a struggle between different religions. Northern Senegalese Christians show

⁷ For a discussion of the role of formal religious traditions, which he identifies as Muslim, Christian, and animist, see Foucher (2005).

little sympathy for the Casamance insurgency. Some Diola Muslims support the movement against a state, which under the leadership of Abdoulaye Wade, had questioned the idea of a secular state. It appears, however, that at the level of land law, Diola land law, enforced by the spirit shrines (*ukine*) and shrine elders, holds sway for local communities, regardless of religious affiliation.

Based on my knowledge of Diola history and religious traditions, I contend that this largest group in the Casamance secessionist movement perceives of itself as marginalized within the religious life of Senegal. Furthermore, they often regard government efforts to impose its authority over the lower Casamance in religious terms. Given the continuing political sensitivity of this topic, I will abandon my tradition of citing informants and their home towns and will refrain from disclosing the full extent of the evidence on which I base my arguments (Baum, 2001). I should also stipulate that my research did not focus on the insurgency, but that I have absorbed much of my data and perspective in the course of conducting field research on Diola religious and social history, periodically since 1974.

As the late Jonathan Z. Smith has suggested, it is important to stipulate what I mean by the term “religion,” particularly since I am arguing that there is a religious basis to Diola perceptions of the need for an independent Casamance. I associate four Diola terms with what I imagine religion to be: *makanaye* (traditions, literally, “what we do”), *boutine* (a path, the term usually employed to describe distinct religions), *kainoe* (thought), and *huasene* (ritual). Thus, in discussing Diola ideas of “religion” we are talking about a particular path, with a body of tradition, a reflective tradition, and a collection of ritual practices that help to sustain a way of living in a Diola community (Baum, 1999, pp. 34-35; Smith, 1982, p. xi).

Marginalization, however, can exist within shared religious traditions. Part of the marginalization that Diola Muslims perceive is based on a sense of an Islamic hierarchy based on when various communities converted. The Tukolor, whose ancestors in Tekrur began to convert to Islam in the ninth century, and from whose midst came people who played central roles in the major West African jihads of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, are the most respected. Wolof, Serer, and Mandinka, who have had significant Muslim communities for centuries, but who did not become overwhelmingly Muslim until the last half of the nineteenth century, comprise a second category. Groups like the Diola, concentrated in the Casamance borderlands with Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, where there was conversion, largely embraced Islam in the first half of the twentieth century and showed less interest in the Islamic brotherhoods, rank towards the bottom of this religious hierarchy. They are often perceived as less rigorous

Muslims, who cling stubbornly to male initiation and women's fertility cults and, as powerful healers and sorcerers, by northern Senegalese Muslims who seek their assistance.⁸

This idea of an ethnic hierarchy does not appear as strongly in Senegal's Catholic community. Although there have been no Diola archbishops, several bishops have been Diola, serving both in predominantly Diola dioceses and in ones in which the Diola were a distinct minority. However, it may be more than coincidence that long-standing Diola grievances about their neglect within Senegal, only erupted into violence after the retirement of the Catholic president, Léopold Sédar Senghor (Diouf, 1998, p. 151). On the other hand, Diola areas of the Casamance, including the least Muslim Department of Oussouye, had become centers of the opposition *Partie Démocratique*, dating back to when its Muslim leader, Abdoulaye Wade first ran against Senghor, in 1978.

Although Vincent Foucher has argued effectively for the central role of young well-educated Diola in the ranks of the MFDC, there is also a considerable group of *awasena* associated with the movement (Foucher, 2002). They are less visible to outsiders and they occupy none of the externally visible leadership positions. Less likely to have received a Western education in an area where Catholic missions operate many of the schools, they are frustrated by their inability to earn a living from rice farming in their home region. They find few opportunities beyond their home communities other than working as palm wine tappers, fishermen, oystermen, or day laborers. All of these activities have been subject to increasing regulation by Senegalese or Gambian authorities, making it more difficult to make a living.

Many of the young people interested in the secessionist movement, while formally affiliated with Christian or Muslim movements, continue to identify with the *awasena* path. This interest has been allowed by a younger generation of Catholic priests whose formative experience occurred after the dramatic changes in the Church after Vatican II. It is also emphasized in the writings of L'Abbé Diamacoune Senghor, especially in his focus on Alinesitoué Diatta, a Diola woman prophet (*Emitai dabognol*, God sent her) arrested by the French in 1943 who died in a French detention center at Timbuctou in 1944. Diamacoune described her as the *Joan of Arc* of the Casamance, who sought to restore Diola autonomy. She was also regularly invoked in speeches by members of the MFDC and at funerals of rebel soldiers. Although Diamacoune played down her emphasis on her direct revelations from the supreme being, Emitai, her religious significance

⁸ During the 1970s I often witnessed northern Senegalese supplicants at Diola spirit shrines. This decreased somewhat by the mid-1980s as northerners were no longer welcome in rural areas of the Casamance.

was not lost on her audience. She introduced a series of new spirit shrines (*ukine*) that emphasized the role of Emitai in providing rain, during the period of Vichy French rule in Senegal. L'Abbé Diamacoune preferred to emphasize her commitment to self-determination and her critique of French colonial agricultural policies and her death from scurvy in a detention camp in Mali (Baum, 1999, passim; 2003, 2016).

Members of Atika, the military wing of the MFDC used a variety of religious rituals to secure their safety. Some of these rituals were of Diola origin; some came from Manjaco, Mancagne, Bainounk, or Balanta practices that had been used in the long war for the independence of Guinea-Bissau, from 1961-1974. These rituals enhanced the protection of Diola warriors, especially against being wounded by anything made of metal. They also empowered oathing ceremonies in which people committed themselves to the struggle and to secrecy about their activities. There are rumors that members of the MFDC had a ritual performed for them in the Bijago Islands of Guinea-Bissau. There is no evidence, other than a single unnamed source, of Ferdinand de Jong's irresponsible claim of human sacrifice in connection with the military wing of the MFDC. It has not been borne out by my own limited experience of these rituals or by the emphatic condemnation of human sacrifice in other Diola contexts (Baum, 1999, p. 120; De Jong, 2002, pp. 185-221).

The central question here is not about how religious differences contributed to the secessionist movement. Rather, it is the issue of how Diola religious sensibilities shape their perception of responses to what they perceive to be a severe threat to Diola autonomy and a Diola way of life. These issues are especially clear in regard to issues of land ownership, agriculture, and economic development which many of us do not normally associate with the realm of the "religious." When the Senegalese government imposed a policy in which European-style, written land titles were legally recognized, but Diola land law and its methods of adjudication were declared null and void, this had far-reaching consequences throughout the region. First of all, the Diola and neighboring people of the lower Casamance had developed systems of rice agriculture which relied on limited quantities of intensively cultivated paddy land. Given the frequency of drought and a general decline of rainfall, suitable areas for rice farming were in decline. What was most unusual about this system was the labor-intensive quality of this work combined with the absence of a landless group. This was true despite the intensive nature of this form of cultivation which often creates a gulf between landowners and hired labor. Instead, Diola relied on voluntary cooperative labor associations, known as *embottai*, who hired themselves out to raise funds for

communal sacrifices or in the cases of Diola Christians for holiday celebrations. Youth groups also formed *embottai* to raise money for youth centers and village dances. They did not rely on a more coercive system of labor management with or without the participation of political authorities (Baum, 1999, Chapter Two; Linares, 1992, passim; Pélissier, 1966). Secondly, Diola and neighboring communities maintained extremely complex systems of land law, which governed the purchase and sale of rice paddies, the process of inheriting them, as well as rights to coastal fisheries (for fish traps), thatching straw, palm trees (for palm wine, palm kernels, palm fronds, and wood), and other trees (most notably the silk cotton tree) (Baum, 1999, pp. 28-31; Linares, 1992, p. 15; Snyder, 1973, 1981a, pp. 68-76). This runs counter to the image of African land law, the fact that Diola land is individually owned and heads of household may buy and sell it (Baum, 1999, p. 29; Linares, 1992, p. 119).

Before the colonial conquest, local land disputes could be heard by assemblies of the relevant lineages or it could be taken to a number of different spirit shrines, whose decisions would be enforced by all who were involved in drinking consecrated palm wine after the decision was made. For most of the Diola of the Department of Oussouye such land disputes were taken to a spirit shrine known as Ewang, which was closely associated with the earliest known inhabitants of the region, the Koonjaen (a type of Bainouk) and their form of male initiation known as Kahat. Many Diola, some of whom have Koonjaen ancestry, claim that the Koonjaen possessed a special tie to the land as “owners of the soil,” by virtue of their early settlement of the region. Even those Diola groups who no longer used the Kahat form of male initiation still brought land disputes to the shrine. Other Diola groups, including the Bandial and Kadiamoutaye have other spirit shrines that deal with land disputes (Baum, 1999, p. 53; Snyder, 1981b, p. 52; Thomas, 1959, p. 274).

These methods of resolving land disputes are still utilized. People who take their land disputes to Senegalese courts, government-appointed village chiefs, or the new *Communauté Rurale* are seen as unscrupulous by many Christians, Muslims, as well as *awasena*.⁹ Land disputes remain a central part of Diola *makanaye* (custom) and *huasene* (ritual). Both village gatherings seeking to find a consensus in land disputes and elders of spirit shrines who use the authority of the *ukine* to enforce their decisions, still dominate the resolution of land disputes throughout Diola areas of the lower Casamance. I have witnessed several such land disputes in the Esulalu region. Individuals who sought to use Senegalese courts faced social ostracism, especially if such cases were adjudicated in their favor. People

⁹ Snyder, 1981b, pp. 63-69. Baum, field notes. Klaus de Jonge, personal communication, Oussouye, 1975.

who persisted in the pursuit of land claims through the *Communauté Rurale* might be visited by representatives of the town council shrine, Hutendookai and its enforcement arm, a kind of local police known as *kumachala*, who might try to prevent such reliance on official channels of dispute resolution.

The close connection between the land, fertility, and Diola religion becomes clearly understood in the context of the Diola day of rest, known as *Huyaye*. Every sixth day, Diola abstained from working in the rice paddies, though other forms of labor were permitted. This was a day of rest for the land, not for people. Although this had been a long-standing tradition in some Diola areas, it was less commonly practiced in the early twentieth century. The prophet Alinesitoué Diatta claimed that the supreme being, Emitai, saw the violation of this day of rest for the land as a primary cause of the droughts and crop failures of the 1930s and 1940s. The fertility of Diola land depended on religious observances by Diola farmers (Baum, 2003, p. 189; 2016, *passim*).

Let us return to the scene of the gathering of the *communauté rurale* of Mlomp, in 1978. For a Muslim northerner, who did not speak the Diola language and relied on an interpreter from Wolof and French, to walk into a community and announce that the Diola no longer owned the land they farmed and where they had built their homes, but were restricted to usufruct; that they had no title to the groves of palm trees, silk cotton trees, or orchards that they or their ancestors had planted and that they would need government permits to cut them down to build their houses or canoes; and that they no longer owned areas along the rivers and estuaries where fish traps could be placed was seen not only as a premeditated act of confiscation by outsiders, but an imposition by people who had no tie to this land, who were not on the *awasena* path and who did not appreciate the complex system of lineage and spiritual ties that underlie Diola land law.¹⁰ Foreigners and northern Senegalese were taking their land, taking their forests, taking their fisheries and transforming their land from a place connected with specific communities in *essouk ediola* (land of the Diola) to a commodity that was subject to surveys and logging permits, an *essouk ehouloumo* (land of the Europeans). As Ousseynou Faye noted:

Marginalized in the area of a mercantile economy, these peoples, victims of the dispossession of their land, feel “invaded” by the migrants from northern Senegal and deprived of the “rights to the city.” They are persuaded that an unprecedented pillage of their local riches has been organized with the tacit blessing of the government. The loss of cultural identity is lived with such great acuity that many

¹⁰ On the connections between changing land law and the secessionist movement, though not its religious dimension, see Faye, 1994, pp. 194-196.

migrant “northerners” replicate towards the indigenous groups, the colonial stereotypes of “savagery” of the adepts of the traditional religions. (Faye, 1994, p. 195)

There have been similar struggles over Diola agriculture dating back to French rule. Central to the French decision to arrest the prophet Alinesitoué Diatta, in 1943, was her steadfast opposition to the abandonment of indigenous varieties of rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) in favor of higher yield, but more fragile Asian rice (*Oryza sativa*) which was seen as European rice. She spoke of the older varieties as having been given them by Emitai and that they were more drought-resistant and resistant to diseases and insect pests (Baum, 2016, *passim*; Linares, 1992; Pélissier, 1966). Furthermore, she objected to French efforts to spread groundnut cultivation because, among northern Diola, it had led men to abandon rice farming, where they had done all the plowing and dike and irrigation system maintenance in favor of a less labor intensive cash crop. They had abandoned all the rice farming to women who were already heavily burdened with the carrying of fertilizer, sowing, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting of the rice crop. This not only disrupted a family mode of production, it overwhelmed the labor capacities of women and forced them to buy French rice imported from Indochina. In 1943, she was arrested, tried under the *Indigénat*, and exiled to Timbuctou, where she died of scurvy within a year (Baum, 2016, *passim*).

Since that time, there have been more than thirty prophets, most of them women, who have emphasized similar concerns about the connections between growing traditional crops and the procurement of rain. Indeed, the spread of Asian varieties of rice, the cutting down of trees for groundnut cultivation, and the conversion of Diola to Islam or Christianity were regularly cited as reasons for the severe droughts of the 1960s and 1970s and the frequent droughts thereafter. Their actions disrupted the intimate connections between land, seed, rain, and ritual that were central to Diola agriculture.¹¹ I will discuss these living prophets in greater detail when I am more confident of the peace process whose prospects we are discussing here at this conference.

The creation of government marketing boards (such as ONCAD) to market agricultural produce and expropriate a surplus to invest in other economic sectors furthered the erosion of rural economies and encouraged the sale of rice on the black market. Government policies of subsidizing rice imports (done to assure a politically quiescent urban population) not only depressed prices that farmers could obtain, but also destabilized a Diola way of life that was focused

¹¹ I am just beginning to write up extensive field notes on these prophetic movements since independence. I have delayed writing about living prophets out of concern for their safety during the continuing violence in Casamance, but am becoming cautiously optimistic about the prospects for peace.

on rice farming. As a Diola proverb suggests: “God made us to grow rice” (cited in Baum, 1999, pp. 28-31). The government seemed to be doing little to strengthen rural Diola communities, which left people little choice but to engage in dry season labor migration. This threatened the vitality of Diola communities’ abilities to perform the vital annual rituals and to socialize the next generation of young adults into the next generation of elders.

The late Abbé Diamacoune Senghor used the life of Alinesitoué simultaneously to appeal to ideas of Diola and Casamance nationalism, while more subtly invoking Diola ideas of an *awasena* religious path. I interviewed him twice in 1978 and heard one of his radio broadcasts during the same period. I also have a copy of his work, *Aliin Sitooye Jaata: Vie et Œuvre* published in 1980 by the Front Culturel Sénégalais.¹² In his 1978 interviews and broadcasts, four years before the insurgency began, he compared Alinesitoué to the Virgin Mary. He spent an equal amount of time discussing her visions from Emitai and her revival of Diola rituals used to seek Emitai’s gift of rain for the rice paddies. He also discussed her agricultural critiques, her insistence on the cultivation of Diola varieties of rice, and her rejection of peanuts as a crop that threatened rice cultivation without bringing prosperity. He placed her firmly within a tradition of prophets, literally, “those sent by Emitai.”¹³

In his 1980 work, as tensions over the Casamance increased, Diamacoune compared Alinesitoué to Joan of Arc, a far more militant, though still Christian figure. His twenty-page description of her in this article places her in the tradition of inspired women resistance leaders, but there is scant attention to her visions, her revitalization of Diola religion, or the new/revived rituals that she emphasized. Her critique of the colonial state’s agricultural programs is fully developed, as is her insistence that the Diola resist French initiative. A revered figure among most Diola, regardless of religious affiliation, Alinesitoué becomes, in Diamacoune’s writings, a heroic martyr for Christians and Muslims, a prophetic martyr for *awasena*. For all three groups, however, her concern about the land, its dependence on rituals for fertility and for rain, its dependence of proper crops – African rice and no groundnuts – affirmed a strong Diola cultural value that Senegalese land policies actively threatened. The loss of land for individual Diola would not only deprive them of a means of subsistence, it would also deprive the land itself of proper crops and proper labor necessary to maximize its fertility. Diola land would just become Senegalese farms. The religious significance of

¹² Anonymous, but attributed to L’Abbé Diamacoune Senghor.

¹³ Interviews with L’Abbé Diamacoune Senghor of Senghalene. Interviews at the Oussouye Catholic Mission, October 31, 1978 and November 24, 1978. Radio Broadcast on Radio Chaîne 4, Ziguinchor, November 12, 1978.

Diola land has been central to the Casamance secessionist movement since the first attempts to assert national control of this most vital of Diola resources.

Although I have not exhausted, by any means, the causes of the Casamance secessionist movement, some of these will have to await fuller development as the peace process deepens. I am encouraged, however, by the government initiatives to lessen the *enclavement* of the Casamance. During my last visit to Casamance, in October, 2018, I was struck by the frequency of air transport between Dakar and Ziguinchor and was heartened by news that the long-awaited bridge over the Gambia River would open in early January. Such initiatives not only allowed for the rapid transport of people between the two regions of Senegal, but it had the potential to open northern markets to the fruit, fish, and other production of the Casamance, suddenly within a day's transportation time. Government expansion of schools from primaries to secondaries and the opening of the University Assane Seck of Ziguinchor are already facilitating Diola access to the labor market both within Senegal and abroad. Inter-ethnic marriages, particularly between Diola and Serer, while common even in the 1970s, appear to have dramatically increased. That, together with what appears to be a permanent Diola community in Dakar, deepens a sense of being Senegalese and not belonging to a particular ethnic group. All of these changes and initiatives lessen the distinctions between Casamançais and other Senegalese.

Still, for a lasting peace to take hold, genuine efforts must be made to establish a system of local authority over local resources. Some type of a federal system would have great potential to address the diversity of Senegalese populations, not only in regard to the Casamance. The trickiest problem remains that of land and real property. The *domaine nationale* must be suppressed and individual land titles must be extended not only to expatriates and urban Senegalese who registered their land purchases, but also to local farmers whose land has been handed down from father to son and mother to daughter for generations in Diola areas of the Casamance. This is a difficult task because it is an oral tradition and an informal practice based on a legal system of consensus rather than one of adversarial procedures. Furthermore, it is rooted in and enforced by religious practices that are older than Casamance's participation in either Christian or Muslim traditions, and they remain outside the secular state.

How do you prescribe a system of consensus-building mediation? The *Communauté Rurale* is seen as too political and too removed from the authority of local shrines. Returning land disputes to villages and townships where land is registered and surveyed but subject to the traditional village assembly mediation process would be crucial. Recognizing traditional Diola land claims, registering

them and transforming them into a written record would place them on an equal plane with expatriates and outsiders written land titles in urban or tourist development areas. The government would retain the right of eminent domain when actually needed. For the Diola to accept minority status in a distant state, however, they must be able to control what is most central to their lives, their land. There can be no peace without this kind of justice.

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