Concealing Authority: Diola priests and other leaders in the French search for a *suitable* chefferie in colonial Senegal

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*This article aims to explain the complexity of the relationship between Diola (or Joola) chiefs and the French colonial administration. After presenting the general Diola context, the author focalizes in Diola-Esulaalu and Diola-Huluf populations, both south of the Casamance River. In this area, the traditional authorities were the leaders of the anticolonial resistance. For this reason, French officials turned to early Diola converts to Christianity to try to control the population. According both to oral information and to colonial archives, the French administration never controlled the leaders of Diola traditional religion (*awaseena*) or, consequently, the Diola population.*

Autoridade Oculta: Sacerdotes diola e outros líderes na procura francesa de uma chefatura *apropriada* no Senegal colonial

*Este artigo tem como objectivo explicar a complexidade da relação entre os chefes diola (ou joola) e a administração colonial francesa. Depois de apresentar o contexto general diola, o autor centra-se nas populações diola-esulaalu e diola-huluf, ambas no sul do rio Casamança. Nesta área, as autoridades tradicionais foram líderes da resistência anticolonial. Por esta razão, os oficiais franceses escolheram os primeiros diola convertidos ao catolicismo para tentar controlar a população. Tanto a tradição oral como os arquivos coloniais confirmam que a administração francesa nunca controlou nem os líderes da religião tradicional (*awaseena*) nem, por consequência, a população diola.*

Introduction

As the European powers dramatically expanded their African territories after the Congress of Berlin, of 1885, they faced the daunting task of administering large areas inhabited by a broad diversity of peoples. Not only did colonial officials have to devise a way of pacifying newly incorporated communities, they had to create strategies for economic development that would allow the metropoles to extract profits from the colonies, and they had to do so at a minimal cost. Complicating these efforts was most Europeans' profound lack of understanding of African political and judicial systems that persisted throughout the initial period of colonization when colonial administrations were being created.

A policy that was closely associated with the British, often labelled as *indirect rule*, relied on colonial administrator's behind-the-scenes control of local authorities, who gave a local face to the colonial administration. This has often been contrasted with French strategies of *direct rule* in which local French administrators were the face of France in the colonies. In most places, these represented broad tendencies, rather than absolutes. The sheer expense of staffing a colonial administration entirely from the metropole created a strong counterforce leading to the recruitment of local *notables*. Ultimately, a French system of canton chiefs and village chiefs, known as *chefferie*, bore some of the attributes of the classic forms of indirect rule, though the French relied far less on hereditary claims to chieftaincy.

Within much of French West Africa, indigenous people were employed at local levels of a highly centralized colonial administration. Often deliberately, French administrators divided pre-colonial polities and ethnic groups into *cercles* and cantons that had little relation to pre-colonial political, economic, or social relations. They tried to avoid candidates for local offices who could develop their own, independent sources of political authority, based on any kind of traditional claims (Ajayi and Crowder, 1975). This conflicted, however, with their simultaneous goal of having such local officials respected enough to be obeyed. Thus, wherever possible, they chose weaker, less independent-minded village and canton chiefs, but who came from families with some claims to *traditional* authority. In the absence of such pliable, but *legitimate* candidates, they often chose people more for their knowledge of French language and loyalty to the colonial administration, than for any claims to legitimate authority within the territories they governed. Catherine Akpo-Vaché describes the role of the local *chefferie*:

> The local administration, confided to the commanders of districts (*cercles*) and to chiefs of subdivisions, who relied on a network of African traditional chiefs. They

> were nominated, enthroned, promoted or removed according to their docility and their capacity to spread information coming from the capital (Akpo-Vaché 1996: 15).

In the French system, these canton and village chiefs were subject to the *Indigénat*, the Native Law Code, which allowed the French to freely remove them from office and their lack of claims to *traditional* authority gave them little recourse against such events.

Adding to this difficulty was a French tendency to reify ethnic boundaries and local traditions, projecting them back unchanged into time immemorial. Images dating back to the era of the Atlantic slave trade mingled with those that developed during the colonial conquest to categorize the different West African peoples and to guide local French administrators in implementing the *chefferie* system. Thus, certain peoples were seen as appropriate for the colonial army, others for agriculture, still others for commerce. In the absence of anthropological studies of political organization or even extensive administrative experience in particular communities, these images of particular peoples informed the ways that colonial authorities instituted the local system of chiefs throughout French West Africa.

The creation of such a network was particularly difficult in those communities usually labelled as acephalous (literally *headless*) or stateless, which insisted upon widely diffuse authority structures, usually based on age and ritual status. In this article, I examine one such attempt to develop a *chefferie* among a people usually described as acephalous, the Diola of southwestern Senegal[1]. Numbering approximately 600,000 people, they inhabit the coastal areas from the southern banks of the Gambia River through the Casamance to the mouth of the Rio São Domingos, where they are considered the most skilled wet rice farmers in all of West Africa (Pélissier, 1966; Linares, 1992). Today, they include the largest community of followers of an indigenous religious tradition in the Senegambia region. Diola communities have remained deeply suspicious of people who

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[1] Field research has been conducted a total of over four years, periodically from 1974 until 2007. This research has been conducted with the support of the University of Missouri, Iowa State University, The Ohio State University, the American Academy of Religion, the American Philosophical Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Social Science Research Council, the Fulbright-Hays Foundation, and the Thomas Watson Foundation.
The Diola are significant minorities in the Gambia, where they are known as Jola, and in Guinea-Bissau, where they are known as Felupes. For a general analysis of Diola political systems before the colonial era, see Robert M. Baum, 1999: 26-28, 58-61.

seek excessive power or display their wealth conspicuously[2]. In their initial dealings with people they identified as Diola, the French assumed that they were a homogenous community that had rejected formal state structures since time immemorial. Until the French conquest, the people who the French labelled Diola did not consider themselves as belonging to one country (*essouk*) or of having the same religious or cultural traditions. On the contrary, they saw themselves as separate, albeit closely related peoples; it was Wolof sailors who described the peoples of the lower Casamance area as Diola and this ethnonym was adopted by French administrators. Indeed, the French relied on Wolof middlemen for their initial contacts with the Diola. The Diola were seen as difficult and resistant to trade. Dr. Maclaud, the Commandant at Ziguinchor, described the Diola, in a 1907 article:

> The Diola pushes to an excess his love of independence; despite four centuries of contact with Europeans, he haughtily affirms his right to liberty. Even today... the Diola do not hesitate to attack those who risk themselves on their Diola territory (Maclaud, 1907: 197).

A chieftaincy administrative structure proved especially difficult to implement in this region, both because of the tenacity of Diola armed resistance until the first years of the twentieth century and the more passive resistance through the First World War (Roche, 1976). Because local French administrators had identified priests of the Diola religion (*awasena*) and women as the primary leaders of the resistance, it became difficult to rely on these community leaders to serve as liaisons with Diola townships. This identification of oppositional priests led to policies designed to destroy what they regarded as the *nefarious* influence of *fetish priests*. Diola communities responded by keeping the French from knowing the identities of such priests as well as creating pressure among religious leaders not to accept administrative positions when offered. French policies of opposition to *awasena* religion, in turn, strengthened Diola identification with their religious traditions as a source of opposition to colonialism. French efforts to install this type of *chefferie* created a situation where real authority remained vested in a group of priests and prophets, who local officials heard about, but with whom they had very little contact. Appointed provincial, canton, and village chiefs were

[2] This continued to be a problem after independence when the Senegalese government appointed northern Senegalese with stronger notions of caste and hierarchy as local administrators. They were perceived as extraordinarily authoritarian in a number of confrontations between local officials that I witnessed in the 1970s. This difference in leadership styles between northern Senegalese and Diola was a factor in the development of the secessionist movement in the Casamance in the 1980s. On similar problems of creating a chieftaincy system in a British colony, see Afigbo, 1972.

almost by virtue of their appointments illegitimate and had little power beyond the direct support of local soldiers and local French officials. Thus, I would contend, the primary purpose of local chieftaincy, to provide a local and respected presence of the colonial authority in Diola communities, was destined for failure from its inception.

Rejecting the most influential people in Diola communities, French officials sought out people whose identities were known to them and whose loyalties were seen as more reliable. Not surprisingly, French administrators felt more comfortable with Bainounk and Mandinka and converts to Islam and Christianity rather than followers of African traditional religions, who had been characterized as *courageous and savage*. Mandinka and Bainounk had long histories of engaging in commerce with Europeans, both during the era of the Atlantic slave trade and in the commerce of agricultural products in the nineteenth century (Baum, 1999: 78-84). Among northern Diola, where there was a significant Muslim minority even before the First World War, French officials preferred to appoint Mandinka traders already familiar with the area as canton and village chiefs, or, on some occasions, some of the first Diola to convert to Islam (Mark, 1978: 1-12; Roche, 1976: 268-269). While uneasy about Islamic influence in northern Senegal, they found greater comfort with adherents of another *religion of the book* in dealing with a predominantly *awasena* region of lower Casamance. Among the southern Diola, where converts to Islam were few, French administrators sought out *strangers* (northern immigrants into the region, like Birama Gueye, canton chief at Carabane), but, in the wake of slave-raiding and Muslim wars against non-Muslim communities in the region, people were often afraid of them. After the First World War, French officials turned to early converts to Christianity and the first generation of mission-educated young men to form the first southern Diola-wide cadre of canton and village chiefs. This is particularly true of the Chef de Province of Oussouye, Benjamin Diatta, and the first two chef de canton for the canton of Pointe St. Georges, Paul Sambou and Ambroise Sambou.

Diola realities, however, were far more complex than most colonial administrators realized. Southern Diola societies had undergone profound changes during the period for which we have written record, i.e. from the mid-fifteenth century. These changes have been outlined in my book, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia*. In the early sixteenth century, Portuguese travellers described a kingdom of the Mansa Felupe (Felupe being the Portuguese term for people the French later identified as Diola). Although the title of this ruler, *Mansa Felupe*, could indicate a Mandinka influence, it could equally reveal the author, Valentim Fernandes' greater familiarity with Mande

political terminology (Monod *et al*., 1951; Baum 1999: 75-76). This king controlled trade; levied taxes on cattle and forest products that had commercial value; and controlled the distribution of land. Traces of this kingdom may be linked to the system of priest-kings or *coeyiaku* of the present-day Huluf, Ediamat, and Esulalu Diola. It appears that this kingdom collapsed as a result of the intensification of the Atlantic slave trade, though evidence for this is speculative at best.

Within communities that we now identify as Diola, by the late seventeenth century, a system of governance by male and female shrine elders and village councils appears to have replaced more centralized forms of governance. Within a township like Kadjinol, in the nineteenth century, there were over fifty different types of spirit shrines, each with its own priests and councils of elders. Three particularly powerful shrine clusters included those associated with township unity, fertility and rain, controlled by the priest-king (*oeyi*); the cluster of blacksmith shrines associated with fire, accusations of theft, and the power of the forge; and the women's fertility shrines which promoted the fertility of women and the land, sought rain from the supreme being, and punished both men and women with violations of codes of behavior governing relationships between the sexes. Rules of access to the esoteric knowledge of each shrine ensured that no single individual could have knowledge of more than one of these powerful shrine complexes. To attempt to acquire restricted information about shrines in which one was not an initiated elder brought spiritual sanctions in the form of death or serious illness and was referred to as *poisoning one's ears* (*bousiqi sidiam*). A complex system of checks and balances among the three shrine complexes; between shrines associated with male initiation (*Bukut*) and the shrine of the male elders *(Hoohaney*), and other shrines worked to prevent the consolidation of too much power in any individual. Although their advice was respected in village councils (except for the priest-king who could not attend), their efforts to enforce their views could be readily checked by other shrine elders with opposing views. With over fifty different spirit shrines, often with multiple shrine sites, most men and women could expect to become either priests or shrine elders during the course of their life times. While Diola societies were highly gerontocratic, there was little possibility of a unified usurpation of power by shrine priests, or from any faction of a Diola community (Baum, 1999: 42-61).

Despite these checks and balances, however, slave raiders and those who sold slaves in neighboring communities built up considerable reserves of iron and other trade goods, and cattle from the ransoming or sale of captives. With their increasing cattle reserves, they were able to purchase rice paddies from less fortunate people who lacked sufficient cattle for essential rituals or the ransoming of

their captive relatives. Still, an ideology of egalitarianism concealed differences in wealth and glossed over social prejudices against descendants of Bainounk and descendants of slaves (Baum 1999: 108-129).

The French conquest of Diola lands reversed this process of growing economic and religious stratification. As Diola townships resisted the French occupation, military officers seized Diola cattle and rice stores, dramatically depleting these primary repositories of Diola wealth and inadvertently returning them to a more egalitarian type of society that existed before the growth of the Atlantic slave trade. These levelling tendencies were reinforced by the initial attempts at colonial taxation in kind, primarily cattle and rice, which further diminished the influence of the wealthy. During the period of the slave trade, newly wealthy Diola had invested some of their resources in the acquisition of new spirit shrines (*ukine*) or modified shrines that stressed wealth as a means of acquiring spiritual power (Baum 1999: 108-129). Thus, the undercutting of a wealthy elite also threatened a priestly elite that were often the first local people entrusted to negotiate with the newcomers[3].

As early as the 1860s, Diola resistance focused on French efforts to levy taxes and to spread groundnut cultivation. In 1860, the French commander at Sedhiou complained that:

> The Yola [Diola] only will begin cultivation [of groundnuts] with difficulty, and will permit the establishment of strangers among him with even greater difficulty, he fears that he will be chased from his country and believes that we would like remove him... their idea, their certitude in their country [is] that our only goal is to make ourselves masters of their country[4].

In 1903, the resistance of local chiefs reached a peak with the tragic case of the priest-king (*oeyi*) of Huluf, based in the southern Diola township of Oussouye. In response to the local Commandant de Cercle's request for payment of taxes in the form of a portion of the rice crop, Sihalebe Diedhiou was said to have defecated in a banana leaf, wrapped it up and presented it to the French leader. Outraged, the French official ordered the arrest of the *oeyi*, and in violation of restrictions placed on a priest-king crossing water, took Sihalebeh to the regional capital at Sedhiou, where they imprisoned him. Forbidden to eat in the presence of others

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[3] In examining the initial French treaties with the Diola-Esulalu townships, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, many of the names of Diola signatories often are prominent in the lists of priests of the most important spirit shrines of such townships as Kadjinol, Mlomp, and Kagnout. See Baum, 1999: 130-136, 143-147. Archives Nationales du Sénégal, 13 G2; 13 G 4 bis; 13 G 6.

[4] "Rapport politique, agricole et commercial sur la Casamance", 1867, ANS 13G 368. See also: "Rapport de la tournée faite dans le marigot à Kadjinol, 21 mars, 1865", ANS 13G 440.

or to consume food prepared by people other than his wives or his council of shrine elders, he starved to death in prison[5]. With the subsequent military occupation of Oussouye and the posting of a garrison there, southern Diola shifted more to passive resistance to taxation, keenly aware, however, of the necessity of keeping important ritual leaders from the eyes and ears of French authorities.

Meanwhile, French administrators posted in the Cercle de Ziguinchor, currently the Region of Ziguinchor, complained of the tenacious hold of fetishists over local people, their use of fear and intimidation to maintain their power, and their roles, along with women, as the leaders of this persistent resistance to the French presence. Beyond a general anxiety about their influence, however, French had little understanding of the roles of Diola *awasena* priests or their relationship to decision-making processes in local communities.

During the First World War, the difficulties of fulfilling quotas for military conscription, resistance to forced labor, and opposition to paying taxes either in money or in cattle and rice demonstrated that French authority over the Diola did not extend much beyond the presence of a military post or a patrol of colonial soldiers. With the end of the war, French officials decided to implement the *chefferie* system in the lower Casamance, which had been one of the most difficult territories to control during the War. They turned to local Diola who had attended Roman Catholic mission schools in the Casamance or who had experience working in the urban areas.

In what was known as the Subdivision of Oussouye, French officials selected Benjamin Diatta as provincial chief, the local person advising the Subdivision Resident. Benjamin Diatta was born at Kabrousse and was one of the early students to attend the Holy Ghost Father's school at Carabane. A devout Catholic, Diatta could rely on a network of early Catholic converts throughout the region[6]. In 1924, Benjamin Diatta appointed Paul Sambou of Kadjinol-Kagnao as chief of the newly created canton of Pointe-St. Georges, which roughly corresponded to the Esulalu Diola region[7]. He too was an early convert to Christianity, had studied catechism, but had not pursued a French education. Rather, he was one of the region's first immigrants to Dakar, where he worked as a carpenter. Elders' recollections of Paul Sambou focused on his size, his physical force, and his lack of fear of the shrine elders. As a former catechist indicated: "They were afraid of

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[5] His skeleton was later placed on display in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, under the title *Squelette Diola*. Not only can non-initiated people see the body of a priest-king, one can not even refer to his passage as death, only as his *being lost*. Thus, such a display was an abomination on many levels (Roche 1976: 282)

[6] *Calendrier Historique*, 1919, Archives de la Sous-Prefecture de Loudia-Ouloff (ASPLO).

[7] *Ibid*., 1924.

him, like they were afraid of God"[8]. Oral testimony was replete with anecdotes of Paul Sambou insisting on being served palm wine after a ritual, even though Diola traditions clearly prohibited drinking of palm wine by people who did not participate in the rituals. It was said that he even drank palm wine at the spirit shrine of *Ehugna*, a shrine whose congregation was limited to those women who had actually given birth to a child. Elders attribute his eventual blindness to his violation of these prohibitions. He also threatened physical harm to anyone who refused to send his or her children to catechism school. His blindness or brutality eventually led him to be replaced, in 1929, with Ambroise Sambou, from Kadjinol-Kagnao, the same quarter as Paul and a center of Diola Catholicism[9]. Ambroise knew a little French, was also a devout Christian and a close personal friend of Benjamin Diatta, and worked closely with him until they were both removed by the Vichy administration of Colonel Sajous.

Benjamin Diatta and the canton chiefs appointed village chiefs within the various Diola townships. In the township of Kadjinol this involved appointing six village chiefs, one for each quarter. At Mlomp, they named five and at Kagnout there were three, again one for each quarter. They did have considerable power, but it was dependent on their ability to call in soldiers from the local garrison and their ability to favor those who helped him in dealing with the onerous burdens of taxation and forced labor or singling out his opponents for additional burdens. The people they chose rarely reflected a position of authority stemming from their families control of powerful spirit shrines (*ukine*)[10]. Rather, they were chosen for their loyalty to the French administration and more specifically to Benjamin Diatta and the canton chief. In some cases, they were descendants of slaves (*amiekele* or *agoutch*)[11]. More often than not, they were part of the small group of Catholic converts who had been through catechism schools or at least they were identified as people who would neither oppose the French administration nor the Catholic missionaries in the region. Real authority, however, remained with the shrine elders who had little contact with French officials. As was noted in a political report from the period:

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[8] Interview with Grégoire Diatta, Mlomp-Kadjifolong, 12/12/78

[9] *Calendrier Historique*, 1929, ASPLO.

[10] Seroundefou Sambou, the priest-king of Mlomp, was a rare exception. He was appointed as village chief of Mlomp's Djicomole quarter in the 1920s and served until his arrest for failure to deliver taxes in kind in 1943. I know of no other village chief who occupied such an important position.

[11] Although these distinctions have eased since the Second World War, distinctions between people whose ancestors were born in the area and people brought in by force, remained important during the first half of the twentieth century. They are still important distinctions in permissible marriage patterns in the coastal township of Diembering.

> Almost always, behind the nominal chief presented to the *commandant de cercle* exists another occult power – the *boekine* – powerful in the practice of sorcery; an absolute authority who decides all important issues concerning the community. His orders, whatever they are, are always executed...[12].

Boekine is a term that refers to a particular spirit and its shrine. Some of these shrines were involved in the identifications of sorcerers and witches, but they were not involved in the practice of these socially condemned practices. It is also unclear to what extent any individual's orders, whether or not they came from a priest of a *boekine* would be obeyed in such an independent-minded society. The commentator is right, however, that these priests exerted considerable influence.

In 1926, word came from a Diola township south of Oussouye, that there was a secret cannibal society known as *Kussangas.* They were said to play a central role in the maintenance of control by the *awasena* elders over Diola communities, through the terror of threatened cannibalism. Benjamin Diatta led the investigation and was the primary witness in every trial in the Subdivision of Oussouye. As noted in the court records, Benjamin Diatta summoned all the canton and village chiefs to Oussouye: "After a long palaver, he asked the chiefs to denounce the guilty... each of them designated the eaters of the dead that he knew"[13]. Benjamin Diatta and his allied canton and village chiefs were the ones who identified the alleged *cannibals*. As an elder named Boolai Senghor noted: "He [Benjamin Diatta] came and asked which people are witches (*kusaye*) at your place"[14]. Dozens of people were arrested throughout the Subdivision of Oussouye. Several elders alleged that Diatta was willing to overlook some names on his list: "Some paid him. Benjamin let them go"[15]. Benjamin Diatta and the canton and village chiefs were the primary witnesses against the accused. Many of the accused were important priests and shrine elders, people who the *chefferie* regarded as opponents to the new system of administration. As an elder at Kadjinol noted: "Each chief

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[12] Territoire de la Casamance, "Rapport sur la situation politique de la Casamance et programme de désarmement et de mise en main de la population", ANS 2D5-3455.

[13] ANS, Ziguinchor, *Tribunal*, 14, 1927.

[14] Note that Diola elders used the term *witches* (*kusaye*) rather than *kussanga* to describe those accused in these trials. Interview with Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 7/10/78. Interviews with Indrissa Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/20/78; Moolaye Bassin, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 3/21/78; Moolaye Bassin, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 3/21/78; Songatebeh Diatta, Mlomp-Kadjifolong, 11/7/78.

[15] Interview with Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/16/78; Grégoire Diatta, Mlomp-Kadjifolong, 3/9/78.

removed people. If his spirit did not like you, he removed you"[16]. Another elder said: "A chief did not like one [person]; that is who is a witch (*asaye*)"[17].

As I have shown in my article "Crimes of the Dream World", these trials hinged upon a French misunderstanding of a Diola idiom, *to eat in the night*, a reference to a Diola concept of people whose souls travel in the night, in the realm of dreams, and eat the souls of other people, a practice that has come to be labelled as witchcraft. This was not eating of human bodies as the French imagined it, but a crime of the dream world, or the spiritual realm, the eating of souls by the souls of witches. As Teté Diadhiou, the court interpreter for many of these trials, noted: "It was not the flesh. It was the soul... it was the witchcraft that we transformed into cannibalism... in witchcraft it is the soul that one eats"[18].

Benjamin Diatta and Ambroise Sambou knew of the French confusion, but did nothing to correct it, allowing the French to try, convict, and, in some cases execute people for crimes that the French did not believe existed (Baum, 2005). Two village chiefs in the Canton of Pointe St. Georges refused to draw up lists of *kussanga*, suggesting that they did not know their identities. No one else came forward, so Benjamin Diatta could not develop any cases. While the two townships had their share of witchcraft accusations, they did not have any problems with *kussanga*[19]. The various elements of the local *chefferie* hoped to lessen the influence and diminish the wealth of the local shrine priests. The old ways of doing this, witchcraft accusations, would not work, since the French did not believe in witches and outlawed witchcraft-finders. However, the French did believe that Africans could be cannibals and were ready to believe accusations about a cannibal society (Arens, 1979). As a now deceased deacon of the Kadjinol Catholic Church described the trials: "It was political scheming. You know that political scheming did not begin now"[20].

The *Commandant de Cercle*, Henri Maubert, candidly admitted that he saw an opportunity in these trials to break the hold of the *fetishist* priests over the minds of the local populace:

> The discovery of this vast organization that spreads so much terror, whose character is absolutely secret, the arrest of its chiefs and its influential members, had

[16] Interview with Moolaye Bassin, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 3/21/78.

[17] Interview with Djiremo Sambou, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 10/19/78.

[18] Interview with Teté Diadhiou, Ziguinchor, 7/7/78. Baum, 2004: 228.

[19] Interviews with Paponah Diatta, Mlomp-Etebemaye, 11/13/78; Sikarwen Diatta, Eloudia, 12/12/78; Kemehow Diedhiou, Eloudia, 10/26/78; Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/16/78; Group Discussion with Wuuli Assin, Cyriaque Assin, and Neerikoon Assin, Samatit, 5/11/78.

[20] Interview with André Bankuul Senghor, Kadjinol-Hassouka, 1/5/78.

> the effect in all of the country of a great retreat that is not without [the effect of] increasing our authority and our prestige[21].

Maubert saw this as an opportunity to discredit the *awasena* priests and their supporters and enhance the legitimacy of a French administration. I noted this in a previous article:

> At Kagnout, arrests included the future priest-king of the community. At Kadjinol and Mlomp, members of the families that controlled important rain shrines (Cayinte), war shrines (Cabai), blacksmith shrines (Gilaite), as well as a son of a priest-king were among those arrested (Baum, 2005)[22].

He was not altogether effective, however, since many of the convictions were overturned by the *Chambre d'Homologation* in Dakar, based on insufficient evidence or improper judicial procedures.

The upheavals of the Second World War generated a crisis in the colonial occupation of Diola territory and in the system of canton and village chiefs that they had devised to administer it. Throughout the 1930s, erratic rainfall and insect infestations had dramatically decreased rice harvests throughout the Diola areas of lower Casamance. Simultaneously, the global depression dropped the market prices for an alternative crop, the groundnut which was the leading export of Senegal, particularly of the central areas of Baol, Sine, and Saloum. As the War began, the French government increased its demands for military conscription, while continuing to demand several weeks of unpaid labor by local men building the road system of the lower Casamance. With the French surrender and the isolation of French West Africa from the metropole and the rice-growing areas of French Indochina, colonial administrators believed that they could requisition sufficient rice from the Diola to support the rice-eating habits of their African soldiers and northern Senegalese civilians, who had abandoned sorghum and millet production in favor of groundnuts. In 1939, as well, the Catholic Church decided to create a separate Apostolic Prefecture for the Casamance and named Joseph Faye, who was half Diola and half Serer, as the first Bishop. Furthermore, the installation of a pro-Vichy administration in Dakar, St. Louis, and Ziguinchor removed most of the judicial safeguards for *indigènes* in the colonial judiciary and removed any official barriers between cooperation between colonial admi-

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[21] Sénégal, Territoire de la Casamance, "Rapport Politique Général, 1926", pp. 4-5. ANS 2G 26: 6.

[22] Interviews with Bernard Ellibah Sambou, Kagnout-Ebrouwaye, 10/13/78; Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 7/10/78; Indrissa Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/20/78; Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/18/78.

nistration and Catholic missions, which had influenced French colonial policies throughout the Third Republic. Their isolation, however, from the metropole; their lack of control over maritime routes; shortages of soldiers and administrators generated a sense of insecurity among the French administrators, reinforcing a tendency to over-react to any threats to their authority. Such an excessive response occurred during the *Revolt of the Floup*s and the arrest of the woman prophet, Alinesitoué Diatta, in January, 1943.

During the dry season of 1941-1942, a young Diola woman, working as a maid in the capital of French West Africa, Dakar, heard a voice commanding her to leave the crowded Sandaga market and go down to the sea. She was told to dig in the sand, water filled the hole, and a voice she identified with the Supreme Being, Emitai, tell her that was her task, to bring water to the Diola during a time of drought. Early in 1942, she returned home to the township of Kabrousse, situated astride the border with Portuguese Guinea, and she began to teach about Emitai and the ways in which it had instructed her to perform rituals and teach to help her community obtain rain[23]. She emphasized a renewed commitment to Diola agriculture, including the continued planting of African species of rice (*Oryza glaberrima)* which was more drought and pest resistant than the higher yielding varieties introduced by the French. She insisted that Diola reject the cultivation of groundnuts as a cash crop, viewing men's attraction for this crop as devastating to family mode of production rice as a staple crop. She introduced new rituals, emphasizing community-wide participation with no esoteric knowledge restricted to shrine elders and no special privileges for the wealthy, the men, or the old.

In doing so, she challenged French agricultural policies and the authority that lay behind them. She challenged French missionaries and their claim to possess the only effective path to Emitai, the supreme being. Diola farmers, already pressed by crop failures, found in her teachings new inspiration to resist forced labor, military conscription, and taxation in rice and cattle. There was even a small-scale armed revolt, known as the *Revolt of the Floups*, immortalized in Ousmane Sembene's film, *Emitai* (1971). People told the French that Alinesitoué was a woman prophet who taught them how to procure rain from Emitai, yet she did not ask for their grain or cattle. People greeted the military columns engaged in collecting taxes with the taunt that before they would give them their rice and cattle, they would give it to Alinesitoué.

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[23] For a detailed discussion of Alinesitoué Diatta and her impact on Diola religion, see Jean Girard 1969, *passim*; Baum, 2001: 179-195.

Already isolated from northern Senegal by the English wartime enemy in the Gambia, Casamance officials grew increasingly nervous. As Colonel Sajous, the local commandant noted in 1942:

> If the public tranquility of the region is not properly speaking *troubled*, it is a fact that, taking into account the questionable authority taken by Ansioutouée (Alinesitoué), it risks suddenly becoming the object of new fantasies that the visionary could invent from one day to the next[24].

Her prophetic movement revived old fears of *awasena* resistance. As the Governor of Senegal noted early in 1943:

> ...this visionary is not the first woman who has created or tried to create an independent religious sect in Basse Casamance... These rudimentary populations of the Basse Casamance are very sensitive to such movements; the influence of this visionary could disappear quite rapidly... But in the troubled times in which we live, it could come to pass that to the contrary, the influence of the visionary wings on the increase, and because we could not tolerate a threat to our authority, I was led to give the necessary orders to Colonel Sajous[25].

Alinesitoué and her followers were arrested, tried for obstructing the colonial administration, and exiled. Many of her followers died in captivity in Ziguinchor, in northern Senegal, or in French Soudan. Alinesitoué herself died a little over a year after her arrest, in exile, in Timbuctou. Her death from scurvy was kept secret not only from the general public, but from her husband and daughter, until the 1980s.

Prior to her arrest, however, the *chefferie* system had broken down. Unable to deliver the requisite number of men for military conscription or rice and cattle to feed northern Senegal, the loyal Chef de Province was removed from office, in 1942. At the same time, his friend and colleague, Ambroise Sambou, canton chief for Pointe St. Georges, was removed for the same reason. Serondefou Sambou, the priest-king of Mlomp, was arrested and held hostage in order to get his quarter to pay their taxes in rice and cattle. Colonel Sajous replaced them, not with pro-French Catholic Diola, but with a Muslim Mandinka at Oussouye, and one of the very few Muslim Diola in the canton of Pointe St. Georges, as canton chief there[26]. These men had no credibility and were removed from office when Vichy

[24] "Commandant de Cercle de Ziguinchor à Monsieur le Gouverneur du Sénégal", Ziguinchor, September 17, 1942, ANS 13 G 12, versement 17.

[25] "Gouverneur du Sénégal à Monsieur le Gouverneur-Général", *op. cit.*

[26] Interview with Paponah Diatta, Mlomp-Etebeymaye, 3/21/78. Girard, 1969: 240, 261.

rule ended at the end of 1943. But by the time that was done, decolonization was in the air. The age of powerful provincial chiefs and canton chiefs had been superseded by politicians, like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Émile Badiane, who regarded village chiefs as minor functionaries in a colonial bureaucracy that was losing its importance.

The French experiment in developing a system of village, canton, and provincial chiefs for the Diola of the Casamance occupied a short span within Diola history. Imposed among some of the northern Diola and at the trading center of Carabane in the late nineteenth century, it was not institutionalized among the southern Diola until the 1920s. In the early 1940s, the demands of a repressive, but demanding Vichy regime, imposed a burden that the *chefferie* could not sustain. It never recovered. During its twenty year reign as the public face of local government in the Casamance, however, it never succeeded in replacing the broadly diffused authority of shrine elders, both men and women, who kept out of sight of French authorities, but who continued to be the sole possessors of legitimate authority throughout the colonial era. They continue to be a significant force in local government and the regulation of land disputes in a post-colonial Senegal. Village chiefs continue to hold office, but their status is low and their functions are limited. They are the tax collectors, the recipients of government edicts, and the conductor of elections, but they have little authority and little influence in Diola affairs.

Even at the end of the Second World War and the defeat of the Vichy officials who had been the target of the resistance, the French resident in Oussouye complained, in 1945, about the continued role of *awasena* priests in Diola resistance to French colonial rule.

> In the form of fetichism, this religion is the most current and the most honored. As a result, there are scarcely any religious concerns without innumerable sacrifices to the fetishes and not always for material reasons; often they are done as recourse against administrative actions[27].

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[27] Sénégal: Cercle de Ziguinchor: Subdivision d'Oussouye, "Rapport politique annuel d'ensemble", 1945. ANS 2: G45: 90.

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