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Vincent Foucher

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# Chapter Ten. SENEGAL: The Resilient Weakness of Casamançais Separatists<sup>1</sup>

**Vincent Foucher**

Les Afriques dans le Monde, CNRS – Sciences Po Bordeaux

The *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance*, which has been fighting since 1982 for the independence of the region of Casamance, southern Senegal, draws an interesting contrast to the other guerrilla groups of recent African history. First, it is separatist, an oddity in a continent where, despite predictions to the contrary, separatism have remained rare.<sup>2</sup> Second, while it soon emerged that it could not seriously endanger Dakar's control over most of Casamance and while its internal divisions weakened its capacities, the MFDC has struggled over a long period of time against the state of Senegal, a state that, despite its difficulties in the 1980s and 1990s, was nowhere near the deliquescent or shadowy states of Liberia or Sierra Leone. Third, the MFDC has endured despite a war economy in rags, dependent on a little cannabis and a variety of labor-intensive forest products such as charcoal and cashew nuts. Fourth, it has largely refrained from employing the violent methods which have been so noted in recent African wars, from child soldiers to mass rapes or amputations. Fifth, since the signing of the first ceasefire in 1991, it has been engaged with the Senegalese authorities in a process of negotiation and accomodation so bizarre that, to take but an example, in

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<sup>2</sup> See Clapham (1998).

September 2005, President Wade of Senegal dispatched the head of the Gendarmerie in Casamance to “reassert his trust” in Father Augustin Diamacoune, the leader of the MFDC.<sup>3</sup> None of these features are in themselves unique, but their combination seems to be: a movement both fragile and resilient, waging a war on weak resources against a powerful adversary, a movement which has largely escaped degeneration into ultra-violence, the little-known MFDC provides a fascinating and somewhat counterintuitive case study which may help us refine our interpretation of how armed conflicts develop in Africa and elsewhere.

After a brief historical overview, the first section will focus on the emergence of the MFDC mobilisation, highlighting its rootedness in a broad social movement. The next two sections will discuss the MFDC’s relative lack of international support and the weak war economy on which the movement has survived. The ambiguous and varied relationships that developed between civilians and guerillas in the context of a rather immobile war are discussed in section four. Section five examines the fragmentation of the MFDC, a fragmentation further reinforced by Dakar’s somewhat contradictory handling of the conflict, discussed in section six. The seventh section demonstrates how civilian pressure on the MFDC has been mounting over the past years. The last section presents the broader conclusions that can be drawn from the case.

## **A Historical Overview**

The separatist mobilisation in Casamance, southern Senegal, went public in December 1982, when a peaceful protest took place in Ziguinchor, the regional capital, calling for independence in the name of the MFDC. Faced with the repression by the Senegalese forces, some MFDC supporters went underground and organised a ‘*maquis*’, a guerrilla group, under the name Atika (‘fighter’ in the Diola language). The *maquis* really took off towards the end of the 1980s, and soon enough, in March 1991, a first ceasefire was agreed upon. Key figures of the MFDC, including its inspiration, Father Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, a Catholic priest, and Sidy Badji, the founder of Atika, then settled

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<sup>3</sup> See *Le Matin*, 2595, 9 September 2005.

in Ziguinchor under Senegalese ward for discussions. Soon after, tensions split Atika open: the Front Nord, a detachment based north of the Casamance river, kept to the ceasefire, while the Front Sud proved less accommodating; these two factions fought one another on a number of occasions. Another rift appeared in 1994 when Atika's new leader, Léopold Sagna, was de facto replaced by a triumvirate of younger fighters, among whom Salif Sadio took a lead role. While the peace process has been going on since then, with many more agreements signed between the Senegalese state and the MFDC political wing, the Front Sud has fought on and off. In June 1998, the Senegalese army intervened in the neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, supporting President Vieira against mutinous Brigadier Mané, who in turn enlisted the support of Front Sud fighters. Through 1999, meetings were held in Banjul, in The Gambia, to try and reunify the MFDC. Mané's eventual victory in Bissau failed to reduce tensions within Front Sud, and violent internal fighting broke out between the partisans of Salif Sadio and those of Léopold Sagna.

The election to the Senegalese presidency in March 2000 of Abdoulaye Wade, a historical opponent of Presidents Senghor and Diouf, raised high hopes, but Wade's calling into question of his predecessor's policy actually resulted in a worsening of the situation throughout 2001. Mané's death in November 2000 had nevertheless given Senegal the upper hand, and since 2003, Atika has almost given up military strikes. Dakar has been fostering a tightly controlled peace process, as well as a silent demobilisation policy, but the guerrillas are still out there, as was demonstrated by the several attacks they staged between May and August 2005. A reunification of the *maquis* was being attempted, whose success and direction remain unpredictable. Over the twenty years of conflict, while a precise count is difficult to reach, several thousand people, combatants and non-combatants altogether, have been killed in Casamance.<sup>4</sup>

## **A Movement of (Some of) the People**

Contrary to many guerrilla movements elsewhere in Africa (e.g., Mozambique, Liberia, or Sierra Leone), the MFDC did not start as the enterprise of a small group of disgruntled

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<sup>4</sup> See Evans (2004, note 7) for a discussion.

politicians, soldiers, and mercenaries, however imbued with ideology, but resulted from a significant pre-war effort at political mobilisation and indoctrination, related to a broader social protest. This does not mean that we can accept uncritically the MFDC's self-description as the evident and immediate trustees of an unanimous population. From its inception, the MFDC was enmeshed in a complex set of conflicts and competitions which provided its substance. These conflicts were very local, and it took some time for the MFDC to broaden its audience. Through what could the idea of Casamance progressively become entrenched in the minds of many people as a solution to their life-problems ? The answer is found in the social and political history of the region.<sup>5</sup>

The standard version of the social history of the region, in both its academic and lay versions, is essentially a narrative of loss and exclusion. In fact, it would seem that there is not much of a history to be found, for both the separatists and the government – and many external observers as well - tend to draw a picture of the Casamançais as primeval peasants. There are basically two main lines of argument: the first insists on the deep cultural misunderstanding between north Senegal and Casamance, highlighting civilisational differences (e.g., Sufi Islam versus Catholicism and animism; millet versus rice; savannah versus forest and swamps; hierarchy versus egalitarianism). There is of course some truth in these differences (though some are simply mistaken<sup>6</sup>), and the weird geography of Casamance, separated as it is from north Senegal by The Gambia, surely does nothing to facilitate the inclusion (objective and imagined) of Casamance into Senegal. The other approach describes the political and economic domination which north Senegalese migrants, traders, and civil servants exert over Casamance: based on their control of state, capital, and the Sufi orders, north Senegalese newcomers exploit the region. Here again, these explanations are caricatural but carry an element of truth. After all, many of the same characteristics could be found in other regions of Senegal, as for

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<sup>5</sup> This first section summarises elements presented elsewhere. See Foucher (2002a & b).

<sup>6</sup> While Islam is overbearing in most of Senegal, Casamance hosts minority Catholic and animist communities; this religious specificity is frequently described as a major factor, to the point of distorting the evidence: some authors go as far as describing Casamance as a region populated by a majority of Catholics and animists. Still, there is no doubt that the resentment of some involved Diola Catholics (including Father Diamacoune) at the invasion of north Senegalese Islam played a part in the formation of the Casamançais sentiment. On these issues, see Foucher (2003b & 2005).

instance, in the Senegal River Valley or in Eastern Senegal. Even in Casamance, the mobilisation has essentially concerned the westernmost part of the region, populated by the Diola ethnic group, around the regional capital city of Ziguinchor – indeed, almost all known members of the MFDC are of Diola origin, as are its symbols and deployment areas; only a few guerrillas hail from other Casamançais ethnic groups, such as the Peulhs.<sup>7</sup>

If one stands back from this description of the MFDC as a peasant rebellion, a description which, interestingly enough, is offered both by the separatists and by the Senegalese state, and if one looks into the history of the mobilisation, one is struck by a combination of two elements: the role of the literati and the context of unstable legal politics. First, the westernmost portion of Casamance, which coincides with both the area of the MFDC mobilisation and that of the Diola ethnic group, far from being the locus of primeval peasants, has long stood out as having the highest level of primary education in Senegal, as well as a very strong migration, both male and female, towards urban centres, and particularly Dakar. To be even more specific, MFDC mobilisation was initially the strongest among the Diola from Buluf (district of Bignona), precisely the portion of Lower Casamance where both education and migration were the most developed – a peculiarity that is not without importance in the subsequent divisions of the MFDC.<sup>8</sup> In Casamance, the crisis of the state from the late 1970s had produced a large group of youth with education but without future, a situation that has been identified as a major element in many other conflicts.<sup>9</sup> But in drawing this link between disenfranchised educated youth and political violence, one is not specific enough: as far as Casamance is

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<sup>7</sup> One participant to the 1982 and 1983 meetings recounted, “The movement was created only with Diola, and two Mancagne and one Peulh”. Interview with MFDC militant, Ziguinchor, February 2005.

<sup>8</sup> This specificity did not go unobserved by the MFDC leadership. One leading MFDC figure at the time recounted: “[in the late 1980s] I told him [to Father Diamacoune] that the Kasa was not involved enough. The very area of origin of the leader, there was no one from there! It was Bignona mostly. And overall, in fact, the Buluf, because the Fogy [another part of the Bignona district] was not very present.” Interview with member of the MFDC political wing, Serekunda, The Gambia, 1st September 2005. As a result of this, a special effort was made to develop influence in other districts, and particularly in Kasa, Father Diamacoune’s area of origin. Father Diamacoune’s own brother Bertrand, a retired agricultural extension worker, was ‘recruited’ for this.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Richards (1995) and Abdullah & Muana (1998).

concerned, the state is at the heart of educational issues, because it has long been the provider of both education and the formal sector jobs that have made it profitable. The young Diola were thus faced with increasing difficulties to get into the civil service and the Army where their elders had earlier secured attractive positions. The frustrated expectations of education and uneasy migration to urban centres with which it is associated thus provided a common experience that gave plausibility to the claims that Casamance was ill-treated. But the high expectations that were bearing on the state among the Diola also pointed to the source to this ill-treatment: the state, that was inexplicably renegeing on its implicit promises. The words of a MFDC supporter who attended the meetings of the early 1980s are clear on this:

Q : What were people talking about in the meetings ?

A: We were talking about unity, they explained about the creation of Casamance, and how Casamance had become a part of Senegal. (...) They told us to compare Ziguinchor to Dakar and the other regions. If you go to Dakar, they call you 'The Casamançais,' never 'The Sénégalais.' Even in court. About Ziguinchor, we would talk about roads, administrative problems, taxes. About the way our students were dealt with. About people who had graduated and the kind of jobs they would get.

Q : Did you experience these kinds of problems ?

Yes. My younger brother, who is now a teacher. He got the bac B [*baccalauréat* in economics], with honours, he was the third in Ziguinchor. He was supposed to get a foreign scholarship. He was accepted. But they replaced his name with someone else's. Almost all my younger brothers, it was the same. My other younger brother, he repeated his second year [at University], and he was told that there was no room for clever people, especially if they were Casamançais, that he had better find another job, or set up a plantation. He was unemployed for four or five years before getting a job as a teacher. I too went to Dakar, I had the same problem, I left school. I was there around 1977 and 1978. 1978, I came back. I could not finish the year. My elder sister managed to pay for school, at the Sacré-Cœur [a Catholic school]. It cost CFA Francs 9,000 per month. My elder sister, she was working, as a maid. I preferred to go back home, to manage on my own.<sup>10</sup>

It must also be said that education did much to provide the shared frame of mind which could give shape to protest. Indeed, in the very same years, the Diola literati themselves played a key part in all sorts of traditionalist enterprises – around the state, the Catholic Church, or the developing tourist industry. A strong interest in the history and culture of

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with MFDC militant, Ziguinchor, February 2005.

Casamance developed among the literati, and up to this day, when one meets with Casamançais separatists, one can rarely fail to notice their evident passion for these topics; a contrario, it seems Father Diamacoune's incapacity to provide the archives which he had assured supported Casamance's claim to independence played a part in the subsequent 'moderation' of a number of important MFDC figures, including Atika's chief of staff, Sidy Badji.<sup>11</sup> The two founders of the movement, a Casamançais migrant in France, Mamadou Sané Nkrumah, and Father Augustin Diamacoune, were heavily involved in cultural activism. In 1981, Sané himself, with fellow literati, including a young Diola who was completing at the Sorbonne a doctoral thesis on Diola culture and colonial intrusion, founded a magazine on Diola culture, *Kelumak*, which was central to the formation of the first separatist circles.<sup>12</sup> The specific experience of Lower Casamance with education and the state was thus crucial in endowing the MFDC with its key resources: a large group of men deprived of a future, who identified the Senegalese state as the source of their difficulties; an ideology based on autochthony and cultural self-valorisation. Thus could "Casamance" be made into a credible political symbol.

This was all the easier as the transfer of traditionalism and autochthony into the sphere of politics was effected not by the guerrillas-in-the-making, but by the legal political sphere itself. Regionalism was a classic feature of Senegalese politics, and in Ziguinchor, a former Portuguese possession ceded to the French in 1886, the Portuguese Mestizos and the French settlers structurally resented the Quatre Communes, the four historical French

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<sup>11</sup> Father Diamacoune, a self-made historian of Casamance, has long insisted that there existed documentary evidence that Casamance was juridically not part of colonial Senegal. MFDC supporters also claim that a secret pact was signed at Senegal's independence, in 1960, for a twenty-year association between Casamance and Senegal. Awenengo Dalberto (2005) has recently documented a plausible source for these claims: in the late 1950s, the French did toy with the idea of a separate Casamance, which they thought might be more favourable to them than the north Senegalese elites. A politician involved in the 1992-1993 peace process recounted that the loyalists had noticed the separatists' fascination with this issue, and had pressed for France's word, so as to weaken Diamacoune's position. The MFDC's call for a French arbitrage was evidently suicidal: for obvious reasons, France could not take an official stand, and in December 1993, a French expert, Jacques Charpy, produced, in his own name, a report to the claims of the MFDC. See Charpy (1993) and the passionate hand-written, hundred-page long answer by Father Diamacoune (1995).

<sup>12</sup> See Sambou (1984).

settlements found along the coast of north Senegal.<sup>13</sup> But this took a peculiar turn when, in the late colonial period, Leopold Sedar Senghor built on a coalition of regionalisms against the dominant Quatre Communes elites. In fact, the current MFDC draws its name from a regionalist Casamançais movement which, in the late 1940s, allied (and later fused) with Senghor's party. But in the context of the early and partial liberalisation initiated by President Senghor from the mid-1974, this classic, bring-the-pork-barrel-home-type, regionalism made growing reference to autochthony – an early instance of the connection between democratisation and debates on autochthony and nationality noted in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> In Senegal, the legalisation of the first opposition party, the *Parti Démocratique Sénégalais* (PDS) in 1974, and Senghor's 1980 handover of power to his Prime Minister Abdou Diouf were key steps in the mounting of legal political competition both within and without the then-ruling *Parti Socialiste* (PS). In the regional capital city of Ziguinchor, whose steady growth was stimulated by the massive arrival of north Senegalese migrants and educated and politicised rural Diola, bitter disputes and scandals developed around land;<sup>15</sup> these land issues pointed the way of autochthony, and various politicians vied for legitimacy by playing the card of the Casamançais natives against the north Senegalese “invaders.” Thus, with the opening of the political scene over issues of representation and regional development, autochthony became an argument in legal politics – and turned into an element for separatist mobilisation.

Interviews with separatists give a clear sense of this combination of elements: the associations and networks which grouped the numerous Diola literati together in Ziguinchor, Dakar and France resounded with arguments on the history and culture of Casamance; the opening of political competition both inside and outside the ruling Socialist Party allowed these reflections on identity to penetrate into politics; linkages were established between the educated youth, politicians, amateur historians, and cultural activists; other groups, such as football fan clubs and female religious associations, were also brought in. A Casamançais mythico-history became entrenched, which stirred

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<sup>13</sup> On this colonial regionalism, see Foucher (2002, 128-130) and Awenengo Dalberto (2005, chapter 3).

<sup>14</sup> See Bayart et alia (2001).

<sup>15</sup> On land disputes in Casamance, see for instance Hesseling (1992).

enthusiasm and resonated with local politics in Ziguinchor. Thus, Casamançais separatism was initially rooted in a lively political civility, in contact with legal politics – this accounts for the way in which the movement chose to express itself initially: a peaceful demonstration in Ziguinchor, held on 26 December 1982. Though many militants were arrested following the demonstration, the movement did not turn immediately into guerrilla warfare: throughout 1983, and despite the pressure exerted by the Senegalese security forces, discrete discussions and meetings went on. As is often the case, repression actually fed mobilisation. Targeting its repression on the Diola, the state seemed to confirm the MFDC's claim that they were second-class citizens in Senegal.<sup>16</sup> This was of no small importance because the separatist version of history was new to Casamance, and by no means undisputed. In a country with an unusually peaceful political history in West Africa, this self-fulfilling logic of state repression was particularly spectacular. In their narratives, most MFDC guerrillas mention that they joined the *maquis* to avenge the brutalities suffered by a kin; one *maquisard* thus confided: “I entered the *maquis* in 1992 [...]. What I learnt was that Casamance exists, that it has a right to independence. But what got me in was that my Dad was taken right here [by the security forces], in front of me. He was beaten up in front of me.”<sup>17</sup>

State repression had another effect: as most MFDC ideologues, including Diamacoune and Sané, had been arrested, a new group of men were in charge – Sidy Badji, Léopold Sagna and Aliou Badji, veterans of the French or Senegalese armies, inclined towards the military rather than the political. Under these new leaders, on 18 December 1983, three groups of MFDC supporters, including men armed with bows, machetes, and hunting rifles, marched down on central Ziguinchor. Coming right after the brutal killing of three Senegalese gendarmes in a MFDC meeting, they met with the heavy fire of the Senegalese forces. The death toll, officially of 24 (including Aliou Badji and five

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<sup>16</sup> There is for instance ample evidence that the Diola, who can be more or less identified by their patronymic names, were subjected to tighter controls by the security forces. Human rights NGOs have documented the extra-judicial killings and tortures (including beatings, electric shocks, burnings and the forced ingestion of harmful liquids) operated by Senegalese forces. See for instance Amnesty International (1998).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Front Sud fighter, Ziguinchor, February 2005.

members of the security forces), was in all likelihood far higher. By then, the proverbial spiral of violence was on the roll: many participants in the march hid in the bush, from where they later developed Atika, the military wing. Militarisation was thus, to a large extent, forced on the separatists. Their preparation had been minimal, and the movement, under pressure from the Senegalese security, took years before engaging in aggressive actions. The MFDC thus has had to structure itself on the spot, with very limited resources.

## **The Limits of Extraversion**

Guerrillas, in Africa and elsewhere, are keen on finding international backers. And indeed, whether to attract the support of the international community or to discard its responsibility in the matter, the Senegalese state has often pointed at the malevolence of other countries – its neighbours (The Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau) or the international rogue states of the day (Iraq, Taylor's Liberia or Libya). Though there may be elements of truth in some of these accusations, what is really striking is in fact that, while international borders have played a central role in the MFDC's development, the separatists have so far attracted very little international support.

Senegal's close collaboration with the West might have earned it a proper Cold War guerrilla movement.<sup>18</sup> But the MFDC came somehow too late to get its share of Cold War money. The suspected Libyan and Cuban connections do not seem to have been significant.<sup>19</sup> There are some indications of contacts between Liberian warlord-president Charles Taylor and the MFDC, but these amounted to little more than decentralised, small-scale circulation of weapons and men, with no larger purpose. After the 1989 incidents between Senegal and Mauritania, Nouakchott did provide, on one occasion at least, automatic weapons to the MFDC, thus playing a key part in the increasingly

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<sup>18</sup> The armed uprising planned in southern Senegal by the Marxist *Parti Africain de l'Indépendance* (PAI) during the 1960s never materialised.

<sup>19</sup> It seems some separatist fighters had trained in Libya's Mathaba camp as associates of Gambian leftist leader Kukoï Samba Sanyang, *prior* to their joining the MFDC.

aggressive behaviour of Atika, but Mauritanian support for the MFDC quickly waned as Senegalo-Mauritanian tensions eased.<sup>20</sup>

There is a lot more to be said about those countries that border Casamance itself<sup>21</sup>. One only has to look at the geography of the MFDC bases and zones of control, between the tarmac roads of Casamance and the borders with The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. This is no surprise: border areas are an asset for guerrilla fighters, as they allow a measure of safety from pursuit and access to refugee camps and supply lines. The relationships between Senegal and its two small neighbours are complicated and marked by a measure of mistrust which occasionally verges on nationalist paranoia, but with the possible exception of the time of General Mané's brief hold in Bissau, neither Banjul nor Bissau have ever strongly supported the MFDC<sup>22</sup>. In any case, the Casamance policies of these two countries cannot be reduced to such formulas as ethnic solidarity or anti-Senegalese strategy. These two countries have always been fragile and dependent on Senegal in many ways, and have usually been keen on maintaining working relationships with Dakar. At the same time, in their diplomacy, economics and politics, the conflict in Casamance has been a factor – a resource and a constraint. It is for instance clear that, when the MFDC took to automatic weapons and land-mines, many were coming from the huge stores of post-Soviet Guinea-Bissau. The Gambia, an established entrepôt-state, was the alternative source for hardware. Also, both countries have been markets for the Casamançais war economy – booty (e.g., cattle and vehicles, TV sets and tin-sheets), but also legal and illegal agricultural or forest productions, from charcoal to cannabis. Finally, refugee communities settled in both countries as a result of Senegalese repression have played a key part in providing a social basis for the MFDC.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Around 1990-1991, the MFDC tried and failed to install a bureau in Nouakchott, the Mauritanian capital.

<sup>21</sup> For one of the rare, and already old, surveys of Senegal's relations with its neighbours, see Diop (1994).

<sup>22</sup> Partisans of Sadio maintain that General Mané reneged on the promises he had made to the MFDC *after* the Senegalese withdrawal from Bissau and refused to provide them with weapons.

<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to have precise figures regarding Casamançais refugees, given the ethnic overlaps and the long-standing presence of Casamançais migrants in The Gambia. In the mid-1990s, it was claimed that there were up to 15,000 refugees in each country, but the figure may have been exaggerated by Gambian and Bissau-Guinean authorities so as to attract more (divertible?) aid. There have been many returnees over the past years.

From the fact that MFDC guerrillas have been renting or buying weapons from Bissau-Guinean militaries of all ranks, one should not however assume that there has been a consistent Bissau-Guinean policy of supporting the MFDC.<sup>24</sup> Weapon sales to the MFDC did become a major factor in Bissau-Guinean politics, but only rather late into the conflict: in June 1998, President Vieira of Guinea-Bissau accused his chief-of-staff, Brigadier Ansoumana Mané, as a pretext to get rid of him, and thus stirred a mutiny among the Bissau-Guinean forces. Eager to cut off the MFDC's supply lines, Senegal dispatched troops in support of Vieira. Ironically, it later emerged that Vieira's entourage was far more involved in the business with the MFDC than Brigadier Mané. Dakar's major intelligence failure resulted in the MFDC rushing to Mané's aid. Following Mané's victory, Dakar worked hard to establish good relationships with the newly elected Bissau-Guinean president, Kumba Yala, going as far as providing funds to the Bissau-Guinean army; this was all the easier as banditry related to the Casamance conflict increasingly endangered Bissau's interests.<sup>25</sup> In November 2000, Brigadier Mané, resenting Yala's take-over of the Armed Forces, rebelled again. Léopold Sagna's Front Sud MFDC faction sided with Yala against Mané, and took control of a major MFDC base in Kassolol, earning for itself the nickname "Kassolol." Mané's subsequent death opened a new era, as Yala backed Kassolol against Salif Sadio's MFDC faction, and took to the forceful repatriation of pro-Sadio refugees. Kassolol has since maintained better access in Guinea-Bissau, on the condition that it remains discrete and peaceful. The persistent fragility of Guinea-Bissau may open the Front Sud factions new opportunities, but it seems Dakar has built enough influence among the Bissau-Guinean elites (particularly the military) to withstand the threat.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Bissau-Guinean National Assembly produced a report which indicates the activity of competing networks, ranging from the renting of individual weapons to large-scale purchases. One source indicated that, around 2002-2003, an AK-47 cost 100,000 CFA francs, and could be rented for a day at 10,000.

<sup>25</sup> In July 2000, to protest against banditry, Senegalese villagers closed down the border, thus cutting a major business road to Bissau.

<sup>26</sup> While it openly supported the outgoing President, Kumba Yala, Dakar could rely on its good relationships with both the chief-of-staff, General Tagme Na Way, and the returnee president, Nino Vieira; Dakar did much to rally Yala to Vieira for the second round of the elections. The uneasy coalition of Yala, Vieira and Tagme Na Way has thus far maintained.

The case of The Gambia is equally complicated.<sup>27</sup> The break-up of the Senegambian confederation in 1989 left bitter memories on both sides, and things seemed to worsen in 1994 with the coming to power of Yahya Jammeh, a young Gambian officer of ethnic Diola origins. For Jammeh, Casamance matters on several counts: first, the fragile Gambian economy has increasingly benefited from the many trade links generated by the conflict. Also, as pressures towards democratisation increased, Jammeh has tried to turn the vast Casamançais Diola community, old-time migrants and refugees together, into a support base (electoral and otherwise).<sup>28</sup> Occasionally, MFDC fighters have been put to direct use, for instance when they were requested to search for and turn in anti-Jammeh activists or plain criminals who had taken refuge in Casamance. But one should bear in mind that the Diola are a minority group in The Gambia, which makes the Diola card an uneasy one for Jammeh to play.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, over the past years, the Casamance conflict has increasingly been a liability for Jammeh, as MFDC-related banditry affected The Gambia. Finally, in the context of the “war on terror” and the renewed trend to global peacekeeping, Jammeh has increasingly had to use his contacts with the MFDC to act as a broker between Dakar and the MFDC, thus building up a diplomatic credibility damaged by his dictatorial style and (now defunct) alliance with Libya. Jammeh thus seems to be trying to strike a balance between Dakar and the MFDC, using the question of Casamance as both a nagging point and a bargaining chip. For all these reasons, Jammeh’s policy is ambivalent and conservative: MFDC militants usually move about freely in The Gambia provided they bear no weapons, but Banjul has been exercising a growing pressure, engaging in occasional sweeps of arrests and ‘encouraging’ the return of refugees to Senegal – or their removal away from the border – with some results.

Overall, while there is no doubt that access to international borders has been vital to the MFDC, Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia have always been entangled in a set of

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<sup>27</sup> For an interesting discussion of Gambia’s policy regarding Casamançais refugees, and Casamance at large, see Baker (2002).

<sup>28</sup> During the 2001 Gambian elections, Diola from all around the Bignona district (Senegal) were brought to The Gambia to vote.

<sup>29</sup> According to *Jane’s Sentinel. West Africa*, February-July 2002, quoting the 1993 census figures, the Diola constituted about 10 per cent of the Gambian population.

contradictory links. The persistent difficulties of both countries, and the increasing negative consequences of the conflict over them have given a greater leverage to Senegal over the last few years. This became all the more true as a result of the 2000 elections in Senegal, with the coming to power of Abdoulaye Wade, a veteran of political opposition, which considerably strengthened Dakar's international standing. Western countries (notably the United States and Germany) and the international financial institutions have been putting increasing weight behind the peace process.<sup>30</sup>

### **Fasting for Guns: War Economy with Low Profits<sup>31</sup>**

As said above, the *maquis* had not been prepared; logistics were inexistent, and the movement built from local resources, such as retired soldiers, bows and arrows, and hunting rifles. Funding has always been a huge problem, as international support was never forthcoming. One MFDC guerrilla described his sense of disappointment when he joined the *maquis* in 1988: "They [the MFDC propagandists] said that there were many weapons. But it was false. So once you were there, you had to live like a man;" in his camp, young fighters went on a fast to save money for weapons.<sup>32</sup> The MFDC has thus been fighting a "resourceless" war. Its economic basis has been through three main steps. During most of the 1980s, the *maquis* relied on banditry and cattle-rustling in the south of the Ziguinchor district where it was based, and the support which guerrillas could gather on visits to their families. At a later phase, as it became clear that war was there to stay and as guerrilla camps stabilised, a network of collectors was organised among the population. After state repression dissolved this network, the *maquis* developed a decentralised, low-profit economy, exploiting local resources.

In the late 1980s, with the release of many of the political activists arrested in 1982 and 1983, an underground MFDC political wing was organised under Father Diamacoune, for

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<sup>30</sup> The United States' interest in Casamance began in 1999, in relation with Bill Clinton's African tour, and has not waned since.

<sup>31</sup> This discussion of the war economy in Casamance owes much to texts by and discussions with Martin Evans. See Evans (2003a & b).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Front Nord liaison, Bignona, July 2004.

propaganda and forms of fund-raising, which occasionally verged on protection-money;<sup>33</sup> civilian sections of the MFDC were set up in many villages, MFDC membership cards were sold, and the money financed the *maquis*. Centralisation of fund-raising was never quite complete: in the late 1980s, through his fighters, Sidy Badji, the chief-of-staff, had his own civilian funders, and when Bertrand Diamacoune, Father Diamacoune's brother and deputy in the political wing, claimed to centralise all resources, hinting that Badji was diverting money, the *maquis* briefly split. Progressively, fund-raising capacities waned, as the conflict damaged the regional economy and as the political wing weakened. The Senegalese forces seized MFDC membership lists and targeted the political wing. Some members of the political wing fled to the *maquis*, while others, such as Mamadou Nkrumah Sané, went abroad; their attempts to raise funds among the small Casamançais diaspora in Europe checked the downward financial trend only for some time.<sup>34</sup> Some, among the most significant members of the political wing, including Father Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, his brother and his four main lieutenants, settled in Ziguinchor under the ward of the Senegalese forces, for negotiations. Unending negotiations and rumours (not always unfounded) of corruption and embezzlement dealt blows to the credibility of the political wing, further reducing its fund-raising capacity. The resource base of the *maquis* thus weakened, and from the mid-1990s the *maquisards* were increasingly forced to manage on their own.

In their attempts to live off the land, the *maquisards* were faced with contrasting economic situations depending on whether they were settled along the Gambian or the Bissau-Guinean border. Along the latter, where the war was most intense, entire villages have been durably displaced and the *maquis* have come to control significant areas, forests, and fields. Not infrequently, they have laid landmines to assert their monopoly over these areas; civilians (including the legitimate owners) who trespass the limits have

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<sup>33</sup> Business interests and Casamançais elites and migrants were approached for contributions, and threats were at times explicit. One relatively well-off Casamançais migrant established in north Senegal recounted receiving death threats for his refusal to contribute to the MFDC.

<sup>34</sup> As noted above, Casamançais migrations long remained national or sub-regional, and until the 1990s, one found very few Diola in France, home to significant and often longstanding communities of Senegalese migrants from other origins.

often been blown up by mines or killed by MFDC patrols. These areas are exploited by the *maquisards* themselves or by their refugee partners. While cannabis may yield higher profits,<sup>35</sup> the produce exploited is often labour-intensive and of mainly low-value: cashew nuts, charcoal, timber, firewood, game or palm products. In the other main MFDC area, along the Gambian border, the products are the same, but war took off later, and displacement has been far less massive and durable. Communities have been maintained and play a key part in business, though the guerrillas have often imposed “taxes” on local producers or incoming merchants<sup>36</sup>. It seems that in the area around Djibidione, cannabis-growing villagers asked for the deployment of MFDC fighters as a protection from the Senegalese gendarmerie. On this side of the Casamance river, business has benefited from the proximity of the Gambian market – a stronger economy and a provider of cheap manufactured goods – as well as from the historically better connections which the Casamançais Diola have had in Banjul<sup>37</sup>. Generally speaking, in the *maquis*-controlled areas along the Gambian border, Gambian products, currency, and transports have grown hegemonic. In fact, the long tradition of contraband with The Gambia benefited immensely from the lifting of Senegalese border control which resulted from the guerrillas’ presence: “here, the market has been liberalised”, proudly commented one Front Nord commander<sup>38</sup> – and indeed, in some of these communities, money has been made, as the relative material wealth of households indicates.

Whatever the variation between these localised war economies, production and marketing are usually decentralised. One *maquisard* thus recounted: “When I need to, I take leaves [from active duty]. If you have a wife and children, you must take care [of them].” This young guerrilla would regularly go work in various villages of Casamance for a few

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<sup>35</sup> Even this profitability should not be overestimated: Casamançais cannabis is of low quality and international exports, which proceed essentially through The Gambia or Dakar, are actually quite limited. Consumption is primarily local and sub-regional.

<sup>36</sup> During a seminar around a presentation of this paper in Oxford in November 2005, David Anderson mentioned that drugs-dealers in the Gambia had shown him receipts issued by MFDC guerrillas for cannabis-taxes.

<sup>37</sup> The Gambia, rural and urban, has been a major destination for Diola migrants ever since the early XXth century. Also, the ‘national’ Diola community is much more significant in The Gambian than in Guinea-Bissau.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Front Nord commander, district of Bignona, August 2004.

months as a fisherman or a woodcutter.<sup>39</sup> In most *maquis*, everyone just fends for himself: taking leave from the camps for periods ranging from a few days to a few months, single fighters or groups of kin or friends go hunting, fishing, cultivating, cropping or trading. Not infrequently, they go back to their village, but they may also find safety in anonymous temporary labour migration in Dakar, Ziguinchor or in the neighbouring countries. Some may also use their weapons and know-how to engage in independent banditry, to the dismay of the impotent MFDC leadership<sup>40</sup> - one fighter admitted to taking part in such operations, to such an extent that he chose to undergo purification rituals to protect himself from mystical sanctions.<sup>41</sup> Because means of subsistence are not earned collectively, meals are not cooked or taken collectively. The exception is those groups that have, at some point of the peace process or another, secured the support of a major resource-provider. Where food and money are made available to the commanders, collective meals could be organised. Where productive equipment, such as fishing-boats, nets, or chainsaws, has been obtained, both production and consumption could be also more centralised. As support from the political and the external wings has been on the wane, the Senegalese state itself has become a major funding source for some of the *maquis*; from the early 1990s, it began providing “reinsertion funds” or “humanitarian assistance” to some MFDC groups, civilian or military, deemed to be “moderates.” This is no small paradox that minimal forms of centralisation in the MFDC have frequently been the outcome of the support of the Senegalese state!

When compared to the flamboyant war economies of the Mano River, Angola or Congo conflicts, Casamance stands out for its ad hoc, decentralised, low-key system: it does not depend on a single, high-price, resource or marketing network; it is a labor-intensive, low-scale, low-productivity, low-profit business. As Evans (2003: 283) argues in his extensive survey, in this sense, the war economy in Casamance represents “continuity

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Front Sud fighter, Ziguinchor, January 2005.

<sup>40</sup> MFDC leaders of both the political and military wings claim that a number of attacks are the feat of off duty guerrillas.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Front Sud fighter, Ziguinchor, February 2005.

with much ‘normal’ activity in the region.” This weak, decentralised economic base is obviously not without political implications, as it has encouraged the economic autonomisation of guerrilla groups, which has in turn reduced the leverage which the external and/or political wing can exert over the guerrillas. Interviews with guerrillas typically raise severe moral criticisms against the MFDC leadership, whose “good life” (e.g., refugee status in Europe, hotel-life in Casamance or the Gambia, children sent abroad on scholarships, possession of vehicles, and private investments) is contrasted with the harsh conditions prevalent in the *maquis*. MFDC leaders thus stand regularly accused of treason and whenever members of the political wing(s) want to enter the *maquis*, they are actually expected to pay their way in.<sup>42</sup> Some have actually run into trouble.<sup>43</sup> The fragmentation of the MFDC into competing factions, which renders the ending of the conflict so difficult, thus finds an echo in its economic structures, and in the culture of generalised suspicion prevalent among the fighters.

## **Localised War, Stable Frontline, Embedded Guerrillas?**

Partly related to the nature of the Casamançais war economy is another important aspect: its strongly localised character. As mentioned above, the MFDC is essentially a Diola movement, and the administrative region of Ziguinchor, which corresponds more or less to the Diola-populated portion of Casamance is small (7,400 km<sup>2</sup>) and locked in by marshes and forests. In this context, the Casamance river is more of a link than an obstacle, as it allows for a lively riverborne traffic. The topography lends itself to the preservation of enclave territories – and this was made even easier by the import of land-mines. The Senegalese government learnt at a price that its Army’s combing operations were costly in political, diplomatic and human terms, and has since become prone to

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<sup>42</sup> A ‘moderate’ member of the MFDC’s external wing thus recounted how he had overcome the hostility of the ‘radical’ refugees by bringing along a container of second-hand clothes for them. Interview with MFDC external wing member, Paris, July 2005. A MFDC liaison reported being robbed in a MFDC attack against public transportation vehicles; as he was protesting that he was himself a MFDC activist, guerrillas told him to report to Father Diamacoune, the MFDC head in Ziguinchor, whom they said was failing to do anything for them. Interview with Front Nord liaison, Bignona, July 2004.

<sup>43</sup> In November 2001, Laurent Diamacoune, a Gambia-based ‘moderate’ political wing member and the nephew of Father Augustin Diamacoune, was killed during a visit to a pro-Sadio *maquis*.

using alternative political strategies.<sup>44</sup> These elements and the nature of the war economy have combined to give this conflict a very localised character. The frontline has indeed remained extremely stable over the years, and is materialised on both sides by a series of earth-bunkers and minefields. On this count again, Casamance differs from the wars in Angola, Mozambique, or the Mano river, where the frontline would fluctuate widely.

One of the consequence of this is that MFDC *maquis* have usually settled. This has meant that, while they do not necessarily hail from the villages around which they are stationed, and may move from camp to camp, guerrillas have embedded in the local communities. This is particularly true of refugee communities, since civilians who fled to Guinea-Bissau or The Gambia often went that way because they were sympathetic to the MFDC and felt threatened by the Senegalese forces.<sup>45</sup> But even in those areas where guerrillas settled among stable civilian populations, connections were established. Links born from the necessary cooperation between civilians and guerrillas in the production and marketing of low-value agricultural or forest products play a part. As the war lasted, even young fighters would marry – frequently with women from a nearby village or refugee camp. Through all these links, the guerrillas have remained dependent on the population – or at least sections of it. Borrowing from Mancur Olson’s comments on warlords in revolutionary China, Mkandawire (2002) suggests a distinction between two styles of rebellion, stationary and roving. While the latter rampage their way through, the former have to build a working relationship with the people among whom they operate, and thus tend to be less violent. Surely, the geographical stability of Atika classifies it among the

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<sup>44</sup> On two occasions, the Army acknowledged the loss of more than twenty soldiers (Babonda, July 1995, and Mandina-Mancagne, August 1997). Given the Army’s tendency to manipulate body counts, losses in these two incidents may have been higher, as some independent sources assert. Heavy losses resulted in a change in tactics: air and artillery bombings were increasingly employed before assaults. The political costs of repression became quickly evident, as human rights NGOs started to pinpoint abuses, endangering Senegal’s major resource, its good international repute. Reacting to Amnesty International’s damning reports in the 1990s, Dakar released two reports. See République du Sénégal (1991 and 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Symmetrically, internally-displaced people who made it to Senegalese urban centres or to villages closer to the tarmac roads controlled by the Senegalese troops were often adversaries to the MFDC, village chiefs with connections to the ruling *Parti Socialiste*, or north Senegalese migrants. When the *maquis* emptied the villages along the Bissau-Guinean border in the early 1990s, villages would literally split in two, some villagers making it to Ziguinchor, while others reached Guinea-Bissau, usually according to their proclivities.

stationary kind, and indeed, in Casamance, levels of violence cannot quite compare with those observed in other conflicts, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone or north Uganda. In Casamance, instances of sexual violence have been noted, but seem not to have been so frequent; the MFDC does not recruit child-soldiers; and while Senegalese soldiers captured or killed have been subjected to mutilations, civilians have usually been spared – with the exception of civilians from north Senegal, who have repeatedly been targeted.<sup>46</sup>

Working on other African conflicts, Paul Richards (1998) and Christian Geffray (1990) have suggested a different (though not contradictory) take on the issue of extreme violence: to them, extreme violence is the result of a transformation of rebel organisations into “war-oriented social bodies” or “sectarian” groups, that is to say enclaved communities, small groups removed from the larger society which fight merely to perpetuate. The controlled nature of the violence in Casamance may seem to indicate that the MFDC has not quite reached this state, though perhaps, in this regard again, one might draw a contrast between the *maquis* settled by the Gambian border, and those by the Bissau-Guinean border: north of the Casamance river, because of the chronology and geography of the conflict, communities suffered only from temporary displacements, and have usually remained in place - or at a short distance, a few miles beyond the border; ties have thus been maintained, and the guerrillas have demonstrated moderation. South of the river, the situation is different: the Front Sud operates in a deeply traumatised area, largely emptied of its population; its ties are primarily with the refugee communities who survive in difficult conditions in Guinea-Bissau;<sup>47</sup> there perhaps, sectarian tendencies can be noted, and MFDC operations have often been very violent. It might thus be no surprise that most massacres of civilians by the MFDC have taken place south of the river (Pointe

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<sup>46</sup> In the rural areas, these north Senegalese civilians were usually civil servants, nurses or schoolteachers. The state encouraged their replacement with autochthonous Diola, maintaining a partial access to public goods. More generally, the war has provoked a silent, unstudied, exodus of north Senegalese from Casamance.

<sup>47</sup> Contrary to communities along the Gambian border, those in Guinea-Bissau enjoy little security; while the former can rely on the large Diola migrant community in The Gambia, the latter seem largely isolated from their host society, except perhaps near the small Bissau-Guinean Diola community near Eramé; they are frequently victimised by their landlords or Bissau-Guinean, and tend to form endogamic groups.

Saint-Georges, November 1992, and Cap Skirring, October 1992) and that those perpetrated in the Bignona district (Niahoump, February 2001, and Bélaye, March 2001) involved Front Sud fighters who had just moved north of the river.

Long after beginning its military actions, the MFDC enjoyed the support of large sections of the population. As discussed above, this owed something to the attractive character of the Casamançais nationalist ideology in a society where young unemployed literati were abundant. The excesses of the Senegalese forces also initially did much to strengthen the movement, but it was when the *maquis* forced the government to a ceasefire and discussions in 1991 and 1992 that support for the MFDC reached its peak.<sup>48</sup> In villages, discussions were rife over the justifications for independence, and what would happen after it was obtained; the imaginary redistribution of state jobs and the riches of the north Senegalese became a major topic of discussion. During the first half of the 1990s, young men flocked towards the *maquis*, uncoerced. Because of the noted fluidity of Atika, the constant shifting to and from civilian life, estimates are difficult to attain, but most accounts agree that, at its high point in the first half of the 1990s, the *maquis* comprised a few thousand men – a lot more than could be provided for, as guerrillas often point out.

The aforementioned embeddedness and popular support should not be taken to mean that all has been well between villagers and guerrillas. Fighters have repeatedly been involved, collectively or individually, on or off duty, in anti-social behaviour such as rapes, the murder of civilians, robbery, the breaking of ritual taboos or petty racketeering. As one woman living under Front Nord control explained, “living with someone who has a weapon is never a good thing.”<sup>49</sup> She explained how her family would always keep bowls of food ready, to placate the passing guerrillas. Indeed, there have been many instances of resistance by villagers. In zones beyond direct MFDC-control, such as Coubanao, resistance was open, using both “mystical” and physical weapons, and MFDC

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<sup>48</sup> In typical MFDC-fashion, the money which the government had given to the political wing to explain the ceasefire in the villages was actually spent on building up support for the movement.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with female civilian resident of a Front Nord controlled area, district of Bignona, August 2004.

guerrillas were killed.<sup>50</sup> In MFDC-controlled areas, villagers would resort to “weapons of the weak;” thus, in one case, villagers took the opportunity of a new school development project to move the school away from the MFDC camp, so as to limit the interactions between their daughters and the fighters.

If anything, what is striking is the variety of configurations of relations between guerrillas and civilians in Lower Casamance – a variety which strangely echoes the amazing cultural and dialectal diversity of the region. But towards the end of the 1990s, MFDC internal divisions worsened, and the odds turned increasingly against the MFDC. Because they owed much to (some of the) people, the guerrillas were forced into an uneasy stand-off. It is to this weakening that I now turn.

### **“Divided We Stand:” The Fragmentation of Atika**

As we have seen above, the MFDC did not start out as a military movement, but as a loose, multi-local network of networks, with no evident leader. This lack of leadership was further worsened, as the most significant activists were quickly rounded up by the Senegalese security forces. The MFDC has somehow never recovered from this initial fragmentation, which increased over the years, as a result of a series of factors. As pointed out in the historical overview, leadership struggles within the MFDC resulted in repeated internal violence in which many fighters were killed. The situation was such that since the late 1990s, the Senegalese government has been encouraging the reunification (on its own terms) of the MFDC as a prerequisite for the peace process. The present section aims to discuss this fragmentation.

First, one should insist on the extent of this fragmentation: the initial Front Sud/Front Nord division in 1992 was followed by a Front Sud internal division. Around 2003-4, the Front Nord itself split into two over negotiations with conflicting Front Sud factions. Most of these divisions have been accompanied by violence, a phenomenon which has

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<sup>50</sup> The partial disarmament of communities by the Senegalese security forces may have reduced the potential for such a resistance. Coubanao is nevertheless a case in point. See the accounts in *Fagaru*, 52, June 1992 and *Le Nouvel Afrique Asie*, 38, November 1992; a further MFDC attack in 2002 against the local credit institution in Coubanao stirred villagers into armed mobilisation. See *Sud Quotidien*, 29 May 2002.

probably become the main cause of death for MFDC guerrillas over the last five years. His adversaries accuse Salif Sadio of having literally starved to death more than a dozen of his captured opponents, including Leopold Sagna himself, in the course of this internal conflict. It is difficult to find a guiding principle to the fragmentation of the MFDC. MFDC leaders have frequently been reproached for prioritising their sub-group, their religion, or area of origin. The first division of the *maquis* apparently resulted from the struggle, discussed above, between Sidy Badji and Bertrand Diamacoune over the control of funds and paved the way for the Front Nord/Front Sud divide; this division seemed to draw from all sorts of cleavages, as the splinter groups which rebelled against Sidy Badji, a Muslim Diola from Buluf (district of Bignona), were led by Leopold Sagna and Maurice Adiokane Diatta, two Catholic Diola respectively from Bandial (district of Ziguinchor) and Kasa (district of Oussouye). Among the Diola from Buluf, a group which, for reasons discussed above, provided many of the first militants and guerrillas as well as much of the initial funding for the *maquis*, there was a sense of ownership of the movement; as a result of their contribution, they would often resent the growing influence of the Diamacoune brothers, Diola from Kasa. This division provided the foundation for the subsequent split of the Front Nord, and it has been looming in the Front Sud too: apparently to counter the influence of Léopold Sagna and the Diamacoune brothers, all Catholics, Salif Sadio, himself a Muslim Diola from Buluf, seems to have played up the religious theme. How real this cleavage actually is remains uncertain: sub-ethnic and religious border overlap very imperfectly, and bonds of friendship (pre-war or war-created) seem to matter a lot in determining factional affiliation. All these factional episodes can equally well be interpreted as leadership struggles between aspiring leaders, with every one of them mobilising a variety of constituencies. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that factions were never built purely on ethno-religious affiliations and that enough ties have persisted between the competing factions to allow for the repeated (and repeatedly failed) drives towards reunification.

Most people who, in one capacity or another, have been involved in discussions with the *maquis*, recount that these discussions are rarely individual, but are usually attended by several *maquisards*, not infrequently a dozen of them. Accounts of the internal

functioning of the *maquis* emphasize the importance of periodic fora in which current policy is reviewed. Indeed, this was how the movement was born, during the countless meetings in Dakar, Paris and Ziguinchor, where Senegal's policies in Casamance were commented on in open assemblies. This populist tendency has been maintained, and military and political leaders can be targets of populist criticisms of their biases, inefficiency, corruption and/or authoritarianism. These criticisms have repeatedly led to changes in leadership which losers in the MFDC game describe as "coups." It was such a "coup" that decided on Léopold Sagna's replacement as the chief of staff of Front Sud in 1994, and the attempts at reunification of the *maquis* proceed through the many contacts which MFDC fighters of all ranks, liaisons, and civilian supporters have with one another; indeed, in his own turn, Salif Sadio was called into question in September 2005.<sup>51</sup> To many guerrillas, this egalitarian character is a source of pride; one of them insisted: "The Casamançais rebellion is the poorest rebellion in the world. And I like that. [...] The people would go of their own will. [...] This too I liked. And the democracy too, I liked. You are not paid, you fend for yourself, so you can quit anytime you want. So I really liked this thing, and I always will."<sup>52</sup>

This egalitarianism may have to do with the entrenched cultural logic of Diola society, which has long been characterised as acephalous; there is indeed no "natural," self-evident hierarchy among the Diola, and even that of "modern" education, one that is very respected among the Diola, quickly lost relevance in the *maquis*.<sup>53</sup> A good name among other fighters is the key to being a *maquis* leader. Beyond the culturalist explanation, it is clear that the movement owes something of its democratic tendencies to its decentralised and weak structure. As noted above, neither the political nor the military leadership control much resources, and as the guerrilla quoted above explained, since fighters fend for themselves, they feel entitled to leave anytime, and to a say in all decisions. The

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<sup>51</sup> See *Wal Fadjri*, 29 September 2005. Following the release of this information in the press, Sadio's men organised for an official refutation, in the form of an interview given by Sadio. But it is clear Sadio was being contested from within his own group.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Front Sud fighter, Ziguinchor, January 2005.

<sup>53</sup> One educated ex-*maquisard* thus explained: "I had decided I would leave. It is very difficult for an intellectual, there. When you live with those guys who have another kind of [education] level". Interview with ex-Front Sud fighter, Ziguinchor, november 1998.

*maquis* leadership is thus very reliant on the good will and motivation of the fighters, and disciplinary measures (e.g., detention in a prison-bunker, beatings or punishing training exercises, the so-called “manoeuvres”) have remained largely unable to strengthen command and control. Indeed, some accounts have it that Salif Sadio’s decision to tighten the discipline and the budget, under the advice of Brigadier Mané, a ‘classical’ soldier, weakened his popularity among many of the guerrillas, and was a key step to the break-up of the Front Sud.<sup>54</sup> But fragmentation owes also to external factors, and particularly to the policies implemented by the Senegalese authorities, which we shall now turn to.

## **Dakarais Paradoxes**

First of all, it is to be noted that Dakar took little time to realise the potential for trouble. The Senegalese government often gave the security forces much room, allowing for human rights abuses which in turn strengthened the MFDC. But although it was going through a hard time during the 1980s and 1990s, faced as it was with structural adjustment, Dakar nonetheless devised policies to try and deal with the grievances expressed by the MFDC: a new generation of autochthonous Casamançais politicians was quickly promoted, a commission for the settlement of land disputes was installed, some cultural claims were catered for. During the 1990s, attempts were made to limit the extent of human rights violations.<sup>55</sup> This surely did something to relativise the credibility of the separatist critique of Senegal, and the hardcore separatists saw this clearly, as they violently denounced the loyalist Casamançais politicians whose careers received boosts from Dakar’s new Casamance policy. More generally, as negotiations began, money and promises of money started to flow. Most civilians who have been involved in one capacity or another with the *maquis* insist that ‘gifts’ were made to the fighters.<sup>56</sup> As one

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<sup>54</sup> Sadio apparently tried to impose a ‘tax’ in cashew nuts on fighters to finance the *maquis*.

<sup>55</sup> To this effect, a joint staff, mixing the civil and military authorities, was created in Ziguinchor in December 1995. Many local notables, including Catholic priests, army officers and politicians involved in the peace process, mentioned interventions on behalf of detainees. This did not prevent however the frequent killing of guerrillas captured in combat, confirmed by ex-Senegalese Army soldiers.

<sup>56</sup> Researchers do not always escape such queries (however minimal) for assistance or gifts.

such middleman commented, “how can one talk with someone who lives in the bush and who is hungry? If you want to talk to him, you must first make him feel good.”<sup>57</sup> At various times, several *maquis* have agreed to direct or indirect assistance from the Senegalese authorities, officially as part of ceasefire money or demobilisation and reinsertion policies or as incitement to refrain from banditry.<sup>58</sup> MFDC members provide all sorts of justification for their acceptance of state monies, describing them alternatively as a “weapon of the weak,” as a way to get Casamançais taxpayer’s money back, or as a legitimate compensation for all the sacrifices they have agreed to.<sup>59</sup> In any case, Dakar’s willingness to hand money out to the MFDC is part of the great Senegalese political tradition, the art of the “reciprocal assimilation of elites” at which Senghor was adept.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, one can only be amazed at the density of ties which quickly developed in the shadow of Dakar’s mixed policy of repression and cooptation.<sup>61</sup> On many occasions, local agreements could thus be negotiated for the release of captives or the retrieval of seized goods, the organisation of elections or the advancement of public works.

But tensions within the MFDC also resulted from another aspect of Dakar’s policy. This is not to say that Dakar consistently implemented a “divide and rule” policy: while there have been instances of this kind of policy, the process seems to have been largely unconscious, with internal tensions in Dakar’s policy-making circles resonating with and

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with foreign development worker involved in the peace process, Ziguinchor, July 1999.

<sup>58</sup> Such was the case of the Front Nord from 1992 to 2000, and of the Camp de la Paix, a splinter group from the Front Nord, from 2003 to 2005. When Wade withdrew assistance to the Front Nord in 2000, the Front Nord successfully lobbied the *Comité des Cadres Casamançais* (CCC), an association of Casamançais elites, to intervene on their behalf. Source: author’s archives. Front Sud factions also received Senegalese-sponsored assistance on several occasions; it is rumoured that, in 2005, Kassolol was receiving state support.

<sup>59</sup> One *maquisard* thus commented “the civilians from the shipwreck [of the Dakar-Ziguinchor ferry, which killed 2,000 people in September 2002], who did nothing, each family received ten millions [as compensation from the Senegalese state, which ran the ferry]. So how much should there be for those young men who have spent their entire life in the *maquis*?” Interview with Front Sud fighter, Ziguinchor, August 2005.

<sup>60</sup> On these political arts in the post-colonial situation, see Bayart (1989). On Senegal more specifically, see Cruise O’Brien (1975), Diop (2002) and Diop and Diouf (1990 & 2002).

<sup>61</sup> To take but one example, around the mid-1990s, Edmond Bora, a member of the MFDC political wing, was famous because his own daughter lived in Dakar in the house of General Wane, the Senegalese official then in charge with the peace process.

aggravating tensions within the MFDC.<sup>62</sup> To sort the conflict out, Senegalese elites tried to develop links and contacts with the MFDC, but in the broader context of the Senegalese democratisation, the Casamance peace process became a political issue, with legal politicians competing for a part. Thus, when a group of Diola MPs of the opposition PDS established contacts with the guerrillas and brokered the first ceasefire in 1991, their initiative was quickly countered by rival politicians both from within the PDS itself and from the ruling PS, who relied on the MFDC detainees released as a consequence of the ceasefire to play a part. Accusing the signatories of corruption and betrayal, the released detainees took over the MFDC, and sidelined Sidy Badji, the leader of the armed wing. This pattern was repeated over the years, as competing factions within the Senegalese establishment built up connections with opposing factions within the MFDC:<sup>63</sup> the other middlemen's separatists would always be "false" and "corrupt," and one was always in touch with the only "true rebels" around. Thus, during the first years of President Wade, a de facto competition was established between the Diola Minister of the Armed Forces, Youba Sambou, and the Minister of the Interior, General Lamine Cissé, an Army general with Casamance experience. Each operated with their own sets of connections to the Casamançais "civil society" and the MFDC, and thus, unwittingly or not, mutually neutralised their interventions: for every step made, there were instant critics denouncing "corruption" or "lack of inclusiveness." As one middleman bitterly commented, "One should first reunify the reunifiers."<sup>64</sup> At some point, from about 2003 to 2005, President Wade seemed to try and regulate the Senegalese side of the peace process, setting one man, General Abdoulaye Fall, in charge and calling everybody else into line, but this policy later frayed.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Though some people insist for instance that it was Dakar that informed the *maquis* on their secret meetings with their then chief-of-staff Léopold Sagna, so as to discredit him.

<sup>63</sup> There were famous one-night-stands, for instance when Abdoulatif Guèye, then an advisor to President Wade, bought his way into the peace process, in what may have been a desperate attempt to rebuild credibility shortly before his arrest in a AIDS medicine scandal.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Casamançais Catholic priest involved in the peace process, Ziguinchor, July 2004.

<sup>65</sup> The December 2004 and February 2005 peace signings were marred by these tensions, with all sorts of agents (from the factions of the MFDC political wing, civil society or legal politics) fighting Wade's

Out of a mixture of subtlety and maladroitness, Dakar's attempts at developing links with the MFDC thus did much to weaken a movement that was already structurally fragile. The paradox is that while many localised agreements could be reached and violence could be kept under control, every potential middleman and every MFDC leader has been cast into doubt in the eyes of everybody else. A credible pan-MFDC negotiation has become very difficult, and Dakar acknowledged that much, as it began fostering drives towards reunification. But fundamentally, Dakar has long been trying to dodge real negotiations, out of a mixture where conceit and *realpolitik* enter in unknown proportions. One may indeed ask what there is to negotiate between a powerful state and separatists who, no matter how divided and weakened, have repeatedly stated they would never settle for anything less than independence. Playing its advantage, Dakar has essentially been using MFDC factions and figures with whom it has links in order to declare the end of the conflict, hoping that the various *maquis*, eventually induced with "reinsertion money," would progressively evaporate. Evidently, the closer a MFDC faction gets to negotiating with Dakar or accepting Senegalese money, the less legitimacy it has and the less "useful" it becomes. Dakar's handling of the peace process and its partially successful attempt to "assimilate" the MFDC may thus have created a catch-22 situation, fragmenting the MFDC to such an extent that no MFDC figure can afford to publicly renounce the idea of independence without losing his clout, while encouraging (and helping) fighters to keep to the bush to increase their "returns" from an unending peace process.

## **The Water Against the Fish?**

Stuck as it has become in these conundrums, the MFDC has seen the proverbial water silently withdraw from under the fish of its rebellious enterprise. It no longer benefits from the legitimacy it enjoyed in the early 1990s, a good indication being the current absence of recruits.<sup>66</sup> On the military side, it progressively emerged that there would be

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handling of the matter, and Wade finally having it his way. For an account of the first three years of Wade's policy in Casamance, see Foucher (2003a).

<sup>66</sup> The children of MFDC activists seem less and less inclined to enter the *maquis*.

no decisive victory on either side: while Senegal came to realise that it could not face the internal and international costs of a military solution, the MFDC saw that it could not extend its control much beyond the mined forested border areas Atika controlled. Skepticism had actually dawned early on some MFDC militants: associates of Sidy Badji, Atika's chief of staff until 1992, insist that Badji's willingness to stick by the ceasefire was related to his growing pessimism regarding Atika's military prospects. This weakness of the MFDC was not lost on the population, particularly when, from the mid-1990s, the movement took to planting land mines and engaging in banditry. The defeat and death in 2000 of Brigadier Mané of Guinea-Bissau, who was possibly the MFDC's first serious international partner, and its repercussions - renewed internal MFDC fighting, a new spate of attacks on civilians, renewed Senegalese army combing operations, significant displacements of civilians beyond the Gambian border - were additional wounds to the credibility of Casamançais separatism. The MFDC came under increasing criticism, even among those populations where its embeddedness was the strongest.

Thus, along the Gambian border, the communities which surrounded, for better or worse, the *maquis*, have been using their leverage: in 2003, local religious leaders, pro-MFDC civilians and local development workers negotiated a de facto ceasefire and the return of refugees. The government followed suit, agreeing to a reduction of its military presence and supporting returning refugees; this led to the signing, in January 2004, of an agreement between General Fall, then the representative of the Senegalese authorities, and the "officials of the MFDC in Fogny" – in fact villagers who were partners of the local *maquis*<sup>67</sup>. The whole Bignona district was progressively stabilised, and refugees have been coming back. Later, the same civilians pushed for the withdrawal of some hardline fighters who are considered troublemakers<sup>68</sup>. Along the Bissau-Guinean border, the refugee communities that were generally supportive of the MFDC were coming under the pressure of the new Bissau-Guinean authorities. Supporters of Salif Sadio were repeatedly harassed by the Bissau-Guinean troops; on one occasion at least, a refugee

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<sup>67</sup> Source: author's archives.

<sup>68</sup> Phone interview with local development worker, October 2005.

village was burnt to the ground by Bissau soldiers. Those further west, who backed the other Front Sud faction, have enjoyed greater stability as a result of their patrons' proximity to the post-Mané Bissau-Guinean army, but have exerted a de facto pressure on "their" guerrillas to keep it quiet - and indeed, they have: MFDC Kassolol fighters have since refrained from action against the Senegalese army. They have also continued cooperating with the Bissau-Guinean forces, and with significant Bissau-Guinean assistance, have assaulted Salif Sadio: in February 2005, they took over one pro-Sadio camp east of Ziguinchor; in March 2006, they launched a massive attack against Sadio's main camp near Baraka-Mandioca, next to the Bissau-Guinean town of Saõ Domingos; chased from the Bissau-Guinean borders, Sadio's men have switched towards the Gambian border where, in May and June 2006, they seized several pro-Kassolol camps. In an international context unfavourable to rebellions, fragmented in both its political and military wing, faced with a Senegal that has gained a lot of strength over the past years, increasingly called into question by the Casamançais population, the MFDC seems to be losing credibility. And because it had long remained like a fish in water, it could only feel the water's growing pressure.

But Casamance is never lacking in paradoxes: Senegal's current visible advantage has encouraged activists of various factions to make use of the ceasefire to try and reunify and refurbish the structures of the *maquis*, and even rebuild a fundraising system. In typical MFDC fashion, this process has partly benefited from President Wade's ceasefire money. The trend towards MFDC reunification is partly related to the activism of young, Europe-based, Casamançais *émigrés* who are not entangled in the bitter disputes of the past, and perhaps the current development of the international Diola diaspora will be an influential factor.<sup>69</sup> It is as yet unclear whether this rebuilding of the movement will succeed.

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<sup>69</sup> While other Senegalese groups have long been migrating to Europe massively, the Diola have historically migrated essentially to Dakar and The Gambia. Since the 1980s, they have increasingly been going to Europe and North America. The possibility to apply for refugee status has been a factor in this evolution. This has led to the development of a trade in MFDC certificates which may help to form refugee status applications.

## Conclusion

What broader lessons can one derive from the present study of the Casamançais insurgency? First, the case of the MFDC calls into question the idea of armed rebellion as a profit-led enterprise: though Casamançais separatism surely had to do with a sense of economic deprivation and ‘stolen’ riches, mobilisation started long before any serious, ‘economic’ consideration of its chances for success or returns.<sup>70</sup> It was grievances, and above all the way in which they were framed in the ideology of Casamançais nationalism, which were key to the separatist mobilisation, and political and historical arguments have been playing a part all along. What also emerges clearly from the case study is the importance of political economy in the later development of armed conflict. The absence of international backing and the incapacity of the political wing to preserve its fundraising capacity have been central in weakening the structure of command of the MFDC. In this situation, the *maquisards* have developed coping mechanisms accorded to local contexts: a bit of banditry, some exploitation of the low-profit local resources, thereby creating ties with civilians whose war-weariness they had to confront sooner or later.

The paradox is that the survival of the MFDC as a guerrilla movement was made possible by its transformation into an embedded, decentralised, and ultimately weak structure. More than anything, the case of Casamance indicates that, within a single movement, there can be significant variations from one sub-group to another in terms of structure and embeddedness, and that these variations matter.<sup>71</sup> Thus, along the Bissau-Guinean border, the MFDC and its refugee communities live in difficult isolation and exhibit some signs of sectarianism. Along the Gambian border, the movement seems to persist more as a kind of mafia, embedded and dependent on the rather prosperous local economy. Barely bureaucratised, relying on a series of constituencies with conflicting interests (e.g., the refugees, the civilian wing, the urban and diasporic supporters, the guerrillas, the

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<sup>70</sup> The growing talk, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, of oil discoveries in Casamance, deserves a special mention here. It seems as if, in an oil-hungry age, oil would grant credibility to separatist enterprises. Modern Scottish nationalism and Cabinda are other cases in point.

<sup>71</sup> On the same issue in Mozambique, see Geffray (1990, chapter 2) and Weissman (1993).

villagers), the MFDC has been highly sensitive to personal links and struggles, and amenable to Senegal's assimilation policies.

Indeed, the nature of the state's reaction to the separatist challenge has been a crucial variable. It had mixed effects: the repression was unexpectedly violent, and while it confirmed in the eyes of many the plight of Casamance at the hands of Senegal, it eventually did much to break up the political wing. But Dakar has also, very early on, allowed for mechanisms of self-control, incorporation and negotiation, however clumsy – a testimony of Senegal's rather peculiar political history of accommodation and mixed democracy.

The condition of the *maquis*' survival has thus been the very mechanism of its fragmentation: the MFDC survived through its connections “above” (with the state elites) and “below” (with sections of the population), but it survived only in a degraded, weak form. A movement of voluntary, part-time guerrillas, the MFDC was never able to escape its “amateur” (though militarily efficient) status, but has also retained some of its audience. These weaknesses, rebel fragmentation, and Dakar's search for a (favourable) soft landing all combine in explaining the duration of the conflict.