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CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO FRONTS – IN SEARCH OF LASTING PEACE IN THE CASAMANCE REGION

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES, PLAYERS AND CONSEQUENCES

Stefan Gehrold / Inga Neu

Senegal is seen as a model example of West African democracy. It is characterized by democratic structures and the rule of law as well as guaranteed basic freedoms, in particular freedom of religion, free speech, a free press and freedom of assembly. The democratically structured Senegalese army is one of the few African armies to be involved in regional and international peacekeeping missions. The conflict in the south-west of the country, which has been going on for almost 30 years now, however, is barely acknowledged by the rest of the world and Europe in particular. Here, in the Casamance region, Senegalese military and rebel groups affiliated with the *Movement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance* (Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance – MFDC) have been engaged in a seemingly never-ending and bloody fight that is the root cause of many of the hardships faced daily by the local population. Several thousand people have been killed in armed attacks or by landmines. More than 60,000 people have fled or have been driven out of the area. Countless peace treaties between the Senegalese government and the now-fragmented rebel forces have not been able to do any more than temporarily alleviate the situation. Since the fall of 2009 in particular there has been an increased incidence of fighting, prompting the Foreign Office to issue travel warnings.

In order to establish lasting peace, a deep understanding of the conflict is necessary. The conflict has taken on a life of its own through a veritable wartime economy and a generation that has grown up with the conflict. But where

do the roots of this conflict lie and what is it that makes it so difficult to resolve these problems? Who are the players and what are the motives that drive them, in the past and today? Above all, what does this conflict mean for society and for the people living in the Casamance region?

THE CASAMANCE REGION

From the outside, Casamance was seen as distinct from the rest of Senegal for many years, if not from the rest of Africa south of the Sahara. Jean Claude Marut talks about the European myth of “Casamance”: a region free of drought, hunger or slums.¹ In fact, part of the reason for the longstanding conflict lies in the geographic location and the mentality of the population of the Casamance region.

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With an area of 30,000 square kilometers, situated in the south-westernmost part of Senegal, bordering on Guinea-Bissau to the South and separated from the rest of the country by Gambia to the North, the Casamance region is practically an enclave.² It is sub-divided into the regions of the lower, middle and upper Casamance, of which the lower, with its capital city Ziguinchor, is most affected by the conflict. The lower Casamance is especially well known for its fertile soils, setting it apart from the rest of the country, which is dominated and shaped by the Sahel. Agricultural use, such as fruit orchards, rice fields and vegetable cultivation has replaced a large majority of the natural vegetation of the region. The forests of the Casamance are used intensively for silviculture but not sustainably enough. In addition, oysters are bred in the many distributaries of the Casamance river. Fishing also plays an important role for the local population. Other elements that contribute towards the livelihood of the people living here are migration to urban regions in the

- 1 | Cf. Jean-Claude Marut, “Le Mythe – penser la Casamance”, in: Francois George Barbier-Wiesser (ed.), *Comprendre la Casamance – Chronique d’une intégration contrastée* (Kathala, 1994), 20.
- 2 | For further information on the geography of the Casamance region see Annie Chéneau-Locay, “La raison – Géographie des Casamance”, in: Francois George Barbier-Wiesser (ed.), *Comprendre la Casamance – Chronique d’une intégration contrastée* (Kathala, 1994).

north of the country and to Gambia with the emigrants supporting their families by sending money home.

The ethnic composition within the region is hugely diverse. A majority belongs to the Jola³ people, followed by Peul and Mandingue and numerous other ethnic groups. Nowadays, there are also many Wolof in the Casamance region, who represent the majority in the rest of the country and have a dominant position, but here account for only five percent of the population. The majority of those living in Casamance are Muslims (75 percent; 94 percent in Senegal as a whole)⁴. Christians, mainly Catholic, comprise 17 percent and a further eight percent are followers of traditional tribal religions. Regional identity plays a central role in distinguishing them from those living in the North (*Nordistes*), which also forms part of the separatist argument.⁵ Jola and other ethnic groups in the Casamance region also have transnational links with Guinea-Bissau and Gambia, which have grown from family, ethnic, religious and economic roots. These links have existed for a long time, but grew in importance in the context of the conflict due to the fact that the rebels operate across borders, also through gun trafficking. Moreover, refugee movements stop at no border.

Transnational links with Guinea-Bissau and Gambia, which have grown from family, ethnic, religious and economic roots, have existed for a long time, but grew in importance in the context of the conflict.

HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE CONFLICT

The causes of the conflict are multifaceted. On 26 December 1982, protestors marched into Ziguinchor demanding independence for the Casamance region. They took down the Senegalese flag from government buildings, replacing it with the white flag of Casamance. The Senegalese government was quick to respond. The leaders of the MFDC, which established itself as a political and social

3 | The figures vary widely here, from 35 percent according to Bocounta Diallo, *La Crise Casamançaise – Problématique et voies des solutions* (Paris, 2009) to an absolute majority (61 percent) of Jola in the Casamance region according to Martin Evans, *Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)* (AFP Briefing Paper, Chatham House, 2004).

4 | Cf. Martin Evans, *Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)* (AFP Briefing Paper, Chatham House, 2004), 3.

5 | This will be dealt with in greater depth below.

movement in 1945, were arrested and sentenced to five years imprisonment for attacking the integrity of the nation. These events resulted in the formation of a military wing of the MFDC, which called itself Attika (Jola for 'fighters'). Following eight years of opposition and violent demonstrations, which were met with growing military and legal force, the nature of the conflict altered. In May 1990, the Attika, sometimes also referred to as the Maquis, attacked military targets as well as civilians accused of cooperating with the government. In response, the army arrested hundreds of people, who were subsequently tortured or executed. The population was caught in the cross-fire between the two fronts. While the Senegalese security forces accused nearly every single person, particularly members of the Jola ethnic group, of collaborating with the MFDC, the freedom movement forced the population to support them.

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The first ceasefire treaties were concluded in 1991 and 1993, but failed to hold since they did not resolve the issue of independence. In 1995, military measures increased in intensity following the abduction of four French tourists. A new ceasefire treaty was signed in 1999, followed by a peace treaty in 2001. Even this failed to bring about any major improvements. The death in 2007 of MFDC-leader Abbé Diamcoune Senghor, who had been the Senegalese government's contact person, complicated the situation even further. Since the fall of 2009 there have been growing numbers of armed confrontations following a decrease in the preceding period.⁶

CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

Players on the various fronts put forward different explanations for a conflict which has its roots in colonialism and even further back and which has grown increasingly complex. Who are the rebels and what are their motives now? How does the conflict affect the lives of the local people and how do they deal with this? Historical, political, cultural and socio-economic factors are closely interlinked and in places have developed their own dynamics.

6 | Cf. Country report by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's overseas office in Dakar: http://www.kas.de/proj/home/pub/26/1/year-2009/dokument_id-17946/index.html (accessed May 11, 2010)

The historical-political dimension of the conflict⁷

The discovery and occupation of the Casamance region by the Portuguese, followed by the British and finally the French, and the eventual independence of Senegal in 1960, including the Casamance region, all had far-reaching consequences. The longstanding resistance movement in the Casamance began under the colonial rule of the Portuguese from 1645 and continued until the French took power.

Eline Sitoé Diatta led the population in a revolution and went down in the history of the country as the 'Joan of Arc' of the Casamance region.

In the eyes of the "colonial masters", the Jola had "an impulsive temperament, which resists every authoritarian principle".⁸ Later, missionaries noted that the region around Ziguinchor in the South-West of the country in particular had not yet been "pacified", and complained about the local people's "lack of willingness to cooperate"⁹. During the First World War, the Jola resistance increased dramatically, primarily as a result of the enforced conscription of young men to fight in the French forces. The families of those killed in the war grew desperate and angry, and expressed their frustrations by honoring and lending their support to the young queen of Cabrousse¹⁰, Eline Sitoé Diatta. She opposed colonial rule and the oppression of the population it entailed. In 1942, she led the population in a revolution and went down in the history of the country as the 'Joan of Arc' of the Casamance region. Aline Sitoé Diatta was arrested in 1943 and banished to exile, from which she never returned. She had many successors and even today, the image of the women who protected their country and their families is still reflected in the armed wing of the separatist MFDC.

7 | The Senegalese lawyer Bocounta Diallo divides the conflict into the historical-political, cultural, socio-economic and military dimensions, which is presented very briefly here for reasons of clarity. Diallo, who has gained an international reputation for defending human rights in conflict situations and is president of various human rights organizations, has dealt intensively with the Casamance conflict and is cited in the region as one of the most important references where the conflict is concerned. Cf. Bocounta Diallo, *La Crise Casamançaise – Problématique et voies des solutions* (Paris, 2009).

8 | Bocounta Diallo, *La Crise Casamançaise – Problématique et voies des solutions* (Paris, 2009), 27, (translated by the authors).

9 | *Ibid.*, 28.

10 | The empires continued to exist in parallel with the colonial administrative structure.

The cultural dimension of the conflict

There are major links between the cultural dimension of the Casamance conflict and the historical-political development of the region. Today's arguments demanding regional solidarity through a common culture that has created an entity distinct from the population of northern Senegal (*Nordistes*), refer, *inter alia*, to the Kingdom of Gabou. From the 16th through the 19th century, this encompassed parts of what today is Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry as well as part of Senegal, particularly the Casamance region. Casamance and the bordering regions still are home to the ethnic groups that, up until a good hundred years ago, lived together in the Gabou Empire and whose extensive networks crossed these international borders. This ethnic diversity did not stop the *Casacais*¹¹ from developing a common identity, which differs markedly from that of the *Nordistes* in terms of values. As a result first and foremost of its enclave position and due to far-reaching economic self-reliance, the peoples of the Casamance region were able to uphold their rich cultural heritage, which is also passed on from generation to generation through their religious beliefs. It is from this commonality of identity among the population of the Casamance region that the separatist MFDC feeds.

Ethnic diversity did not stop the Casacais from developing a common identity, which differs markedly from that of the Nordistes in terms of values.

While those writing about the Casamance region and its inhabitants itself¹², in contrast to the *Nordistes*, primarily cite their shared history and values, Jean-Claude Marut points out that the Gabou Empire can serve both as an example of similarities and as a basis of differences. According to Marut¹³, novelists have romanticized the shared history. The construct of a common culture based on the history of the Gabou Empire was in fact used in functional terms as a means of separation.

11 | The population of the Casamance are variously referred to either as the Casacais or Casamançais.

12 | For example Bocounta Diallo, *La Crise Casamançaise – Problématique et voies des solutions* (Paris, 2009).

13 | Cf. Jean-Claude Marut, "Le dessous des cartes casamançaises – une approche géopolitique du conflit", in: François George Barbier-Wiesser (ed.), *Comprendre la Casamance – Chronique d'une intégration contrastée* (Kathala, 1994), 203 et sqq.

Two cultural characteristics play a central role in the conflict and the resolution thereof.

- Firstly, the Jola in particular oppose every form of state authority. In fact, the only authorities they respect and revere are the “High Priests” of the villages, known as *Aloenba*, and the clan leaders. In the Jola tribe, a clan encompasses all those descended from the same male ancestors. As a rule, the eldest is their leader and is supported by a clan council. While the clan council exercises the legislative power, the leader takes the role of the executive. Generally there will be several clans living together in a village or town, each of which nominates a representative to the town council. In addition to the individual towns and villages, there is also a national council with regional powers. It is composed of delegations from the towns and villages, as well as direct members known as *Hunir* and the elected king.¹⁴
- The Jola’s Clan system is also closely linked with the belief in certain fetishes (objects believed to have supernatural powers) which influence important decisions.

Leaders of the separatist movement and their first fighters made a blood pact in the sacred forests. According to animist beliefs, anyone who breaks a pact made in the “Bois Sacrés” will be cursed.

In addition to the fetish priests of each clan, there are ancestral cults and fetishist beliefs relating to the family ancestry. The supreme fetish priest and charismatic leader is the king, who ensures solidarity between the various families. The initiation into the

fetishist culture takes place in the sacred forests (*Bois Sacrés*). Here, the initiated meet and contact supernatural powers. It is here that important decisions are taken, including calling upon the ancestors to provide supernatural guidance. The historian Noah Cissé¹⁵ reports that in the wake of the events of December 1982, the leaders of the separatist movement and their first fighters made a blood pact to fight with their lives for the independence for the Casamance region in the sacred woods surrounding Ziguinchor. This pact has continued

14 | Cf. Bocounta Diallo, *La Crise Casamancaise – Problématique et voies des solutions* (Paris, 2009), 41 et sqq.

15 | The historian Noah Cissé is director of the Lycées Djignabo in Ziguinchor, where the first revolts took place. He has been studying the conflict intensively since it began and is used both as an advisor and cited as a reference with regard to issues relating to the conflict.

among MFDC members to this day. According to animist beliefs, anyone who breaks a pact made in the sacred woods in respect of one of the deceased will be cursed.

The Senegalese government's lack of respect for the Jola culture and its failure to incorporate magic-religious elements when justifying the armed conflict make it even more difficult to resolve the situation.

The socio-economic dimension of the conflict

The Casamance region has resources that Senegal otherwise lacks. Foreign currency earned through fishing and tourism in particular represent important potential opportunities for the development of the country. However, the development of the region is limited by its enclave position and the lack of developed infrastructure. The country is sinking into poverty - with negative consequences for the tourism.

Above all the lack of proper administration of agricultural areas has led to a worsening of the social and economic conditions. Even the colonial rulers showed little interest in the Casamance. Infrastructure development was carried out in the four Senegalese municipalities through municipal law: Dakar, Goree, Saint-Louis and Rufisque. This marginalization of the South led to a feeling of inferiority among the population of Casamance. The situation was aggravated further by the fact that in the 19th century the colonial leaders relocated *Nordistes* to Casamance, initially only to break up the close-knit structures and the resistance of the *Casacais*. Later, arable land was handed over to the *Nordistes*, leading to opposition from the local rice farmers, which the French colonial powers countered with military attacks. In the mid-19th century the independence movement of the *Casacais* against France came into existence. For greater control, at the end of the 19th century the French increasingly often appointed Senegalese from the North as village leaders.

In the 19th century the colonial leaders relocated *Nordistes* to Casamance, initially only to break up the close-knit structures and the resistance of the *Casacais*.

A sociological principle in Casamance is that the soil and forests, especially the sacred forests, which are inviolable, cannot be sold. The government development policy since Senegal gained independence, coupled with the arbitrary

award of arable land and the lack of respect for traditional cultural values have built an almost insurmountable wall between the *Casacaïs* and the immigrants from the North. An additional problem is the increasing salination of the soil, which has caused agricultural land to become scarce. This salination is a result *inter alia* of deforestation for peanut cultivation, which was introduced from the North.

Furthermore, the construction of new residential settlements, where housing is given to Wolofs at low prices, led in the 1970s to the widespread destruction of sacred forests. This established an image of the *Nordistes* as intruders and “the dominant race”. While Senghor, the country’s first president, avoided appointing prefects and governors belonging to the Wolof ethnic group in the region, today the administration in Casamance is again largely in the hands of the Wolof. This has cemented the *Casacaïs’* prejudice.

Another economic aspect that has been especially instrumental in the continuation of the conflict is the wartime economy that has established itself in the region, and

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beyond. The drugs trade in particular has expanded far beyond the borders of Casamance. Used initially by the military wing of the MFDC to finance its operations, the cannabis trade has taken on a life of its own. Nowadays, doors are open to wide range of players, even those without political objectives. Ghanaians who live exclusively from cannabis cultivation have settled at the border between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. The geopolitical situation in the region also has a special importance. Diallo points out that wars in Sierra Leone and Nigeria play just as great a role as do the uncontrollable borders with Gambia and Guinea-Bissau.¹⁶ In addition to several hundred tons of cannabis, drugs raids by the national police force have also uncovered considerable sums of money in various currencies.

The cross-border arms trade, first and foremost with Guinea-Bissau, has also become a fixed part of the established wartime economy. Guinea-Bissau’s accession to the

16 | Cf. *ibid.*, 65.

Union d'Etats Monétaires Ouest-Africains (West African Monetary Union) led to a severe worsening of the living standards due to the alignment of prices with those in the neighboring countries. This has led many Bissau-Guinean soldiers to rent out their weapons to MFDC members in order to make extra money. Trade in weapons with other countries also plays a role: West Africa has an arms trade involving an estimated eight million small arms and light weapons. Porous borders and coastal zones that cannot be sufficiently controlled further promote circulation. In 2000, the Senegalese president, Abdoulaye Wade, publicly accused Libya, the Ukraine, China and Russia of supplying the Maquis. The MFDC denied these accusations. Furthermore, it is assumed that rebels in Sierra Leone and Liberia also supply weapons to the Maquis.¹⁷ The interests of those involved in the arms trade are without a doubt also impeding the resolution of the conflict.

The military dimension of the conflict

While the independence movement of the MFDC formed as far back as 1945, its military wing formed when a "second generation" moved up the ranks in 1982. Those living in Casamance talk about three trigger factors. First, in 1976, Casasport Ziguinchor, the team from the capital of Casamance, was playing against JA Dakar in the final of the Senegalese football cup. Following a foul by a Casasport player, the team was disqualified, despite the fact their win was secure. Among the population in the Casamance region there was talk of corruption. Second, the government appointed another prefect from Dakar as governor of the Casamance region. Third, a student was killed in protests as a result of police action against the protestors.

The historic march to the governor's office in Ziguinchor in 1982 culminated in the taking down of the Senegalese flag and the raising of the white flag of Casamance. The Senegalese government responded with violence.

On December 26, 1982, there was an historic march, mainly by students, to the governor's office in Ziguinchor. It culminated in the taking down of the Senegalese flag and the raising of the white flag of Casamance. The Senegalese government responded with violence. Many arrests were

17 | Cf. Martin Evans, Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC), (AFP Briefing Paper, Chatham House, 2004), 9.

made in the weeks that followed. The protestors fled to the forests. With the support of the high priests, the decision was taken to set up the military wing of the MFDC, called Attika. The next year, on 18 December 1983, another protest march was organized in Ziguinchor, to commemorate the unrest of the previous year. The demonstration took such a bloody turn that December 18, 1983, has gone down in Casamance history as "red Sunday". Despite the initially peaceful demonstration, the police took aggressive action against the protestors, the brutal beatings resulting in anything from 50 to 200 deaths¹⁸ and a large number of arrests. An atmosphere of fear ensued.

The government eventually gave the military solution priority over any kind of political or legal solution. Violent attacks by both sides further aggravated the crisis.

The MFDC then developed a veritable guerrilla force, which was able to hide easily in the densely forested delta area covered with mangroves and criss-crossed by distributaries. The topographic situation in the region posed serious challenges for the Senegalese military in its operations to counter the MFDC. Following a development phase characterized by arms acquisition and training, during which there were only occasional bloody encounters with the military, by 1990 the guerrilla forces were fully mobilized. Their repeated interventions led to many deaths and casualties. The government eventually gave the military solution priority over any kind of political or legal solution. Violent attacks by both sides further aggravated the crisis. The arrest of several hundred people and their subsequent torture and murder in prison led the rebels to turn their backs on political protest and retreat to the underground.

The conflict is multifaceted. The historical, cultural and family links with the neighboring states of Guinea-Bissau and Gambia play an extremely important role. The political, economic and infrastructural connection of the '3B' Banjul-Bignona-Bissau axis, the link between Banjul (Gambia), Bignona (Casamance) and Bissau (Guinea), is a nightmare for the Senegalese government. The 3B Axis would lead to the separation of Casamance from the rest of Senegal and to the amalgamation of revolutionary forces in the region.

18 | Cf. Martin Evans, Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC), (AFP Briefing Paper, Chatham House, 2004), 3.

In light of the factors that define the identity of the people here, as set forth above, this development is not unrealistic. There are, in fact, close links between the military wing of the MFDC and the Bissau-Guinean freedom movement, PAIGC.¹⁹ The arms trade across the border with Guinea-Bissau has already been mentioned. Sections of the Bissau-Guinean army under Ansoumane Mané were intensively involved in this during the 1990s. According to investigations by the Senegalese government, there are links right up to the government level in Guinea-Bissau and Mané is accused of involving his units in military operations. Following Mané's suspension, in May 1998 there was a military coup in Guinea-Bissau, in which MFDC rebels also took part.

The official line of the Senegalese government was to promote in peace negotiations, but in fact it actually strengthened its military presence, sending more troops to the south of Casamance in particular.

Gambia also maintains close links with the MFDC. For many years its government was suspected of supporting the rebel leader Salif Sadio while units and politicians close to him are said to have supported the guards around Gambian president Jaya Jammeh.

As a result, the Senegalese government attempted to play down its responsibility for the deterioration of the situation. Its official line was to promote in peace negotiations, but in fact it actually strengthened its military presence, sending more troops to the south of Casamance in particular. Most recently in March 2010, the military forces were carrying out intensive air attacks and bombings of rebel bases in response to ongoing attacks by the rebels.²⁰ It is clearly apparent that the government has not abandoned the option of a military solution.

19 | Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde, Portuguese for the "African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde".

20 | See for example the Senegalese newspaper *Le Matin* on March 22, 2010.

THE MOUVEMENT DES FORCES DÉMOCRATIQUES DE LA CASAMANCE

The fragmentation and formation of various factions within the MFDC guerrilla has made negotiations even more difficult. Originally one unit, two main groups soon emerged within the guerrilla movement. There were also further splits within these groups, which made it difficult to differentiate the one from the other and even today they are still in transition.

As a result of ceasefire negotiations in April 1992 in Guinea-Bissau, the movement split into a Northern and a Southern front, separated geographically by the Casamance river. Even the fact that the talks were held in the neighboring country illustrates the cross-border nature of the conflict.

Until today, the fragmentation of the Northern front has increased further. There are also conflicts within the individual fronts.

The MFDC was represented by rebel leader Sidy Badji. Father Diamacoune Senghor, the founder of the resistance movement, criticized the fact that the main goal of the movement, namely the independence of Casamance, was not even the subject of negotiations. It was on this basis that Badji and his followers established the Northern front and halted active fighting against the government. In spite of this, it would be wrong to assume that the North at least had been pacified at this point in time. The Northern front continued its illegal activities. Since 2001, the ceasefire between the Northern front and the army has been uplifted again. The reason: the Senegalese army intended to establish military bases in the region. In 2003, a further splinter group formed within the Northern front, which apparently exercises great influence. The relationship between the Northern and Southern fronts is characterized by intermittent violent infighting. Until today, the fragmentation of the Northern front has increased further. There are also conflicts within the individual fronts, meaning that now we must talk of splinter groups rather than fronts.

As a result of the peace talks in 1992, Father Diamacoune Senghor joined forces with the leader of the Maquis, Leopold Sagna, who at that point controlled the stronger military Southern front. Its main headquarters were located in the densely forested region to either side of the Bissau-Guinean

border. For a long time, the Southern front continued to be the active military force of the MFDC. However, here, too, there were internal rifts. Sagna's more moderate views and his contact with the president of the time, Abdou Diouf, alienated him from the hardliners of both the military and the political wings. A further faction established itself around Lieutenant Salif Sadio, despite the fact that Sagna was the official leader of the Southern front. The civil war in Guinea-Bissau from 1998 to 1999 also influenced the situation. Following his suspension from office for illegal arms trading, the Bissau-Guinean General Ansumane Mané attempted a military coup. He was supported in his actions by Maquis from both splinter groups within the Southern front. They were fighting primarily against the Senegalese military, which supported the Guinean government. The Bissau-Guinean government under Vieiras was overthrown and replaced with a newly-elected government fronted by president Kumba Yala. Mané was killed during a renewed military putsch in 2000. This enabled Yala to develop close relations with the Senegalese government. The common goal was concerted action against the hardliners in the Southern front. In 2001, the Senegalese army started an offensive against the hardliners in which moderate units of the MFDC-Southern front were involved. The operation failed and several representatives of the moderate wing were murdered by Sadio's men. This set the seal on the rifts within the Southern front and ultimately weakened the movement.

Despite the easing of the crisis, the potential for unrest in Guinea-Bissau continues to be a factor in the development of the peace process in Casamance.

The maladministration by Bissau-Guinean president Yala led in 2003 to another military coup. The newly-elected government under Carlos Gomes Junior continued to cooperate with the Senegalese government in the areas of border controls and national security. However, its means were limited. In 2005, there were further tensions within the military and mutiny due to the poor living conditions and corruption. Despite the easing of the crisis, the potential for unrest in Guinea-Bissau continues to be a factor in the development of the peace process in Casamance.²¹

21 | For a more detailed analysis of the rift within the MFDC into Northern and Southern fronts and other splitter groups cf. Martin Evans, Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC), (AFP Briefing Paper, Chatham House, 2004).

The face of the MFDC guerrilla

Information about the composition of the MFDC's Maquis is difficult to come by and is laced with inconsistencies.²² The number of members in the MFDC varies greatly depending on the informant and details provided. Information regarding the size of the military wing alone is also hard to find. This is exacerbated by its reach beyond the borders of Senegal, as well as the involvement of refugees living in camps in Guinea-Bissau or Gambia. While Evans assumes considerably greater numbers in the past, in 2004 the current size of the Maquis was thought to be around 2000 to 4000 men. However, they were seldom all mobilized at the same time. According to observers, usually only a third of all fighters were at their bases, while the others pursued economic or other activities.

The demographics of the Maquis demonstrates the protracted existence of the guerrilla movement. Many fighters are aged 30 to 40 or even considerably older.

Often the far younger fighters of the second generation grew up isolated at bases in violent conditions and were not socialized in any way that provided cultural or social values.

Motivation to join the Maquis took the form, for example, of ideological beliefs coupled with persecution by the Senegalese military, attacks on home villages, presumed discrimination on the part of the *Nordistes* or even recruitment by other members. Now, however, here is a second, far younger, generation. It differs from the original members in that there are high rates of illiteracy. Often, these new-generation fighters are the sons of members of the first generation, who grew up isolated at bases. Historian Noah Cissé talks about "veritable monsters", who grew up in violent conditions and were not socialized in any way that provided cultural or social values. Unlike in Sierra Leone or Uganda, for instance, there are few minors among the Maquis, especially among the "Front" fighters. Nevertheless, there are still some children in the Maquis. In the Southern front it is said that in the context of the Bissau-Guinean civil war, many minors aged 13 to 15 years old were involved in the transport of munitions and military logistics.

22 | Cf. *ibid*, 6 et sqq.

The issue of the ethnicity of the MFDC and its guerrilla wing remains a touchy subject. While the Senegalese government talks first and foremost of a Jola-movement, the MFDC claims that all ethnic groups of the Casamance are represented within its ranks. However, it is striking that Jola as a rule are not the target of MFDC attacks and it is frequently reported that Jola are spared in MFDC intervention.

Many Maquis now have UNHCR refugee status as refugees from Casamance and often also hold a Senegalese or Bissau-Guinean passport, which they use according to which best suits their purpose. The Maquis belong to various different religions: some are Muslim, some Catholic and yet others are followers of traditional tribal religions. This is an expression of the religious tolerance practiced across the country.²³

The Maquis' means and methods

Initially armed only with hand-held weapons such as bows and arrows and spears, the Maquis have been able in various ways to acquire modern weapons. Contacts with Guinea-Bissau in particular were of great importance in this context. Libya and Iraq also supplied weapons to the Maquis. In addition, during the conflict, weapons changed hands between Mauritius and Senegal in 1989. In Maquis attacks on the Senegalese military, the latter's weapons ended up in the hands of the guerrillas. The Maquis uses mostly Soviet or Russian brands, first and foremost AK-47 (Kalashnikovs), but also grenade throwers powered by RPG-7-rockets.²⁴ The land mines are of Russian, Chinese and European origin. The existence of non-registered mine fields is a considerable problem for the population, particularly for those involved in agriculture. Between October 1995 and May 1998 the Senegalese military found 845 anti-vehicle-mines and 2053 anti-personnel mines.²⁵

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23 | For a more in-depth analysis of the composition of the Maquis cf. Martin Evans, *Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)*, (AFP Briefing Paper, Chatham House, 2004), 6 et sqq.

24 | Cf. Martin Evans, *Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)*, (AFP Briefing Paper, Chatham House, 2004), 8.

25 | *Ibid.*, 9.

While the military training of the first generation relied on experience gained during the French and Senegalese military training, the second generation of guerrilla fighters received hardly any training. The Maquis attacks mirror these divergences in training. The military interventions range from strategically clever attacks to atrocities and blatant banditry. Above all attacks on citizens that do not belong to the Jola-ethnic group and armed attacks on shops and vehicles are indicative of a lack of leadership and coordination within the fragmented guerrilla force. Extremist groups ignore both the ceasefire treaties and orders from the political wing of the MFDC. In so doing, they create a permanent climate of uncertainty, which has a detrimental effect on economic and societal development in the region.

It is often hard to tell whether attacks are actually carried out by the Maquis, or simply by gangs who benefit from the lack of control mechanisms.

The MFDC itself finances its activities in parts at the expense of the population that initially provided financial support for the movement. Then, however, the guerrilla force increasingly turned to trade in weapons and drugs. This was supplemented by attacks and cattle rustling, with animals being sold across the Bissau-Guinean border. These activities were facilitated by the almost complete lack of state controls. Furthermore, it is often hard to tell nowadays whether attacks are actually carried out by the Maquis, or simply by gangs who benefit from the lack of control mechanisms. The guerrilla forces also received support from a number of well-known MFDC-activists abroad.

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE FRONTS: 28 YEARS OF CONFLICT

The Casamance conflict has claimed relatively few lives in comparison with other conflicts in West Africa. Nevertheless, by 2004, between 3,000 and 5,000 people had been killed. At least 652 fell victim to land mines. Children aged 12 to 14 are most often affected.²⁶ Accidents caused by mines have spread a feeling of extreme fear in the region. This fear is partly responsible for the decline in agriculture, in particular the decline in subsistence farming.

26 | Cf. Bocounta Diallo, *La Crise Casamancaise – Problématique et voies des solutions* (Paris, 2009), 80.

The widespread distribution of mines thus has a direct effect on the economic, social and cultural situation in the region and exacerbates poverty. Tourism, a fairly important source of income in the region, has collapsed, and the situation has worsened further since the events of the fall of 2009. The same applies to trade, which is severely limited by difficulties in accessing arable land, the decline in foodstuffs production and attacks on food transporters. Furthermore, the security situation has also affected the willingness of external funding providers to donate and they are withdrawing from the region in ever greater numbers.

By 2009, 41,500 refugees and displaced persons, who had been relocated to 115 villages in Casamance, returned home. This migration demanded a challenging and expensive infrastructure development.

A study carried out by Caritas in 1998 showed that up until that point, a total of 62,638 people had been displaced within the country or had fled. By 2009, 41,500 refugees and displaced persons, who had been relocated to 115 villages in Casamance, returned home.²⁷ This migration demanded a challenging and expensive infrastructure development (housing, schools, sanitary facilities, etc.).

Human rights breaches by the Senegalese security forces

In connection with the conflict, Amnesty International talks of hundreds of arrests made by the Senegalese military based on ethnicity or political views. Many are arrested on the basis of anonymous denunciations, others due to simple mistaken identity.²⁸ In many cases, no charges are actually filed against those being arrested who are often detained in prison for many years without any investigations being carried out. According to Amnesty International, between 1995 and 1997, 120 people were arrested who in 1998 were still in prison, without trial proceedings having been initiated.²⁹ The initiation of preliminary proceedings is not a guarantee for a regular trial in these circumstances either: The questioning of prisoners is brief and informal, and witnesses are not called on. There is a general lack of evidence. Amnesty International further criticizes the fact

27 | Ibid., 69.

28 | Cf. Amnesty International, Senegal: Climate of Terror in Casamance (1998, AI Index: AFR 49/01/98), 5 et seq.

29 | Ibid., 7.

that the prison conditions are also in breach of human rights. Torture is said to be commonplace, and people die in prison. The background to the release of prisoners in connection with the peace negotiations in 1995 were said to be based in strategic considerations rather than on formal completion of investigations, which, according to Amnesty International, is an indicator of the illegitimacy of the imprisonment.

Amnesty International furthermore claims to have evidence of illegal executions carried out by Senegalese security forces. The risk for vehicle passengers who are unable to provide identification is particularly high at roadside checks. A witness cited by Amnesty International talks about brutal beatings, during which soldiers slit the throat of one of his fellow passengers. He had been accused of being an MFDC member because he was not carrying any personal documents.³⁰

For survivors, the disappearance of their relatives and loved ones means a long period of hoping and waiting, but private investigations are seldom successful.

According to Amnesty International Senegal, many surviving dependents find it especially hard to deal with the fact that their loved ones simply disappear. People who are arrested are never seen again. Their names are not listed on any list of prisoners, nor anywhere else. The security forces deny ever having arrested the person, or say that they released him/her after questioning. Amnesty says this practice is often observed subsequent to arrests at roadside checks by the military. Children are also affected. For survivors, the disappearance of their relatives and loved ones means a long period of hoping and waiting, but private investigations – if these are at all possible – are seldom successful. Witnesses are hard to find since they live in fear of the reprisals. In addition to the psychological suffering, the economic consequences should not be underestimated. The state does not acknowledge the “disappearance” of the persons concerned. Accordingly, the authorities will not issue a death certificate, which means surviving dependents are left without financial compensation of any kind. Widow’s pensions are not paid out either. Women whose husbands “disappear” are solely responsible for the survival of their

30 | Cf. Amnesty International, *Senegal: Climate of Terror in Casamance* (1998, AI Index: AFR 49/01/98), 27.

families. As a result, children are increasingly called upon to earn money for their families and are forced to leave school, often without being able to read or write. The result: the family sinks into poverty.

Murders and abuse by the MFDC's Maquis

The MFDC guerrilla forces expect the complete support of the people of Casamance. Should they refuse, they are threatened with death. In the event of refusal, the Maquis accuse the people of collaborating with the Senegalese military. Arbitrary executions are often carried out in front of the family or the entire village "as a warning". Immigrants from the North are particularly affected. Despite protestations by individual MFDC leaders, ethnic criteria are blatantly the motivation behind many attacks, as demonstrated by the many murders of members of the Manjak, Mandingue, Balante or Mancagne ethnic groups. They were accused of not contributing enough to the fight for independence of the Casamance region at the side of the Jola.

The MFDC guerrilla force mercilessly harasses the population: entire villages are burnt to the ground; the people living there are threatened, beaten or killed if they fail to fulfill demands for money and food. In some cases, the villagers were forced out, allowing the Maquis to appropriate their possessions. Witnesses report forced payment of tolls in order to be allowed to access the fields.³¹ This has led to an increase in rural migration. In the cities, nothing but poverty awaits the farmers.

Many women were kidnapped, raped or attacked to keep them away from the fields and forests, the areas used by the rebels to retreat to. Others had everything taken from them to force their husbands to join the Maquis.

Amnesty International highlights the difficult situation faced by the women of the Casamance: many were kidnapped, raped or attacked to keep them away from the fields and forests, the areas used by the rebels to retreat to. Others had everything taken from them to force their husbands to join the Maquis. The consequences, particularly for women who have been the victim of rape, are very grave indeed. In the report "Casamance women speak up"³² women

31 | Cf. *ibid.*, 36 et seq.

32 | Cf. Amnesty International, *Casamance Women Speak Out* (2003, AI Index: AFR 49/002/2003).

affected describe in detail the mutilation of their bodies and the psychological effects of the often brutal rape attacks. Moreover, these women have to battle the challenging financial situation and having to take sole responsibility for their families. As a result of being raped, they are often no

longer able to continue their work, which in general is in agriculture. Women who were raped in the fields are often too scared to return to that place, where the Maquis are now based. Meanwhile, large sums of money are required to pay for doctors and medication. The families fall victim to poverty.

Observers criticize the fact that the atrocities by both sides are rarely subject to criminal law prosecution. The population is caught in the middle and is used strategically by both sides. Meanwhile, both Senegalese forces and the MFDC guerrilla forces deny having committed crimes and those responsible are rarely prosecuted. Furthermore, the current Senegalese government promises rebels who participate in peace negotiations extensive amnesty.

The consequences of the conflict for the cultural and social life of the Casacais

Being forced to live between the fronts also affects social structures and cultural values. The *Casacais*, in particular the Jola ethnic group, are very bound by tradition. Values such as solidarity, the traditional authority of the village elders (principle of seniority) and the fetishist

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religious culture bestow identity and help to organize society. These traditions have suffered greatly in the course of the conflict.

A climate of distrust has established itself. Many are afraid to openly express their opinion for fear that neighbors could have government contacts or are MFDC members. This even happens in school, where children remain silent in fear of betraying their parents. The principle of solidarity has been undermined and replaced with an extreme form of individualism.

The use of weapons furthermore breached the seniority principle. Cissé reports an attack on a village by armed Maquis youths. Under threat of violence, the village elder

was forced to choose sides. Cissé talks of a switching of roles in the context of the conflict, which until that point in time would have been unthinkable. There is a lack of time and capacity to bring up and educate children properly and to pass on traditional values.

Moreover, traditional concepts of conflict resolution have been lost in the course of the conflict. The role of women as the givers and protectors of life was important in the context of the resistance movement in colonial times. In the Jola culture, women and children resolve conflict by placing themselves between the disputing parties and, in the worst case, covering them with their bodies to protect them. In the Casamance conflict, however, both women and children themselves became the victims. According to Cissé, this has led to the desecration of traditional roles and caused much distress.

The conflict has also affected the fetishist religious culture. The sacred forests, the *Bois Sacrés*, were destroyed. As a result, sacrificial items with special religious significance which were offered up during ceremonies can no longer be found: animal bones, sacred masks and plants and especially trees, all of which were buried or hidden in the forests. The consequences of the conflict for the Jola culture and social life in Casamance are closely interwoven with economic activities. There are no longer enough young men to take on the tasks traditionally assigned to them in the villages, such as rice cultivation and making palm wine.³³

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THE PEACE PROCESS

Since President Abdoulaye Wade came into power in 2000, there has been more or less direct contact with the Maquis in the course of peace talks. Following the abandonment of all preceding negotiations by his predecessor, Diouf, and Wade's announcement that he intended to resolve the Casamance conflict in 100 days, he appointed General

33 | Cf. Markus Rudolf, *Ni paix, ni guerre – war peace and reconciliation in the Casamance* (Cape Town, 2009), 17 et seq. for a detailed description of the fetishist religion in the context of the Casamance conflict.

Abdoulaye Fall as mediator in 2002. Using audio and video tapes, Fall attempted to contact the Maquis. He informed them that the army had been ordered to retreat and offered them amnesty in return for them laying down their arms. The Maquis, confused by Wade's new policy, returned to armed fighting. Wade responded with more stringent law enforcement and the destruction of rebel bases in 2003.

From September 2004 onwards, the situation appeared to have stabilized as a result of various meetings between the government and the MFDC. This temporary peace enabled many refugees to return home. People began to rebuild their lives. On December 30, 2004, new peace treaties were signed. However, not all MFDC factions were involved, resulting in renewed violent clashes. Wade felt betrayed and withdrew funding from the region. The conflict intensified once more. New peace talks on neutral soil in Fundjul in the Kaolack region in January 2005 were nothing more than political discourse, which was not followed by actions. Particularly since the death of Abbé Diamacoune Senghor in January 2007, who for many years acted as the link between the MFDC and the Senegalese government, the situation again has become more complicated. The Attika began fighting again on August 20, 2009. The current situation in the spring of 2010, with new reports of attacks in Casamance, shows that the conflict is far from being resolved. Wade's strategy is considered by observers as an awaiting of signs of fatigue in the MFDC.

Various reasons led to the failure of all peace talks: There are ideological factors on the part of the rebels coupled with the complex fragmentation within the Maquis.

There are various reasons behind the failure of all peace talks to date. On the one hand there are ideological factors on the part of the rebels, who do not want to see their goal – the independence of Casamance – abandoned. This is coupled primarily with the complex fragmentation within the Maquis, which has made negotiations almost impossible. The power relationships within the military wing have not been clarified and the individual factions are hostile towards one another. The military wing is almost independent from the political wing of the MFDC. Above all since the death of Senghor, the situation has become even more difficult: subsequent MFDC leaders have not been accepted by all members. The many internal splits also make it difficult to identify the negotiating partners. Those

instructed to carry out the negotiations on the part of the MFDC often have no decision-making powers. Another problem is the dispersal of the Maquis across various countries.

There are also economic and psychological factors standing in the way of the Maquis simply laying down their weapons. After almost 30 years in the forests, it is very difficult for the rebels to change their lifestyle. Many have not learnt a trade or profession. Also, former agricultural workers who wish to return to society are confronted with various difficulties. During their absence, which often spanned a period of many years, their land was given to others. This leaves them with very few options for a new start. Many are hardly able, on account of their experiences of state persecution during the 1980s and 1990s, to settle again. Reintegration into the rural structures is also problematic. For the Maquis, laying down arms also means returning to villages in which they may themselves have committed atrocities. Revenge and forgiveness traditionally play an important role for the local people, particularly among the Jola. Furthermore, many are traumatized, some have problems with alcohol and drug abuse. Moreover, fighters wishing to leave the Maquis face repercussions in the form of persecution or even murder.

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It is difficult to evaluate how great the president's interest in resolving the conflict actually is. As for his predecessors, independence for the Casamance region is not on his agenda. He also rejects alternatives such as an autonomous status for Casamance. Ultimately, the conflict does not threaten the existence of the Senegalese state. However, what is problematic is the image cast on a country that likes to portray itself as a model of African democracy by a conflict that has already lasted thirty years. The measures taken by the Senegalese forces have doubtless become more measured and cautious than in the past. Nevertheless, criticism is repeatedly voiced with regards to their approach. For instance, there are reports that journalists are still being arrested; in addition, a Senegalese correspondent for Radio France International, who was accused of one-sided reporting of the Casamance conflict, was

expelled from Senegal.³⁴ The Casamance conflict poses a serious threat to Wade's international credibility.

There are also some interesting economic aspects. Lasting peace in the region is a prerequisite for both the exploitation of natural resources and income from tourism.

However, in order to be able to establish lasting peace, the causes of the conflict have to be dealt with. As long as the complex factors outlined above, which range from historical-political developments to cultural to socio-economic aspects, are not included in peace talks, it will not be possible to ensure the stability of any treaties at the political level. It is also vital that all of the players involved are included. The Casamance conflict has taken on the dimensions of an international affair, in which diverse economic and political interests have become entangled. Above all, however, it is the people living in the Casamance region, who have lived with this conflict for nearly 30 years, who represent the starting point for a peace process and the further development of the region.

The Casamance conflict has taken on the dimensions of an international affair, in which diverse economic and political interests have become entangled.

The local civil society has assumed the task of promoting peace in Casamance first and foremost at the micro-level. Only if they succeed in resisting attempts by both sides to exploit the population for their benefit, will Casamance have a real chance.³⁵

The manuscript was completed in August 2010.

34 | With regard to Senegalese authoritarianism see Vincent Foucher and Jean-Claude Marut, *Kein Geld, Kein Sieg, Kein Charisma – Die Regierung des Senegal verfängt sich in Widersprüchen* (Eurozine, 2004).

35 | Vincent Foucher ("La guerre par d'autres Moyens? – La société civile dans le processus de paix en Casamance" in: *Raisons politiques*, 35, August 2009) however, sees the role of civil society in the peace process in Casamance from a more critical perspective. Local NGOs fulfill the demands of the donor organizations with close links to the government without question. Both the MFDC and the government attempt to influence NGOs, meaning that their existence in part leads to further rifts within the fronts. Furthermore, cooperating with local organizations poses a risk for the local population, since this can easily be interpreted by the rebels as betrayal.