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I- HISTOIRE

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE DIOLA PEOPLE FROM FONGNY IN LOWER CASAMANCE: POLITICAL STRUCTURE, LAND LAW AND DISTRIBUTION OF TASKS (15th-20th CENTURY)

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Abstract

The interest of this study lies in the fact that it focuses on the political structure, land rights and the tasks' distribution of the Diola people from Fongny in lower Casamance. Thus, the objective of this research is to understand the organization of the traditional society of the Diola people from Fongny and their conservative management of natural resources. This study tackles the following issues: what are the specificities of Diola people's land rights? What are the forms of work organization put in place by the Diola peasant to meet the demands of rice growing? Our methodology is based on the confrontation of written documents and the analysis of our oral sources collected in Casamance (southern Senegal). The results obtained show that the traditional Diola society is not an anarchic society plagued by individual wills and interests. The mechanisms of social regulation have made it possible to impose a collective will very attached to the conservative management of natural resources. The effectiveness of these mechanisms derives from several factors among which the most important is religion.

Keywords: Diola, social organization, land, settlement.

Introduction

The history of the settlement of Fongny before the arrival of Europeans is poorly known because historical sources are rare and those that do exist are often contradictory. However, despite the scarcity of written sources and the differences in interpretations, two facts seem to stand for some people. The first is that the installation of the Diola in the region predates the 16th century and the second is that the Bïnoucks are the first to arrive (Mark, 1985, Roche, 1985). Coming after the Bïnouck from the South in the department of Oussouye, the Diola set up their first homes in the Djougout, a region which shelters the current villages of Thionk Essyl, Tendouck, Mlomp. Before their arrival, this region does not seem to have been occupied because, historical sources agree on the fact that the Baïnouck never exceeded the west of the meridian of Bignona. Sedentary farmers, custodians of a "civilization of rice", the Diola consolidated their conquest by transforming the landscapes into rice fields thanks to elaborate techniques. This ability to adapt and transform the environment led Péliissier (1966) to say that the ethnic personality of the Diola is eminently geographical. The gradual extension of the settlement from the Djougout was dependent on rice cultivation, in the sense that the progression was made along the lowlands in search of the best land that could accommodate the rice fields. Initially, they skirted the valleys of the Bignona's and Baïla's Marigots. The progressive exiguity of the flood zones in front of the demographic pressure, constrained them thereafter to take the direction of the south-east to settle on right bank of the Soungrougrou river by circumventing the large forest of Kalounayes. Towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, they will cross the Soungrougrou where we can find today Diola villages like Niassene Diola and Kamoya. Progress towards the east will be stopped by the Mandingos (C. Roche, 1985). Until the 19th century, Fongny was essentially populated by the Baïnouck and the Diola who are by far the oldest established ethnic groups. It was at the

beginning of the 20th century, at the instigation of Fodé Kaba, that the Mandingos began to settle under the banner of Islam, after several vain attempts at war (Pélissier 1966). At the same time, the Wolofs began their first wave of settlement thanks to the Europeans, whose auxiliaries they were in the economic and political framework. Unlike the Mandings, the latter had no influence in rural life and in production activities.

How is the traditional Diola society of Fongny politically structured? What are the specificities of its land law? What are the forms of work organization put in place by the Diola peasant to meet the demands of rice growing? We therefore advance the hypothesis that the Diola society is distinguished by its egalitarian character, and the ownership of the land always belongs to the family, which makes individual allocations to the different members, with the obligation to develop it.

1. Political structure among the Diola of Fongny

The organization of traditional Diola society differs significantly from that of other ethnic groups in Senegal. Here, social cohesion is not expressed by a political mode of structuring as among the Wolofs and the Serers. Indeed, religion plays a very important role in collective consciousness and respect for group disciplines (J. Trincaz, 1978, p. 85-109). This very utilitarian religion also influences land tenure, which is characterized by a very strong collective appropriation, the absence of a master of the land and the principle of inalienability. The Diola society is also distinguished by its egalitarian character and the refusal of any privilege acquired apart from working the land, which is the supreme reference value. Contrary to the Mandinka country and in Wolof societies, men and women occupy the same production spaces and share the tasks related to field work.

African societies have often been described as strongly hierarchical societies with different classes, with well-defined roles in socio-political structures, at the head of which is the chief. The latter has a political power that puts him at the center of all decisions and earns him special consideration. The words of G. A Kouassigan show this well when he writes: *the chief is in black Africa the fundamental element on which the whole politico-social edifice rests. It is the pivot around which the traditional political institutions are organized and balanced, and its importance is such that it has been said that black Africa naturally has chiefs* (G. A Kouassigan, 1996, p. 80).

This general scheme, supposed to account for the organization of traditional African societies, is however not valid among the Diola. The traditional Diola society, as surprising as it may seem, is characterized by the non-existence of a political hierarchy and legally defined and administered territorial units. The diola has no leader and no centralized political structure unlike the wolofs and the serers, about whom, *“these peoples have put their genius into the search for means likely to ensure their political supremacy, particularly in the 'development of structured institutions’”* (P. Louis, 1970, p. 440-447).

In the Diola lands, each village maintains independence from its neighbour, which is reflected in the spatial organization by a very characteristic dispersion of the habitat. Thus, in the same village, it is not surprising to find districts two to three kilometers apart. The villages have no center, the houses are isolated in an apparent disorder which does not reveal any principle of organization (Dujarric, 1994). Each village forms a nebula with no social, economic or administrative center of gravity. In a report of the colonial administration, it is written: *“in Lower Casamance, we did not find any political groupings and it is we who were called upon to constitute regions which, under the authority of residents, form the current administrative provinces”* (P. Dujarric, 1994, p. 153-178).

There were, however, king-priests who drew their legitimacy from their experience and their intimacy with the deities and genies of the forest. They thus enjoyed deep respect but their powers were limited to purely religious considerations: for instance. maintenance of dogma,

administration of rites, and exercise of justice (Thomas, 1959). They could by no means constitute a materially and financially better off class above the rest of society. The other major feature of traditional society which has profoundly marked the production system is found in its egalitarian character, a phenomenon all the more remarkable in that the context was particularly favorable to the use of slave labour. Diola society has no caste or slaves and no one can claim a social position to which their birth would entitle them:

The written Diola society is made up of peasants all devoted to agriculture; no functional specialization intervenes and has never intervened in the economic activity inside the group. All the diola are socially equal and none has the privilege or the obligation to engage in particular productive functions which confer on him a definitive vocation putting him at the service of the community (Pélissier, 1966, p. 682).

While in other societies the number of captives represented for the families a servile workforce, a means of enrichment and a sign of power, among the Diola, it is inconceivable to be maintained when one can work. This egalitarian character, coupled with a pronounced individualism, explains the generosity in the effort and the ardor in work in a society where each person of working age must ensure his own food.

Indeed, in the absence of a king and a slave, pride is placed first in work, which is the supreme reference value. Man asserts himself less by ancestry than by his intrinsic value which he must build every day (Ndiaye, 1994). Contrary to what happens in Mandinka society, the man and the woman go down into the rice fields and each has his attic, the fruit of his work. The two share the same hardworking ethic and rigor at work in the rice fields. With regard to the management of natural resources, one can think that the absence of socio-political structures and a centralized authority constitute a weakness favoring an anarchic management of natural resources, as is the theory of the tragedy of the commons formulated by Hardin in 1968. But in reality, it is not so because individualism and the absence of a leader does not necessarily mean anarchism and dilution of all responsibility in relation to the common good and the general interest. Despite the absence of institutions, traditional society had adopted mechanisms regulating the balance and harmonious life of the group in the environment. Among these, we can mention initiation ceremonies, the sanctification of spaces and village organizations. The initiation ceremonies constitute a very important stage in the socialization of the young diola. Initiation according to Marzouk (1981) is the decisive mark of adulthood, it leads to civic majority. Under the direction of priests and elders, young people retire to the sacred forest for at least three months during which they are initiated into the mysteries of life, the norms that govern the functioning of society, religion and, in general, to all the elements that allow them to integrate harmoniously into life in society.

According to M. Falque (1991) who popularized Hardin's theses, wherever a limited resource is treated as a collective good, i.e. where the absence of property rights leads to a dissociation between authority and responsibility, between and duty, we will find the tragedy of the commons since everyone has an interest in exhausting the resource immediately before someone else does it in their place. The training inculcates a code of values and attitudes that make the young initiate an accomplished man, socially mature and ready to face life in society. On leaving the sacred wood, *"the person, to quote Thomas (1994, p. 73-74), is reduced to a character, that is to say to his social function and solidarity becomes the most important of all imperatives"*.

The various physical trials and esoteric revelations of all kinds to which he is subjected, dictate to him a deep respect for the community good and solidarity with the other members of society. They also dictate to him a duty of respect vis-à-vis the elements of nature with which he has a relationship of complementarity. Thus, the absence of an institution does not place the diola, far from it, in total freedom which allows him to act without having to render an account.

The sacralization of resources, one of the defining features of religion, turns out to be a very effective mechanism of socio-ecological regulation characteristic of the Diola society. From the moment a resource is made sacred, it is no longer perceived only as a factor of economic production that can be mobilized at any time and in any condition. Its accessibility is subject to the agreement of the protective spirits at the cost of a ritual which often includes a sacrifice. There is thus in the conscience, the need for a counterpart without which the resource is not accessible, which preserves it from a continuous degradation. Each tree being inhabited by a genie, it is necessary to ask the latter for permission to cut down what serves as its refuge. Sometimes, a week before the cheese maker is slaughtered, the trunk of the tree is carefully surrounded by red amulets encrusted with cowrie shells, which has the effect of dislodging the spirits that haunt it without brutality (Thomas, 1959). Such practices are still present in certain areas, but it should be emphasized here that their area of validity has considerably narrowed due to the influences of revealed religions and cultural mixing. However, their impact in the protection of natural resources is still observable because sacred spaces and in particular forests are the last refuges of primary plant formations.

Finally, in some village areas there are vigilance committees responsible for ensuring compliance with collective disciplines. To form the committee, each village provides a boy, which gives the instrument of the collective will a legitimacy and an efficiency that allows it to put offenders in order. Expression of peasant solidarity, the latter are involved in rice-growing work which requires a large workforce, for example, plowing and construction of protective dykes.

2. The specificities of land law in traditional society

In traditional Diola society, the private appropriation of land is indeed a very strong reality. The property originated with the clearing of virgin areas and the establishment of family altars preceded by the approval of geniuses. The land thus belongs to the first occupants, that is to say to the family who settled first and carried out the clearing. The right of ownership in the traditional perception, can only result from a creative work and consequently, all that exists naturally without this creative work cannot be the subject of exclusive rights for the benefit of a single person (Fichoux, 1991). The basic ownership of the land still belongs to the family, which makes individual allocations to the different members, with the obligation to develop it. There is a collective appropriation at the family level, but the exploitation of the land remains individual.

Everything that the affected land bears and which is the result of personal work, belongs to its author who can use it and dispose of it in complete freedom, subject to the imperatives resulting from the rule of solidarity.

If a field is not worked, or if there is a deficiency in the management of a plot, its occupant is considered to have committed a sacrilege and the land once again falls back into the family domain. It is therefore important to clearly distinguish between collective and family property and individual allocation because the rice field transferred to a household within the family can never be alienated. In the politico-social order, primacy is given to the group over the individual, hence the principle of collective land tenure. On this point, Girard (1963) argues that there are no real private appropriations according to European standards. It is only a usufruct and, in law, the land does not leave the possession of the community.

The management of the family's land assets is entrusted to the eldest, who is responsible for distributing it among the various rights holders. Unlike many African societies, there is no master of the land exercising land rights that allow him to collect royalties on the affected land. Access to land is free of any discrimination, of any fee. It is generally at the time of marriage that the man is granted a plot of land which he becomes usufructuary for as long as he develops it. Apart from a few exceptions, the woman has no right to land, she works in her husband's

fields (Thomas, 1959). When a father dies, the land is divided equally between the male sons. If the sale is excluded because of the sanctity of the land, the loan and the gift are on the other hand common phenomena. The loan does not imply any royalty because working the land is a fundamental value here and therefore whoever works it benefits from its fruits. The recovery of loaned land is done according to strict rules, but sometimes violent conflicts oppose villages or neighborhoods. This is often the case when an heir claims land lent by his grandparents and the owners of the field in turn invoke the heredity of use (Pélissie, 1966). These conflicts can last several years and oppose several generations. During our investigations, the populations informed us of a land conflict which has opposed for several generations the villages of Kagnarou and Niankitté located in the district of Sindian.

The other particularity of land tenure among the Diola lies in the differential appropriation of land. The rigor and precision of the land system are not identical everywhere. Indeed, as written by Thomas (1949, p. 689) cultivable land in Lower Casamance first means cultivable land in flooded rice, the appropriation of land at the level of cultivable rice zones differs from that applied at the level of land covered by forest. In flood-prone areas, which can be transformed into rice fields, the diola demonstrates a keen sense of appropriation and a use finely codified by tradition.

On the other hand, in forests, land rights are flexible and sometimes even ambiguous. In some cases, they were non-existent. According to Fichoux "the forests are distributed in a more or less summary way between the families according to the balance of forces and the demographic pressures between neighboring villages" (M. Fichoux, 1991, p. 186). The immediate vicinity of the villages is appropriated by families and distributed among households who use it for harvesting palm wine, harvesting palm kernel bunches and sometimes to establish millet and cowpea fields.

The sacred forests, the exclusive property of the spirits, were however managed by the priest who grants the right to pick fruit, hunt or collect dead wood. Access to the sacred forests is never free and always requires the consent of the spirits after a few sacrificial rituals. The fear of punishment creates an atmosphere of terror that is sufficient to prevent any violation of the conditions of access and exploitation (Condamin, 1988).

The main characteristics that can be retained from land tenure in the Diola society are undoubtedly the confusion between law and religion, the primacy of the group (the family) over the individual, the absence of a master of the land and the principle of the inalienability of the land. This conception of law responded to the needs of a precarious and closed economy, or at least one with a low openness to the outside world, in which solidarity is the condition of survival and land, the only source of wealth, the most precious of goods. of production.

3. Requirements of diola rice cultivation: distribution of tasks between men and women

To meet the demands of rice growing, the Diola peasant has set up forms of work organization that are based on a synergistic distribution of tasks between men and women within the household and solidarity through village self-help associations (Linares, 1992). In this egalitarian and individualistic society, each person of working age has a field. Thus, the plots are individualized, at the expense of the household which constitutes the basic production unit. Each household is autonomous and assumes its production to ensure its subsistence. The man is at the center of the unit, he judges the advisability of the farming operations and sees to the execution of the agricultural calendar but, he does not assume the work alone. He shares them with the woman

who is perfectly integrated into the production activity? Both go down to the same rice fields and share the different tasks (Linares, 1992; Mark, 1985; Thomas, 1959).

The distribution of tasks between men and women obeys the need to bring into play the complementarities between the dispositions of each sex. It reserves to the man the heavy work,

requiring the deployment of a great physical force and to the woman the work requiring less physical force and more patience. Thus, the man assumes the clearing, the plowing and the guarding leaving to the woman, the other tasks namely the contribution of manure, transplanting and weeding. Some tasks can be shared occasionally, such as weeding and clearing. This sharing of tasks between the two sexes, within the same production spaces, guarantees greater efficiency, especially since the various works call exclusively on human energy alone. However, during the period of intense activity (ploughing, transplanting, harvesting...) the workload is such that it becomes unbearable for many households. Also, it can happen that a farmer falls ill, wherever he is confronted with an accident that prevents him from following his agricultural calendar correctly. These exceptional situations, which can compromise food security in certain families, are at the origin of the setting up of associations as social strategies for the management of agricultural work. These associations exist in several forms and bring together people of the same generation, of the same age group. The sexual division of labor means that some are reserved for men and others for women. Joint work made it possible to optimize the use of labor during work peaks, and therefore to extend the cultivable surfaces, in particular on the slopes (Girard, 1964).

The associations are involved in work requiring a large labor force such as ploughing, the construction of protective dikes and transplanting. The aim of the associations is to intervene first in the fields of the various associates in turn. They can also intervene against remuneration, for a non-member who makes the request. Payment is made in kind and the products collected are used to organize festivals between neighboring villages at the end of the agricultural campaign. These companies, whose objective is not to accumulate products, also work on a voluntary basis for all people who are prevented by illness or a situation of force majeure from carrying out their work (Girard, 1964; Thomas, 1959). The main conclusion that emerges from the study of the socio-organizational framework is unquestionably its deep agrarian roots and its specificity, which it owes to its egalitarian character and its mechanisms of social regulation. In addition, the examination of the Diola society reveals the privileged place granted to rice cultivation, an activity whose originality of the development techniques reinforces the specificity of the Diola peasants.

4. The role of religion in traditional Diola society

Religion plays a big role in traditional Diola society. All obligations are based on religious prescriptions and are placed under the supervision of geniuses. But what most characterizes religion is that it is considered from a very utilitarian perspective which aims above all to promote harmonious relations between man and nature. Here, God is called "Emitay" and he is represented by many boekin (which corresponds to a sanctuary, an altar and a genie) specialized in the different areas of life and endowed with a dreaded power. The latter populate the rice fields, the rivers, the forests embody the mediating powers between the Supreme God and the villagers.

To communicate with them, there are the priests in charge of worship. It is the latter who decide on the appropriateness of the sacrifices to be made and the organization of religious ceremonies (Mark, 1985; Thomas, 1959). The cult dedicated to geniuses and to the supreme God finds its justification in the diola only in the conviction that it is the latter who decide on the fertility of the fields, the health of the people, the abundance of the rains, and the cohesion of the group. It is a religion that has no other perspective than that linked to the daily concerns of the peasants and their production activities. According to Alassane Badji, access to natural resources involves a religious rite and sacrifices because it seals an alliance between man and the genius representing the "Supreme God". The sowing and harvesting which constitute the most important moments of society are always the occasion for great propitiatory feasts which maintain the pact of allegiance between men and the protective spirits (Thomas, 1959 and

1994). The communion between man and nature constitutes the principal characteristic of religion and makes religion play a very important role in the protection of the environment. Religious practices and veneration of natural forces imply a perception of natural resources that prohibits misuse and all destructive practices.

Conclusion

This research has attempted to analyze the political structure, land rights, and the distribution of tasks between men and women in the traditional society of the Diola of Fongny from the 15th to the 20th century. Thus, the main conclusion that emerges from this study is undoubtedly its deep agrarian roots and its specificity, which it owes to its egalitarian character and its mechanisms of social regulation. Each household is autonomous. The man is at the center of the family unit, and sees to the execution of the agricultural calendar but shares the various tasks with the woman: the man the heavy works are reserved for the men, whereas the woman takes care of the works which require less physical strength. Religion aims to promote harmonious relations between man and nature. Thus, the Diola society reveals the privileged place granted to rice growing, an activity whose originality of the development techniques reinforces the specificity of the Diola peasants.

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N°	First & Last name	Function or responsibilities	Age	Date of interview	Place of interview
1	Alassane Badji	Notable	75 years old	08/10/2020	Bignona
2	Ansou Sané	Farmer	55 years old	06/10/2020	Toubacouta
3	Auguistin Diatta	Farmer	More than 80 years old	13/10/2020	Ziguinchor
4	Coumba Sané	Housewife	74 years old	09/10/2020	Diégoune
5	Delphine Coly	Housewife	80 years old	09/10/2020	Diégoune
6	Joseph Coly	Teacher	40 years old	11/10/2020	Niaguis
7	Mamadou Sonko	Notable	55 years old	11/10/ 2020	Kandialang
8	Moussa Diémé	Notable	65 years old	06/10/2020	Toubacouta
9	Simond Mané	Farmer	55 years old	13/10/2020	Kénia

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