Women's Agency and Collective Action: Peace Politics in the Casamance

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@ Abstract
In 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 called for the increased participation of women in formal political processes surrounding violent conflict. However, worldwide, women continue to be a minority in formal politics, particularly in situations of armed violence. Contrary to this trend, women have played an influential role in the Casamance peace process in southern Senegal, where a rebel movement has been fighting for independence since 1982. This article assesses the methodology, constraints and, most importantly, the gendered opportunity structures surrounding the women's peace movement in Casamance. It demonstrates how women participate in the politics of war and peace through an astute manipulation of gendered platforms and a judicious reading of political context, thus propelling their voices into the formal political arena. This case study highlights practical and local approaches to political participation that may be relevant to women around the world.

@ Introduction
In recent years, interest in the confluence of women's issues, armed conflict and political decision-making has grown. More and more stories of women advocating for peace are capturing media attention; notably, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Argentina; Women in Black, Israel; Mothers of Soldiers Committee, Russia. Establishing this trend even further, in 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 called on the international community to recognize the unique and specific violence done to women and girls during conflict and, more importantly, called for their increased participation in decision-making surrounding armed conflict and peace processes. However, worldwide, women constitute a minority in government (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2006). Contrary to our interest in the colourful stories of women's grassroots peace-building and the UN's push for women's political representation in conflict zones, women are not only a distinct minority in government but are also rarely visible in the formal, and usually male-dominated, arenas of formal political peace processes, negotiation, and conflict resolution (Meintjes 2001, 63-77; Turshen 2001, 78-96; Sharoni 1996, 107-26; Abdela 2004, 87-99).

The absence of women in most peace processes makes the case of Casamance so significant. In Lower Casamance, situated in southern Senegal, women mobilizing in a peace-building capacity have exercised significant influence on the formal political level -- in particular, the peace process that led to the signing of the 2004 Peace Accords.

Since 1982, a separatist movement has destabilized Lower Casamance. Unaddressed grievances such as political exclusion, economic marginalization, and discrimination in terms of infrastructure, employment, and education eventually led to armed struggle between the Casamançais -- led largely by the Diola, the majority ethnic group in the Ziguinchor administrative region - and the Senegalese state. The lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of government representatives in Casamance, along with the geographic division between the north and south of Senegal inherited from colonial borders, fed a feeling of marginalization and facilitated the rise of identity politics.[1] Currently there are an estimated 14 400-22 400 internally displaced people and 15 163 refugees living mostly in The Gambia or Guinea-Bissau (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center 2008). The twenty-six-year-old low-intensity conflict has seen

a number of ceasefires and negotiations. However, the two most recent peace accords of June 2000 and December 2004 were the first to include, at their insistence, women in negotiations. Though these peace accords have not resulted in the end of the conflict, the women's peace movement has successfully mobilized many women and positioned itself as a player in the peace process. These women style themselves as "indispensable" to the peace process, drawing on rhetoric of the inherent peacefulness of women and the motherly profession of care.

Using social movement theory as a reference point, this article analyses how women use gendered platforms to manoeuvre their voices into the formal political arena. The analysis of gendered opportunity structures presents a new area of investigation for social movement theorists. Gendered opportunity structures refer to symbols, institutions, or language that resonate with a social movement's audience and enables a broader mobilization of potential constituents. A correct analysis of these opportunity structures may also lead to the implementation of culturally appropriate, and therefore more engaging, topics and methods of collective action. Social movement literature has focused on interpreting such structures through a cultural lens (Taylor 2000, 219-30); however, to ignore the gendered aspects of certain societal constructs that give women agency disallows for the many forms of women-specific action that occur daily around the world. I will look at how women have historically used their gendered power to organize for war and peace in Casamance and briefly surmise what impact their work has had on the peace process. Following this, I draw out the anthropological and sociological aspects of gendered opportunity structures in Casamance through an analysis of power, religion, and tradition, and information gathered during fieldwork. Though there are many examples of women invoking motherhood to voice their concerns in the formal politics of war and peace, the women's peace movement of Casamance demonstrates unusual efficacy in applying their religious, cultural, and maternal power in village level politics to formal and national politics. The fungability of female power in the Casamance allows us to take a closer look at the gendered opportunity structures embedded in local religious, cultural and maternal constructs, thus enabling us to envision similar opportunity structures that may exist elsewhere for women.

@ The Casamance Conflict

In historical analyses of conflict, women's activities tend to be under-researched. By drawing on various histories of the Casamance conflict, special attention will be paid to the role of women throughout, both in supporting the conflict and promoting peace. This holistic perspective reveals that women have played a noteworthy role throughout the Casamance conflict and presently in the peace process.

Ethnic resistance to colonialism in Casamance has been noted as early as 1857 (Roche 1985, 102). A rainmaker, the Diola Queen Aliine Sitoé Diatta, was imprisoned by the French in Timbuktu during the French colonial period for fomenting rebellion and has since become a cult figure (Toliver-Diallo 2005). Moreover, Diola women were noted for their tenacious fight against the conscription of their sons and husbands during the two World Wars (Diédhiou 2004, 121). These sources demonstrate the historic pattern of resistance by the Diola people, including the active resistance and mobilization of women, towards the external imposition of political authority as well as the use of cultural symbols by the Diola to forward a particularized version of history. For example, drawing on a long history of regional rebellion, the rebel group *le Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance* (MFDC) cites instances of ethnic (Diola) resistance to external political domination dating from the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (*Jeunesse Internationale et Indépendante de la Casamance* 1999) as well as European

intentions and desires during the colonial period to make Casamance independent (Lambert 1998).

In the 1970s, northern Senegalese migrated south to Casamance attracted by the resource-rich land, which they began to exploit for rice, cashew, peanuts, and timber. At this time, there were protests over land tenure issues. Traditional land rights gave ownership of the land to the first family that had cleared the land; however, the 1964 *loi sur le domaine national* favoured Mouride marabouts and the Wolof and Toucouleur ethnic groups (Evans 2004, 3; Diédhiou 2004, 111, 53). Often, the land was expropriated using less-than-legal means (de Benoist 1991, 33). In so doing, the government inadvertently drew the battle lines -- the Casamançais began to voice their economic and political grievances in regional-ethnic terms.

It is important to note that people from Casamance have also been migrating to urban centers for quite some time, both to the regional capital (Ziguinchor) and the national capital (Dakar). During colonial times, Diola women in particular were engaged as dockworkers at the Ziguinchor port (Diédhiou 2004, 123). Moreover, many young men (and now women) migrate north to Dakar to continue their education, and women also migrate there to find employment as maids and increase their marriage prospects (Diédhiou 2004, 278; de Jong 2007). Having an education gave rise to hopes that a job would follow; however, many educated Casamançais testified to repeated discrimination both at school and in the job market, which increased frustration and disillusionment with the State (Foucher 2007).

In 1980, the students from *Lycée Djignabo* in Ziguinchor demonstrated against the new mandate of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs). The SAPs emphasized economic deregulation at the expense of the government budget for education, among other things (Diédhiou 2004, 59, 65). These cutbacks affected Casamance students in particular as the local high school was under-equipped to serve the high number of high-school age youth in the area. At the same time, teachers and the administration conflicted over unionization. The teachers went on strike, and the municipal authorities and the administration called in the police, thus escalating the conflict. The night of 6 January 1980, four teachers were taken into the woods and tortured by the authorities.[2] Upset, students decided to hold a march on 11 January. During this protest, a Diola *lycéen* was killed by Senegalese authorities, and for two days there was student-led anarchy in the streets. The students called for the northern principal of the *lycée* to be fired but the local government refused. This refusal was key in determining the political salience of identity: the local population made a connection between this event and the 1960 firing of Daniel Kabou, a Casamançais and then-governor of the northern town of Saint Louis who was demoted by the local authorities when the local population called for his removal from office. For the Casamançais, the refusal of the local government to fire the principal signalled that the government was a part of the problem -- thus augmenting a feeling of marginalization. Moreover, because of the connection made between the 1960 and 1980 events and the two very different outcomes, the Casamançais felt that they were being discriminated against. Finally, Usana, the association of women initiates and priestesses from the sacred forest, led a march in Ziguinchor to protest the *lycéen's* death. With their calabashes and brooms in hand, they criss-crossed the streets half-naked, while students were manning barricades and setting fire to local authorities' houses. The calabash bowls and brooms signify that the women have risen and made a decision regarding a community issue. These instruments are also mystical weapons denoting female spiritual authority to clear away evil spirits, symbols invoked often by the women's peace movement. The women demanded the release of the arrested students, the cessation of the detention and torture of teachers, and the departure of the principal (Diédhiou 2004, 123).

Confronted by the women, the government finally gave into their demands.

In the early 1980s, the MFDC held meetings to discuss independence.[3] These meetings were held in the sacred forests -- a tree, or grove, in a village, or in the forest where the spirit world is propitiated, that often also serve as a meeting point to discuss village or communal matters.[4] Female priestesses of the local traditional religion were present during these meetings; not only did they hold MFDC members in pledge to fight for the independence of Casamance at these shrines, but they also created shrines elsewhere where they could pray for the success of the movement (Beck *et al.* 2001, 16). Priestesses used the threat of cursing to oblige others to support or join the MFDC. There are also rumours of women priestesses cursing individuals who are active opponents of the MFDC. Field interviews demonstrated that the population takes these curses seriously, particularly those who adhere to the traditional religion, thus reinforcing the power of women.

In 1982, the MFDC, including women from the sacred forests, marched on government buildings where they replaced the Senegalese flag with a white flag to symbolize independence. The women were wearing beaded gourds over their heads, a traditional fertility symbol, and claim to have called the men to action during the night while restraining their aggressiveness during the day (Geschiere and Van der Klei 1987, 315-17). A similar march held a year later degenerated into violence, as the government forces reacted with a display of military force. Women were likewise present at this march and some marched naked, a symbolic gesture of cursing.

Throughout the early 1980s, the MFDC remained largely a political movement, content to voice its grievances in discreet discussions and occasional protests. However, the continual repression of the state amplified the sense of discrimination and marginalization and tipped the cost-benefit scale in favour of violence. In 1985, the military wing of the MFDC -- *Atika,* meaning "warrior" in Diola -- was created and many men joined the *maquis.*[5] Although there have been no reports of female combatants, women have supported (and continue to support) the military wing of the MFDC by providing information and food, transporting landmines and weapons, and selling cannabis to fund the rebellion (Beck *et al.* 2001, 15; Bop 2001, 22, 25). Women hold a traditional role of importance in the Diola religion and have, "strengthened their control as keepers of the fetishes believed to assure the protection of combatants" (Bop 2001, 22). At times, female priestesses have created direct links with certain *maquis,* providing spiritual as well as physical support to the *maquisards* (Foucher 2005, 378). These examples demonstrate women's engagement in the Casamance conflict since its inception.

The 1990s saw an escalation in violence and human rights abuses committed by both sides, which alienated the population from the cause of the MFDC. In 1992, Father Diamacoune, the head of the MFDC, failed to produce proof that the French intended for Casamance to be a separate state, causing division between the military and political wing within the MFDC; since this time, the movement has become increasingly factionalized.[6] Also at this time, the Senegalese government targeted the military wing with development programs and favours in order to divide the rebel movement. In 1993, the lack of historical proof for independence was confirmed by French historian Jacques Charpy. Following this external evaluation and given the internal problems of the MFDC, people slowly began to withhold support for the MFDC. They also questioned the MFDC claim that Casamance had an official right to independence.[7] One organization, the Movement des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance (MOFEPAC), comprised of Casamançais women living in Dakar, tried to hold a peace march in Dakar in 1993 but was prohibited from marching by the government.[8] This movement lacked leadership and a clear

purpose and eventually faded (Beck *et al.* 2001, 15). Moreover, government constraints did not yet allow women, and other interest groups, to publicly organize on issues relating to the Casamance conflict.

In 1993, the MFDC, and subsequently the military, started laying landmines. The loss of life due to landmines was greatest in 1997 and 1998.[9] One individual states:

> Until 1997 the population was exempted from the violence because they paid dues to the MFDC. After 1997 the population paid dues less and less and the MFDC began to retaliate on the population.[10]

Through the media, the population became aware of the degree of loss of life which also affected their perception of the conflict. One particular attack in 1997 left twentyy-five soldiers dead: "People really understood there was a problem when they saw a mother crying for her dead son, a soldier, and her son, a rebel, who could have killed him."[11] With the use of landmines, many international NGOs left Casamance.[12] This gave the opportunity for more local NGOs to intervene in potentially more culturally resonating ways.[13] One particularly noteworthy example is the use of the joking cousin relationship between the Diola and the Sereer in resolving conflict (de Jong 2005).[14] In 1994, Saliou Sambou, a Diola governor serving in the Sereer region of Fatick, organized a festival commemorating the relationship between the Sereer and Diola which aimed to involve women in the peace process (Beck *et al.* 2001, 17). Additionally, these joking relationships were used by President Diouf in 1996 to solidify a peace accord signed between the MFDC and the government (Wilson-Fall 2000, 63). Most recently, in 1997, a Muslim spiritual leader from Fatick began having visions. Working with the Diola governor in Fatick as well as civil society members from Casamance and the women of Kabonketoor, including a priestess, these visions enabled them to identify and deactivate one of the fetishes in 2001 that had been buried in during an MFDC initiation ceremony (Beck *et al.* 2001, 17). This shows how many actors use cultural opportunity structures to diffuse the Casamance conflict.

In 1997, the government changed its position to allow for the participation of non-governmental actors in the peace process. This was due to a large meeting organized by CONGAD *(Conseil des ONG d'Appui au Développement),* an umbrella group that coordinates the activities of all NGOs in Casamance, which reclaimed a position for civil society in conflict management. Before this time, only human rights organizations dared to denounce the Casamance conflict openly. A number of interviewees reported that this meeting was instrumental in changing their perception of their own utility in promoting peace.[15] In addition, from 1998 to 1999, the government moved away from the use of force towards negotiation. Prior to this the government detained anyone who was accused of supporting the rebels; many people were detained, tortured, and killed indiscriminately as neighbours accused neighbours of sympathizing with the MFDC when in reality a personal grievance or jealousy was at stake.[16] This shift came about, in part, through international pressure employed by Amnesty International and RADDHO *(Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme),* a Senegalese human rights organization, concerning the use of torture and excessive force in Casamance.[17] As a result, distrust of the government and neighbours decreased. Freedom of speech increased and civil society felt freer to meet in groups. This demonstrates how the type of repression chosen by the state and the rebels will determine the occurrence and type of collective action taken (Mason and Krane 1989).

Around the mid 1990s, some women from the sacred forest began discreetly exploring mystical ways to rectify their original support of armed violence -- signalling the stirrings of a women's peace movement. Prior to 1995, women from the sacred forest continued to wash and

bless young men in preparation for their entry into the *maquis*. In 1999, women began to mobilize more formally for peace and created the *Association Régionale des Femmes pour la Paix* (ARFP).

The women's peace movement did not mobilize in a vacuum. Though women had tried to organize for peace prior to 1999, the changing interests and the lifting of political constraints and rising opportunities allowed more civil society organizations to populate the landscape after this time.

Later in the year, ARFP held a Women's Forum. In one of the workshops, it became apparent that the women from the sacred forest associations were not pro-active for peace because they had previously supported the armed violence and now felt ashamed of and guilty for their involvement. These women decided to make sacrifices for peace in the sacred forest to repair the previous pro-conflict sacrifices and a women's peace march was held in conjunction with International Women's Day. Money for these activities was provided by several international donors.

In December, a ceasefire was signed. After obtaining funding and official invitations from Father Diamacoune, four women from ARFP, as well as a priestess from the sacred forest, were able to attend the talks. Though they were invited as observers, the women demanded to speak. After their speech, others also took the opportunity to speak and, thus, these women's actions made it the first peace talk in Senegal to allow civil society to intervene.

Due to internal conflict, the ARFP later split into two groups: the *Comité Régional de Solidarité des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance* (Usoforal -- "hand in hand" in Diola), a development organization, decided to disseminate international conflict resolution tools and implement development projects, while Kabonketoor ("to reconcile with each other" in Diola), a grassroots women's peace association, continued to focus on local traditional and religious methods of conflict resolution and to maintain close connections with the Usana. It has been suggested these groups also differ along political lines -- Usoforal with PDS *(Parti Démocratique Sénégalais),* the current ruling party, and Kabonketoor with PS (*Parti Socialiste*) (Foucher 2003) -- the women themselves vehemently denied this distinction and pointed to members in their midst belonging to both political affiliations.[18] However, politicians themselves did seem partial to one group or the other, perhaps pointing also to co-optation or patronage by the political elite.[19]

In 2001, Kabonketoor began a peace awareness tour throughout Casamance, educating others about the different options available to the region apart from an armed struggle for independence. They framed their activities with traditional religious ceremonies, thus drawing on cultural symbols to engage the population in efforts for peace. Around this time, women from Kabonketoor also marched through the bush, without knowing precisely where they were going or what welcome they would receive, to find the *maquisards* of the MFDC and convince them to lay down their weapons. Some priestesses have committed to work for peace by spiritually releasing the *maquisards* from their pledge to fight and by deactivating the fetishes that were created at the beginning of the conflict to support the rebels (de Jong 2007, 4).[20] Many actors, including international donors, NGOs, the government, and rebels, are using tradition and religion to further their own objectives, both pro-peace and pro-conflict (Marut 2005, 327-28).

In October 2002, a peace march organized by Kabonketoor saw over four thousand women in attendance; this signalled the success of their peace awareness tour and the presence of a mass movement of women for peace. Kabonketoor's peace awareness tour culminated in a Women's Forum in 2003 with over one thousand women present. After the Forum,

representatives delivered a declaration to the Senegalese government and the MFDC calling for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

In December 2004, women from both Kabonketoor and Usoforal, along with various NGO and civil society representatives, were invited as observers to the Peace Accords held in Foundiougne, Senegal. Many people believe that women were instrumental in setting the stage for these accords by opening up dialogue on the conflict and gaining the confidence of sections of the rebel movement and the government, thus contributing to a climate of negotiation.[21] These most recent Peace Accords are the second accords signed between the rebels and the government of Abdoulaye Wade and hopes were high for its success. Unfortunately, not all the factions of the MFDC were present. In addition, these accords did not negotiate any outcomes; rather, they merely constituted an agreement to negotiate at a later date.[22]

Though women are now recognized more often in official circles, many people feel that this is merely lip-service and women's activities are used as cultural decoration.[23] In addition, women report being manipulated by community and political leaders, as well as being used to lend legitimacy to procedures they are not in agreement with. The women of Kabonketoor and Usoforal reported dissatisfaction with the 2004 Peace Accords as well as their role within it. Similarly to 1999, women were invited and sent invitations to participate once again as observers. More women were invited this time and once again they demanded the right to address the assembly, thus opening up the floor for dialogue. However, some women reported that it was a waste of their time -- the government had its own agenda, despite women's efforts to put certain issues on the table. At a certain point, the women from Kabonketoor reported that they refused to speak anymore because they did not want to be seen supporting a process that they did not have faith in.[24] In addition, the quality of the Peace Accords was questioned. Some people felt they were just a publicity stunt to prove that the government was carrying out election promises so that it would not lose the elections scheduled for 2007. Moreover, it appears as though Wade's government received the positive international press it was hoping for: shortly after the Peace Accords were signed, the World Bank and European Union applauded the move by announcing funding for economic development (de Jong and Gasser 2005, 215).

Since January 2006, the formal peace process has been stalled. From mid-2006 to the present, there have been reports of increased fighting in Lower Casamance. Moreover, the Casamance conflict has a strong regional dimension with reverberations felt in Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia. The conflict has already spilled over to Guinea-Bissau once in the past (1998-99) and the risk of spill-over also extends to The Gambia as weapons and rebels cross the border from Senegal. In addition, the Casamance conflict has added international dimensions as President Wade attempts to portray himself as a sub-regional and regional peacemaker and statesman through various channels such as the African Union and NEPAD. It also impacts Senegal's desire to be seen as a success in terms of pluralism and democracy. In 2008, civil society groups are increasingly criticizing the failures of the past and present Wade governments and are calling for the peace process to be restarted.

Altogether, it is evident from the above narrative of the Casamance conflict that a number of political constraints and opportunities shifted in the nineties so that civil society organizations (CSOs) could be involved in the peace process, both formally and informally. Additionally, the interests of the conflict actors and the greater Casamançais population changed in tandem with the constraints and opportunities, further opening the space for CSO involvement in the peace process, including women-centred action. Unlike the usual histories of many conflicts, when specifically giving space to female discourses of war and peace it becomes obvious that women

have also played a role in the conflict and in the peace. Rather than perpetuating gender stereotypes, women-centred discourses highlight the many broad and diverse activities undertaken both by men and women in situations of peace and conflict. Now, by looking at the gendered opportunity structures in Casamance, specific modalities of women-centred action and the global implications for women and politics, particularly in conflict-prone areas, will be brought to light.

@ Women's Agency and Collective Action

The increasing interest in women, development, and politics ensures greater visibility for grassroots women's movements; however, it also gives rise to an increasingly complex web of organizations that compete for finite resources. The case of the women's movement in Casamance demonstrates how geographically-bound cultural and spiritual references, for instance, the women's sacred forest associations, interact with various external factors and are instrumentalized and mobilized to sustain collective action on macro political issues. As they navigate the development industry, mobilize their constituency base, solidify their organizational structure and mount effective action on the ground -- all this in exceptionally difficult circumstances which entail the threat of violent reprisals, disappearances, rape, and torture -- women also have to transpose their locally-held legitimacy onto formal national politics in order to effect change. Working from locally prescribed bases of power, how do women's social movements effectively move their leverage to the national level?

Social movements, understood to be a critical mass of people making contentious demands on a political entity, were increasingly seen as an acceptable mode of action and making claims during the rise of the modern nation-state (Tarrow 1998). One aspect of social movement theory analyzes the role of women in collective action initiatives. A gender analysis of social movements is relevant to the case of Senegal in order to determine how the women's peace movement has manipulated gender constructs to increase its societal and political leverage.

Framing refers to the use of common symbols, culture, or organizations to enable a broader constituency to identify with the movement. "Frame lifting" collective action on a pre-existing cultural practice or institution is used to augment the power of and widespread identification with the movement. In this way, "collective action is grafted onto the cultural and emotional schemata of actors embedded in relevant social networks" (Morris 2000, 449). Framing is useful in analyzing the cultural, social, and religious platforms in Casamance: for example, Islam, Catholicism, and sacred forest associations, as well as sports associations are "agency-laden institutions" which provide a framework for the rebel movement as well as the woman's peace movement in Senegal.[25] The MFDC's use of these institutions demonstrates a strategic manipulation of social and public symbols that resonate with the public to frame their movement. Moreover, culture can be instrumentalized in times of unrest as it contributes to new strategies of action on macro issues of politics and economics (Swidler 1986, 280). In Casamance, tradition has been recreated and strategically manipulated by various actors, including government, the MFDC, various civil society organizations, and women's groups, to influence the conflict (Marut 2005; Tomàs 2005; de Jong 2005, Foucher 2003). For example, the legend of Aline Sitoe Diatta has been used by the MFDC to demonstrate Casamance unity and resistance as well as by the Senegalese state to promote nationalism (Toliver-Diallo 2005, 339).

The terms "tradition" and "culture" pose a semantic dilemma in that they imply ahistoricity and immutability. However, tradition and culture are malleable as they constantly interact with time, geography, migration, and external ideologies and value systems. Tradition,

therefore, is dynamic and fluid. The role of tradition in the conflict is not limited to the activities of women. For example, the arrival of a new priest-king has led to the reactivation of tradition in the region of Oussouye (Tomàs 2005, 432). The localized idea of "tradition" is now the most powerful source of identity in the region of Oussouye, more powerful than the notions of tradition articulated by the current Senegalese state or even by the separatists. The revitalization of tradition in the region of Oussouye is a direct response to the conflict crisis (Tomàs 2005, 427).

Traditional religious institutions have become politicized during the conflict and are subsequently being utilized for their peace-building potential. The fact that traditional institutions are being constituted by anthropological knowledge and international donor money, as well as being instrumentalized by all manner of state and NGO machinery does not make these practices less authentic (de Jong 2007, 4). Rather, traditional practices shape and are being shaped by contemporary politics. In fact, Casamançais and Diola identities are relatively new social constructs born out of globalization: these identities are created out of borrowed material from anthropologists and the Catholic church, for example, and their authenticity is less relevant so long as they provide legitimacy and a platform for mobilization (Marut 2005, 331; Foucher 2005). The numerous groups in Ziguinchor that use culture and tradition in conflict management have been criticized for their lack of knowledge of "true" tradition (Tomàs 2005, 421); however, field interviews suggested that Casamançais culture varies widely across the region. The critical point then becomes knowing which "traditional" tools to use in order to obtain the desired outcome.

It is useful to view culture as a "tool kit" that constructs strategies of action (Swidler 1986, 273). This view of culture does not define culture as values or beliefs; rather, culture is made up of cognitive tools that allow people to make sense of certain symbols and actions that they observe in social processes (Guthrie 1995, 424-5). Social movements make use of culture to appeal to the widest audience possible. If cultural significance is lost on a given audience, mobilization potential will also be lost; alternately, if the cultural significance of certain actions resonates with the audience, they will tend to identify with the movement and its aims. Recognizing how institutions and actions resonate with Casamançais' cultural "tool kit" offers insight to the meaning of social action undertaken not only by the peace movement but also the rebel movement.

In order to understand how women influence politics, it is necessary to understand if and how women hold power in society. First, in Casamance, agricultural tasks were traditionally divided equally among men and women. With the influx of cash crops such as peanuts, women's power has diminished as they have become less important to agricultural pursuits and have decreased ownership over the means of production.[26] However, in areas where rice production is practiced, the reciprocal relationship of dependency between men and women is ongoing and concomitantly reinforces women's social stature. Where female labour is valued, women also have access to decision-making roles in the community.

Second, though Diola society is patrilineal and patrilocal, it is less restrictive for women than other patriarchal West African societies. Indeed, it is difficult to define Diola society as strongly patrilineal since connections to matrilateral kin are also considered important (Linares 1988, 475). Some Diola groups allow women to inherit land. During colonialism, matrilineal inheritance of land was widely practiced in the region south of the Casamance River, later reverting back to transmission from a woman to a paternal sister or niece. As Diola society is patriarchal, one would infer that women thus have little to no say in politics; however, the loose

patriarchy practiced by the Diola once again gives women a measure of authority (Linares 1992, 56; Journet 1994, 344).[27]

Third, Diola society is further defined as a gerontocracy due to the close relationship between elders and the spirit shrines (Linares 1992, 29). As both men and women can retain the position of spiritual leader, women again share power with men on the societal level. Of pre-Islamic Diola groups, it is said:

> ... women had considerable influence in village matters. They may even have played a vital role in war councils. In 1906, the resident at Bignona wrote: "It is the consensus of the women that predominates and decides in principle, in matters of tax or war" (Mark 1976, 18).

It is not all women, however, that can participate in the sacred forest rituals. Only mothers are allowed to participate, thus excluding young women, the infertile, and the unmarried. Yet, the shrine for women in a village

> ... places them on an equal ritual and political footing with the corporation of resident, agnatic men.... Proof of the importance of female ritual activities is the fact that of the two sprit-shrines generally concerned with rice production, one is part of the *ehun* [female] shrine while the other is the *bakiin* [male] under the control of the paramount ritual elder.... Clearly, then, *ehun* asserts women's equality with men.... In fact, some women say their *sihun* are more important than the men's spirits of *bakiin*, and there are those who believe them (Linares 1988, 482).

Diola society gives women not only power over spiritual and material resources but also power over decision-making.

Due to the relatively egalitarian distribution of power via socio-economic, religious, and cultural mechanisms, Diola society places societal rights and responsibilities on women as well as men. The organic process of tradition-building -- interacting with nature, religion, the land, globalization, and social and economic forces over time -- has solidified women's power over many resources in society (Linares 1992, 70-1). Though it is obvious that female power is still compartmentalized to certain gendered domains and generally relegated to the domestic and social spheres (not the political), field interviews suggested that men from Casamance generally respect the power of these women. The legitimating force behind female power is the population's belief in, and wide acceptance of, the mystical forces controlled by priestesses. If belief in the traditional religion wanes, so, too, will the priestesses' authority in the community.

Gendered tools have, in the case of Casamance, led to specific topics and methods of collective action. These tools provide platforms for women to exercise agency, leverage, and persuasion in society. In Casamance, traditional mysticism, particularly through the activities of priestesses, is used both to fight for independence and to work for peace; however, in addition to being a cultural opportunity structure, the sacred forests are also gendered opportunity structures in that they provide a platform for women-specific agency, leverage, and persuasion.

As we have seen, since 1999, a number of women in Casamance have stopped supporting the rebel movement and have instead turned their efforts towards promoting peace. There are three main women's groups that undertake peace-related activities in Casamance: Kabonketoor, Kagamen, and Usoforal. Kagamen started by offering humanitarian assistance to female victims of gender-based violence and landmines relatively early on in the conflict. Inactive for a while, currently their activities revolve around humanitarian aid, development assistance, and lobbying. Both Kabonketoor and Usoforal are Ziguinchor-based NGOs, thus largely made up of urban women, though both do development work in rural communities.

It appears that there are three reasons for the divide between Usoforal and Kaboketoor: an

interpersonal conflict, cultural differences, and divergent approaches. One study has analyzed the interpersonal conflict in depth; however, this line of inquiry did not appear very informative.[28] Cultural differences, such as the sense of secret, particularly when talking about mystical activities performed in the sacred forest, seem to play more of a role.[29] The practice of secrecy is important in exercising and maintaining power (de Jong 2007). Some women involved in the peace movement are from the north of Senegal and as such were excluded from the secret practices of the sacred forest. Several women from Kabonketoor suggested they were incapable of keeping a secret in the same way a woman from Casamance would. This tension led many women to split from Usoforal and create Kabonketoor. There also may have been a difference of opinion on how to proceed. Usoforal uses a more generic approach to conflict resolution while Kabonketoor uses local tradition and religion to work for peace. Moreover, all women's organizations, as well as the larger local NGO community, are in competition for international donor money and resources.

The divide between these two organizations should not be over-emphasized. Both organizations do excellent work and they do cooperate from time to time on different projects -- one man closely connected with the work of Kabonketoor even suggested that they are cooperating more and more frequently.[30] However, the multiplicity of women's organizations working for peace and the division between Kabonketoor and Usoforal is used by others to downplay the importance of including women in decision-making, particularly related to the conflict.

Civic engagement is high in Casamance. It is rare to find a woman that is not involved in some sort of community association. During fieldwork, fifty-one women were either interviewed or participated in focus group discussions. These women represent various backgrounds: some are members of Kabonketoor, Kagamen, or Usoforal or do not belong to a women's peace group at all; others belong to sacred forest associations, *dahiras* (Muslim women's associations), or Catholic or Protestant women's associations; some are members of *Groupements d'Intérêt Économique* (GIE), community radio stations, or other community groups. Research questions focused on the motivation, timing, gender norms, and impact of women's peace activities as well as the ongoing Peace Accords. This research focused on the work of Kabonketoor because it fits the definition of social movement organization -- it has coalesced around a cultural and gendered symbol of collective action, namely, the Usana. While Kabonketoor itself is formally an NGO, it was created (1) to formalize and regularize those activities of the Usana which promoted peace and (2) to develop an organizational platform from which to exercise their leverage in formal peace politics. While other groups may also be distinct organizations operating in a larger social movement, they have not mobilized gendered resources or framed their approach with gender-appropriate symbols. Kabonketoor has succeeded in mobilizing an overwhelming number of women using a cultural and gendered approach; estimates during field interviews ranged from four thousand to fifteen thousand members.[31] This broad membership base legitimizes the peace efforts of Kabonketoor and gives weight to their collective voice. Categorizing Kabonketoor as a social movement organization with a mass participant base sets it apart from other organizations and positions it as a stakeholder with leverage in the Casamance conflict.

The leadership of Kabonketoor is primarily urban, formally educated, and Muslim, Catholic, or belonging to the sacred forests -- though it is structured so that both women from the sacred forest and uninitiated women have equal say in the activities and direction of the organization. Their grassroots membership is largely rural. Though it is sometimes seen as a Diola organization, members, including some in leadership, are of other ethnicities as well.

However, it is true that Diola women are primarily members of the Usana, from where Kabonketoor primarily draws its membership and influence. It is also important to note that not all women are pro-peace. Members of the women's peace movement have reported women in their midst who support the rebels and report back to MFDC leaders of what was discussed at their meetings and forums.

In order to be effective, the women's peace movement must combine mastery of the political scene with an astute manipulation of the gendered platforms which give them agency and leverage. The modalities of gendered opportunity structures, particularly when applied to the peace process, are nuanced. By providing a gender-specific, culturally sanctioned organization (the sacred forest associations) the popular cosmology of Casamance validates the authority of women while at the same time providing a gendered opportunity structure from which to exercise leverage on the political level. Women instrumentalize spiritual, familial, or village connections when exerting influence over someone from Casamance. However, it is important to note that language and grammar also define and legitimize power. As such, domains of power are geographically located and politically salient only where they are legitimized by belief systems (Foucault 1984). As women from Casamance operate more and more outside of their geographically defined domains of power, the more they need to look for other sources of legitimation that are broader and more universal. Consequently, when interacting with government officials and individuals from the north of Senegal, the women in Kabonketoor have to draw on other, more universal, customs, values, and sources of power to influence individuals and organizations that do not belong to the same belief system. They also have to speak a certain language that comes via exposure to the formal education system and work environment. In this sense, their leverage over politicians from the north of Senegal is weaker than their leverage over other Casamançais.

Motherhood is a common position of authority shared by people from the north and south of Senegal, and indeed is a more universal value, both in Africa and elsewhere; therefore, when interacting with officials from the north of Senegal, women draw on their authority as mothers to carry their point. Similar to the south of Senegal, the north of Senegal also places great weight on motherhood. Kabonketoor's membership includes women who have worked in politics or whose family has been involved in politics. Therefore, these members have more leverage with politicians from the north of Senegal.

Women in the peace movement realize the different spheres of influence surrounding the varying sources of their authority. One woman from Kabonketoor attests:

> The men who share the same culture as Diola women are the rebels. These men have no problem giving women space to speak. In a meeting of men the woman's voice is heard. The men who do not share the same culture as Diola women are in the government. However, these men do respect women insofar as they are mothers.[32]

A community worker with an international non-governmental organization (INGO) explains the spheres of influence, saying:

> Regarding the government and the role of women in the [peace] negotiations, those who are in the government and who come from Casamance, who have this Casamançais culture, will have an ear more open to the women because there will be certain things that both this Minister and Kabonketoor believes in. For example, the women could remind them that they have a family connection, or that they have the capability to take your name and curse it in the sacred forest. But for the Ministers that do not have Casamançais culture, Kabonketoor needs to take a different approach.

By manipulating both the social system and the formal political system, women are able to be doubly effective in grassroots and formal politics. The same person attests:

> The changeover [from one sphere of influence to another] depends on the situation. There are certain things the women [from the sacred forest] are better situated to perform and for others, it is the accompanying [non-iniated] women.[33]

The women of Kabonketoor script their meetings with rebels and northern politicians -- certain influential members of Kabonketoor are chosen to speak based on the leverage they hold over different people. If they are speaking with someone from Casamance then a respected woman from the sacred forest is chosen. If they are speaking with someone who is not from Casamance, a member of Kabonketoor who has worked in formal politics or who has ties to politicians will speak. A community worker describes how Kabonketoor prepares meetings with the government:

> They prepare meetings with the government like a theater performance ... who will say what at which time, who will cry at which time, etc. [One leader of the sacred forest] has the respect of all Casamançais so she is responsible for reminding [the politician] when he is trying to manipulate them. But if the women are speaking with someone who is not from Casamance, it is [a woman with political clout] who will speak.

He goes on to explain that, in a meeting with one high-level politician, Kabonketoor scripted how the meeting would go -- to the point of determining in advance who would burst into tears at what moment in the conversation in order to manipulate the feelings of the politician. In effect, the woman in question lost her place in the script and burst into tears at the wrong moment, resulting in everyone crying and a very successful meeting.[34] This demonstrates how women in Kabonketoor consciously manipulate the various sources of power that are at their disposal, depending on which sphere they find themselves in. The use of these sources of power obliges men from varying backgrounds to take into consideration what women are saying. It is evident that women from Kabonketoor not only understand political opportunity structures, but also cultural and gender opportunity structures.

The women in Kabonketoor are also seen as important because of the connections they maintain with the *maquis*. Normally, these bush camps are inaccessible; therefore, it is difficult to gauge the mood of the *maquisards* and their willingness to negotiate. Interviews suggested that the MFDC has some measure of respect for the women's peace movement. However, it is difficult to assess whether all factions of the MFDC respect the women's peace movement. During their awareness tour in 2001, both the military and the MFDC ensured the safety of Kabonketoor. One member reported that in a particularly hot conflict zone the MFDC sent a representative from the bush, past military security, to assure the women that the MFDC was aware of their tour and that they would be safe.[35] On the other hand, at the time of fieldwork, Kabonketoor was still trying to meet with Salif Sadio, the hardline MFDC rebel leader. If and when they do meet with him, it is difficult to ascertain the measure of influence they might hold over him.[36] He may or may not ascribe to their authority as women from the sacred forest, or he may not hold the forest shrines sacred any longer. Indeed, it has been posited that the *maquisards* generally consider themselves above the fetishes of the villages, going so far as to create their own "new" fetishes or moving old fetishes into their camps (Foucher 2005, 379).[37] In addition, some interviewees believe that the conflict will continue for as long as there are women from the sacred forest still supporting the MFDC. At present, not all women have embraced a position of peace and there are still some who mystically support the rebels.

@ Conclusion

From the historical narrative of the conflict, it is evident that Casamance culture fosters gendered opportunity structures from which women exercise agency, leverage, and persuasion. The institutionalization of the women's peace movement in Casamance offers fertile ground for a broader analysis of peace movements and women-centred political action. The women's peace movement appeals to other women and a broader audience largely by using gendered opportunity structures such as the sacred forest associations and motherhood.

> Though limited by gender constructs that deny formal political agency to "female" activities, women continue to exercise traditional female power on behalf of the conflict and the peace process in Casamance. Their success in transposing female authority from the local level onto the formal political level is demonstrated by the increase in dialogue and negotiation and, most importantly, the nascent perception that women's activities are, and can be, political. While women reported that there were no female combatants with the MFDC, they did state: ... women make up a mystical army. They use calabash bowls and march with nude torsos in order to clear away the evil spirits.[38]

Though women themselves compartmentalize their activities within acceptable societal roles for women, they are also experimenting with the political scope and leverage of these activities.

From the case of Casamance, we can infer that women may choose to manipulate and instrumentalize traditional societal structures that have historically given women some measure of voice and agency in society to influence formal politics. Indeed, while there is little data on the status of women in pre-colonial societies (Mikkel 1997; Staudt 1989), it appears that women may have had more political power in the past as current distinctions between the religious and political, or private and political realms were not so rigid previously (Geisler 2004, 19, 207). More simply, women may be merely seizing an opportunity as globalization, local customs, and women's status in society work together to produce openings for leverage, voice, and agency on the political level. However, given the sub-regional implications of the conflict, creating peace necessitates the involvement of more parties than just women. The illicit timber, cannabis, and precious gems trade, the possibility of off-shore oil extraction, and the risk of spill-over of the conflict to the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau give the Casamance conflict an added sub-regional dimension that would necessarily implicate a diverse range of actors, including international figures.

The role of women in the Casamance conflict, and its implications for conflict analysis more generally, should not be lightly dismissed. The existence and relative success of gendered opportunity structures in the peace process in Casamance may point to the existence of similar structures elsewhere. Though these structures are context-specific, similar platforms for women-centred agency, leverage and persuasion may be utilized for peace-building and the political empowerment of women in other conflicts. Gendered opportunity structures may provide women with the ability to get involved in politics. An appropriate and local manipulation of both local and formal political tools for peace could result in a more holistic and lasting peace than those normally negotiated solely by international powers.

@ Notes

[1] The country of The Gambia divides the north of Senegal from the south of Senegal.

[2] School teacher / community leader from the north of Senegal. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 1 Dec 2005.

[3] The MFDC was founded as a regional (non-ethnic) political party in 1947 by Émile Badiane and Edouard Diallo (both Diolas from Lower Casamance) and Ibou Diallo (Peul from Upper

Casamance) to further the interests of the Casamance within the Senegalese state. The MFDC was later absorbed into Leopold Sedar Senghor's *Parti Socialiste* (PS). However, the voices of the MFDC in the larger PS lacked leverage as patrimonial politics served, and continue to serve, the interests of large Islamic brotherhoods from the North. This patron-client relationship between the government and the Sufi marabouts hinges on the marabouts' capacity to mobilize large voter blocks (Beck *et al.* 2001, 1). In the 1980s, those pro-independence decided to revive the MFDC name as a separatist movement. While the MFDC is now seen as a Diola movement, other ethnic groups in Casamance originally also participated in the independence movement.
[4] A "sacred forest" in this context refers to Diola tradition, though some other ethnic groups in Casamance have similar spaces.
[5] *Maquis* are bush camps. Rebels working out of these camps are referred to as *maquisards.* Many rebels identify revenge on behalf of their tortured or killed relatives as one motivator in joining the guerrilla movement (Foucher 2007). The late Father Diamacoune himself had mentioned the torture of a relative in his speeches about independence. Journalist. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 23 November 2005.
[6] The late Sidy Badji, leader of the military wing *(Atika)* of the MFDC, split with Father Diamacoune, a Catholic priest and leader of the political wing, when Diamacoune failed to produce evidence regarding the sovereignty of Casamance. The *Front Nord,* led by Badji, ceased active combat and committed to regional autonomy within the Senegalese state. While Badji and his followers purportedly stuck to this ceasefire agreement, large segments of *Atika* did not adhere to his leadership and remained armed, leading to factional in-fighting. Alternately, until his death in 2007, Father Diamacoune continued to take a more hard-line approach to independence through the political wing and the *Front Sud,* which itself became deeply factionalized.
[7] Local NGO Director. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 4 November 2005.
[8] Member of Usoforal. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 23 November 2005.
[9] Personal communication from Handicap International. Ziguinchor, 9 November 2005.
[10] Journalist. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 23 November 2005.
[11] Member of Usoforal. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 23 November 2005.
[12] International aid worker. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 22 November 2005.
[13] Tarrow (1998, 71) states that political opportunities and constraints may be more of a determinant of social action than ongoing oppression or injustice.
[14] Joking cousin relationships are used throughout West Africa to solidify relationships between ethnic groups. Alternately called "mutual aid relationships," they usually derive from origin stories of different ethnic groups. Not only do they provide comic relief and a way of smoothing over arguments, but they also allow members of one ethnic group to call on the services of another ethnic group when in need.
[15] Member of Usoforal. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 23 November 2005.
[16] Member of Kabonketoor. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 21 November 2005.
[17] See Amnesty International (1998).
[18] Member of Kabonketoor. Author interview. 21 November 2005.
[19] Senior civil servants. Personal communication with author. Journalist / School teacher. Personal communication with author. Ziguinchor, 27 October 2005.
[20] Journalist. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 14 November 2005.
[21] Author interviews. Ziguinchor, 7 November-3 December 2005.
[22] The absence of *Front Sud* hardliner Salif Sadio was particularly noteworthy. Actual

negotiations following Foundiounge were set to take place one year later, 26-27 December 2005, but they were postponed indefinitely. Incumbent President Wade won the February 2007 presidential elections; however, many attacks in the north of Casamance preceded the elections. For an analysis of the ambiguities surrounding the 2004 Peace Accords see de Jong and Gasser (2005, 213-29).

[23] Community worker. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 15 November 2005.

[24] Member of Kabonketoor. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 30 October 2005.

[25] Journalist. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 14 November 2005.

[26] See Linares (1992) for an in-depth analysis of the agricultural, religious, and sociological changes occurring in Casamance.

[27] School teacher / Journalist. Personal communication with author. Ziguinchor, 27 October 2005.

[28] For an in-depth look at the divisions between the two groups, see Foucher (2003) and Beck *et al.* (2001). However, during one interview I was told that the latter publication had negative effects on the ground and that it presents a biased perspective of the division between women's groups. Member of Usoforal. Ziguinchor, 23 November 2005.

[29] Some people name these divisions "ethnic"; however, I believe a truer representation is "cultural," as both groups include individuals from various ethnic groups, even including women from both the north and the south of Senegal.

[30] INGO worker / Casamançais. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 15 November 2005.

[31] At a Women's Forum that I participated in with Kabonketoor during 2003, there were over one thousand women present from all areas of Casamance -- indicative of a much broader and larger support base than those who made the journey for the two-day Forum.

[32] Author interview. Ziguinchor, 30 October 2005.

[33] Author interview. Ziguinchor, 15 November 2005.

[34] Author interview. Ziguinchor, 15 November 2005.

[35] Member of Kabonketoor. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 17 November 2005.

[36] Journalist. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 14 November 2005.

[37] Local NGO Director. Author interview. Ziguinchor, 5 November 2005.

[38] Leaders from the sacred forest / Members of Kabonketoor. Author focus group discussion. Dioloulou, 2 December 2005.

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[first page footnote]
This article is based on fieldwork that took place from September to December 2005, generously funded by the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC), as well as two years of working with *le Mouvement contre les armes légères en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MALAO) in Dakar from 2002 to 2004. I would like to thank Ken Bush for supervising my Master's thesis. I also wish to thank my external reviewers, Stephen Brown and Louise de la Gorgondiere, as well as James Ron, Vincent Foucher, Barry Riddell, and the anonymous reviewers of the Canadian Journal of African Studies for rigorous and insightful reviews of earlier versions of this work. All errors and omissions are my own.