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Peace Committees for Conflict Resolution in Casamance: from popular illusion to political denial

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Summary

Peacebuilding is an intervention model that emerged in the 1990s. It postulates that traditional diplomatic mechanisms of conflict management, involving exclusively the representatives of belligerent parties, is no longer sufficient. Populations' participation in the peace process has mainly led to NGOs' involvement, to whom donor agencies have delegated the responsibility for "organizing" populations' participation. In Casamance, as in other post-conflict areas, one of the most popular strategies for promoting participation is the establishment of peace committees: a group of people is designated to prevent and manage disputes arising at the village level. Against the background: the idea that small conflicts' accumulation could fuel again the great independence conflict.

Often presented as an original and popular intervention mechanism, committees are rather the result of the standardisation of peacebuilding's strategies. The need to build intervention from the bottom is systematically advocated from the top. The objectives of participation, its methods and functioning are prescribed from the outside; especially since there are many different mechanisms of conflicts' resolution in the village societies. In the absence of social anchoring, those set up by NGOs are rarely used. This exteriority systematically raises the question of the appropriation of these mechanisms by the populations. This often leads to manipulation. Far from the sought for impartiality, committees are used in strategies of material, economic or political capitalization. Furthermore, village conflicts, essentially related to land property, as well as the independence conflict have political origins that committees are not in a position to address. In this way, they aspire to the treatment of the symptoms rather than causes.

For the last fifteen years in Casamance, peacebuilding has benefited from funders' craze, giving rise to the commercialisation and massification of peace actions. As illustrated by the proliferation of peace committees, interventions are not judged by their results, on the basis of the benefits that they affirm to provide. They are valued and replicated according to their competitive value on the development market.

Keywords: conflict management, peace committees, peacebuilding, Casamance, legal pluralism.

Peace Committees for Conflict Resolution in Casamance: from popular illusion to political denial¹

Introduction

Peacebuilding is an intervention model that emerged in the 1990s. It is based on the idea that contemporary conflicts are less and less likely to involve two distinct states, and increasingly oppose a multitude of actors from within the same state. For this reason, traditional diplomatic mechanisms, which are based on the will to bring the political and/or military representatives on both sides together for the purposes of negotiation, are insufficient. The new ways of “making peace” advocate population involvement, recommending “grassroots” work, “at the community level”, as its advocates would have it. According to the tenets of peacebuilding, this intervention strategy enables the participation, not only of the elites, but also of the population, by means of activities for the promotion of dialogue and reconciliation. It also enables the facilitation of social stability in post-conflict areas, and can prevent new flare-ups of violence.

Populations’ involvement in the peace process has often resulted in the involvement of NGOs. The latter have been charged by sponsors with the responsibility of “organising the participation” of the population. Statements regarding the need to pacify populations, and formulations of the imperative of peacebuilding “from the bottom up”, are part of a rhetoric which has systematically placed NGOs at the heart of the intervention system. Through this narrative they have become the main recipients of the external aid intended for peacebuilding.

In Casamance, in the south of Senegal, the drastic decrease in confrontations between the Senegalese military and the pro-independence forces of the MFDC since the 2000s² has allowed for the intervention of humanitarian and development actors³. Since then, dozens of organisations have been working according to the peacebuilding model. In this area, as in other post-conflict contexts, one of the most prized strategies for “making populations participate in peace” is based on the establishment of peace committees⁴. This involves

¹ My thanks go to Paul Diédhiou and Vincent Léger for their comments on the first versions of this text.

² The conflict between the Senegalese State and the pro-independence forces of the MFDC (Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance) dates back to 1982. The warring parties have yet to reach a peace agreement. Certain parts of the territory, which are increasingly restricted, remain under the control of the MFDC. There has, however, been a period of relative calm over the last few years, with no direct confrontations, although this has been occasionally interrupted by increasingly rare incidents.

³ In this text I use the terms “humanitarian actors” and “development actors” interchangeably. I am referring to national or international organisations which, beyond the services of the State, aim to transform the societies in which they intervene from the outside. Humanitarian aid refers to interventions which respond to an emergency imperative, whereas development refers to economic or social actions with non-vital stakes. This distinction, which is incidentally disputed within the sector of humanitarian coordination itself, is relative. In Casamance, populations make no distinction between these two forms of aid, nor between the actors who implement them. Indeed, for the most part, the same interlocutors are involved in both development and humanitarian aid.

⁴ For the last twenty years, the creation of peace committees has been a particularly widespread strategy in a variety of post-conflict contexts. To name but a few on the African continent, the model

designating a group of people in one or several villages, whose members will be responsible for preventing and managing any disputes which may arise at the village or inter-village level. The management of disputes at the “community level”, as the project-carriers claim, is intended to prevent conflicts from reaching a point of no return or leading to large-scale litigation. The idea behind this is that the cumulation of small conflicts on a local level could feed into the major independence conflict. Their prevention and management would therefore reduce the risks of a new eruption of the armed conflict⁵.

This form of intervention is especially popular in Casamance⁶. In 2017, nearly a dozen NGOs were still working on the basis of peace committees. And yet the method raises a number of conceptual and operational problems. In the following article, we will try to address the main ones. These observations are based on ethnographic work carried out in several villages in Lower Casamance⁷. The need for new lines of enquiry in this area seems all the more urgent given that the existing literature on peacebuilding in general, and on peace committees in particular, is essentially produced by humanitarian operators⁸. The monopolisation of the discourse by predominantly Anglophone actors who fund and

has been used in various forms in South Africa, the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya.

⁵ In this regard, certain project carriers often use the metaphor of embers under the ash which can still start a fire.

⁶ Recourse to village committees for conflict management is a particularly popular strategy in Casamance. We might mention the intervention carried out by the Senegalese NGO CRSFPC/Usoforal, largely funded by the German organisation Weltfriedensdienst (WFD) and a Spanish NGO, Assembly of Cooperation for Peace (ACPP) between 2010 and 2017. The actions carried out since 2013 in consortium by the American NGO Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and two Senegalese NGOs, Caritas Sénégal and the Plateforme des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance (PFPC), with funding from the American cooperation agency (USAID), also follow this pattern. These two projects formed the basis for the ethnographic observations. Other interventions, such as the “Peace and Security” project by Tostan, financed by Swedish development aid, or others by Dynamique de Paix (DP), with support from the Geneva cooperation, are also part of the same approach. The Association d’Appui aux Initiatives de Paix et de Développement (ASAPID) also carries out similar operations in the north of the Ziguinchor region. Over the last few years, Ajac Lukaal (Association for Young Farmers of Casamance), with funding from Amnesty International, also implemented conflict management committees, exclusively made up of women in their case, in three municipalities of the Nyaguis district. In the past, other local interlocutors such as Afrique Enjeux (AFEX) or Kabonketoor have also worked in this direction in the framework of the PRECOGEL programme (Programme for Reinforcing the Capacities of Local Management Committees), financed by the European Union in 2009. In 2006, AFEX had already worked in this domain with support from Oxfam Great-Britain. Other entities, such as CASADES (Committee for Social and Economic Development Support in Casamance) in the Sédhio and Kolda areas, as well as Enfance et Paix in Balantacounda, followed a similar intervention logic. ANRAC (the National Agency for Economic Recovery in Casamance) has also set up a number of committees with funding from German development aid.

⁷ Fieldwork was carried out between January and June 2017 in the department of Ziguinchor. A number of interviews were carried out with national and international humanitarian actors, as well as with local authorities. Several field visits were organised in six villages. This enabled us to take part in the events organised by the project-carriers (awareness campaigns, inaugurations, follow-up visits). A survey based on the distribution of thirty questionnaires amongst village populations was carried out, as well as a number of more informal interviews with village members.

⁸ Moreover, in Casamance, social science research produced on the mechanisms of conflict management used by humanitarian actors has focused on the instrumentalisation of tradition (Awenengo, 2006; Foucher, 2007; Marut, 2009; Diédhiou, 2013). Little attention, however, has been given to the social structures set up by NGOs in the name of peace. Their interventions nevertheless generate social dynamics which, independently of the level of conformity they display with the stated results, ought to be the subject of deeper analysis.

implement these strategies leaves little room for critical reflection. It establishes that evaluation processes are often in deficit, and more the product of strategic issues of international development aid than of the will to understand the real impact of interventions.

The presentation of committees by humanitarian operators is often part of the inversion of a discourse which positions populations as the promoters of action and NGOs as the accompaniers of popular initiatives. Developed and mandated by NGOs, the committees are part of a process of standardisation of strategies for peacebuilding. Like all so-called “participative” approaches, their implementation calls into question the possibility of inspiring “inside” participation and mobilisation “from the outside”.

Moreover, these exogenous measures are added to a number of pre-existing conflict-management mechanisms. In a context of legal pluralism, it seems relevant to examine their relationship with local authorities, as well as with public administration. Without social and institutional anchoring, they often lack legitimacy and tend to disappear at the end of projects, as soon as the sponsor’s support is withdrawn.

The establishment of peace committees is accompanied by an argument concerning the limitations of pre-existing conflict-resolution mechanisms in rural areas, often referred to as “traditional” mechanisms. The committees, which are considered to be exclusive and authoritarian (especially with regard to women and young people), correspond to the will of “modernising tradition”. To do so, they would need to technologise the community treatment of conflicts, and to bureaucratise it, to give it greater “objectivity”. The ethnographic data collected nevertheless reveals the illusory nature of this sought-after impartiality. The committees, much like the pre-existing systems, are subject to instrumentalisation by local actors. In this way, they are often victims of the very shortcomings which they are intended to remedy. They fit into strategies of material, economic and political capitalisation, reminding us that all external interventions are systematically reformulated in line with the given context and its issues. These issues are often not sufficiently taken into account by project-carriers.

Peacebuilding is particularly competitive in the development marketplace. It is systematically presented as innovative, and as “the only tool that is reliable, non-coercive, unintrusive, respectful of the autonomy of local populations”, for the sustainable prevention of conflicts (Lefranc, 2006: 247). Given the magnitude of the funds provided, NGOs have logically rushed into this new niche in the development marketplace. The merchandising of peace actions has led to a broadening of the market base for interventions in Casamance. Rivalries between different operators, as well as an acute lack of coordination, has resulted in frequent duplication of interventions. It is not unusual for several NGOs to intervene simultaneously in the same place with similar goals and methods. These regular overlaps have an effect, not only on the quality of interventions, but also on the credibility of actions in the eyes of the population.

Finally, peace committees are presented as an exercise in sophistication of strategies designed to build a lasting peace (Odendaal, 2008). In Casamance, their implementation suggests a particular reading of conflicts. By situating the response to problems at the community level, operators encourage a local reading of the conflicts. And yet, a large proportion of village disputes, and especially land ownership issues, as well as the pro-independence conflict, have political origins which the committees are not in a position to address. Are they not therefore condemned to treat symptoms rather than causes?

Bottom-up participation, advocated from the top

The ideology of peacebuilding generally divides interventions into three levels. At the top of the ladder are the political representatives of the conflicting parties. An intermediary level seeks to mobilise influential people and institutions. And in third place comes the “community level”, or “grassroots”, referring to the entire population (Gawerc, 2006: 442-443). The implementation of village peace committees fits into this last level, and is justified by the need to involve the population in the process, given that the other levels of intervention tend to exclude them.

“The involvement of populations”, their “compliance”, and the “appropriation” of the peace process, are so many inescapable terms in the current terminology of peacebuilding. It is a question of going beyond the top-down model, which prevailed up until the 1980s, in favour of a bottom-up model. This model postulates that peace relies on individuals and communities. The discourse on peacebuilding is therefore essentially founded on the involvement of populations in the peace building process. Populations must not simply want peace. They must get involved and take on their share of responsibility (Agwanda and Harris, 2009: 43).

The creation of committees for the management of conflicts is precisely intended to allow for peacebuilding from the bottom up. Hence, for the last fifteen years, the rural areas of Casamance have witnessed a proliferation of these social structures. Implemented by humanitarian actors, their goal is to endow communities with the capacities to “better manage” the micro-conflicts which complicate cohabitation. Often called “peace committees” or “committees for peace management”, they can also be referred to as peace “cores”, “bureaus”, “observatories” or “commissions”. Some committees even take their names from local languages⁹. Regardless of the names and the operators who implement them, the principle is essentially the same. Several people from the village, who by their status are considered to be influential, are chosen to take part in the initiative. The committee is often established at the village level, although other zonal or regional committees can also be created. In the latter case, they can include a representative from each village in order to manage conflicts which committees were unable to solve at the village level, or which involve the inhabitants of two or more villages. In order to carry out their mission, the members of the committees are made aware of various issues such as conflict management and mediation, non-violent communication, female leadership, good governance, the environment, the exploitation of natural resources, etc. Committee meetings often take place under a tree in the village square. They can also be conducted in the town, where participants are invited and encouraged to travel on a *per diem* basis.

According to the head of a local NGO, it is a question of “leading populations to identify the sources of conflicts for themselves”, and finding peaceful resolutions. In this way, the populations are “the central players” in the process (CRSFPC/Usforal, Ziguinchor, 13/12/2016). Incidentally, these initiatives, intended to “facilitate community dialogue”, are often referred to in the sector as “people-to-people activities”. This term clearly shows the ambition of highlighting the “popular” nature of the committees. Local organisations are keen to present peace committees as a strategy arising from population demand.

⁹ The committee established by CRSFPC/Usforal in the commune of Nyassia, for example, is called *Ubanum*, which means “the end of conflict” in the Diola-Bayot language.

“The populations asked us to do this. We carried out a process of research-action, and that is what came out. We needed to help them to resolve the small conflicts which appear at the community level” (Catholic Relief Services, Ziguinchor, 23/01/2017).

The presentation of committees as the result of popular will fits into the usual discourse of local organisations which emphasises the participative character of their projects. The operators speak of “accompanying”, “reinforcing”, “supporting”, and “stimulating” populations, but they are increasingly reticent about displaying themselves as the promoters of the actions undertaken. This narrative, which attributes the monopoly of decision-making to the recipients, is testimony to the central place acquired by the popular will in the dominant developmental ideology. For thirty years, population participation in projects has been a major reference in the rhetoric and strategies adopted by all development institutions (Chauveau, 1994; Bonnal, 1995; Lavigne Delville, 2011). The “top-down” development model of the 1960s-1980s has been replaced by strategies which aim to promote endogenous dynamics and populations’ own management of their own problems¹⁰.

In Casamance, these so-called “participative” approaches have been a key stake. Since the beginning of the 2000s and the significant decrease in combat, they have accompanied the deployment of humanitarian actors. Following the failure of the military solution and attempts to reach peace agreements, local and international organisations have actively defended population involvement. It is up to the people, and no longer just the warring parties (the State of the MFDC) to work towards peace (Foucher, 2003: 116). Population participation, and local operators’ capacity to promote it, make up a narrative on which the project-carriers’ legitimacy depends:

“We say to the MFDC and to the State that we are not here for them, but so that the population can look at the situation and dare to tell us what they want” (CRSFPC/Usoforal, Ziguinchor, 13/12/2016).

“We are not the ones who decide. It’s the populations. We ask them what they want to do to improve their situation”. (CRSFPC/Usoforal, Ziguinchor, 24/01/2017).

“We are only the oil that greases the wheels” (Catholic Relief Services, Ziguinchor, 23/01/2017).

“The projects must necessarily start with the populations, they cannot be parachuted in from the outside” (AJAC APRAN, Ziguinchor, 15/11/2016).

The project-carriers operate a rhetorical inversion which casts the populations in the role of the true promoters, and developmental organisations as mere facilitators. In Casamance, American development aid (USAID) has been one of the main importers of so-called participative strategies designed to promote peace. In order to implement them, USAID has essentially relied on American NGOs¹¹, whose local representatives are generally from Casamance. These organisations work together with local partners, who are expected to contribute their knowledge of the area. Far from the “bottom-up” method so advocated, the role of different actors is organised according to an explicit hierarchy. Whilst international partners such as USAID fund and prescribe the intervention models, international NGOs “plan”, local NGOs “apply”, and populations “approve” (Marut, 2010: 279). The necessity of building the intervention from the bottom up is systematically advocated from the top.

¹⁰ For a critical review of so-called participative approaches, see Chauveau (1994), Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1997), Chauveau and Lavigne Delville (1998), Lavigne Delville (2007, 2011).

¹¹ Organisations such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Education, Christian Church Foundation, Africare, Oxfam-America, Karuna Centre for Peacebuilding, to name but a few.

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In order to promote the dissemination of the conceptual framework and the strategic tools developed by the technical and financial partners, local organisations are subjected to training sessions:

“For capacity reinforcement, we were accompanied by PADCO¹², an American for profit service company based in Washington, hired by USAID, and specialised in conflict resolution” (Afrique Enjeux, Ziguinchor, 12/01/2017).

Phrases such as “capacity-building” or “skills transfers” reveal the intervention logics which are dependent on knowledge brought in from elsewhere. The situation of financial dependency often doubles up as intellectual subjugation. A number of local organisations are therefore led to “subcontract” for development programmes with guide lines dictated by the sponsors (Courtin, 2011: 120). It is relevant to question the capacity of local NGOs to encourage populations to decide on the actions to be carried out, when their own autonomy is itself compromised. This situation of “vassalage” with regard to the sponsors (Ba Gning et al. 2017) results in genetically modifiable local organisations. This is clearly illustrated by the existence of agricultural organisations, who turned towards peacekeeping interventions as a result of funding from USAID¹³.

In principle, the peace committees are intended to promote endogenous mechanisms of conflict resolution, to facilitate the creation of a context which would be propitious to peace. Created at the village, communal or departmental levels, they are supposed to bring together representatives of village society. They are generally presented by operators as being the emanation of the will of the population. In practice, the peace committees integrate the usual repertoire of peacebuilding tools. They are more the fruit of the sponsor’s catechism than of the popular will. For the past twenty years, this has been a frequently-used intervention strategy in a number of post-conflict contexts¹⁴. In Casamance, many operators have recourse to it, independently of their geographical zone, or the religious or ethnic affiliation of the populations. The committees are not the result of a spontaneous and endogenous mobilisation of the population (Marut, 2010: 303). They are more the product of direct action by NGOs. They are organised and mandated by these NGOs. The aims of participation, the methods and functioning are prescribed from the outside. Whilst meetings with the populations allow for negotiations with regard to contextual aspects, the guide lines of the intervention are generally decided in advance. These meetings are mainly designed to promote the mobilisation and compliance of the populations with regard to the planned actions. A number of “participative” sessions are therefore developed in order to skillfully direct local actors towards the articulation of problems and solutions which have been agreed beforehand by the operators:

“If we are at level A and we want to get to level C, how do we do it? That’s the question which we put to the communities. [...] the answer we are looking for is always a management committee, because the whole community cannot take care of it” (Catholic Relief Services, Ziguinchor, 23/01/2017)

¹² PADCO is a for-profit organisation, specialised in conflict mediation (acquired in 2004 by AECOM). It is a service company well-known to NGOs and associations in Casamance. With American funding, it has been used on a number of occasions to organise meetings and training sessions intended to promote participation in the peace process.

¹³ This is the case for certain local networks of the AJAC (Association for Young Farmers of Casamance)

¹⁴ This is the case a number of African countries, as we have already mentioned, but also in Colombia, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, etc (Odendaal 2008).

“The group leader must bring the people around to the problem [over the course of the participative dynamics intended to identify a project]. The populations do not know where they will end up, but the group leader, for his part, does know. We influence, direct, and rectify. It is necessary to know how to do it so that they will accept it. There is always resistance when we impose things. To succeed, you need to know, you need a period of observation. You have to let things happen” (Group leader, AJAC APRAN, 4/01/2017).

If the questions put to the populations already contain their own answers, these “participative” dynamics are essentially intended to create the illusion for the villagers of having been the instigators of the solutions which are then implemented. In this way, the intervention is not so much an endogenous process as a recommended exogenous therapy.

“Endogenous” structures, dependent on external forces

The exteriority of the new rules decreed by the project-carriers, as well as the power reconfigurations that they imply (namely through the inclusion of women and young people in mediation bodies) call into question these structures’ capacity to become integrated into the fabric of society. Aside from a few rare exceptions, the intervention of NGOs for the establishment of peace committees does not give rise to a lasting recomposition of local mechanisms of conflict resolution. When the committees are mobilised to address a dispute, it is almost always whilst a project is running, thereby responding to financial stimulation from the sponsors, who assume the costs incurred by meetings and travel expenses. The committees do not generally manage to become integrated into the usual functioning of conflict resolution mechanisms beyond the duration of the project. They appear in its course, last for its duration, and disappear when it is completed. They can sometimes be resuscitated and reformulated later on by a different project, usually with the same outcome. The issue of sustainability concerning peace committees is common knowledge for the operators:

“It’s true that there is an issue to do with the sustainability of the committees. We took over the committees which AFEX had set up. They were dormant. We brought them back to life with a different strategy. [...] Now we’re faced with the problem of sustainability again. Our sponsor suddenly decided to back out this year, and we have to think how these structures can maintain themselves” (Project manager, CRSFPC/Usforal, Ziguinchor, 24/01/2017)

Even for the duration of the project, committees do not seem to invest much of their own initiative in conflict resolution. It is often the local NGO group leaders who encourage the committee to take up a conflict which they have become aware of:

“Since I am from the area, I know when there are conflicts. So I pull the strings a bit, in the shadows. I call up the president of the committee so that they take on the matter. We need to guide them, push them a bit, otherwise they won’t act”. (Group leader, Brin, 27/07/2017).

The sustainability issue of the established committees, along with the lack of initiative displayed by many of them, illustrates their often pathological dependence on NGOs. Their legitimacy, which is often based on the means provided by the project, crumbles when the project comes to an end, and sometimes even before:

“The committees need money for travel expenses and meetings. Without that, there’s no motivation. People give up. As soon as the project stops, the committees disappear.” (Committee president in the Diouloulou area, 18/07/2017)

“At the beginning, there were 20 to 25 people [who came to training sessions in the village on the subject of conflict management]. Then, people gradually lost interest [...], because there were no *per diem*, only meals. But there is no real difference between the meal which you leave at home and the one you come to eat at the training session. Except that to eat the one at home, you don't have to abandon all your other business.” (Inhabitant of Dar Salam, 19/01/2017).

These committee activities are not seen by populations as mechanisms which local actors are responsible for maintaining over the long term. They are outward-looking contact zones, orientated towards the potential material or symbolic benefits that can be derived from the project, rather than towards the management of “internal” affairs¹⁵. Their community vocation is often negligible. Competing with existing consultation frameworks (the chiefdom, public figures, age groups, religious leaders, etc), they are not often called upon by populations for the management of village disputes. Indeed, apart from the people involved, many are unaware of their existence. By a group leader's own admission, a woman who had been designated by the head of village to become a member of a committee because she met the project requirements was not even informed of the fact, and was unaware of any of the NGO's work in matters of conflict management (Group leader, Brin, 27/07/2017). Her nomination was a concession to administrative logics, rather than an effort to pursue the stated aims of the intervention.

Tradition and modernity

The mobilisation of “traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms” currently integrates the usual repertoire of peacebuilding strategies. In the context of the developmental trend which advocates the promotion of local capacities, “tradition” has often been used as the token of a population-driven intervention¹⁶. In order to promote the peace process in Casamance, the so-called “culturally integrated” approaches (according to the terminology used by a representative of a Casamance organisation) have benefited from the technical and financial support of a number of sponsors. Countless events associated with tradition (prayer ceremonies, sacrifices, libations to fetishes, cultural days, etc) have been organised at the initiative of development organisations¹⁷. These intervention mechanisms have attracted the attention of a number of observers in Casamance. They all agree on the instrumentalisation of tradition. Its mention is particularly competitive on the development market, and is part of the fundraising strategies of local and international NGOs. At the same time, the efficiency of these strategies is systematically called into question inasmuch as they do not accompany endogenous dynamics so much as involving and mobilising local actors from the outside.

¹⁵ The most explicit, and also most worrying witness account is undoubtedly that of a committee member who was convinced that the conflicts addressed in the framework of the project were a “simulation” “so that the committee might distinguish itself in the eyes of the sponsor” (Dar Salam, 17/01/2017).

¹⁶ The developmental sector generally understands tradition in essentialist terms. From the perspective of the social sciences, and especially since the work of Terence Ranger (1983), it is difficult to refer to tradition as a stable corpus of meanings and practices. Tradition and modernity are not defined so much by their specific contents, but rather by their antagonistic and dynamic relationship with each other, and by the local issues which refer to this relationship (Jones Sánchez 2016 :300).

¹⁷ Hence, since the beginning of the 2000s, a number of representatives of tradition (ritual associations of animist women, animistic religious authorities such as the King of Oussouye, but also Catholic and Muslim authorities) have been actively sought out by aid actors for the promotion of peace.

The latter generally play along, in light of the political, economic or material benefits at stake, but the scope and legitimacy of these actions remain limited because of this (Awenengo, 2006 ; Foucher ,2007 ; Marut, 2009, 2010: 277 ; Diédhiou, 2013, 2015).

Although the mobilisation of tradition in Casamance by aid actors has received special attention from the social sciences, little has been written about the proliferation of peace committees in the region. This is perhaps precisely because the committees are not expressly presented as relating to tradition¹⁸. Humanitarian actors are keen to present them as popular mechanisms inspired by endogenous dynamics of conflict resolution. Their implementation is nevertheless based on the idea that it is necessary to overcome, if not correct, tradition:

“You could say that we have come to modernise tradition. Women and young people are often overlooked in traditional conflict management mechanisms. And yet conflicts often involve these groups, which is why they need to be involved. Also, traditionally, there is no middle path: “You are right. You are wrong”. With our mediation mechanisms, we’re trying to facilitate negotiations between each party, as opposed to hardlining” (Project manager, CRSFPC/Usoforal, Ziguinchor, 24/01/2017).

Whilst the committees may sometimes use references to tradition¹⁹ in order to emphasise their local roots, the promoters place them squarely in the category of modernity. In the face of “traditional” mechanisms, which are seen as deficient, unjust and totalitarian, the peace committees are often referred to by NGO staff and committee members as “the modern system”. They mean to be “democratic”, “inclusive”, and “open to dialogue”. Far from being exalted, tradition is seen here as an obstacle. The discourse on the promotion of local capacities and population participation is pronounced simultaneously with the idea that the techniques and practices at their disposal are archaic, and that only external technicians have the knowledge required to promote development (Lavigne Delville, 2007). The training and awareness-raising activities led by NGOs are precisely intended to confer the appropriate techniques on the populations:

“We train the people who make up the committees so that they can clarify the problems; we show them how to take distance and avoid bias. We teach them the value of listening.” (Afrique Enjeux, Ziguinchor, 12/01/2017)

Whilst traditional mechanisms are seen as being exposed to bias, the “modern system” is supposed to be capable of taking the necessary distance. The proposed model relies on the building-up of an external point of view, the role of which is to identify the problems, facilitate discussion, enable each party to express their point of view, and promote a form of negotiation which leads to a solution that suits both parties. “We do not judge, we do not negotiate, we mediate”, recalled a group leader (Brin, 27/07/2017). The techniques used must allow for the separation of people from conflicts (Davidheiser, 2006: 882). This depersonalisation of problems is seen as the road to impartiality. The aim is to rationalise conflict mediation, or, as Sandrine Lefranc (2006) puts it, to “pacify scientifically”.

It is common to oppose this method of conflict mediation, based on an external figure aspiring to objectivity, to traditional African systems. According to Davidheiser (2006), in the customary systems, neutrality is not necessarily sought after. The status of the mediator, as

¹⁸There is a tendency amongst certain observers in Casamance (Diédhiou, 2015: 150) to reduce peacebuilding interventions to recourses to tradition, thereby neglecting other strategies which, like the committees, make reference to modernity.

¹⁹The African community myth of the palaver tree is sometimes mentioned by certain operators, who claim that the committees are an extension of it.

well as his/her link to the parties (kinship, relationships to jokes, age groups and initiations, etc) are the tools of mediation. During the process, the mediator recalls the relationships he/she has with each party, thereby attempting to reinforce influence over them. Whilst modern mechanisms seek the satisfaction of each party's individual interests, the goal here is rather one of maintaining social cohesion (Davidheiser, 2006: 843-854). This binary culturalist vision, which puts back to back endogenous and imported systems (community/individual) neglects the real use that is made of both of them. Far from being opposites, they are used in a strategic way by villagers in the context of the power struggles which play out at the local level.

The system promoted by NGOs sustains the hypothesis of equal treatment of conflicting parties, independently of the interests linking the mediator to the village community. "We cannot be neutral, because we come from the same community," acknowledged the president of a committee in Diouloulou, adding "but we must strive for impartiality" (Diouloulou, 18/07/2017). The governance mechanisms promoted by NGOs at the village level call to mind the contradictions already raised by Chauveau (1994): they are meant to be community-based and technocratic at the same time; they simultaneously aspire to proximity and to the bureaucratic lack of differentiation. As we will see later, the obvious tensions between these two dimensions go some way towards explaining the mechanisms of reappropriation and clientelism which these structures often fall prey to. In this way, they are not exempt from the very problems which they are set up to address.

Multiple ways of managing conflicts

Conflicts arise when differences of interests between groups or individuals come into confrontation. These are common occurrences of social life which village societies have various frameworks for dealing with, according to the nature and severity of the altercation. Kinship offers several possibilities for management, which, depending on the kind of conflict, can involve the nuclear family, or further members of the lineage. Matrimonial, economic and land disputes are usually treated at this level (Le Roy, 1990). Age groups can also be called upon: the fact of having been initiated together creates a strong bond which can allow a group to put pressure on one of its members (Tomás, 2014: 161-162). The elders, the chiefdom (Hassane, 2010), or the religious leaders (Saint-Lary, 2012) also take part in the mediation of village disputes. Ritual practices (such as initiation, circumcision, prayer meetings) are events which can facilitate dialogue between two parties²⁰. Some matters are also treated by religious associations (be they Muslim, Christian or animist). There are a multitude of social structures in place to manage public confrontations when they arise. According to the nature of the issue to be addressed, consultation frameworks bring different methods of inclusion and exclusion into play. Hence age, gender, lineage, religious affiliation, the fact of having been initiated or not, married or celibate, father or mother of a family,

²⁰ For this purpose, Diédhiou describes how the preparation and observance of ceremonies such as *ésang* (pre-circumcision), and *bukut* (circumcision) in the village of Youtou just recently enabled the appeasement of tensions which had built up due to different positions taken up by villagers during the conflict in Casamance. The organisation of these events required the collaboration of the opposing parties in the village (MFDC sympathisers and detractors). Pacts were also carried out at the "fetish" level, committing villagers not to go back over the past. Diédhiou contrasts these kinds of "endogenous" methods to those which make use of customary authorities for the management of conflicts by NGOs (Diédhiou, 2015: 153-155).

“autochthonous” (belonging to one of the village’s founding lineages), or not, are all criteria which condition participation in mediation on a given question.

Beyond the customary frameworks, state services such as the prefecture, sub-prefecture and the police force can also be involved. The authorities derived from decentralisation, including municipal councils and community consultation frameworks²¹, are sometimes called upon. Land disputes often involve rural councils. According to an elected representative in Enampore, these councils regularly turn into tribunals (Enampore, 26/07/2017). The variety of institutional systems is all the more diverse given that they are not restricted to positive law. The norms which are applied are not always those which are written, but also those based on clientelistic relationships (Chauveau and Lavigne Delville, 2002: 224). Some of the processes regarding the allocation and decommissioning of land in Casamance are a good example of this. They are motivated by the potential benefits accruing from the exercise of power, rather than by the strict application of the law (Badji, 2015: 111-112).

Given the State’s withdrawal from certain areas, a number of witness accounts from villagers (Diouloulou, 18/07/2017) also highlight the involvement of MFDC forces in the mediation of certain disputes. At the beginning of the 2000s, for example, in a village close to Diouloulou, recurring land disputes between autochthonous and other groups prompted the former to call for MFDC arbitration in order to win their case. Other local bodies, including associations of young people, women, or diaspora groups can also be used as leverage in the management of certain conflicts. Moreover, local actors frequently set up systems to manage certain conflicts. For example, certain people can be mandated to meet MFDC soldiers in order to discuss their return to abandoned villages or to negotiate access to certain rice-growing or arboricultural areas, forbidden to villagers by rebel forces. These meetings are sometimes supported by NGOs on a logistical level. Certain local interlocutors nevertheless said that they preferred to avoid getting involved. The impact of their activities is likely to create suspicion on behalf of the MFDC and to compromise negotiations²².

It is not our intention here to make an exhaustive inventory of existing mechanisms for conflict resolution. Rather, the point is that the establishment of peace committees by humanitarian operators does not take place in virgin territory. It is part of a context of legal pluralism, as is particularly common in the West African context (Le Roy, 1985; Chauveau Le Pape and Olivier de Sardan, 2001; Jacob, 2002; Klute Embaló and Embaló 2002; Chauveau and Lavigne Delville, 2002). There are a multitude of formal and informal structures associated with conflict management, which cannot be reduced to the binary opposition between “tradition” and “modernity” so often advanced by development actors. In the name of local management, the intervention of humanitarian actors has reinforced this normative pluralism. NGOs have actively worked towards creating informal structures intended to address particular sectors of activity (water, agriculture, education, conflicts, etc), whose

²¹ Municipalities in Senegal are governed by an elected mayor, along with several elected councillors who make up the municipal council. Community consultation frameworks are larger structures which group together the municipality’s civil society representatives. According to the texts, they are decision-making bodies which must decide on the direction taken in the development of the municipality.

²² The witness account of a member of a displaced village is especially illustrative in this respect: “The NGO supported us, providing transport to go and see the rebels. We explained to them that we wanted to go back home. They said, “we’ll see what we can do”. The NGO said to the media, “we are on the right track”. That is not the same thing. The rebels threatened to walk out of the negotiations. They didn’t like the pace being set by somebody else. In the end they told us to get the NGOs off our backs. I can understand the NGO: the sponsors need to know that their work is making a difference. The problem is that they embellish too much” (Ziguinchor, 23/07/2017).

management is assigned to village populations. In conflict management, as in other areas of social life, it is worth asking whether attempts to implement new rules from the developmental sector simplify matters or whether, on the contrary, they tend to confuse things by diversifying the number of actors involved.

According to Chauveau and Lavigne Delville, the problem does not stem so much from normative pluralism, but rather from its lack of regulation. The lack of coordination between different management mechanisms “precludes any lasting resolution of conflicts”, inasmuch as the parties can keep appealing to different bodies as long as they are not satisfied (Chauveau and Lavigne Delville, 2002: 233). The choice of a mediation framework is also a major strategic issue. Local actors’ tendency to accept or reject committee intervention clearly illustrates this. Faced with damage caused by cattle on a plantation, a peace committee recommended a “consensual” solution, based on the farmer’s pardon. The latter preferred to bring the matter to the authorities, thereby securing compensation which further escalated tensions between the two parties. In the case of rape of minors, the accused preferred to call upon the mechanisms of village resolution (namely turning to the aforementioned committees), which tend towards “amicable resolutions”. In the reported cases, the mediators agreed to send the assailant away from the village, and to charge his family for the medical expenses resulting from the violation. This solution seems to be favoured in cases where the families of the victim and the assailant have kinship ties. Otherwise, the victim’s family rejects the mediation of the local body and refers the matter to the courts, in order to ensure that criminal charges are brought²³.

The illusion of neutrality, and the instrumentalisation of peace committees

The number of people in the peace committees varies between four and eight, depending on the humanitarian operator and the zone covered (one or several villages). The organisational structure generally includes a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, and sometimes counsellors or sectoral managers. Some NGOs leave the choice of people to the head of the village, thereby giving him the possibility to rely on his network. However, more usually, the NGOs impose certain selection criteria, such as parity, the inclusion of young people or “community leaders”, as the humanitarian jargon calls them, referring to people who are considered as being influential in the area (the village chief, the imam and/or catechist, the president of the women’s promotion groups, the president of the youth association, etc). It should be noted that the imposition of male/female parity, as well as the inclusion of young people in conflict resolution bodies, can reduce their legitimacy, in a context where the mediation of differences is often the preserve of men of a certain age and status. Moreover, the inclusion of women and young people in village social structures created by NGOs does not necessarily entail a broadening of participation. It corresponds rather to a broadening of the domination exerted by the most powerful lineages, who take advantage of the representation of women and young people to multiply their modes of public representation (Olivier de Sardan, 2009: 28).

²³ These two scenarios were reported to us by members of the peace committees set up in villages belonging to the Enampore and Boutoupa Camaracounda municipalities, over the course of interviews carried out in July 2017.

Other organisations express a preference for systems which they define as “democratic”, but which are not really so. The people present during the “election” are often the NGOs’ customary interlocutors, representing only a minority section of the village population. Moreover, the vote is made by a show of hands, within sight of everybody. In village contexts where young people cannot openly defy their elders, or women their husbands, and in which public confrontation is socially unacceptable, the process has more in common with consensus than democracy. “We do not vote, we make do”, recalled Souley and Hahonou (2004 : 43) on the subject of management committees set up in Niger. Generally, there is only one candidate for each position, and no one openly challenges this person.

These different systems can be combined. The NGO can, for example, impose the choice of certain people (such as the imam or the village chief), and leave the remaining positions open to a “democratic” vote by the population, whilst respecting parity criteria. In order to avoid the undivided reign of one person or one group of persons within the committees, certain NGOs envisage the periodical rotation of positions. In practice, the appointments are rarely subject to a second scrutiny. The opposite is often true: each time an operator intervenes in an area, it is the same people who systematically stand for different village posts associated with the implementation of the project. Hence, the president of the peace committee established by NGO (A) may, a few years later, also be designated president of the system established by NGO (B). These “coincidences” can also happen concomitantly when several organisations carry out projects in the same place at the same time. In Kaguit village, for example, in the municipality of Nyassia, the same person has presided over all of the committees for conflict management put in place by NGOs over the past few years. He first presided over the organisation set up by AFEX and Kabonketoor in 2009. When the project ended in 2010, the committee ceased to operate. From 2012, he was again president of the committee set up by the Casamance organisation CRSFPC/Usoforal. When another project, led by the American NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS), also decided to set up a committee in 2013, it was again he who was designated president. The lack of coordination and dialogue between the organisations not only allows for the overlapping of two similar interventions in the same place, but also the designation of the same person as the local interlocutor. This person is very careful not to let the NGOs know this, in order not to lose out on the advantages associated with his position as a local interlocutor for two organisations in the village.

The committee presidents frequently correspond to the figures of development courtiers (Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk, 1993; Blundo, 1995; Foucher, 2009: 154-155). Often characterised by a level of education superior to the village average and a history of having spent long periods away from their rural home environment, they have a mastery of both the rural language and the language of development actors. As customary interlocutors for NGOs on the local level, they set themselves up as the main intermediaries between the population and the development actors. Beyond the altruistic motivations cited, their commitment “for the community” also corresponds to personal ambitions. They are social, economic and political entrepreneurs. Their privileged position serves to reinforce or improve their standing in the local political arena, and to benefit from, and sometimes divert, the resources of development assistance. It also gives them the opportunity to develop a broad network of clientelism.

In the municipality of Boutoupa Camaracounda, the Casamance organisation Afrique Enjeux (AFEX) has been setting up peace committees since 2004, with American funding. These organisations were reactivated in 2009 by the same organisation, in collaboration with another regional NGO (Kabonketoor), this time sponsored by the European Union. In 2013,

CRSFPC/Usoforal, another Casamance organisation, having signed a convention with AFEX, attempted to revitalise them²⁴. The committees therefore alternated between periods of activity and inactivity, according to each operators' intervention logics²⁵. During this last period, the members of the committees, from different villages in the municipality, took on the management of tensions between three villages (Samick, Laty and Niadiou) which were opposed on the subject of property and land division. In the framework of the project, the committee brought together the public figures of the three villages, who, without reaching a shared solution, agreed to avoid any violent confrontation. When the project came to an end in 2016, the travel expenses and meetings were no longer funded by the sponsor. In contrast to the usual outcome, the committee did not entirely cease its activities. It took action with the subprefect to try and appease the tensions which arose in Mpack as a result of a process of land allocation which was contested by the population. It also sought new sources of funding in order to be able to mobilise the public figures from each of the opposing villages once again. A chance encounter between youths from the three villages deteriorated, thereby rekindling the controversy.

The committee's activism during and after the project is indissociable from its president's commitment. Beyond the will to "work for the good of the municipality", he cultivated obvious political ambitions which he acknowledged unambiguously: "this is also a political investment. I aspire to the town hall of the municipality at the next election. I think that I must take this step for my community" (Ziguinchor, 25/07/2017). The committees' activities give its presidents the possibility to invest in local public affairs, and to capitalise on conflict management for their future campaigns. Ensuring the visibility and permanence of the organisation is also a good way to ensure one's own visibility in the eyes of the population. The use of committees for purposes of political visibility can therefore ensure the continuity of the initiative started by the project. It can facilitate the search for consensual answers, with a view to gaining the positive appreciation of the population. It can also favour implication in certain affairs and disinterest in others, according to their potential for political capitalisation. The political commitment of the committee members nevertheless remains a double-edged sword, since it can compromise their legitimacy and expose them to boycotts from their political opponents.

The expectations relative to the committees can also be of an economic and material nature. The involvement of people in the committees is presented as being voluntary. Activities linked to the project nevertheless give rise to meals, meetings and travel costs, often accompanied by *per diem* in order to motivate the participants. The frequent comments regarding the amount of this remuneration or the quality of the meals demonstrates their importance for those involved.

Moreover, certain projects provide for the establishment of community economic activities so that the committee has enough resources to gather, communicate or travel after the project has been completed. Nearly always, these activities peter out at the end of projects,

²⁴ The establishment of this committee took place as part of the intervention carried out by CRSFPC/Usoforal in several municipalities in the department of Ziguinchor between 2013 and 2016. It was largely funded by the German organisation Weltfriedensdienst (WFD).

²⁵ The number of people in the committee, the geographical zone covered, and the type of conflicts managed (cattle rustling, management of natural resources, land disputes, etc) can vary from one operator to the next. Certain interventions prioritise the creation of zonal committees, grouped around a unifying resource (a forest, a river), the exploitation of which is liable to cause conflicts. This was the case for interventions led by AFEX or CRS. Other organisations, like CRSFPC/Usoforal, establish village-level structures on the one hand, and communal structures on the other, grouping all the villages of the municipality into one structure.

and the available provisions are generally appropriated by the local leaders. In Nyassia, for example, chairs and tarpaulins were provided for a peace committee set up by AFEX. They were then supposed to be rented out for cultural, festive or religious events in the area in order to ensure the proper funding of the committee after the end of the project. The president of the committee responsible for them was also the head of the village, and a person of influence in the area. When the committee stopped functioning, a number of people maintained that he had appropriated the equipment along with the proceeds of its being rented out.

Alongside the establishment of peace committees, a number of humanitarian operators in Casamance develop so-called “connecting” or “integrative” projects. Arguing that there were ethnic tensions within one village, or between two or several villages, the aim was to reunite all of the parties around one revenue-producing operation, encouraging the shared use of public spaces, collaboration and sociability. In one such project, women from the same village, but of different ethnic groups, worked in a common vegetable garden. In another, fish ponds situated between three ethnically distinct villages were mutualised, the management and profits of which were to be shared. For the project-leaders, it is a question of building common interests and objectives, in order to “recreate the social link between communities”. The bad management of these economic activities often leads to disputes and divisions which conflict strongly with the aims of social cohesion initially announced by the humanitarian operators. In Añac, for example, seven female groups from the village, each with different ethnic affiliations, were invited to work together in the first NGO-capacitated vegetable garden. According to its promoters, the “connecting” project was designed to “encourage the creation of links”. Problems arose when sharp suspicions began to develop concerning the management of the equipment provided by the NGOs (wheelbarrows, watering cans, shovels, etc), as well as the allocation of contributions. Accusations of embezzlement created new divisions, and led to the the defection of the women from several groups. The peace committee, which was made up of the same people who had been accused of bad management of the garden, was unable to appease the tensions, which still remain three years after the end of the project.

Committees can also serve clientelist-style redistributive logics concerning aid resources. These mechanisms are particularly present in the management of economic or material resources mobilised by the projects. In the municipality of Boutoupa Camaracounda, for example, chairs and tarpaulins were again provided by AFEW in order to finance the committee’s continuing activities after the end of the project. In this case, the equipment was placed under the responsibility of the president of the rural community. The latter loaned it out on several occasions without economic compensation, for events organised by influential people, namely religious leaders, thereby consolidating his clientelist network. With no follow-up, the equipment gradually disappeared as the ceremonies took place. It must also be noted that the allocation of positions within the committees is also often part of clientelist networks.

Within the development industry, the implementation of village committees is traditionally designed to manage basic infrastructures or to promote a particular social sector (agricultural development, child welfare, the advancement of women, etc). For the last twenty years, this strategy has expanded to include interpersonal relationships in post-conflict areas, through peace committees. The implementation of each of these committees corresponds to a bureaucratic ideal (Chauveau 1994) according to which every problem has a technical solution. It would be enough to train individual and social groupings to master these particular techniques and organise them accordingly for them to be able to deal with their

problems. The project-carrier's attention is entirely focused on the establishment of a set of "rational" rules stating the functioning of implanted social structures. Intervention logics are far less preoccupied with the legitimacy of these structures, or with the instrumentalisation which they often fall prey to. The respect of form over content sometimes gives rise to phantom structures which only exist normatively. Conversely, as the above examples suggest, appropriation mechanisms can also renew the same logics of power or exclusion which they were designed to prevent.

Most of the peacebuilding promoters in Casamance agree that people's choices, as well as "the reinforcement of their capacities" are critical issues for the success of peace committees. These two dimensions must, according to them, enable the new committees to operate in an impartial way. For the different heads of NGOs we interviewed, it would also be desirable for the people chosen as committee members to display a certain number of qualities. They should be called upon to display a capacity to listen, understand, have patience, discretion, tact, tenacity, empathy, and they should also have the trust and respect of the villagers²⁶. The listing of these qualities leads one to believe that "good people" with "good tools" would be capable of extracting themselves from the local issues which form the basis of their social anchoring. And yet, these individuals act in accordance with the place they occupy in the social sphere. They cannot be dissociated from it. In this sense, the erasing of local issues on the basis of a "virtuous" attitude cannot be held as a viable aim for humanitarian actors. The instrumentalisation of the committees is inevitable. It is not necessarily detrimental to the goals set out by the project: it can just as easily foster social cohesion as compromise it. The convergence with or divergence from the appeasement objectives formulated by the project-carriers depends on the way in which the committees integrate local issues. Often left to chance by the project-carriers, this convergence could be better understood with a better grasp of local dynamics.

Complementarity or rivalry with public services?

In sub-Saharan Africa, sponsors actively promote state disengagement (Fanchette, 2001). Partly decreed to be inefficient, alternative mechanisms of governance are given precedence, which attempt to involve populations in the management and delivery of services in all sectors of social life. In the name of good governance, decentralisation, and local development, there has been a proliferation of policies, programmes and projects designed, in principle, to bring decision-making closer to the populations. In Lower Casamance, as in other contexts which have been subjected to intra-state armed confrontations, sponsors supported the extension of these dynamics to the management of conflicts. Hence, certain sections of village society are promoted by the operators as local providers of justice and governance. In principle, they should be able to reach local arrangements, thereby avoiding the need to involve public authorities in lingering hostilities.

The proliferation of decision-making areas has led to a degree of friction between public authorities and the associative bodies established by the projects. That each body's role is not always clearly defined is often a source of cacophony, and arbitrating between the different voices is not always easy. The coexistence of official and informal systems hovers

²⁶ These qualities were collected over the course of our interviews with different NGOs. They are supposed to inform the selection of committee members. They are also put forward during awareness campaigns designed to explain their role to new members.

between practices of ignorance and competition, but can also give rise to complementarity, or negotiation (Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan, 2001: 54-58).

The relationship between peace committees and administrative institutions involved in conflict management is an important issue. To see just how important, one only has to observe which are the most active committees and those who very rarely manage to survive for a time after the end of the projects. They are generally committees which the authorities (the town, sub-prefecture, or police force) call upon to get involved in the management of certain conflicts. This delegation by official bodies, “from the top down”, in the settlement of disputes, is all the more important given that peace committees are often overlooked by the populations when it comes to the management of “bottom-up” village quarrels. The latter tend to mobilise the usual structures, which benefit from the populations’ recognition. In this way, one of the keys to the functioning of the committees is based, not on popular legitimacy, but on the support given by the authorities. These structures require a certain degree of institutional integration, without which they are unable to maintain themselves. And yet, as soon as the sponsors withdraw, it is very rare for public administrations to call upon the committees.

Several conditions might encourage the involvement of the authorities. This involvement comes down to practical issues. Certain local government officials realise the benefits of “community” management. In rural contexts, where customary law regarding land often carries more legitimacy than administrative law, it is not uncommon for sub-prefects to refer land issues to the village level, since the strict application of national legislation runs the risk of escalating tensions. In this regard, it is preferable to look for local compromises. These negotiation practices between different jurisprudential systems remind us that customary law and public systems are not systematically opposed. The recourse to village institutions of conflict management is therefore a common practice which predates the establishment of committees in the villages.

The promotion of inter-village structures covering more than one area by several NGOs nevertheless addresses an important gap in conflict management between two or more villages, thereby offering new possibilities for recourse to the authorities. In Goudomp, faced with a succession crisis in the wake of the death of the imam from the Great Mosque, and the confrontation between the supporters of the two candidates, the prefect sought the cooperation of the committee set up by CRSFPC/Usforal in the area. The latter actively took part in the mediation between the two parties in order to reach an agreement in the selection procedure of a new imam²⁷. The sub-prefect also asked the committee of the Boutoupa Camaracounda municipality to organise a meeting to settle various issues regarding land delimitation between different villages. These zonal structures are nevertheless those which disappear the quickest once the project is completed, due to the lack of resources available for members’ travel expenses.

This logic of recourse is not systematic, since it is precisely through decision-making and the monitoring of the social order that the power of the authorities best manifests itself. If the committees set up by the projects manage to achieve a certain degree of autonomous functioning, their actions are more likely to be seen in a rival, rather than in a complementary, manner. Elected (municipal) or administrative (sub-prefecture) bodies do not generally tolerate other local authorities escaping their control. Especially since they are sometimes vested with economic resources by the sponsors, allowing them to carry out actions which are beyond the reach of the public authorities (inter-village meetings, awareness-raising

²⁷ <http://goudomp.com/les-imams-et-les-populations-ont-choisi-limam-ratib-de-la-grande-mosquee/>

sessions on topics relative to the emergence of conflicts, such as straying livestock or the protection of the environment, etc). In the area of East Bayot, for example, the American NGO CRS, together with two local organisations²⁸, set up a committee for the management of conflicts linked to the exploitation of natural resources. The project team came up with a convention for use by the community authorities, intended to formally define the role of the aforementioned committee in the municipality. The document was rejected by the relevant authorities²⁹. In an interview with the mayor, the latter stated that he preferred the municipality to come up with its own committees for the management of natural resources, rather than relying on structures established by the American NGO (Ziguinchor, 3/01/2017). The sub-prefect, for his part, was particularly reluctant to acknowledge structures “with no obligations in terms of accountability with regard to the administrative authorities”:

“Everything is set down in the texts. The problem is the implementation. NGOs should lend their support in this way, instead of reinventing the wheel.” (Nyassia, 15/01/2017).

The authorised representative also regretted not having been consulted during the drafting of the formats, which followed a model that is generally agreed upon in advance, with the sponsors, rather than with the village populations and authorities.

The importance of the authorities' involvement in the establishment of structures linked to community governance is not lost on most humanitarian actors. The latter resort to various strategies in order to consolidate a difficult collaboration. The authorities are called upon to preside over events organised by NGOs (project launches or closings, infrastructure inaugurations, etc). *Per diem* and travel expenses are also often provided. Hence, the sub-prefect of Nyassia claimed to have turned down an “expenses” offer of 25 000 CFA francs for travel costs, conscious of the fact that the money was a pressure tactic. According to his interpretation, he was expected to exercise his power of influence in order for the municipality to adopt the convention submitted by CRS, the American organisation. The latter delegated the management of natural resources of part of the municipality to a conflict management committee created by the NGO (Nyassia, 15/01/2017). These attempts to “win over” officials are all the more problematic since they aim to secure the authorities' involvement for the duration of the project, but hasten their loss of interest as soon as it is completed, thereby jeopardising the sustainability of what has been achieved.

The lack of harmonisation also complicates the peace committees' integration with local authorities. Each operator has their own system, the names, objectives and functioning of which differ substantially. Given the wealth of funds provided by sponsors for peacebuilding, one regularly comes across two if not three committees in the same village, all dedicated to conflict mediation, and set up by different NGOs. In the face of these duplicates, which structures should be taken into account by the populations on the one hand, and by the official authorities on the other? The institutionalisation of these structures could extend their longevity, which is too often reduced to the running time of the projects, especially since the informal collaboration of one sub-prefect does not guarantee his successor's following suit. And yet, the formalisation of the committees logically depends on a certain degree of standardisation. This would require coordination mechanisms between humanitarian actors which are, as yet, nowhere on the agenda.

²⁸ Caritas Sénégal and the Plateforme des femmes pour la paix en Casamance (PFPC).

²⁹ <http://burabenews.net/article.php?lien=2&id=684&categorie=ENVIRONNEMENT>

Peace actions: from commercialisation to massification

The importance of local actors in peacebuilding theories gave rise to the eruption of development organisations into the peace sector. The imperative of population participation in peacebuilding led to the involvement of NGOs. They became the main gateway for external funding for peacebuilding work. This “NGO-isation” of the sector was based on the capacities attributed to or claimed by the NGOs with regard to mobilising populations. The preference for these actors was mainly due to their ability to answer the bureaucratic demands of the sponsors in terms of justification, which direct population involvement cannot guarantee (Paffenholz and Spur, 2006: 25).

This opening up of peacebuilding to development actors gave rise to the commercialisation of peace. Organisations “compete” (“compétir”)³⁰ to demonstrate to sponsors their abilities to “make peace”, “mitigate conflicts”, and “promote dialogue”. The competition grew especially fierce over the years as the sources of funding dried up. In Casamance, in the face of a pro-independence conflict which has lasted over 30 years, the relative calm which has prevailed since the 2000s has allowed for the consolidation of a particularly juicy humanitarian market. Constructed around peacebuilding, it has mobilised staggering sums over the past fifteen years, which are disputed between local organisations and external project-carriers alike. Peace is counted in projects, committees, NGOs, platforms, agencies... Most importantly, it is counted in millions of CFA francs.

Countless projects have been developed on the back of peacebuilding. The term, made fashionable by the UN in the 1990s³¹, refers to activities aiming to build the foundations for a lasting peace, as well as preventing the return of violence in regions emerging from conflict. Some theorists defend a restrictive approach, limited to the establishment of specific measures for non-violent conflict resolution, whilst others refer to a much broader range of activities, including those relating to economic and social development and good governance (Garon, 2005: 23-233 in Rocha Menocal and Kilpatrick, 2009: 69-70). The latter interpretation has prevailed in Casamance. In a context where “peacebuilding” has enabled the mobilisation of exorbitant sums by sponsors, this broader approach is a key issue. It allows association between all sectors of activity for peace consolidation, and everyone can aspire to the funds allocated to it.

Some actors claim, not without irony, that peace is a fetish, and that those who invoke it hope that it will bring abundance and prosperity. This perception expresses the absence of legitimacy which NGOs are currently suffering from, and especially the local organisations, in the context of Casamance. Accused of placing their economic interests above those of the populations, they are often taken to task, namely by pro-independence forces who accuse them of instrumentalising peace. This image explains their incapacity to play a decisive role in the implementation of a peace agreement.

One of the main problems linked to the merchandisation of peace brought about by peacebuilding is the massification of this method of intervention. The difficulties do not arise solely from a lack of vertical coordination (with population aspirations and public administrations, as we saw above, or at the political level, as we will see below). They are also the result of a lack of coordination on the horizontal plane, and especially at the grassroots level. In the department of Ziguinchor, several NGOs squabble over the

³⁰ “Compétir” is a verb frequently used in Sénégal to refer to rivalry. It is often used to describe the competition between NGOs for sponsors’ funding.

³¹ The concept of peacebuilding was first used by the former UN Secretary General M. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his 1992 Agenda for Peace.

promotion of conflict mediation. They share the same targets (certain villages), the same objectives (conflict mediation), and similar “participative” strategies (the implementation of peace committees). Certain zones and villages therefore end up with two or sometimes three different committees, set up by different NGOs. In Nyassia, for example, CRSFPC/Usoforal and the consortium led by the American NGO CRS both set up committees for conflict management during the same period. They carried out parallel interventions for three years (2013-2016), without either organisation communicating with the other on the subject. I made the same observations in the area of Nyaguis, where Tostan and CRSFPC/Usoforal both had projects in the same villages, whereas at the municipal level, Ajac Lukaal was working to set up a committee for conflict management, made up this time exclusively of women. Further south, AFEX and Ajac Lukaal were operating in the same area in a situation of mutual ignorance. An ANRAC manager³² recalled the organisation’s attempts to promote communication between the two entities:

“They were working in the same area with very similar strategies for conflict management. We were accompanying the two organisations on GTZ financing. We tried to get them to talk to each other and collaborate. We met in this very office, but it was no use. You know, NGOs work with a spirit of competition. Duplicate projects are very common” (ANRAC, Ziguinchor, 3/07/2017).

Some particularly spectacular local conflicts attract different operators who become rivals in the field, wanting to play a determining role in conflict resolution. This was for example the case of the clashes between high school students and military personnel in a village in the department of Bignona in 2014, or the altercation between autochthonous and non-native groups surrounding a fishery in the municipality of Nyassia. Designating oneself as a mediator can be an end in itself, which can be capitalised on in the development marketplace, independently of the quid-pro-quo, misunderstandings and conflicts which might arise from an overcrowding of different actors.

Thanks to a concerted intervention strategy with their external partners, local NGOs often operate in total ignorance of the activities carried out by their counterparts. Everything takes place as though the activities of one party had no effect on the results of others. They feign to operate on distinct social realities, when actually they are intervening in the same area. The division of reality carried out by the “project-based approach” bypasses the fact that village life is not sectioned up according to external interventions³³. This willful blindness to the activities of others inevitably has repercussions for the scope of the actions. In Kaguit, for example, CRSFPC/Usoforal and CRS both set up conflict management committees over the same period and in isolation from one another. Some of the people designated as members of one were also present in the other. Problems arose when the activities of the two projects were scheduled at the same time. In Añac, an organisation pursues a project to promote social cohesion by means of the establishment of a vegetable garden bringing together seven female groups, each consisting of women of the same ethnic affiliation. In parallel, another organisation supported one single group, rebuilding their former vegetable garden, encouraging the abandonment of the unit destined for the use of all of the women in the

³² The National Agency for Economic and Social Recovery in Casamance (ANRAC) is a Senegalese State entity established in 2004 to promote development in Casamance. Numerous sponsors, including the World Bank and GTZ, have channelled funds through ANRAC for the rebuilding of Casamance.

³³ Chauveau and Lavigne-Delville remind us that “project division” is a bureaucratic and financial reality, but remains an abstraction from a social point of view (Chauveau and Lavigne-Delville, 1998: 199).

village. The first organisation's work to promote social cohesion was directly affected by the intervention of the second organisation.

When asked about the overlapping of their actions with those of other operators, several local aid actors were quick to argue that they were "the first on the field", or the first to use a given intervention strategy. Because of this, they insisted, it was up to the rival organisation to come and find them, and not the other way around. These explanations, intended to account for the refusal to communicate, suggest the scope of the competition. Rivalries linked to fundraising, as well as to the quest for legitimacy in a particular area and sector in the eyes of the sponsors, interfere with the quest for efficiency. The pre-eminence of these rivalries over coordination between NGOs, found in every sector of intervention, is all the more ludicrous in matters of conflict resolution: the search for consultation and dialogue which is called for at the village level is generally lacking in the relationships which the project-carriers have with each other. In September 2016, several operators were even unable to agree on joint celebrations for International Peace Day. Subsidised by the same sponsor, each one celebrated the event in different places in Ziguinchor, competing for the same guests...

Beyond the strictly operational repercussions which the above examples illustrate, competition between NGOs also precludes any possibility of capitalising their experiences for the benefit of other organisations, and leads to the same mistakes being repeated by different operators. Furthermore, the lack of dialogue between NGOs has a less visible, but probably more important impact in terms of the meaning acquired by the operator's actions in the eyes of the populations. Duplicates alert villagers to the abundance of means and objectives of those administering aid in the field. The idea that the proliferation of interventions reinforces their impact, regardless of their coordination, is incorrect. The repeats derived from overlapping projects do not reinforce the message: they tend, on the contrary, to destroy it. The existence of duplicates reminds the populations that beyond the stated objectives, the intervention is essentially designed to serve the interests of the project-carriers. It feeds an instrumental and ostentatious vision of NGOs' activities and messages, designed to justify the project to the sponsors and to fundraise, and less concerned with the efficiency and follow-up of the intervention. These representations are fertile ground for the development of a narrative which clears villagers of the instrumentalisation of external interventions. In this regard, they generally do not alert the operators of the overlaps which they observe, since they are less interested in the relevance of the message and the activities than they are in the possibility of benefiting from the NGOs' presence:

"These bosses with their cars, they bring their leftovers here. The populations say to themselves, "Let's take the leftovers, and go about our business". They say "The NGOs come here to get rich. Let's have the scraps" (Member of a committee, Darsalam, 19/01/2017)

A reading unencumbered by politics?

The type of conflict associated with village committees varies from place to place. It can be a question concerning the exploitation of natural resources (forestry and fisheries, generally), which often bring neighbouring villages, as well as autochthonous and other populations, into conflict; cattle rustling, especially in border areas; the straying of livestock and the resulting recurrent conflicts between herders and farmers... All the observers nevertheless agree on the fact that one of the main causes of conflict within and between

villages relates to land ownership. The issue of land tenure is the overwhelming cause for the mobilisation of conflict management bodies, be they endogenous, administrative, or NGO-led.

The conflicted nature of land ownership is essentially due to a lack of systematisation in the articulation of the different legal frameworks that regulate it. The descendants of founding lineages in the villages are usually the customary tenants of the land, their ancestors having made a deal with the guardian spirits there (Thomas 1960 : 203-205). Since the beginning of the 20th century, various migratory movements led certain northern groups in Casamance to the south of the region in search of new arable land. The autochthonous populations thereupon relinquished part of their land to the newcomers without compensation. It is often said that the families of the former are the “tutors” of the latter. The abundance of land facilitated these loans between families, which were passed down from father to son over the course of several generations, without the ownership of the land being called into question.

A number of factors have since transformed these verbal contracts, based on hospitality, into sources of conflict. Firstly, the administrative reforms initiated in 1964 disrupted the social balance between different sections of society. They stipulated that the State was henceforth the owner of the land, and that the farmers had a right of usufruct on them (Le Roy, 1985: 255). These new provisions neglect customary practices, since they don't recognise the property rights of the “tutors”, but recognise the right of usufruct of those cultivating the land. According to the new legal framework, those to whom the lands had originally been loaned were in the dominant position. Hence, certain non-native families could cite the new laws in refusing to relinquish their lands.

Secondly, the abandonment of certain villages during the pro-independence conflict exacerbated misunderstandings regarding land ownership. Distance from the villages over a number of years in some cases broke the chain of memory regarding the agreements which had formerly been made between families. As a result, the return of the populations was accompanied by recurrent tensions (Robin and Ndione, 2006). The real or feigned ignorance of the non-native descendants with regard to the verbal contracts which linked their ancestors with the autochthonous families often led them to consider themselves as the rightful owners, especially given that the national legislation was on their side. They therefore began to build permanent dwellings, or plant trees, which the autochthonous families categorically refused. For the latter, these developments went against the temporary nature of what they considered to be a loan.

Thirdly, drought on the one hand, and the pro-independence struggle on the other (due especially to the positioning of the rebel bases and anti-personnel mines, which complicated access to arable and arboricultural land), increased the scarcity and value of land. This new development fuelled the aspirations of autochthonous families to recover the lands which their ancestors had transferred to the non-native families.

The legal pluralism which invokes common law on the one hand, and national legislation on the other, feeds a climate of insecurity with regard to land issues which is conducive to conflicts (Jacob, 2002; Gausset, 2008; Badji, 2015), especially in conjunction with the scarcity of resources and the confusion created by mass population movements in the area. In this context, mechanisms for conflict resolution are constantly liable to be called into question from one moment to the next. The arbitration of a sub-prefect in favour of the law is exposed to a lack of legitimacy and the resurgence of conflicts inasmuch as it bypasses the established order for generations. On the other hand, local arrangements are part of daily life in village disputes. They make reference to common law, but the lack of legal basis makes them vulnerable and exposes them to possible contestation given the national legal

framework. This situation explains the cyclical reappearance of certain disputes, which local conflict management structures, whether endogenous or administrative, have only a limited capacity to produce definitive solutions for. The peace committees are faced with the same difficulties. "Very often we can appease the tensions", acknowledged the president of a committee, "but we cannot prevent the conflicts from coming back" (Ziguinchor, 03/07/2017). In this regard, the problems linked to land issues are not only the product of a lack of "attentiveness" and "mutual understanding", which a culture of peace, promoted by NGOs and sponsors, could offset. Above all, they have to do with a structural situation the perpetuation of which means that the conflicts will endure.

In the developmental narrative, conflicts are presented as arising from exclusively local issues. The issue of land ownership is reduced to a simple question of community development (Goetschel and Péclard, 2006: 101). And yet, the control of land and resources is highly political, and part of the history of social relationships. By circumscribing it to the "local" or "community" level, interventions bypass the national and political dimension of conflicts, effectively depoliticising the issue. The endemic recurrence of tensions linked to land ownership, in Casamance and elsewhere (in Senegal, and in West Africa³⁴) nevertheless clearly shows the importance of the question. The implementation of Western-inspired legal frameworks designed to promote land exploitation is constantly confronted with pre-existing norms which regulate land practices. In this regard, committees aspire more to the treatment of symptoms than of the causes at the origin of the tensions.

The political dimension linked to land ownership is all the more important in Casamance given that it was one of the catalysts of the pro-independence conflict in the 1980s (Marut, 2010: 80-87). The feeling that certain sections of the population have of having been robbed of their lands on the basis of Senegalese legislation was one of the explosive issues³⁵.

The actions of humanitarian operators in the field of peacebuilding in Casamance have essentially been orientated towards interventions targeting the social and cultural dimension of conflicts. They have been far less focused on the structural origins of these conflicts. By depoliticising conflict management, project-carriers have ignored the underlying political issues which influence their interventions. The emphasis placed on community matters, on the participation of populations and civil society in the building of peace, and on the domain of culture, gives a diagnosis by omission: it positions the pro-independence conflict as a local problem linked to the cohabitation of ethnically differentiated populations. Hence, the search for local answers bypasses the political issues. This approach is part of the State perspective which, faced with "the problem of Casamance", is moving ahead with reconstruction, disenclavement and economic development projects, whilst being careful not to respond on a political level to pro-independence aspirations. In this regard, humanitarian operators are working for the "the peace of the State", which maintains the status quo, rather than towards a lasting peace negotiated between the two parties. The promotion of social stability on the community level is part of a political project which draws humanitarian actors away from the neutrality which they proclaim for themselves. It clears the Senegalese State of the implementation of political responses to a conflict with origins and claims nevertheless at the very heart of politics (Marut, 2009: 117; Foucher, 2009; Diédhiou, 2013). Peacebuilding is

³⁴ For Casamance, see Ki Zerbo (1997: 141-169), as well as the articles of Hesselting (1994) and Badji (2002). See also the work of Blundo (1996) for Senegal, or that of Chauveau and Lavigne Delville (2002) for French-speaking Africa. The ethnographic work carried out by Gausset (2008) in Burkina Faso reports on a situation comparable to that found in certain areas of Lower Casamance.

³⁵ The issue of land does not, however, seem to be taken into account in the search for a peace agreement, either by the warring parties or by humanitarian actors.

therefore not exclusively a tool for conflict management. It is also a tool which contributes to defining conflicts³⁶.

Conclusion: results in accordance with set objectives?

It is difficult to evaluate the degree of conformity of the results with the objectives set by the peace committees. It is certain that they treat conflicts, and sometimes manage to reach peaceful and consensual resolutions. Nevertheless, there is no information on the percentage of cases with such an outcome. Do they really favour non-violent resolution mechanisms with more success than endogenous, communal or state systems? Are there less conflicts in the zones where NGOs have intervened than in those where no management system has been implemented? Given the quantity of humanitarian actors operating in this field, are there intervention logics that are more efficient than others?

Project-carriers systematically justify the quality of their work through evaluations, the trust of sponsors, and audits. And yet, the evaluation procedures for projects, often instigated at the external sponsors' initiative, do not enable us to answer these questions. They give limited information regarding populations' experiences, project experimentation, dynamics of appropriation which are often far removed from the intended goals, misuses, or the instrumentalisation of aid by local actors. The understanding of these dimensions requires fieldwork, which is often lacking. On this subject, Millar notes the recurring omission of field experience in the existing guide books on the subject of the evaluation of peacebuilding interventions (Millar, 2014: 17-18). This work is especially important given that the consultants in charge of the evaluations are specialised in a given sector (peacebuilding, agricultural development, education, health, etc), but generally know little or nothing of the local context. Moreover, in the aid sector, it is common for evaluators to only have a few days or a few hours (Arditi, 2005) to visit the intervention zones³⁷. Given this situation, it is particularly difficult to estimate the distance between the objectives set and the actual experience which social collectives have of the implemented systems, especially since most interlocutors tend to minimise it. The most critical voices from the village populations often go unheard. They are filtered out, either by the NGOs, who direct the evaluator towards particular zones and interlocutors, or by the populations themselves, for whom it is important that they make a "good impression" on the sponsors in order for them to continue their interventions in the area³⁸.

³⁶ For evidence, let it be recalled that in some areas, when the village representatives were reluctant to communicate on quarrels in the village, certain group leaders were quick to remind them that the progress of the project in the region was conditional on the existence of a conflict, and that in the absence of conflict, the project would be moved to another village. According to a project manager: "The community leaders were informed of the fact that the progress of the project in the area was conditional on there being an existing conflict underway. We told them that if there was no conflict, we would go on to the next village. That loosened their tongues." (Plateforme des femmes pour la paix en Casamance, Ziguinchor 20/02/2017). These pressure tactics reveal that project operators do not only describe the existence of conflicts, but also prescribe them.

³⁷ "An expert is someone [...] who has never had the time", claims Arditi (2005: 866)

³⁸ In this regard, the witness account of a young person in the village of Toubacouta is especially illustrative: "During the closing ceremony, on May 25th, they prevented us from speaking. There was a journalist there. When he came towards me, people didn't let me speak because they knew what I was going to say. The SCOPE [the name of the project implemented by the American NGO CRS, with USAID funding] came here to add conflicts to our poverty. They talked for a long time, but they didn't

It is therefore not surprising that there is a gulf between the positive appreciations of peacebuilding interventions drawn from evaluation reports, and the critical perspectives developed by anthropologists concerning these same methods of intervention (Millar, 2014: 16). The lack of time and prior knowledge of the socio-cultural context is one of the constants of evaluation procedures in the aid sector³⁹. In the domain of peacebuilding, the absence of an ethnographic culture in the evaluation procedures is especially problematic given that it is a question of evaluating the impact of the project in terms of social cohesion.

For reasons of bureaucratic and budgetary homogeneity, evaluations are often carried out as the project is running its course, or as it is ending. For this reason they do not permit an assessment of the systematic disintegration of the committees after the intervention has ended. For more than a decade in Casamance, it has nevertheless been easy to see that there is a lack of continuity in the social structures in place, independently of the operators and the characteristics ascribed to them. Their longevity is indexed to the duration of the projects. The evaluation procedures generally at work are essentially for the “reproduction of the project” (Olivier de Sardan, 195: 169), in order to release new funding for a second phase, or for a geographical expansion. They focus on measurable and quantifiable elements. They make a note of the activities carried out, the implementation of the management mechanisms, independently of their longevity, and the place that they occupy relative to the different local tools for conflict resolution. Focused on the project unit, they tend to neglect the impact of the multiplication of similar interventions in the same place by different project-carriers.

The interventions are not judged on the basis of their results, or on the benefits which they claim to provide. They are valued and replicated according to their competitive value on the development market. A number of projects are intelligently built along lines most likely to raise funds from sponsors, such as peace, gender, good governance, and natural resources. This gives rise to social engineering which seems complex and creative on paper, and particularly appealing for sponsors, but with a projected succession of causes and effects which turns out to be more uncertain in practice. By establishing committees, certain interventions simultaneously aim to preserve forests and to “pacify” village conflicts. These two objectives can reveal themselves to be eminently contradictory, and often lead to violent confrontations between those who make a living from forest harvest and those, supported by external project carriers, who want to prevent it⁴⁰.

The developmental literature is keen to present peace committees as mechanisms designed to temporarily overcome shortcomings or weaknesses in governance (Odendaal and Oliver, 2008). In Casamance, there is a certain ambiguity surrounding the question. Whilst their implementation answers a transitional situation which they could help to transform, their record is necessarily problematic. The main conflicts which these systems aim to address involve land ownership, and relate to the tension between common and administrative law. Unless political dispositions are taken, it is very likely that conflicts will persist in the villages. The action of the committees is therefore organised around the symptoms, but has only a limited impact on the causes. They look at the community

give the microphone to the young people. They knew that they had to give it to the people who were in the network. They never give the floor to time-bombs like me.” (youth in Toubacouta, 10/05/2017)

³⁹ Between 2008 and 2014 I worked with an international organisation in Senegal, Equatorial Guinea and Cape Verde. During this period, I managed a number of projects which, in accordance with the contemporary culture of development assistance, were regularly subject to evaluations.

⁴⁰ To this end, a forthcoming publication is scheduled relating to an intervention for conflict management, which turned out to be at the origin of conflicts in the village of Toubacouta.

dimension but neglect the political one. If, on the contrary, these committees are supposed to be part of the promotion of a new form of governance, intended to guarantee conflict management “from the bottom up” over the long term, their systematic disappearance at the end of each project is a resounding failure.

The mass involvement of humanitarian actors in Casamance over the last twenty years has enabled significant progress. They played a critical role in the return of populations to abandoned villages, as well as in the establishment of basic infrastructures in rural communities. The activities linked to the promotion of peace have also had a significant impact. They have brought visibility to the desire for peace of populations worn out by the economic and social consequences of the confrontations between pro-independence forces and the Senegalese State; a desire with an articulation that was likely, until the end of the 1990s, to be subject to repression by one or the other of the warring parties. Nevertheless, a number of grey areas remain, linked to the merchandisation and massification of peacebuilding actions. It is all the more urgent to evaluate their successes, given that humanitarian organisations often only offer a positive reading of their interventions. Locked into a marketing logic on the development marketplace, they are often subject to “the dictatorship of appearances” (Arditi, 2005: 864). Accustomed to staging themselves, their discourse rarely touches upon missteps, or minimises them when they are suggested by the interlocutors, reproducing what some would call an institutionalised “system of ignorance”, which “excludes the information which might contradict the model’s inbuilt assumptions” (Arifari and Le Meur, quoted by Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan, 2001: 155). It also takes the place of questioning the impact of these strategies with a view to reaching a peace agreement. In any event, the management of small village conflicts has no hold on politics, and offers limited escape routes from the pro-independence conflict, which, after 35 years, remains deadlocked.

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