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Joanna Davidson

Feet in the Fire
Social Change and Continuity among the Diola of Guinea-Bissau

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Abstract

Diola villagers in Guinea-Bissau have long been recognized for their capacity to grow rice in their landscape of tangled mangroves and thick oil palm forests. Recently, declining rainfall, desertification, and widespread erosion have increasingly challenged their ability to provision themselves through long-established wet rice cultivation practices. The effects of these ecological shifts are exacerbated by increased youth migration, national political instability, and the simultaneous increasing demands of a cash economy and declining overall economic security.

Based on two years of ethnographic research in Guinea-Bissau, this dissertation begins with the recognition, shared by most residents in the region, that Diola villagers are currently challenged to maintain a way of life that has largely worked well for many centuries. Diola see their sustenance system not simply as a means of survival, but as integrally tied to their conceptions of personhood, social relations, ritual obligations, and collective cultural identity. What do Diola villagers do when the actions that define a worthy person are no longer tenable? What happens when they find that many of the premises of their society are working against them? How does a cultural group maintain itself as such when the values that have long defined its members are under severe pressure? This ethnography tells a complex and often contradictory story about Diola responses to these challenges by examining three central crises underway in Diola-land.

First, I consider Diola responses to changes in their environment that impinge upon their ability to maintain their long-held system of rice agriculture. The second part examines Christian missionary presence in Diola-land, and particularly how Diola Christians negotiate the different orientations and opportunities of village and mission life. The final section explores a conflict between Diola and Fula residents in this region, and explicates Diola values regarding social incorporation and exclusion.

Across these sites of analysis, this study explores which social forms are reproduced, which boundaries are maintained or redrawn, and how such processes are continually contested. Through specific ethnographic examples that have direct bearing on current Diola lives these three stories collectively engage broader questions about conflict, social change and continuity.

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Acknowledgements

There is no single Diola word for “thank you.” Diola often express gratitude with gestures (a graceful nod of the head, a quick dance) or a blessing invoking their supreme deity, *Emitai*. More recently, Diola villagers in Guinea-Bissau have adopted various “thank-yous” from other languages in their midst, and people now pepper their speech with “merci,” “obrigadu,” or “jerrijef.” The many ways Diola offer their thanks resonates with the multiplicity of my own gratefulness for the many individuals and institutions, families and foundations that have contributed to this project.

First, my adviser, Bruce Knauff, and committee members, Ivan Karp, Donald Donham, and Bobby Paul, have added immeasurable value and support to my work as a graduate student, researcher, and dissertation writer. In the past several years they have all taken on new leadership roles well beyond their own work as scholars and advisers. I want to acknowledge that despite their new time-consuming responsibilities they have continued to make time for me, and as a result my dissertation bears each of their distinct marks. In addition to my committee, many other mentors and colleagues have provided key insights, critical assessments, and collegial support at important junctures, especially Cory Kratz, Carla Freeman, and Eric Gable.

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**Feet in the Fire:
Social Change and Continuity among the Diola of Guinea-Bissau**

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Prologue

Feet in the Fire

On a humid day at the end of a rainless rainy season, I sat on a low wooden bench and chatted with Abayam.¹ It was just before *agoto*, the only named month in the Diola calendar, a month that signifies hunger and sorrow as it marks the time in the agricultural cycle when the dry rice has been consumed and the wet rice has not yet ripened. Even though *agoto* is a typically tough time of year, the suffering seemed more severe this year. Although the rains had come the previous year, a plague of insects had devoured paddy after paddy of delicate rice seedlings before they had a chance to mature. Diola farmers in Guinea-Bissau watched as Senegalese planes flew over rice paddies just across the border, spraying insecticide and saving crops, and lamented their unfortunate membership in the poorer of the two nations. The insect plague followed on the heels of several years of drought and most families' granaries were empty. "We used to be able to do this," many of my neighbors told me, referring to the complex technical, social, and ritual system through which Diola produce, consume, and revere rice. "Now we cannot."

It was the hottest part of the day. Abayam had stopped by to visit me on the way back to his village, five kilometers down the dirt road. I had been filling up my plastic buckets with water from the well, and I was as grateful for the interruption as he was, no doubt, for the temporary respite from the glaring sun. My heavily thatched roof afforded good shade and, provided we kept our movements to a minimum, we would each be able to

cool down a bit. This was hard for Abayam; he was too naturally animated and gregarious to stay still and his face was always covered in droplets of sweat that he periodically wiped off, using his index finger like a windshield wiper blade, which he shook out vigorously at his side. Abayam was around my age, perhaps a bit younger. He remembered a time when surplus paddy rice was stored for decades, often used in great quantities for ceremonies, and “sack rice,” imported by the Portuguese, was disdained and rejected as inferior and smelly. “My grandparents,” he told me, “never would have eaten—let alone depended so fully upon—store-bought rice.”

Perhaps it was inevitable—given the time of year, the heat, the cloudless sky—that Abayam and I became involved in a familiar script. Shaking his head and sucking his teeth, Abayam commented on the lack of rain, the lack of rice, and the struggle to continue what had clearly become an untenable way of life. I was having the same conversation over and over again with my Diola friends and neighbors in the village, and I had become rather bored and frustrated with this predictable and seemingly dead-end discourse. When Abayam repeated the habitual complaints of dearth and destitution, I simply went through the motions of reciting my requisite lines about *Emitai*—the Diola supreme deity and ultimate arbiter of justice and rain—being ever-present and all-knowing. Rather than agreeing with me by murmuring his own stock phrases about *Emitai*, Abayam surprised me by saying:

If you put your foot in a fire, you feel it burn and you are quick to respond by taking it out. But here we are, all of our feet are in the fire and we don't do anything about it. We keep our feet in the fire and complain about how much it hurts, and no one takes their foot out and no one arranges to get water to put the fire out.

Abayam's formulation of a now perennial Diola dilemma encapsulates many of the issues I explore in this study. Based on two years of fieldwork among the Diola, a group of rice cultivators in northwest Guinea-Bissau, my dissertation considers the broad themes of conflict, social change and continuity. It begins with the recognition, shared by most residents in the region, that due to a range of external and internal factors, Diola are currently challenged to maintain a way of life that has largely worked well for them for many centuries.

Diola see their sustenance system not simply as a means of survival, but as integrally tied to their conceptions of personhood, social relations, and collective identity. But what happens when Diola residents in Guinea-Bissau find that many of the premises of their society are working against them? How do they respond when the actions that define a worthy person are no longer tenable? How does a cultural group maintain itself *as such* when its mode of livelihood and local institutions are out of sync with the conditions of its natural and social world?

This ethnography tells a complex and often contradictory story about Diola responses to these challenges of social change and continuity.² I have organized the dissertation into three parts, each comprised of two to four chapters. The first part considers Diola responses to changes in their natural and social environment that impinge upon their ability to maintain their long-held system of rice agriculture. The second part explores responses to the Christian missionary presence in Susana. I focus on the experiences of the first cohort of Diola Christians as they negotiate the different value systems of village and mission life. Finally, Part Three narrates and analyzes an episode of violence in Susana between the majority Diola population and the minority Fula population. Each of these crises exposes the ways that Diola residents in Guinea-Bissau confront perceived threats to their way of being; they are rich sites of analysis for understanding the pressures, challenges, and transformations in Diola values, and they both illuminate those values and enable an exploration into the processes and plurality of change and continuity in contemporary Diola social life.

The first—and perhaps most pressing—is a crisis brought about by environmental change compounded by various social, political, and economic factors that have resulted in a challenge to Diola modes of livelihood. More concretely, declining rainfall, desertification, and widespread erosion in northern Guinea-Bissau have made it untenable for Diola to sustain themselves through the wet rice cultivation practices that have long defined them as a people. The effects of these ecological shifts are exacerbated by increased youth migration—and hence the loss of a vital source of agricultural labor—,

national political instability, and the simultaneous increasing demands of a cash economy with the decline in overall economic security. These factors combine to make contemporary Diola lives precarious.

This is not to say that, until fifty years ago, Diola experienced stasis in their environmental, economic, and political surroundings. Such a view is untenable in any West African context, as cultural groups in this region are defined more readily in terms of change than stability. To be sure, there have been times of dearth throughout Diola history, and Diola lore is filled with both tragic and heroic tales of how their predecessors coped with lean years. But both outside observers and Diola themselves recognize that the impact, intensity, and most importantly, *confluence* of the changes of the past several decades present particularly dramatic challenges to their beliefs and practices. The first section of the dissertation details Diola responses to this environmental and economic crisis, and focuses particularly on how these responses shed light on long-held Diola values and social forms, and in what ways these are changing—or not—because of new pressures.

The second section begins with a crisis in religious practices. In 1998, the Diola village of Susana held its male initiation rites—a once in every 30 years event—and the nascent Diola Christian community split over the decision of whether or not to participate. This conflict caused a deep rift within the Diola Christian population itself, as well as between the Catholic Mission and the village. The male initiation crisis—still a sensitive subject in Susana—sets the stage for an exploration of the 50-year relationship between the

Susana Catholic Mission and Diola villagers. Again, the question of values and conflict takes center stage as I examine how the Diola/Catholic interface challenges, transforms, and/or solidifies longstanding Diola beliefs and attitudes.

The final section introduces a conflict between ethnic groups. In May 2000, a clash erupted between the majority Diola and minority Fula populations in Susana, resulting in the rapid evacuation of Fula families to the nearest town. Observers outside the village cast the episode as a “tribal conflict,” and in some renditions an “ethnic cleansing.” The third section of the dissertation unpacks the events that led up to, culminated in, and followed this event, and situates it in the broader historical and structural patterns relevant to a deeper, and less sensationalistic, understanding of its dynamics. Although I question the facile and singular application of ethnicity to read the conflict, I also delve into Diola cultural forms—such as values regarding land, incorporation, and social interaction—that help render Diola attitudes and actions intelligible.

What ties these three stories together? First, these were all vibrant topics of discussion that were still playing themselves out during the course of my fieldwork, and an ethnography of the present in Susana needs to account for each of them. They comprised the pivotal events and salient features that shaped Diola characterizations of their present circumstances; references to them abounded, they contoured the lives of my friends and neighbors, and they were the focal points of countless discussions.

Beyond this, they each represent conflicts within a system, on several levels, and detailing Diola responses to these current predicaments sharpens our understanding of how Diola imagine their past, present, and future social and moral worlds. Moreover, they enable an engagement with broader questions about social change and continuity, moral imagination, and value conflict through specific ethnographic examples that have direct bearing on current Diola lives. The anthropological study of value is typically situated within a general shift in ethnographic inquiry from “how different cultures define the world in radically different ways (which anthropologists have always been good at describing) to how, at the same time, they define what is beautiful, or worthwhile, or important about it. To see how meaning...turns into desire” (Graeber 2001: ix). I take this line of inquiry further by asking first how meaning and desire turn into action (and reaction), and then how these values that condition desire and action *change*, as well as what these changes entail in terms of a refashioning of collective identity. My analyses focus on what gets reproduced, which boundaries are maintained and which are re-drawn, and how such processes are continually contested.

In each section of the dissertation, I explore a case or scenario where conflicting ends meet head on. Sometimes these conflicts are brought about in the encounter between two systems of thought—such as Diola traditional religion and missionary Catholicism, or Diola cultural mores and Fula cultural mores. Other times, they emerge because of changing circumstances in the natural and social environment that result in shifting structures and demands that challenge longstanding values. When what it means to be Diola and what it means to survive in a changed environment come head to head, how do

Diola respond? When the ideals of being Diola and being Christian clash in the same community, or sometimes the same individual, what happens? And when two ethnic groups have different ideas about what it means to live together, how does this manifest in their relations with one another? By analyzing a range of responses to these conflicts, my aim is not to reveal an ultimately dialectical process in which values collide and a synthesis is eventually and inevitably reached. Rather, I explore contexts in which conflicting values continue to co-exist, but with transformations on all sides and the recognition of sacrifices (often tragic) made in the process.³

Capturing how Diola currently experience and cope with these challenges inevitably exposes tremendous variation in individual responses along with the consequences of those choices. Examining how Diola deal with such differences is analytically appealing on at least two levels. First, it breaks down the myth that so-called egalitarian societies do not harbor significant differences among their members. We are used to seeing difference tied to claims of inequality, and most contemporary analyses of distinction and pluralism are framed within the axes of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. But even when marked inequality is not a prominent social feature, and even when differences are muted, evaluative distinctions always exist and often become powerful forces governing individual conduct and collective social life. Moreover, in the contemporary context of pressing change, Diola residents in this region are faced with new kinds of plurality on religious, ethnic, political, and economic planes. Each of these dimensions presents an opportunity to include or exclude new members and new ways of being Diola.

Death and the Crisis of Reproduction

Throughout these three sections, I weave in descriptions and analyses of Diola funerary practices. Death is, by definition, always a crisis of reproduction, and the wealth of anthropological literature on mortuary practice demonstrates the extent to which funerary rituals represent ways of overcoming the “crisis” of death by symbolically ensuring both individual and collective continuity (Bachofen 1967; Bloch and Parry 1982; Evans-Pritchard 1948; Frazer 1890; Hertz 1907; Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Klima 2002; Raglan 1945; Van Gennep 1909). Diola funerary practices are a rich and varied ritual complex, and a close examination of them enables a better understanding of many other arenas of Diola culture. But my decision to write about funerals is based neither solely on their connection to my main theme—plural responses to crises of reproduction—nor on their utility as windows into an array of ethnographic insights into Diola society.

From my first day of fieldwork in Susana, I attended and (in spite of myself) learned about funerals. After I had been in the capital city, Bissau, for about a month, studying Crioulo (the national vernacular) and digging deep into the library and documentary resources at the national research center, I decided it was time to visit my prospective fieldsite. I made my way up north and arrived in Susana late one November evening. Over dinner—a shared bowl of rice at my temporary host’s residence—I was told that an old man had just died and the funeral would be held the following day. I spent the entire next day at the funeral, watching as a platform was constructed in the middle of a clearing, the corpse was placed on the platform, sitting upright, dressed and adorned,

while women, and later men, danced in a circle around the seated corpse. I had very little idea of what was going on, and at the time I was struck by the size of the crowd, the tirelessness of the dancers, the regular physical contact with the corpse, and the amount of dust generated by the whole scene. Although I was impressed with the proceedings, I had not come to Guinea-Bissau to study funerary rituals, so I chalked up the event as a good opportunity to get a sense of Susana's population, and as a source of ethnographic exotica that filled up pages of letters to my family and friends back home.

A few months later, after I had moved to Susana permanently, I found myself going to funerals almost every week. At first, I thick-headedly saw them as so much ethnographic apocrypha, outside my primary interests and, because of their frequency and all-consuming nature, impinging on my more important and central fieldwork concerns. I continued to attend funerals out of a sense of anthropological—and increasingly kinship- and community-based—obligation. Also, during my initial stages of fieldwork, I acted simply like a shadow, going wherever “the people” went, and since the vast majority of the village population attends funerals, I followed them, observing and increasingly participating in such rites. As my web of contacts and relations increased, so too did my exposure to various roles in funerary practices, and I began to get a sense of their complexity. And yet still I did not view funerals as connected to the main line of my research concerns.

Only many months later, after I had attended more than thirty funerals, in all of Susana's neighborhoods, of women and men, old people and infants, Christians and spirit shrine

priests, did I finally begin to value funerals as a valid site of deeper anthropological inquiry. By then I had unwittingly amassed hundreds of pages of fieldnotes describing various funerals and their surrounding rites, and also had pages of questions that I was increasingly inserting into my conversations and interviews with informants. *But still*, I saw these funeral data as the foundation for an extra project, rich with potential for symbolic interpretation. Something that would make for an interesting article, something I could write after my dissertation, certainly a secondary concern.

Not until my final few months of fieldwork did it dawn on me that Diola funerary customs are intimately connected to my other research concerns—and, even more importantly, that any ethnographic portrait of Diola lives in Guinea-Bissau would have to include an analysis of their funerary beliefs and practices. As mentioned above, Diola funerals are potent sites of social and symbolic relations—from kinship and age-based social organization to residence patterns, from history to theology and cosmology, from power and authority to specialized knowledge and justice. In short, funerals and their collateral rites at once encode and manifest Diola ideas of time, place, personhood, and individual and collective identity. And, at least during the course of my fieldwork, their frequency shaped the contours of Diola (and my own) lived experience.

Despite my initial blindness, it has become inconceivable to me to represent contemporary Diola experiences in Susana without bringing funerals into almost every frame. Just as funerals punctuate and organize the quotidian rhythms of Diola lives in Guinea-Bissau, so too will they appear in my writing about these lives, sometimes

intruding inconveniently into the narrative, other times providing cathartic moments of (temporary) resolution to analytic and real-world problems, and still other times introducing new problems or redirecting the expected course of events.

Content, Form, and Stories

The narrative structure of the dissertation braids together ethnographic material, secondary literature, and theoretical exposition into each chapter. In my effort to creatively explore the interface between content and form, I rely heavily on the rhetorical strategy of storytelling, not merely as a means to an expository end, but as an analytic method in its own right (Griffiths 2004). Partly, this is meant to mirror my own experience in Susana, as I learned about Diola lives largely through the stories told to me—sometimes clear and cogent, other times fragmented or inconsistent, but always rich in narrative texture and detail—and I want to capture and convey that process in my own writing. Furthermore, one of the undercurrent theoretical themes in this study is the notion of plurality—of voices, perspectives, causes, processes, and (often unintended) outcomes. Understanding the plurality of current challenges and responses to Diola agricultural (and, hence, social and moral) practices, the tensions inherent in the relatively new subject of a Diola Christian, and the seemingly rapid polarization processes involved in the Diola-Fula conflict is, I believe, best achieved by writing stories about these unfolding dramas in northern Guinea-Bissau. As Griffiths suggests,

Story is sometimes underestimated as something that is
easy and instinctive. But story is actually a piece of

disciplined magic, of highly refined science... It is also a privileged carrier of truth, a way of allowing for multiplicity and complexity at the same time as guaranteeing memorability. Story creates an atmosphere in which truth becomes discernible as a pattern... The conventional scientific method separates causes from one another, it isolates each one and tests them individually in turn. Narrative, by contrast, carries multiple causes along together, it enacts connectivity (Griffiths 2004: 2).

Each section, then, tells a story about a current crisis in Diola society. And, as the story develops, increasing details fill in some gaps while simultaneously opening new cracks. The choice of these particular stories, and not just the storytelling mode, is also an analytic decision. To be sure, the way my Diola interlocutors discussed these events with me reveals how they made sense of their own lives. The stories they told about themselves and each other encompass part of their imaginative work: how they see current challenges and how they organize responses to them. But these stories were not delivered in full form, nor am I simply repeating what my hosts told me. I am engaging them by constructing my own frames around these events. It is my choice—and challenge—as an ethnographer to select and structure these stories. Part of my rationale for highlighting these particular episodes is that they comprise recent events in Diola history, and part of the work of an ethnographer is to chart this history of the present. Furthermore, discussing Diola responses to these recent events enables me to represent—

even emphasize—the immense variation in how people experience, make sense of, and engage the inevitable dynamism of their natural and social worlds. These particular events, moreover, refract on many analytic planes: economic, environmental, political, religious, social, personal, and historical. Rather than separating each of these dimensions out for distinct analysis, I am bringing them together to explore how they connect.

Finally, this is an ethnography that explores the multiple meanings and uses of imagination: how Diola residents in Guinea-Bissau imagine their world—what their lives ought to (or used to) be like—and how an ethnographic imagination can help us understand Diola responses to their world as it is. In this sense, I follow Beidelman’s concept of the moral imagination as that which “simultaneously links and releases individuals from their social and material circumstances” (Karp 1993: xiv-xv). In contrast to a materialist approach, which confines symbolic activity to natural and social content, Beidelman “focuses on the experience of limits themselves and on how attempts at transcending the physical, social, and moral conditions of existence are the stuff out of which the moral imagination is made” (Karp 1993: xiii). Ultimately, this is a tragic portrayal, because in the process of showing how—through the moral imagination—“people subvert expectations [and] fail to conform,” it also reveals how these same people “simply fail in their aims” (Karp 1993: xiv). Again, stories are the most appropriate medium through which to convey the simultaneous experience of coherence and inconsistency in imagining one’s world, and how “the fantastic quality of imagination takes us outside ourselves in two ways, by presenting a version of experience

and things that is both less and more than what we ordinarily encounter” (Beidelman 1993: 8).

How we see this tragic dimension of imagination playing out in the context of contemporary Diola lives in Guinea-Bissau brings us back to Abayam’s poignant “feet in the fire” metaphor. Abayam’s formulation is equally powerful in terms of what it reveals and what it obscures. Feeling one’s feet in the fire signals an awareness of a problem, but it should not be surprising that this does not immediately turn into conscious efforts to change either one’s own actions (taking one’s feet out of the fire) or the conditions of one’s predicament (putting out the fire). Recognizing the need to change does not lead inexorably to the next step of enacting change itself. When taken to the level of social organization, such efforts become even more challenging as one confronts the powerful forces of continuity, rooted as they are in values, institutions, and intricate structures of power. Abayam’s metaphor is stripped down in order to highlight a dilemma, but that dilemma is not isomorphic with real world dynamics of social change. In fact, it greatly distorts them. Having one’s feet in a fire misleads us into presuming an instinctive, intuitive, rapid, and generally easy response to a given problem: we see the signals, we feel the fire, we take our feet out. But the manifold resistances to change are buried in this analogy, turning it into a profound paradox.

My approach to these issues sometimes seems to strain at some aspects of anthropological custom, because it opens up the possibility that local logics and cultural practices should not just be explained and validated, but be challenged themselves. In

this vein, I follow Richard Handler's (1985) call for "destructive analysis." Responding to anthropology's existential crisis of representation, and in particular to Dennis Tedlock's (1979) call for dialogic ethnography, Handler advocates a "destructive analysis of our shared presuppositions [which] can become the anthropologist's contribution to a dialogue that respects natives by challenging rather than romanticizing them" (Handler 1985: 181). Anthropologists have, on the one hand, been very good at valorizing—even eulogizing—the people we study, and on the other hand, very good at criticizing the external power structures that threaten them. What the Diola paradox calls for is a closer conversation between these two broad and largely uncontested anthropological conventions.

Part I

Environmental and Economic Crises: *Rice and Rain, Labor and Leveling*

Chapter One

Introduction: Rain, Rice, and Responses

The memories of my first visit to the northwest corner of Guinea-Bissau are a blurry impression of rain-soaked villages dotted along a muddy road and engulfed within a lush landscape of tall oil palm trees and thick, green bush vegetation. It was August 1999 and I was visiting Guinea-Bissau to conduct preliminary research, rather too bold a phrase for what amounted to a general wandering around the country in an attempt to determine whether I would be able to conduct long-term ethnographic fieldwork there. I had already decided that Bolama, an island that lay just off the coast and once served as the former colonial capital, would be the ideal site to conduct a doctoral study of inter-ethnic relations. So it was on a whim that I joined a former Peace Corps volunteer whom I had met in Bissau to visit his friends in Varela, a fishing village on the Senegalese border. I needed to cross the border anyway to make my way to Dakar, and he promised that I would be enchanted by the isolated beauty of this rarely visited part of the country.

The trip from Bissau—one that I would make repeatedly in the years to come—was long and rough. We pieced together various modes of transport, squeezing into over-packed *kandongas* (flat-bed trucks) for bumpy rides over mostly paved roads pocked by cavernous potholes. We crossed two rivers in wobbly canoes, as the ferries that usually chugged back and forth between the muddy banks were both broken. And finally we arrived in São Domingos, the border town that marks the end of paved roads and the beginning of a single dirt road to the coast, traversing Diola and Baiote villages along the

way. Only a couple of flatbed trucks head down the São Domingos-Varela road each day, and we were lucky (as many subsequent strandings in São Domingos highlighted) to climb aboard a departing lorry and position ourselves atop 50-kilo sacks of rice. As soon as the driver began navigating the over-flowing and precariously balanced truck down the muddy road, the skies opened and rain pelted the exposed passengers and their cargo of rice, jerry cans, and chickens. One of the *adjudantes* (fare collectors) pulled out a large blue tarp and threw it out to the already soaked crowd on the back of the truck. We managed to get the tarp over us, people at the sides holding it down or sitting on its edges to secure it, and we bumped and bounced along, now a rain-drenched, sweaty, muddy mass huddled beneath a piece of plastic.

It was only through the holes in the tarp that I caught my first glimpses of Diola-land. Small boys in tattered shorts sticking to their skin, holding their bows and arrows at their sides and their bounty—a few small birds—up in the air, in the hopes that the driver or one of the passengers would give them a few CFA in exchange. Women carrying large baskets on their heads, jumping out of the road and into the bush as the truck veered dangerously close to them. Small, thatch-roofed shelters. The constant blur of green, everywhere thick green bush. I took all this in as a passerby, not expecting to return, or at least not expecting to be concerned with this area of the country beyond its promise of good palm wine and isolated beaches.

At the time, I did not imagine that I would come back and that these hazy impressions would solidify into deeply familiar sightings. Nor could I imagine that my eventual experience and research in the area would focus on the *lack* of rain, since my first two

trips were defined by its seeming abundance. That first trip ended in Varela, a village dominated by Senegalese and Gambian fishermen, so my exposure to the Diola residents that populate the rest of the region was limited. But two years and another very wet preliminary research trip later, I made my way back to the region. Two things were different: this time, I planned to stay for two years in the central Diola village of Susana. And this time, it was the dry season. The open-air ride—no need for a tarp in the dry season—finally enabled me to see the landscape we traversed. I secured a perch on the hard wooden bench, squeezed between women in brightly patterned headscarves and scrunched my feet under a pile of rice sacks, and held on tight as the truck lurched along the deeply rutted road. We passed the furrowed stretches of open land that I would come to recognize as Diola rice paddies. We careened alongside the thick bush of palm trees, and the rain of previous trips was replaced by red dust that swirled all around us, coating our bodies and the roadside trees with an ochre blanket.

I continued to go back and forth along that road for the duration of my fieldwork and inevitably lost the sense of just how dramatic the landscape is. Only when my husband came to visit over a year later did I recapture, through his eyes, the impressive quality of the *butat*, one of many Diola words for their thick oil palm bushland. “You neglected to mention that you’re living in a forest,” he teased. He was right; I had forgotten the first rush of excitement that comes with heading deeper and deeper into the expanse of green, and further and further off the beaten track. Such a description leans toward a type of romanticism now out of synch with currently fashionable ethnographic modes of writing. But most researchers and writers who spend time in this area are similarly unable to

avoid such impressions of this isolated landscape. Baum, for example, notes that “Visitors to the region are struck by the profusion of vegetation: vast forests of silk cotton trees and oil palms, separated by rice paddies and tangled mangrove swamps” (Baum 1999: 25). Similarly lush portrayals abound in the early chronicles, colonial, and postcolonial literature on this region (see Dinis 1946; Eanes de Zurara 1453; Jajolet de la Courbe 1685; Linares 1992; Lopes de Lima 1836; Mark 1985; Pélissier 1966; Thomas 1959).

Perhaps my initial failure to represent my surroundings as a lush, verdant forest also indicated my own growing sense of the problems that lurked beneath the seemingly fertile and salubrious soil. Very early in my fieldwork, conversations (like the one with Abayam in the opening anecdote) focused on a set of linked problems that made Diola see their own surroundings as a source of anxiety. I had spent time working with my adopted family in (and talking endlessly about) the parched rice paddies, listened as my neighbors in the village discussed their meager harvests, seen newly transplanted rice seedlings wither from sun exposure when they should have been submersed in knee-deep rainwater, surveyed households across the village regarding their food production and consumption patterns, walked along stretches of salinated and hard-baked paddy layered with white salty icing, and heard residents continually express their frustration with their seemingly futile labor in the forests and paddies. Wrestling matches and other religious ceremonies were postponed or canceled for lack of rice to conduct them appropriately. Children were kept from continuing their schooling in São Domingos or Bissau because of lack of rice to support them there. Widows were reduced to begging for their children

and grandchildren. Most Diola residents were caught up in a set of changed circumstances that they were in the midst of figuring out, interpreting, responding to, or sometimes defiantly ignoring.

My own work in this context—and my translation of it for the dissertation—explores how Diola residents are responding to these changing circumstances. My aim is not to prove or disprove the existence of an ecological crisis, not to measure rainfall patterns and provide evidence of environmental changes that impact Diola livelihoods. Diola residents in this region already felt and articulated these circumstances quite clearly by the time I arrived. My efforts to engage them on these issues center on their own perceptions of these changes, their own understandings of the implications for their individual and collective lives, and most critical in terms of ethnographic insight, what I can pinpoint as particularly Diola about these beliefs and behaviors. Thus, following a generally Maussian orientation, I explore these issues as they emerged in the encounter between the observer and the observed, and what that encounter can teach us about a heretofore unimagined way of human life: “a question of attempting to grasp other values *intellectually*” and how that “discovery” challenges us to reconsider what we think to be universally human (Dumont 1970: 2, emphasis in original).

Understanding Diola responses to their current predicament requires revisiting longstanding anthropological questions about social change and continuity. Although, for me, these questions emerged within the unexpected empirical conditions of my research, they are not new questions for anthropology. In considering them, not only do I

take my place in a long line of anthropologists who, as Peter Metcalf has quipped, “end up studying whatever their hosts want to talk about” (Metcalf 2002: 32), but in my efforts to engage with them analytically I draw from a generation of anthropologists—especially in Africa—who looked at similar dynamics in the contexts of decolonization, urbanization, shifts in political economy, missionization, and so forth. Max Gluckman, Meyer Fortes, Jack Goody, David Parkin, Tom Beidelman, Norman Long, Ronald Frankenberg, Fred Meyers, and Howard Morphy—to name a few—have provided rich ethnographic insights into central problems that—even though some of them wrote 50 years ago—continue to resonate with contemporary circumstances in Diola-land, and, I would argue, continue to be relevant for much of rural Africa.

Diola also share many of the cultural features highlighted by these ethnographers. Like the Giriama of Kenya; the Pintupi and Yolgnu of Australia; the Pentre of Wales; like the rural Zambians considered by Norman Long and many of the Southeast Asian peasants in James Scott’s work, Diola share: a relative sense of isolation vis-à-vis the nation-state (see Morphy and Layton 1981; Parkin 1972, 1978; Scott 1976); a clearly demarcated gender division of labor and social life (see Frankenberg 1957; Meyers 1986); a general suspicion of what Frankenberg calls “uppishness”; that is, suspicion—and often subversion—of fellow community members’ innovations and initiatives (Frankenberg 1957); an economy—some would call it egalitarian—in which wealth is not used to confer higher standards of living, but typically channeled into ritual purposes (see Long 1968; Parkin 1972; Scott 1976); a resistance to, and careful containment of, leaders outside the household (Frankenberg 1957; Parkin 1972); and a reputation, within both the

colonial and postcolonial national context, of being some mixture of conservative, “tribalist,” “backward,” or, more romantically, “authentic” and “independently spirited” (see Meyers 2002; Morphy and Layton 1981; Parkin 1972; Scott 1976).

In terms of their current predicament, like Parkin’s portrayal of the Giriama, Diola are “perfectly aware that their society has undergone rapid economic change over the past twenty-five years” (Parkin 1994: 30). Like the Yolgnu of Australia, Diola have, “through the external threat to their society become [increasingly] conscious of their cultural system... not simply as a means of physical survival but as a particular way of being human” (Morphy 1981: 72). And, finally, like the Pintupi described by Meyers, Diola are currently “struggling to maintain [this] order of being and action that they value” (Meyers 1986: 12). The following sections elaborate on some of these aspects of Diola social life by describing the ethnographic and historical background in which this drama unfolds. I will then return to some of the theoretical engagements most relevant to this study at the conclusion of this introduction.

Ethnographic Setting

Diola inhabit the coastal region of West Africa from the southern Gambia to the northwest corner of Guinea-Bissau, including the Casamance region of Senegal, where they have been spearheading a low-grade separatist war since 1982 (see Foucher 2002, 2003). Precise population statistics are difficult to obtain. Regarding Diola in Senegal, estimates range from 200-250,000 (Mark 1985: 6) to 400,000 (Baum 1987: 1). Linares (1992: 5) suggests a middle ground of 260,000-340,000. Although Diola are the majority

ethnic group in the Casamance, they are a minority in Senegal overall, where they comprise 6-9% of the total population (Baum 1999; Linares 1992). There are approximately 65,000 Diola in the Gambia (Baum 1999), although this figure is in constant flux given seasonal migration patterns. Diola are a minority group in Guinea-Bissau, numbering approximately 14,000 (*Recenseamento Geral da População e Habitação* 1991), although Scantamburlo (1999) estimates a total Guinean Diola population of 15,000 and Baum (1999) suggests 16,000.⁴ Based on my own survey, I believe these numbers are too low, and suggest a total Guinean Diola population of approximately 20,000, not including the resident refugee populations of Casamance Diola currently spread throughout Guinean Diola villages. In Guinea-Bissau, Diola occupy an area of approximately 320 km² (Lehmann de Almeida 1955). Within Guinea-Bissau, Diola are commonly referred to by others as Felupe.⁵

Diola live in an area of low-lying, lush forest and mangrove swamps, where they grow rice. Archaeological evidence suggests that Diola have been in this region of West Africa, and have been practicing their trademark wet rice cultivation, for at least one thousand years (Linares 1981). Even though Diola now reside in the coastal zone from the Gambia to Guinea-Bissau, “archaeological and historical evidence suggests that the original Diola home-land was a much smaller strip of coast extending from the mouth of the Casamance River, east to the city of Ziguinchor, the present regional capital” (Linares 1981: 577). From there, they spread slowly northward between the 15th and 17th centuries.

As the history of the Diola seems to suggest, the spread of these people into a riverine, coastal environment, was accomplished gradually by small groups splitting off from several parent villages, setting up new households, and forging new villages on the basis of a common agnatic ideology. Penetration of a certain area by small groups originating in several villages would logically result in agglomerations whose component households are tied together by the realities of propinquity, rather than by genealogical recollection (Linares 1981: 591).

Diola participation in the Atlantic slave trade appears to have been uneven and generally reticent. Linares (1987) explores the “deep structural” factors that retarded Diola development of domestic and export slavery, and Baum (1999) discusses various aspects of Diola involvement in slave-trading as evident in residual religious practices around certain spirit shrines. Although Linares notes that “It is by no means clear to what extent these societies participated in slave raiding during the 19th century. Whether they were victims or profiteers of the slave trade, the Kasa Diola, Balanta and Baga retain few if any traces of former slave status” (Linares 1981: 587-588), Baum argues that current Diola religious and social institutions developed “during an era of political and economic upheaval that was fueled by the gradual penetration of the transatlantic slave-trading networks and the growing importance of a world economic system” (Baum 1999: 3).

Early European explorers among the “Fulup” include Àlvaro Fernandes (1446), Valentim Fernandes (1506-1510), Duarte Pacheco Pereira (1506-1508), and André Alvares de Almada (1594). These chroniclers, similar to those that followed them centuries later, noted the absence of centralized authority and their intensive agricultural practices. Other European accounts “spanning the centuries particularly remark on heavy drinking, feasting, and dissipation among Diola groups following the harvest” (Brooks 1984: 26-27).

Diola Diversity

Although they share fundamental social and cultural principles—such as a mode of livelihood based on wet rice production, a set of religio-political institutions that emphasizes decentralized and diffuse power and authority, and a religious system based on spirit shrines and a supreme deity (*Emitai*)—there is significant variation among and within Diola populations in the Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau. There are three major dialects among the Diola: Fogny in the north, Kasa in the middle, and Edjamat in south, including Guinea-Bissau. Even within these dialects there is a great deal of linguistic variation, sometimes from village to village. Furthermore, Diola in the Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau were subject to different colonial regimes—British, French, and Portuguese, respectively—each of which left its particular legacy on Diola populations to varying degrees. Religious conversion has also impacted Diola across these countries in distinct and uneven ways. Briefly, the northernmost population of Diola, north of the Casamance River and along the Gambian border, were Islamicized by the 1930s (Mark 1978, 1992). South of the Casamance River, but still within Senegal,

several Catholic missions have had—and continue to have—significant influence (Baum 1990). The southernmost sub-group of Diola, in Guinea-Bissau, has remained most impervious to religious missionization on both Islamic and Christian fronts, although there is an important Catholic Mission in Guinean Diola-land whose influence I will consider in Part Two. Religious conversion among Guinean villagers across the Upper Guinea Coast is a complex, dynamic, and varied phenomenon, and the ways in which Diola have incorporated new elements from Islam and/or Christianity while maintaining (and sometimes strengthening) traditional Diola religious practices has been the subject of several scholarly works on Senegalese Diola (Baum 1990; Linares 1981, 1992; Mark 1978, 1992).

Differences in external pressures—whether from the colonial and postcolonial state or from religious missionaries—has had implications for diversity in Diola social organization, gender roles, and agricultural practices across this swath of West Africa. Linares (1981) has most ably documented the various patterns of social organization among Diola in Senegal. Comparing three Diola villages in the Casamance—Fatiya in the north, Jipalom in the middle, and Sambujat in the south—Linares observes spatialized differences in social organization that reflect increasing “Mandingization” from south to north. The process of Diola “becoming more like Manding” involves increased social differentiation, smaller household units, the creation of two separate farming systems (cash and subsistence crops), and more secular and explicit authority roles (Linares 1981). Linares argues that different social and ideological forces have shaped different modes of cultivation, particularly regarding the sexual division of labor. At one end of

the spectrum is Sambujat, “a nucleated highly endogamous community in the most intensive swamp-rice growing area, where the sexual division of labour is equitably divided between men and women... At the opposite extreme of the continuum is Fatiya,” where women do all the labor associated with rice cultivation and men are involved with cash crops (Linares 1981: 576).

Linares’s work makes it clear that it is impossible to generalize very much regarding Diola populations on the Upper Guinea Coast. The very category of Diola, like most ethnic groups, is of course a slippery one. This is further compounded by the separation of Diola villages across three countries and the differential impact of religious conversion. The Diola villagers with whom I resided in Guinea-Bissau most closely resemble those described by Linares in Sambujat, but just by virtue of being across the Guinean border many important differences exist. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the term “Diola” to refer to the residents in the cluster of villages in northwestern Guinea-Bissau, except when noted otherwise. Even within this relatively small population, however, there is significant variation, which I will discuss when it is relevant.

Diola in Guinea-Bissau

Although Senegalese Diola have had a fair amount of scholarly attention (Baum 1990, 1999; Foucher 2002, 2003; Linares 1970, 1981, 1987, 1992; Mark 1978, 1985, 1992; Pélissier 1966; Sapir 1965, 1970, 1977a, 1977b, 1981; Schloss 1988; Thomas 1959, 1963, 1968, 1970; van Tilburg 1998), ethnographic literature on Guinean Diola is scant

(Journet 1987, 1993, 1998, Taborda 1950a). When Diola appear in the general ethnographic literature of West Africa, observers tend to emphasize three characteristics: their prowess in the rice paddies and general centrality of rice in Diola society (Brooks 1993; Carney 2001); their decentralized political structure and lack of social stratification (Davison 1988; Ly-Tall and Robinson 1976); and their bellicosity and tendency toward internecine feuds (Baum 1999: 26).

In Guinea-Bissau, from São Domingos to Varela, there are approximately 24 villages, the majority of them Diola (see Table 1). Interspersed among Diola villages are several Baiote settlements, such as Elia, Arame, and Djobel. Baiote are similar to Diola in terms of cultural and religious practices, and most Diola have Baiote kin, but their languages differ.

Figure 1: Guinea-Bissau and Casamance Region

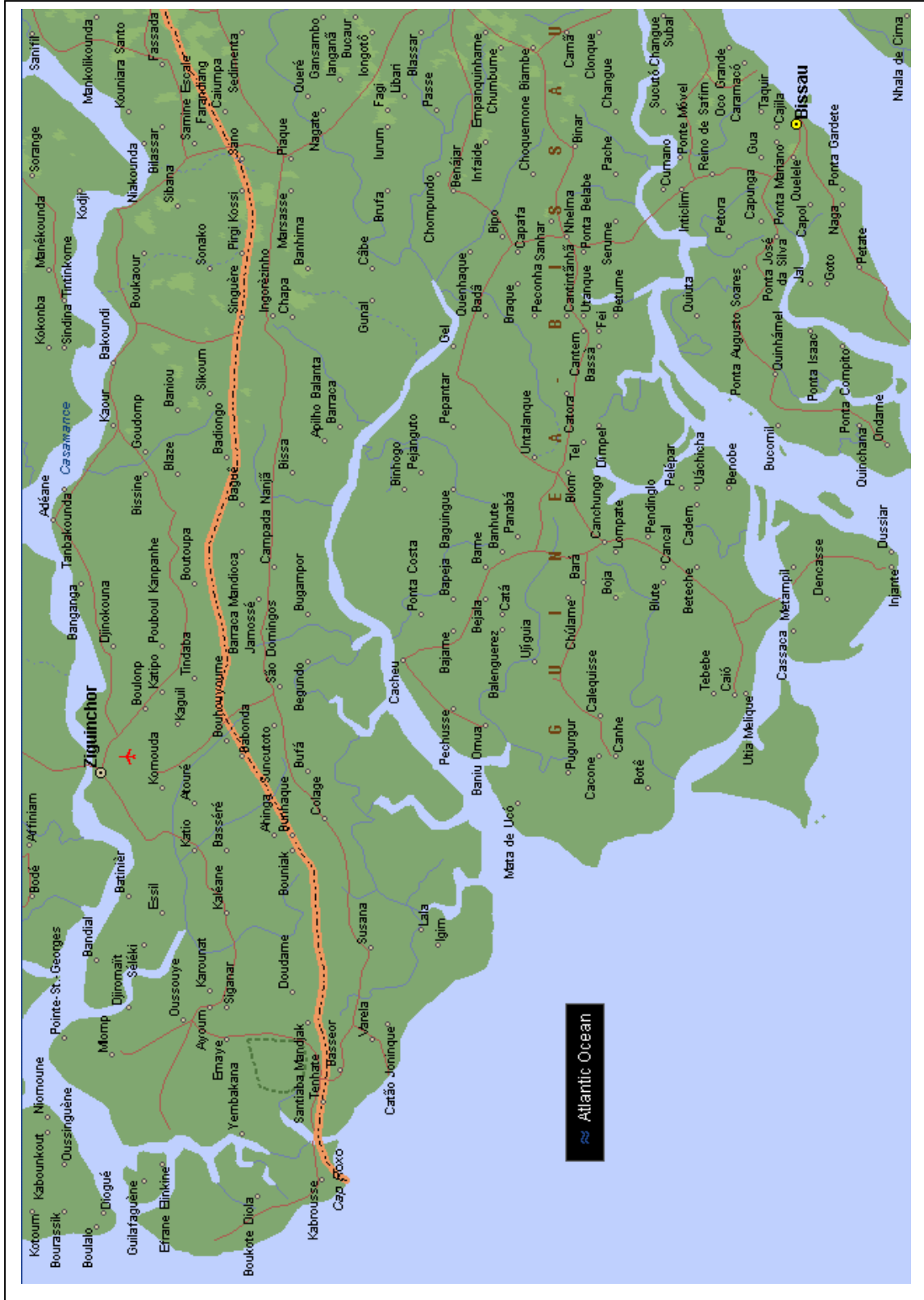


Table 1: Major Villages from São Domingos to Varela

Village	Predominant Ethnic Group	Distance from Susana (kilometers)
Susana	Diola	--
Budjim	Diola	5
Kandembã	Balanta	3
Edjatem	Diola	11
Arame	Baiote	5
Kassu	Baiote	8
Elia	Baiote	12
Bussali	Manjaco	12
Djobel	Baiote	14
Kulage	Baiote	17
Djacumundo	Manjaco	21
Nhambalañ	Baiote	25
Kassolol	Diola	8
Yal	Diola	13
Katon	Diola	12
Edjim	Diola	24
Ellalab	Diola	12
Eossor	Diola	34
Bulol	Diola	36
Varela	Diola, Mandinga, mixed	16
Karuay	Diola	13
Basseor	Diola	16
Tenhatt	Diola	19
Sukudjak	Diola	22

Susana, where I resided during the bulk of my fieldwork in Guinea-Bissau, is the central village in Guinean Diola territory. Being geographically central, Susana links the outlying villages, roughly evenly divided between those that live in the forest and those that live on riverine islands, in what used to be a mutually interdependent trade of extracted goods: forest villagers would trade palm tree products (wine, oil, kernels) for fish.⁶ The traditional market—some say it has existed for over five hundred years—is still active, and, once a week, every six days according to the Diola week, women from Susana and other nearby forest villages await women from Ellalab, who bring baskets of small fish in exchange for palm wine, *cheben* (palm fruit), tobacco, and more recently, manioc. The market is conducted on a trade basis, with standard equivalencies for traded goods: one liter of palm wine for one kilo of fish, one leaf of tobacco for one kilo of fish. Since people in Susana generally do not fish, even though they are close enough to the water to do so, market day is often the only day of the week when Diola rice bowls feature fresh fish.

In the past several years, as people have become more integrated into the cash economy, residents from fishing villages have shunned the traditional barter market in preference for the more lucrative cash markets in Elia (a nearby Baiote village), São Domingos, Ziguinchor, and even Bissau. At the end of the dirt road, Varela comprises the most active fishing village in the region. Varela is only 16 km from Susana and is literally overflowing with fish, but almost none of it comes to Susana. Women from Varela smoke the fish brought in largely by Senegalese and Gambian fishermen, and then load up their straw baskets onto the *kandongas* for the daylong trip to Bissau where they sell

the fish for considerable profit. But Susana, as a result, is often without fish to complement the rice they consume at every meal, and most villagers complain bitterly about the lack of “mafé”—anything (fish or meat or chicken or sauce) to eat with their rice.

Susana’s current population is approximately 2,000, although there is seasonal variation based on the migration of family members attending school or seeking work in urban areas during the dry season and returning to Susana to help with the arduous labor involved in wet rice cultivation during the rainy season. The 50-kilometer dirt road from São Domingos to Varela is the major artery that cuts through Guinean Diola-land, and, because of its poor condition, is also the major source of its isolation from the rest of the country. Even though Susana is just 150 kilometers from Bissau, the trip can (and often does) take 14 hours, or even a few days. This fact increases Diola isolation from the capital, hinders access to markets, and also helps explain why most Guinean Diola orient themselves northward, across the Senegalese border to Ziguinchor, and even into the Gambia and other more accessible urban zones.

Susana is made up of two wards—Endongon and Utem—each divided into three and two neighborhoods, respectively. There are three other recent additions to the Susana neighborhood structure: Santa Maria is the neighborhood of Diola Catholic converts, which skirts the Mission walls; Centro is comprised of an assortment of houses and administrative buildings along the main road; and Fulacunda is the now abandoned row of houses, adjacent to Santa Maria, where Susana’s Fula residents lived until they were

evacuated in May 2000 (see Part Three). All of these three neighborhoods occupy terrain that was, until the 1950s, dense forest which separated Endongon and Utem. Portuguese colonial officials were the first to make serious inroads into this forest, followed by the Catholic Mission, which cleared large tracts in order to build both its own facilities and to offer a place of refuge for recent converts to build their houses, and hence escape both the temptations of traditional neighborhood ceremonial life and persecution from kin opposed to their conversion.

Susana as a unified entity is of somewhat recent vintage. Susana's two wards were federated in the mid-1800s, during the height of internecine fighting among Diola villages. In Susana, neighborhoods remain the basis of most social and religious organization. All collective associations—age-grades, work groups, women's groups, soccer teams, etc.—are neighborhood based. Each neighborhood has its own *hukulahu*, a clearing in which funerals, major ceremonies, and dances are conducted. Each neighborhood has its own cemetery, its own menstrual house, and its own maternity center. Each neighborhood also has a secular representative on the village-wide *comité de tabanka*, an administrative organ set up by the post-independence state to serve as a link between local communities and the state.⁷

Households and Basic Living Conditions

Diola have residentially based patrilineal kin groups. Households are typically composed of a married couple and their unmarried children. Monogamy is by far the most common form of marriage, although polygyny is acceptable. Diola are virilocal; upon marriage, a bride is brought from her natal neighborhood (or village), and takes up

residence in her husband's family compound, where her new husband has recently built a house.⁸ Most marriages are exogamous at the neighborhood level and endogamous at the village level. The Diola word for "family" and "house" is the same—*eluupai* (pl. *siluupas*). So closely are an adult man and his house tied that, upon his death, his house will be broken down. This usually takes place a year or more after his death, depending on the number and complexity of the required posthumous ceremonies. If his wife (or wives) does not remarry a small house (*hungumahu*) is built for her, usually by her grown sons or uncles, on a plot of land near her dead husband's house. Virilocality extends even after the death of the husband, as a widow's house is built in her husband's compound (*hankahu*) rather than in her natal neighborhood, and a woman's funeral and burial take place in her in-married neighborhood.

Diola live in rectangular, largely windowless mud houses with dirt floors and thatched roofs. Houses are built by men, and building a house is perhaps the most important male rite of adulthood, in some ways more significant than male initiation. Houses are typically composed of a central room where the family eats around a collective rice bowl, and a few inner rooms that serve as bedrooms. The children of a household generally sleep in one room and the parents sleep in a separate room, often with the youngest child if he or she is under 6 or so. While polygyny is rare, if a man has more than one wife each will have her separate room and separate cooking hearth. The only other room in the house is the granary, which holds the family's rice and any other comestible goods (like palm oil or cashew wine). All cooking takes place outside at stone hearths; some families construct a low thatch kitchen in their backyard, others cook in the open.



Diola houses in Susana



On the veranda, Susana

Most houses in Susana's original neighborhoods (that is, *not* Centro and Santa Maria) and in outlying villages have a wide, wrap-around earth veranda with a thigh-high mud wall enclosing it. This is where most of the household activity takes place, including visiting. It is very rare that people actually enter inside each other's houses, even those of close kin, friends, and neighbors. If one enters another's house, it is usually just to walk through to the back or to sit in the central room. The granary is especially off-limits. Although I lived in Susana for two years and ate at my adoptive family's house every day, I never saw the inside of the granary, nor did I see anyone else in the household enter it besides the mother of my adoptive family. Linares notes similar conduct among Senegalese Diola. "Secrecy is the pervasive attitude toward the paddy stored in the granary. The wife can open the door only early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when others are not around. Strangers may never enter the *buntungab* or the stored crop will 'run away' (that is, will be bewitched)" (Linares, 1970: 218).

Household furnishings are sparse and largely uniform. Most people sleep on mats, although some households have acquired foam mattresses from Bissau. Chairs are a rare luxury; people sit on long wooden planks propped up by large rocks on the veranda, or on low wooden stumps, makeshift stools, or (the seat of preference in my adoptive family's home) plastic car battery cases. Other household objects are limited to items for agricultural, extractive, and domestic activities: the trademark fulcrum hoeing implement (*budjandabu*⁹) used for wet rice agriculture (usually suspended in the veranda rafters); a large wooden *pilon* for pounding rice; an assortment of straw baskets for winnowing rice; a rarely used fishing basket; and larger straw baskets for carrying heavy head loads.

Cooking implements include market-purchased large aluminum pots and variously sized tin *tijelas* that serve as collective rice bowls. People in a neighboring village (Elia) make earthenware pots that are sometimes used for drinking palm wine and boiling small fish. I will explore issues relating to the display or absence of household goods—and how this is connected to general social and economic leveling tendencies and the seemingly desired appearance of poverty—later in the dissertation.

Families have domestic animals—chickens, ducks, goats, pigs, and (now more rare) cows. These animals are not used for family alimentary consumption. Rather, they are raised and sold to others, usually to be used for ceremonial sacrifice, where their meat is divided among participants according to the distribution rules for any given ceremony. Every family in Susana has chickens but eggs are not eaten; this is considered wasteful since an egg can potentially become a full-fledged chicken, which is more valuable for economic and ceremonial purposes. Only if a chicken dies after laying eggs, or the eggs are abandoned, will the eggs be used, usually by selling them. Pigs are used for large celebrations, such as age group or work association parties. Cows used to be more common, but now having cows is a sign of significant wealth. Young boys are in charge of herding, and they often work in groups, herding their collective cows off to the rice paddies early in the morning, and returning at dusk. Only the most important ceremonies use cows for sacrifice. During my first rainy season in Susana, when it became more and more clear that the rains were late and scant, a cow was sacrificed at Susana's main rain shrine. The single cow's meat was distributed to all Susana households (over 350 houses, although not everyone accepted the offering). Other than rare sacrificial opportunities,

cow meat is eaten when a cow dies of sickness; the cow is slaughtered and word quickly spreads around town and people with a little spare cash hover over the carcass and buy portions of meat from the owner. Neither cows nor goats are milked; Diola find the practice of milking embarrassing if not abhorrent, and insist that they only breastfeed once in their lives.

The generally poor nutritional status contributes to the overall high incidence of sickness in the area. Some diseases that had been prevalent (smallpox, polio, yellow fever) were controlled or eradicated through now largely effective vaccination campaigns, generally orchestrated by UNICEF through local health service channels. However, childhood mortality is very high, primarily due to the usual suspects of malaria and diarrheal diseases. Malaria is ubiquitous—most adults to have 8-10 malarial episodes each year and children have even more. During the rainy season, the children in my adoptive family had bout after bout of malaria, and chloroquine was consumed by the crateful. There have been cholera outbreaks in nearby villages in recent years, especially Elia, a riverine island village. Leprosy is less common than it used to be, but still present (one of my best informants on Susana's precolonial history has leprosy). The national HIV prevalence for adults (aged 15-49) is 3.8% (UNAIDS), although it is significantly higher in Bissau. AIDS has yet to have much impact in Susana and surrounding areas, although, given general ignorance about HIV transmission, high risk sexual practices, and increasing travel of youth between Bissau and Diola-land, I expect that AIDS will soon be on the rise in Diola-land.

Land Tenure

There are two main types of agricultural land: forest (*butat*) and wet rice paddy (*butonda*). Land is inherited through the patriline. When a boy reaches marrying age, his father (or his father's brothers if his father is dead) provides him with some paddy and forest land. During the life span of the individual more fields may be distributed to him according to the size of his family. "Redistribution of usage rights to specific parcels is a constant and democratic process in response to fluctuating family size" (Linares 1981: 568). When a man dies, his land reverts back to his brothers or, if they are all dead, his brother's children. A woman has rights to work and reap the benefits of both *butonda* and *butat* through her husband, and can sometimes inherit or be gifted land through her paternal kin, although women's ownership of land is rare and they are largely dependent upon marriage to gain access to land.

While patrilineality determines inheritance of land, a man can still exercise certain privileges through his maternal kin. The most important is a man's right to borrow unused paddy from one's mother's brothers. This right is limited to the use of surplus paddy, and is far removed from the sense of ownership that is applied to inherited land. If borrowed paddy yields an abundant rice crop, the owners (usually his mother's brothers) will not hesitate to reclaim it for the following season.

Beyond inheritance and borrowing, one may acquire land through a pledge system. A man who needs more paddy can approach one who has surplus (even if they are not related) and offer to trade an animal, usually a pig, for a parcel of paddy. The transaction

can also be initiated by the landholder, who perhaps needs an animal for a ceremony. The pledge is made and the fields can be passed on to pledger's children through normal patrilineal inheritance, but again, they are never outright owners of the fields, and the paddy must be returned to original owner, or his descendants, if he gives back equivalent animal(s) involved in the original transaction.

Precolonial land acquisition involved expansion into uncultivated areas and conquest of land through raiding and internecine war. Neither of these practices is currently used, as all land within the territory of a village is nominally "owned," so there are no uncultivated areas. However, most villages have border disputes with their neighboring villages, some more active than others.

Pledging and internecine war help explain why most families have scattered holdings. Rather than land being concentrated in one section of the village, a family will work parcels of land scattered across the village's terrain. Linares notes that "In order to carry out normal cultivation practices, and at the same time minimize the risks of pests, weeds, and insufficient rain..." a person should have scattered holdings (Linares 1981: 570). Land distribution within a lineage takes into account the particular differences in fertility of each plot and allocates each agnate a mixture of prime and less prime parcels. But, since land distribution happens within the confines of the lineage, and there are no corrective measures (as far as I am aware) on a village-wide level; often a lineage or several lineages are more advantaged than others based on the fertility of their collective land.

Once a man has inherited land his rights to that land during his lifetime are highly individualized in terms of its use: he can cultivate it, lend it, pledge it, or let it lie fallow. However, he may not sell it. This is where the concept of individual versus collective ownership no longer fits Diola land tenure practices. Since *butonda* and *butat* will always revert back to the lineage and be redistributed according to the ongoing dynamics of the domestic cycle, land is both individually and communally owned (see Linares 1980). Everyone knows the borders of their *butonda* at a family level. These are sometimes marked with forked sticks or other tangible signs, but most often simply recognized because of deep familiarity with the terrain. The same goes for *butat*; while there might be natural border markings, such as a particular tree or a slight elevation in the land, again, knowledge of one's land and its limits comes from constant contact with it since infancy, and its contours and boundaries are indelibly etched into one's internal cartography. What, to me, are often indistinguishable tracts of neatly plowed rice paddy or densely packed forest are, for Diola, as distinguishable and recognizable as the individuals who work them.

Political Organization

As mentioned above, most authority is wielded within the *eluupai*—the house-based family. But, beyond the largely autonomous household, Diola political structure involves a combination of religious and administrative positions with varying degrees of authority. Each village typically has one “chief” (sing. *ai*; pl. *ai-i*). Diola *ai-i* are part of a priest class who hold ritual office over a spirit shrine that both safeguards and is the source of

their right to reign.¹⁰ Theoretically, *ai-i* are bound by many restrictions: they cannot enter a layperson's house (with the exception of *batolhabu*—members of the burial society lineage), they cannot be seen eating or drinking or performing any bodily activities (urinating, sleeping, etc.), they cannot use anything that separates their bare feet from the ground (e.g. shoes, a bicycle, a car), they cannot leave their house during the entire rainy season, they cannot walk across salt water, and they cannot travel by major paths or roads, only by secret bush paths. Because of the combination of their ritual power and restrictions, some observers of the Diola have suggested that a Diola *ai* is both “sacred and slave, all powerful and yet prisoner of his power” (Baum 1990: 375).¹¹ Many of these restrictions have been relaxed in the last 15 years.

There is one supreme *ai* for all Diola who lives in Karuay, a village several kilometers off the main road. His reign covers both Guinean and Senegalese Diola, although he rarely crosses over the Senegalese border now given problems associated with the Casamance conflict. Beyond religious duties the main purpose of the Karuay *ai* is to spiritually unite the Diola, and to serve as an ultimate arbiter in inter-village conflicts. Also, the Karuay *ai*, in collaboration with village elders, appoints other village *ai-i* as needed.

In addition to an *ai*, Diola shrine priests (sing. *amangen*; pl. *amangen-i*) hold important ritual offices based on their access to and communication with particular disease-inflicting spirits. *Amangen-i* are generally older men, but women and younger members of Diola society can be shrine priests, too. *Amangen-i* are primarily responsible for religious and ceremonial matters, but can also be called on for advice and arbitration of

matters relevant to the village. I discuss their roles in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

As previously mentioned, there is also a secular *comité de tabanka*, with one or two representatives from each neighborhood, who serve as conduits for any official messages that come from both within and outside the village. Sometimes they organize collective labor on a neighborhood basis for village-wide projects, such as building a new school or constructing a community health facility.

The literature on Diola (from both Senegal and Guinea-Bissau) describes them as acephalous, lacking any centralized political structure (e.g. Brooks 1993; Davison 1988; Forrest 1992; Ly-Tall and Robinson 1976; Thomas 1959). This assessment does not accurately portray the many layers of political/religious authority and institutions extending from the neighborhood to inter-village networks. But power is very loosely wielded by official authorities (such as the *ai* and *comité* members), and, while elders (both men and women, but especially men) are generally respected and listened to, younger men can certainly go their own way if they chose, so a strict gerontocracy does not exist. Overall, Diola are ambiguous about the existence of leaders outside the household, and the restrictions on *ai-i*, as well as the no-rush approach to replacing them, can be seen as ways to confine or limit their authority.

Diola use the term *awasena* to refer to their religious practices, which manifest primarily in frequent ceremonies at the range of spirit-shrines (*ukinau*) around the village, but the

precepts of which also infuse almost all aspects of Diola social life. An *awasenau* is a person who participates in Diola traditional religion, and Diola currently use this term to contrast those who are engaged in ceremonial activities at *ukinau* with those who have aligned themselves with the Catholic Mission. *Awesenau* literally means “one who performs ceremonies.” I discuss aspects of *awasena* belief and practice throughout the dissertation, especially in Part Two.

A Brief Note on the State

At the African Studies Association’s annual meetings in 1999, during a panel that presented various perspectives on power and authority in Guinea-Bissau, George Brooks—a noted historian of the region—quipped from the audience that there never was a Portuguese Guinea (“Just a few Portuguese and several thousand Africans”) and “except for a few Camelot years,” there never was a Guinea-Bissau. Although other audience members took exception to the extremity of this view, Brooks’s point was an important one with significant implications for defining one’s unit of analysis when working in Guinea-Bissau. His own work (1976, 1980a, 1980b, 1984, 1985, 1993), for instance, has looked further back in time—tracing social networks, labor migrations, and inter-ethnic marriages from several centuries ago—and has cast a wider net across the regional context of the Upper Guinea Coast. And his insistence on the absence of viable state power in both the colonial and postcolonial context—even though it irked those who were subjects of, or witnesses to, often brutal state authority in both eras—was meant, I believe, to point to the relative absence of state-like structures in Portuguese Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.

To be sure, Portuguese colonialism was a violent endeavor (see Birmingham 2006; Chilcote 1967; Forrest 1992, 2003; Hawthorne 2003; Lobban and Forrest 1988; MacQueen 1997). But compared with neighboring colonial policies and practices of the French and English, and even Portugal's flagship African colonies of Angola and Mozambique, the tentacles of colonial power did not reach as deeply and extensively into Guinean social life as they did in these other regions. The typical constellation of colonial presence through its impact on land, labor and taxation was certainly felt by the local population, but not to the extent that such policies and practices impacted other areas in Africa and beyond. Colonial power was limited, and although it was still a major feature during a significant period of Guinean history, it probably has less to do with what happened in this area than it did in other places.

Guinea-Bissau's colonial history is inextricably intertwined with the Cape Verde Islands. Portuguese activities in this region were headquartered in Cape Verde, which was an important slave depot and port for ships involved in the Atlantic trade (Crowley 1990). The Portuguese established their administrative base on Cape Verde, and "although the Portuguese experimented with a number of different ways to administer the Guinea-Bissau region, for most of the time from its discovery [sic] in 1446 until it acquired an autonomous government in 1879, the area that is now Guinea-Bissau was a dependency of the Cape Verde Islands and seemed to be more of a colony of Cape Verde than of Portugal" (Crowley 1990: 97). Such an infrastructure helps explain the limited control and influence the Portuguese exerted in Guinea-Bissau during this period, especially

since “communications between Cape Verde and its dependency were infrequent. During the entire period of colonial rule only six governors posted in Cape Verde ever visited Guinea” (Crowley 1990: 103-104). It was only with the decline of the slave trade that, in 1879, Portuguese Guinea became an autonomous overseas colony and was administered separately from Cape Verde for the first time, after almost 400 years of Portuguese presence.

Even so, the turning point in Portuguese colonial administration of Guinea-Bissau did not come until 1912-1915, which marked the beginning of effective Portuguese domination and occupation through a series of “pacification” campaigns. This period of colonial occupation ran roughly from 1915-1960. Portuguese Guinea was never a settler colony. The Portuguese effort to subdue the population through its “pacification” campaigns was unevenly felt, focusing primarily on the Bijagós Islands and the coastal regions. There was no massive re-organization of land familiar from neighboring countries, and relatively small attempts to shift agricultural practices. In many parts of the country, the presence of colonial authority was negligible. In Diola-land, Susana was the site of a Portuguese colonial outpost in the 1940s, although the Portuguese were at first rebuffed by Susana residents, and set up in three other villages before forcibly situating themselves in Susana.¹² The Portuguese base in Susana primarily served to receive and train new Portuguese soldiers before they were sent to other parts of the colony.

The War of Liberation, spearheaded by Amílcar Cabral and the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), began in 1963 after a rapid political

mobilization of the rural population.¹³ The independence struggle lasted for eleven and a half years, culminating in official independence in September 1974, shortly after the breakdown of Portugal's fascist government. The prolonged war of independence was, in many ways, the cause of more fundamental disruptions across Guinean societies than the several centuries of colonial presence that preceded it, and it remains the defining event in a generation of Guineans' lives.

State politics and power since independence have been generally unstable. Amílcar Cabral was killed shortly before his long-fought goal was achieved, and his half-brother, Luís Cabral, assumed the first presidency of independent Guinea-Bissau. In 1980 he was overthrown by one of his own generals, João Bernardo Nino Vieira, who occupied the presidential palace for the following 19 years and, for most of this time, maintained a one-party state through his leadership of the once-revolutionary PAIGC. Guinea-Bissau's first multiparty legislative and presidential elections were held in 1994, and Vieira emerged victorious in these as well. But he was deposed in 1999 in a popular 11-month civil war led by his former general Ansumané Mané. The war wrecked the already fragile economy and several years of political instability and rapid economic decline ensued. As a UN report (IRIN August 2003) noted, "After several years of modest growth, Guinea-Bissau's gross domestic product contracted by a massive 28 percent in 1998. It has not recovered since." In 2003, Guinea-Bissau ranked 167th out of 173 in the UN's Human Development Index (HDI). The post-war election of Kumba Yalla to the presidency led to several years of government irregularities, complete bankruptcy of the state's coffers, and a general downward turn in Guineans' trust in

anything related to state politics. Given his increasingly erratic and often embarrassing behavior, as well as mounting tensions across the country, Yalla was forced out of office in a bloodless coup in September 2003. Presidential elections, which were delayed until 2005, returned the exiled Nino Vieira to power.

The postcolonial state has had a more limited role in defining its citizens' social lives compared with many other neighboring states. Joshua Forrest (1992, 2003) has provided a thorough account of Guinea-Bissau's chronic state weakness. Forrest argues that, despite numerous attempts, the post-independence state of Guinea-Bissau has not been able to capture and control rural peasant economy. This is largely because of existing village-level power structures, the resilient and multifaceted peasant mode of production, and unofficial rural trade and migration.

Ironically, the village-level political substructure is a by-product of the anti-colonial struggle, during which the PAIGC formed village committees, comprised of members elected by the villagers. The intended post-independence role of these committees was to act as local, decentralized bases through which the central state government could exert its authority. But the state has never been able to achieve this level of coordination, primarily because of lack of necessary institutional capacity. Villages have thus remained "under the leadership of locally selected or traditional authorities" (Forrest 1998: 3).

Decisions concerning conflict resolution, distribution of common surpluses and, most importantly, land usage continue to be made by these [local] authorities according to particular local custom.... It is the local authorities or individual peasant families—rather than state officials—who wield power at the village level and who make the critical decisions concerning the control and use of village land independent of the village bureaucracy.... On the whole, then, village committees have not served as institutional linkages between state and peasant allowing for government penetration of the rural political arena, but rather as village-level bulwarks against state penetration, enabling local leaders to preserve their hold on micro-level power structures (Forrest 1998: 3-4).

The role of the state in contemporary Guinea-Bissau is uneven throughout the country, and in many parts of the interior there is, for better or for worse, very little state presence. In Diola-land, state authorities rarely intrude on the daily lives of villagers. There are no taxes to be collected, as Nino Vieira abolished all taxes in his bid to secure the presidency in 1994. During my fieldwork, the only representatives of the state in Diola land were the overworked state-appointed nurse and a state administrator with little or nothing to do. Corroborating Forrest's argument, most conflicts are solved through local channels and adjudication at spirit shrines, and most would-be state services—such as public

schooling and other public works (building roads, providing water, etc.)—simply do not exist. Although there is a public elementary school serving Diola and Baiote villages in this region the bankrupt government has been unable to pay the teachers for many years, and during the course of my fieldwork schools were more often than not closed as teachers continued to strike in an attempt to receive their long-overdue salary arrears. The Catholic Mission in Susana played a much bigger role in financing public needs—including teachers' salaries—than the state. With the exception of a few military personnel, most residents in northwestern Guinea-Bissau did not factor the state into much of their thinking, planning, decision-making, or even anxieties. State authorities, policies, and politics simply were not dominant features in Guinean Diola lives in the last several years. It is for these reasons that, with the exception of Part Three (on the Diola-Fula conflict), discussions about the state do not appear very much in this ethnography. Although the current anthropological fascination with the state often requires contemporary ethnographies to place the state as *the* (or at least *a*) dominant player in people's lives, in Guinea-Bissau's case—or at least in Diola-land—such a rendering would not be accurate. To highlight the state just because it is currently theoretically fashionable in anthropological circles would be to misrepresent the texture and quality of contemporary Diola lives in Guinea-Bissau.

Rice in Diola Social Life

They have undertaken great works to render [their land] fertile, and they have become one of the wealthiest peoples in Africa (Bertrand-Bocandé 1849: 90).

Rice is the symbol of ethnicity, of continuity, of all that is traditionally Diola... Rice keeps men tied to the land, village-bound, and wholeheartedly peasant (Linares 1970: 223).

Our money is rice (Diola villager, 2002).

Diola villagers have long been recognized for their capacity to grow rice (Almada 1594; Baum 1999; Coelho 1669; Lauer 1969; Linares 1970, 1981, 1992; Mark 1985; Pélissier 1966; Thomas 1959, 1963). The species of rice that Diola cultivate—*Oryza glaberrima*—is indigenous to Africa and developed independently from the Asian varieties of *Oryza sativa* and *Oryza indica*. (See Carney 2001; Fields 2001; Hawthorne 2003; and Linares 2002 for discussions on African indigenous rice.) *Oryza glaberrima* has a heartier and nuttier flavor than the Asian varieties, and only it—and not imported

white rice—can be used for ceremonies and ritual purposes. Diola refer to imported rice as “sack rice” or “store rice.” Most imported rice in Guinea-Bissau currently comes from Vietnam and China.

The activities that comprise Diola rice cultivation—as well as those of neighboring populations along the Upper Guinea coast—have been thoroughly and richly described by most scholars and observers of their social life (Almada 1594; Baum 1999; Brooks 1993; Coelho 1669; Crowley 1990; Dinis 1946; Gable 1997; Hawthorne 2003; Linares 1970, 1981, 1985, 1992; Lopes de Lima 1836; Mark 1985; Pélissier 1966; Taborda 1950a; Thomas 1959, 1963). In fact, the preoccupation with repeatedly cataloging, in such meticulous detail, Diola agricultural practices is a reflection of the dominance with which these tasks define Diola lived experience.

Nonetheless, it bears repeating just how strenuous this mode of production is. The tasks involved in carving out paddies, erecting and constantly repairing dikes, lifting heavy soil with the *budjandabu* to create the paddy’s mounds, and then planting, transplanting, fertilizing, and finally harvesting rice all require rigorous physical exertion, diligence, and constant taxing work. Although work increases in intensity during the rainy season, rice cultivation is a year-round endeavor and most days involve some activity related to growing or processing rice, especially for women.

The majority of agricultural work is performed by conjugal families in their forest groves (*butat*) and paddies (*butonda*) in a mutually interdependent gendered division of labor. A

married man and his unmarried sons are responsible for preparing the butonda for rice planting, and a married woman and her unmarried daughters are responsible for transplanting rice seedlings and harvesting ripe rice. But there are certain moments in the agricultural cycle when household labor is not sufficient. Although there is an informal exchange of kinship-based reciprocal labor—for instance, a married man might help his married brothers in their butonda in exchange for the same service—this, too, does not adequately meet labor demands at the most intensive moments of rice production.

Such needs are met through neighborhood-based, gender exclusive work associations.¹⁴ Work associations can be contracted by a conjugal household for certain agricultural tasks that require more hands within in tight timeframe; men's groups are typically contracted for hoeing (*ewañai*) and women's groups for transplanting rice seedlings (*borokabu*) and harvesting (*edjalai*). Given virilocality, female work groups within each neighborhood are divided between those comprised of affines and those comprised of agnates. Work associations can be contracted by anyone, including those outside their neighborhood, and have a fixed rate that they charge for a day's labor, whether the task takes an hour or a full day.¹⁵ This rate is based on the number of members of the group. In Guinea-Bissau in 2002 it ranged from 5000-7500 CFA (approximately US\$7-11) per day for men; for women, it averaged half that amount.¹⁶ I elaborate upon the roles of work associations in subsequent chapters.

Diola paddy cultivation practices are meant to produce a crop that has multiple valences for Diola. As the above epigrams indicate, it is impossible to exaggerate the all-

important presence of rice among Diola. It is a cliché that among Diola (as among most cultural groups in this region) one has not eaten if one has not eaten rice. More than mere food, rice textures Diola lives in many ways; it is connected to status, social relations, and ritual activities. Newborns are given overcooked and chewed rice to eat (despite various attempts by outside health workers to stop this practice) commencing the intimate and embodied link between a Diola person and rice from the very beginning of one's life. At funerals every in-married woman from the dead person's lineage brings a cup of pounded rice and pours it on the corpse after he or she is positioned on the stretcher for the corpse inquisition. Then they throw a small bouquet of un-milled rice next to the corpse. When the dead person is reincarnated in another lineage or neighborhood, Diola believe that he or she should always take some rice seeds from his previous lineage. Rice thus connects lineages across space and time.

Ethnographers of Senegalese Diola have continually emphasized the importance of rice in Diola social and cosmological orientations. Linares suggests that because rice is “embedded in networks of traditional prestations and ritual obligations... [t]his insures that old practices surrounding [its] production may well remain unchanged, or even become reinforced” (Linares 1985: 83). Likewise, Baum notes that

Rice farming... shaped the way that all other economic activities were organized... Rice, as represented by a full granary, protected a family against physical, economic, and spiritual hardship... Rice was seen as part of a covenant

between Emitai [the Diola supreme deity] and a people, a covenant based on the Diola's hard work in cultivating the crop and Emitai's responsibility to send them rain to nourish it. Francis Snyder collected a Diola-Bandial proverb that illustrated this task: 'The Diola was created in order that he farm [rice].' Rice was seen as having a life force within it, similar to the souls of people and animals (Baum 1999: 28).

Simply put, rice is omnipresent in Diola economic, social, and symbolic life. It is the center of social gossip, and people regularly discuss whose supply is abundant and whose is depleted. Rice is the medium of exchange during life-cycle redistributive processes, such as weddings, funerals, and initiations. And rice is the ticket to ritual power, as spirit shine ceremonies require abundant expenditures of one's crop.

Decline in Rain and Rice

In the past, you would eat rice from the paddy and still have plenty left over at the end of the year. Now, the rain does not come, and our rice does not last (Elder Diola man, 2002).

If not for sack rice, we would have died already. Now is not like before, when the rain was good (Diola woman, 2002).

Diola villagers regularly invoke a recent past during which their mode of production yielded an abundance of surplus paddy rice, often stored for decades and used in great quantities for ceremonial purposes. As Abayam pointed out in the opening anecdote of this dissertation, “My grandparents never would have eaten—let alone depended so fully upon—‘sack rice.’” The decrease in rice stores has already had significant consequences for Diola ritual activities. As noted above, most shrine ceremonies require copious paddy rice expenditures—“sack rice,” even if it could be purchased in sufficient quantities, would not be acceptable in most ritual contexts. During my fieldwork two inter-village wrestling matches were canceled because of insufficient rice for the attendant ceremonies.¹⁷ Similarly, the previously elaborate rites during which adepts at various spirit-shrines are inducted as priests had taken on a compromised quality. Late in my fieldwork, a small procession of adepts from the spirit-shrine *Amumau* danced through the village’s main street as I sat chatting to some men in a rice shop. As the freshly shaven adepts jostled by one of the men with whom I was sitting commented, “It used to be a big deal, this business, when it rained more. A big affair, lots of rice. But now, it’s like nothing. No one has rice anymore.”

Beyond its impact on ritual life, diminishing crop yields has led to increased anxiety around sustenance. Based on a household survey I conducted in 2002, for the past

decade paddy rice lasts an average of three months. Some households with more paddy or fewer mouths to feed can live off paddy rice for up to eight months. But not a single household was able to say that paddy rice carries them through the full year.

The very Diola agricultural practices that have made them so successful in centuries past, and have struck visitors to the region such as Bertrand-Bocandé as so impressive, leave them vulnerable in changing climactic conditions. As Linares explains,

In coastal villages... impressive dikes with sluices and ducts control the water of the *marigots* in and out of the more exposed ricefields. If the rains are sufficient, the salty waters will be pushed downstream during the rainy season; but if the rains are insufficient, salts will accumulate in the ricefields, with disastrous consequences for the rice crop. This is essentially what is happening as a result of the Sahelian drought of 1968-73 onwards... Since the Diola ... do not regulate to any appreciable extent the flow of water in and out of their fields, they are at the mercy of the rains, and of the drying sun, for appropriate moisture levels to perform the cultivating, transplanting, and harvesting in a group of fields (Linares 1981: 560, 567).

There is, of course, a long history of food insecurities in this region due to shifting and unpredictable environmental conditions—most infamously the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s—as well as social and political upheaval (Carney and Watts 1991; Chazan and Shaw 1988; Cohen 1988; Commins, et al. 1986; Franke and Chasin 1980; Glantz 1987; Linares 1985). Much scholarship on the transformation in agrarian work regimes along the Upper Guinea Coast (and elsewhere in Africa) has explored the ways in which shifts in the mode of production during the late colonial and early postcolonial era—through the introduction of new crops and/or technologies, the intensifying pressures on land, and the need to respond to increased commercialization—have significantly transformed social relations, especially gender roles, within cultural groups in this region (Berry 1984, 1989; Carney and Watts 1991; Guyer 1978, 1983; Linares 1981, 1985; Weil 1973). This literature helps contextualize contemporary problems in Diola-land within a longer history of shifting structures and demands on agrarian populations in the region, and across the continent.

There is, however, a growing consensus that the impact, intensity, and most importantly, *confluence* of the particular changes of the past thirty years present especially dramatic challenges to people residing along the Upper Guinea coast. Increasing international concern over the effects of global climate change in Africa, particularly in the lead-up to and aftermath of the November 2006 UN conference on climate change in Nairobi, has focused on the unfortunate irony that even though Africa produces a disproportionately small percentage of the world's greenhouse gases, the continent and its people will bear the brunt of the problems caused by these climate changing substances. Across the

continent droughts are increasing and crop yields are decreasing. As one observer summed it up, “Despite progress in boosting democracy, ending wars, and economic growth, Africa is the only region in the world becoming less and less able to feed itself” (McLaughlin and Purefoy 2005).

On one of my first visits to Guinea-Bissau, in 1999, I heard people talking about the country’s membership in the Permanent Inter-state Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). I thought they were joking. A casual observer (as I was during my preliminary fieldtrips) could only be impressed by Guinea-Bissau’s wetness—much of the country is literally under water for part of every year and roads are regularly washed out during the rainy season. But the same patterns of drought and desertification that have been affecting Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, and Chad for decades are now being felt in Guinea-Bissau. Guineans certainly recognize these changes; even the lush southern “rice-bowl region” of the country suffered food shortages in 2006 because of lack of rain (IRIN 2006). Scholars in Guinea-Bissau have begun to explore the impact of these pressures on agrarian societies around the country. Temudo and Schiefer, for example, note that

While mangrove cultivation still allows the production of a marketable surplus, today rain-fed production is in crisis.

The Cubucaré [southern] region still produces surplus rice.

But while many producers sell their surplus outside the region, more and more families inside the region fail to

meet their yearly requirements in rice from their own production.... Contrary to the ritual invocations of success by development ideologists, the agrarian societies have been sliding downwards on a negative spiral since the beginning of the 1960s (Temudo and Schiefer 2003: 401).

Likewise, in the country's northwest, environmental changes are already being felt by villagers who depend upon abundant rain to desalinate and irrigate their rice paddies. Every day, villagers in Diola-land complain about how much they are suffering because of the decline in rain and rice. Diola residents regularly articulate their predicament in clear terms, and are fully aware that it is no longer tenable to grow rice as a subsistence crop given these ecological transformations.

Unlike many others in Guinea-Bissau, Diola have resisted adopting cashew farming as a replacement—or even a large scale supplement—to rice farming. The transformed landscape in the rest of the country—grove after grove of cashew trees and, for several months of the year, jerry-can after jerry-can of cashew wine—is notably absent in the Diola and Baiote villages that dot the dirt road between São Domingos and Varela. This is partly because Diola view cashew farming as “lazy work,” since growing cashews is much less physically demanding than growing rice.¹⁸ To be sure, some Diola residents in this area have planted small plots of cashew trees. But the primary preoccupation in Diola-land still resides in the rice paddies. Diola men, women, and increasingly children

spend most of their time engaged in the arduous activities that comprise wet rice cultivation, but with ever-less rice to show for their efforts.

Berry's (1989, 1993) important work on agrarian change in Africa provides useful insights into some Diola behavior in the face of these challenges. Explaining how rural Africans coped with declining economic security in the context of 1970s and 1980s droughts, Berry demonstrates that poor farmers employed strategies to increase their "liquidity and flexibility" (Berry 1989: 10). This includes continuing expenditures—"on ceremonies, bridewealth payments, construction of family houses, or the education of close and distant kin"—that enabled them to maintain or strengthen their membership in social networks as means of access, as well as reducing the "scale and time horizon of social units engaged directly in production" (Berry 1989: 15-16). I agree with Berry that poor farmers' seeming adversity to risk is not a reflection of their inherently conservative attitude, and has much more to do with their poverty and limited access to the resources needed to take advantages of new opportunities. And her diagnosis that there is a "growing discrepancy between the organization and objectives of current cultivation, and the management of investment out of agricultural income" certainly resonates in contemporary Diola-land (Berry 1989: 18). However, the coping strategies Berry describes only partially—and very partially—help explain Diola responses to their current circumstances. In Chapters Three and Four, I explore other arenas—such as an adherence to a particular work regime and the impact of certain patterns of information flow—that I believe are equally, if not more, important for understanding how Diola villagers are "coping with confusion" (Berry 1989).

The following chapters thus explore how the tension between the central importance of rice in Diola society and its increasing scarcity are intensifying contestations over customs, power, and identity. As Linares observed regarding Senegalese efforts to engage Casamance Diola in agricultural technological change as early as 1970,

Obviously, their rice yields could be increased with modern technology. Mechanized cultivation, at present, is out of the question because paddy fields are far too small and have levees and furrows. To eliminate paddy boundaries and consolidate fields would be very difficult, since holdings are scattered. *For the government or anyone else to force changes on one of the most complex and fundamental aspects of Diola culture would be to invite total mistrust and complete disruption* (Linares 1970: 225, emphasis added).

The same holds true for Guinean Diola more than 30 years later. But, although I agree with the sentiment behind Linares's subsequent assertion that "these changes must come from within a society in response to new needs and new demands" (Linares 1970: 226), I am less confident that such a process will simply unfold, and I not comfortable with the seemingly simple distinction between "external" and "internal" forces of change. The remaining chapters in Part One of the dissertation unpack this criticism by exploring

some of the reasons why Diola are more likely to maintain their current practices, even when they experience ever-worsening conditions as a result.

Understanding Conflict and Change:

Embeddedness, the New Political Ecology, and Emancipation

This study builds on scholarship that—in the context of continued dominance of neoclassical economic models to understand and frame academic and policy debates on poverty and social change in Africa and other parts of the “developing” world—insists culture and power must be taken as seriously as, and on equal footing with, questions of material resources (see Berry 1993). Amidst the sustained primacy of exclusively economic orientations to analyses of poverty and social transformation (see, for e.g., Collier 2007; Easterly 2006; Sachs 2005), there is, I believe, an increased need for analyses that can demonstrate the embeddedness of economic activity—production, consumption, and exchange—in social, religious, and political processes at even the most local levels, and that try to grapple with this multidimensionality rather than exclude or diminish questions of culture and power. Following Berry (1993), who rejects the general orientations of both neoclassical and Marxist approaches to economic and social change, I also assume that “culture, power, and material resources are of equal importance, acting in mutually constitutive ways to shape the course of economic and social change” (Berry 1993: 13). Berry argues that

...the implicit adherence of economists and policy analysts
to structuralist concepts of rural societies and institutions—

while understandable in terms of their interest in quantitative analysis—has also limited their ability to describe and explain processes of agrarian change. Generalizations about agricultural practices and performance in Africa are problematic not only because reliable quantitative evidence is scarce, but also because the data available rest on misleading or overly restrictive assumptions about the social organizations of rural economic activity. Farming-systems researchers emphasize the importance of studying production and exchange in specific social contexts, but usually do so on the assumption that African societies are composed of stable institutions which perform various functions in consistent ways. However, if economic activity is embedded in multidimensional social processes, questions raised by historians and anthropologists about the fluidity and ambiguity of African cultures are also relevant to the study of economic processes in Africa. In particular, there is no reason to assume that farms, economic ‘decision-making units,’ and farming systems are any less fluid than other African social institutions (Berry 1993: 6).

I take as a given that Diola social institutions are dynamic, as is the very concept of what it means to be Diola. And I try to sort out how contemporary Diola villagers in Guinea-Bissau are defining and re-defining these very institutions and identities, remaining attentive to the ways in which Diola are drawing from past and present experiences that have shaped their “concepts and categories” (Berlin 1979), and continue to guide the ways they cope with current challenging circumstances.

Moreover, through the detailed, monographic account of contemporary Diola experiences, I hope to counter a resurgent trend in academic and practitioner circles that oversimplifies linkages between environmental crisis and (especially ethnic) conflict. The reappearance of Malthusian assumptions in increasingly popular conceptions of “environmental security” tend to smuggle in inappropriate and inaccurate theories of causation (e.g. resource depletion leads inexorably to violence) that ultimately impoverish our ability to understand the complex dynamics of social change and continuity in diverse ecological contexts. This dissertation analyses how a given population is responding to changing circumstances on environmental, economic, religious, and political fronts. Following Peluso and Watts (2001), I see conflict and violence “as a site-specific phenomenon rooted in local histories and social relations yet connected to larger processes of material transformation and power relations” (Peluso and Watts 2001: 5). This orientation is especially clear in Part Three, when I consider the conflict between Diola and Fula residents in Susana, but it is also evident throughout the dissertation, especially when the notion of violence is understood in “physical, symbolic, cultural, and emotional terms” (Peluso and Watts 2001: 26) and includes “the destruction

of home and humanity, of hope and future, of valued traditions and the integrity of community” (Nordstrom 1997: 123).

I want to be especially clear that, although I emphasize the ecological dimensions of social transformations (particularly in Part One), I am not suggesting a direct causal link between environmental change and conflict. As the following chapters demonstrate, there is no simple, deterministic relationship between shifts in the environmental conditions in northwestern Guinea-Bissau and transformations in Diola social life, and even less so between environmental scarcity and conflict.

Like Peluso and Watts (2001) I “reject automatic, simplistic linkages between ‘increased environmental scarcity,’ ‘decreased economic activity,’ and ‘migration’ that purportedly ‘weaken states’ and cause ‘conflicts and violence’” and draw inspiration from their influential edited volume, which provides “both a critique of the school of environmental security and alternative ways of understanding the connections between environment and violence” (Peluso and Watts 2001: 5). Peluso and Watts identify the central problem with the Environmental Security (ES) literature as its

Presumption of an ineluctable connection between environmental degradation, population growth, alleged resource scarcity, and the proliferation of ‘small wars’ that haunt the post-Cold War planet... Current iterations of ‘environmental security’ and ‘Greenwar’ suffer, in our

view, from both the historical failings of Malthusian thinking and an untenable theory of political economy and political action (Peluso and Watts 2001: 7).

Specifically, Homer-Dixon (1999) and Baechler (1998), as the foremost proponents of ES, have “outmoded views of culture as shared beliefs and rules of social interaction, and an always monolithic set of unspecified ‘power relations.’ The net effect is that the process by which violence occurs is always hidden...” (Peluso and Watts 2001: 23). They offer an alternative approach, framed as the “new” political ecology, that

Provide[s] accounts of the ways in which specific environments, environmental processes, and webs of social relations are central parts of the ways violence is expressed and made expressive... The starting point is not a presumed scarcity or precursor ideational factor but the relations between users and nature. This is a reciprocal relationship between nature and humans—humans are naturalized and nature is humanized—in which labor is active, transformative, and social (Peluso and Watts 2001: 25, 27).

Finally, like Peluso and Watts, I strive to be “especially attentive to the simultaneity of symbolic and material struggles over environmental resources and their articulations with

sedimented histories of violence that shape landscapes and livelihoods” (Peluso and Watts 2001: 30).

In this way, my analyses rest—and hopefully build—on the conceptual and methodological foundations of early British cultural studies. In the most general sense, like Williams (1977) and Thompson (1993)—as well as numerous other historians and anthropologists—I understand culture to be a site of struggle over meanings, identity, valuation, tradition, and innovation. Perhaps more particular to these authors, and more pertinent to this study, I try to understand culture as a form through which both resistance and hegemony occur. Below, I sketch some of the insights from both Thompson’s and Williams’s approaches to social change—most eloquently and cogently articulated in Thompson’s “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century” and selections from Williams’s *Marxism and Literature*—that I have found especially useful in grappling with questions about Diola behavior. These approaches infuse much of this dissertation, sometimes explicitly but often more implicitly in the framework and texture of several chapters.

Thompson’s (1993a) analysis of 18th century English bread riots emphasizes four fundamental conceptual and methodological points that I take to be vital for understanding social change and continuity among contemporary Diola. First, as he describes in painstaking detail, violent resistance to changing practices such as using the Winchester measure and “setting the price” expose that even the most seemingly mundane customs have high symbolic content, moral valence, and (importantly for Diola,

as I will explore in Chapter Three) a performative quality. Thompson thus elucidates the tenacity of custom, even in a climate of anxiety and fear. He shows how “the rioting masses” were not just reacting “spasmodically” to external forces, but were self-consciously responding within the framework of their moral economy and the context of their established nexus of reciprocal relations (see Thompson 1993a: 185-258).

Second, and in a similar vein, Thompson’s essay is an exercise in a certain kind of imagination. He reminds us that

It is difficult to re-imagine the moral assumptions of another social configuration. It is not easy for us to conceive that there may have been a time... when it appeared to be ‘unnatural’ that any man should profit from the necessities of others, and when it was assumed that, in time of dearth, prices of ‘necessities’ should remain at a customary level, even though there might be less all around (Thompson 1993a: 252-253).

The particular content of this pre-capitalist moral assumption is less important than the effort to imagine it, and, just as I earlier invoked Mauss on a similar point, much of my analysis in the following pages is directed toward this end (see, also, p. 10 of Prologue). Third, Thompson’s essay demonstrates the inextricability of various domains of social life—economy, morality, culture, and politics are all intertwined with one another and

none is given privileged status over the others. As outlined in the Prologue, my dissertation takes that inextricability as integral to its narrative and expository framework. Scaffolded by stories about particular events, relational analyses of the economic, environmental, political, religious, personal, and historical dimensions of Diola social life are interwoven into each chapter.

Finally, Thompson provides a means to explain structural transformation at the level of attitudes, assumptions, and the actor him/herself.¹⁹ As the bread riots in 18th century England eventually waned, Thompson argues that structural transformations in the market economy, by challenging the core assumptions and customary values of the English masses, also entailed a change in subjectivity (see also Thompson 1993b). A different kind of person—or, as Raymond Williams would have it, a new “structure of feeling”—emerged (Williams 1977). One of the key questions driving my research and analysis concerns exactly this kind of change in Diola society. What notion of personhood is being simultaneously reinforced and challenged as Diola respond to the structural transformations underway in Guinea-Bissau? And what might emerge as new ways of being Diola?

Williams’s chief purpose in *Marxism and Literature* is to find (or, when necessary, invent) the terms and tools to define the present as a moving target, and in this way develop a more nuanced understanding of social change than previously available through a strictly Marxist approach. He does so through a series of carefully delineated

words, some of which I will review here as they become important windows through which to view Diola social change later in the dissertation.

Much of Williams's appreciation of hegemony as "an active process" (Williams 1977: 155) rests on the concept of selective tradition as

an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of a social and cultural definition and identification... From a whole possible area of past and present... certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded... It is a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present. What it offers in practice is a sense of *predisposed continuity*" (Williams 1977: 155-116, emphasis in original).

Importantly, selective tradition is both "powerful and vulnerable" (Williams 1977: 116). It is powerful because those who invoke or operate under selective traditions dismiss elements they do not want, but are vulnerable because the "real record is effectively recoverable" and there are always alternatives lurking about. Selective traditions are expressed as *dominant* social formations—the "ruling definition of the social,"—but Williams is quick to remind us that "*no mode of production and therefore no dominant*

social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention” (Williams 1977: 125, emphasis in original). Dominant formations (for Williams these are generally cast in major historical epochs such as feudalism or early capitalism, but they can also be considered spatially across cultures) vary in the degree to which they penetrate lived experience. Another question that guides my exploration of dominant Diola social forms is how—and how far—these reach into the institutions, practices, and quotidian experiences of Diola lives.

Two other key words drawn from Williams’s analysis are *residual* and *emergent*. A residual element “has been formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (Williams 1977: 122). The emergent includes “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created” (Williams 1977: 124).²⁰ I try to identify which Diola practices might be considered dominant, residual, and emergent. But in doing so, I have found that these categories can easily slide into each other. Williams recognizes this, although he stresses that the balance, visibility, and recognition of each varies in different circumstances and historical moments. What I try to pinpoint in each chapter is one particular configuration of this combination “in solution” (Williams 1977: 134).

By exploring how Diola burial practices manifest ideas about individuality and collectivity, by elucidating attitudes and practices around work, and by charting the circulation (or circumscription) of certain kinds of knowledge, I draw out the pattern of

relationships among traditions, institutions and formations—ordered in a certain powered way—in rural Diola society. While emphasizing its seeming coherence, I also try to identify the conflictual and contradictory elements in this pattern, and the “dynamic interrelations” among these social forms (Williams 1977: 121). My analytic approach is directed toward elucidating the current “structure of feeling” among Diola as “a specific structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and, what are often its most recognizable forms, particular deep starting-points and conclusions” (Williams 1977: 134). Part One, in particular, is concerned with questions of stability and continuity, with “displacement” in Williams’s lexicon; that is, how emergent categories shift away from the conditions of their emergence.

Finally, both Williams and Thompson use theory in the service of an emancipatory project. Simply put, they understand change as not only inevitable but potentially beneficial, and they are committed to improving the way we understand how it happens. This same sentiment ultimately undergirds my own approach to questions of social change and continuity as I seek both creative and constructive ways to articulate theoretical understandings of these processes with practical efforts to engage with people involved in improving their own societies, without compromising the integrity of either of these two broad preoccupations whose practitioners more often than not talk across—rather than with—each other.

Chapter Two

Wombs and Tombs: An Example of Social Reproduction in the Ritual Realm

On my second day of fieldwork in Susana AmpaDjeluo—an old man known for his ability to cure eye problems with plant medicines and spirit shine ceremonies—died. News spread around the village in the evening, and the following day I attended my first Diola funeral. Funerals are held in a *hukulahu*—a circular clearing, shaded by large cottonwood trees. Every one of Susana’s five lineage-based neighborhoods has its own *hukulahu*, in which major ceremonies and meetings take place, but the most frequent use of a *hukulahu* is for funerals. The corpse is dressed in his or her finest clothing and seated on a stilted platform temporarily erected in the center of the clearing. At AmpaDjeluo’s funeral I spent the day in the *hukulahu*, witnessing with utter incomprehension the dancing, singing, and other performative displays around the corpse. What struck me most was how public the event was; at various points during the day, and especially in the late afternoon, almost everyone in the village—young and old, men and women—seemed to be packed into the clearing.

It turned out that funerals would become one of my most frequent experiences throughout fieldwork; there was rarely a consecutive two-week period during which I did not attend at least one, and often a few, funerals in Susana, and I eventually came to understand most of things that bewildered me at AmpaDjeluo’s funeral. But it was not until a few months into fieldwork—and many funerals later—that I realized that I had never seen a burial, nor heard much about how burials are conducted. Unlike the funeral itself—

which is open, public, and participatory—burials are closed, secretive, and strictly exclusive affairs. And while I attended and eventually participated in scores of funerals, I never witnessed a traditional burial. My information about burial is thus one of the only areas of ethnographic inquiry that I was unable to verify through personal observation. Nonetheless, two of my closest companions and most trusted informants happened to be “burial specialists,” and through them I was able to learn much of what I present here.

This chapter explores Diola burial practice as a symbolic form of social reproduction. I focus on three facets of Diola burial: the physical characteristics of graves and cemeteries, the processual aspects of interment and disinterment, and the attributes of lineage-based burial specialists—*batolhabu* (sing. *atolhau*). *Batolhabu* are men who perform all of the work involved in preparing a gravesite, burying a corpse, and maintaining a cemetery.

Like a *hukulahu*, each neighborhood in a village has its own cemetery. The cemetery is unmarked, left to grow wild, and—other than *batolhabu*—people are not permitted to enter cemeteries. In Susana, neighborhood cemeteries have remained in the same place for centuries. Only Nhakun has moved their cemetery from what is now the secular administrative center of Susana when this area began to be populated by colonial authorities, Portuguese troops, and merchants. Men are buried in their natal neighborhoods, and women in their in-married neighborhoods, although a woman’s funeral and burial can sometimes be a source of dispute, especially if her husband has already died, with her natal and virilocal neighborhoods competing in their claims over

her. The only exceptions to neighborhood-based cemetery burials are children, who are most often buried in their parent's yard or under their veranda, and *ai-ì*, whose burials are even more secret.²¹

A corpse is dressed for burial using the many cloths that have been donated, formerly just by kin, now also by age-mates and friends. *Batolhabu* generally prepare the corpse, although non-*batolhabu* may do so if they have developed a specialty in corpse dressing. First, the body is wrapped in a couple of cloths. Then a large cloth—preferably a *kaholaku* (pl. *uholau*), which is heavier than the typical cloth found in West Africa today—is used as a full body covering. The corpse is sewn into the *kaholaku* with only his or her face exposed. The *kaholaku* is tucked around the head, covering the ears, and then sewn from the chin down to the ankles, where it is tied around the soles of the feet. The legs are extended and wrapped firmly into the *kaholaku*. The only part of the body that remains loose and flexible are the arms, which need to be manipulated during burial. But the arms are still covered in long sleeves made from the *kaholaku*. Cloths are used according to their quantity—depending on the possibilities of the extended family members who offer cloths for the burial, a corpse may be buried with six cloths or fifty cloths. Any kind of cloth can be used, as long as it is not red.

A Diola grave is comprised of three levels. The first level is a shallow square, in the center of which the *batolhabu* dig a round tunnel, as if for a well, just wide enough for the corpse to fit through. Once this tunnel reaches the height that if someone stands in it, their head sticks out into the upper square, but not into level ground, then the *batolhabu*

start digging a larger chamber, generally constructed as a round room. The digging is collaborative, as the ground is hard at this depth and the work is tiring. In this inner chamber, care is taken to make the walls smooth, as if plastered with cement. The tomb's walls are made finer and smoother than most people's homes.

Once the grave is dug, one *atolhau* enters the inner chamber, and the others hand down the corpse, whose body is manipulated through the tunnel. The *atolhau* then lays the corpse on his or her side with the head facing east. If there are spare cloths, the *atolhau* will spread them out on the floor and lay the corpse on top. One hand is placed under the right cheek and the other hand is placed between the thighs. Once the corpse is arranged the *atolhau* leaves the chamber through the tunnel. He then works with the other *batolhabu* to cover the grave with logs, cover the logs with thatch, and only then cover the thatch with dirt. *Batolhabu* emphasize that, because of their careful roofing procedures, dirt will never touch the corpse as it decomposes in the inner chamber.

Batolhabu—and only *batolhabu*—can attend and participate in a burial in any neighborhood.²² If anyone else—any woman or any non-*atolhau* man—witnesses a burial, he or she risks blindness. As one of my friends, who is one of the more popular carriers for corpse inquisitions, explained to me:

When we finish a corpse inquisition (*kasaabaku*), we must deposit the corpse amongst the *batolhabu* and then leave. We cannot watch the burial proceedings. If you choose to

drink the wine at the post-burial ceremony, you may. But you cannot peek into the burial site. The spirit will catch you and your eyes will have problems. Your eyes will always bother you.

Graves are not marked, nor are they visited. Recently, *batolhabu* who have received some schooling have started to mark each new grave with a sign on which they write the buried person's name and the year of death.²³ The main reason that people are interested in keeping such records is for the process of disinterment, so that *batolhabu* can keep track of how long a corpse has been buried and determine whether the body has fully decomposed and the grave is ready for re-use. If a grave is opened and the *atolhau* finds that the corpse has not fully decomposed, it is left undisturbed and another site is disinterred. Once a corpse that has fully decomposed is disinterred, its bones are removed and put in a separate ossuary in the same cemetery, where all of the exhumed bones from that cemetery reside permanently.²⁴

Unlike Hertz's (1907) famous discussion of second burials, the Diola practice of disinterment is not linked to the mourning state of the deceased's kin. Given the secret and secluded character of burial practices, only *batolhabu* know when a re-burial of a decomposed body takes place, and this act is not ceremonially accompanied by family members whose official mourning may have already ceased.²⁵ But unmarked graves, the use of a collective ossuary, and the re-use of gravesites do signify the absence (at least after the public funeral) of an individualized approach to death, and in this way echo

Hertz's attention to burial practices as moments of social reintegration. "Human bones... contain the germ of a future existence, and must therefore be treasured as security for the continued existence of the group. The ossuary... [is] a reservoir of souls from which descendants will issue" (Hertz 1907: 70).

Diola, and especially *batolhabu*, often emphasize their careful and respectful treatment of corpses. Nothing can be taken away from a corpse—the head cannot be shaved, the body must remain intact, and cremation is anathema to Diola sensibilities. Diola believe that their supreme deity (*Emitai*) creates people out of dirt and mud, and this is why proper burial is so important. As one man explained:

Everyone who dies must be buried. You cannot burn a corpse. When we hear that other 'tribes' burn their dead, we gasp. For us, this is not the right way to treat the dead. People are buried because their flesh turns to dirt, and that dirt becomes the next person that *Emitai* makes.

But the connection between burial and birth goes much deeper. The physical features of Diola graves, as well as the method of burial, evoke a reverse birthing process. The grave's shape—an upper chamber, a narrow tunnel, and a deeper cavity—all mimic a woman's body: her surface, her birth canal, and her womb. Corpses are laid in a way that resembles a fetal position. Diola burial practices suggest a symbolic return to the womb, as a preparation for reincarnation and an affirmation of the ceaseless circular relation

between birth and death. Of course, this is nothing new. Perhaps more ink has been spilt on the significance of fertility symbols and rebirth in funeral rituals than on any other aspect of mortuary practice (see, for e.g., Bachofen 1967; Bloch and Parry 1982; Evans-Pritchard 1948; Frazer 1890; Hertz 1907; Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Raglan 1945; Van Gennep 1909). As Bloch and Parry note in the introduction to their edited volume, “The observation that notions of fertility and sexuality often have a considerable prominence in funeral practices excited the attention of anthropologists ... from the very beginning of the discipline” (Bloch and Parry 1982: 1). While anthropologists have been able to generalize that people deny the finality of death by “proclaiming it a new beginning,” this apparently widespread tenet is still a wellspring of ethnographic insight because of the diversity of ways in which it is enacted. My analysis of Diola burial practices follows Bloch and Parry’s effort to merge what they identify as “two rather disparate traditions” in the anthropological literature on mortuary ritual (Bloch and Parry 1982: 6). That is, concerns with the cultural logic of fertility symbolism will be considered in tandem with Diola social organization.

Like the Merina described by Bloch (1982), Diola can be described, for the most part, as fitting Weber’s category of “traditional authority.” That is, authority figures are not “makers of their own superiority, but... caretakers of a well-organised world... Power is legitimated as being a matter of caretaking of an eternal and unchanging order” (Bloch 1982: 223-227). In such systems, individuality is an obstacle and a challenge to power and it has to be elaborately negated. This entails a kind of permanent victory over individuals. As Bloch explains:

This victory is necessary because both birth and death imply discontinuity and individuality, things which of their nature are a challenge to the permanent representation of a society based on traditional authority where people are mere caretakers of eternal positions... in all societies where authority is linked to an ideal, unchanging order the funerary rituals have in one way or another to overcome the individuality of a particular corpse and in particular the fact of its individual death which also implies the fact of its individual birth. This is because both death and birth negate the notion of eternal unchangingness (Bloch 1982: 223-224).

The erasure of individual identity upon burial—as manifested in the corpse wrapped in burial cloths, the absence of grave marking, the re-use of gravesites, and the ultimate grouping of all bones in one collective grave—represents such a victory. The disruptive intrusion of death is negated in Diola burial practices by reaffirming “the eternal order where birth and death are overcome by representing them as the same thing and where therefore everything is fixed forever and ever.” (Bloch 1982: 224). Diola thus conform to and confirm the received anthropological wisdom that death is a challenge to the social order, and funerary

practices are ways of transcending individual death to maintain the continuity of that order.

In the Diola context, however, the appearance of birth symbolism during burial raises several questions. If representing birth and death as “the same thing” is meant to repair the social order, which has been threatened by the suggestion of individuality in the form of birth and death, why are Diola burials conducted in secret, invisible to the very public that needs to be assured of its continuity as a collective whole? Partial answers to this question lie in an exploration of gender-specific knowledge and power, labor specialization, status distinctions, and key symbols of transformation—such as fire and blood—which are intimately and intricately bound with birth and burial.

For Diola, birth is a secluded, secret activity among women. Women traditionally give birth—assisted by older women and birth attendants—in neighborhood based maternity houses, which are surrounded by tall palm fronds and are strictly off-limits to men and un-initiated women (that is, women who have not yet given birth). Not only are men prohibited from approaching birthing houses, men are supposed to be entirely ignorant of the birthing process. Rather than returning to their husband’s home after birth, women typically stay with an older woman in their in-married neighborhood until their baby’s umbilical cord has fallen off. The stated reason for this extended stay is that the husband, upon seeing the umbilical cord, might become curious and ask what it is or where it came from, thus becoming inadvertently enlightened about the “secrets of birth.” In fact, one of the major concerns that Diola parents had when, in the 1960s, a Catholic mission

started kidnapping children to attend their school, was that their sons and daughters would have their “ears poisoned” by hearing about human reproduction from their teachers (see Chapter Four).

The secrecy and seclusion of burial mimic that of birth, again reinforcing the link between these two transformative moments in the life cycle. But if men are supposed to be ignorant about birth, how, then, are certain men able to imitate it during burial? What attributes do *batolhabu* possess that may provide hints to resolve this dilemma?

This requires a brief diversion into Diola social and neighborhood organization. As described in the previous chapter, Diola reside in patrilineal kin groups. Each neighborhood is made up of a few lineages, although some lineages can be resident in more than one neighborhood. There are several patrilineal clans, most of which are distinguished by name only, but a few of which come with certain entitlements and responsibilities. One’s surname does not always reveal one’s patrilineal clan, as surnames only came to be used in the last 10-20 years, and, as one Susana resident understated it, “our system of last names is not completely organized.” Often, people simply chose a last name when asked by a state authority; other times, people intentionally changed their last names so as to distance themselves from a “newcomer” lineage, and sometimes people adopted the last names of their foster family. However, even though it is not reflected in one’s name, everyone knows what patrilineal clan he or she really belongs to. *Batolhabu* come from two patrilineal clans: Djedju and Sambu. The Djedju patrilineal clan is the blacksmith clan; only Djedjus can become blacksmiths, although not all Djedjus must practice smithing.

Unlike other West African cultural groups, Diola blacksmiths are not distinguished in any other way than their right to work iron at a forge. They can marry whom they please, they live in the same neighborhoods as other lineages, and they are neither stigmatized nor esteemed for their blacksmithing role. The Sambu patriclan is responsible for a spirit shrine of the same name, *Sambunasu*, which means fire.

The significant distinguishing characteristic of *batolhabu*, then, is their relationship to fire. Blacksmiths are said to be “always in the fire” as they craft the iron tools Diola depend on for their agricultural and extractive work. And members of the Sambu patriclan, whose very name means fire, have rights over the fire spirit shrine, which, among other things, is associated with leprosy, also known as the “fire disease.”²⁶ *Ai-i* are also linked with fire and are said to have firepower, which they use for punitive purposes. A myth about the origin of *ai-i* makes this clear:

A long time ago a woman was working in her rice paddy. Out of nowhere a man wearing all red appeared and approached her. She greeted him. He also greeted her but as he turned around he left fire all around her and she burned alive. People who were working nearby saw this happen but they could not save her. They reported what they had seen back in the village and from then on people knew that *ai-i* had firepower. If you break a rule and the *ai*

finds out, maybe your fields will burn, or your rice will
burn, or your house will burn, or even you will burn alive.

This link was further confirmed for me during one of my periodic visits to the Diola supreme *ai*, Kulekenor, in Karuay. It was during the extended funeral of Susana's minor *ai*, and Kulekenor had mandated that Susana's residents were prohibited from working and were to dance every day for six weeks. When I arrived in Karuay, Kulekenor asked me how people were acting in Susana—whether they were dancing everyday, if they were working, whether they were contributing enough palm wine for the ceremonies. I did my best to give Susana a good report card, and then asked what would happen if someone broke the work prohibition or did not dance. Kulekenor replied, "People in Susana must dance. If they don't dance... problems will come. Maybe their forest grove will burn or all of their rice will burn."

An *ai*'s link with fire is manifested in his clothing, which is red from head to toe. But red not only signifies fire and chiefly authority. Red is the color of blood, and evokes the essence of women and fertility. This, too, is revealed in costuming practices. In the male age-grade system boys work their way up a hierarchy of wrestling stages, based not on strength or skill but on age and proximity to marriageability. A particular hairstyle and outfit worn at wrestling matches mark each of these stages (see Chapter Six for more on male age-grades). For several years, boys wear a red tail on their cloth skirts during wrestling matches, but when they get to the penultimate grade, one year before they prepare for marriage and



Diola *ai-i*, 2002



Wrestling match, Karuay 2002

autonomy by building a house, they remove this red tail and replace it with a white, braided one. Thus, entering into manhood entails removing vestiges of femininity, represented by the red tail.

A now defunct dance—*huwokuñahu*—demonstrates the opposite move on the women’s side.²⁷ Young women who have been “declared” as brides—that is, formerly engaged to men who have already built their new home, but who have yet to move in—wear a red cloth skirt at this dance. This announces their proximity to becoming wives, and literally clothes them in fertility.

Thus, red for Diola is a key symbol, denoting both fire and fertility, the extremes of male chiefly power and female creative power.²⁸ (A more direct link between these two—fire and blood—is revealed in a currently frowned upon practice in maternity houses. During childbirth, if a woman is bleeding excessively her attendants will put fire close under her back in order to curb the flow of blood.) Somewhere between these two poles lie the Djedjus and Sambus, whose use of fire is both masculine and feminine; like *ai-i*, their birthright in a particular lineage gives them rights over firepower; but like women (especially in the case of blacksmiths) they use this fire for creative ends. Blacksmiths take an unformed substance and, by subjecting it to the transformative power of fire, make something new and formed and functional. Blacksmiths make working implements, which is often how Diola perceive of themselves: instruments of labor to cultivate the rice paddies and tap the forest’s resources of wine and other palm products. Djedjus and Sambus, then, are logical candidates for *batolhabu*. Their relationship to fire

(and the trinity of fire-red-blood) helps explain the transgressive character of their burial work, as they are symbolically sanctioned to replicate women's creative role. The process of men taking on women's work—that is, *batolhabu* mimicking birth during burial—recalls Debora Battaglia's (1992) discussion of gender confusion in Sabarl mortuary exchange. Battaglia sees this boundary blurring during funerary ritual as generative. For Diola, too, *batolhabu* burials simultaneously collapse death and birth, and blur the boundary between male and female, which suggests the very process of human reproduction.

Death, as a potentially disruptive force, is effaced in Diola burial practices by erasing individuality and evoking continuity. This is achieved not only by equating death with birth (Bloch 1982: 218-219), but by reinforcing—and simultaneously symbolically reintegrating—the central oppositions in Diola society: female/male; life/death; work/rest; and secrecy/knowledge. (These last two oppositions are further explored and complicated in the next two chapters.) Thus, the act of burial encodes the regenerative process, while maintaining—by its gendered exclusivity and secrecy—the separate spheres so central to Diola social life.

Although a symbolic analysis of burial practices helps to highlight several important social and cultural ideals, such an approach is clearly limited in its ability to be extended to the real-world dynamics of sociality, ambiguity, intentionality and agency in contemporary Diola social life. Ultimately, this approach, as Beidelman has critiqued, decodes “a complex but somewhat static moral and semantic system,” but it does not

account for “the difficult, even subversive and morally uneasy relations between individuals and their roles as persons...” (Beidelman 1993: 207).

One contrast between Diola ritual enactments of social reproduction and real-world dynamics in response to current circumstances stands out: In the process of burial, the individual is erased in order to reconstitute the collective. But even though most Diola in Guinea-Bissau find themselves in the same precarious circumstances—their granaries are empty—Diola responses to what, in other ethnographic accounts, has been called a “community of suffering” is, actually, highly individualized. In other words, Diola responses to other arenas in which “the collective” and “continuity” are challenged tend to focus exclusively on individual culpability or misfortune.

This brings us back to the problem of rain and rice. In the next chapter, I explore Diola approaches to work and focus on questions of social change and continuity as they pertain to modes of production and the social organization of labor.

Chapter Three

“We Work Hard”: Customary Imperatives of the Diola Work Regime

Introduction

Diola survival and success in their landscape of tangled mangroves and thick oil palm forests—despite periodic droughts and other environmental hazards, as well as myriad social and political upheavals—is a testament to both their complex and intricate agricultural knowledge system (Carney 2001) and their commitment to hard work. But, as discussed in the opening chapters, environmental changes compounded by shifts in the economic, social, and political spheres have increasingly challenged Diola villagers’ ability to provision themselves through their long-established wet rice cultivation practices.

Despite their own acknowledgement of profound transformations that impinge upon their ability to produce their staple crop, the vast majority of Diola villagers continue to expend most of their efforts working in the parched rice paddies, and they discourage—and sometimes punish—those who seek alternative productive activities. The question that motivates this chapter is: why do Diola villagers in Guinea-Bissau uphold such strict adherence to their notion of work, even—or perhaps especially—when they become aware of ways to lessen the arduous nature of that work, or when they admit that their work is not actually working for them?

Diola see their sustenance system not simply as a means of survival, but as integrally tied to their conceptions of personhood, social relations, ritual obligations, and collective cultural identity. One of the central characteristics of their mode of production is the performance of arduous manual labor—“hard work.” By preserving a commitment to an exacting work regime in the face of its acknowledged inability to meet basic subsistence needs, and by disciplining individuals who seek alternate productive activities, Diola work has become detached from its provisioning purposes, and experienced and expressed as a dominant and dominating social formation (Williams 1977). The particular process of wet rice cultivation, the social organization of labor, and the cultural ethic that values hard work were once all elegant solutions to an especially inhospitable environment. But these social forms are currently experienced as external facts—in both the Marxist and Durkheimian sense. The idiom of “hard work” and the emphasis on the practice and ritual mimesis of wet rice cultivation—regardless of its outcome—expose the ways that Diola work obscures its own embeddedness in a social, historical, and ecological frame.

This chapter explores several aspects of Diola work. First I discuss the basic contours and inducements to compliance (Moore 1978) of the Diola wet rice labor regime. I then provide various examples of how the notion of hard work gets expressed in Diola social and ritual life. After discussing the discourse and practices of hard work in the current context of environmental and economic transformation, I consider the ways in which contemporary Diola villagers are “caught in a custom of their own making” (Parkin 1994: 6).

Rice Cultivation, Social Relations, and Spirit Shrines: The Inducements of Diola Work

Chapter One outlined the major components of Diola wet rice cultivation, emphasizing its arduous nature and its organization of labor at the level of households and gender-exclusive, neighborhood-based work associations. This section elaborates on some aspects of Diola work rhythms, and expands the discussion of work associations.

Like most agrarian societies, passage of time within the year (and sometime across years) is indexed by agricultural work; when discussing the recent past or future, Diola refer to the agricultural activity attached to that moment. “That was when we were making salt,” my interlocutors would tell me when I asked about a past event, or more obliquely, “By the time they come, they’ll find us doubled over already,” referring to the work of transplanting rice seedlings into wet rice paddies.

Women, as usual in Africa, carry the largest work burden. In addition to primary agricultural activities, women—with the assistance of their unmarried daughters—gather wood for cooking fires, draw water, process rice, pound palm kernels, make palm oil, cook family meals, tend to all childcare needs, and clean households. Women’s labor has actually increased in recent years, as women have taken up traditional male activities—like clearing the forest and hoeing paddies—without reciprocal efforts from men to take up women’s work. Women’s increased labor is due to both the increase in widowhood in the region, and the general increased need for money, and thus the impetus for women’s work associations to take on collective work for which they can charge for their services.

A typical agricultural calendar and gendered division of labor follows:

Month	Women	Men
December-January	Harvest paddy rice; cook salt in estuaries	Tap palm wine; repair dikes and/or prepare new fields
February-March	Clear bush for planting rice; cut thatch for roofing	Tap palm wine; cut palm branches in preparation for clear cutting
April-June	Pick cashew fruit and nuts; squeeze fruit for juice and wine; cut and/or braid thatch for roofing	Tap palm wine; tend cashew groves; cut palm kernels
July-October (rainy season)	Plant dry rice in cleared forest; transplant rice seedlings from forest to wet rice paddies; harvest manioc	Hoe sections of forest or village land to plant rice nurseries; work in wet rice paddies (repair dikes, till rain drenched paddy soil).
November-December	Harvest forest rice	Hoe backyard plots for manioc; plant manioc; tap palm wine

As previously mentioned, fishing is not a major activity in Susana and other forest villages. In the height of the dry season (February-May), adolescent girls occasionally take fishing baskets to trap fish in the nearby estuaries and river. If the rains are good, very small fish appear in the wet rice paddies, and children (and sometimes women who are transplanting rice seedlings) will catch them with fishing baskets. But generally fishing does not occupy much time in Susana. In the riverine villages (such as Katon, Ellalab, and Djobel), fishing is more central to economic life, and in Varela it is the basis for the village economy, although most of the fishermen are not Diola.

In the dry season, men tap palm trees twice a day. Selling palm wine to traveling merchants who come to Susana from Ziguinchor has recently provided an important injection of cash into Susana's economy, and is one of the only ways that families have been able to purchase imported Asian rice to sustain their families during these last few meager-harvest years.²⁹ Palm wine tapping is rare during the rainy season, partly because time does not permit it and partly because of the natural cycle of palm trees and the need for them to recuperate in order to deliver sufficient wine during the dry season.

However, a small minority of men continues to conduct limited tapping, and one can, with effort, find palm wine during the rainy season. But now that cashew groves have proliferated somewhat, the drink of choice—and availability—during the rainy season is cashew wine.

In the rainy season, men's schedules change more dramatically than women's. Although transplanting rice (*borokabu*) is more labor intensive than some other activities, there is

generally less difference in the load or rhythm of women's work between rainy and dry seasons. Men head to the rice paddies (*butonda*) early in the morning and conduct the extremely arduous work of hoeing and preparing the *butonda* for planting. If the rains are abundant, they often work in water up to their thighs, lifting heavy mud from the ground to make furrows, ridges, and dykes. They will work typically until early afternoon, returning to the village to eat and rest, and often going back to the *butonda* to continue hoeing in the late afternoon. Most men are thoroughly exhausted during the rainy season, and do little more than hoe and drink.

Diola arrangements of "property and product" are largely individualistic; "land [is] 'owned' individually and largely worked by household labor...[and] the crop is also stored separately and consumed separately by each conjugal family" (Linares 1992: 16). Although most agricultural labor is organized and conducted by each autonomous household, there are moments in the cultivation cycle that require collaborative labor beyond the conjugal family and extended kin network. What mechanisms exist, then, to compel otherwise individualistic and competitive people to cooperate in shared labor?

Diola participation in collective work regimes reflects, in part, the "regular reciprocities and exchanges of mutually dependent parties" (Moore 1978: 63). Beyond this, productive activities are linked in crucial ways to religious beliefs and practices. In her studies of Senegalese Diola, Linares has ably shown how Diola politico-religious concepts—especially their system of spirit shrines—operate to enforce cooperative labor through "fulfilling socio-ritual obligations" (Linares 1992: 66). In essence, work

associations are affiliated with specific shrines that enforce members' reciprocal contributions to the group. Work associations are "corporate wage earning organizations" (Linares 1992: 67). That is, the money earned by a work association is not distributed to its members; it is collected and pooled until the end of the rainy season, and then the entire season's worth of savings is used to purchase the necessary palm wine and sacrificial animals to hold a feast and propitiate the appropriate spirit-shrine that facilitates their work. Social control is thus exerted through the link between a work association and the ritual obligations it is meant fulfill.³⁰

The purpose is to earn enough money with which to buy rice, sacrificial animals, condiments and palm wine in order to propitiate the community shrines. On these occasions, members of the association with their guests will feast amply. Unlike wage labor that is performed in the city, associative labor is directly under the supervision of the spirit shrine.... The association has practical, as well as symbolic, functions. Profits made from corporate activities are re-invested in rituals that ensure every person's productive, and hence reproductive, success (Linares 1992: 68-69, 70).

To resolve the problem of how and why Diola adhere to such arduous work practices and overcome otherwise individualistic impulses to occasionally work cooperatively, all the

while maintaining their largely acephalous political structure—that is, no one person or class is exerting their will, in a Weberian sense, to make them work this way—Linares demonstrates that social control can come from a different sort of politics, one rooted in religious beliefs and institutions.

Legitimation is a political process. It can be achieved through consensus and shared ideals; it does not require outright coercion nor the use of force. In societies where bureaucracies are missing and there are no standing armies, as among the relatively self-sufficient rural communities of Africa, religious beliefs and ritual practices often reinforce many aspects of political economy. Cultural ideologies and symbol systems usefully provide a legitimating idiom for the values and aspirations surrounding the economics of role behavior (Linares 1992: 15).

Such an examination of social control through politico-religious mechanisms contributes to anthropological understandings of power as connected to “other aspects of the encompassing cosmological system” (Arens and Karp 1989: xiv-xv). It also corresponds to Sally Falk Moore’s designation of a “semi-autonomous social field” (Moore 1978). That is, the Diola work regime reflects an internal generation of rules, customs and symbols that serve as the “means to induce...compliance” (Moore 1978: 55). As Linares demonstrates, “Politics is not solely about ways of dictating policies through the use of

force, but also concerns how people may be directed, through mild forms of ideological persuasion and coercion, to perform socially-sanctioned tasks” (Linares 1992: 10).

In this sense, I follow Linares’s approach in emphasizing the inextricable connection between political, religious, and economic spheres in Diola social life—the trilogy of power, prayer, and production from Linares’s (1992) book title. But my problem is a different one because current conditions have now changed such that Linares’s assertion that this all “works well” in the realms of production and reproduction can no longer be maintained.³¹ Furthermore, while religious ideals are expressed in various dimensions of Diola productive practices, the protective and punitive power of spirit shrines to enforce the social relations of labor has diminished in importance among contemporary Guinean Diola. Although work associations operate in much the same way as Linares described, and still spend their season’s earnings on a collective feast, these celebrations are not necessarily linked to propitiation rites. So what mechanisms of social control account for the continued cooperative practices of work associations? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in my experience among Diola villagers in Guinea-Bissau, the idiom and practice of “hard work” takes on additional facets and expressions not explored in Linares’s otherwise resonant study of Senegalese Diola. Beyond its place within the nexus of social and ritual obligations “hard work” is expressed as a cultural value in its own right, regardless of productive or reproductive outcomes. In this context, the concept of legitimacy might not be the best way to understand Diola conformity to their strict labor regime; villagers enact hard work in specific situations even when they do not believe that such practices are necessarily legitimate. This requires a re-examination of

why Diola villagers conform to expectations around hard work, particularly given the contemporary circumstances of ecological and other transformations that make the fruits of their labor negligible.

“We Work Hard”

Diola villagers often claim “hard work” as a distinguishing cultural characteristic. When I asked people about differences between Diola and other ethnicities, one of the first responses was “we work hard.”³² A dialogue I overheard between two women drawing water from a well illustrates this point. One of the women, Segunda, was Balanta—the majority ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau. The other was a Diola woman named Aneki. As Segunda lifted the heavy, water-filled bucket on her head to carry it home, Aneki teased her, “You’re lazy. That bucket’s not even full.” Segunda laughed off the insult and walked away. She returned a few minutes later to refill two buckets. Aneki continued teasing her, “So, you don’t even work.” Segunda replied, “Yes, I work.” Aneki asked, “What work do you do?” To which Segunda responded: “When I get up, I sweep. Then I wash the pots and pans. Then I draw water.” Aneki laughed: “You call that work? You don’t even go to the rice paddies. You just sit at home... We Diola, women use the machete, women even take up the *budjandabu*.” Segunda retorted, “That’s why you all get old so quickly,” and Aneki proudly agreed. “That’s right. We get old quickly. We work hard. Balanta, they have lots of money, so they can get people to work for them, and they just sit at home. We Diola, we don’t have money. We do the work ourselves.”

Segunda left the yard and Aneki turned to me and explained: “You see, we Diola, we’re different. We work hard. We’re just not the same as those others. We Diola, our work is different. We cut palm kernels, and then we go straight home to pound them. We pound them, and then we go back to the forest to clear it for planting rice seedlings. We work hard.”

Elderly Diola continue to “work hard” even when similarly aged members of neighboring ethnic groups would typically be exempt from manual labor and supported by younger family members. I was often told that even if a grown child offers to work for his or her elderly parents, they are refused. This assertion is typically backed up by various versions of the following story:

A long time ago, there was an old man who had several children. All of them had married and were living in their own houses or those of their husbands, except for one son, who had not yet built his own house. This son, seeing that his father was old and tired, spoke to him: ‘You should stay at home now. I will do all of the work. I’ll hoe the paddies and tap the wine. You should not go to work anymore.’ The old man accepted, and the son worked hard, leaving nothing undone. The first year, the man stayed at home while the son went to the rice paddies. People noticed his absence and were curious, since he was not sick. The

second year, the old man again stayed at home. His son even built his father a new house. This continued for the next few years, and people continued to notice and remark on the situation. In the fifth year the son died. The man returned to the paddies, but when he picked up the heavy *budjandabu* he started to cry. He cried and wailed so powerfully that people working nearby came to see what the matter was, and when they saw the old man's pain they helped him in the paddies. But the following year, when the same thing happened, people left him alone—they had their own paddies to tend, after all—and the old man continued to cry and was unable to work.

For Diola narrators, the point of this story is that providing help that alleviates others' labor—even the elderly—is actually a disservice, as it will ultimately render one incapable of toiling in the fields, and reduce the kind of self-sustenance that is so crucial to Diola notions of personhood.

I was introduced to the centrality of Diola wet rice agricultural work immediately upon my arrival as an ethnographer in Susana. On my first full day of fieldwork I went to harvest rice. Marijai, the mother of my adoptive family, and I left the house after a quick breakfast of the previous night's leftover rice. We walked a few kilometers down the dirt road toward Varela, then turned onto a bush path passing orchards and palm trees and

eventually arriving onto the flat terrain of furrowed rice paddies. We met with various women along the way, all of whom I later recognized as members of the same neighborhood work association I eventually joined. Once we arrived at our destination all of the women got straight to work. Marijai had told me to bring along a knife, and she showed me brusquely how to cut ripe rice. She insisted that I use only my right hand to cut the stalks and my left hand to hold them. After gathering a handful and holding the chaff apart with my left thumb, I learned—by a quick demonstration—how to pull and discard this chaff. After several rounds of cutting and pulling, an older woman observed my poor technique and showed me—more slowly this time—a better method. The women chatted to each other as they quickly made progress down each row of the paddy, deftly cutting handfuls of rice with simple silver blades. It was swift work and quite gratifying to see the cut rice accumulate in large piles.

After a couple of hours of steady harvesting, we paused to eat a paste made of pounded rice powder mixed with water and a little sugar. Each woman scooped up the mixture, molding it into a small ball with one hand and popping it into her mouth. One of the women (I later found out that it was her family's paddy we were harvesting) had arrived with a large jerry-can of palm wine, and this was poured liberally into plastic jugs throughout the day. By midday, as we continued to work down each row, there was more singing than talking and I felt quite mute by my inability to join in. The older woman who had taken me under her wing demanded that I take a break under a shady tree, but I already sensed that I was being evaluated on my ability to stick it out so I continued cutting and tearing and listening to Diola songs. We had harvested several paddies by

this point, and our work was evident in the landscape of cut stalks we left behind us. I had no idea how much more was left, how long we would remain in the burning sun, how much more I could take.

As the hours passed and more palm wine was consumed things got rowdier. Several of the women began to sing louder, sometimes yelping and dancing along the row shaking hands and slapping palms with the others. We were ankle deep in water at this point; my sneakers were soaked through and my jeans hopelessly muddy. One of the more boisterous women took off all of her clothes—only her waist beads were left—and danced in front of us on the paddy ridge. Another woman, dancing behind us, fell into the murky paddy water in peals of laughter and became covered in mud. The other women smirked and chuckled, shaking their heads, and continued their work.

At some point late in the afternoon there seemed to be a collective decision that we had done what we could do, and everyone starting making preparations to leave. The harvested rice had been gathered in bundles and tied with long stalks. A few of the women placed these large bundles into huge straw baskets or empty imported rice sacks, and then lifted the heavy loads onto their heads. Feeling the need to contribute but knowing I could not handle such weight on my own head, I carried several pots and empty containers, now drained of palm wine. We set off down paths that led circuitously back to the village, taking one break to dance and sing in the middle of the path. After wending our way through the village paths, we arrived at the household whose paddies we had harvested and deposited the rice in front of the veranda.

Curious people along the way cocked their heads at me, and my new friends excitedly told them that I had stayed the whole day and cut rice in muddy water up to my shins, and that I had refused to take a break when they told me to, and that I danced (albeit risibly) when they danced. There were nods of approval, and of course a few smirks of amusement. But for the next several days wherever I went in the village I was greeted enthusiastically by my workmates and they would repeat their narrative of my participation in the harvest to whomever happened to be around. After a few more times in the rice fields with Marijai and her teenage daughters later that same week I became more adept at cutting and sorting rice stalks. But a single day out in the paddies harvesting rice, drinking palm wine, sweating it out with the work association had instant results in terms of that all-important ethnographic quest: rapport. It was work—especially the willingness to work hard—that provided entrée into a group of women who would become my closest friends and confidants throughout fieldwork. Cliché as it is, participation in the core Diola activity—rice cultivation—put me on the road to acceptance.

Of course, it did not stop after harvesting. I continued to spend most of my time for several months working in the forests and fields, both with my adoptive family and with the women's work association. We harvested dry rice in the forest groves and wet rice in the paddies; clear cut sections of thick bush with machetes; planted rice seeds in prepared forest nurseries; transplanted rice seedlings from the bush to the rain-flooded paddies; carried heavy baskets of home-made fertilizer to feed the fragile seedlings; and, when the

dry season came around again, harvested ripe rice once more. In between the primary labors surrounding rice cultivation, we gathered fallen cashew nuts in the forest groves; pounded cashew fruit to fill up jerry cans with juice that would quickly ferment into wine; cut and braided dried thatch for roofing; made salt on sweltering days out in the sticky mangrove flats; and constantly carried heavy objects from the forest to the village and back. In the first flush of fieldwork, I rarely knew what each day would bring. But I learned quickly that it would involve walking and work—often hard work—in the forest or the paddies. With Marijai as my guide I joined in the day's activities, gradually grasping the rhythms that contour Diola lives, learning-by-doing just how much work it takes to grow rice, and trying hard to maintain the efforts that won me camaraderie and a sense of inclusion from the first day in the paddies.

In fact, I often struggled throughout my residence in Susana to maintain a balance between participating in Diola agricultural work—with my adoptive family and my work association—and getting any other kind of “work” done, like conducting interviews and surveys, writing fieldnotes, and simply hanging out. My initial days and weeks of work in the paddies and forests, while they simultaneously provided me with a wealth of data and that elusive sense of approval among my neighbors in the village, also set up a standard that often became difficult to meet for the following two years. I had shown myself capable of manual labor, and I was expected, then, to show up for work association work days, which I more often than not did. But on the days when I had scheduled other activities, members of my work association chided me for missing work and I felt the sting of their disapproval.



Tilling the rice paddies (*ewañai*)



Transplanting rice seedlings (*borokabu*)

Diola judge each other on work habits, socialize their children into a life of disciplined manual labor, and discipline each other based on adherence to a strict labor regime. I felt myself caught up in the same system, to a much lesser degree, of course, than permanent Diola residents in Susana, and I strove not only to maintain legitimacy as a community member in their eyes, but to establish legitimacy for “my work.” It was a futile effort. Within the spatial confines of Diola villages in northwestern Guinea-Bissau, “work” refers specifically to arduous, manual wet rice agriculture and its corollary efforts. Any other work outside of wet rice agriculture is seen as separate from Diola’s primary efforts in the rice paddies. Anyone engaging in alternate productive activities, whether as a teacher, mechanic, domestic, cashew farmer, or certainly an ethnographer—performs these activities *in addition to*, not *instead of*, wet rice cultivation.

Ceremonial Evocations of Work

Hard work is performed both in the paddies, as I have described above, and through ritual mimesis. For instance, during certain moments in a funeral dance, each dancer holds some kind of work implement, or some object evocative of Diola work—such as a stick, machete, *budjandabu*, or a bunch of unhusked rice—in his or her hand as they dance in a circle around the corpse. This simultaneously signals honor for the dead person’s lifetime commitment to work and visibly distinguishes the living from the dead. For Diola, to work is to be a living human, and death entails the end of work. A typical condolence offered to bereaved relatives, or even in consolation to oneself in anticipation of death, is: “At least she is resting now. At least now she can relax.” By carrying objects

that represent work funeral dancers are performatively marking their status as alive as opposed to the dead person on the platform around which they dance.

A more clear-cut example can be found in wedding celebrations. Late in the afternoon on a wedding day, a singing procession of women from the bride's neighborhood arrives at the groom's new home, each member carrying women's work implements: heavy rods for pounding rice, cooking utensils, aluminum straining spoons, cooking pots, etc. They dance and "perform work" with these objects, demonstrating that the bride will be a hard worker in her new neighborhood.

A corollary to ceremonial moments that perform work is the village-wide work ban during funeral proceedings. The work ban is one of the key elements that characterize a funeral, and is often brought up by development workers and urbanized Africans eager to modernize as one of the biggest obstacles to external efforts to progress. During a layperson's funeral the prohibition to work lasts only the day of the funeral itself, but for an *ai* it can last up to three months. Work, in this sense, includes all agricultural efforts in the rice paddies and forests. During the extended work ban after Susana's *ai* died in February 2003, villagers who had teaching jobs or who worked in the Catholic Mission could continue these endeavors, but no one was allowed to prepare their paddies for transplanting rice seedlings.

When I asked the *ai* of Sukudjak—who was the deputy to the Diola supreme *ai* in Karuay—why it was work, specifically, that was prohibited, he replied:

Because *Emitai* tells us that if an *amangen* or *ai* dies, and you do not respect the work ban, and you go *bungapabu* or do other work, maybe you will get seedlings and you will transplant them, but all of your rice will burn. Also, the rain will not come, and everyone will starve. That's why people cannot work and they must dance. For a regular person, you do not work for the day of the funeral, but the following day, you can go to work. Just the close relatives will stay at home—sometimes for two weeks, or three, or even four. But you can still work. But with *amangen* or *ai*, you cannot work. If you work, *Emitai* will not send the rain.

Although this punishment-focused explanation does much to demonstrate the importance of the work ban, given severe repercussions for violating it, it does little advance our understanding of Diola concepts of work. Of course, these operate at a tacit level for Diola villagers, including spiritual leaders; no one had to remind anyone else that he or she could not go to the rice paddies during a funeral, any more than anyone needed reminding to tap palm trees every day or transplant rice seedlings in the rain-fed paddies. It is precisely because work—in the form of wet rice cultivation and the collateral agricultural efforts that support and complement it—is such a defining feature of Diola lives that the stark contrast represented by a funeral work ban sets in relief the essential

difference between life and death. The ways in which work gets evoked, performed, or prohibited illustrates how Diola work is a complex of values that cuts across economic, religious, and social domains.

An instance outside the ritual realm, and entrenched within the subtle configuration of everyday sociality, helps underscore the same point. There was a man in Susana named AmpaBontai who was universally disdained and shunned by Diola villagers. He had once married, but his wife left him because never worked, he left his children with nothing to eat, and he regularly stole household items to sell them for *sum-sum*, a potent distilled drink sold in shots in the small village shops. AmpaBontai spent most of his time begging for money or food, and he used whatever resources did come his way—such as small amounts of rice—to trade for tobacco and *sum-sum*. He would hobble down Susana's main street complaining about his poverty, looking for charity, and usually finding none. Diola residents disparaged him, and often treated him harshly. He was completely ostracized from Diola social life, mocked and scorned by adults and children alike. When referring to him, most Diola villagers would shake their heads and say, "What can you do? He refuses to work." Although many villagers complained regularly about their own poverty, AmpaBontai's grievances were dismissed; his continual lack of money and food could not be taken seriously because of his "refusal to work." Diola recognized others who worked hard and still gained nothing as "unlucky," and sometimes they could be helped with small donations of rice. But AmpaBontai received no sympathy in Susana. Whatever the reason for his behavior, there was no leeway on the part of his family and neighbors for accommodating his difference. Diola

had no patience for him because of his rejection of the most fundamental of Diola tenets: hard work. AmpaBontai's case—and particularly others' attitudes toward him—continually reminded me just how little room there was for any kind of non-conformity with regard to Diola work regime.

Work, Theft, and Socialization

As I witnessed with my adopted family, children are socialized into Diola work mores both through the examples set by their parents and other older kin and by disciplining tactics that counter both laziness and theft. For Diola, theft is a symptom of one's refusal to work, and they do not hesitate to severely discipline those who steal. Theft is the worst kind of crime in Diola minds, even worse than homicide, which can sometimes be justified. Diola take pride in their claim that "Diola do not steal," stressing the difference between their own cultural norms and those of neighboring Balanta, who are notorious thieves. Often, when walking through the village or on bush paths or even on the main road between São Domingos and Varela, I would see a shirt hanging from a tree branch or a flip-flop balanced on a bush, or even a license plate propped up by the side of the road. This, I was told, is the correct Diola method of dealing with found items. If you find something dropped on a path—even money—you must place it in obvious view, and it will stay there until its owner comes to reclaim it. I once discussed with my neighbor a sack of rice that we both had seen on the road to Varela. It stayed there for three days until its owner came to claim it; no one else touched it (or so everyone insisted). Many times, trucks would break down along the treacherous dirt road from São Domingos to Varela. Most often, the drivers or their *adjudantes* would be able to cobble them back

together, at least enough to finish their journey to the main road. During the latter stages of my fieldwork, a broken-down truck was abandoned on the side of the road. It stayed there for several months, untouched, before its owner came from Bissau to tow it away. For a while it became a predictable part of the landscape, and I came to accept its dormant presence as my Diola neighbors seemed to. But when I traveled down the dirt road one day with some non-Diola Guineans, they expressed amazement that the truck was still there, undisturbed. “You’d never see that outside Felupe-land,” one of the travelers commented when I explained how long the truck had been there. “You’d never know a truck had been there if it had the misfortune to break down anywhere else. First, it would lose its windshield wipers; then its windows and doors and tires and wheels. Even every bolt would disappear on sticky fingers,” he went on. “Maybe a skeleton of the truck would remain, but maybe not even that.” The Diola passengers shrugged. “We Diola, we don’t steal,” one of them simply stated.

The prohibition against theft is strictly enforced at many levels: in the household, within age-groups, and at public fora, such as ceremonies and village-wide meetings. Once, the youngest boy in my family’s household—6-year old Marco—stole some largely worthless fishing equipment from an old man in the village on a dare from his friends. When his mother found out, she encouraged the old man to beat her son. Early in my residence in Susana, there was much talk about a teen-aged girl who had worked in Bissau and “learned to steal.” I was warned to be careful around her and the women in my work association shook their heads and tsk-tsked when they spoke about her. At a crowded girl’s dance on one of the village’s dusty roads, someone witnessed her taking a

pair of flip-flops (often removed and piled up on the side of women's dancing circles). The news passed around the village and for a few days it seemed to be all anyone would talk about. When I asked what her parents would do, my interlocutors would throw up their hands and say, "They've given up; they've beaten her again and again and still she doesn't learn." It was up to her age-group to discipline her. One of the girls in my adoptive household—14-year old Saba—was a member of her age-group, and she told me that they had a special meeting to discuss this case and determine what to do. They had decided that they must beat her as a group because, as Saba explained to me, "Theft is not good, and she is an embarrassment to us." The group of teen-aged girls ambushed her late one afternoon and beat her with sticks they had fashioned into whips. She spent a few weeks recovering from the welts and bruises in a neighboring village, and returned contritely to Susana and, as far as I know, did not steal again. Many similar episodes were recounted to me, with even higher stakes for adults. Sipamiro, the father of my adoptive family, told me of a man in his work group who continued to steal, even after warnings and beatings by his co-members. The members, having exhausted all other options, tore apart and burned his house and excommunicated him from the village. He went to the Gambia to tap palm trees there, but had recently sent his son back to Susana for the 1998 male initiation, and residents were keeping an especially watchful eye on this son of a thief.

Theft was often discussed in terms of its relation to work. One only steals, according to Diola logic, because of laziness. So theft prevention was best attained through socialization into hard work. The only time I saw Sipamiro physically discipline his

children was because of their “laziness.” The two older girls in my family—both teenagers and the eldest with an out-of-wedlock baby of her own—believing their father to be away teaching in the neighboring village of Arame, did not join their mother in her agricultural work one day. Instead, they loitered at the military barracks, playing checkers with the few bored soldiers stationed there. But Sipamiro came back to Susana earlier than they expected and spotted them at the barracks. He did not say a word to anyone about the matter, but at the end of the evening, after the family had finished eating from our collective rice bowl, he stood up and calmly barricaded the front door. When he handed me the baby sitting on his eldest daughter’s lap and instructed me to “hold on to her tight,” the children knew something was about to happen, but it was too late to escape. Sipamiro took his machete and, clenching his eldest daughter’s upper arm, brought the flat side of the machete down hard along her back and thighs. She shrieked out with pain and humiliation as the machete made a high-pitched whizzing sound again and again before it struck her. Next it was her sister’s turn, and Sipamiro applied the same punishment. The other children stuck to the back walls of the mud house, looking on with fear, and the youngest girl—though she remained untouched—cried along with her older sisters. I was paralyzed with surprise and confusion, and though I turned it over in my mind many times after the event, I could not find a way to intervene between Sipamiro’s machete and the girls. I sat and looked on dumbly with the rest of the family, doing my best to soothe the baby in my lap. It only took a few minutes, but the intensity of it made it seem much longer. After Sipamiro sat down on a low stool and rested the machete across his knees, the beaten girls huddled in the farthest corner from him and whimpered, eventually moving to the small room in which all six children slept.

Sipamiro spoke calmly: “I will not have lazy children in my house. Either you work with your mother or you leave.” Saba clearly heeded the lesson, and for the duration of my fieldwork she was her mother’s constant companion in the household chores, as well as in forest grove and paddies. But her older sister took the latter option. Shortly after this incident she left the village with her baby, arranging to work in the cashew groves of her boyfriend’s mother in another town.

The day after the beating, Sipamiro sought me out and said he wanted to explain what had happened the previous evening. He told me that it was a dangerous prospect having children who did not work. Not only did it make his wife’s daily burden heavier, but perhaps they would get used to their “laziness” and soon turn to theft. He emphasized to me that no one would respect grown women or men who would not work, and that—even though Diola work was admittedly hard—his daughters’ lives would be even harder if they refused to work. I never saw Sipamiro beat his children again, and I never heard of any disciplinary action in other households that was not related to either work or theft.

It is especially interesting to discuss the Diola work regime and its current problems being entangled in an ethic that values—demands, really—hard manual labor because so much of the scholarship on African notions of work has focused on the opposite attitude: that of perceived African “laziness” (see esp. Coetzee 1988). Most postcolonial scholarship in this vein addresses stereotypes of “native laziness” by revealing how local work practices were developed as a subversive tactic to resist arduous, menial, or forced labor (Adas 1986; Comaroff 1985; Ong 1987; Scott 1985; Taussig 1980), or by

demonstrating different cultural understandings of work, time, and pace that conflict with colonial notions of work (Atkins 1993; Cooper 1992; Pickering 2004; Povinelli 1993; Sodikoff 2004). In a recent exploration of these issues, Sodikoff interrogates French and Malagasy interpretations of Betsimisaraka laziness by explicating an “alternative work ethic which entailed a different space-time orientation” (Sodikoff 2004: 367).

Betsimisaraka approaches to work differ, Sodikoff argues, from a Western capitalist orientation to work tied to output and individual accumulation. When others refer to Betsimisaraka as lazy, “they imply a preference for a capitalist work ethic that values diligence, industry, frugality, a drive to acquire money and an eye to future income-making possibilities...” (Sodikoff 2004: 375). She explores Betsimisaraka behavior in order to find clues into the Betsimisaraka concept of the “right way to work” (Sodikoff 2004: 387). For Betsimisaraka this involved a combined strategy of occasional wage labor and piecework that enabled them to maintain customary practices that linked farming with ancestor worship and familial relations. The way that Betsimisaraka work, then, demonstrates that “‘making life’ is part and parcel of ‘making a living’” (Sodikoff 2004: 391; referring to Williams 1991: 64).

Although Diola work habits run contrary to colonial and neo-colonial stereotypes of “lazy natives,” their approach to work—like that of Betsimisaraka—also clashes with Western capitalist orientations to work. Not only do Diola have a counter-ethic to that of individual accumulation, but, as explored below, the hard work that Diola perform in the forest and the paddies is not tied to output. Rather, the “right way to work” among Diola

involves each individual's adherence to the physically demanding set of activities required by manual wet rice cultivation, regardless of the ultimate outcome of these labors in terms of crop yield. It would be inappropriate for Diola to adopt "labor saving" devices—such as draft animals, or even wheelbarrows—as this would be judged critically by one's kin and neighbors as "taking the easy way out." Sodikoff demonstrates that the assessment of Betsimisaraka work habits as lazy "foreclosed the possibility of people conforming to models of work other than that of commodified labor, individual self-interest, material accumulation and future-oriented anxiety about economic and ecological survival" (Sodikoff 2004: 392). So too with Diola, except that the Diola model of work emphasizes individual strength and ardor, and requires participation in a labor regime that demands both autonomous discipline at the household level, as well as moments of cooperation at the neighborhood level.

Conditions for Knowledge of an Agrarian Society: The Making of a Wet Rice Cultivator

Part of this emphasis on hard work is bound up with characteristics integral to the Diola mode of production. As we know, certain kinds of production regimes require certain kinds of workers (Chakrabarty 1988; Thompson 1963, 1993). Hard work is part and parcel with the particular demands of wet rice agriculture. It is simply not conducive to partial disengagement; one cannot decrease one's participation in it or engage in it minimally or symbolically. As I have discussed above, wet rice cultivation requires not only physically taxing individual labor, but also participation in a set of social relations—at the household, lineage, and neighborhood levels—that weave Diola together in a nested series of interdependent obligations. If individuals attempt to extract themselves

by seeking out alternatives, their neighbors and kin sanction them partly because they rely on their participation in moments of collective labor.

Neighborhood work associations exemplify this dynamic. Although work associations have long been a central way of organizing labor needed for the most intensive and time-sensitive aspects of wet rice cultivation, they are becoming an even more important part of the agricultural workforce as the rainy season has become increasingly shorter, and the labor required to complete certain critical activities during the ideal period of time usually exceeds the capacity of the conjugal family or extended kin. But the increasing importance of collective labor coincides with the recent phenomenon of urban migration of youth, which has only become a major factor in Diola social life during the past fifteen years. Since the local school stops at sixth grade, young people who are able to continue their studies must go to either São Domingos or Bissau. More often than not, they return to their home villages during the rainy season to help their families during this particularly intensive phase of wet rice agriculture. But, within the past decade, young people have started to stay in Bissau or other urban areas even during the rainy season. Youth work associations in the villages have used their importance in the work system to force absent youth to return and do their share of labor. For instance, a man whose son has not returned from Bissau contracts a youth work group to work in his paddies. They give him his assigned day, but when that day comes they fail to show up. The family recognizes their absence as a form of punishment for the fact that the man's son is not amongst them, and is "taking it easy" in Bissau. The man, losing an important day of agricultural labor, puts pressure on his son to return home, and when he does the youth

group is contracted again, and this time fulfills its commitment. In this way, work associations have become an important mechanism for the social reproduction of Diola modes of production, more so than the previous control exerted through the spirit shrines.

Diola pride themselves on their hard working ways. As we saw with Aneki and AmpaBontai, often the most critical thing someone can say about another is that he or she “refuses to work.” But this pride is also mixed with complaint. During the course of my fieldwork I heard villagers sigh every day that Diola life is only hardship and drudgery. Once, when I asked my neighbor about Diola notions of hell, he replied, “We cannot believe that hell exists after death, because our life on earth is hell, so what kind of god would make yet another hell after this one?”

Again, all of this work is primarily focused on a particular type of rice cultivation, and it is the work *itself* that is valued, regardless of the outcome. But what does all this hard work actually add up to? Like Abayam mentioned in the opening anecdote, a couple of generations ago Diola granaries were filled with rice, and ethnographers of Senegalese Diola villagers from the 1960s to the 1980s focused on debates about “hoarding” and how Diola expended “excess” rice (Linares 1970, 1981; Mark 1978, 1985; Thomas 1968, 1970). But, as noted in previous chapters, for the past decade paddy rice lasts an average of three months. Some households with more paddy or fewer mouths to feed can live off paddy rice for up to eight months. But not a single household was able to say that paddy rice carries them through the full year.

Diola villagers continue to encourage and enforce the performance of hard work in the wet rice paddies even when they acknowledge that this work is unlikely to produce sufficient rice to feed their families. And even though most Diola villagers find themselves in the same circumstances—their granaries are empty—they view each household or individual in isolation with regards to this situation. Thus, in contrast to the ritual enactments of collectivity performed through burials, real-world dynamics concerning threats to Diola continuity tend to emphasize—rather than erase—the individual. The current case of widows in Diola-land offers an illustrative example.

Lesser among Equals

When a Diola man dies, his house is torn down and his widow—unless she re-marries—is left to build a *hungumahu* (pl. *kungumaku*)—a smaller, less sturdy house—in her virilocal neighborhood. At the time of my fieldwork, from 2001-2003, an average of 34% of the Diola households in each neighborhood were *kungumaku*. This represents a recent rise due largely to the linked factors of waning levirate practices, escalating poverty, and increasing male mortality. A widow's *hungumahu* can be built for her by her sons or paternal uncles, but in some cases, if she has no kin to help her, she will build her own house. During my first dry season in Susana, I saw a young widow build a *hungumahu* completely by herself. She constructed her *hungumahu* on borrowed land across the road from my adopted family's house, in an area of the village with much foot traffic. No neighbors or passers-by ever offered to help with the arduous work. When I asked Marijai—a good friend and co-member of a women's work association with this widow—why she was building her house by herself (a task that, even for men, is a

collective activity), she replied, “What choice does she have? Who would help her, and risk other people talking? We Diola, we’re difficult. Everyone has to fend for themselves.”

In addition to tearing down his house, a dead man’s land is incorporated back into his lineage and redistributed amongst his brothers and nephews. Given land tenure practices, a woman only has access to land through her husband, and once he dies, she is no longer entitled to work in his forest grove or rice paddies. If she has sons, they will inherit their share of their patrilineal land when they come of age. Once the husband’s paddies are re-absorbed into his lineage, his widow must borrow her kin’s unused paddies, a fragile and tenuous arrangement at best. If she does not have grown sons or benevolent uncles who will hoe the paddy for her, she will wield the heavy *budjandabu* herself and perform what is considered quintessentially male labor. If she cannot borrow paddy, she begs for rice. Sometimes her grown children provide her with a small quantity of rice, sometimes neighbors take pity on her and send over some rice. But, in the past several years, bad harvests make it extremely difficult for anyone to be generous. When the average member of the population is anxious about having enough rice to feed themselves and their families, widows are left even more on the margins.

Take the case of Asaamaku, a widow raising her adolescent children and toddler grandchildren. Asaamaku regularly had days when she would not eat, sometimes several days in a row. On a hot day during the dry season, she told me,

I have these young children here. But early in the morning, I don't let them leave the house. I sit them down here until later in the morning. Because if they go off, they will see that other people are eating rice for breakfast and they will see that we have nothing. And maybe they will ask to eat at other's houses. We do not do this. So I keep them here until others are finished eating, and then I let them go.

When I asked Asaamaku whether she spoke to other widows about their similar situation, and whether she thought about joining them together to collectively address their common problems, she looked at me blankly. I shared my observation that there were many women who were dealing with the same problems; women whose husbands had died, who had no access to land, who struggled to feed themselves and their children. Remember: 34% of households in each neighborhood are widows' houses. I asked if they talked about such things, perhaps when visiting each other or when attending the same event. Her response was unequivocal: "We do not talk about such things... For us, it is a secret." "Poverty is a secret?" I asked. "Yes," she responded. "For you to tell someone, 'Today I don't have this or that,' he'll listen to you, but won't give you anything. That's why, in this sense, I stay alone with this poverty. That's why I don't tell anyone."

When I brought up the topic of widows to my friends and neighbors within the context of casual conversation, they typically responded with a comment or anecdote about a

particular widow, but almost never (even with my not-so-subtle encouragement) engaged in the topic of *widowhood*. My interlocutors had no problem recognizing the poverty of Asaamaku or other widows, but they did not easily recognize themselves (or their mothers, sisters, or wives) as potentially in the same situation. There is no Diola word for widow or widowhood, and each widow is thus seen singly, not as part of a social category into which, it seems, most women eventually enter. Both widows themselves and the community at large see each widow in isolation, not as manifestations of a collective problem, and, as my Marijai suggested, each widow has to fend for herself.

Such attitudes towards widows relate back to Diola notions of work ethic and self-sustenance. Recall the man whose son worked his paddies, only to die and leave his father incapable of lifting the heavy *budjandabu*. Seen in this light, widows cannot be the beneficiaries of special assistance, since those helping will become targets of witchcraft and widows themselves will “forget how to work.”

Once, when I was discussing leveling practices with Sipamiro, I pointed out that it was interesting that leveling was targeted at those who have more than others, but those who have less (like widows) are not helped so they can reach the same level as others. In other words, why were those who succeeded beyond a certain level pulled down, but those who dropped below it *not* pulled up? He agreed, and said that others are left below the norm so that “people can laugh at them and their poverty.” But then he gave an example of Nhamae, a widow who lived across the path. It was good, Sipamiro commented, that all of Nhamae’s children had scattered and refused to support her,

because now she has learned to work. She used to work a little, he told me, by planting dry rice in a small forest grove her younger brother had given to her. But then, after a week of work, “she would complain and then not work for a month.” Nhamae also used to beg for rice and palm wine from Marijai, but “when Marijai gave her these things, sometimes even without her soliciting them, Nhamae would never offer to help Marijai transplant rice seedlings.” Now that her children are not sending her anything, Sipamiro concluded, “she is working more, and this is good.” Once again, my intended conversation about contradictions in the egalitarian impulse turned into a lesson on Diola work ethic.

Although gender politics is certainly a factor in widows’ predicament, it is not the primary one. This is not a case of conscious discrimination against a superfluous segment of the population; it is not that widows, as women who have typically performed their reproductive roles and are no longer “of use,” are being marginalized and neglected in a purposeful or iniquitous fashion. A previously functioning levirate system, the fact that widows’ minor children are in the same situation as widows themselves, and the similar treatment of other “unfortunate” individuals all suggest that widows’ current situation does not lie in their perceived or structural dispensability. Widows’ poverty is, in fact, an extreme form of a general problem. Most families in Susana are involved in the same kind of day-to-day struggle to survive as are widows. As mentioned above, even households with healthy adults, access to abundant land, and combined male and female labor power do not produce enough rice to feed their members throughout the

year. And these households, too, are seen as individual examples of misfortune, not as manifestations of a collective problem.

Diola acknowledge their predicament in words, but their deeds only seem to reinforce or exacerbate their problems. Every day, villagers complain about how much they are suffering because of the decline in rain and rice. But individuals who deviate from currently accepted modes of livelihood become targets of severe social sanctions. Villagers who experiment with alternative productive activities are often punished, or at least are believed to be.

One interesting perspective on these dynamics came from Salek, a Mauritanian shopkeeper in Susana, who regularly offered insightful—if unsympathetic—commentaries on Diola behavior. One day, when I was sitting outside Salek’s shop, he shook his head and said that people in Susana were the “worst off and most behind” people in the area; they simply do not work. I countered that Susana’s residents work very hard indeed, to which he responded: “Nau, es i ka tarbadju, es i castigo” [No, that’s not work, that’s punishment.] Salek said that people punish themselves in the rice paddies and

For nothing since they get no rice... Then they get old quickly and get sick often, all because they insist on doing things the way they have always been done... And if anyone tries to do anything different, like work that

actually gets them something, they are insulted and criticized and people say: 'That person refuses to work.'

Many of my neighbors provided me with examples of people who stepped outside the bounds of rice cultivation—whether earning money by tapping palm wine outside Susana or planting a cashew orchard—and were subsequently witched, most of them killed. Late in my fieldwork, I saw an old Diola man help build the walls of a house for a long-time resident Manjaco man. During the second week of his work a Diola woman passed by the hard-laboring, profusely sweating old man and said: “So, you’re working here to get some quick cash. The rains didn’t come this year and we’ll all suffer, but you’re taking the easy way out by getting paid.” The next day the old man’s hand was swollen beyond recognition, and he could not work for the following week. Everyone was convinced that he had been witched, since nothing had bitten him and he was not sick. This was obviously a case, according to participants and observers, of social sanctioning, because people did not approve of his working at something other than rice cultivation, and especially at something for which he would be paid. The expectation is that wet rice cultivation and its complementary efforts—regardless of outcome—is simply a Diola person’s lot and anyone attempting to change the system through innovation or substitution of other kinds of work puts him- or herself at risk of witchcraft and other sanctions.³³

Such leveling tendencies among egalitarian and peasant societies have been well documented—whether labeled crabs in a barrel, the zero-sum worldview, the notion of

the limited good, or the golden mean—and often explained in terms of a virtuous commitment to equality and solidarity (see Bohannan 1962, 1995; Gluckman 1972; Isichei 1997; Wilson 1973. See also Gable 1997 for an excellent critique of this view). Among Diola, a particular brand of household autonomy and hard individual labor makes collective action around common problems especially difficult.

As David Parkin has suggested:

It is less fashionable in scholarly circles nowadays to consider the role of ideology as negatively diverting peoples' attention from attending to their own worsening conditions. Instead, persons are credited with much more knowledge of and agency with regard to their own situations, for instance of having ecological wisdom which is superior to that of outside investigators. This turn to respect for indigenous technical and economic knowledge is an important corrective in many cases... But none of us in our daily lives has as much knowledge as we would like of the long-term implications of our current practices and beliefs (Parkin 1994: ix-x).

Paradoxes of Custom: Decoupling Production from its Products

Diola incitements to and practices of “hard work” have become what David Parkin calls a “paradox of custom” (Parkin 1994: 6). That is, “in the short term they seem to maintain the *status quo* of custom and authority and so are publicly approved, but in the long term they serve to mask the development of a fundamental cleavage” (Parkin 1994: 6).

The intrinsic characteristics of wet rice cultivation, the tightly woven and often tangled web of social relations and obligations involved in this mode of production, and the religious ideals with which it is linked mutually reinforce each other and serve as powerful drivers of continuity. This gets expressed most clearly in Diola orientations to hard work, which refract across these economic, social, and religious realms. Currently, Diola villagers experience and enact this configuration as a kind of hegemonic lock, a dominant social formation in Raymond Williams’s sense as the “ruling definition of the social” (Williams 1977: 125). It is through the idiom of work that Diola villagers talk about being a member of this society. These notions of hard work as expressed through self-sufficiency, participation in a particular social organization of labor, and performative ritual evocations index, for Diola, who is an accepted and acceptable member of their society. One is essentially outside the social order if one is not participating in and reproducing this mode of work. Opting out of the wet rice labor regime requires physically removing oneself from the spatial zone of rural Diola villages, and even then—as in the case of would-be urban migrants—pressure can be exerted to retrieve far-flung work associates at critical junctures in the agricultural cycle.

In the current context of environmental change and the decreasing viability of the Diola mode of production, attitudes and practices around “hard work” get decoupled from the products they are meant to generate. Diola work is taken as given and fixed, rather than as a particular social form that arose under certain historical and environmental conditions. It is perfectly acceptable—even commendable—for Diola to toil in the rice paddies for many months of the year with little or no yield in rice. As the constraints and limits in the natural world are more keenly felt, Diola are perhaps stressing the ways in which enactments of their work ethic and the moral obligations they reinforce might be all the more important. What gets reproduced, though, is a detached social form—a commitment to arduous manual work—even while the conditions that it is meant to safeguard—the capacity of households to provision themselves—are disintegrating.

Chapter Four

Controlling Knowledge: Secrecy and Silence in Diola Social Life

If human sociation is conditioned by the capacity to speak, it is shaped by the capacity to be silent (Simmel 1950: 349).

The Death of an Ai

During my second year of fieldwork, Susana's *ai* died. AmpaKapeña had been transported to the clinic in São Domingos when he had become very ill, but fear over his dying away from Susana—an *ai* must always die in his natal village—prompted several men to retrieve him from São Domingos and bring him back to Susana, where his condition quickly worsened.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the secret and secluded aspects of Diola burial. When it comes to the death of an *ai*, many more layers of secrecy are added. An *ai*'s death is supposed to remain secret, sometimes for many months, with only *amangen-ì* attending to aspects of his post-mortem preparations and burial. One of my informants told me that, when the previous *ai* in Elia died, no one was told for three months, not even his wives. When I inquired how it was possible to keep such a secret from his wives, he said, "It's easy. When such a man gets sick, no relative is allowed to attend to him; only the *amangen-ì* minister." Although everyone is buried in secret, with only *batolhabu* attending, an *ai*'s burial is conducted by only the *batolhabu* among the *amangen-ì*, and

the location is kept secret from the rest of the population. The top of the gravesite is made to look undisturbed; as one informant put it, “you would not even know if you were lying on top of it and drinking palm wine.” Furthermore, unlike Diola buried in neighborhood-based cemeteries, *ai-ì* are not disinterred.

Such practices correspond to the range of prohibitions surrounding *ai-ì*—that one may not see an *ai* eat or drink or urinate. These are all humanizing bodily acts that—when visible—lessen some of the *ai*’s divinity. Death is, of course, the ultimate mark of mortality; hence the secrecy and seclusion surrounding an *ai*’s death and burial. Marijai confirmed this later, but she was quick to note that things have changed in this respect. “Back then,” she said, “we were not so savvy. If the *amangen-ì* told you that the *ai* went on a trip, you would simply believe it, you would not question their authority. Now, everything has changed, and people tell even the smallest of secrets.”

This was certainly the case with AmpaKapeña’s death, news of which spread rapidly around Diola-land the very next day. It was even announced on the newly installed community radio that broadcast to Susana and several surrounding villages, although the announcer carefully avoided the same phrasing used in other death announcements, and instead told his listeners: “Children, your father has been lost.” But even though AmpaKapeña’s death was not kept secret for the requisite amount of time my neighbors commented on this as a violation of norms, and gossiped about who messed up. Many of my interlocutors expressed concern that Susana’s *amangen-ì* had made an egregious error in divulging AmpaKapeña’s death so soon, and that they would be given a fine of cattle.

They stressed that they should have taken AmpaKapeña to another place when he returned from São Domingos, so they could care for him in seclusion; instead they left him at his house and when he died people found out immediately.

Furthermore, events surrounding the funeral proceedings remained a mystery. No one knew whether there would be a funeral the following day or what the procedures would be regarding the normal funerary customs. Marijai, who was related to AmpaKapeña in such a way that it would normally require her to spend the night at his house (*harimanahu*) did not know whether she would be required or allowed to do so. As people drifted around the village after the news spread, they repeatedly confirmed that they did not know even the most basic aspects regarding his funeral—when the funeral would be held, whether there would be a corpse inquisition (*kasaabaku*), whether he had already been buried. “We’re waiting for the *amangen-i* to tell us,” they repeated. Sipamiro summed up the state of affairs: “We are like women in this matter: we know nothing.”

Susana’s *amangen-i* were gathered at Ulandjebe’s house. (As the second *ai*, Ulandjebe was responsible for the funeral.) When the *amangen-i* did send messages regarding AmpaKapeña’s funeral procedures, people began to gather at the Bukekelil clearing (*hukulahu*), but they still did not know whether AmpaKapeña’s body would be there. By noon, most of Susana’s population of women was at the *hukulahu*; a small group of women were in the center of the clearing, pacing back and forth and chanting funeral

songs, while the larger group of women remained seated in the shade of the cottonwood trees that framed the clearing.

The typical platform structure for displaying the corpse had been erected, but instead of standing in the middle of the clearing, it was off to the side, across from where the women were sitting, and completely covered in cloths. It was impossible to see whether there was actually a body in the platform or not, but clearly the platform and cloths were there to suggest that AmpaKapeña's body was hidden within.

In the early afternoon, a procession of men entered and all of the women stood up. The procession was led by an elder man, followed by the paramount *ai* from Karuay and his second-in-command from Sukudjak, then a few *ai-i* from neighboring villages—Budgim, Edjaten, Djifunco—all of whom were dressed from head to toe in the signature red robes and hat of an *ai*. Ulandjebe followed behind these *ai-i*, and behind him came two men carrying drums on which they beat a slow rhythm as the procession walked forward. A line of 20 or so men, most of them elders, finished off the procession. The men entered the *hukulahu* and circled it once, walking slowly and solemnly while the drums sounded. As they entered, the women greeted them with chants and dancing. Then the Karuay *ai* and a few other *ai-i* sat on their stools at the foot of the cloth-covered platform.

Circular dancing commenced, and the funeral began to take on the rhythms by now so familiar to me, with the exception of the dignitaries present. People danced and sang funeral songs for a few hours. Later in the afternoon, a man came to the group of sitting

women and told everyone to gather around the center. The drumming stopped, and everyone made a close circle around the *ai-i* from Karuay and Sukudjak, who stood at the center of the clearing with Ulandjebe. Each spoke briefly, repeating and reinforcing what the previous one had said. They declared that residents of Susana could not work for six weeks, and would have to bring enough palm wine to the *hukulahu* every day to quench the dancers' thirst and to provide for the appropriate posthumous ceremonies. After this pronouncement, the dancing continued for a little while longer, and then people began to disperse.

As I made my way home, I discussed the *ai*'s proclamation with several people along the way. I asked a group of men affiliated with the Mission whether the work ban applied to their work within the Mission walls; they said that kind of work could continue as usual. When I asked them what the reason for the work prohibition was, they insisted that they could not know the reason as they were not *amangen-i*. One responded, "Only *amangen-i* know such things, and everyone else simply obeys them. It is not for us to know the rationale." I asked whether people would respect the work ban, and they said that some would and some would not, but that the Susana *amangen-i* would make a request and pay a fine of cattle in an attempt to reduce the work prohibition from six weeks to four weeks. (This was ultimately an unsuccessful effort.)

The work ban included any kind of agricultural work in the forest or paddies. Men could continue to tap palm wine, of course, as it was needed for dancers and ceremonies, but they could not sell it. Women could continue to gather cooking wood, but they could not

stay in the forest all day as usual. Everyone was required to stay around the village in order to dance at the *hukulahu*. Sipamiro later confirmed this information, adding that teachers would continue teaching and come to the *hukulahu* only in the late afternoon. He said that when the laws around work bans were made, there was only agriculture; new kinds of work, like teaching, were thus exempt from the work prohibition.

At the time, what struck me most about the proceedings surrounding AmpaKapeña's death was the widespread and general lack of knowledge about what would happen, both in terms of the immediate funerary rituals and in terms of Susana's residents' work and lives and material circumstances in its aftermath. It was also a moment that crystallized the difference between certain kinds of anthropological and Diola ways of knowing. I was the only one asking questions; my Diola interlocutors, whom by now I knew well enough to discern when they really did not know something or when they were dissembling, were for the moment content to remain uninformed, waiting for the ritual authorities to provide them with information about the funeral and their own day-to-day activities for the following months.

AmpaKapeña's death and funeral also manifested the complexity of Diola knowledge production and circulation. The many structures and performances surrounding his death—the cloth-enclosed platform that might or might not contain his body, the as-yet unrevealed obligations of his kin, the location (or even occurrence) of his burial, even the violated secret that he did, in fact, die—all served to uphold a “public secret” in Taussig's (1999) sense, a secret that is not really a secret. Everyone knows that an *ai* must eat,

drink, urinate, and ultimately die. So why the pretense of secrecy around such acts? Other ethnographers have discussed the ways in which shrouding banal occurrences with mystery gives them potency (Lurhmann 1989), but the explanation that so much effort went into preserving or even fabricating a sense of mystery and divinity seems too transparent. What becomes significant here is not the content of the concealed information itself—of course the *ai* urinates, and dies—nor the pretext for such content being, so to speak, secreted, but the energy, effort and complexity of the secret-keeping process, as well as the real material consequences of the funerary ritual surrounding the *ai*'s death. In Susana's case, villagers were prohibited from engaging in agricultural work for six weeks. In other instances or more important *ai-i*, the work ban can last as long as three months, and if it coincides with the rainy season, an entire village can lose its rice crop for the year.

What broke down in AmpaKapeña's case was the secrecy shielding the fact of his death, the untimely exposure of this "public secret." And this violation was met with anxiety about the consequences, demonstrating that it was recognized as a breach of moral conduct around information flow. But the work ban itself was never questioned; even the failed effort to bargain it down to four weeks did not challenge the prohibition itself, just its duration. The previous chapter demonstrated how committed Diola are to hard work. So why would they cooperate in a work ban that not only seems to contradict their core work ethic, but has significant detrimental material consequences in terms of their ability to sustain themselves? I suggested above (Chapter Three) that the funerary work ban enacts the key difference between life and death: Diola lives are defined by work, so

death is marked by a temporary cessation of that fundamental activity. Now, I want to go further and understand this within a system of knowledge production and information flow.

In this chapter I demonstrate that efforts to manage knowledge, erect structures that conceal information, and maintain control over who can know what and when is also a kind of work. But unlike the wet rice cultivation work regime that tends to level Diola villagers in socioeconomic and practical domains, the work involved in producing, delimiting, and circulating knowledge differentiates people along various axes, including gender, generation, lineage, and other kinds of status distinctions. Furthermore, unlike the natural world with its inherent limits of land and water, there are no natural limits to what one can do with information. This is, as we will see below, an enormously productive realm of Diola social life. Amidst material poverty, the abundance of cultural information in both quotidian and ritual realms makes some Diola villagers—perhaps all Diola villagers, to some extent—rich. And the range of ethnographic examples that follows suggests that this world of information is as important to till, cultivate, and harvest as the natural world.³⁴

But first back to AmpaKapeña's funeral. Knowledge about and decisions regarding the proceedings were kept closely guarded by a small group of elders, and everyone else in Susana was kept in ignorance. They did not ask about any matter related to the funeral itself or how it might impact their own lives, especially regarding the work ban; they waited for the elders' proclamation. With reference to the untimely disclosure of

AmpaKapeña's death, Marijai's comment is important to unpack. "Back then," Marijai said, "we were not so savvy. If the *amangen-i* told you that the *ai* went on a trip, you would simply believe it, you would not question their authority." On the face of it, this seems to imply an association between secrecy and naïveté. Contrary to a previous era, modern Diola could not be so easily duped. But upon reflection I realized that Marijai's comment did not index the "wisening up" of the lay population that made such secrets no longer tenable, but rather the need respond to changed conditions for complicity. The leakage of information that would, "back then," have been kept under close wraps reveals the necessary joint nature of maintaining "public secrets." The orchestration involved in upholding such secrets is not a static. Borrowing from Sally Falk Moore's (1976) work on Chagga male initiation, this was less a matter of belief and more an instance of "ritual collusion" that had been ruptured and needed repair.

Characterizations of Diola Secrecy

"Diola have lots of secrets," people in Bissau would tell me just as frequently as they observed that "Diola work hard." These two comments were remarkably consistent, as if hard work and secrecy neatly summed up Diola society. Even the scant ethnographic accounts from Portuguese colonial officials stated quite bluntly that Felupe were probably the most closed and guarded of Guinean "raças" and that plumbing the depths of their world was no easy task (Lehmann de Almeida 1955). Just as I found in exploring Diola attitudes and practices around work, these characterizations were voiced among Diola themselves, although they did not always have the same referents as those assumed by non-Diola. Many residents in Susana told me "We Diola have lots of secrets."

When my interlocutors told me that “Diola have many secrets,” they generally collapsed at least three different kinds of secrecy into one category. First, the flow of information and access to certain kinds of knowledge is highly regulated. That is, women and men know different things and are prohibited from knowing each other’s “secrets.” Also, information and esoteric knowledge about history, ritual, and various aspects of religious practice is circumscribed by those who have either been born with or earned the right to know such secrets.

Second, that Diola have secret powers and capacities that reside in the supranatural realm, such as shape-shifting and trading souls. Such assertions were often offered with a contradictory mix of respect and denigration that typically textured Guineans’ perceptions of the more “traditional,” “tribal,” and “authentic”—though simultaneously “backwards” and “superstitious”—members of their society. Colonial and postcolonial characterizations of Diola as both “secretive” and “resistant to change” generally came in the same breath, as if the very practice of secrecy—particularly in the form of supranatural beliefs and practices—posed an obstacle to modern rationality and progress (Lehmann de Almeida 1955; Tabora 1950b).³⁵ As I will elaborate below, such an assumed divergence between secrecy and modernity did not only apply to practices such as shape-shifting, but also to the more quotidian ways in which secrecy was deployed around concealing possessions and various domains of knowledge.

Third, Diola are secretive people, in the sense of being reserved and restrained in their interactions and not revealing more than what is absolutely necessary (and usually dissembling even that) in a given encounter. As one resident in Susana—a Mandinga soldier stationed at the army barracks—put it: “Almost everything is kept secret. Even if you ask someone, ‘Do you know Joanna?’ and they definitely know Joanna, they will respond, ‘No, I don’t know Joanna.’”

Other ethnographers of the Diola and neighboring groups, most importantly Baum (1990, 1999), Gable (1997), Mark (1992), Schloss (1992), van Tilburg (1998), have already explored secrecy as an significant element of their studies. Baum considers secrecy in relation to Diola ideas about history and esoteric knowledge within their system of spirit shrines. He asserts that L.V. Thomas and subsequent commentators on the Diola were misled into thinking that Diola have little regard for history. According to Baum, “it is precisely because history is so important to the present that it is concealed from outsiders and the uninitiated by an ideology of continuity over time and equality of social status. Given the transformative power associated with historical knowledge in Diola society, access to such materials was limited to those who demonstrated the maturity to use their knowledge responsibly” (Baum 1999: 15). Knowledge of a supranatural and/or ritual nature is closely guarded by those who have rights to it, as Baum explains,

The existence of esoteric knowledge meant that much of the detailed information regarding rituals, initiations, and shrine historians is forbidden for those who do not have a

right to know about such things. This right can be gained through inheritance, by being chosen to become an elder at a particular shrine, or through initiation. Otherwise, such information could be dangerous to the listener. A person who reveals forbidden information is said to have ‘poisoned the ears’ of his listener” (Baum 1999: 19).

Mark Schloss’s (1992) ethnography of the neighboring Ehing touches on secrecy in the realm of spirit shrines, and Peter Mark’s (1992) study of Diola-Fogny male initiation covers many aspects of secrecy in male initiation (*bukut*) practices. My own experience among Guinean Diola largely confirms these ethnographers’ discussions of circumscribed information in terms of history, specialized knowledge, and ritual. As a complement to Mark’s focus on male initiation, van Tilburg’s (1998) more humanistic approach discusses the ways in which secrecy surrounds pregnancy and childbirth, not just from men but among women. Her own experience as a pregnant fieldworker in a Senegalese Diola village led her, in a complicated and ultimately tragic way, to understand the depth and layers of secrecy enveloping reproductive matters. I will expand on these issues in a subsequent section that addresses gendered domains of knowledge and secrecy.

Studying Secrets

Secrecy is an intrinsically difficult topic for ethnography: how does one study secrets if they are just that? Anthropologists have long struggled with the methodological,

political, and ethical challenges posed by this subject matter. One approach has been to view secret knowledge as a key to indigenous worldviews, which has led some ethnographers to focus on uncovering and representing secret content, usually in formalized ritual domains. The quest for “secret knowledge” operates at both theoretical and methodological planes; not only would a cultural group’s secrets explain their “way of being,” but the very process of uncovering them would demonstrate an ethnographer’s prowess at getting beyond the surface and exposing the supposed core of a culture.

Anthropologists critical of this approach on moral and methodological grounds have interrogated ethnographers’ right to expose—or even ask about—information deemed by their informants as not appropriate for public consumption, as well as probing the presupposition that really important “cultural stuff” necessarily lies concealed in secret or esoteric knowledge. Gable (1997), for example, provides a particularly compelling critique of this penetrative aspect of the ethnographic endeavor. He discusses how ethnographic narrative generally follows the dumbfounded or perplexed ethnographer as he or she probes and prods his or her way into becoming the ethnographer with insights into the workings of indigenous worldviews. Not only does this approach place too much emphasis on unquestioned ethnographic authority (Clifford 1988), but it assumes that “the secret” of a given society’s inner workings requires digging deep. Perhaps what seems hidden and secret to the ethnographer is actually the most obvious thing to his or her interlocutors:

It is all too easy for the ethnographer to project his or her initial befuddlement and emerging understanding as a model for the surface and depth of an indigenous culture. Fieldwork may feel like a kind of penetration, but crucial cultural truths are as likely to be obvious as hidden or esoteric (Gable 1997: 227).

Responding to these critiques, as well as to anthropology's increasing interest in questions of process and power, contemporary ethnographic approaches to secrecy have largely taken their cue from Simmel (1950) by shifting from an emphasis on content (the secret itself) to form (the dynamics of concealing and revealing information). Simmel's seminal essay suggests that what is significant about secrecy as a sociological technique is the way information is shared or not shared in a given society. The content of the secret is secondary, or perhaps even irrelevant; it gains in value *because* it is secret, rather than being secret because it is valuable. What ensues from this proposition is an examination of the differentiating power of secrecy, independent of its specific content. The focus on form over content has spawned a great deal of literature that examines the dynamics of concealing and revealing information in various contexts (Barth 1975; Lurhmann 1989; Ottenberg 1989) as well as analyses that stress secrecy as a social form imbricated in sets of power relationships (Bellman 1984; Murphy 1981, 1998; Taussig 1999).

In my own case, I did not go to Guinea-Bissau to study Diola secrets, or even the dynamics of Diola secrecy. In fact, I was particularly concerned to distance myself from such a problematic approach. When my interlocutors—both Diola and non-Diola—regularly told me that “Diola have lots of secrets,” I always responded by expressing my disinterest in—and respect for—areas of cultural content they deemed secret. I insisted (to myself and others) that I was not interested in prying, in digging for secret cultural knowledge through pesky questions or sneaky methods of selective self-disclosure and participation, of conducting penetrative ethnography. I even made a point of affirming this to the group of Susana *comité* officials when we met to discuss my work. I assured my interlocutors that I was not interested in knowing things that they were not willing to tell me; that I was not there to do espionage, but simply to see and record what was available to me. “I know there are lots of secrets here,” I told the gathering of old men whom I had invited to share some cane rum and discuss my presence in the village. They nodded and hummed their confirmation of this. “I respect that. I don’t want to know anything that I am not supposed to know.”

While my presentation was quite sincere, I soon found out how naïve such a stance was. I quickly ascertained the contours of gendered domains of knowledge and secrecy, as well as the basic rules governing access to—or silence around—esoteric and religious knowledge and practice. I learned that only certain people were privy to certain kinds of knowledge, and to know something not within one’s purview was a breach of moral conduct and potentially dangerous. But beyond gendered domains of secrecy and arenas of religious/esoteric knowledge, Diola were guarded about even the most seemingly

mundane information. Secrecy regarding one's movements, possessions, and opinions seemed to be embedded in almost every instance of quotidian social interaction. There was often a deliberate effort to shroud even the most pedestrian things.

My experience during an old man's funeral made me more aware of the impossibility of ignoring secrecy as a central aspect of Diola social life, and, although I had not yet read Simmel's essay, this episode helped me frame my thinking about secrecy not as a body of facts I was desperately trying to avoid but as a process of social interaction inextricably intertwined with the very questions animating my larger research goals. During this funeral, I was temporarily "adopted" into a small cohort of dancers. I had observed these small groups who took on special roles during a funeral, often dancing in the opposite direction as the long line of dancers around the circular clearing and engaging in antics and frivolity, especially at the funerals of old men and women. I had learned that the groups were made up of the cohort of men and women who had declared their brides (or been declared as brides, in the women's case) at the same time. The men and women (those who declared and those who were declared) remain a cohort (*buyabu*) even if the marriages end. They form a tight-knit social group on certain ritual occasions, and the women often wear a distinguishing article of clothing, like matching cloth skirts or the same color cloth tie around their waists. During this particular funeral, I was swept up into a *buyabu*, given a matching cloth tie for my waist, and taken everywhere they went for the day. At one point, one of the *buyabu* members told me, "Now that you are part of us, you will learn all the secrets of our 'buyabu.' We will tell you everything." Each time he or one of the other members told me a "secret," they did so with a conspiratorial

bearing and a great deal of gravity in their tone. But the content, such as what bound them together as a *buyabu*, was hardly a secret. Each time one of them offered an “ah-ha” explanation to either a question I asked or an unsolicited piece of information, I ended up feeling disappointed that I had not learned anything new at all, or that the “big secret” they were revealing was completely banal. What I missed at the time was that the content of the secret was irrelevant; it was the performance surrounding its concealment and revelation that was significant.

This realization signaled my own shift in understanding that it was not “the secret” that I was after (or, rather, trying to avoid being after), because “the secret” itself would reveal nothing new. Of course the *ai* dies and of course this kind of *buyabu* is made up of contemporaneously declared brides and their spouses. The fact that such effort went into making these prosaic facts into secrets was the fact worth pursuing. Who could know such things? When and how could they access this information? How was such knowledge revealed? In this sense, neither penetrative ethnography nor the protesting-too-much stance against it were useful methodological guideposts. The possibility that there might not be any *there* there—that the *ai* might not be within the cloth covered platform, or the *buyabu*’s supposed secrets might be quite commonplace—makes a wild goose chase out of penetrative ethnography. For Diola, the idiom of secrecy was very much on the surface, was claimed daily by villagers, and was staked out—both internally and externally—as a form of ethnic distinction. In the domain of secrecy, surface is both the signal and the substance of what information flow is about. And so I began—quite

belatedly—to focus on the dynamics of producing, controlling, and transferring knowledge.

Beyond the emphasis on form over content, there is another aspect of the secret that has implications for its epistemology: its inevitable disclosure. Simmel discusses the secret as “a form which constantly receives and releases its contents... the secret is full of the consciousness that it *can* be betrayed” (Simmel 1950: 333, 335, emphasis in original). In ethnography, this is often discussed in terms of formal structures or pivotal moments of revelation, such as initiation (Kratz 1990; La Fontaine 1985; Ottenberg 1989). But I also found that there is an informal, spontaneous desire to reveal. Interestingly, my explicit insistence that I was not concerned with secrets *per se* opened up the possibility for people to share with me—not the esoteric knowledge of the spirit shrines, but their own stories and anxieties and interpretations. This was unintentionally facilitated by establishing a residence separate from my adoptive family’s house; a private space in which my friends and neighbors could visit and talk—increasingly freely—out of earshot of their kin and neighbors. My own foreignness—which often although not always trumped my gender and age—also helped establish a sense of safety, or perhaps it was powerlessness and irrelevance. As I will explore below, Diola customary behavior around secrecy, especially in quotidian social interaction, is enmeshed within the tangled social relations of village life. As an outsider I became an impartial repository of information generally kept close to one’s breast when among kin and neighbors. As I developed different kinds of relationships with residents in Susana and became more aware of the multiple threads—beyond obvious ones like kinship—that textured their

relationships with each other, I began to observe various levels of sharing and withholding information depending on the context and composition of each gathering. I became better at discerning when people were being guarded or dissembling—either with me or others—and more adept at recognizing subtle forms of managing the flow of information. That said, given what was overall a prevailing ethos of secrecy around most things and my own reluctance to pry too much, I am acutely aware of the limits of my own knowledge of Diola lives.

What follows, then, is an attempt to understand this prevailing ethos as it manifests in both formal and informal arenas, and to consider what bearing it has on the larger questions that inform this study. Secrecy is a complex that Diola actors use for different purposes. There are two kinds of secrecy that I want to distinguish here. The example of AmpaKapeña's death touches on *ritual* secrecy and the ways in which information flow is wrapped up in explicit cultural forms like funerals, initiations, and spirit shrine ceremonies. Ritual secrecy organizes access to religious and esoteric knowledge along gendered, generational, and lineage lines. The other category of secrecy, which I will discuss first, I call *interactional*. We see this at play in everyday forms of social intercourse around consumption, possession, and action.

Interactional Secrecy: Concealing Actions and Possessions

“Ukai beh?”

During a certain phase of fieldwork in Susana, I found myself reluctant to go outside the confines of my own or Sipamiro's house, even on a short walk around the village. When

I did venture out, I had to gear myself up for the inevitable barrage of seemingly innocuous questions that people would yell at me as I walked past their verandas. After a round of “Kassumais” and the appropriate age-based greeting, my interlocutors would ask “Ukai beh?”³⁶ (Where are you going?), followed quickly by “Ubei bukayemih?” (Where are you coming from?). Simple and apparently friendly questions, but by the time I had walked a hundred yards I had answered them many, many times and always felt poked and prodded and scrutinized a bit too close for comfort in the process. I usually provided a brief response, such as “Inje mikai beh butat” (I’m going to the forest) or “Inje mikai beh huyungorahu” (I’m going for a walk). Later, I found that it was more typical to provide even more obtuse responses. I observed my neighbors field the same questions with “Mikai beubeh” (I’m going over there), not indicating where, in particular, with any further words or gestures. Or, even more vague, “Inje muh” (Here I am). And after having found out nothing from their initial inquiry people would rarely pry further. A question had been asked, it had been answered with no real information, and everyone seemed satisfied with the exchange.

Other tactics involved avoiding the observing eyes and ears altogether. Early in my second year of fieldwork, one of the pregnant members of my women’s work association was approaching her due date. It was her eighth child and she had always experienced very difficult births, nearly dying during her last one due to loss of blood. She was afraid that she would die in childbirth if she delivered in Susana, and she asked me if I would take her to Ziguinchor, across the Senegalese border, so she could give birth in a hospital with better medical conditions than those available in Susana. I made arrangements with

her to meet at my house at mid-morning, but when I woke at dawn on the morning we were to leave, I found her on my back veranda. I exclaimed “But Isabel, we’re not leaving for another few hours!” She said she knew, but she had left her house early, before dawn, and come to hide out at my house and wait. If she left her house with a bag when people were already awake, they would ask her where she was going. “Isabel, ukai beh?” they would demand. “You see,” she explained to me, “people here are tiresome. They ask and ask and ask.”

In a similar occurrence, I agreed to take Marijai and a few other women to Karuay the next time I visited the paramount *ai* there. They were eager to cross the Senegalese border at the river in Sukudjak to sell their palm oil, and it was a long journey from Susana to Karuay, especially when carrying heavy jerry-cans. When we made arrangements to go, Marijai suggested that instead of meeting at my house, they would walk ahead past the village and wait near Sipamiro’s forest grove. When I passed there in the car, I could pick them up. She said that if people saw them getting in the car at my house, they would ask where they were going, (“Jikai beh?”) and she did not want to have to explain. “You see, Joanna, people here wear you out. They want to know where you’re going, for what reason, and so on and so on. Better that we leave them behind here.”

As many ways as Diola have to “ask and ask and ask,” there are methods to counter or avoid such attempts. The examples above demonstrate the lengths residents in Susana go to in order to avoid the inevitable and predictable surveillance of their own neighbors.

But why bother? Why not reveal where one is going or what one is doing in a straightforward manner? Why all the effort to evade, dissemble, and conceal? There are at least two possible explanations, both of which are probably at play in these instances.

First, these tactics—even for me during my relatively brief residence in Susana—provide a sense of insulation in the face of constant observability. To some extent, they can be understood as “simply a way to preserve a sense of autonomy or privacy in the close world of the village” (Gable 1997: 217). Such interactional dynamics have been documented and accounted for in a similar way by others (Cosser 1962, 1979; Pitt-Rivers 1971) studying contexts in which one’s every move can be seen by those in the immediate vicinity. Secrecy about such matters as where one is going or what one is doing can be partly understood, then, as a response to the intrusive aspects of living in a fishbowl.

Beyond the drive to maintain some measure of privacy for its own sake, these interactions encode a particular type of power relationship. Not a Weberian coercive power over others, but a productive kind of power that has the effect of both maintaining a connection between individuals while making manifest their very autonomy. This requires an understanding of power that incorporates “semantic creativity,” in David Parkin’s (1982) sense: a subtle configuration of power as connected to consciousness and action, not just domination and authority. In the seemingly fruitless structure of greetings, what gets expressed is a kind of agency. It would not be appropriate to follow an “Ukai beh” with silence; there is a script that one follows, even if it seems to lead

nowhere. “Ukai beh” becomes an invitation to assert one’s power to withhold, to conceal where one is going and where one has been. It is precisely because Diola villagers are so enmeshed with one another in the small and tightly woven world of village life that dissembling and evasion become meaningful forms of social interaction. As Fabian contends, “Secrecy, far from being non-communication, is a cultural practice of communication” (Fabian 1991: 184). The daily repeated performance of “Ukai beh” and “Inje muh” acknowledges that people have a kind of power, not only to decide where they are going, but whether or not to reveal or conceal that information.³⁷

Likewise, in higher stakes moments, concealing one’s actions and movements also enables individuals to navigate around the more oppressive structures of surveillance, particularly when their actions might be judged as non-normative or suspected as a breach of conduct. Obtaining special medical care in the context of childbirth or engaging in commercial transactions were not outright violations of Diola norms, but they were certainly grist for the gossip mill, and gossip, in turn, could lead to leveling disciplinary measures. More on this below.

Just as I began to formulate a stereotype of Diola as inquisitive and prying, I was confounded by countless examples of the opposite attitude and behavior in other realms. Beyond “Ukai beh,” which, as described above, does not actually lead to any further knowledge, Diola do not engage in direct questioning into people’s lives or about any specific body of knowledge. Regarding religious or ritual practice, Diola do not ask *amangen-i* or others with ritual authority how and why certain practices are observed.

When I asked such questions—like how one became a corpse carrier at funeral divinations (*kasaabaku*), or why *ai-i* wear red—lay people not only did not know, but most had never thought to ask those who might.³⁸ Beyond ritual and religious matters, Diola do not tend to acquire knowledge through direct questions, but through observation, imitation, and first-hand experience.³⁹ Anytime an adult was engaged in a task—whether fixing part of their house, weaving a basket, or hoeing a rice paddy—children would crowd around and watch intently. My own process of learning how to harvest rice and transplant rice seedlings came through quick demonstration and then practice, and I sensed my work associates' irritability when I tried to ask questions about how best to cut the rice stalks or punch the delicate seedlings into the mud.

This points to an important distinction in epistemological assumptions. When we ask, we assume there is an answer, and that we have rights to it. But for Diola, neither of these principles can be assumed. Not only are certain kinds of knowledge restricted in terms of who can and cannot access it, but Diola assume an essential unknowability to some things. Such a view is encoded in the Diola word for their supreme deity—Emitai—the root of which is a condensed form of “irit,” which means “that which cannot be known.”

Because of this, I became acutely aware that some ethnographic modes of inquiry were at odds with Diola mores. As my own sensibilities regarding appropriate decorum meshed with those of my Diola friends and neighbors, I felt ever-more awkward and self-conscious about asking pointed questions. Like many ethnographers, I had framed my objectives for residing in Susana as search for knowledge. I repeated to my interlocutors

that I was there to learn—about language, culture, history, daily reality, current conditions, and so forth. But learning among Diola is not a process of asking questions. My approach to learning about these and other arenas of Diola social life by asking questions felt increasingly at variance with my acculturation into Diola customary behavior. Perhaps I was over-sensitive, and also underestimated the allowance for my rudeness in this realm given my foreignness. But, as I imperceptibly shifted my own sense of manners and etiquette regarding personal interaction, I felt my questions to be increasingly out of place and rude.

Beyond “ukai beh,” then, direct questions were not appropriate, whether regarding religious practice, basic household or agricultural tasks, or other people’s lives. This last realm was particularly concerned with not asking about—or displaying—material conditions. But as in other domains of secrecy, what was protected under the shroud of secrecy and silence was, in most cases, already known.

Out of Sight

Paulo, the newly arrived Brazilian Protestant evangelical missionary in Susana, once made the mistake of walking on the main road from his house at one end of the village all the way to the resurrected baking ovens at the other end of the village. He bought six loaves of bread for his family, but by the time he reached his home again, he had only half of one loaf left and he looked bewildered. He had carried the loaves in plain sight and everyone he passed along the way asked for a piece of bread. He quickly learned to carry his purchases concealed in a bag or backpack. People would still glare at it, trying

to divine its contents, but—just as in their attempts to divine a passer-by's destination—they would not pry further.

No one in Susana buys anything at the small shops in the village without putting it in a bag, preferably a dark one. One of the most universally coveted objects among Susana residents is a black, opaque plastic bag, used in the central market in Bissau and much preferred over the more ubiquitous but transparent blue striped plastic bags. Once obtained, these flimsy bags are treated with great care, as they can be used to conceal any objects one might need to transport around the village. Even better than a bag, many people hide items in their shirt or other clothing. Many times, old men came to my house and sat on the back porch, seemingly carrying nothing. Then they would reach deep inside their long shorts and extract a liter of palm wine, or take off their hat and uncover a leaf of tobacco, or search in the recesses of their robe and pull out a papaya. Once, on my back porch, I gave one of the members of my women's work association a t-shirt she had asked for. Hearing other people approach, she quickly folded it into a tight bundle and tucked it under her cloth wrap skirt.⁴⁰

Diola household organization also reflects similar concerns. Rice, for example, is stored in a separate room in one's house, out of visitors' view. (See Linares [1970: 28] for similar observations among Senegalese Diola.) As previously noted, although I lived in Susana for two years and ate at my adoptive family's house every day, I never saw the inside of the granary, nor did I see anyone else in the household enter it besides Marijai.

The only household objects on public view are those possessions that everyone has—straw baskets, worn out eating bowls, well-used aluminum pots, a *kandaabaku* (belt for climbing palm trees to tap wine), and a *budjandabu* or two propped up in the rafters. Diola display only these items and secrete others (including stored rice) away in the recesses of the house. Anything besides these common objects that members of a household might possess is kept out of sight.

Once, at my adoptive family's house, I had a discussion with Sipamiro about different books we had read. Having completed fourth grade, Sipamiro was one of the few literate Diola residents in Susana and he was eager to discuss his love of reading. He could re-tell the plotline of a book in great detail. He said he had collected many books from his days as a teacher in Canchungo. Later that night when we were behind closed doors, he disappeared into the room he shared with his wife and their youngest son and brought out a 50-kilo rice sack filled with his books, most of them termite-ridden Portuguese translations of American westerns. We were looking through them when we heard someone approach with a "kon kon kon." Sipamiro rapidly put the books back in the sack and brought them to the interior room before the visitor entered. On another occasion I offered to give Sipamiro an old suitcase for his books, to help protect them a bit from the ubiquitous destructive trio of termites, dust, and mold. He said he would come by my house, just around the corner, to pick it up, which he did late at night, when no one would see him. Villagers regularly used the cover of darkness—even better than an opaque plastic bag—to achieve the closest thing to invisibility when transporting objects to and from their homes. One of the women from my work association came

deep in the night to collect two large logs—leftover from repairs to my house—that she had asked for. Once, I went with Marijai on a midnight errand to the other end of the village to one of Sipamiro's relative's houses where we fetched a pig that they were giving her to raise. It was pitch black outside and I had to navigate carefully not to trip over tree stumps and other obstacles on the path. But by that time I knew it would have been unheard of to fetch the pig during daylight hours, when everyone would see Marijai walking all the way across Susana with a new pig.

One of the clearest examples of this attitude came very early in my stay in Susana. During my first few weeks, I discussed with my adoptive family how I could best contribute to their household in order to compensate them for feeding me every night. I offered to pay them a monthly sum and buy a sack of rice each month. Discussions such as these take several days (weeks in this case), and I learned not to bring it up when neighbors or other kin were visiting the house. Finally, Marijai and I were walking to the forest one day and she said—once we were out of earshot of anyone—that she and Sipamiro had discussed the matter and decided that it would be better if, instead of arranging for the sack of rice, I just gave them the money that I would have spent on the rice. I agreed, of course, and Marijai went on to explain that they did not want people to see me bringing a sack of rice to their house every month. People would think they were better off, she said. It was safer to just give them the money; no one else needed to know about it, and they would arrange for the extra rice.

In a similar vein, when a neighbor once stayed for dinner at Sipamiro's house he commented that he never ate so well at his own home. Marijai responded that this was unusual fare for them too. We were, in fact, eating the same food as always: rice with *bagiche* (cooked hibiscus leaves), and a meager portion of several day old, miniscule fish on top. It was not so unusual, except that *bagiche* is not an every day event, although it is commonly available to everyone. But Marijai took pains to express that we were eating lavishly that night. She said: "Ask Joanna. She eats here every night. She sees our poverty." I nodded, playing my part as expected. Marijai was concerned, again, about her guest reporting to others that Sipamiro's household was better off than others. This was a clear example of what Gable refers to as "keeping behind the Joneses" (Gable 1997: 215).

Such efforts were also evident in villagers' responses to my questions about their household composition. My initial attempt to conduct a household survey by visiting people's homes in broad daylight was often an exercise in futility. Asking how many children or chickens or pigs one had when neighbors might stop by and hear the answers was too risky for most Susana residents to participate. People were, however, willing to respond given the appropriate conditions of privacy. One respondent told me straightforwardly that these were not the sort of questions he was willing to answer in front of other people, especially his neighbors. He said it was not good for other people to know your secrets because then "they would talk about you to others and plot behind your back and slander you." But once we were behind the closed doors of my house, he was quite eager to respond fully to all such questions.⁴¹

Why all this effort to conceal? There are a few things at work here. First, just as Diola develop evasive responses and tactics to avoid the omnipresent surveillance of their neighbors, so too do they have imaginative ways to skirt the obligation to share. If you possess an item—especially food—in plain sight, it is quite appropriate for others to ask you for a piece, and it would be rude to deny them. Children are brought up to offer whatever they happen to have to those in their immediate vicinity; I witnessed this type of instruction through games involving give-and-take even with toddlers. The only way around this imperative to share is to remove such objects from view by concealing them in a bag, a hat, or the recesses of a house.⁴² If you are foolish enough, like Paulo the missionary, to show too much there are consequences.

Such ingrained and ingenious tactics for hiding possessions are, of course, quite common in contexts where one is not only obliged to share whatever one has, but material wealth—and a loaf of bread or a t-shirt certainly count as material wealth in Susana—arouses enmity or suspicion among one's neighbors. Not only do methods of concealment help protect the object from being consumed by others, they protect the possessor from jealousy-inspired actions by those who seek to undercut other's wealth. And, in a related logic, they protect the possessor from accusations that they acquired the object in some ill-gotten way. Ethnographers have documented similar dynamics for many decades and have typically explained them by referring to the zero-sum worldview. Within small-scale societies that maintain an adherence—if only in rhetoric—to socio-economic equality, someone who has something different than others is assumed to have

acquired it at someone else's expense. Hence, the danger of exposing one's possessions is far greater than having them nibbled away by pesky passers-by.

Secrecy, Egalitarianism, and Hierarchy

Diola concern with concealing possessions, then, seems to fit within the general framework of “nightmare egalitarianism” (Bohannan 1963; Bohannan 1964; Foster 1965). This seductive but problematic catch-phrase contends that in egalitarian societies,

People share equally in material poverty. Or, if some are richer than others, they hide their good fortune... Usually, the implication is that the ‘less prosperous’ are motivated by a fundamental belief that the equality of conditions (as opposed to the equality of opportunity) is a moral good. To be rich is to be morally reprehensible (Gable 1997: 215).

Interestingly, one of the more prevalent—but as yet unconnected—themes that emerges from recent ethnographic literature on secrecy is the way in which various practices of secrecy disrupt our conventional understanding of egalitarianism and challenge typical models of the relationship between egalitarian and hierarchical forms of social and political organization (Gable 1997; Kratz 1990; Lurhmann 1989; Petersen 1993; Piot 1993).

Petersen (1993), for example, in his explication of *kanengamah* among Pohnpeians, rejects the assignation of “hierarchical” or “egalitarian” to whole societies, preferring instead to locate when members of a community engage in hierarchical or egalitarian activities in different spheres, or even in the same sphere at different moments. Through the cultivated practice of *kanengamah*—a mode of interaction that involves concealment, reserve, and restraint—the ambiguity of language makes possible the co-existence of individual autonomy with patterns of dominance and subordination. “In emphasizing concealment, Pohnpeians effectively deny truth and thereby undermine a local hierarchy they otherwise support” (Petersen 1993: 33). *Kanengamah* creates the conditions in which everyone assumes that everyone else is dissembling and that “the truth,” as such, can never be determined. The practice of *kanengamah* enables people to manage those in leadership positions, as Petersen explains, “When a people do not imagine that they—or anyone else for that matter—can determine the truth, deceit’s utility as an instrument of domination recedes” (Petersen 1993: 334). This argument challenges the notion that secrecy generally serves only those in power—a Machiavellian proposition followed more recently by Bailey (1991) and Bok (1979, 1982).

Petersen’s move is to suggest that the “habit of concealment [*kanengamah*] serves the people in their efforts to manage those in leadership positions at least as well as (and in some cases better than) it serves the interests of those who would rule them” (Petersen 1993: 334). In this way, Pohnpeians gain a measure of autonomy and equality even when, on the surface, they seem to support a rigid local hierarchy. In the Pohnpeian case, “*kanengamah* serves as a deliberately constituted safeguard against the

encroachment of power,” thus suggesting a more complicated relationship between hierarchy and equality (Petersen 1993: 335). Of course, such habits as dissembling and management of information have long been recognized as a “weapon of the weak” (Jackson 1982; Scott 1985). The interesting point in Petersen’s argument, however, is the way in which the practice of concealment allows for the co-existence—he goes so far as to insist on the mutual reinforcement—of egalitarian and hierarchical social orders.

Piot (1993) also explores these dynamics through an analysis of secrecy, but in a somewhat different vein. Piot rejects the conflation—largely unquestioned in Africanist literature since Evans-Pritchard and Fortes published *African Political Systems* (1940)—of acephalous and egalitarian societies. Kabre, Piot insists, are acephalous, in that they have no centralized government, but decidedly *not* egalitarian. In fact, hierarchical social relations are a central value in Kabre society (Piot 1993: 36). Furthermore, secrecy among the Kabre is not about content or exclusion—as Marxist and structural-functional interpretations of secrecy tend to stress—but about process, interpretation, ambiguity, and the quest for this hierarchy. Piot uses Bellman’s (1984) insight that “secrets are meant to be told” to discuss the concealed but partially revealed aspect of Kabre secrecy in names, greetings, wealth, sung insults, and gifts (Piot 1993: 357). The movement from concealed to revealed involves moments that establish a hierarchical relationship—of gifter to giftee, of one’s place in the overall economic order, or of insulter to insultee. This, according to Piot, is the ultimate goal for Kabre: hierarchy is exactly what they are after. But the initial ambiguity in the meaning of a name or an insult shields actors and enables them to test out uncertain relationships. Again, an

analysis of secrecy ends up challenging what we think egalitarianism and hierarchy are all about, or at least how we assume they are related.

The most compelling analysis in this domain is Gable's (1997) study of Manjaco secrecy. Gable effectively pokes a hole in the logic of nightmare egalitarianism by demonstrating that it is not the fear of having something that motivates Manjaco secrecy, but the fear of being found to have nothing worth inciting jealousy. Gable's essay—a parallel critique of nightmare egalitarianism and ethnographic authority—is worth exploring in some depth. Just as I assumed in the case of Diola secrecy, Gable at first sees Manjaco secrecy around possessions conforming to conventional anthropological wisdom regarding egalitarian societies. That is, it is a dangerous prospect to reveal or be public about one's possessions because of either inciting envy—and hence repercussions in the form of witchcraft—by others who have less, or by being accused of using witchcraft oneself to acquire such possessions. This, at least, is what Gable assumed was going on in the Manjaco village in which he observed his neighbors concealing objects and being secretive about their possessions. But it gradually dawned on him that this motive was actually a façade, and it was better for Manjaco to be assumed to have power and possessions—even if that might attract envy—than for it to be revealed that one had nothing. Thus, older men seemingly concealing objects in their ever-present satchels actually have empty satchels; better, according to Gable, to seem to have something worth concealing than to be found to have nothing at all. As he explains,

For much of the time I operated under the assumption that the Manjaco were concerned with hiding the full sack, the full granary, the full bottle... It was not until late in my stay that I came to believe that 'hiding' or 'secreting' had as much to do with concealing an empty bottle as it did with hiding a full one. While it may be true that Manjaco inhabit a world of limited goods where one person's gain must be paid by another's loss, many of them... are nevertheless more afraid of appearing unworthy of envy than they are afraid of being accused of injuring others to further their own interests. It is the empty sack or granary, not the full sack or granary, that they wish most to conceal (Gable 1997: 227).

Gable comes to understand that even in a supposedly egalitarian zero-sum society, individuals often aspire to have the upper hand—to be the winner—even at others' expense. What is central to his contribution is the way in which he exposes anthropological understandings of egalitarianism to maintain some vestiges of romantic ideals around solidarity, communitarianism, and altruism. His study of Manjaco secrecy shows that egalitarian societies—or at least Manjaco society—“do not scan as a kind of embryonic socialism” (Gable 1997: 226).

Just because people inhabit a zero-sum world does not mean that, in a moral sense, they would rather have the game end up a draw. Rather, it appears that for [Gable's interlocutor], it is better to be a winner, even though that winner will always stink of other people's blood (Gable 1997: 226).

Gable's argument corrects long-standing anthropological representations of egalitarian societies that do not account for the "will-to-power" of their individual members. His understanding of the particular features of Manjaco secrecy challenges a depiction of "egalitarianism devoid of this image of the individual who admires—and strives to be or at least appear—like the one who has power and possessions rather than hiding this" (Gable 1997: 228). Once again, our assumptions of what egalitarianism looks like, what its correlates might be, and how it relates to hierarchy are profoundly challenged through an ethnographic analysis of the dynamics of secrecy.

Gable's is a particularly potent critique of the anthropological cliché of nightmare egalitarianism. Others tackle the issue in more oblique ways, but what comes out of much of the literature on secrecy is the surprising way in which secrecy challenges otherwise neat divides between egalitarianism and hierarchy. The process of concealing—and eventually, inevitably revealing—objects and information often demonstrates the interdependence, rather than the mutual exclusivity, of hierarchy and egalitarianism.

In the Diola case, I would not go so far as Gable to assert that Diola are more concerned with hiding what they do *not* have than what they have. There are some aspects of Diola secrecy that genuinely are caught up in a “keeping behind the Joneses” dynamic, and, at least as Diola experience them, their actions and interactions are very much oriented around concealing what they do, in fact, have and know.

Again, the relationship between Diola work ethic and modes of secrecy is revealing here. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Diola maintain a particular work regime and sanction those individuals who deviate from long-established wet rice cultivation practices. Diola work is public and visible, and can be maintained through sanctions and admonishments that are likewise public and visible. Secrecy as a pervasive mode of social interaction provides a counterpoint to the conformity demanded by the work regime, and enables a measure of autonomy and differentiation. The fetishized work regime allows people to uphold the appearance that everyone does and has the same things. Carefully scripted modes of dissembling and concealing also protect the image and idiom of equality, but they simultaneously provide a sphere for individuals to store up a little extra and do or be something a little different. Secrecy preserves the appearance of an egalitarian society, while at the same time providing an arena for individual variation. In a society generally emphasizing conformity, secrecy around one’s opinions and actions enables individuals to gain some measure of autonomy without openly disputing the smooth veneer of public consensus. It allows for

differentiation—even, as we will see in the more formal domains of ritual, accumulation—without disrupting the outward display of equality in poverty.

Furthermore, like the evasive responses to “*ukai beh*,” concealing possessions affirms one’s power to keep a secret, and hence provides a modicum of agency and autonomy within the structures that generally require redistribution or a supposed state of “nightmare egalitarianism.” It is worth emphasizing again that all the effort to conceal—shrouding objects in dark bags and under dark skies, insisting on material poverty, and so forth—does not actually obscure the understanding that people buy things in shops and raise pigs and maybe even have books. Again, this is neither about the content of what is being concealed, nor about maintaining the illusion that such “secrets” are in fact quite public. Rather, these dynamics indicate a complicity in and deference to a particular scheme of information flow.⁴³ Extending Sally Falk Moore’s (1976) concept of ritual collusion, what we have here is, again, not a matter of belief, but a kind of interactional collusion.

The second of Simmel’s central points most frequently taken up by subsequent analysts is that secrecy offers “the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world” (Simmel 1950: 330). Like the shift in emphasis from content to form, this insight has been a well-spring of ethnographic attention. It has typically been applied to realms of magic, esoteric knowledge, and secret societies (see especially Bellman 1984; Lurhmann 1989; Murphy 1980; Zahan 1979), but it is equally apt in the domain of material possessions and quotidian acts of dissembling and concealing. In the manifest Diola

world, everyone conforms and has the same possessions. In the secret, second world, people have and know different things. This secret world of differentiated individuals exists in a complicated but ultimately convenient way alongside the manifest world of equality, conformity, and consensus. We see this even more clearly in the formal realms of gender-based knowledge and rites of initiation.

Ritual Secrecy

Gender-based secrecy and knowledge

In addition to the ways silence and secrecy around a range of quotidian interactions serve to differentiate individuals while maintaining the appearance of conformity, more formalized arenas of knowledge and secrecy differentiate Diola in terms of gender, generation, and various statuses that ultimately preserve a very different kind of impression. In the previous chapter, I described the gendered division of labor in Diola cultivation practices. This gendered distinction is as carefully reproduced in the realm of cultural knowledge as it is in their agricultural efforts. One of the first rules I learned among Guinean Diola pertained to the gender-specific prohibitions around women's and men's spheres of knowledge. Simply put, men were not supposed to know anything about women's reproduction and women were not supposed to know anything about male initiation. Uninitiated members of both genders are not supposed to know anything about either. There is a rich ethnographic literature on gendered domains of secrecy—especially in reference to the body and bodily processes—that I draw on here, especially Sally Falk Moore's (1976) analysis of why Chagga preserve the fiction that men's anuses

are stitched closed during initiation, and Janis Irvine's (1976) study of Buu women's jural authority in matters of reproduction.

Beyond distinct men's and women's knowledge, information about women's secrets and men's secrets is strictly organized *within* each gender. Van Tilburg's (1998) reflexive essay on her fieldwork experience as a pregnant ethnographer among Senegalese Diola is instructive here. Van Tilburg discusses how she unwittingly learned the rules of secrecy and silence surrounding pregnancy and childbirth through the constraints on her own access to information about these domains. She confesses: "I hoped that my fieldwork while pregnant would initiate me into Diola womanhood and help me acquire the knowledge of the Diamat Diola women of Youtou..." (van Tilburg 1998: 180). But quite the opposite occurred. "I found that there were different lines, those that separate women from men, those that separate women from various statuses, and those that separate Diola from all others" (van Tilburg 1998: 185).

Access to different knowledge about reproduction organizes women into a hierarchy. Women gradually learn more and more "secret knowledge" based on their experience and success in childbirth. As van Tilburg explains,

As time went on, I started to learn the categories to which Diola women belonged according to their stage and success in reproduction. These categories formed a hierarchy. On the lowest rung were women pregnant for the first time;

next in order were the women whose babies did not survive; then women who had given birth only to girls; mothers who had given birth to and raised both sexes; culminating in mothers who has passed menopause (van Tilburg 1998: 183).

My research among Guinean Diola confirms and expands upon van Tilburg's analysis of Senegalese Diola secrecy around pregnancy and reproduction. For Guinean Diola, giving birth marks a woman's initiation into adult status. Interestingly, while male initiation is highly collectivized and rare (once every thirty years), female "initiation" in the form of childbirth is highly individualized and frequent. But both male initiation and childbirth are moments of complete gender-based seclusion, as well as realms of total secrecy within each gender. Women are not supposed to know anything about male initiation practices, and men are not supposed to know anything about women's reproduction—from menstruation to childbirth. Uninitiated members of both genders are meant to be ignorant of both male initiation and reproduction. When the Catholic missionaries set up the first school in Susana in the 1950s and started forcibly matriculating students, one of the most frequent parental and community-wide objections to schooling was the possibility that children would learn about the "secrets of reproduction." The first Diola word for school was *kadjanayaku*, which is derived from the Diola word for "ear" and "to hear." The implication was that school was the site of hearing things that would "poison the ears" of their children.⁴⁴

Each neighborhood has a maternity hut, enclosed with thick palm branches, thus distinguishing it from every other building in the village. Men are not allowed to go near the building. Although most women in Susana now typically give birth in the state clinic, they have preserved the secret and secluded aspects of childbirth. Some women continue to use the neighborhood maternity huts. Up until about ten or fifteen years ago, all women went into seclusion in the maternity hut when they were about to give birth. If it was their first time, they were supposedly ignorant of all proceedings until they unfolded, just as men were meant to be ignorant of circumcision until the moment they felt the knife. Older women assisted as traditional birth attendants in the maternity huts, some of whom continue to assist at births in the state clinic. Women are prohibited from giving birth at home, and if they do the house becomes polluted and must either be ritually cleansed or torn down.

After giving birth, a woman stays at the maternity hut for a few days and is then moved with the newborn to a nearby older woman's house, usually a widow living alone. She cannot go home—and her husband cannot see her or the baby—until the umbilical cord falls off and the wound is healed. The reason given for this extended stay is that if the husband sees the umbilical cord wound, he will ask what it is, and that might lead to revealing information about the “secrets of birth.” After giving birth, a woman's entire body is shaved, including her head. The only other time full head shaving occurs, that I am aware of, is shortly after the funeral for one's close relatives, such as a son or husband. Even though most women in Susana now give birth outside the maternity hut, these last two customs are still practiced.

In a parallel fashion, women are not supposed to know anything about male initiation and circumcision. There is a great deal of secrecy surrounding what happens in the sacred forest, where initiates are secluded for three months. Women are not allowed to walk beyond a certain point in the direction of the sacred grove, and the food they prepare each day for the initiates and their male kin in the forest is carried by other men—usually the most recent initiates from the last village to have undergone the rites—into the bush. I will discuss more aspects pertaining to male initiation in Part Two of the dissertation. For now, what is important to know is the emphasis with which Diola refer to the secrecy of male initiation, both in terms of the actual proceedings and the “secret knowledge” revealed to initiates by the elders in the forest. I was often told a cautionary tale about a man in the neighboring village of Elia who, having drunk too much palm wine, told his wife when the initiation proceedings would begin. As it is strictly forbidden to reveal such information to women, the man was severely disciplined; residents of the village raided his granary and took his rice, then tore the thatch off his house and broke down the mud walls. He was expelled from the village and he now lives in the Gambia.

Diola men also emphasize the instructional aspects of male initiation. Just as women in the maternity hut gain knowledge previously inaccessible to them, men in the sacred forest are instructed in oral history, songs, and norms by elders (see Mark 1992).

Referring to the decision of several Catholic families to desist from attending the last Susana male initiation, one informant told me, “The initiation forest is our library. Those that did not go will never really know the true meanings.” And “those who did not go”

are regularly reminded of their ignorance of and exclusion from these realms of Diola cultural knowledge. One young man whose family kept him from attending told me that his friends who did attend no longer want to spend time with him. “They think they know more than me,” he explained. “They say they learned many secrets in the initiation forest. And they say are not allowed to talk about many things in my presence because I am uninitiated.”

Although most women now give birth in the state health clinic with the assistance of the male (non-Diola) nurse, many women remain uncomfortable giving birth in such a public setting, which is used by men and women for all health concerns. During the latter stages of my fieldwork, women in Susana collectively built a separate building behind the existing clinic for the exclusive use of women with obstetric needs. The construction of a separate maternity center provides a compromise between the sacrality and secrecy of women’s reproduction and the need for improved and professional health services. Such a move represents women’s recognition of the decreased rates of mortality during childbirth at the clinic, but the need to create the conditions that maintain long-standing practices of secrecy and seclusion around childbirth.

A similar compromise occurred during an NGO-sponsored training for Diola traditional birth attendants I attended in May 2003. A Portuguese NGO that had recently become involved in the region organized the training, in which each Diola village selected two or three women—most of them recognized for their experience in attending births—to participate. The training was conducted by three non-Diola nurse-midwives from other

cities in Guinea-Bissau who spoke to the participants in Crioulo. Some of the older women needed translation, so a young man from Susana who was helping the Portuguese NGO with various tasks around the region was called in to translate. Since the topics on the first day pertained to general health and hygiene, this was not a problem. But at the end of the day the women decided that no men were to be allowed in the room for the rest of the training, since they would be discussing female reproductive matters, so the translator was sent home and the more competent Crioulo speakers among the women took on the task of translation, although this often resulted in much confusion.

At another point in the same training, also in the absence of the male translator, the nurse-midwives asked the Diola women what they knew about methods for preventing pregnancy, and several of the younger women mentioned birth control methods such as [Depo Provera] injections, IUDs, and the Pill. The nurse-midwives pressed them to discuss what kinds of methods they used before such modern means, or what other options they knew about from “traditional medicine” to prevent or abort a pregnancy. They were met with blank stares and shrugs. “Come on,” one of the nurse-midwives pushed, “You must know ways to do these things. Every *raça* [ethnic group] has these methods.” When asked again what plants would help a woman avoid conception, the Diola women demurred; several of the participants around the room insisted, “Felupe don’t do such things.”

It is impossible to know whether the women actually did not know such methods or they were unwilling to divulge such “secrets” to the younger women and non-Diola attendees.

But several other episodes during the course of my fieldwork made me suspect the latter. There is a rather stringent pro-natalist ethic among Diola that some women confessed to finding oppressive. In fact, once I had become closer to several women in the village, I was often asked to fulfill a somewhat clandestine role pertaining to birth control or other aspects of childbirth. On several occasions, I shuttled women across the Senegalese border to Ziguinchor, where they could receive both birth control and childbirth assistance not only unavailable to them in Susana but far from the watchful eyes of their neighbors.

One woman's case is particularly illustrative. Maribel had six children, and several of her pregnancies after her last child had ended in miscarriage. She had become quite weak and anemic, and suffered from regular abdominal cramping. She often told me that she would "like to take a break" from pregnancy and childbirth.⁴⁵ I asked Maribel whether there were any ways of preventing pregnancy that other women in the village knew. She said that there were, that the elder women knew ways and that her ancestors had long used "traditional medicine" to prevent pregnancies and perhaps induce abortions. I asked why she did not try one of these methods, and she said that the women who knew would not be willing to tell her. "This knowledge is secret," she shrugged.

It is not clear how elder women eventually come by such knowledge, but Maribel (and others) insisted that they would not readily part with it, even to women who had given birth many times. She reinforced this point when I asked her whether such prohibitions applied even to women like her, who had given birth to six healthy children—boys and

girls—and who were clearly sick and might compromise their health further with another pregnancy. Maribel shrugged again. It did not matter, she said, whether she had “six or ten or twenty children. You are still expected to give birth, just keep giving birth. They tell you it’s better to die giving birth than to avoid getting pregnant.”

Interestingly, gendered domains of secrecy tend to institute power relations and hierarchy within the same gender rather than between genders. The parallel secrecy between genders regarding reproduction and male initiation both minimizes and emphasizes difference between genders. It establishes a structural difference between men and women, without that difference necessarily leading to a position of domination and subordination between men and women. In fact, such measure-for-measure practices around gendered domains of secrecy could be seen as maintaining some sense of equality between men and women: we know some things, you know others. But secrecy about such matters within the same gender tends to lead to status distinctions laden with power and control between elders (the initiated) and juniors (the un- or less-initiated). Elder women, in the case above, maintain control over a realm of knowledge that helps give them power over their juniors. Until recently, women in labor depended entirely on their elders for assistance in the maternity hut during their most vulnerable moments. Keeping their juniors ignorant of both the childbirth process and other information pertaining to reproduction creates, as van Tilburg notes, a hierarchy of knowledge among women, differentiating women based on their reproductive status. Such differentiated knowledge and modes of secrecy gives elder women power not only over the fate of particular women, but over maintaining and enforcing norms regarding high parity. Likewise,

uninitiated men are entirely at the mercy of their elders when they enter the sacred forest, and their status as full Diola men who “know the true meanings” can only be attained through submission to elders’ authority, both in the act of circumcision and in the acquisition of cultural knowledge.

Such dynamics resonate with scholarship on the technologies of control over the flow of information, particularly in the realms of religious and other esoteric knowledge (Keen 1994; La Fontaine 1985; Murphy 1980, 1981, 1990, 1998). Murphy (1980, 1990), for example, asserts that the performance of secrecy is always part of a larger play for power. Scholars in this vein tend to follow a largely Marxist and/or Foucauldian formula in which knowledge equals power and differences in access to knowledge lead to particular kinds of hierarchy. As Appiah encapsulates, “Secrecy generates differences in what people know. These differences matter; knowledge is power” (Appiah 1985: 15-16). I suggest that these differences matter more in some instances than others. In the Diola case, such power is exerted within the same gender, but the differentiating aspects of secrecy between the genders seems to distinguish without specific ensuing power implications.

What is perhaps most interesting about the insistence on gender-based secrecy and knowledge is just how much effort goes in to preserving these exclusive domains of knowledge. The process of generating, concealing, and eventually transferring cultural knowledge sometimes seems as laborious as do Diola efforts in the rice paddies. And the content of such carefully guarded “public secrets” is, again, largely irrelevant. Of course

men know about reproduction and women have a generally good idea about what happens in the initiation grove. But maintaining separate spheres of knowledge and secrecy differentiates women from men, which is important enough that such a state of gender- and status-specific knowledge and ignorance is elaborately preserved both through jural consequences—as we saw in the case of the Elia man who revealed the date of the initiation’s commencement to his wife—and, as discussed in Chapter Two, through *batolhabu* burials. It is both an instance of ritual collusion and a manifestation of how cultural energy is expended to reproduce social forms that cannot be taken for granted (see Arens and Karp 1989).

Secrecy of the Spirit Shrines

Another institutional domain structured around a strictly regulated flow of information is the realm of spirit shrines (*ukinau*) and the religious knowledge involved in attending to the spirit world. What bears emphasizing for the purposes of this chapter is the way in which knowledge regarding religious practice is maintained and transferred within a very small, exclusive segment of the population. Knowledge about rituals and shrine ceremonies is not just restricted from nosy foreigners; most lay Diola do not know much about spirit shrines beyond who officiates at each one and what animals can be sacrificed there. Esoteric knowledge is strictly forbidden to those who do not have rights to it—either through birthright or selection as a shrine priest. It is deemed dangerous to know something beyond one’s purview.

As we saw in the opening vignette detailing AmpaKapeña's funeral, elders and ritual officers (*amangen-i*) possessed and controlled all information regarding the funerary rites and posthumous mandates, and laypeople neither did nor could question their authority in these matters. Such was the case in most ritual occasions I observed; even when participating, lay Diola had very little idea of the reasons for ceremonies and religious practices and, unlike me, would never ask for such explication. When I would inquire about the significance of religious or symbolic acts—such as why *ai-i* carry their own stools and wear only red, or why the *ai-i* light a *fire* to commence a wrestling match—my questions were met with shrugs. Often my interlocutors would tell me, “It is not for us to know such things. Only the *amangen-i* can know.” Whether or not they did, in fact, know and could not (or would not) reveal this knowledge to me is irrelevant. What became clear in these interactions is that they were not *supposed* to know, and it would have been a serious breach if they admitted to such knowledge.

Gaining the rights to such knowledge—even if one inherits the role of a shrine priest—involves a long and often expensive process of initiation and ceremonial inductions. Interestingly, not everyone who has rights to a ritual office is eager to exercise them, and some go to great lengths to avoid them. I detail such cases in Part Two of the dissertation. The active refusal to become a member of an exclusive class of ritual officers who control valuable knowledge about the natural and supranatural world demonstrates that, for Diola, the pursuit of knowledge is not always an unqualified benefit.

Both of Simmel's key contributions are relevant here. Clearly, the content of a secret is far less important than the form in which it is concealed and revealed. In the case of gendered domains of secrecy, such regulation of knowledge serves as a mask to separate, in a structuralist sense, along the lines of sex and status; an artificial distinction that enables differentiation based on access to particular kinds of knowledge and practice.⁴⁶ Moreover, alongside the manifest world of material constraints and poverty, Diola inhabit another world rich in ideas and information. It is a world free from the limits of natural resources, intricately managed in its production and reproduction, and potent with the capacity to differentiate and cohere. Knowledge, as we know, is a kind of currency. You can possess it, it flows among people, and it has hidden power. In the Diola case, the production and circulation of both informal information about oneself (where one is going, what one might have in a bag) and more formal cultural knowledge about the natural, social, and supranatural world are inflected with subtle configurations of power, autonomy, and differentiation. In more stark terms, information as a kind of currency one can generate, amass, and withhold provides a contrast to the experience of material poverty in the manifest world.

We can take this one step further when we see that, from a Diola perspective, the power that resides in certain knowledge does not just pertain to the world of ideas, but coalesces in the "interaction between natural, social, and supernatural realms" (Arens and Karp 1989: xviii). It is precisely because Diola recognize their precarious circumstances, and in a more general sense, have always acknowledged the fragility of the natural and social world, that they invest so heavily in maintaining control over the forces—often mediated

through particular forms of knowledge—that order both of these realms. Diola adherence to these modes of knowledge production and circulation proscribe, in powerful ways, what they can and cannot do in their daily lives. Rather than Simmel’s designation of the world of secrecy as secondary to the manifest world, for Diola the world of circumscribed cultural knowledge might be considered primary, ultimately shaping—or hoping to shape—the manifest, material world. As the constraints and limits inherent in the natural world are more keenly felt, similar to their adherence to a particular work regime Diola are perhaps accentuating the ways in which controls over and enactments of forms of cultural knowledge might be even more important. Again, what gets reinforced are displaced social forms—an allegiance to arduous manual work and a regulation of information—even when these are increasingly at variance with the capacity of households to provision themselves and the society to reproduce itself.

Conclusions: Secret Societies, Open Societies

Simmel hailed secrecy as “one of man’s greatest achievements” (Simmel 1950: 330). From a developmental perspective he saw secrecy as a sophisticated social form that contrasted with the “childish stage in which everything is expressed at once” (Simmel 1950: 330). At one level, we can see Diola modes of secrecy as a “great achievement” in terms of the elaborate structures of knowledge into which people sort themselves. Information flow is partly organized in formal domains of social structure—widely understood categories of gendered, generational, and status based access to knowledge—and partly in individual choice and agency. We have seen that this is a sophisticated and

elaborate system of producing and transferring knowledge that is highly complex and differentiated.

Diola seem to encode the insight offered in this chapter's epigram in their very conception of what it means to be human. The Diola word for human is "anau," the root of which—"N"—means "to speak." But the words for each particular type of person—a man, a woman, girls and boys at different levels of maturation, and so forth—add to this root "N" a range of conditions and constraints. A human being, then, is one who speaks, but becoming a person involves understanding when and how and with whom to be silent. Learning how to manage information—who can know what, when knowledge can be revealed, how to dissemble in everyday forms of social interaction—is all part of Diola socialization processes. The capacity—or, sometimes, the imperative—to be silent refracts across Diola social organization along many dimensions, such as gender, generation, lineage, ritual roles, and life-course. This chapter has explored the interplay of speaking and silence, concealing and revealing as it textures Diola social life, organizing axes of difference and shaping human sociation in powerful ways.

Gaining a better understanding of how Diola manage information and strategize around concealing and revealing knowledge enables a more appropriate engagement with the central concerns that motivate this dissertation: how Diola are responding to their own acknowledgement of profound economic and environmental changes that make their lives—individually and collectively—precarious.⁴⁷ Faced with this dilemma, one might assume that discussion among villagers about these conditions would be critical. But

norms that regulate the circulation of knowledge, and the habits of concealing information about oneself and the conditions of one's household, texture the ways in which Diola confront such changes in their ecological and economic landscape.

The Diola tendency to circumscribe the flow of information contrasts with Western ideas about knowledge. In a general sense, it is a rather Western commonplace to see openness, broadly conceived, as beneficial on both individual and social planes. Modern psychological theory and practice rests on an assumption that openness—with oneself and others—is the crux to restoring and maintaining a healthy mental state.⁴⁸ Not only is openness assumed to be essential to the health of the individual body and psyche, but openness and transparency are seen as the hallmarks for a healthy (read: democratic) society. Simmel was clear on this point, too:

Every democracy holds publicity to be an intrinsically desirable situation, on the fundamental premise that everybody should know the events and circumstances that concern him, since this is the condition without which he cannot contribute to decisions about them” (Simmel 1950: 337)

Many scholars have focused on the presumed antithetical dynamic between secrecy and democracy, discussing how state secrets and “public secrets” challenge or undermine the relationship between citizens and state actors, or generally subvert supposed democratic

values (see Bok 1979, 1982; Masco 2006; Shils 1956; Taussig 1999; Tefft 1980).⁴⁹

Simply put, there is something disturbing about secrecy to the Western/modern mind.

The teleology of the Western version of its own history of knowledge is that transparency replaces other forms of knowing, such as secrecy and witchcraft. (See a recent edited volume by West and Sanders (2003) that exposes such “retrograde” practices as magic in so-called modern contexts, thereby subverting this Enlightenment idea that transparency, as a mode of knowledge, replaces previous “irrational” forms). Secrecy is often cast as the bedfellow to such irrational, antiquated, and reactionary projects as magic, witchcraft, and authoritarian power. It is the enemy of democracy and the “open society.” The free pursuit of knowledge and transparency in the relations between citizen and state: these are the values that define an “open society.” And these cast secrecy in the shadows of backwardness, anti-modern, the sinister. When we uphold the value “truth and reconciliation,” secrecy becomes conjoined with conflict, chaos, and backwardness.

In Diola approaches to the production and circulation of information, knowledge is often conceived of as dangerous and is sometimes actively avoided. Given this orientation, secrecy and silence are seen as protective strategies, as van Tilburg acknowledges: “I learned the rule that speaking makes one vulnerable and silence makes one strong. Silence not only increases the value of the knowledge it protects; it also protects people during periods of vulnerability” (van Tilburg 1998: 178). The efforts to conceal possessions, opinions, and actions; the habits of social interaction that emphasize reserve, restraint, and evasion; and the seclusion of the initiation forest and the maternity hut all stand quite a long way from the “free spaces” (Evans and Boyte 1992) of a Habermasian

public sphere (Habermas 1999). Among other implications, this presents thorny challenges to even the most culturally-sensitive, Freirian-inspired development policies and practices. Diola modes of knowledge production and circulation both expose and complicate the Western assumption that the pursuit of knowledge is an unequivocal right, and that society gains when intellectual property is democratized.

Furthermore, within the Diola framework, patience becomes more than just a virtue: it is a dominant cultural feature.⁵⁰ Diola individuals spend a lot of their lives not knowing things, secure in the understanding that waiting until they reach the appropriate age or status will yield knowledge at the apposite time and place. The prolonged initiation cycle means that some men wait over 30 years to acquire what is deemed to be the bulk of valuable cultural knowledge. Beyond that, it takes a great deal of time and effort to acquire the knowledge that comes with a particular ritual office. And beyond even that, there is an entirely ineffable realm—that of Emitai, the supreme deity whose ways are, as the root of the word indicates, “unknowable.”

This all contrasts with a Western approach to knowledge—that it is good to ask, to learn as much as possible as young as possible. That the way to address a given problem is to learn about it rapidly and act even faster. And that, in our own religion of science, everything is ultimately knowable.

But it is impossible to ignore the fact that secrecy—or the tendency to narrowly distribute information—is part of the reason that it is so difficult for Diola to deal with their current

predicament as a collective problem. A structural consequence of the ways in which Diola control knowledge, combined with the tendency to wait and not to ask, is that these dynamics maintain the status quo. These are powerful drivers of continuity of specific social forms, and they make innovation difficult. This is not the same as saying such cultural processes *cause* Diola inaction and increasing poverty. Rather, these dynamics have the unintended consequence of simultaneously buttressing continuity and being poorly suited to responsive changes in a changed set of circumstances.

This chapter and the one preceding it have demonstrated that both the production of rice and the production of knowledge entail rigorous work. Both are arenas in which Diola expend a great deal of physical and cultural energy. The adherence to these particular regimes of work and knowledge has significant consequences for the ways in which Diola villagers confront their current predicament of environmental and economic decline. As we have seen, the boundaries that get maintained and the domains that get reproduced and reinforced operate at the level of values and social forms that are detached from the provisioning needs that these are meant to support.

Part II

Mission Implausible: *Conflicting Values of Mission and Village Life*

Preface

Dry Season 1998: A Crisis in the Diola Christian Community

In 1998, Susana held its once every 30 years male initiation (*bukutabu*). The majority of Diola families who were aligned with the Catholic Mission participated in the initiation, although a minority of families desisted. After initiation was over and men returned to the village from their four months in the forest, Diola Catholics went to Mass, where they were “publicly insulted” by Susana’s reigning Italian priest and “expelled” from the Mission. They and their families have not been to the Mission since, and the Diola Catholic community is currently split, in all of its associations, between those who attended initiation and those who did not. Even four years later, during the course of my fieldwork in Susana, the male initiation debacle served as the fulcrum on which most interpersonal conflicts turned.

Conflicts over male initiation were not limited to Susana. Each of the outlying Diola villages that have Catholic communities went through a similar process, but since the Catholic communities are much smaller there the proceedings caused less commotion. Another factor that led to the particularly intense turmoil over Susana’s initiation lies in the way male initiation circulates from village to village each year, causing a kind of snowball effect of accumulating tension and problems that culminated in Susana’s 1998 initiation rites.

The post-initiation fallout has been severe on both sides. Physical violence has erupted on a number of occasions between Diola Christians who did attend and those who did not, and several deaths have been linked to the initiation dispute. Another repercussion from the split between the pro- and anti-initiation contingents involved the reclaiming of all borrowed and pledged rice paddies from the anti-initiation families. As discussed above, every family depends on a mixture of inherited, borrowed, and pledged land. The idea of reclaiming borrowed and pledged land as a punishment against anti-initiation families emerged in Edjim, during their initiation a few years prior to Susana's, and subsequently spread to Susana where it affected most of the 29 families who did not attend initiation. Finally, the disagreement over initiation caused a rift in what was a tight-knit Diola Christian community, and reorganized alliances strictly along the lines of those who did and those who did not attend initiation. Whereas before 1998 Santa Maria's neighborhood and work associations included all Mission-attending families, now there is a youth association comprised of those who attended initiation and a separate one for those who did not, a women's association comprised of mothers whose sons attended initiation and a separate one for mothers whose sons did not, and so on. Even the neighborhood soccer team has split along these lines, and during a 2003 inter-village tournament sponsored by a Bissau-based Diola youth group, the non-initiation youth proposed forming a separate team, rather than competing to be in Susana's village-wide team, for fear of how they would be treated if they joined the regular team. The social lives of the families are also deeply divided: pro-initiation and anti-initiation youth have separate clubs, separate parties, and separate dances. Pro-initiation and anti-

initiation adults no longer visit one another's homes, even though they were once the closest of friends.

The overwhelming majority of initiation-attending families want to return to the Mission. They no longer participate in other "traditional" religious activities, such as ceremonies and sacrifices, and they strongly feel that they are proper Christians. But they want to return on their own terms, and they are deeply sensitive to what they feel are inappropriate insults from the priest and the non-initiation families. Each side claims its members to be the "true Christians," and, in a display of seemingly un-Christian attitudes, neither is willing to forgive the other for the post-initiation fall-out. The initiation conflict thus exposes a number of tensions between Christian and Diola ways, and opens up an exploration of the complex interface between Mission and village social worlds.

The relationship between the Mission and various Diola communities and the emerging and dynamic sense of what it means to be Diola and Christian are the primary areas of concern for the following chapters. Although the conflict over male initiation set the tone for many of my discussions with Diola residents about Mission-village interaction and Diola Christianity, I was soon able to develop a wider understanding of these issues over space and time. I came to understand that it is impossible to underestimate the importance of the Mission—in religious and non-religious domains—for current Diola lives, and an ethnography of contemporary Diola society must take into account this complex history and set of dynamics. Furthermore, the introduction of a new set of values, norms, and practices through the Mission sets into relief Diola indigenous

attitudes and practices, especially in the more contentious moments of village-Mission interaction. Such interplays enable me to make more visible certain areas of Diola belief and custom as they are defined in contrast to the brand of Catholicism advocated by the Susana-based missionaries. Given the half-century presence of an Italian-sponsored mission in Susana, I can also now examine the ways in which such values and practices have transformed—from both Diola and Mission perspectives—and the extent to which a new “structure of feeling” (Williams 1977) has emerged around the Diola Christian community. Finally, the introduction of a new religion into Diola society opens up questions about the possibility for pluralism in cosmological and theological terms. Simply put: can one be both Diola and Christian? Is there room in both Diola and Christian social and theological frameworks to combine the two? And is the result really an increased plurality, or is religion simply not amenable to a pluralistic approach (Hardy 1993, 2003)?

The following chapters explore these questions by delving into the history of Susana’s Mission and its various personnel, the experiences of the first cohorts of Diola Christians, and the ongoing tensions and negotiations within the Diola Catholic community and between the Mission and village. The two chapters continually return to the specific case of male initiation and consider, within the broader and deeper context of Mission-village relations, how and why this crisis became so pivotal to questions about Diola Christianity.

Chapter Five

The PIME Mission in Susana, 1952-2003

In approaching the study of conversion, one must begin with the assumption that two religious traditions come into contact, each implying a world view far more comprehensive than any particular statement of belief can fully articulate... New concepts are often understood through the categories of experience sustained by their prior religious knowledge. Only gradually can these deeper structures of thought be influenced by new religious experience. This persistence of pre-conversion modes of enquiry and explanation encourages the convert, where permitted, to establish links between the teachings and attitudes of his pre-conversion life and the demands of the new religion (Baum, 1990: 394).

The scholarly literature on Christianity and religious change in Africa is vast and varied, and had led to many productive debates over the past several decades (Bediako 1995; Beidelman 1982; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Fernandez 1978; 1982; Hastings 1979; Isichei 1995; James and Johnson 1988; Maxwell 1997; Mbiti 1980; Meyer 2004; van Binsbergen 1981).⁵¹ Discussing religious change in Africa typically entails, at its core, attention to the encounter between African traditional religions and world religions in terms of the ways in which this encounter both reconfigures the indigenous social order and indigenizes the newly introduced world religion. What are the processes of

conversion (Baum 1990; Engelke 2004; Horton 1975a, 1975b)? How are different metaphors and codes assimilated and transformed in these processes (Fernandez 1978, 1986; James 1988; Werbner 1989)? How are community organizational structures—or even the notion of community itself—altered (Beidelman 1982; Bravman 1998; Ranger 1987)? Among other themes, Africanist scholars have examined the collusion between missionaries and colonial authorities (Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Etherington 1983), as well as the instrumentalist motives of Africans who seek membership in religious communities or brotherhoods (Long 1968; Parkin 1972).

Scholars exploring the influence of Christianity in Africa have tended to focus on the impact of Protestant missionaries, whether from Europe or North America (Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Donham 1999; Etherington 1983; Gray 1990; Sanneh 1991) along with the growth of African Independent Churches (Fernandez 1978) and Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (Meyer 2004) across the continent. Others have examined the spread of religious cults (Fabian 1981; Turner 1957; Werbner 1989). There is comparatively scant literature on the role of Catholic missions in Africa (exceptions include Kenny 1983; Kollman 2005; Konings 2003), perhaps partly because their numbers are dwarfed by the burgeoning Protestant presence, especially since the era of independence and the general global growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity (Robbins 2004). But Catholicism continues to play an important role in postcolonial Africa, and its history in various regions, as well as the particular dynamics involved in Catholic Missionary efforts, which are distinct from Protestant ones—both in terms of

Church institutional organization and theological differences between the denominations—merit a closer look.

Fernandez's (1978) important review noted the shift in scholarship on African religious movements (and particularly African Independent Churches) from typological approaches to more historical and ethnographic attention to local images and ideas. His main problem with earlier structural and Marxist approaches (e.g., Horton 1975; van Binsbergen 1977) is their uncritical tendency to impose Western frameworks (such as the distinction between superstructure and infrastructure) onto African religious imaginations. As he summarizes,

My point is, and I think it is a very anthropological one, our real enlightenment lies not in the application of imageless ideas exported from the West but in beginning with African images and by careful method learning what they imply—what is embedded in them. In this approach we may discover other dialectics (Fernandez 1978: 215).

Taking Fernandez's review as a point of departure, Birgit Meyer (2004) provides an update on approaches to the anthropology of Christianity in Africa, especially given the increasing salience of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (PCCs). Moving away from Fernandez's distinction between Western and African religious imaginations, Meyer

contends: “If the adjectives “African” and “Independent” were once employed as markers of authentic, indigenous interpretations of Christianity, these terms proved to be increasingly problematic to capture the rise, spread, and phenomenal appeal of PCCs in Africa.” But even though Meyer critiques Fernandez’s approach because it no longer suits the empirical reality of African religious movements—especially PCCs—25 years later, and she calls into question the validity of such terms as “African” and “Independent,” I still find Fernandez’s review useful for my research context, in which we are dealing less with religious movements along the lines of PCCs, and much more with the encounter between a brand of Catholicism represented by (and through) Western missionary leaders and an indigenous religious worldview that has been largely insulated from many of the shifts to world religions—whether Christianity or Islam—that have had such a sweeping impact on most of the rest of the continent.

My exploration of the PIME Catholic Mission in Susana, and of Diola Christianity more broadly, takes up many of these longstanding themes in the study of African religious change. Through a close examination of the dynamic relationship between Mission and village, the tensions and conflicts between the two systems—as well as within each—are illuminated (van Velsen 1967). This formulation of the major players being cast as either “Mission” or “village” is the one most typically used by residents in Susana and Mission personnel themselves, whether they see themselves as more aligned with the Mission or the village. These two broad terms encode a range of meanings and assumptions that have become, over the past few decades, encased within a growing understanding—on both sides—of where the significant distinctions between the two lie. “Mission” often

connotes foreignness, especially whiteness, as well as a range of social, economic, cultural, and political features that have come to define the PIME mission in Diola-land. “Village” is often a code word for “traditional” and, when used in contrast to “Mission,” usually refers to people and practices whose core operating principles revolve around the logic of spirit shrines and *awasena* ways.⁵² The chapters in this section of the dissertation explore the Mission-village formulation through the narratives and experiences of people on both sides, with special attention to those who are caught in the middle ground, trying to resolve the tensions between Mission and village and perhaps reformulate what it means to be Diola and Christian.

This section relates to the broad themes of the dissertation—social change, continuity, and conflict—in its attention to current contestations over customs, practices, and morals as they emerge in the relations among Catholic missionaries, Diola Christians, and non-Christian villagers. I am particularly interested in exploring how different members of Susana’s Diola population negotiate their positions and practices within and outside the Mission, and where (and why) they draw clear boundaries between Diola and Catholic sensibilities and orientations.

It is inevitable that any microanalysis of such dynamics in so small a place as Susana concentrates heavily on the particular people involved—the priests, the first Diola Christians, and the Susana residents whose lives have become entangled with the PIME Mission. Much of what I record and discuss is enmeshed within the highly particular personalities and life trajectories of those most deeply involved, and it is my intention to

represent and preserve these particularities, and enable the reader to come to know these individuals as distinct and complex characters, as much as it is my goal to look for collective patterns, emergent themes, and broader issues relevant to the Mission-village encounter.

Mission History

On January 22, 1952, the first priest from the PIME diocese arrived in Susana, and subsequently established a Catholic Mission that has played a vital and often controversial role in the region's recent history. PIME, the *Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere* (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions), is an Italian-based missionary group founded independently in Milan in 1850 and in Rome in 1874 as a society of diocesan priests whose explicit purpose is to dedicate their lives to missionaries across the globe.⁵³ PIME priests first came to what was then Portuguese Guinea in 1947 (Gheddo 1999). The Portuguese missionaries already active in the colony insisted on retaining their turf in Bissau, the new colonial capital. PIME priests had come through the imposition of the Vatican and the Portuguese were not pleased about their presence in the colony (Gheddo 1999 and interviews with PIME priests). The policy of the Apostolic Prefect (there was no bishop in the region yet) was to reserve Bissau, Bula, Canchungo, and Mansoa for Portuguese Franciscan priests, and to send PIME priests, should they choose to stay, to "the bush." So, in 1947, six PIME priests and one monk began a series of expeditions into the interior, ultimately splitting into two groups: one settling in Bafatá and the other in Geba, both locations in the heart of Guinean Muslim country (Gheddo 1999: 23). From the Bafatá group, Padre Spartaco Marmugi went to Susana after an exploratory trip

by one of his colleagues, who described the life in Susana as “very difficult, poor, and full of sacrifice; the two priests Marmugi and Andreoletti literally cannot find things to eat, one cannot buy anything if not in Senegal, at Suzana there is only the exchange of agricultural products and crafts” (Gheddo 1999: 53).⁵⁴

The Italian PIME priests had two Portuguese Franciscan predecessors (a priest and a monk) who came to Susana in 1943. They set up their small mission in the center of town, across from the Portuguese army barracks, and attended only to the scant non-Diola population. They baptized six non-Diola African residents and set up a small school in which to teach them to read in Portuguese and pray in Latin. But they left in 1944 because, according to the current priest in Susana, they felt “it wasn’t time yet” to be among the Diola since “Felupes were too closed.”

The Portuguese Apostolic Prefect in Bissau proposed starting up the stalled work in Susana in 1951, as perhaps “things were more open.” Padre Marmugi, who was in Farim at the time, volunteered to go, excited by the prospect of “starting from scratch” and insisting that he was the one to go, “even if I have to go on foot.” Marmugi first established the PIME headquarters in the same area that the Portuguese Franciscans had left. Soon, though, he obtained land (with Portuguese colonial backing) in the center of the village, in what was then *matu fitchadu*—dense, un-cut forest. After clearing the land, presumably through forced labor campaigns comprised of local residents often used for such purposes during the late colonial era, Padre Marmugi built a school. Unlike his Portuguese predecessors his efforts were focused on the majority Diola population, and

he began to recruit Diola participants in Mission activities. After several unsuccessful attempts to convince local families to attend mass and send their children to his school, Padre Marmugi enlisted Portuguese colonial backing once again. He convinced the chief colonial administrator in Susana to register the names of all school-aged children in the village. The administrator then sent his *sipaios* to physically catch the children and force them into the school. When Diola families realized what was going on many of them took their children into the thick forest surrounding the village to hide from the authorities, a tactic they used repeatedly during the subsequent forced schooling campaigns. But several young boys and girls were successfully captured, and Padre Marmugi began to teach them rudimentary reading and writing skills. Even though the Diola families were deeply suspicious of his efforts, they were threatened by colonial officials to let their children attend classes on pain of corporal punishment. As for the children, they enjoyed the novelty of Mission schooling, and most participants in these first cohorts recall with nostalgia the glee they felt in receiving their first clothing from Padre Marmugi, as well as a weekly ration of soap to wash themselves and their new clothes. Many Diola residents, when talking about this era, do not seem indignant or resentful of these coercive tactics. Rather, they laugh at their own innocence and discuss the proceedings as if they were a playful game. "I used to hide in the bush," my neighbor told me, nonchalantly. "My mother would tell me never to accept a gift from a white person. There was a suspicion that white people who seemingly gave you gifts were really fishing for you because they wanted to catch you and make you a stranger. So I would hide in the forest when they came to capture the other kids for school. But really I

wanted to go see what my friends were up to there. And they got a t-shirt from the priest. I wanted a t-shirt, too.”

A few of the non-Diola residents who had received minimal training from the Portuguese priests were brought in as teacher’s aids. Tio Manuel—my neighbor in Susana and one of the first non Diola residents to be baptized by the original Portuguese missionaries—had completed third grade under their tutelage and was considered educated enough to help with the earlier grades, holding their hands in the appropriate way to teach them to form letters. In this way, the first cohort of Diola school children proceeded. But, by the time they had completed a couple of grades, the boys reached the age in which they declared their future wives. Betrothal ceremonies took over school-related activities, and Padre Marmugi, deciding it was inappropriate to have students who were married or preparing to be so, expelled the entire group and recruited, through the same methods, a fresh cohort.

Through this act, Marmugi was also making a statement that he was opposed to the Diola tradition of declaring brides at such a young age, but the message did not seem to have much impact. Instead, once he was wise to this custom, Marmugi developed a new plan for his next cohort. When the boys neared the age of declaring brides, he sent them away to the Bafatá mission to continue their schooling. Once they were removed from Susana and the control of their families, they had little recourse but to continue in their Mission-led lives.⁵⁵ This strategy worked quite well, and several cohorts of Diola boys were sent to Bafatá, where, according to members of this group, “things accelerated a bit.” When

they completed fourth grade in Bafatá, they were considered educated enough to be teachers in their own right, and Marmugi either arranged for them to continue schooling elsewhere, or he brought them back to Susana to serve as teachers for the younger students. This is how Susana developed a stable of Diola teachers that, to this day, comprise the majority of teachers at schools scattered across Diola territory.

When the Mission school first started, adults called it *kadjanayaku*, derived from the Diola words “ear” and “to hear.” Their primary concern with the school was that children would learn things that were taboo for them to know, especially regarding sexual reproduction. Their fear was that boys would learn about “women’s ways,” of which they were supposed to remain entirely ignorant. The school marked the first intrusion into the carefully separated gendered domains of knowledge and secrecy that organized Diola social and ritual life. To compound matters, the site on which the mission was developing its facilities was also home to an important women’s spirit shrine—*karahayaku*. Women would regularly congregate there for ceremonies and weekly barter markets, and Padre Marmugi’s attempts to hold mass or classes were often disrupted by these large gatherings, which sometimes included drinking, drumming, singing, and dancing. Marmugi decided that the two ceremonial sites—an expanding Catholic Mission and a longstanding women’s spirit shrine—could not co-exist on the same turf, so he negotiated with village elders to have it moved to a place behind the Mission walls. He gave the elders a pig, some sugarcane liquor, and several bunches of tobacco and asked them for their help in moving the market and shrine. According to current accounts of this process, the negotiations were amicable (some more cynical residents say

elders will do anything if you give them a little liquor), and a ceremony was held to remove the shrine and re-establish it where it currently sits, near the clearing that serves as Susana's traditional barter market.

To this day, Diola consistently repeat that their elders were opposed to the Mission school because of its violation of gendered domains of knowledge and secrecy; schoolchildren would have their "ears poisoned" by teachers who told them about sex and reproduction. But Padre Zé, the current reigning Italian priest in Susana, discounts this reason as a façade.

They refused to let their children go to school because they thought, 'If they go to school, white people will tell them how babies are born.' [Laughs.] Since that's taboo, they shouldn't go. That's always the reason that was given. But in my mind, there were other reasons behind this one. Going to school would mean that the elders would lose their authority. They sensed this... Felupes are, after all, intelligent [laughs]... At a certain point, school would put their power and authority in crisis; if their children gained access to knowledge of things elders did not know, knowledge of things from outside, they would no longer listen just to their elders, do just what their elders told them... Even before school, the generation of parents of

these children already knew things. They knew about cars, for example. Cars hadn't come here before. I remember Alfredo Kassompa's father... he was the first person who taught Padre Marmugi Felupe [language]; he was a free thinker, he had his own philosophy. He was the first to see a car, the first Felupe from Susana who saw a car. When the first car came to Susana, everyone went to go look at the car. He didn't go. He said, 'Look, I told you already what a car looks like. I saw one in Cacheu. You didn't believe me. Now, you go look at the car and see for yourselves if what I told you is true.' When they returned he asked, 'Isn't it like a canoe with a top? Doesn't it have wheels that touch the ground?' They nodded. 'So,' he said, 'I told you all this but you didn't believe.' So even this generation, they came to know things that their elders didn't know. Their children would go to school and be exposed to even more? No, they couldn't allow it. Their authority would be finished, because they would come to know.... So they gave the excuse that it was taboo for children to know how babies are born. But behind this excuse was much more...

Both Padre Marmugi and Padre Zé reasoned that the elders' resistance, based on their self-interested desire to preserve their own gerontocratic power, was grounds for using colonial intervention to defy elders' authority and enable children to attend their school.

Beyond the captured schoolchildren, Padre Marmugi was able to recruit several early converts to the Mission, each of whom came because of a different set of motivations (to be explored below). These first converts were the targets of much abuse from their families and neighbors. They had stopped going to certain *awasena* ceremonies, and their elders accused them of "denying their ancestors." Although they had not been baptized yet, they had begun to attend catechism and frequent Mission activities, and they responded that they had "seen another way and entered a different path." Elders threatened them, saying that their children would die and they would not be able to have more children, and many of them were physically beaten. So they decided to leave their natal neighborhoods and look for a different place to settle. At first, Padre Marmugi did not want them to leave their neighborhoods, as he believed they were a vital link to reach out to the as-yet unbelievers in the village; he feared that by moving away from their neighborhoods they would lose contact with others in the village and the work of the Mission would not progress. But once he saw the physical dangers involved in their staying put, he arranged with the Portuguese authorities to use the vacant land along the Mission walls. Six families built their houses there in 1964 and established Santa Maria—a name the converts chose themselves—as the Diola Christian neighborhood. Santa Maria has since grown to a neighborhood of 62 houses, although not all converts build their houses there, and there are a few houses in Santa Maria that belong to non-

Christians (even though this is discouraged by the current priests). Santa Maria residents maintain their claims to inherited rice paddies and forest groves, and thus continue to cultivate in their agnatic environment.

Padre Marmugi spent 21 years in Susana, establishing several chapels in outlying villages. Marmugi's extraordinary diplomatic skills and warmth, even with what must have been—at first—rudimentary Diola language competence, are evident in recollections of his reign in Susana. Despite what seem to be coercive, manipulative, and altogether intrusive tactics, Marmugi remains well loved by Diola Christians and non-Christians alike, especially when compared to his successor, Padre Zé, who joined Padre Marmugi in Susana in 1968. Marmugi seemed to have deep respect for Diola residents, and treated villagers with sincere affection. He was an avid hunter, and regularly went hunting with Diola friends, cementing social bonds with them beyond those of a reserved and removed priest.

It was on such a hunting trip that Marmugi received what turned out to be a fatal blow. After shooting a bird he went to collect it, but the bird had not yet died and bit him on the ankle. Even though he treated it, the wound became infected, so he went to Bissau (in those days, there was no road transport, only a plane used by Portuguese colonial officials to bring supplies back and forth from Bissau into the interior) to seek further medical treatment. The Portuguese doctor wanted to give him an injection that Padre Marmugi tried to refuse, but the doctor insisted. (In another version of this story, I have been told that the medicine was past its expiration date). Within minutes, Padre Marmugi fainted.

This was during the height of the War of Independence, and Marmugi was convinced (as are others in Susana when recounting the story) that he had been intentionally injected with bad medicine because the Portuguese did not approve of his activities and believed him to be a supporter of the liberation efforts. He insisted on returning to Susana, because if he died in Bissau he knew his body would be sent back to Italy for burial, and he wanted to be buried in Susana. So he chartered a plane and flew back to Susana in time for Christmas. But he was already too weak to conduct Christmas mass, and the next day he took to his bed. Tio Manuel and a few others went to visit him, and Manuel recalls that Marmugi joked with them that he wanted to be buried properly; that he did not want to be buried in Bissau because the cemetery was crowded and bodies were so close to one another, but here in Susana the cemetery was still open and largely unoccupied. The next day, one of the Italian nuns—Irmã Maria—went to look for Padre Marmugi but could not find him. No one saw him all day, and when Padre Zé returned from his activities in outlying villages, he peered in the window of Marmugi's bathroom and saw he had collapsed there while taking a bath. He was still breathing, but died later that day. Padre Marmugi died in 1973, and is buried in the still mostly empty Catholic cemetery behind the Mission. Most Susana residents, even non-Christians, recall him with overwhelmingly positive regard and many still mourn his death, as the Susana Mission headed in quite a different direction under his successor, Padre Zé. Many Susana residents—Diola and non-Diola, Christian and non-Christian—often lament that “things would be better if Padre Marmugi was still with us.”



Padre Spartaco Marmugi in Susana, 1950s (Gheddo 1999)

Padre Zé

Giuseppe Fumagalli was born on January 19, 1939, in a small town just outside Milan. His family had been carpenters for many generations, prospering within their family business. In 1949, his father and 5 uncles split up the business due to personal problems (mostly involving their wives) and Giuseppe's father started his own business from scratch, struggling at first but eventually establishing what is still a stable family carpentry business. Giuseppe's older brother followed in his father's footsteps and entered the family business, which he still runs today. Giuseppe himself started thinking about becoming a missionary priest when he was a small child. His father's three sisters had all become nuns, one of them serving as a missionary in India for so long that Giuseppe never met her. His parents, he insists, never pressured him to join the family business, and supported his decision to continue schooling and enter a Silesian seminary. He became active in a local Catholic youth group and took on leadership roles from an early age, particularly conducting catechism and "teaching others about the Christian

path.” A PIME priest came to help out in his youth group on Sunday evenings, and Giuseppe sought out his advice. He was not yet 15 years old, but had made a firm decision to become a missionary. The priest introduced him to other PIME personnel and it became clear to Giuseppe that he wanted to join them. When discussing his decision to become a missionary Giuseppe reflects,

It came from the inside, from Jesus himself... It wasn't the idea of adventure, it wasn't an idea that came externally. It was a theological decision, from the inside, personal, from Jesus... This was, after all, the kind of Catholic education I received: to be Christian is not only about being a member of a group; to be Christian is about a personal relationship with Christ. This was a key insight.

Giuseppe entered the PIME seminary in 1953 and began studies and preparation for the priesthood. There was no difference, in his mind, between priests who served in Italy and missionary priests from PIME. The only significant distinction was that, “in Italy, we knew Christ already, we already had this notion, they had already told us... But my idea was directed toward *those who did not know yet.*”

After several more years of study most of his cohort members had received their orders to prepare themselves for various PIME missions, but Giuseppe had not been notified of

anything. He began local work with a nearby parish and became involved in youth activities, thinking perhaps his superiors believed he was not strong enough for missionary work outside Italy. But, in 1967, the general superior of the seminary called Giuseppe to his office.

He asked me, 'Where do you want to go?' I responded, 'I want to go where we have a mission.' He asked again, 'What kind of mission?' and I said, 'Thank God we don't have any missions in cold places, because I don't do too well in the cold.' So the Superior said, 'Well, you're not going to Japan because our mission in Japan is in a cold place... But don't you have a preference?' Well, my preference had been for Burma [because of the challenging conditions: rugged mountains, no roads, etc.], but the Burmese mission was closed at that point because of national political problems. So we went practically around the world: Bangladesh, Thailand, Hong Kong, Northern Brazil, Southern Brazil. He asked me again, 'What type of mission do you want to go to?' I answered, 'If you send me to a mission where most of the time I will sit at a desk inside and not move around, well, this would not be ideal.' I wanted to go to a place where I could be active, move around, engage in activities.

Giuseppe later found out that the Superior (who was also a bishop) had already decided where he was to go, and was simply playing with him. He had recently returned from a trip to Portuguese Guinea and had visited the Susana Mission. Upon his return, Padre Marmugi had written the Superior a letter. As Padre Zé recounts,

Padre Marmugi came to Susana in 1952. By 1967, he hadn't baptized anyone yet... People [PIME priests] were criticizing him, saying, 'Why don't you baptize them? There are people there who want to be baptized; if you don't baptize them, this whole thing will be lost.' The bishop asked Marmugi, 'Do you have a reason for not baptizing people?' Marmugi responded in his letter: 'One of the reasons I have is this: Where is another priest who can talk with them? Is there another priest here? I'm going to baptize people and they will only be able to talk to me. Tomorrow, if they want to talk to someone else, what priest can they talk to? They need to have the freedom to talk to one or another. If you send a new priest whom I can teach the language, then I'll start baptizing, because I'll know that there will be continuity. There will be freedom, and then there will be continuity.' This was Padre Marmugi's ultimatum: 'If you are not going to send me a priest by this

date, not only will I not baptize anyone, I'll also leave.'

That's how I eventually came to understand why I was called in at the last minute, and why the Superior acted this way. At the end of our meeting, he said, 'Oh, and Portuguese Guinea... I almost forgot we have a mission in Portuguese Guinea, too. Do you want to go there?' 'Well,' I said, 'If you send me there, I'll go.' 'But will you go in good faith?' 'Of course I'll go in good faith, because I know that it's a mission that started from scratch, it was built right in the bush.' 'O.K.,' the superior told me, finally, 'you're going to go there. You're going to go to the bush.' This was on September 4, 1967... I left for Guinea on November 20, 1967.

At that time, PIME priests in Portuguese Guinea were officially under the auspices of Portuguese *Serviços de Educação do Ministerio do Ultramar* (the colonial education ministry). There was an accord between the Portuguese government and the Vatican that official schools "in the bush" could be run by missionaries, who were considered "school directors" and received a salary from the colonial ministry of education on this basis. Giuseppe stayed in Portugal for 9 months of language training, and learned to negotiate the tricky turf of being sponsored by a colonial government whose policies he opposed.

Giuseppe Fumagalli, now Padre Zé, joined Padre Marmugi in Susana on September 6, 1968, when he was 19 years old. He arrived during the protracted war for Guinean liberation from Portuguese colonial rule. Although PIME priests had benefited from Portuguese colonial administrative and authoritative structures in establishing their presence around the country, and did not hesitate to use colonial backing—sometimes with physical force—when it served their interests, both Padre Marmugi and Padre Zé were sympathetic with the Guinean independence movement. Relationships with Portuguese colonial authorities had to be managed delicately, though, especially as Susana served as a base for incoming Portuguese troops, and many of Susana’s residents were conscripted into the Portuguese army. At the height of the Independence War, Susana’s Mission facilities were used by the Portuguese army as a prison and torture camp for suspected PAIGC sympathizers, and several of Susana’s residents were killed there. The original church, which had only been built several years prior to its use as a torture facility, was never again used for ceremonial purposes, as Padre Marmugi declared it “tainted,” and it was eventually torn down after independence. Also, immediately after independence, the PAIGC took official control of all schools across the country, and Susana’s Mission school was shut down and eventually replaced with a state-run school shack near the entrance of the village. Even though other Missions across the country have since re-opened and expanded their schools, Susana’s Mission school building remains vacant to this day.

The physical mission and its personnel

When the Independence War broke out in 1963 and the Portuguese army occupied the Susana Mission, Padre Marmugi returned to Italy to get support and raise money for building a permanent Mission to advance PIME's work.⁵⁶ Part of his plan included building a house for nuns, because, according to Padre Zé, "he had come to the conclusion that, in order to enter among the Felupes, they would not accept us talking to the women. We needed other women to talk to Felupe women. If we didn't have nuns, we weren't going to get anywhere." He secured funds from various private donations in Italy and returned to construct many of the buildings that currently comprise the Mission facilities. The physical structures of the Mission buildings presently include the priests dormitories and offices, with an attached kitchen and dining room; the nun's dormitory; a small health clinic run by the nuns; a women's center for sewing and canning activities; a carpentry and mechanic shop for Mission vehicles; a guest house (largely unused); the church⁵⁷; and the abandoned school house.



Construction of the PIME Mission facilities in Susana. Nuns' house in background, priests' house in foreground, and the first church (later dismantled) in the far background (Gheddo 1999).

These buildings are surrounded by a brick wall, topped by a barbed wire fence that gives the entire complex an intimidating, fortress-like feel. The structures themselves are unlike any in the surrounding area; they are made of concrete and tile roofs, and stand out in sharp contrast to the mud and thatch houses that comprise the rest of the village. The entrance to the Mission—two large, creaking iron gates—remains closed unless one of the priests or nuns needs to drive their car in or out, after which they are promptly shut. Overall, the Mission has a rather uninviting physical presence, and there is very little traffic between the Mission grounds and the rest of the village. Those that do enter the Mission gates do so with trepidation. The priests and nuns are rarely seen outside the



PIME Mission entrance gates



Walls and fence surrounding PIME Mission

Mission walls, except in their cars on their way to another village or Bissau. A gully separates priest and nun quarters, and the grounds between them are swept daily by small children looking to gain a piece of candy.

Padre Zé arrived in Susana as a young man, and unexpectedly became the senior priest in Susana shortly thereafter, due to Padre Marmugi's death. He has remained in Susana for over 35 years, and his reign has been fraught with tensions and conflicts between himself and Diola villagers. But his perspective on changes in Susana over the last 35 years and his comments on the emergence of a Diola Catholic community are unparalleled in terms of his often-contentious involvement with Diola in the region. He is also an invaluable resource on Diola linguistic matters. As soon as he arrived in Susana he began to study Diola language with Padre Marmugi, and he has since deepened and expanded his study so that, as many Diola villagers claim, Padre Zé speaks better Diola than most Diola. He is clearly gifted with languages and one of the only times he becomes animated and engaged in a discussion is when it turns to linguistic matters. He has compiled his linguistic studies into a small volume on Diola grammar (which I used in my own effort to learn the language) as well as in several editions of Diola dictionaries. Padre Zé has also translated much of the church liturgy and catechism lessons into Diola, and, unlike most priests around the country who have long since adopted Crioulo as the church lingua franca, he continues to conduct mass and gives sermons in Diola. He has also always been musically inclined; he taught himself how to play several instruments and write music while he was a seminary student, and has brought those skills into the Susana Mission, composing many of the Diola liturgical pieces now used in services around the

region. “Music is just like a language,” he once told me. “In terms of grammar and syntax, it’s the same.” When he first came to Susana, he incorporated his interest in music into his activities with Diola youth, forming a church choir and teaching many of the schoolboys to play various instruments. But he long ago desisted from these activities and became more reclusive and reserved in his interactions with the villagers, especially in Susana, and no one plays any instruments in Susana’s mission now except for Padre Zé himself, on his solar-charged keyboards.

Padre Zé is a lanky man, now mostly bald save a small crown of gray hair and a neatly maintained gray mustache and goatee. He rarely smiles, and has a rather intimidating presence, often making his interlocutors feel that they are wasting his precious time. Despite his initial expressed preference, during his meeting with the Superior of his seminary, to not sit behind a desk, Padre Zé now spends most of his time doing just that. Granted, he is 35 years older, and has been plagued by various illnesses for which he now periodically returns to Italy for treatment. And he still regularly visits the outlying village chapels he established in Edgim, Caton, and Cassolol by barreling along the washed out and rugged dirt paths in his Land Rover. But, when in Susana, he stays in his office sorting through piles of papers, or checks in at the Mission workshop to see how his workers are progressing on various projects for Mission facilities.



Padre Zé on trumpet (right) with his Diola choir (Gheddo 1999)

During the course of my fieldwork, I only saw Padre Zé outside the Mission walls in Susana once, when he appeared at the funeral proceedings for Susana's *ai*, AmpaKapeña. He came to the *hukulahu* with a camera, hoping to take a picture of the deceased *ai* on the *benten*, but AmpaKapeña had already been buried and the *hukulahu* was packed with Susana's residents, many of them still dancing around the circle, others sitting under large cottonwood trees in the dust. Padre Zé entered the area and walked awkwardly over to a group of men standing near the periphery. Everyone noticed him but no one paid him any heed; no one came to greet him or talk to him, which I found quite unusual. I was sitting with a group of women, all of us in *panos* with our legs stretched out in front, and a quiet murmur washed over the group noting his presence and stealing furtive glances. The older woman sitting next to me leaned in and whispered in my ear that she had never seen Padre Zé at a Diola funeral before. I was struck by how sad it seemed to be part of a community for so long and be so obviously unwelcome, although perhaps

this was my own projection and Padre Zé, even though his presence appeared awkward to many of us there, may have felt perfectly content. He stood off to the side holding his camera until finally AmpaKapeña's brother—a disaffected Christian convert—went over to him and they spoke briefly together. After the *ai*'s brother left, Padre Zé continued to stand amidst a group of men, most of whom he had known for the last 30 years. No one talked to him and he talked to no one. Soon after, he left.

Since Padre Zé's arrival, there has been a parade of other priests in the Mission, each one spending just a few years or less in Susana and leaving usually under a cloud of controversy (see Table 2). Most Diola believe that each time a new priest arrives and tries to engage in activities that would benefit the community—such as opening a orphanage or establishing a school for disabled children—Padre Zé arranges to have them transferred. Although these allegations are based more on Diola suspicions of Padre Zé's intentions than on informed knowledge of the inner-workings of PIME's institutional bureaucracy, even Padre Zé admits that, “among the Susana Mission's various reputations, the reputation for devouring priests is one of the strongest.”

Table 2: Priests and Nuns who served at Susana PIME Mission

Name	Dates in Susana	Comments
Padre Spartaco Marmugi	Jan 29, 1952 - 1973	Died in Susana
Padre Luigi Andreoletti	Jan 29, 1952 - 1955 (1955-1956 in Catio) 1957 - 1968 in Susana	Transferred to Bafatá in 1968, just after Padre Zé arrived.
Padre Giuseppe Fumagalli (Padre Zé)	1968 - present	
Padre Felippo Croci	1955 - 1956	Returned to Italy due to sickness
Padre Giovanni Musi	1971 - 1973	Transferred to several Guinean missions. Now in Farim
Padre Mario Baruffaldi	May 1974 - Oct 1975	Transferred to Mansoa, Bissau, other Guinean missions. Promoted to head of Guinea-Bissau PIME. Currently in Brazil.
Padre Mario Faccioli	Sept 1974 - Oct 1975	Promoted to head of Guinea-Bissau PIME
Frei Renato Rovelli	May 1976 - 1989; 1993-1997	Moved back to Italy in intervening years; stayed in Bissau during 1998 war; died 2002.
Frei Giuseppi Bertoli	Dec 1977 - Jan 1978 (18 days)	Decided on the road to Susana (when Padre Zé came to collect him in Bissau) that he could not stay—Susana was “too far from town.”
Padre Roberto Spaggiari	Feb 1978 - April 1980	Transferred without telling Padre Zé, according to whom “he did not work...did not even learn Felupe.” Transferred around various missions in Guinea-Bissau for 20 years.

Name	Dates in Susana	Comments
Padre Luigi Aziani	Feb 1981 - May 1984	Transferred back to Italy, then Brazil, then back to Italy, then Cameroon. Padre Zé states: “He had an adaptation problem and also celibacy problems.” He would take advantage of times when Padre Zé was in outlying villages to sleep around with women in Susana. This emerged after he left Susana.
Padre Pedro Zilli (Brazilian)	Jan 1989 - Nov 1997	Promoted to head of Guinea-Bissau PIME; now bishop of Bafatá.
Padre Oscar Bosisio	Nov 1996 - Nov 1997	Promoted to head of Guinea-Bissau PIME
Padre Daniel António de Souza (Brazilian)	Feb 1996 - May 2001	Left because of sickness (physical and emotional); returned to Brazil.
Padre Davide Simionato	Nov. 5, 2000 - present	

In addition to the priests, one year after Padre Zé’s arrival three Italian nuns came to Susana’s Mission. On February 11, 1969, Irmã Rosa Furlani, Irmã Maria Serafina, and Irmã Adelia Toffoli settled in Susana and lived within the Mission walls until January 31, 1993. They were the first nuns in Portuguese Guinea to take up missionary work.⁵⁸ As one of the nuns had been trained as a nurse, they focused their work in Susana on building up the health facilities and running a small clinic and maternity ward for Diola women. They were far more proactive about going outside the Mission walls and into the village neighborhoods in order to reach out to Diola families to provide health services, and they are primarily responsible for the increased demand among Diola residents for improved health care, especially regarding childbirth. Padre Zé recalls that “they entered

the world word of women... they entered every maternity hut in Felupe land. They [Diola women] called them in to help.” Soon, women affiliated with the Mission began to give birth in their own homes, assisted by the nuns. It is taboo for women to give birth in the family home; such an act pollutes the house, which must then be torn down. But other village women began to see that the Christian women’s births resulted in lower mortality rates, and they started coming to Christian homes to give birth. The nuns eventually coaxed them into the clinic, and little by little women began to give birth in the Mission and state-run clinics.

Currently, the maternity houses in Susana are largely unused, although they remain standing and are still strictly off-limits to men and women who have not yet given birth. But the change in birthing practices was not so smooth in some of the outlying villages. In the mid-1980s, for instance, many women were dying in the maternity houses in Ellalab, Edjim, and Djifunco. As Padre Zé recounts,

So many women died that Christian men in Ellalab entered the maternity houses and said, ‘If you don’t stop killing women here, we’re going to hand you over to the authorities.’ Also, in Edjim, Christian men complained to the secular *comité* members that too many women were dying in the maternity houses....They said to the women in the maternity houses, ‘If you are not able to do this right, then you have to say, ‘We’re not able.’ You have to ask for

help. Otherwise, you are criminals.’ In Edgim, the *comité* members entered the maternity houses by force and shut them down until they agreed to let the nuns help them.

This was uncharted territory for Diola men, who are supposed to remain ignorant of—and completely uninvolved in—birthing processes. It represents a significant shift in gender dynamics resulting from Mission teachings and influence.

In addition to their work in matters of health and reproduction, the Italian nuns were also particularly known and esteemed for their handouts—of clothing, medicine, and other material goods. In 1993, after 24 years in Susana, their superior in Italy decided to transfer all three of them to Brazil, largely due to Irmã Maria’s continuing health problems, but also because of Irmã Adelia’s serious car accident on the road to Susana, from which she never fully recovered. Irmã Maria died in 1997, followed by Irmã Rosa 2002.

The Italian nuns’ departure from Susana coincided with the decision of a South American convent to send missionaries to Africa. As part of the quincentenary proceedings in South America, several Catholic institutions came together and noted that, after 500 years, they had very few missions abroad. According to the current South American nuns in Susana, their superiors reflected, “We have our own problems, it’s true... We’re poor. But we need to share our poverty with others, who have not heard yet.” On December 8, 1992, the first nuns from South America arrived, and since then the Susana Mission has

seen several nuns from Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, none of whom are particularly liked by Susana villagers, and all of whom are deemed “unhelpful” compared with their Italian predecessors.⁵⁹ Partly, this is because the South American nuns sought to curtail the constant handouts, and wanted to instill an ethic of earning and paying for services and material goods from the Mission. This was in part motivated by the fact that the South American nuns were supported by an institution with less resources than the Italian convent that preceded them, and they regularly complained to me that Diola residents did not understand that they were poor too. But the Italian nuns and several of the priests had, it seems, created a culture of dependence on the Mission as a charity, and such a dynamic is among the hardest to change. Diola residents viewed efforts on the part of the new nuns and priests to curb the handouts as mean-spirited and ungenerous. “These people,” my neighbors would often complain to me, “they don’t help anyone. They’re not interested in helping us at all.” For their part, Padre Zé and the South American nuns were not only constrained by increasingly limited resources, but also motivated by a general shift in the ethos of international development in which charity is seen as sustaining, or even exacerbating, cycles of poverty and dependence, and “true development” comes by encouraging people to “develop themselves” by earning goods and services. This ethic did not translate well to a population that had already cast the Mission as a wealthy and benevolent charity, and it did not help matters that the people involved in communicating the new ideal—Padre Zé and the South American nuns—were not particularly well suited to the task. They often came across as harsh, condescending, and unkind, and Diola residents in the region, who are quite sensitive in these matters, took offense. The current relationship between most villagers, Christian

and non-Christian alike, and the Mission is fraught with misunderstandings, built-up resentment, and an uncomfortable combination of dependence and disdain.

Another major facet in the dynamic between village and Mission is the role of the Mission as an employer. When Padre Marmugi established the Mission facilities, he included a small mechanics shop in which to train his young charges in the basics of bicycle and automobile repair. The impetus was two-fold: the Mission's own vehicles (the only ones in the area) needed regular repair from the inevitable damage wrought by rough or non-existent roads in the region; and Marmugi wanted to provide his Diola students with the opportunity to develop a set of practical and marketable skills beyond subsistence agriculture. The mechanics shop has since grown, under Padre Zé's patronage, to include a well-equipped carpentry workshop and a automobile repair shop with Diola mechanics trained in the Mission vocational school in Bula.⁶⁰ Diola converts have been awarded positions as workers in these shops; they are apprenticed to more senior employees and receive an hourly pay averaging 250 CFA (about 35 cents). The carpentry and automotive center, referred to generically as the *oficina*, conducts its work internally; that is, workers perform services only for Mission jobs requiring carpentry and vehicle repair and maintenance, and Padre Zé frowns upon accepting work for anyone else in the community or in surrounding villages. But, since it is the only facility of its kind in the northern swatch of the country, such requests are frequent, and Padre Zé and his *oficina* workers are regularly rejecting such requests. Once again, this is seen by community members as Mission selfishness and insularity, which, to some degree, it is, although Padre Zé insists that as a not-for-profit institution, the Mission *oficina* is not in a

legal position to take on work outside the Mission itself. Because of the *oficina*, with its constant generator hum and power tool whine and busy Diola workers in an otherwise completely non-industrial setting, the Mission often appears to be more of a well-functioning business enterprise than a religious institution.



A Diola Christian working in the *oficina*

Likewise, on the nuns' side, a modest building houses productive activities for women, such as sewing machines and canning facilities. The Italian nuns started sewing classes for Diola women, many of whom learned basic sewing techniques that they now use to stitch clothing for themselves and their children. But the primary use for the sewing machines is to make clothing sold by the nuns for the Mission coffers. The South American nuns introduced canning techniques, and a few times a year they will bring women in to can the burgeoning crop of tomatoes, mostly from the nearby village of

Edjim, as well as to make various fruit preserves out of locally abundant seasonal fruit (such as mangoes, foli, and caboceira) that otherwise rots on the ground, half eaten by children, cows, pigs, and goats. The nuns sell these canned tomatoes and fruit preserves to other Guinean Missions, as well as to infrequent visitors to Susana.

Of course, the Mission also conducts a series of religious activities, such as mass and catechism. But most people's interaction with the Mission and its personnel is business-oriented, whether through the various productive activities, or to sheepishly solicit a favor to borrow equipment, get a ride, send a message to another village or Bissau, or borrow money. And most of these requests are rebuffed by Padre Zé in patronizing tones, which reinforces the general consensus that "the Mission doesn't help anyone." Even the relatively newly arrived Padre David admits that Padre Zé's manner in denying requests leaves much to be desired. He once mentioned to me, as we witnessed the usual line of solicitors at Padre Zé's office door get turned away, that diplomacy was needed when turning down someone's request, especially here where "people are so sensitive." "One must sometimes say 'no'," he said quietly, "but one can soften the blow."

The First Diola Christians

During the course of my fieldwork there were 29 families in Susana who were fully active Mission participants, many of them with jobs in the various Mission workshops. Another 53 families *were* active Mission participants, but broke with the Mission during the 1998 male initiation debacle. Both groups consist primarily of the now-grown men who comprised the several cohorts of Padre Marmugi's captured schoolboys. They are

now heads of their own houses, most of them in Santa Maria, and many of them have brought their wives and children into the Mission, although with varying degrees of intensity and commitment. But, aside from those who were brought into the Mission through its school, there are several other families whose motivations to join the Mission are as diverse and complex as their own life histories. The following relates some of the experiences of these first Diola Christians.⁶¹ Their reflections on their own past, their relationship with the Mission and the village, and their individual and collective responses to their newly fashioned identities are all rich terrain for understanding what it means to be Diola in contemporary Susana.

Josefina

Josefina Nhajenam is a matriarch in Santa Maria; a widow still living in her dead husband's home, and one of the founding six families of the neighborhood that skirts the Mission's walls. She was born in Kugelh and raised through fosterage in Mañodjagu. She married back into Kugelh because, she says, "my people wanted me back." Soon after she married, she and her husband began attending catechism at the newly established Mission. It is not clear what motivated them to attend, although Josefina recalls a young Baiote man from Elia who used to discuss Christianity with Diola residents in Susana, and she and her husband were curious to find out more. Josefina gave birth to three children in Kugelh. Two of them died, and she believes they were poisoned by others in her household because she and her husband had started attending Mission activities. They decided, together, to move to Santa Maria for the sake of their children's safety and to escape the persecution they were subject to in Kugelh. This type

of decision has a long precedent in Diola custom. When a family experiences misfortune, especially infertility or the death of children, they are likely to attribute their tragedy to the actions of their kin, who, whether motivated by jealousy or acting out of some sense of punitive justice, poison or witch their progeny. A typical response is to move residences, usually to the neighborhood of the father's mother's brothers. Even though Susana as a whole is quite compact, and travel among the various neighborhoods is frequent, there is a general belief that if a man moves away from his natal neighborhood he gains a measure of safety for himself and his family. The establishment of Santa Maria as a new neighborhood offered an alternative to those early converts seeking refuge from their disapproving kin. Josefina and her husband took advantage of the opportunity, and built a house directly across from the Mission's western wall. Even once they were settled in Santa Maria, their former neighbors and kin from Kugelh would still regularly take her husband back and beat him severely because of his affiliation with the Mission (or, perhaps more accurately, because of his increasing refusal to participate in *awasena* ways). Josefina gave birth to 8 children in Santa Maria, only one of whom died. Once she had all of these children and Santa Maria began to grow as other early converts built their houses there, the beatings and persecution from Kugelh abated. But Josefina insists that, although the physical punishment of Diola converts has diminished, the sentiment among residents in Kugelh and other traditional neighborhoods remain the same and their "battle is not over yet."

In 1968, Susana held its male initiation. At this point, the Mission was relatively new and Padre Marmugi was still learning about which Diola customs and practices he would

take a stand against. Marmugi did not interfere with the 1968 initiation, but the small group of new converts feared for their lives if they were left in the hands of their elders in the initiation forest. Male initiates are quite vulnerable in Diola initiations and elders wield great control over them throughout the process. There are always several deaths of young men during the three-month initiation proceedings, and these deaths are considered taboo to talk about; the bodies are buried quickly in the forest—without the usual funerary rites—and no one is allowed to discuss the cause death. The Santa Maria men who would have been initiates in 1968 were convinced that Susana's elders would finally be able to kill them once under their control in the forest. So Josefina's husband, along with the other founding fathers of Santa Maria, hid inside the Mission for a week while the rest of Susana's men and boys headed to the initiation groves. This would not be the last time the Mission was used as a refuge by those seeking to hide from perceived threats by their non-Christian kin.

Josefina moves slowly now, although she does not have the frail and bony appearance of many of her contemporaries in the traditional neighborhoods. She is a plump older woman, often surrounded by many of her grandchildren, and her movements and speech are calm and purposeful. She wears a large flowing shift of printed cotton, and a scarf tied at the back of her head, covering her hair and part of her forehead. Despite the stories of physical abuse and persecution, she reminisces fondly about the founding years of Santa Maria. It was better back then, she insists, because there were only a few families and everyone got along. Now “there is confusion, people talk behind each other's backs, there are divisions, people go to ceremonies and initiation.” In other

words, Santa Maria's growth has made it much more like a typical Diola neighborhood, and Josefina misses the days when just a few families bonded together in their pioneering spirit.

Agulebe

Agulebe was born in Bukekelil, where both his paternal and maternal line go back a long way. He was chosen by the elders to be the official Bukekelil *comité* member, and he was quite active in this role for many years. He did not attend the Mission school; he was already too old to be part of the original cohorts of captured boys. Instead, he spent his time tapping palm wine in his abundant forest groves. He is known to be a particularly skilled and persistent tapper, and as a young man he left Susana during several consecutive dry seasons and tapped wine in the other areas of the country, where he was able to sell his extracted goods and earn cash—an accomplishment quite rare for Susana men at that time. When he returned to Susana, he built a house on his father's compound in Bukekelil, got married, and had two sons. Then he contracted leprosy. Some people say he got leprosy from a snake bite (Diola believe that if a snake bites you on the right foot you will have good fortune, but if it's on the left foot you will become sick). Others are quite sure that jealous neighbors and kin cursed Agulebe because of his success selling palm wine. Agulebe remains noncommittal on the subject, but he found that traditional remedies in the village were not helping him, and so he sought medical help at the Mission. At that time, another Mission in Cumura, just outside Bissau, had set up a leprosy clinic and was offering treatment to afflicted people around the country. The Susana Mission personnel arranged for Agulebe to be treated in Cumura, and he has since

been a regular patient there. Although the Cumura nuns have tried to convince Agulebe to move permanently to the clinic, Agulebe has refused, saying he still has work to do in Susana.

When Agulebe first contracted leprosy, he resigned his position as Bukekelil *comité* member and asked the elders to select someone else. At first they refused, but he insisted that, given his condition and extended absences in Cumura, the *comité* work would be neglected. So they appointed his brother-in-law as the substitute member, although Agulebe remains involved in most Bukekelil activities and attends to *comité* business when he is in Susana.

Even though Agulebe did not attend the Mission school and never received any formal training at the Mission, he decided to build a new house in Santa Maria after his second son was born. There is a general belief among Susana residents that Agulebe saw Santa Maria as a refuge from jealous and perhaps vengeful kin in Bukekelil, even though his loyalty to and involvement in his natal neighborhood remain strong. He now has nine grown children, all of them raised as Catholics. His sons are known to be especially intelligent, and his oldest son received a scholarship to study medicine in Cuba, a feat virtually unheard of in Susana.

Agulebe is a very tall man, though increasingly deformed by his illness. He is missing a couple of fingers and one of his long legs is stick thin. His right foot is twisted out of shape and he has difficulty walking on it. One of his eyes always roams while the other

one regularly tears, and his cheekbones protrude above hollow cheeks. He continues to tap palm wine in his forest grove every day, and his sons return from school in Bissau during the rainy season to work with him in the rice paddies. He brought all of his sons to the 1998 male initiation, and encourages them to keep their links with Bukekelil.

“They can build their houses there if they choose,” he once told me. “It’s their right.”

Agulebe has deep disdain for Padre Zé, and there is open antagonism between him and his Santa Maria neighbors who did not attend the 1998 initiation. Agulebe himself was never baptized and he does not attend any Mission activities, nor has he ever worked at the Mission. He continues to return to Cumura for treatment, always coming back to Susana and his palm trees when he is able.

AmpaAsolo

Carlos AmpaAsolo was born in Mañodjagu and has three older siblings—two brothers and a sister. When Padre Marmugi opened the school, he was not among those captured to attend; his parents hid him since they relied on him to herd their cows. Soon, though, he became jealous of his peers, especially Alfredo Kassompa, who were going to school and receiving t-shirts. He also wanted a t-shirt, so he told his mother that he wanted to go to school. She said that he couldn’t go because of his herding duties, but he explained that the schoolboys now took turns herding for each other; those that went to school in the morning had their cows herded by the afternoon boys and vice versa. She agreed to let him go, even though she feared that he would be “lost to the white people,” but she made him promise not to tell his father. She also feared, like most Diola at the time, that he would learn secrets not appropriate for someone his age, especially about women’s

reproduction. Nonetheless, he began to attend the Mission school and immediately excelled. He received his Christian name—Carlos—from the schoolteacher who registered him; since he had only his Diola name, the teacher, Carlos Vasconcelos, gave him his own Christian name. Once, his father caught him wearing his t-shirt, and he questioned him. AmpaAsolo lied and said that one of his friends who went to school had given it to him in the rice paddies. He was able to keep his school attendance a secret from his father for 9 months, as his father left early every morning and spent the entire day in his forest grove.

AmpaAsolo passed his first term, and even won a small prize for his academic achievement. His mother then insisted that he reveal his secret to his father, which he promptly did. His father, much to everyone's surprise, did not get angry and agreed to let him continue going to the Mission school. Only once was he ever beaten up because of his Mission activities, when he did not show up for the collective workday with his neighborhood peers. The workday had been scheduled on a Saturday, and Saturday was the day that all the schoolboys went to the Mission and Padre Marmugi gave them soap to wash their shirts so they would be clean for school. He could not skip shirt-washing, he explained, because he could not go to school with a dirty shirt for the rest of the week, so he skipped collective work, and he was hence beaten by the bigger boys in the neighborhood work group who were in charge of disciplining the younger ones. But that was the only time he recalls any punishment regarding his involvement in the Mission.

AmpaAsolo continued to do very well in school, and began to attend catechism after classes. He was baptized with the first group Diola boys in 1969. He was still very young (about 12 years old) when he finished fourth grade, the last year taught at the Mission school, but because he had such good grades he was sent to teach in Edjim. Since state law required that teachers be at least 18 years old, the Mission paid his salary. He taught in Edjim for a couple of years, and then Padre Zé saw that he “had capacity” and sent him to Bissau, to the seminary, to study more. He studied for a couple of years there, and then the new Bishop (Ferazzetti) decreed that only those who wanted to become priests could study at the seminary. AmpaAsolo withdrew from the seminary because he knew, without any reflection, that he was not meant to be a priest. He sent word to Padre Zé who invited him back to the Mission in Susana, where, Padre Zé told him, “there will always be a place for you.” After working in the *oficina* for a while, a priest who was staying at the Susana Mission asked him why he did not remain at the seminary. AmpaAsolo explained that it was because he did not want to be a priest, and the new bishop’s rule prohibited him from studying more. The priest arranged for him to attend the Mission school in Mansoa instead, where he studied for a few more years, and then went again to Bissau and studied at a non-seminary school until he finished secondary school, a truly unusual feat for anyone in Guinea-Bissau at the time, especially someone from Susana. Then, not knowing what else to do, he returned to Susana.

When he came back he started to work in the Mission *oficina*. Padre Zé sent him to get a driver’s license, and he became the first Diola driver in Susana. He was also now of marrying age; some of his peers were already married, although he had not really thought

much about marriage. He talked to Padre Zé who agreed that he should get married since he did not want to become a priest. His father told him to choose a girl, but to come to him and tell him first so he could approve. His first choice was approved of, and he started three years of marriage preparation at the Mission, both in order to have time to build up the economic wherewithal to maintain a household, and for he and his betrothed to get to know each other well before getting married to make sure they would get along. He had already decided to build his house in Santa Maria, instead of in Mañodjagu, not so much because of any real or perceived persecution in Mañodjagu, but because he spent most of his time anyway in Santa Maria, where most of his friends were settling, and he liked the atmosphere there.

AmpaAsolo continued working at the Mission, driving the cars and gaining further skills at the *oficina* and through various Mission jobs. He remains one of the most loyal Mission adherents, and one of Padre Zé's only supporters. When he talks about his life in the Mission, he emphasizes the schooling and training aspects, and the opportunities he has had to learn several trades and receive a good income. He very rarely touches upon theological matters, although he insists that being Christian and Diola is not hard, because what they learn in catechism is already ingrained in Diola mores. Christianity changed only a couple of things from the "time of our fathers," namely, no more polygyny and no more war. Diola used to have a "problem of war," he explained, with villages fighting each other all the time, but Christianity has taught them that they should try to resolve problems by talking them through, rather than killing each other. On the marriage issue, he is quick to qualify that Diola never practiced egregious polygyny, like

some other ethnic groups; generally, polygyny resulted from the levirate system. Still, Christian doctrine insisted on only one wife, which AmpaAsolo said was better for everyone because it “prevented problems and confusion.”

When I asked what he thought about the next generation in Santa Maria, since they were the first to be born as Christians rather than to consciously switch from one religion to another, he said that he hoped and believed that they would make a lot of progress on the “Christian road,” never specifying what, precisely, this meant. He added another metaphor: “We built a canoe. They will build a boat.”

Epitai

Adriano Epitai is a reserved man, older than most residents in Santa Maria, and I rarely saw him outside of his own home. He admits that he does not wander around much, preferring to sit quietly on his veranda at the far outskirts of the neighborhood. He has a slow, warm smile, and when he speaks he formulates thoughtful sentences in soft tones, substantially below the usual decibel level of Diola conversations. Epitai was born in Mañodjagu in the early 1950s. He was in the second cohort of children that were caught by colonial authorities to attend the Mission school. His older brother had been captured first, but the authorities insisted that they wanted “another one.” His father tried to refuse, since Epitai was an especially good cow herder, but the administrative head of the colonial outpost insisted, and so Epitai went to school. “At that time,” he reflects, “people in the village thought that if you went to school, you were lost.” Epitai recalls being a good student, especially at math. But he was also a sickly child and he was kept

behind for several years, ultimately unable to continue school due to illness. “Now I cannot even write my own name,” he laments. “If I take up a pen my hand starts to shake.”

Even though he did not continue his schooling at the Mission, he remained affiliated and built his first house in Santa Maria in 1975. He had a traditional Diola marriage, bragging that he killed ten pigs for the marriage rites. But, he qualifies, there was more livestock in those days. Now the animals die so quickly, because of contagious diseases from other villages’ animals that are unloaded onto Susana. “It used to be that everyone from other villages would come to Susana to get their pigs. But now Susana has to go elsewhere to get their own pigs.” In addition to greater abundance in livestock, Eptai also recalls—as do most residents in Susana—a time when rain and rice were plenty. “My father used to have a lot of rice because he worked hard, and we had years’ worth of rice stored in the granary. That was when rain fell like it’s supposed to. But now, no one has enough rice.” Living in Santa Maria and being affiliated with the Mission has not changed these circumstances, as Eptai notes, “Rain does not choose to fall on the paddies of those who have good hearts. Rain does not judge between good and bad people. It falls on everyone’s land, or it does not fall on anyone’s land, whether one is good or bad.”

The only advantage to the Mission, according to Eptai, is the possibility of schooling. This has now been taken over by the state, and Eptai insists that schooling is the key to

prevent exploitation by others. He says that other ethnic groups (especially the Fula population in Susana) have tried to dominate the Diola.

They tried to exploit us and cheat us... They wanted to be our ‘white people,’ just because they spoke more Crioulo than we did and they had more schooling. So, now we know that we cannot let this happen. That’s why we send our children to school. If my children disobey and try not to go to school, I have to hit them and insist that they go, so we do not have any more problems like [that].

Padre Marmugi “opened their eyes” to the benefits of schooling, and for this Epitai remains grateful. But on all other Mission matters, he remains (even after 30 years in Santa Maria) noncommittal. Epitai brought his sons to the 1998 male initiation and took on a leadership role among the Diola Christians who attended initiation, acting as a spokesman and delegate in subsequent interactions with Mission personnel.

Akabau

Julio Akabau started going to the Mission school and catechism just before the 1968 male initiation in Susana. When the first cohort of Mission affiliates were baptized in 1969, his father refused to let him go, primarily because Akabau was in line to inherit the priesthood to an important shrine—*Sambunasu*—and his father believed that, once baptized, Akabau would be “lost forever.” Since then, Akabau has continued to attend

Mass and catechism, even when he was posted to teach in Ingore, but he has never been baptized. He has brought up the topic many times with Padre Zé, who has continued to defer the matter. “He tells me, ‘Come back tomorrow and we’ll sort it out.’ But it’s still not sorted out.” Akabau has become fed up, but he still wants to be baptized; he also wants a Christian marriage and his children to be baptized. He has been married to Isabel for many years and they have seven sons. He insists that he will not marry another woman, that only Isabel will be his wife, and he does not understand why he cannot have a Christian wedding.

When I asked him why he wanted to be baptized after all these years, he explained that it was like gaining entrance into a series of accomplishments; once you are baptized, you can start taking communion and working towards the other sacraments. He said that it felt pointless going to Mass and repeating the words, and “then when everyone else gets up to take communion, you just sit.” He does not understand why Padre Zé still has not baptized him: “Perhaps he has forgotten about me.”

Akabau is probably in his late 30s or early 40s. He is one of the Diola school teachers, currently teaching first-grade in Cassolol, where he bicycles the 18km round-trip along the dirt road every day. He is still very involved in his natal neighborhood, Mañodjagu, and he has encouraged his sons to join the collective youth work group there if they want to, instead of Santa Maria. He believes that the upbringing in the traditional neighborhoods is better, because tougher, than that of Santa Maria, and that as a result Santa Maria youth are less well behaved.

Akabau brought all of his sons to the 1998 initiation in Susana, and hence joined the group of Mission outcasts. But, by 2001, he was back at the Mission, attending mass (even without communion) and eager to become affiliated with Mission life again. His reasons became more clear when I understood his position within his family regarding spirit shrine obligations. Akabau is the only one of his brothers who is still in Susana—the others have all gone to São Domingos and Bissau—which means he is the only one left to inherit his father’s shrine. He knows that, after his father dies, the *amangen-i* will invite him to a particular forest grove under the pretext of conducting a posthumous ceremony for his father, but during the proceedings they will attempt “to catch me and make me assume responsibility for *Sambunasu*.” Akabau has no interest in becoming the *Sambunasu* shrine priest, and he has already developed a plan to evade the process. “When they invite me to the forest, I will pretend to go along with it, agreeing to meet them there. But then I’ll escape to Bissau and hide there, and they will have to wait until the time is right again to try to catch me again.” He will have to continue this strategy—as many others have in their efforts to avoid becoming shrine priests—every time he is invited by the *amangen-i* into the forest. His only hope of permanently avoiding the shrine priesthood is if he is baptized.

Becoming a Diola Christian

Each member of the Diola Christian community in Susana has a unique story about their initial involvement, ongoing interaction, and general relationship with Catholicism and the Mission. But several common themes emerge through these narratives. By far the

overwhelming majority of current Diola Christian families are those who were captured as schoolboys during Padre Marmugi's early years, and were essentially separated from traditional socialization in village life and brought up within the Mission walls, often being sent off for more schooling and teaching positions elsewhere in the country. They were taught to disbelieve spirit shrine ceremonies, and their baptism vows included a commitment to forgo attendance at "idolatrous ceremonies." As one convert from the first baptismal cohort of 1969 recalls, "When you are baptized, you are asked: 'Do you reject Satan?' And you respond, 'Yes.' Then you are asked: 'Do you reject all of the ceremonies and fetishes of traditional religion?' And you respond: 'Yes.'" The distinction between Christian and traditional Diola as based on the rejection of spirit shrine ceremonies seems to have become stronger with Padre Zé's leadership, as one early Christian convert remembers Padre Marmugi's somewhat more lenient stance in these matters:

Padre Marmugi said there was nothing wrong with going to ceremonies just to listen and be respectful. We should not libate, though, and make requests to the *ukinau* (spirits), as this was contrary to the 'Christian path.' But Padre Marmugi himself attended many ceremonies and was always welcomed by the *amangen-i*.

Currently, Diola Christians from this group think of themselves as Christians because they no longer participate in *awasena* ceremonies, although many of them equivocate

when asked whether they still believe in the *ukinau*. But the overriding feature of Catholic identity, for them, is the rejection of *awasena* participation, rather than the acceptance of anything particular from their new religion.

Even though Mission schooling was imposed by colonial authorities, some Diola came to appreciate the advantage of schooling, especially as it gave them literacy and other skills that were increasingly needed to face the new social, political, and economic arrangements of the late colonial and early postcolonial period. As suggested by Epitai's narrative, schooling was seen as a way to avoid exploitation by others, and affiliation with the Mission, even once Padre Marmugi's school was closed down, was one of the only ways to gain access to schooling beyond Susana's limited pedagogical resources. Such a relationship between the Mission and village had a parallel across the Senegalese border, where Catholic missionaries set up Christian-based schools earlier in the century as the surest way to attract converts (Baum 1990). As Baum states for Esalalu Diola,

For many parents Christianity seemed to be one of the costs of schooling and of gaining the chance to enter into an African elite. One hears repeatedly, 'We live in an age of the European and, therefore, we must allow our children to take on the European religion.' To deny children contact with Christianity seemed like denying them a chance to get ahead" (Baum 1990: 390).

Although the methods for recruiting schoolchildren were different in Susana, the overall effect of making school an attractive, even necessary, resource was the same. Also similar was the missionaries' efforts target youth. Diola boys have traditionally enjoyed a carefree childhood with minimal parental interference. They were, in many ways, an ideal target population for the Mission, as they were the only residents in Susana who had free time. Girls were expected to perform extensive domestic work at a young age, and Diola adults are busy in the forests and rice paddies throughout the year. The only obligations boys had were to deliver messages across the village for adults, and to wrestle. Those families that had cows used young boys as herders, but this was a minimal investment in time. Boys did help out in the arduous rainy season labor in the rice paddies, but during the dry season they had plenty of free time. Padre Marmugi was aware of this, and was also convinced that elders would be unlikely converts since, according to Padre Zé, "they were already set in their ways, they already have their path, and it's difficult for an elder to reject his path." So Padre Marmugi focused his attention on the boys.

Little by little some of them would come to understand.

And he was in no rush. If he could get just a few of the youth to enter, then they would grow up and have autonomy and think about which direction to send their own children. Because among Felupes, youth have no autonomy; they cannot make autonomous decisions. Now it's a bit different because they go to school, but in those

times, absolutely...For Felupes, as soon as they build their house and marry, that's when they gain authority. The minute he marries, he gains a voice to speak. That's why Padre Marmugi waited until they [the youth] had their own houses and gained autonomy to make their own decisions. He waited 17 years to baptize anyone. He left them until they matured, until they gained autonomy, independence...

By the time they grew up, of course, they had already been inculcated into a new system of thought. "In the schools children received religious answers at an age when they had not yet begun to formulate religious questions" (Baum 1990: 390). This is a particularly effective strategy for Diola, who do not receive religious instruction as children; as discussed in Chapter Four shrine priests and elders maintain access to religious and spiritual knowledge, and one can only earn the rights to such knowledge through the long (and sometimes inaccessible) process of becoming an adept at particular shrines. Most Diola remain quite ignorant of specialist religious domains, and hence Diola children certainly cannot counter Catholic teachings from an informed and solid position in *awasena* ways.

Aside from the now grown captured schoolboys, several families joined the Mission in its earliest days as young adults without the physical force of colonial authorities or inculcation of Mission schooling. The six founding families in Santa Maria came to the Mission for a wide range of reasons, and through the Mission they have gained access to

many resources, from health-related services to the material resources of Caritas and other charitable efforts to jobs in the Mission workshops, and to guaranteed education (and often preferential treatment) for their children. This last aspect was especially attractive to those families who did not have sufficient land. Faustino, for instance, settled in Susana from the neighboring village of Budgim. Although he had kin in Susana who lent him several plots of paddy and forest land, as an immigrant, he did not have access to secure land-holdings that he could pass on to his children. Even though he was distantly related to Susana's culture-hero Ambona, he did not have kin-based rights to any land in Susana. Ambona's direct line leads to Pedro, who inherited a great deal of forest and paddy land through his ancestor's pillaging practices and lent some to Faustino when he settled in Susana. But this is a precarious situation at best, and many Diola residents in Susana claim that Faustino embraced the Mission life so readily and put pressure on his children to perform well in school because he knew that his land would not be sufficient to divide up amongst them, and their futures would be insecure without the alternatives provided through life in the Mission. Faustino's family is, in many ways, the epitome of a successful Mission family (in Mission terms). His eldest son became the first Diola priest from Susana, his daughter became a nun (currently serving in Brazil), and his youngest son, in his early 20s during my fieldwork, was one of the most active youth organizers in the Mission and had obtained odd jobs—including working as an assistant for a Portuguese NGO with strong ties to the Susana Mission—because of his Mission affiliation. It is, of course, speculation by myself and others that such a strategy was adopted out of utilitarian motives; Faustino himself would never emphasize this connection and his children believe themselves to be sincere and devoted Catholics. But,

although access to schooling, jobs, other material resources did not necessarily draw anyone to the Mission to begin with, especially in its earlier days, once these goods were obtained they did much to keep Mission-affiliated families strong in their adherence.

Another motivation for Mission affiliation centered on access to health services, especially for illnesses that appeared to defy traditional medicine and spirit shrine libations. The Italian nuns were most successful in reaching out to the Diola population by addressing their pervasive preoccupation with sickness, and a few well-timed antibiotics and first-aid medical treatments were enough to win allegiance to, or at least curiosity about, Mission authorities. One of the most consistent explanations I heard from Susana residents (other than those from the Mission school generation) about why they became involved in Mission activities centers on a personal experience of sickness. As one young man told me, "I was sick and I went to ceremony after ceremony, but nothing helped. Then I came to the nuns and they cured me." Interestingly, though, persistent sickness is one of the areas in which Diola Christians most often stray from their Mission adherence. Even the most orthodox Mission loyalists (especially women) have been known to sneak back into their traditional neighborhoods to perform ceremonies for a sick child or seek the guidance of a traditional healer.

Finally, some Diola residents in Susana saw the Mission as a refuge from both witchcraft and persecution practices regularly employed in traditional neighborhoods and the onerous obligations that come with *awasena* ritual authority. Those individuals who found themselves to be targets of traditional Diola social sanctions, whether brought on

by jealousy or as punitive measures to some perceived moral or social breach, aligned themselves with the Mission and moved to Santa Maria in order to escape the reach of their envious or disciplinary neighbors and kin. As one young Diola man from Katon notes,

Nobody wants anyone else to have anything better than what they have. So if you do better in school, have better health, have more resources, people will be jealous and hate you and cause the spirits to do something bad to you, and often you will die. This is one of the reasons that people first adopted Christianity, because they thought that they could escape this system by becoming Catholic. But it didn't work.

Once Santa Maria began to grow they found the same attitudes and actions sprouting up in their newly established neighborhood, even alongside the Mission walls. As Josefina laments, things were simpler when Santa Maria comprised just a few families, all with the common purpose of avoiding further persecution. Now that Santa Maria has grown to 62 houses, "there is confusion, people talk behind each other's backs," and it increasingly resembles traditional Diola neighborhoods in its social dynamics and witchcraft practices.

But the Mission has served as an effective refuge for those seeking to avoid ritual responsibility as shrine priests for several important inherited *ukinau*. Becoming

Christian, in this sense, gives one license to abjure the exigencies of elders to assume one's destined position as an *awasena* priest, and although the reasons for doing so vary, several Mission-educated men who otherwise have broken with the Mission have since sought to renew their ties with a view towards eventual permanent abnegation of the burdens of their *awasena* ritual responsibility. Herein lies Julio Akabau's continued quest for baptism. Likewise, another Susana Diola resident—Raúl Humar—has also strategized various ways of avoiding his inherited shrine priest responsibilities. Several years ago the *amangen-i* captured Humar and attempted to force him into taking over his lineage *bakinabu*. "I sat with them and fooled them by acting relaxed and staying with them, drinking palm wine." But before they could start the ceremonial procedures to ordain him, he made a quick escape.

They chased after me, and I tore off, running through the Mission cemetery, then dodging through the woods and making a wide detour around Kugelh, coming around to Kandembã. I was so much younger, they could not outrun me...even though they chased me for a long time. When I came out near the main road by Kandembã, I hid and waited until I heard the sound of a passing *kandongá*. Then I went to the road and hopped on; I had nothing with me, just what I was wearing and no money. When the *ajudante* (fare collector) asked for my fare, I kept stalling and saying I would get it in a minute. When we reached São

Domingos, I went to borrow the money for the fare from a friend, then borrowed more money to get to Bissau. I stayed in Bissau for a week, and then came back to Susana.

There were no repercussions when Humar returned to Susana; everyone acknowledged that he had simply outwitted—and outrun—the *amangen-i*. Many Diola confirm that there is no shame in trying to escape ordination as a shrine priest. As one Susana resident told me, “Our fathers told us, if you can run from a *bakinabu*, do it. If they catch you, then oh well, you have to accept it. But there’s nothing wrong with trying to escape.”

Sipamiro’s story corroborates this. Sipamiro is the direct heir to an important shrine—*Karenghaku*—which he has continued to evade. When I first discussed the matter with him, he reiterated the most prevalent reasons for refusing shrine priesthood: first, that as a Christian, he no longer believed in *ukinau* and ceremonies, and second, because he did not want the burden that comes with having to be available when people ask you to perform a ceremony on their behalf. I had heard these reasons from others who were in a similar situation, although, as mentioned above, most of them no longer attended Mission activities and all of them had participated in the 1998 male initiation rites. During a lengthy discussion one evening, Sipamiro revealed another reason for refusing to inherit *Karenghaku*. Sipamiro’s family is the original lineage from Katama; they came to Katama from a small forest hamlet called Lhikeuh, which no longer exists but Sipamiro’s family still uses Lhikeuh’s forest groves for tapping palm wine and planting rice nurseries. His lineage has always been small in number but it has a certain privileged

status as being “firstcomers,” including rights over *Karenghaku*. When his ancestors were still in Lhikeuh, Diola strangers came to request that they settle amongst them, and his ancestors agreed, as Sipamiro says, “out of good will.” Once they were given land to build houses and rice paddies to cultivate, they started growing in numbers, and also began doing witchcraft against Sipamiro’s lineage. According to Sipamiro, this now integrated stranger group wanted to “take over the whole village; they wanted to do away with our lineage and be the only ones.” Eventually, they all moved to Katama, but the problems continued. On the surface they considered and treated each other as family—the descendents of the stranger lineage are now Sipamiro’s classificatory brothers, Angala and Simeon, and they divide land amongst each other according to Diola custom as a single lineage. But lurking beneath the surface, the mistrust amongst the kin was deep. Sipamiro continued,

When my father married and started having children, his children kept on dying. My father’s first wife gave birth to my older sister, Erminia, but she [the wife] died a few weeks later. His subsequent wives gave birth to many children, but all of them died as babies or infants except for me and my younger sister, Aissatu, who was born to a different mother. My mother gave birth more than 10 times, but only I survived. My father thought that staying in Katama was unlucky, because he knew that all these deaths were caused by the witchcraft of his brothers, who

were still out to dominate Katama. So he took refuge in Nhakun, his mother's neighborhood, and built a house in what is now the section of forest near Felis's house. This is where I was born. But when it was time to assume responsibility for *Karenghaku*, the elders insisted that he return to Katama to be close to the shrine. He did so, and the cycle of children's deaths resumed.

As a boy, Sipamiro attended the Mission school and was baptized with the first Christian cohort of 1969. He went on to become a teacher, and built his house in Nhakun, where he lives with his wife and six children. When his father died, Sipamiro was supposed to be inducted as *Karenghaku's* shrine priest, but he refused, telling the *amangen-i* that he was now aligned with the Mission and could not assume responsibility for the spirit shrine. In fact, Sipamiro had long since broken with the Mission, primarily due to Padre Zé's behavior and his own doubts about Christianity. The real reason, Sipamiro admitted, that he is refusing to assume his destined position as *Karenghaku's* priest is that "If I accept responsibility for the shrine, the witchcraft will begin again, and my children will be put at risk." It is too dangerous, in his opinion, to accept the priesthood. Like Humar he can be forced into ordination, but only during the *esaangai* proceedings every six years. So, every six years, Sipamiro goes into hiding (usually in Bissau) and returns to Susana when the *esaangai* ceremonies are complete and the *amangen-i* can no longer abduct him and force him to take responsibility for *Karenghaku*. If he continues to do

this they might seek someone else, like his eldest son Gregório. But Gregório is in school in São Domingos, and will probably continue his schooling in Bissau, and it is unlikely that he will return to Susana. The shrine must stay within the original lineage, and “the people who really want it [his classificatory brothers] cannot take it because it is not their right.” As for Sipamiro, he says that he will eventually go back to the Mission, although his reasons for doing so are hardly theological. “I will go back,” he sighed, “because then the elders will see that I cannot have *Karenghaku*. My heart is not in it, but I’ll go back.”

Emerging Tension

Sipamiro’s heart had left the Mission many years before, as his relationship with Padre Zé had deteriorated and he became increasingly uncomfortable with the tensions between Mission mandates and Diola mores. For example, he was not happy with the way Padre Zé spoke openly about sex during Mass, especially since attending children would hear references to sexual matters of which they were supposed to be ignorant. According to Sipamiro and others, Padre Zé would call out specific names of people and accuse them of having extra-marital affairs, discussing sex openly in “vulgar words.” Diola are quite careful when it comes to sexual references, as one of my friends put it: “It’s fine to speak of sex, but one must do it in evasive, hidden language, so the children would not understand.” Congregants complained to Padre Zé about his inappropriate public references, but “Padre Zé took no heed and continued doing so.”

Moreover, Sipamiro had become frustrated with the continual parade of priests that showed up in Susana and, just as they embarked on an activity or project that would benefit the community, “Padre Zé sabotaged their efforts and kicked them out.” This is a widespread allegation amongst the population of disaffected Diola Christians, as well as amongst residents in the traditional neighborhoods.

In 1980, Mission congregants—principally Diola teachers—met about these matters and decided to take action. The overwhelming majority was in favor of removing Padre Zé from Susana. They wrote a letter to the Bishop in Bissau outlining their complaints and asking the Bishop to transfer Padre Zé from Susana. They gave the letter to Miguel Kumori, one of the signatories, who had an errand in Bissau and was thus charged with delivering the letter to the Bishop. But Miguel Kumori’s errand in Bissau fell through at the last minute, and he gave the letter to Padre Zé, who was on his way to Bissau, and asked him to deliver it to the Bishop.

After the group received no response for several weeks they asked Miguel Kumori if he had delivered the letter, and he explained—admitting to his own stupidity—what he had done. Although they had no proof they felt sure that Padre Zé had opened the envelope and read the letter and never delivered it to the Bishop. Shortly thereafter, Padre Zé called a meeting of the congregants. He never referred directly to the letter but spoke in such a way as to make it obvious that he was aware of its contents. The meeting, participants recalled, was filled with anger and disagreement. Padre Zé demanded, “Why are you kicking out Jesus? The Jews kicked out Jesus, and now you are, too!” Some

people responded: “So, you are saying you are Jesus? You are not Jesus! You are not even a priest!” Others—about 5 or 6 people, all of whom worked in the Mission *oficina*— supported Padre Zé, arguing against those who were insisting on his removal. Padre Zé announced that the people who had signed the letter could no longer take communion. Shortly after the contentious meeting, Sipamiro and others saw Padre Zé deliver 50-kilo sacks of rice to the households of those who supported him. Since then, Sipamiro and several others left the Mission. The first few times they went to Mass after the meeting, they got in line to take communion and Padre Zé refused them, offering the wafer to the next person in line. “So we stopped going to Mass. What’s the point of sitting through mass if you cannot take communion?”

During the years after the Bishop letter fiasco, Sipamiro’s wife, Marijai, was the only one pressuring him to keep Mission ties. Following Sipamiro’s suggestion, she had started attending catechism while she was working as a domestic in the Gambia, when she and Sipamiro were engaged but living far apart. When she returned to Susana and they married, she started attending Mass and catechism for the unbaptized. But, like so many others, she attended catechism for many years without getting baptized. Sikinto, for instance, attended catechism for more than 20 years without getting baptized. He finally became fed up and left the Mission. The same happened with Daniel Correia, Julio Akabau, and many others. Padre Zé has a reputation for refusing to baptize even those who attend Mass and catechism regularly for extended periods of time. Knowing this, Sipamiro had encouraged Marijai to attend catechism in the Gambia, because it was much easier and faster to get baptized there (or anywhere outside of Susana). They later

found out that Padre Zé had written a letter to priests in Senegal and Gambia telling them not to baptize the many Guinean Diola who were there temporarily as domestic workers or seasonal laborers, especially those from Susana. Padre Zé's reason, according to Sipamiro, was that the Guinean Diola were "not mature enough yet."⁶²

Padre Zé stands by his decision to delay baptism, but casts his reasons in a somewhat different light. "You cannot live like a 50% Christian in Susana, like others do in town. Because this is an isolated area in the interior, Christians must be 100%, or else they risk going back to the village ways." Because the Susana Mission is "in the bush" Padre Zé insists that Diola need more preparation in order for baptism to be meaningful and "take root." Nonetheless, those seeking baptism generally perceive that Padre Zé's motivations are personal and malicious, and many of them have eventually become "tired of waiting" and left the Mission.

The Ebb and Flow of Religious Conversion

Although, from an outside or cursory perspective, it would seem that most people who left the Mission did so because of the 1998 male initiation debate, a deeper look into the increasing tensions between Mission authorities—especially Padre Zé—and villagers paints a more complicated picture. Padre David, who has served as the second priest in the Susana Mission since 2000, insists that it is quite natural for people to ebb and flow in their Mission participation. "Some choose a road, and then other things enter, other needs, or you simply become disinterested, and so you come and go." This, he claims, was the case before the 1998 initiation. There was also growing resentment among

community members largely based on perceived inequity in terms of financial resources and access to Mission goods. Those who left felt that they were denied favors from Padre Zé that he showered upon others. The 1998 male initiation was used as an excuse, according to Padre David, for people to “officially leave,” since it was easier to blame their discontent on Padre Zé than “to deal with the real, internal problems of jealousy that exist among community members.”

The reasons for such an “ebb and flow” in Mission participation are complex and varied, and change based on the interlocutor, the personal circumstances of the individuals involved, and the passage of time and work (and re-working) of memory regarding Mission-village dynamics. In his discussion of Diola Christianity in Esalalu, just across the Senegalese border, Baum confirms this more complex version of religious change (Baum 1990). He outlines five major patterns of resolving tension between Christianity and Diola traditional religion:

- 1) Full conversion as a “sudden and far-reaching conversion in which one embraces a new faith fully,” which, he notes, is extremely rare;
- 2) A shift in religious authority “but one in which the paradigms of Christian thought are only partially incorporated”;
- 3) Indigenisation, through which the “convert attempts to resolve the tension between religious systems by bringing to his new religion the spiritual and moral questions of the old”;
- 4) Syncretism, where the “new Christian maintains a dual allegiance by recognizing two sources of religious authority.” In other words, each faith has its own areas

of knowledge and expertise, as well as own areas of ignorance and error;

5) Reconversion, or a return to the traditional faith and rejection of Christianity

(Baum 1990: 375-376).

Reconversion is the most frequent mode in Esalalu, and is also the source of introduction of Christian ideas into Diola religion. Further, reconversion to *awasena* religion suggests that “conversion is not the only direction” in religious change (Baum 1990: 370). Baum argues against the largely evolutionist approaches to religious change found in Nock’s (1933) classic theory of conversion, Horton’s (1975a, 1975b) analyses of religious change in Africa, and even Thomas’s (1967) portrayal of Senegalese Diola. He notes that “Thomas...described Diola religion as ‘a false remedy to a very real crisis; fetishism will become a temporary response that will be quickly swept away by another attempt, even larger and undoubtedly more profound: Islam and perhaps we could add, Christianity’” (Baum 1990: 370, quoting Thomas 1967). Using evidence from Esalalu, Baum demonstrates that Diola traditional religion has not been “quickly swept away,” but rather has grown in importance given postcolonial national concerns with Africanization, as well as changes in missionizing practices of those present in the Casamance region.

Senegalese Diola have been exposed to Christian missionaries far longer than Diola in Guinea-Bissau, as the first Catholic Mission in the area was established in Carabane in 1880. But, even in its briefer history of contact with Christianity, many of the same patterns can be found among Guinean Diola in their responses to Christian missionizing efforts. For instance, Baum notes that, in Esalalu

The Diola were ready to welcome the missionary as a provider of services in schooling and medicine and as a source of additional ritual expertise. When missionaries attempted to obstruct *awasena* religious practice, however, the majority abandoned the mission path and opposed missionary teachings (Baum 1990: 382).

Much of this depended on the postures and practices of particular priests. Baum notes that in the early colonial period (1880-1919), the Holy Ghost fathers present in the southern Casamance—and especially Father Wintz—would attend Diola rituals and discuss Diola ritual procedures and beliefs at *ukinau* over palm wine. During this period, Diola had sense that that there were no disputes between Christianity and Diola religion, and they were baptized quickly “after a fairly brief catechumenate and without rigorous examinations” (Baum 1990: 380). But the tactics changed in 1928 when Father Joffroy was posted to the area and took a harder line against *awasena* practices, demanded extensive training through catechism and strict adherence to Mission practices, and—through his intimidating colonially-backed intermediary—used many of the same threats and coercive devices to force people to attend the Mission school and catechism as those later used across the southern border. The tensions between Christian and Diola ways became starker, especially as the missionaries became more strict regarding marriage and inheritance proscriptions, rejection of spirit shrine ceremonies, prohibition of initiation rites, and even abstinence from wrestling matches. “If one went to a traditional funeral,

even that of a relative, Father Joffroy ‘would put you out the door of the church.’ ... Those who sought to bridge the increasing gap between Catholic and *awasena* were publicly humiliated and denied access to the Church ” (Baum 1990: 387). During this period, conflicts arose between those who aligned themselves with the orthodoxy of the church and those who continued their *awasena* practices, and the Diola community became increasingly divided along these lines. “Christians saw themselves as people under siege, trying to protect themselves from the ignorance and persecution of their *awasena* neighbours” (Baum 1990: 388). But missionary practices changed once again in the 1960s when the Pierist Fathers arrived in Esalalu, and “brought with them an awareness of the need for an African Christianity and of the nature of peasant religion in their native Spain” (Baum 1990: 392). These priests encouraged people to bridge the gap between Diola traditions and Christianity, and even began to advocate that Diola Christians attend the male initiation rites, “but accompanied by priests and with a mass said on their behalf” (Baum 1990: 392).

Similar to the Senegalese Diola experience, Guinean Diola engagement with Christianity has been textured largely by the particular priests who happened to be posted to the Susana Mission, and whose personal proclivities, missionary styles, and general manner greatly influenced the ways in which Diola encountered, understood, and participated in (or refrained from) Mission activities. Padre Zé, because of his longevity in the region and the stark contrast in dispositions between himself and his predecessor, has been especially instrumental in shaping the Diola-Christian encounter in Guinea-Bissau, and it would be a mistake to underestimate his individual role in the history and dynamics of

Diola Christianity. Likewise, the individual circumstances and life histories of those Susana residents who first chose to align themselves with the Mission should not be overlooked. That said, the ways in which Diola engagement with the Mission has changed over its relatively brief history in Susana can also be understood in terms of the growing understanding and crystallization—on both Mission and village sides—of the normative concepts and categories that underlie each world view. The next chapter explores several of these domains in which tensions between Diola and Christian beliefs and practices emerged, and highlights the values and assumptions at the core of Mission and village understandings—and often misunderstandings—of each other.

Chapter Six

Becoming and Being: Diola and Catholic Socialization and Systems of Thought

We learn most about the religious thoughts and religious intentions involved if, instead of imposing molar concepts and the vocabulary of macroanalysis, we stay close to those grounded images and by methodic microanalyses proceed from them to what they imply. This kind of study will no doubt involve us very much in primary process, but that is where the religious imagination lies (Fernandez 1978: 228).

I had been in Susana just a few days when I became involved in my first lengthy discussion about what it means to be a Diola Christian. At this point I had not considered Christianity to be a relevant area of ethnographic inquiry, and was simply having a pleasant talk with one of my new acquaintances. In fact, I was wary of forming close ties with Mission affiliated Diola in Susana, primarily because, in the first blush of romanticized fieldwork, I naïvely considered them to be less authentic than their “village” kin, and I was worried to align myself with Mission families just in case more “traditional” Diola would cast me as a Mission supporter and thereby not grant me as

much access to their world of spirit shrines and pig sacrifices in the outlying neighborhoods. Looking back, I can see what faulty assumptions and simplistic formulations underlay my initial prejudicial orientation to forming alliances and friendships. But at the time I was quite concerned about my own self-presentation tactics and how they contributed to the image that Susana residents were forming of me, as well as quite ignorant of the complicated array of issues surrounding Diola Christianity and Mission-village dynamics.

Paulo, a tall man with a broad, toothy smile who had served many years in the military—first as a Portuguese conscript and then as a post-independence PAIGC soldier—came to sit on my host family's veranda and, no doubt, check out and report back on their new guest. I was sitting on a low wooden plank underneath the thatch roof fringe, bent over a basket of rice from which I was lamely trying to pick out small pebbles and other debris. Marijai was sitting on the packed dirt floor of the veranda and leaning against one of the house's wooden posts, her legs stretched out in front of her and crossed at the ankles. She was also cleaning rice, although her progress was much more swift and fluid than mine. Paulo sat next to me on the hard plank and peered into my basket to inspect my work. We greeted each other and then sat silently for a while; I methodically scanned the rice grains for stones, he pulled a piece of thatch from the roof and used it to pick at his teeth. Paulo told me that he lived in Santa Maria, near where the airstrip used to be, and that he had just come from the Mission where he had asked Padre Zé for a ride to Bissau, as he had some business to take care of in the capital. I later found out that Paulo had recently deserted the army after not being paid for many months and deciding that his

time was better spent working in the rice paddies, but he had just heard that the bankrupt government was granting amnesty to retirement-age deserters who were willing to officially decommission themselves. Even though Diola do not keep track of their age, Paulo told me later that he could produce papers that would prove that he was, indeed, of retirement age, and he was eager to put his military involvement behind him. “Nowadays there’s no point,” he said. “Better to sweat in the paddies and pray for a little rice to feed my family than to sweat in the barracks and not be able to send anything home.”

I asked him how long he had lived in Santa Maria. He had built his first house there, he said, and brought his wife and raised all of his children there. He was baptized in 1969 and all of his children had been baptized, although his wife never had. He asked me whether I was baptized. I explained that I was a member of a different religion that did not baptize, and we discussed, briefly, what it meant to be Jewish. Like most Susana residents Paulo had never met a Jew, although he had heard about Judaism in catechism. Then he said,

You know, being Christian and being Diola, it’s all the same. Christians say not to kill. Diola also have rules against killing. Christians say not to steal. For Diola, thieves are the worst kind of criminals. And for us, if you take someone else’s wife, there will be a lot of trouble. People will punish both of you. The priests tell us that we should not want to have the things our neighbors have. But

here, everyone has the same things, and if you have something, maybe you caught some fish or you have a little bread, you give some of it to the people around you. See? Christianity is not so difficult for us. We already had many of these things. It's the same as being Diola.

Paulo's selective recitation of the Ten Commandments and their similarity to Diola moral codes was the first time I heard such a comparison, but it was far from the last. Just about every time I would discuss the relationship between being Christian and being Diola, my interlocutor would provide me with the exact same speech. "Being Christian is the same as being Diola," my neighbors and friends would repeatedly tell me. "We also don't kill or steal." It became almost comical that these lines would inevitably be repeated, as if by rote, in the context of such discussions, reflecting a common didactical origin from catechism classes.

The PIME missionaries did not only emphasize parallels between Christian and Diola morality through their careful attention to some—although certainly not all—commandments. Other similarities were ripe for the taking. Diola belief in a supreme deity—Emitai—who has ultimate control over both the macrocosm and microcosm was readily translatable to the Christian God, and the Diola mass liturgy originally developed by Padre Marmugi and expanded by Padre Zé refers to God as Emitai. Likewise, the role of priests as ritual specialists was something Diola could relate to from their experience with *amangen-i*. Priests, whether of the Mission or of spirit shrines, had access to certain

esoteric knowledge and authority over religious matters that Diola readily respected and rarely interrogated. As an extension of this, through their understanding of the *ai* as “a man who is both sacred and slave, all-powerful yet a prisoner of his power, Diola converts could readily understand the sacrifice of Jesus as a way of securing divine favour for his people” (Baum 1990: 375). Moreover, Padre Zé’s musical proclivities enabled him to tap into a general Diola appreciation for singing as an expressive form. Singing plays a significant part in many spheres of Diola social life, whether in specific ritual contexts or in quotidian interaction. One of the first impressionistic features that struck me as a newcomer to Susana was the fact that everyone seemed to be singing all the time, whether making up songs with their friends, singing popular songs from Diola dances, or humming along with songs on the radio. When I went to Mass at the Mission for the first time and listened as most of the service was conducted through Diola songs that everyone knew and sang comfortably together, I, too, reflected that there was not much difference between being Christian and being Diola, singing in the Mission and singing in the village. And so, it seemed, Diola were quite well suited to Catholic conversion.

Of course, tensions and conflicts between the two inevitably surfaced in conversations and actions shortly after this initial and superficial harmonious representation. From the previous chapter, we saw how some of these clashes were the result of interpersonal dynamics, especially revolving around Padre Zé’s missionary and personal style. Other problems arose around economic issues and perceived inequity in Mission resource distribution. This chapter will focus more on the domains of Diola and Christian social

organization, personhood, and values that, when ones digs a little deeper than the Ten Commandments, do not so easily mesh.

First, I discuss elements of Diola socialization, family structure, and gender norms in order to deepen an understanding of the key Diola cultural features, as well as highlight how Christian suppositions and practices differ from these attributes of Diola social life. The second part of this chapter delves into values and orientations in both Diola and Christian systems of thought in order to illuminate further the differences between the two, and develop a better understanding of the challenges and tensions of being a Diola Christian.

Becoming a Person: Diola Male Socialization

As a Diola boy grows he passes through four stages that mark his maturation, signified by adornment and activity. Diola do not count their years, and even today it is rare to find someone who knows their numerical age unless they have had frequent contact with bureaucratic institutions that require this kind of information. But age—especially a boy's age—is marked physically on the body with various kinds of adornment, and through various kinds of work, educational, and recreational activities.

The first age-grade—*apurau*—typically includes boys around 11 or 12 years old, but can also include boys as young as 6 years old. This is the age of cow herders, when young boys take responsibility for their family herds (or are lent to another family with herding needs). Previously, this would be their sole responsibility, but increasingly children are

beginning to perform agricultural work in the rice paddies at younger and younger ages. The adornment used to mark this age grade, worn typically at large public gatherings like wrestling tournaments or dances, is a hairpiece with small shells sewn as a circle into the boy's hair at the back of his head. The next stage—*aruntchikau*—includes boys in their late teens to early 20s. An intermediate phase—*aruntchikau arau*—encompasses boys who are not quite big enough to be full *eruntchikai*, but have outgrown their *epurai* status (usually 14 year-olds). At this stage, the headpiece no longer has shells, but several buttons scattered on back of head to make a star-like shape. This is first phase of various *ebongai*, the headpiece progressions that distinguish male age grades, each phase with their particular name. This first one, *badjolidjolabu*, comprises white buttons threaded onto the back of the boy's head. The ash from a burnt *caboceira* shell is mixed with palm oil and spread on the back of the head until everything turns pitch black except for the white buttons. At wrestling matches *eruntchikai* are not distinguished by any particular clothing, as they are in later stages. During the late *aruntchikau* phase a boy starts to explore his options for betrothal. When he is ready to declare a girl as his wife, he will add another ring to headpiece, turning it into a *kugabaku*, with two buttons tied together around the star on his head. It is at this point that the boy and his family begin to raise pigs for the *ebandai* marriage ceremony.

During the next phase—*adjadjau*—more emphasis is placed on wrestling and kon-kon participation. *Edjodjowai* wear white skirt-like cloth wraps when wrestling, and their *ebongai*, now called *bapendabu*, is thread around their entire head with 3 or 4 buttons in a row on each part of the star. Later in this phase, the headpiece is transformed into a

hungómahu, in which the buttons from the previous phases are removed and an *embelengai* (pl. *bambelengabu*), a type of copper-like metal, is sewn into the hair covering the whole head. At this point, the young man is waiting for the elders in his neighborhood to give him the go-ahead to build his own house. Much of this depends on his wrestling ability; if he is an exceptionally skilled wrestler, elders may decide to delay his house-building activities for a couple of years in order to keep him in the wrestling circuit (once married, he must retire from wrestling). The final *ebongai* phase is *ehendjekurai*, in which the *embelengai* is removed and the young man's entire head is tied with shells. This signifies that, during the following year, the man can begin to build his own house.⁶³ At this stage, young men trade in their white skirt for a black one, which they wear at wrestling matches and kon-kon dances. Moreover, they remove the red tail worn by all boys at wrestling matches from *apurau* to *hungómahu* phases. They replace the red tail with a *hurirahu*, a white cloth with beads sewn on it twisted until it is hard and reaching to the back of the knees. The year that young men build their own houses, they become *esubangilai* (*asubangilau*, sing.), the final youth phase. They no longer wrestle, although they usually take on a supervisory role at wrestling matches and kon-kon dances. After this final youth phase, one becomes an *adjamurau* (pl. *edjamurai*), a married adult with an autonomous household.

Table 3: Youth Age Grades for Diola Males

Grade Name and Approximate Age	Activities	Adornment
Apurau (pl. epurai) 11 or 12, but can include younger boys	Cow herding	A hairpiece with shells on back of head
Aruntchikau (pl. eruntchikai); late teens to early 20's (Aruntchikau arau = mid-teens)	Wrestling, kon-kon dancing, betrothal process.	<p><i>Ebongai</i> stages begin (headpiece comprised of buttons in star shape on back of head):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Badjolidjolabu</i>: mix of burnt caboceira shell and palm oil spread as black ash around head; white buttons sewn into hair. 2) <i>Kugabaku</i>: After declaring a wife, another row of white buttons is added to the star shape.
Adjadjau (pl. edjodjowai)	Wrestling and kon-kon dances.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) <i>Bapendabu</i>: 3 or 4 buttons in a row on each part of the star; 4) <i>Hungómahu</i>: buttons from previous phases are taken off; <i>embelegai</i> (pl. <i>bambelengabu</i>), a type of metal, is sewn onto hair over all of head; 5) <i>Ehendjekurai</i>: Take out <i>embelengai</i>. Tie whole head with shells. At this stage, white skirt is switched for black skirt at wrestling matches, and a <i>hurirahu</i> replaces the red tail.
Asubangilau* (pl. esubangilai)	Build autonomous house. Retire from wrestling, although act as supervisor for younger grades.	

* The phases from aruntchikau to asubangilau generally take 7-10 years.

The changes in *ebongai* and wrestling wear encode several key insights into Diola ideas about masculinity, personhood, development, and knowledge. First, a young, pre-pubescent boy wears a circle of shells on his head, and does not have any distinguishing clothing below his waist. The shells contrast with the later use of buttons in their naturalness, and the circle suggests self-containment, both of which mark this phase as one of undisturbed boyhood, intact in and of itself. It is only with entrance into the *aruntchikau* phase that change is signaled by opening up this circle into a multi-armed star, and by replacing “natural” shells with “artificial” white buttons.⁶⁴ The progression of the star shape suggests incompleteness—there will be more buttons and the headpiece (like the boy himself) will grow outwards. The openness of the star image conveys this sense of growth; as buttons are added, the star radiates outward, mimicking, on the one hand, the body’s transformation from the inside out, while suggesting, on the other hand, the multiple directions of possible growth. It is still unclear how the process will end, and Diola indicate the potential for following multiple paths simultaneously through the many arms of the star, each of which represents a possible area of growth and a possible path toward manhood.

The contrast between the black ash and white buttons symbolically sets up a meeting of opposites that marks most liminal moments, and that has to be worked out and ultimately resolved through a transitional process. These next several stages coincide with ages that mark growth and transition in the boy’s physical and social life; it is a vulnerable period in which the previous state of an unmarked and largely ungendered child goes through the gradual process of becoming more visibly marked as a man. The use of artificial (e.g.

“man-made”) buttons as opposed to naturally found shells suggests that Diola recognize the ambiguity of gender, and have a clear sense that gender difference must be socially and symbolically (not just physically) worked out. In a structural vein, that which is natural must be undone and remade in order to reconstitute something else. The final stage of a full head of shells marks the completion of this process, and a return (although somewhat differently configured) to a natural state—that of a fully completed man. All of this symbolic work is happening on the head, again emphasizing that this is an imaginative process. Diola see the head not only as the site of intelligence, but as a source of potentially creative or destructive power. A witch, for example, is said to “have head,” meaning his or her capacity to perform extraordinary feats (for good, but more often for evil purposes) resides in the head. That *ebongai* also reside on the head implies an attempt to imprint and guide the still vulnerable youth into each next stage by symbolically demarcating both growth and the working out of contrasts (in this case, male and female encoded by black and white) on the site where creative/destructive power lies. Moreover, locating this process of adornment on the head reveals how Diola think about knowledge as tied to maturation. Again, the transition to manhood is not just about growth and physical change, but importantly includes the acquisition of different kinds of knowledge (represented by the multi-armed star) necessary to become an autonomous head of household.

The seemingly incongruous *hungómahu* stage, in which the buttons are removed and a type of metal is tied around the head, can be better understood when we think about the properties of metal. As a material object, metal represents the ultimate in potential; it

requires human intervention in order to transform it into something useful. Among Diola, metal is most often used at the tips of the long fulcrum shovel that men depend on for their arduous hoeing labor in the rice paddies. Blacksmiths must transform a block of metal by exposing it to fire, which, for Diola, simultaneously encodes male chiefly power and female creative power (see Chapter Two). *Hungómahu*, as the penultimate stage, dramatically encapsulates this extreme transformative process by moving from the gradual accumulation of buttons to a headdress of metal, suggesting at once the joining of male and female power (through fire) in the making of new people,⁶⁵ and the consolidation of this new person as a man, most importantly distinguished by his trademark instrument of labor in the rice paddies.

While all of this symbolic work is happening on the young man's head, it might also be instructive to examine what changes are happening on the lower half of the body. Once a boy enters into the liminal and transitional phases demarcated by *ebongai*, he also begins to wear a white cloth with a red tail at wrestling matches. Again, the contrast of these colors hints at some level of gender confusion—or at least ambiguity—marked, not coincidentally, around the sexual organs. *Eruntchikai* and *edjodjowai* are not yet fully sexualized beings; in other words, their sexuality is still indeterminate as indicated especially by the red tail. Red, like fire, is a polyvalent symbol among Diola, sometimes signaling male ritual leadership and other times encoding female fertility. Its use during these transformative stages suggests again the blending of gender archetypes that need to be worked out in the ultimate reconstitution of a fully sexualized man. We see this happening at the final stage of *ehendjekurai*, when the metal headpiece is removed and

the young man's head is covered with shells. At the same time, the white cloth and red tail are replaced by a black cloth and *hurirahu*. The symbolic work that has been conducted on the head is no longer necessary, because the accumulation of knowledge necessary to become a man is now complete. Instead, the final symbolic gesture is located around the sexual organs, as the young man removes the ambiguous red tail and wraps himself in black, publicly displaying himself as a fully sexualized man about to embark upon an autonomous life by building his own house. (Remember that the Diola word for house and family is the same—*elhuupai*—and the building of one always already encapsulates the building of the other.)

We can see, then, that the key elements in a Diola male's maturation involve an ever more refined distinction between male and female spheres, an emphasis on knowledge as constitutive of manhood, and a sense of the multiple directions (or paths) that growth and development can entail. Each of these precepts, as we will see, butt up against Catholic notions of gender, family, knowledge, and development. Before elaborating on these contrasts, I want to continue my discussion of male socialization by filling in a few other important features of Diola social life.

In addition to the process of passing through these age grades, Diola male youth used to participate in a form of general and social education called *hubohu*. Youth at the latter phases of *adjadjau* and *asubangilai* would take charge of younger boys at a neighborhood level, bringing them into the rice paddies and teaching them many of the skills they would need as Diola boys and men. They learned to wrestle, climb palm trees,

make fishing traps, and take care of cows. As one neighbor told me during a nostalgic conversation about how village life has changed,

During the day, you would not see boys running around loose in the village as you do now. They were all in the paddies... And you would never see unattended cows in the village, roaming about as they do now. No, *hubohu* ensured that both boys and cows were in their place and well looked after... The older boys would discipline the younger ones. If they saw that one of the boys was not properly taking care of his cow, they would report him to his mother and father. If the behavior continued unchecked, they would organize a supposed wrestling match, but it was really a pre-text for disciplining the errant boy.

The Mission and, later, the state school system disrupted *hubohu*. Now, children claim that they have no time to hang out in the paddies all day. Another important socialization forum—*eranai*—was likewise disrupted by Christian conversion, and has, according to some Diola residents in Susana, led to an overall decline in “good behavior.” As one informant described it,

Every now and then, the *amangen-i* would call all of Susana together by saying that there was an important ceremony to be conducted. They would give the location, and everyone would show up at the shrine site. Then the *amangen-i* would perform a little ceremony, not really much of anything, after which they would proceed to give advice to those gathered around. The advice would consist of moral and social education: do not steal, do not impregnate women if you do not intend to marry them, do not tell lies, etc. The “ceremony” was a mere excuse to gather people together, but the real substance of the *eranai* was the moral and social education.

When the Mission began their activities in Susana, priests told their recruits that they should not go to ceremonies. Since *eranai* counted, nominally, as a ceremony, young men who were attending the Mission school and catechism desisted from attending. But whether they intended to or not, the priests disrupted an important site of civic education without replacing it through catechism or other orientation. Ironically, from the Mission’s perspective, moral and social education only began once they introduced Christianity. But most Diola villagers lament the fact that “things are falling apart” in terms of social and moral codes, especially around theft and out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Although the practice of *eranai* has not decreased, young people no longer attend. “Just old people go,” my informant told me, “So they are preaching to the converted.”

It is especially ironic that Catholic influence has increased out-of-wedlock births. There are a number of factors contributing to this increase, many of them directly or indirectly tied to missionary presence, including a) the breakdown of elders' control; b) the erosion of the betrothal system; and c) the disintegration of boys' sleeping houses. This increase is the most frequently cited "symptom" of moral decay, and many of my friends and neighbors stressed to me that, even a generation ago, it was extremely rare for a Diola woman to become pregnant before marriage. As Tegillosso explained,

If someone had a child out of wedlock, he would die. If he had "support" [witchcraft protection] he would not die, but his child would. We did have sweethearts [kusubaraku], but this meant that when you passed your asubar on the road, you would greet each other as "asubarom" and that was the end of it. No touching. You could also rally workers through your asubar; her sisters and age-mates would transplant rice in your paddy. And she could benefit from you, too; you and your brothers and age-mates would hoe in her father's fields. But you would never sit alone together, unsupervised. There would always be a chaperone.

Part of the reason for changes in sexual relations among unmarried young men and women stems from the abandonment of collective sleeping houses for young men. In Tegilosso's youth, only 15-20 years ago, he slept in the same room as three of his age-mates from the neighborhood. In his father's time, all of the young men from a neighborhood would sleep in the same house. Unlike a Melanesian longhouse, sleeping in common quarters would take place in one of the households in the neighborhood, a family home with an extra room for the young men. If everyone did not fit into one house, they would be divided among several houses. But the point was to ensure multiple bodies in the same room, supervising each other and being supervised by the head of household. According to Tegilosso, "If a boy needed to get up in the middle of the night [to urinate or defecate], he would tap his friend sleeping next to him and tell him so, and the two of them would go out. If he did not do this, he would be suspected of chasing girls... Nowadays, young men sleep in their own room, and so when a girl sees him there alone, she can come to him."⁶⁶

References to increased premarital pregnancy often followed directly on the heels of my own questions about death. Finding myself at funerals every week, and sometimes many times each week, I couldn't help but wonder whether this death rate was typical or extraordinary for Susana. When I asked if more people were dying recently than in years past, most of my interlocutors insisted that it was very strange for so many people to be dying all the time, and that something was wrong. Several of them linked the increase in funerals to the increase in premarital pregnancy. As Paulo once put it, "God has a fixed number of people in the world, and now that young people are giving birth early and out

of wedlock, God is taking others away.” This theory expresses, on the one hand, a kind of “carrying capacity” thinking—that the community can only handle so many individuals, and if more are born, then others have to die to keep the balance intact. It also makes a clear circular link between birth and death (discussed in Chapter Two), seeing them as inextricably linked feedback processes.

Women’s Worlds and Birth

As discussed in previous chapters, birth traditionally took place in secluded maternity houses attended only by other women. Men and women who had not yet given birth were prohibited from entering these maternity houses, and were meant to remain ignorant about the process of birth. Although there are no reliable statistics to confirm it, both Diola and non-Diola sources agree that rates of maternal and infant death were quite high in the maternity houses, and birth was considered one of the more dangerous activities in women’s lives. The Italian nuns’ intervention into Diola birthing practices transformed the ways in which Diola women give birth, as most women in Susana now choose to give birth in the state health clinic attended by the male nurse. But most residents in Susana see this as a welcome change, given the decrease in deaths through childbirth. Men and uninitiated women (i.e. women who have not yet given birth) are still not privy to the secrets of birth, and recently, women collectively built a maternity house directly behind the state health clinic to serve as a separate and exclusive birthing house, so that only women and the state nurse (who is not Diola) can enter. In this way, Diola have been able to maintain the gendered exclusivity so central to birthing while gaining some

measure of increased health and safety in delivering babies. Although the Mission efforts may have seemed to disrupt traditional birthing practices, in Susana the changes have been regarded as largely positive, and the central elements concerning gendered domains of secrecy and knowledge have remained somewhat intact.

Family Organization: The Case of Widows

One significant difference in the demographic make-up of Santa Maria and the traditional Diola neighborhoods is the absence of scattered *kungumaku*, or widows' houses, across the Mission neighborhood. I became aware of *kungumaku* and the plight of widows during the early phases of my fieldwork, when I conducted a preliminary household survey across the village. As I traipsed along the winding paths within each neighborhood, armed with a clipboard and accompanied by my friend and neighbor Senabu, we would come across houses that appeared somewhat different from the norm. Diola houses are rectangular, with small (usually uncovered) window openings, a front and back door, and a heavily thatched roof. The atypical houses had all of these elements, but they were smaller, shabbier, not quite the same. Upon approaching them, Senabu would tell me that a "*solteira*" lived there. *Solteira* is a Portuguese and Crioulo word used to designate unmarried female status, a maiden. I became curious about why there were so many single women living in their own houses, especially when I started to meet some of them and realized that they were not as young as "maidens" tended to be. A few conversations cleared up the matter when it became evident that these were widows' houses, and their occupants were the widows, and often children, of a deceased

man from that compound's lineage. It was only later that I appreciated the full implications of Senabu's use of *solteira* to describe their status.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Diola have no word for widow. Women whose husbands have died, and men whose wives have died, are referred to in the same way as other women and men of their age, relative to who is addressing them. Sometimes widows and widowers are described as *apagnorol akem*, meaning "his/her spouse died," but this is not used as a title or designation so much as a description. Portuguese and Crioulo use the same word—*viuva*—for widow, and I wondered why Senabu and others, when speaking in Crioulo, consistently used *solteira* and not *viuva* when referring to widows. Perhaps, when translating from Diola to Crioulo, they opted for *solteira* as a recognizable "unmarried female" designation, whereas *viuva* has no corresponding category in Diola. Or perhaps they were signaling the reality of a Diola widow's experience, as *solteira* derives from root words that mean single and alone.

Even though there is no Diola word for widow, a widow's house is called a *hungumahu* (pl. *kungumaku*). As mentioned previously, the Diola word for house and family is the same: *ehuupai* (pl. *siluupasusu*). Building a house represents a young man's most concrete move toward adult status, whether or not he has been ritually initiated. Traditionally, a young man built his house on his father's compound, although he was also entitled to build on his mother's brothers' compound. These days, young men often build their houses where it suits them: on their patrilineal or matrilineal compounds, in Santa Maria if they are Catholic, or closer to the village center if they desire. The fact that the word

for family and house are the same reveals the extent to which the two are inextricably tied, as relatively autonomous producing, consuming, and decision-making units.

Designating a widow's house as *hungumahu* emphasizes its difference and distance from the family-based *eluupai*. According to Diola custom, a man's *eluupai* is torn down around a year after his death, although this may be prolonged if he holds a number of religious offices and there are more lengthy posthumous ceremonies to complete. A widow's *hungumahu* is built in her virilocal neighborhood, often adjacent to where the destroyed *eluupai* once stood.

Diola offer various reasons for tearing down an *eluupai* after a man's death. Some say that a man will be unable to find his way to heaven if his house remains intact after his death. A variation on this claims that his soul (*ahukau*) will be upset and remain in his house to disturb its occupants, similar to our notion of bothersome house-ghosts. Others suggest that, since it is impolite to refer to someone after they die, if a man's house is left standing and a visitor asks whose house it is, one will be forced to utter the deceased's name. Still another account emphasizes the widow's experience by suggesting that, if a woman stays in her dead husband's house, she will be constantly sad because the house will be filled with memories of him. Clearly, there is no consistent explanation for why a man's house is broken down upon his death, and this range of versions and guesses is quite consistent with Diola modes of explicating their customs.

In addition to tearing down his house, a dead man's land is incorporated back into his lineage and redistributed amongst his brothers and nephews. Given land tenure practices,

a woman only has access to land through her husband, and once he dies, she is no longer entitled to work in his forest grove or rice paddies. If she has sons, they will inherit their share of their patrilineal land when they come of age.

When I tabulated the results from my household survey I found that an average of 34% of the Diola households in each traditional neighborhood were *kungumaku*, whereas only 8% of the households in Santa Maria were widows' houses (see Table 4). I thought I might have made a mistake, and I went over the results with Sipamiro, my most trusted informant. He verified that I had labeled all of the houses correctly, but he, too, was surprised by the numbers. Surprised, that is, in a characteristically understated Diola way: raising his eyebrows slightly as he slowly nodded his head and said, "Ah-haaa."



A demolished *elupai*



A Susana widow

Table 4: *Kungumaku*

Susana, Guinea-Bissau 2002

Neighborhood	Diola Houses	Widows' Houses (total)	Widows' Houses (percent)
Traditional			
Nhakun	77	19	25%
Katama	25	9	36%
Kugelh	52	19	37%
Mañodjagu	47	16	34%
Bukekelil	58	25	43%
Sub-total	259	89	34%
Catholic			
Santa Maria	60	5	8%
Overall Total	319	94	29%

The number of *kungumaku* in Susana is not the same as the total number of widows. Some widows live with a married son (or, much rarer, a married daughter), where they will help with the domestic work and be provided rice from their son's paddy. Others—especially co-wives—live together, and still others live with another family member. In one case, two widowed sisters lived with their blind widowed brother. (During the time I lived in Susana, there was only one widower who lived alone; that is, only one household comprised of adult man and no woman.⁶⁷) But these are the exceptions. The rule, nowadays, is that once her dead husband's house is broken down and his agricultural land taken by his brothers, a widow will move into a *hungumahu*, built either by her sons or paternal uncles. In some cases, if she has no kin to help her, she will build her own

house. During my first dry season in Susana, I saw a young widow build a *hungumahu* completely by herself. Each day, she gathered sand and dirt into a large pile, then drew bucket after bucket of water from a nearby well, carrying it over to pour onto her sand pile. Then she kneaded the heap with her feet, making a muddy mound. Next she made piles of mud balls, each about the size of a bowling ball, which she used to form the walls of her house. This went on for weeks, until she had four short, uneven walls, onto which she placed a makeshift roof of wood poles and a gesture of thatch. The resulting house is no more than a leaky hovel; one cannot stand upright inside and, with large gaps between the walls and the roof, it is not closed off to outside elements. She lives there with her four young children. This widow constructed her *hungumahu* on borrowed land across the road from my adopted family's house, in an area of the village with much foot traffic. No neighbors or passers-by ever offered to help with the arduous work. When I asked the mother of my family—a good friend and co-member of a women's work association with this widow—why she was building her house by herself (a task that, even for men, is a collective activity), she replied, "What choice does she have? Who would help her, and risk other people talking? We Diola, we're difficult. Everyone has to fend for themselves."

Once the husband's rice paddies are re-absorbed into his lineage, his widow is reduced to borrowing her kin's unused paddies, a fragile and tenuous arrangement at best. If she does not have grown sons or benevolent uncles who will hoe the paddy for her, she will wield the heavy fulcrum shovel herself and perform what is considered quintessentially male labor. If she cannot borrow paddy, she begs for rice. Sometimes her grown

children provide her with a small quantity of rice, sometimes neighbors take pity on her and send over some rice. But, in the past several years, bad harvests make it extremely difficult for anyone to be generous. When the average member of the population is anxious about having enough rice to feed themselves and their families, widows are left even more on the margins.

Widows' Lives: Asaamaku

Asaamaku is a widow in her forties whose husband had only recently died. She was still living in her dead husband's *ehuupai*, and as we sat on her porch one day I noticed that her newly constructed *hungumahu* was beginning to take shape just across the yard. Asaamaku had formed the mud balls for her new house herself, and then contracted her brothers from Bukekelil to build the walls. She owed them money for their work and was concerned about how she was ever going to be able to pay them. Like many Diola women, Asaamaku had given birth to many children, and most had died in infancy. She now lived with her two remaining sons, the eldest of whom had five children of his own, three of whom lived with Asaamaku. Her eldest son had not yet built his own house, nor had he officially married, and the mother of his children was living in Ziguinchor.⁶⁸ The two grandchildren who did not live with Asaamaku were being fostered in São Domingos. Asaamaku's son spent his days tapping palm wine and selling it to merchants who came over the Senegalese border to Susana once or twice a week in trucks with scores of 25-liter plastic jerry cans jangling around all sides. Sometimes he gave his mother two liters of palm wine that she could sell or trade for a kilo of rice, which was not quite enough to feed all the members of her household. On one of the

days that I visited, she was cooking two packets of porridge that Susana's resident nurse had given her grandson. After that, she did not know when they would eat again.

Asaamaku had grown up in better times. She remembers her childhood in Bukekelil: "In those days, children did not work. We would play in the dirt and swim in the sea. We didn't work like kids today; now you see little kids going to cultivate, going to transplant rice seedlings. But parents did all the work then. I would go to the rice paddy with my mother, but I would just play while my mother did all the work." She was around 8 or 9 years old when she was betrothed to her future husband. As part of the betrothal ceremony, the declared bride is given a rooster that she must slam on the ground in order to kill it. But Asaamaku was small and weak for her age, and when she was given the rooster she tried and tried to throw it hard enough on the ground, but was not able to kill it. The adults teased her for her frailty, and took the rooster back to kill it for her. Even after her betrothal, she continued to lead a carefree childhood.

Almost immediately after her husband built his *eluupai*, they left Susana for Ziguinchor. This was during Guinea-Bissau's independence war, and her husband—like many men in Susana—had been conscripted into the Portuguese army. He was sent to serve in Bolama, the former colonial capital, but was tired of fighting and wanted to set up a secure home with his then-pregnant wife. They feared for their lives in Susana, where they believed the PAIGC "rebels" surrounding the area would kill supposed Portuguese loyalists and their families. Asaamaku received word from her husband to wait for him in São Domingos, so she made the 35-kilometer trek and shortly thereafter gave birth to

their first child. Her husband escaped from Portuguese military service in Bolama, and they crossed the border together to live as refugees in Ziguinchor. Lacking access to land in Ziguinchor, Asaamaku spent her days chopping and selling wood. “I would paddle around the river in a little dugout canoe to look for wood. Then I would cut it and pile it onto the canoe and trade the wood for rice. Or I would sell the wood and buy some rice.” While in Ziguinchor, Asaamaku gave birth to four more children, three of whom died. Diola women in Ziguinchor recruited her to join *kanyalen*, a ceremonial society for women dealing with both fertility and child mortality problems, and she gave birth to a “kanyalen child,” but he, too, died. The material demands of *kanyalen* proved too onerous, and Asaamaku decided that as soon as she had paid off her *kanyalen* debt, she would return to Susana with her remaining children. “If Emitai wants to take my children, it is up to Emitai. But I decided not to conduct any more *kanyalen* ceremonies; it wasn’t worth it... If Emitai wants to take my remaining two sons, they will die in Susana. Ziguinchor was bad luck.”

The family moved back to Susana long after Guinean independence, and they resumed their agricultural activities in Asaamaku’s husband’s rightful land. But as soon as her husband died, his brothers reclaimed the rice paddies, and Asaamaku was left with a household of children and no land to cultivate. Her eldest son will only inherit his share of land once he builds a house. In the meantime, Asaamaku begs for small sections of her relatives’ surplus paddy, which her sons till. She also offers her labor to other women, helping them with the arduous work of transplanting rice seedlings, and they pay her in harvested rice. But this work is limited to the rainy season; the rest of the year she

struggles to get enough rice to feed her children and grandchildren. She once asked her brothers for some rice that they received through their children, who were attending school and participating in a temporary UNICEF/FAO program to feed schoolchildren. Her brothers refused, and she has since stopped asking them for help. Asaamaku regularly has days when she does not eat, sometimes several days in a row. Her main concern is to get her hands on anything she could trade or sell for rice to feed the smallest children in her household. As I explored in Chapter Three, Asaamaku saw her situation in isolation, and did not discuss it with other widows in similar circumstances.

Widows' Lives: Apekua

Apekua lives in Nhakun and is probably in her late-thirties. Although she does not live in Santa Maria, she and her husband had been active in the Mission community, and Apekua continues to attend mass and participate in women's associations whose members all have ties to the Mission. In addition to rice cultivation on borrowed plots, Apekua engages in a range of productive activities—such as making oil and sauce from palm kernels—in order to barter for rice in a hand to mouth existence to feed herself and members of her household. Apekua and I belonged to the same women's work association, working together in the rice paddies and the thick forests, contributing to the same collective fund, and socializing together after arduous workdays. There is a great deal of camaraderie within a women's work association, and members often form the tightest bonds of care, support, and friendship outside (or sometimes surpassing) the family context. While other members of our association knew about Apekua's situation, they rarely commented on it, and when they did it was only to refer to her "bad luck." She was subject to the same requirements and penalties as other members, having to pay

a fine for missing a collective work day and having to contribute the same amount of money to our bi-weekly pool.

Apekua has eight children in her house; five of her own, two grandchildren, and the daughter of her dead brother. Her grandchildren were born out of wedlock. In addition to Apekua's five living children, she had given birth to five more, most of whom had died when they were infants, and one of whom—a teenage boy—died during my second year of fieldwork in Susana. Apekua's husband was Catholic, and they were married in the Mission, although he built his house in Nhakun. When he died, his brothers reclaimed his rice paddy, and Apekua began to borrow small plots from her paternal relatives, which yielded very little. Any rice that she had managed to store was consumed during her teenage son's funeral. She was involved in a day-to-day effort to trade other forest products, especially palm oil, for enough rice to feed her children, but sometimes they had nothing to eat. Apekua's mother was alive and also a widow, living in a *hungumahu* in Mañodjagu. They were the only mother-daughter widows in Susana. Apekua's mother was too old to work, and lived off others' generosity, as Apekua explained, "If I have a little, I can give her a little."

When I asked Apekua whether she got help from the Mission, which has a local *Cáritas* committee that is ostensibly committed to cases such as hers, she responded that she had never received anything from *Cáritas*, even though she goes to Mass. I asked whether she had informed the *Cáritas* committee members (two of whom were her neighbors) about her situation, and, after much hedging, she explained that talking to the *Cáritas*

representatives would only make her feel worse because they would disdain her and treat her like a beggar. Apekua already had a bad experience with *Cáritas* when, several years before, her house burned down. The Italian nuns who were at the Mission at the time arranged for several items—foam mattresses, buckets, clothing—to be brought up from Bissau, and sent them to Apekua through Susana’s local *Cáritas* representatives. According to Apekua, the *Cáritas* committee sold the goods, setting aside some for their own families. Such allegations about *Cáritas* were common in Susana, and it was largely held as commonplace that the Diola Christians who had been made responsible for *Cáritas* distribution in Susana were lining their own pockets with goods meant for Susana’s neediest residents. To compound matters, Apekua also believed that she was being kept off the *Cáritas* widows list because her sons attended the 1998 Diola initiation.

I visited Apekua one afternoon a few days after her son’s funeral. Old women were sitting with their legs stretched out on torn mats around the dirt yard, weaving winnowing baskets or digging *jigan* (a boring chigger) out of each other’s feet with *kabaf* thorns. Some women chatted amongst themselves, others softly sang the funeral songs they had been composing during the past several days in honor of Apekua’s son. Apekua had harvested three large baskets of rice from her paternal uncles’ paddies, two of which had already been consumed by her relatives during various funeral ceremonies. Given the number of children in her home, the remaining basket would last only a few days. I sat with Apekua for a while on her veranda, and then she moved a few feet in front of the veranda, sitting on the ground in front of an old woman who carefully shaved her head with a dull knife blade. Apekua gathered up the fallen hair and buried it in a corner of the

yard, just past the singing women. I looked out at the crowd and recognized most of the women as widows. They sang about Apekua's son's prowess, his tireless work in the rice paddies, his tilling strength and speed. None of them sang about the fact that he had been living in Bissau, and that his mother (or for that matter, any of them) no longer had any land to till, let alone anyone to till it.

When I came back several weeks later to pay Apekua another visit, long after her remaining basket of harvested rice had been consumed, she pointed to her children scattered around the yard. "Today, you can see, here are the children. They haven't eaten today. The ones that go to school, they get a little porridge. But not all of them can go to school... Last year was better. But now there is no rice left."

Increase in kungumaku

Diola traditionally had a levirate system in which a widow would typically marry one of her deceased husband's brothers. The levirate system provided a well-integrated safety net for widows within the context of Diola social organization, kinship norms, and land tenure practices. But in Susana, levirate is rarely practiced anymore. When I commented on the surprising number of *kungumaku* to my friend Tegilosso, he explained:

Now there are more *kungumaku* than before. Before, if a man died, a woman would be obliged to marry again. First, she would wait for one of her husband's brothers to seek her out. If they did not, one of his nephews would. First,

the nephew would come to the husband's brothers and say, 'Given that you are not seeking her out, do you mind if I do?' They would accept, and he would go to her. She could accept or refuse him, and if she refused him, another nephew would come. If none of the nephews worked out, she could marry someone from outside the lineage, but she would have to do a ceremony [usually sacrificing a pig] in the compound of her deceased husband. If she had children, the brothers of her deceased husband could decide to keep the boys, or if they didn't she would take them with her. But now, women refuse to re-marry, so there are more *kungumaku* than before.

Levirate has declined not primarily because of Christian prohibitions against polygyny but because of other shifts in mores and economics. Some Susana residents agreed with Tegilosso that, now, "women refuse to re-marry." Others pointed to the current economic impossibility of a man taking on a second wife and her children: "When you cannot put rice in your own children's mouths, how can you bring others into your *eluupai*?" But whether my interlocutors identified the reasons for the eroding levirate system as women's or men's refusal, as changing attitudes and norms around gender and marriage or increasing poverty and decreasing ability to sustain one's family, everyone seemed surprised that there were so many *kungumaku*.⁶⁹ When I brought up the topic of widows to my friends and neighbors within the context of casual conversation, they

typically responded with a comment or anecdote about a particular widow, but almost never engaged in the topic of *widowhood*. My interlocutors had no problem recognizing the poverty of Asaamaku or Apekua or other widows, but they did not easily recognize themselves (or their mothers, sisters, or wives) as potentially in the same situation. Each widow is seen as a unique person, a unique case, and each has to fend for herself. The fact that there is no Diola word for widow or widowhood further suggests that widows are not perceived as part of a social category into which, it seems, most women eventually enter. Both widows themselves—as seen in Asaamaku’s comments—and the community at large see each widow in isolation, not as manifestations of a collective problem.

Compounding this atomized view of widows is the fact that, given male land inheritance and virilocal marriage, women have no permanent base, whether agricultural or residential. As one informant put it, “Women are like the wind. They can be in one place one day, but if they marry, they will be in another place, perhaps even another country, the next.” What collective organizing exists in Diola society happens very much at the neighborhood level, through a deeply place-based sense of allegiance, solidarity, and mutual commitment. Women’s mobility thus lends them a permanent aspect of impermanence and ethereality, making it even more difficult to recognize widows as a collective group.

Overall, the increase in *kungumaku* appears to be the result of uneven change. Levirate practices have eroded without concurrent shifts in linked customs, such as breaking down

a man's *ehuupai*, reclaiming his agricultural land holdings, and redistributing it only to married sons with their own households. But if the large number and deeper poverty of widows in Susana can be explained by a combination of uneven change in customs, general stoicism, and Diola ideals around work and autonomy, why are there substantially fewer *kungumaku* in Santa Maria than in all of the other Diola neighborhoods?

Part of the answer lies in short-term historical demography. The families that make up the bulk of residents in Santa Maria are comprised of the now grown captured schoolboys, most of them in their late-30s and 40s, heads of their own households, with wives and many children. Relative to the rest of the population in Susana there are fewer deaths related to old age, simply because there are fewer old people. But Santa Maria residents still have to grapple with the issue of widowhood, both in terms of their widowed mothers living in other neighborhoods and the few cases of Santa Maria-based widows.

Some Santa Maria residents have taken their widowed mothers into their own homes, for either temporary or prolonged stays. One man built his mother a *hungumahu* behind his house. His neighbors tried to persuade him not to, claiming that he was permanently removing his mother from her own neighborhood and her involvement in neighborhood-based ceremonial life would be compromised. He insisted that he was better able to care for his mother if she was nearby, and others soon followed suit. But these were minor adaptations that did not disrupt any important Diola customs. A bigger challenge came

when Santa Maria started producing its own widows. Several years ago, when a married man in Santa Maria died, his brothers came from his natal neighborhood and tried to break down his house. Santa Maria residents had already decided, in catechism discussions, that they would oppose the practice. The brothers insisted that, if the house were not broken down, their dead brother would not be able to find his way to heaven, and he would rot in the forest. Utikal, an outspoken Mission member, responded, “Let him stay in the forest, then. Better that than have his widow and children suffer here.” The house was not broken down, but the dead man’s rice paddies were still reclaimed. This set a precedent for future widows, and as of 2002 there were five widows living in their husbands’ *siluupas* in Santa Maria (including Josefina Nhajenam from the previous chapter). How do we understand the change in attitude that brought about this change in practice? What does this practice in Santa Maria reflect in terms of the transformation in values involved in being a Diola Christian, and how does it mirror the non-Christian Diola values involved in the current situation of widows in other neighborhoods?

In terms of the process, one major difference between Santa Maria and the other neighborhoods is the dominating presence of the Mission, with all of its attendant leadership roles, venues, and mechanisms. The decision to leave a dead man’s house intact might have been born out of a Christian rejection of “pagan” belief, the denial of the link between a man’s house and his soul, and the promotion of a new road map to heaven. But, more importantly, the fora and mechanisms for arriving at these convictions—Mass, catechism, and religious coaching by the resident priests and nuns—have become integral to Santa Maria’s residents’ quotidian life. Beyond doctrinal

instruction, participation in these Mission activities creates a new kind of space for Diola in Susana. With the Mission as a physical base, and Mass and catechism as regular gathering moments, Diola Christians come together to discuss their community's concerns in a way that facilitates the move from seeing autonomous and atomized widows to recognizing widowhood as a collective issue. But these "meetings" are still largely orchestrated and dominated by the resident Italian priests, who embody a new kind of leadership and a different mode of power and authority for Diola. The priests still determine much of the content and exert a great deal of influence over discussions at Mission venues. It remains to be seen whether Susana's Diola Christians will continue to participate in problem-identification and decision-making activities without an external actor orchestrating such encounters. And, as is clear from Apekua's case, the extension of care and concern is inconsistent, particularly given the post-1998 schism in the Catholic community over male initiation.

Santa Maria's residents changed the practice of demolishing a dead man's *eluupai*, but they did not address land tenure, and even widows in Santa Maria are not entitled to their deceased husbands' land. And, aside from *Cáritas*, there are no other provisions for Santa Maria's widows, and certainly no innovations in social organization or religious practice that enable widows to maintain a livelihood on par with other households. Nonetheless, the Santa Maria stand against breaking down a dead man's *eluupai* causes great concern among the general Diola population in terms of land tenure, inheritance, and other issues of social organization. Will Christians soon insist that widows be entitled to keep their husband's paddy and forestland? There is no doubt that Diola must

deal with their widow problem eventually; the disintegration of the levirate system without the formulation of a new safety net has left a significant portion of Susana's population in an extremely vulnerable state. But if the only alternatives to the deeply impoverished existence of a widow fending for herself in a *hungumahu* come from the Mission, it is unclear what long term effects this will have on Diola land tenure practices, family social organization, and gender norms. It is too soon to evaluate how these changes might impact Diola practices and contour the relationship between Mission and village. But the current predicament of widows highlights one of the pressure points in the Mission-village dynamic that extends beyond the realm of individual moments of crisis and into arenas of values, collective organizing, and community ethics.

In addition to these shifts in family and social organization, the encounter between Diola and Catholic ways has brought several more abstract tensions to the fore. These include attitudes regarding work, collectivism and individualism, and differences in what I will call a navigational perspective on knowledgeability.

Pity and Piety

In Chapter Three I discussed Diola attitudes and practices around work and self-reliance, some of which are echoed in Asaamaku's and Apekua's stories. It should be clear from the first three chapters that the prevailing sense of autonomy, within the context of the household as an integrated producing and consuming unit, requires a commitment to hard work and self sufficiency, and that there is little room in Diola social interaction for pity and charity towards those (including widows) who fall behind. Diola personhood is

rooted in these qualities, and pity for others' misfortune does not fit within a system where everyone can and should succeed—within the limits of Diola notions of success—through their own efforts.

One observer of Diola mores in Susana was a resident Mauritanian shopkeeper named Salek. He had lived in Susana for several years and was unusually well liked and well respected by his Diola customers. When I sat with Salek drinking *warga*—an elaborately brewed tea—one hot afternoon, he commented. “These people have no pity. Pity doesn't exist here. [*Elis ka ten pena. Pena ka ten.*]” He continued,

An old person will be walking along, carrying a huge burden on her head, and a young man will briskly walk by, not even thinking to help her. This is lack of pity. They do not help people who are most in need. This is the only “tribe” in Africa in which old people work so hard and young people do nothing to help.

I told Salek what I had learned about Diola work ethic, especially with regard to old people. He listened attentively and then shook his head. “They have no pity,” he repeated, “Everyone has *some* pity, but not them.” While I was not as inclined as Salek to generalize to this extent, he did have a point. Diola, too, regularly comment on this aspect of their social life, as a friend once sighed to me, “We Diola, we're very individualistic. Everyone in their own house, with their own affairs, not concerned with

their neighbors.” Others often commented that Diola think only about their own stomachs, and even though people worked hard within the family unit and agricultural work associations, it was impossible to harness labor and support for needs beyond the household.

Padre Zé also weighed in on this issue: “People here think only for themselves and their family,” he once told me. According to the priest, this individualism, or as he called it “anthropocentrism,” is one of the major obstacles to true Christian conversion. And the “lack of pity” that Salek observed was exactly what he and other Mission personnel were trying to combat in their flock. Catholicism offers a radically different view of personhood and social interaction, one that morally praises charitable acts towards others. Rather than seeing widows as impoverished objects of ridicule or candidates for lessons on hard work, the priests viewed widows as charity cases, and instilled in their converts the sense that widows deserved not only pity, but charitable treatment. This, in turn, led not only to a change in custom regarding *siluupasú* in Santa Maria, but to charitable acts towards widows in other neighborhoods.

For instance, early in my fieldwork, a group of Diola Christian men organized a day to thatch Nhabuhel’s house. Nhabuhel is the oldest woman in Susana; she is a widow, all of her age-mates have died, and, as one of the Diola Christian men put it, “no one takes care of her.” As the group of Mission men thatched her house, her neighbors looked on in surprise. One of them asked the men what they were getting in return, and when the men responded that they were simply doing a charitable favor, the onlookers seemed skeptical,

but shrugged and turned away. When I discussed the episode with other villagers, it was clear that the incident struck an odd chord with Diola sensibilities, and most of them commented on Diola individualism. “We don’t have time to help the poor people,” one of my neighbors explained, “it’s too bad but it’s just not our concern.” Another example emerged when Utikal, a longstanding leader among Diola Christians, proposed that Susana residents build a small road and bridge over the treacherously swampy area that women cross in their efforts to harvest thatch for roofing Diola houses. After cutting large bundles of thatch, women, often pregnant or carrying small children on their backs, wade waist-deep in muddy water balancing their heavy loads on their heads. Utikal arranged with Padre Zé to borrow the Mission’s tractor to make the bridge on the condition that he would organize people from the population to fix the road. All was set, they borrowed the tractor, they made the bridge, and they set the date for people from Susana to come and make the road. No one came. They set another date. No one came. They set a third date. No one came. When Utikal asked his neighbors why they did not show up, they responded that they did not have thatch in that location, so why should they help. Utikal sighed, “The idea that women were carrying thatch that might be for their houses did not occur to them.”

When I asked Diola Christians (especially those still active in the Mission) what they saw as the main differences between themselves and non-Christian Diola, it was often this attitude toward what they called “charity” that came up first. Padre Zé called it “lack of solidarity” and claimed that it was the primary reason that “the change of mentality [among Christian Diola] is not yet complete.” He once gave an example of his effort to

inculcate a different kind of sensibility among Churchgoers. He wanted to garner financial support for the seminary in Bissau, and when he brought it up in a catechism class, one man said: “But my son does not attend the seminary, so why should I pay for another man’s son?” Padre Zé responded: “You do not understand even the most basic principles of Christianity.” He went on to lecture that the seminary is where priests are made and one day, when the foreign priests leave, there needs to be a substantial corps of Guinean priests. “Priests serve the whole community, not just their own families, so why can’t you see that it was in your interest, and in the community’s interest, to support the institution that will provide you with future priests?”

Leveling and Initiative

A linked, although seemingly contradictory, issue is that of collective leveling. As explored in Part One, not only do Diola maintain strict standards regarding work and self-reliance, but they are quick to bring down those who appear to be getting ahead of the perceived “golden mean” (Gluckman 1972). When considered in the context of the Mission-village interface, however, we can see how such concepts conflict with Christian norms. For instance, one of the primary outcomes of general leveling tendencies is the inhibition to innovate. Anyone using his or her initiative to innovate on either agricultural practices or other areas of work is looked upon with suspicion, especially if it appears that he or she is gaining material goods not hard-won in the form of manual labor through these efforts. Again, Padre Zé sees this as part of his challenge in crafting a new kind of person through Christianity. He claimed that Diola Christians

Put more effort into what they did, because they knew that God would ask them: ‘What did you do with the gifts that I gave to you?’ God gave us seeds. You cannot hide a seed in the roof of your house; you have to sow it, to work with it. And since God will ask what we have done with his gifts, we need to work hard to show Him that we have not squandered them. We have to develop them. That’s why Christians are the people with the most initiative in the village. Sure there are Christians with no initiative, but besides them... most of the people with initiative are Christians.

It should be clear that non-Christian Diola are extremely hard workers (see Chapter Three). What Padre Zé is referring to here is a different understanding of work. For Diola Christians, a new concept of work needed to be developed, one that demanded innovation and success measured by the fruits of one’s labor, rather than just the labor itself. And this innovation and initiative struck at the core of Diola ideas and attitudes regarding egalitarianism and leveling. As we saw in the previous chapter, escaping the system of jealousy-provoked leveling was sometimes an incentive to join the Mission, where it was perceived that members would be protected from the leveling efforts of their village kin and neighbors. According to some Diola Christians, many of these leveling tendencies have diminished in Santa Maria, although others are quick to point out that this vein runs deep in Diola social interaction and has certainly taken root in Santa Maria

as much as other neighborhoods. But Diola Christians still involved in Mission activities agree that true conversion entails a change of attitude and morality in this respect, which is remarkable in terms of the initial insistence by most Christians, referring to the Ten Commandments, that Diola and Christian morality is the same.

Navigational Differences

Perhaps the most interesting difference between Christian and Diola orientations regards each system's conception of place, positionality, movement, and change. These differences became increasingly clear the more I spoke with Mission personnel (especially Padre Zé) and the more I observed Diola social interaction and religious practice. I begin this discussion with an excerpt from an extended interview with Padre Zé during which we conversed about a range of issues revolving around the 1998 male initiation controversy. Padre Zé started with an anecdote about other recent missionary efforts in an outlying village, which then led to more general statements regarding overall orientations to religion and humanity:

When the New Apostles came to Ellalab, they gave the people a lot of things, they told them they would write their names in their church. One man...said, 'No. My name will not be put there. Because you, you are not serious people. You tell us, 'You will all enter our path,' but that we don't need to throw away our own path. I've never seen anyone who can walk on two paths at the same time. It cannot be.'

The man was an elder from the village. One of his sons is in the [Catholic] community, but he's not baptized yet, he's still preparing. [The old man] said: 'You see those people there [referring to the Catholic community whose houses were built along the chapel's walls]?' Because they [Catholics] had left the village and built houses outside because there was no other way to advance. 'Those people there, *that's* a path. Because those people, they threw away one path in order to enter another. Those are trustworthy people. But your path is not a path. You're not going to put my name there.'... The Felupe path, the Christian path, the Muslim path, etc... are understood in a global sense. If someone changes paths he will leave behind all of the things of the old path, he will enter on the new path. Now, this group, Christians, who returned to initiation, the village will wait for them in all of the old path. Some went. Good, they made another choice, they're free, just as they chose one thing now they choose another. But those who returned, but they didn't fully return, they stayed in the middle; I've already heard from elders' mouths from the village: 'We don't understand these kinds of people. These types of people are not serious, they do not have dignity. Because, why is it that they haven't chosen from this or

that. First they threw away one path and entered another. Then they rejected that path, but didn't enter the other. They're in the middle. They're neither attending mass nor attending ceremonies... These people, they cannot stand.' Now that's the kind of talk that's coming out. It's a pity, really, because these people, they have no personality, no identity. Either Felupe identity or Christian identity or Muslim identity. Someone else who is not on this path or any other path, Christian or whatever else, does not have an identity. What are they going to say? 'Us.' Us? You? Who?... It's a problem for them.... You cannot live like a 50% Christian in Susana, like others do in town. Because this is an isolated area in the interior, Christians must be 100%, or else they risk going back to the village ways... Here in Susana... the Christian community did not start out in town. It started in the village. That's why the contrast is more alive, because the Christian community is not in the middle of a town where there are people that went with a priest and people who left their village and put their homes in a town... there's a mixture. Here, there are just these two paths. There is no such thing as a secular life. That's also why we learned the Felupe language. Because when we first came here, we were in the middle of this tiny town,

tiny! There were no more than 3 or 4 or 5 houses in town [what is now Centro] when Padre Marmugi came. When I came, too, there weren't so many other houses. So our interlocutors were Felupe, because those who were in town, the majority of them were Muslims. There were 2 or 3 houses of Christians, those who already attended Mass, but didn't really have the depth of a real Christian life. But the Christian path began as a proposal to the village. Because they were in the village, there was no opportunity for them to say, 'I will be a Christian like that one there.' No. 'I will be a Christian in the way the priest says so.' ... That's why there is a clearer Christian identity here, because there simply aren't those who don't have an identity... There's no other thing in their midst. People who remain in the middle, others say, 'No, it cannot be.' That's why this group [Christians who attended initiation], even Felupe say, 'These people, they left the Felupe path, they left the Christian path, where are they now?' They just don't understand their logic; you can't stay in the middle. According to their [village] logic, they have more respect for those Christians who did not attend initiation; at least they stuck to their path. Just as others in the community have heard, some people in the village say, 'It's better,

those who refused to let their sons go to initiation. Because at least they chose a path. We might be against it, we might disagree, but they chose a path and they can advance on that path.’ They have more respect for someone who keeps his word than someone who talks in one way today and in a different way tomorrow and the day after tomorrow they will change again. It’s a pity.

Padre Zé’s narrative is replete with metaphors that open up the possibility of contrasting several fundamental tenets of missionary Catholic thought with Diola beliefs and practices. First, there is the issue of the “path.” Several times in this and other narratives Padre Zé refers to a path, or sometimes a “Christian path,” on which people stand firmly, move forward, or, in the case of those converts who engage in Diola religious practices (especially those who attended the 1998 male initiation), “go backwards” toward the village. The image of a path simultaneously encodes several ideas about positionality and movement. There is a sense of linear progression (either forwards or backwards) towards an ultimate destination, a sense of constant movement, and a sense of singularity. A person can only be on one path, and the most consistent criticism of those Diola Christians who attended the 1998 male initiation was that they were “trying to be on two paths at the same time.” Carlos AmpaAsolo, one of Padre Zé’s most loyal followers, echoed this same sentiment during one of our discussions. When I asked what he would think if his own children decided to return to their natal neighborhood and follow awasena traditions, he said his children could opt to go their own way once they become

adults. “If they ‘go back’ to the village, that’s their choice, as long as they do it full-fledged. But to call yourself a Christian and do some things in the village, like go to ceremonies, that’s not acceptable. You pick a road and stick to it.” Recall, from the preceding chapter, AmpaAsolo’s response when I asked him what would differentiate the next generation in Santa Maria. He said that he hoped and believed that they would make a lot of progress on the “Christian path.” “We built a canoe,” he said, “they will build a boat.”

Padre Zé’s evocation of “only one path” textures much of his discourse regarding Diola villagers; it is a framing principle with which he interprets—and attempts to change—Diola behavior. Interestingly, he often assumes Diola traditionalists themselves adhere to the same principle. Following a path is such a commonplace for him that his narratives preclude the possibility of a different orientation to one’s place and movement in the world.

On another occasion, I questioned Padre Zé on several of his previous statements regarding the increased cultural sensitivity that the PIME Mission brought to their educational activities compared with the Portuguese colonial approach. Padre Zé had gone to great lengths to explain that the PIME school differed from colonial schools around the country in that the Portuguese schools denigrated local values and customs and taught people to be ashamed of their identity, and “to think of themselves as animals or savages in need of assimilation into European culture.” The PIME school, on the other hand, “emphasized what was positive about Diola culture: all the things they know, like

how to farm in a sophisticated way, and the way they build houses.” I pointed out that there was an internal contradiction in this presentation when, by his own admission, the very existence of school put into crisis one of the core features of Diola culture and social organization: the knowledge and power of elders. “Simply by having a school,” I said, “you admit to putting this aspect of Diola culture in crisis, and changing who got access to knowledge, and thereby reorganizing authority and power in Diola society. How do you resolve this contradiction?” Padre Zé provided the following response:

Well, what we would tell our teachers to prepare them is this: We need to have our students with their feet firmly standing on their own ground, and with an open mind. In order to firmly stand on what they have, they need to value it. But, when it comes down to it, they know that what they have is not enough. It lacks a lot still. ‘That which others have and we don’t have yet.’ But our students should not be like monkeys, like white people’s monkeys that just imitate. They see and they copy. No. They need to have a critical sensibility. We need to form them, little by little, so that, when faced with whatever novelty, when faced with whatever phenomenon that happens, they should choose for themselves what is worthwhile and leave behind what is not. Now, it’s not us that can make this choice. It’s them that should make it. But we need to help them grow in this

sense. That's why, we would tell them, 'It's true, you have your values, you have the experience of your elders, you have your way of life. It's not like you have nothing. But pay attention: what you have is not enough; what you have is incomplete. And what you have, also, there are some things that cannot continue. Now, you have to see, of these things you are learning in school and things that come from the outside, what could be worthwhile for you, what could help you. Choose well. What could be worthwhile to integrate with what you already have.' This is the kind of lecture we would give to prepare teachers in the school. Now, within the instruction of children, that was another way... [We told them:] 'You need to prepare your head and do well and advance in school. So you need to pass the exams and get your piece of paper, your certificate of passing 4th grade... Because tomorrow, it's not just about having a piece of paper, but to have in reality the ability that the piece of paper symbolizes. But pay attention: Don't leave, don't completely leave your place.' This we discussed in school and in catechism. 'Your elders have a culture and have answers to the questions that arise in the heart of every human being. And one type of answer to these questions you, too, can reach, you can achieve it.

God will help you reach it. When someone sincerely looks deep in his or her heart for the ways in which to lead a proper life, we cannot say that God will leave you. God is our father, he helps us, just like a father helps his own children to do any kind of work. If he gets to a point where he can't do it, a father will help him reach his goal. God does the same with us. It's the same thing. So, your elders have a lot of value, which also comes from God. But it's grasped within the limited way that sometimes ideas are grasped. Sometimes, people don't fully grasp it, or maybe because of selfishness, or other things like jealousy. So, what's coming now from the revelation, from this message that we receive from evangelism, that we receive from the word of God, it's not a completely new thing, a completely different thing. Because its roots are already there. But attention! It's a thing that we've grasped only provisionally. It's only a partial notion, a partial answer within the realm of humans. Now, we have another answer that comes directly from God. But it's not something that's completely different. It's a way to advance, to move forward on the path. We say to our parents: 'Thank you, because you put us in a place where we believe, we have a God. You put us in a place where we can search for a way

of life. Now that we've seen it, we tell you, Thank you, we're going forward on this path. We cannot remain stopped/stuck.' That's the outline that we have as catechism. But it's the same outline that we had in the school.

In addition to images of paths and progress, Padre Zé's discourse hinges on the idea of incompleteness versus completeness with regard to knowledge and development. His statement that "what they have is not enough" sets up a framework within which one accumulates that which one "lacks" by moving forward on the path. The image conveys not only forward progress but cumulative development. Growth and maturity are achieved by recognizing the partial and provisional nature of "what we have," and then by "going forward on this path."

When we compare these images to those in the *ebongai* and wrestling attire of young men, we see a very different kind of orientation toward change, knowledge, and growth. The Diola image of a star comprised of buttons that radiate outward conveys a sense of multiple directions of growth and knowledge, rather than a singular path on which one can only move forwards and backwards. Each arm of the star represents a different realm of knowledge, several paths which one can (or must) pursue simultaneously in order to grow and mature into manhood.⁷⁰ The circularity of the initial shell headpiece and the final shell head covering suggests a completeness and sense of closure to a transformative process, rather than a continuous trajectory of ongoing movement (in ever faster vehicles)

along a path. For Diola, then, change and transformation are not always about progress and accumulation. In fact, Paulo's explanation of why there was an increase in deaths in Susana—because of a perceived link with the increase in out-of-wedlock births—contains within it both the notion of circularity through the association between increased births and increased deaths, and the idea that accumulation sometimes comes with severe costs.

Moreover, growth and maturation in Diola tradition are inextricably tied to increasingly distinct gendered spheres of knowledge and action. We have seen how gendered distinctions are worked out through changes in a young man's wrestling skirt, and how becoming a Diola adult is defined, in many ways, through what one knows—or, equally important, what one cannot know—about being a man or a woman. The significance of distinct gendered spheres of knowledge reaches its peak at male initiation and women's birthing, each of which are gender segregated affairs and are marked by the attainment of knowledge that must be guarded within the exclusive realm of the initiated (see Chapter Four). The Christian evocation of a path that does not distinguish between male and female travelers contrasts sharply with the gendered separation so central to Diola social life. And the image that dissolves this separation between men and women has, as we have seen, been translated into action at several tense moments in Mission-village affairs. Recall the initial (and continued) complaint by Diola villagers that their children would have their "ears poisoned" in the Mission school because they would learn about human reproduction in a way that violated Diola norms around the gender-specific acquisition of knowledge of such matters. Even more dramatic, when men in Edgim entered maternity

houses and when Padre Zé insisted that women join in catechism discussions regarding male initiation—based on the insistence that “a Christian family is one entity”—these highly protected domains of gender-specific knowledge and secrecy were physically ruptured. To be sure, this may have led to positive outcomes with regard to women’s reproductive health in the first instance. But the very idea that such sacrosanct spaces could be entered by the opposite gender could only have come about through the introduction of new ideas about such spaces and the knowledge contained within them.

Perhaps the most significant contrast with the Christian image of a path emerges not from a particular Diola ritual or custom, but from a wider perspective regarding Diola orientations to place and movement. Rather than being defined by forward movement, Diola religion and social life revolves around action, performance, and repetition. The word *awasena* literally means “one who performs ceremonies,” and the religious realm—just like the productive realm—is thus defined by what one does, rather than where one goes or what one attains. How do Diola define themselves? “We Diola, we work hard.” How is Diola religion defined? *Awasena* is about action, about the doing of ceremonies, dances, and rituals, most of which entail a repetitive and circular theme.

Even more telling is the Diola linguistic convention through which a speaker’s place is defined in relation to his or her interlocutor. Diola verbs of motion have the speaker as their ultimate reference point, based on the use of the suffix “ul,” which means “to me.” Thus, when someone is descending from a palm tree, you do not say he is simply descending, you say “*uwaloul*,”—he is coming down *to me*. Likewise, when you ask,

“Are you coming back?” you do not say, “coming back,” or “coming back here,” but “mbalanhul” – coming back *to me*. Such linguistic insights reveal the extent to which each Diola speaker sees him or herself at a central point around which motion takes, even while the interlocutor may be simultaneously encoding the same sentiment. Movement is not conceived as linear or unidirectional, but as constantly changing based on the social situation and the action involved. Ultimately, it is person-based or sociocentric movement that always already involves a relationship between the people involved and the space between them.

Padre Zé has a somewhat different interpretation of this same linguistic observation. He sees the Diola use of “ul” as evidence of egocentrism—that everything revolves around the person speaking. His efforts to move Diola Christians toward a different understanding of their place in the world involves conversion to a theocentric worldview. “Man is still in the center,” he explains, “but only as linked with Jesus, who is linked with God. The concept is relational—me in relation to Jesus, getting from where I am to as close as I can get with Jesus and God.” This shift in navigational perspective entails not only a transformation in one’s understanding of personhood and positionality, but also a different understanding of one’s relationship to the supernatural. *Emitai*, the supreme deity in Diola religion, has at its core a concept of unknowability and unattainability. As we learned in Chapter Four, the root of the word *Emitai* is an abbreviation of the word *irit*, which means “that which one cannot know.” Central to the Diola concept of a supreme deity, then, is the maintenance of distance and unknowability. Even though the PIME Mission incorporated the use of *Emitai* as God in their liturgy, the God they refer

to is both knowable and reachable, if one follows the path. Padre Zé often comments that one of the first steps toward Christian conversion involves the understanding that “God is closer than what you had previously thought.” His narrative above refers to the typical Catholic formulation of God as a father and Christians as his children, which is a radically different kind of relationship than the one between Diola and *Emitai*.

Diola images, linguistic conventions, and religious practices remind us that transformation does not always have to imply progress and movement forward.⁷¹ The contrast between Padre Zé’s formulation of personhood and Diola practices around what it means to be a good and full-fledged person challenge us to imagine change as not necessarily bound within a linear and cumulative process. This is certainly not news for anthropological thinking, but the particular ethnographic insights that interpretations of Diola custom bring to bear point to a core conflict between Diola and Christian systems of thought, and make it clear that Christian conversion entails far more than a selective recitation of the Ten Commandments. The making of a Diola Christian—at least under Padre Zé’s missionary leadership—involves refashioning Diola ideas of self, family, gender, place in the world, relationship to the supernatural, relationship to work, and notions of movement, change, progress, and knowledge.

Conclusions: Male Initiation and the Making of a Man

The question remains: even though many of these tensions between “Mission” and “village” thought and practice surfaced during the past several decades, why did the 1998

Susana male initiation become such a focal point for clashes between these two worldviews and their respective institutions? Part of the answer becomes more apparent when we embed Diola responses to the male initiation crisis within the broader context of environmental and economic change in this region.

Aside from the initiation forest and a young man's head, the other site of "man making" is, of course, in the rice paddies. As we have seen throughout the dissertation, and especially in Chapter Three, the arduous manual labor of hoeing the heavy mud to prepare the paddies for rice seedlings is a quintessentially Diola male act. Adolescent boys often brag to each other about how fast they can hoe a rice paddy, and members within the neighborhood-based work groups of unmarried men often compete with each other during the rainy season weeks of tilling to see who reach the end of the row fastest.

The intricate system of Diola nicknames—*Kasaalaku*—is a testament to Diola ideals of manliness that revolve around prowess in the paddies. The most popular nicknames are praise codes for being a successful rice cultivator. My next-door-neighbor's *kasaalaku* was *Amisábangéh*. *Amisau* is a little person, and *abang* translates roughly as "he works a lot." Taken together, *Amisábangéh* means: "Even though he's little, he works hard in the rice paddies." Another man's nickname was an even more oblique reference to cultivation competence. *Kudjuntó di kudjal* translates as "if they stand, they will cut." It alludes to fertile and abundant rice paddies by evoking the image that even if women just stand still, they will be surrounded by ripe rice to harvest.

Similarly, eulogistic couplets composed at a man's funeral typically emphasize his cultivation prowess. And at one of the first funerals I attended—for a man who was the shrine priest for five different spirit shrines—the space in which public funerary rites were conducted was decorated with bundles of rice from the dead man's granary. Attending villagers looked at the rice admiringly, nodding their heads and repeating throughout the ceremony “he had lots of rice.” Rice abundance, as we have seen, is tied to increased ritual authority. I was often told the story of Birom, the man who presided over more spirit shrines than anyone else in the village. In the 1960s he had single-handedly irrigated and cultivated a large tract of paddies and produced enough rice to offer sacrifices at several of the most important (and costly) shrines, eventually gaining rights to priesthood over them.

The Diola twist, then, on the recurrent (and now much criticized) anthropological trope that women are born and men are made is: women are made by giving birth; men are made in the paddies and the forest.

But now, even the most able-bodied and perseverant man would not be able to produce as much rice as Birom. As documented in Part One, in the past few decades, environmental problems such as desertification, declining rainfall, rampant erosion, and persistent locust invasions have made Diola subsistence precarious. As a result, domains in which “being a man” is proven are on the wane and increasingly threatened. Diola are no longer able to eke out a living in the rice paddies, and previous accolades that attested to masculinity (“He has lots of rice”) are becoming rare. Now that these sites of establishing,

demonstrating, and performing masculinity are declining, others are becoming even more significant. Diola male initiation gains in importance as one of the last purely male and purely man-making venues.

The making of a Diola Christian man—at least under Padre Zé’s missionary leadership—involves disrupting Diola ideas of gender, and particularly distinct gendered spheres of knowledge and secrecy, beyond the point where most Diola men are willing to go. Especially given recent ecological shifts that make it increasingly difficult for Diola men “to be made” in the rice paddies, male initiation has become an increasingly important site to maintain male exclusivity to certain kinds of knowledge. For the majority of Diola Catholic families, these factors trumped Mission mandates prohibiting initiation, even though their actions ultimately resulted in their expulsion from the Church and deep divisions among Christian community members.

Finally, the decision of Diola Christian initiation participants can perhaps be taken one step further if we consider Fortes’ (1966) notion of “prehending the occult” (see also Gell 1974). Understanding ritual as a way to influence conditions—often environmental—that enable one to make a living, Diola men’s insistence on participating in male initiation might encode their hope to affect their natural world, and regain the opportunity to “become men” in the rice paddies once again.

Epilogue: Free from Fear?

During my second year of fieldwork in Susana I had one of those rare experiences that brought many of these insights together, while simultaneously disrupting the too-neat formulation between Diola and Christian worldviews that they seem to endorse. I had spent the first couple of hours one morning interviewing Padre Zé at the Mission, during which he discussed one of the main differences in the lives of Diola Christians from the lives of their kin “back in the village.” Padre Zé insisted that one of the principal elements that attracted the original converts to the Mission was the ability to escape a life governed by fear. The Diola system, he explained, revolved around the punitive power of spirits and intermediaries and it was “filled with fear... People were scared all the time about the meanings and consequences of their lived reality.” Once they joined the Mission, they became “free from fear... It was like a kind of lightness for them. Fear was no longer among them. They no longer had fear.”

Later that same day I was at Utikal’s rice shop, listening to the radio with several of Susana’s most ardent Christian converts. The brief Portuguese news summary of recent political changes in Lusophone Africa sparked a conversation about various African presidents and their infamous abuses of power. One man praised the former Ivorian president, Felix Houphouet-Boigny. Utikal agreed and said, “That’s why religion helps good governance.” I asked him what he meant, and he explained that not a single one of Guinea Bissau’s presidents “had religion,” that is, believed in God, and that this “allowed them to commit immoral acts.” Eerily echoing—but reversing—my morning conversation with Padre Zé, Utikal said, “If you are not afraid of God, how are you

supposed to avoid sinning? Only when you have fear of God will you think about the sin of stealing someone else's money or killing someone. But these people, they fear nothing.”

For Padre Zé, conversion to Christianity frees people from the fear that spirit-based religions impose. For Utikal, Christianity provides just the right element of divine fear that people need to conduct moral lives. Which version of Christianity—or fear—is accurate? The irony that Padre Zé and one of his most “successful” Christian converts conveyed such different perspectives on the same concept complicates even further the transformations involved in crafting a Diola Christian identity. It suggests that the contrast between Diola and Christian systems of thought is but one step in analyzing the Mission-village interface, and that a next level of analytic intervention involves looking at differences—in interpretations and practices—within the Diola Christian community itself.

This brings us back to the split within the Mission population between those who did and those who did not attend the male initiation, and in particular, the views of each group regarding their behavior in relation to their sense of what it means to be both Christian and Diola. The differential allegiance to some Diola traditions, as well as the claim by both groups that they are the “true Christians,” requires a more multivocal portrayal of the attitudes and actions at play. During the course of my fieldwork, I was unable to collect enough material to fully represent these differences here; my understanding regarding those who did *not* attend is especially bare and biased, partly because I was

living and working and socializing with those who *did*. A potentially fruitful future research project might entail fleshing out this dimension of the 1998 male initiation crisis by collecting more narratives from Diola Christians who abided by Mission mandates and refused to attend—or kept their sons from attending—the initiation rites.

Another dimension of religious change also arose during my tenure as resident in Susana: a family of Brazilian Protestant evangelical missionaries arrived in Susana shortly after I did. Most of their efforts during the course of my fieldwork were focused on establishing their own household in the village, learning rudimentary Crioulo and Diola, and attending to the needs (both health and educational) of their three young children. But even these endeavors brought out the differences between their approach and that of the PIME Mission. Unlike the fortress-like enclosed world of the Mission, the Brazilian family established their residence on Susana's main street. And unlike Padre Zé's distant, closed, and often harsh interactions with villagers (even his own converts), the Brazilian missionaries began immediately to interact with Susana's residents in a congenial and open manner.

By the end of my fieldwork, it was still too early to tell what impact, if any, these differences might make on Diola responses to the new Christian option in their midst. And it remains to be seen what Diola residents make of a Protestant theology and practice as compared with either *awasena* or PIME Catholic ways. But all of these are potentially interesting and important sites of inquiry for the future, especially as residents in Susana and neighboring villages continue to explore what it means to be Diola—which social

forms and institutions must be reproduced and which are open to change—in the context of their current predicament.

Part III

The Diola-Fula Conflict

Preface

May 30, 2000: A Day of Destruction

Just before the rainy season of 2000 the Diola population of Susana collectively demolished a mosque under construction by Susana's Fula population. When a young Fula man attempted to intervene, the Diola group went on to break down three Fula houses. The Fula population gathered at Susana's army barracks and upon the arrival of military reinforcements they were evacuated to the nearest town.

A few days after the incident journalists swarmed into Susana, many of them coming for the first time to this isolated region of their tiny country. Their headlines read: "Diola versus Moslems." All attempts at reconciliation have failed.

The physical violence in this episode was restricted to buildings. Although there were both threats and attempts to elevate the conflict to a more violent plane, these were fortunately circumvented. A segment of Susana's population was permanently removed from their homes, but no one died, and no one was even seriously injured. Only later did the Guinean police arrest and beat up several Diola men from Susana. In terms of the level and scale of violence in Susana, compared with the rest of the continent, the region, or even recent events in Guinea-Bissau itself, this is a relatively minor and forgettable affair. But if we put body counts aside, this case affords an opportunity to examine many of the same dynamics present in these other (more blatantly gruesome) conflicts. And even beyond these parallels, the conflict between the Diola and Fula populations in

Susana presents another complex array of events and narratives that shed light on many of the themes explored throughout this dissertation, just as they open up new questions about Diola collective organizing and identity.

Part Three tells the story of the Diola-Fula conflict in Susana. Rather than present it as a composite narrative, I have divided the story into two sections. This discursive strategy reflects a change in my own approach to the significance of this event. Elsewhere, I have written about this event through a more conventional approach, describing it chronologically and then analyzing it once all the “facts” are laid out on the page (Davidson 2006). But this, I have realized, obscures too much of what is contradictory, processual, and conjectural about this conflict. Even worse, it locks the story into its “ethnic conflict” box, perhaps even inappropriately reinforcing the notion that this was, primarily, an *ethnic* conflict. Beyond its (often over-emphasized) ethnic dimensions, there is much the Diola-Fula conflict in Susana can tell us about postcolonial experience in Guinea-Bissau, the histories of violence in this region, settlement patterns and ideas about land, and a series of relationships—host/migrant, state/local, generational, gender, concurrent and conflicting models of justice, to name a few.

The various iterations of my attempts to write about this conflict over the past six years—from grant proposals to fieldnotes, from a policy-orientated case study to conference papers to a published chapter in an edited volume—reveal the extent to which my own thinking has changed in the course writing about Diola lives in Susana. At one point, I considered presenting here the various ways I have begun this story, each capturing a

phase in my own framing of these events. From an early attempt to render my own flimsy hold on the details after a preliminary visit to Susana shortly after the incident: *“In late May 2000, clashes between Felupe and Fula groups in Suzana, Guinea-Bissau resulted in the forced removal of many Fula families from the community,”* to a version written shortly after starting long-term fieldwork in the village and gaining a minor measure of appreciation for the relevant historical context: *“After a few generations of living seemingly peacefully together, the majority Felupe population mobilized to chase out the Fula residents, tearing down many of their houses in the process,”* to a slightly more nuanced version that refused the simplistic categories of perpetrators versus victims: *“Early in 2000, Fula residents in Susana began building a mosque on land that had been designated for a community health center. After repeated attempts by Diola residents to get state authorities to intervene on their behalf, Diola took matters into their own hands and collectively demolished the almost-completed mosque, as well as three Fula houses.”* It is a humbling experience to see how incomplete and misleading each of these versions is, because it of course means that whatever I write about this event (or any other, for that matter) will be subject to the same indictment with the appearance of new details and shifts in analytical perspectives. This is not news, just a reminder of my own partial and tentative hold on anything resembling the “truth” of this event.

Hence the appeal of presenting the Diola-Fula conflict as a set of stories—each of which adds new details, more layers of complexity, expanded historical depth and ethnographic breadth—thereby not only echoing my own learning process, but keeping open the possibility that new stories can always be added to those presented here.

A note on methodology and structure

My information about this case is based on ethnographic and historical research conducted in Susana, São Domingos, and Bissau during the course of my extended fieldwork stay (2001-2003). The first time I visited Susana, however, was in July 2000, shortly after the events described above, and although my stay was brief and I did not conduct any systematic inquiries, my impressions from this time helped shape my subsequent research plan. As a resident in Susana, I collected narratives and information about the May 2000 episode from informal discussions about the conflict with various residents in Susana, both Diola and non-Diola. I also conducted more structured interviews with representatives of Susana's Diola population who were more actively involved in the conflict and its aftermath. Susana's former Fula community now resides in São Domingos, and I conducted and recorded a series of one-on-one and group interviews with them.⁷² Moreover, I interviewed state authorities and other mediators (including members of Susana's Catholic Mission) involved as participants in and witnesses to the case. Finally, I collected newspaper articles, court records, and other written documents pertaining to the episode.

Given my general approach to ethnographic research in Guinea-Bissau, I did not ask direct questions about the conflict until a few months into fieldwork. Partly, I wanted to see whether the topic emerged during regular conversation (which it did), but mostly I did not want to seem overly interested in these events (even though I was), lest that create the impression that I was morbidly fixated on a bad-news story. A naïve preoccupation,

perhaps, but throughout fieldwork I was more willing to err on the side of cautiousness than confrontation in my relationships with informants.⁷³ Nonetheless, references to the May 2000 incident emerged regularly in the course of casual conversation, and I was soon able to pursue and expand these references in many directions. Each time I heard someone recite the events that surrounded the conflict, more details were added, and my interlocutors tended to go increasingly backward in time to add texture and historical context to the incident. Part of my own narrative strategy in re-presenting this case is an attempt to capture this process of learning about it: the slow and sometimes haphazard process of accumulating new information to add to an increasingly familiar core, and the fitting together of pieces that at first seemed disconnected, but eventually came together, not seamlessly like a jigsaw puzzle, but more like palimpsest, each new layer adding richness to previous iterations, but each previous layer intruding on subsequent ones, continuing to be seen and felt, though somewhat more obliquely.

Another significant aspect of researching and writing about this conflict is that—unlike many of the other events and anecdotes presented in previous sections—I did not personally witness the May 2000 conflict. My engagement with it more closely reflects an historical investigation—albeit recent history—even while my effort to understand its many dimensions draws heavily from ethnographic insights. Conflicts between cultural groups are notoriously difficult to reconstruct, as immediate post-conflict dynamics tend to harden attitudes on all sides, and participants' accounts often reflect an *ex post facto* naturalized sense of ethnic boundaries and tension. I became aware of these ongoing mutations in narratives about the conflict even in the difference of tone and content

between my first visit to Susana and my return just over a year later. Such revisions are inevitable, of course, in any effort to gather information about historical events through oral accounts, especially when they pertain to conflict situations, and even more so when the implications of different versions may bear themselves out in the immediate future (that is, when the conflict remains unresolved). I am less preoccupied with attaining some surety about “what really happened” than exploring these shifts and inconsistencies for what they reveal about the narrators, the stakes, and the various modes of historical consciousness at play.

Finally, it should be clear that my own knowledge is uneven regarding the groups involved in this case. I lived and worked and studied among an almost exclusively Diola population in Susana, since the Fula population had already moved to São Domingos by the time I arrived. Although I did befriend and, as mentioned above, interview Fula men and women who had previously lived in Susana, I did not study Fula society (in São Domingos or in its previous incarnation in Susana) in the same way as I studied Diola society in Susana, and so my analysis is weighted toward the Diola.⁷⁴ This does not mean, however, that my judgment is inevitably biased in favor of them; because I know them much better, I am more deeply attuned to both their admirable and problematical attributes that are manifest in this case, and the resulting orientation is a combination of ethnographic appreciation and “destructive analysis” (Handler 1985).

My early judicious self-presentation maneuvers were motivated by my initial sense of the importance of this event for my overall research, and hence an anxious need to get it right

and not damage my ability to “get data” on it. The Diola-Fula conflict was, in fact, the primary reason I chose to do fieldwork in Susana. As a graduate student, I was deeply preoccupied with ethnic conflict, and the May 2000 conflict in Susana seemed to offer an opportunity to explore the dynamics of ethnic polarization. When I came to Susana my original intent was to conduct research on the conflict, working backwards in time to retrace relations between the Diola and Fula populations in Susana, and hopefully coming to a better understanding of how groups become polarized along ethnic, cultural, and/or religious lines. But when I began to reside in Susana, I soon realized that *my* research agenda, while theoretically interesting to *me*, did not adequately address many of the more pressing concerns of the local population, and so I shifted my research in response to unanticipated empirical conditions I encountered during the course of my fieldwork. This event increasingly took a backseat to other questions and concerns, and it did not even appear as part of my dissertation outline in my first year of writing up my research.

But I did write about it. Sticking to the original concern about ethnic conflict, I showed that the roles of a range of social actors—young men, state administrators and politicians, journalists, and military personnel—shed light on certain aspects of postcolonial experience in Africa, especially in shaping and interpreting so-called “ethnic” conflict. I argued that the immediate post-conflict events transformed the conflict—for both outsiders and participants—from one focused on a particular plot of land, into one with ethnic, religious, and political dimensions. The incompetence and abuse of power by a state appointed local authority; the media focalization and transvaluation of a complex story into an event framed along ethnic/religious lines; the role of young men—on both

sides—in exacerbating tensions; and the fact that outside intervention and mediation efforts by state authorities, military personnel, and other national political players divested the situation of its local contours and molded it to fit often irrelevant—or at least secondary—national concerns: all of these factors contributed to the escalation and intensification of the conflict, which increasingly took on an *ethnicized* tone, one not necessarily there to begin with. I went to on demonstrate—through myths, migration stories, and linguistic analysis—that deeper structural and historical features in Diola settlement patterns and precolonial processes for incorporation or exclusion of “strangers” also helped explain the seemingly rapid polarization between these two groups.

I thought I was finished analyzing this conflict. I satisfied my funders, gave the requisite conference papers, and published the study as a chapter in an edited volume (Davidson 2006). And I moved on. I focused my analytic concerns on Diola responses to the predicament outlined in the beginning of this study. But then, in the midst of writing about Diola work ethic, secrecy, and seemingly egalitarian principles and practices, I started wondering whether I should return to the Diola-Fula conflict, whether I should turn the kaleidoscope and consider it from a different angle. My approach to writing about current Diola lives centers on conflicts and transformations in values and the general challenges of social change and continuity. I realized that I needed to revisit this event and account not only for the seemingly anomalous appearance of highly organized collective action, but also connect many aspects of this case to the central themes of conflict, collective cultural identity, and social transformation that inform this study.

The following two chapters explore these dynamics through the story of the May 2000 episode in Susana. First, I present narratives about the day of the mosque destruction and Fula evacuation, emphasizing the chronology and details that led up to these actions and the involvement of particular social actors both locally and nationally. The next chapter takes several steps backwards in time and discusses the settlement history of Diola-land, and Guinea-Bissau more generally, exploring issues pertaining to land tenure, Fula arrival in Susana, notions of strangerhood, and long-term processes of incorporation and exclusion in the region. Within these two chapters, I focus on the dynamics of Diola-Fula relations in Susana and explore the domains in which distinctions between Diola and Fula populations were sharpened (such as development projects, intermarriage, commerce, land, and religious institutions). Throughout Part Three I ask about the values that are attached to particular cultural distinctions, as well as how issues of cultural style play themselves out through moral judgments and boundary maintenance.

Chapter Seven

Postcolonial Politics and Local-State Relations in Guinea-Bissau

A Day of Destruction: Susana, May 30th, 2000

On May 30th, 2000, at approximately 8am, the *bombolom* sounded in each of Susana's neighborhoods.⁷⁵ Susana's adult Diola men—including members of the Catholic community—gathered at Acuio, the male initiation shrine at the outskirts of Nhakun. Word had spread through *amangen-i* to tell the men in their respective neighborhoods to come to Acuio with a stick. Only once they arrived did the *amangen-i* inform them of their intentions. Elders instructed them to collectively break down the mosque under construction by the resident Fula population, but insisted that no one was to hit anyone or kill anyone or engage in any other kind of violence. The elders then asserted, "If the state comes to kill us, we elders, we'll be killed first." So they went in the front of the line. They marched into the center of the village and proceeded to beat on the mosque's walls, hacking at them until they came apart.

Sipamiro—who at the time was leaving early each morning to teach in Arame's primary school, often not returning until after nightfall when he headed directly to his forest grove to drink palm wine with his brothers—had remained unaware of the build-up to this event. The night before, an *amangen* stopped by Sipamiro's house and said, "Tomorrow, don't go anywhere. Don't bike to Arame to teach." Sipamiro agreed (one never openly disagrees in such conversations), but he did not know why he was being told to stay put. The next day, however, he prepared to leave for work as usual. As he rapidly spooned

the previous night's leftover rice into his mouth for breakfast, the first *bombolom* sounded, from Santa Maria.⁷⁶ A moment later, the Nhakun *bombolom* sounded. Sipamiro knew something strange was happening. The *bombolom* rhythm—prolonged drumming—told him that it was not a funeral, nor was it simply children banging on the huge drums for amusement (something only this new generation of children would dare to do). Then the other *bomboloms* sounded—Katama, Kugelh, Utem.

Sipamiro looked out on the path in front of his house, but no one was there. Suddenly, he heard a loud commotion coming from further up on the path, and an enormous crowd of people soon began charging past his house. Some were carrying machetes and axes, but most were carrying sticks. They reached the intersection in the middle of the village, several yards from Sipamiro's front veranda, and turned left toward the mosque. Sipamiro hurriedly went to change his clothes, but by the time he left the house and got to the corner, not a single wall was left standing. Everything had been broken down.⁷⁷

Fula residents recall hearing the *bombolom* from their neighborhood in the center of Susana and thinking that they had never before heard *bomboloms* sound in all of the neighborhoods simultaneously. A Fula man recalled, "I was born in Susana. I was born in 1923... but never, like this thing that happened, they hadn't done it before. That day, in the early morning, we were getting ready to go to the bush to tend to our cashew trees. We began to leave when we heard the sounds of the *bombolom*; it went 'kun kun kun.' We said, 'Huh, don't go yet. Wait.' This has never happened in Susana. Never!" An older Fula man, Tchernon Ba, came to ask his young neighbor, Angelo—a Bagnun man

born and raised in Susana—what was happening. Angelo told him that Diola were going to break down the mosque. When another Fula neighbor came over and Angelo told him the same thing, he gasped and said, “So, they are going to finish us off today.” Angelo reassured him that they would just break down the mosque and then return. Fula residents spread the word amongst the households in their small and tightly clustered neighborhood. A few elder Fula men came to ask Manuel, Angelo’s father, to intervene on their behalf and ask the Diola not to break down the mosque. Manuel is a highly respected older man in the community who is often asked to mediate conflicts, given both his calm and thoughtful demeanor and his neutrality as the sole Bagnun resident—besides his children—in Susana. But, in response to their entreaty, Manuel told the Fula men that he knew nothing about the proceedings.

How did Angelo—a Bagnun Christian young man who did not participate in Diola ceremonial activities conducted by the *amangen-i*—know what was going on when Sipamiro did not? Angelo was engaged to Senabu, the daughter of Ulandjebe, Susana’s secondary *ai*. At the time, Senabu was living with her blind and aged grandmother, next-door to her father’s house at the far end of Nhakun. Angelo, during his regular visits to Senabu’s household, was privy to conversations amongst the Diola men gathered at Ulandjebe’s compound. Just prior to the May 30th event, Ulandjebe confided directly to Angelo their plan to break down the mosque’s walls. But everyone who was aware of the plan was under the strictest orders to keep their mouths shut. “Anyone who tells their *camarada* [Fula],” they were told, “will suffer.” So Fula residents, along with Sipamiro

and several other Diola teachers who spent most of their time in outlying villages, remained ignorant the plan.

As Diola residents started pouring into Susana's main intersection, Angelo went to stand under the mango tree in the middle of the road, just outside his house and within viewing distance of the crossroads and the mosque construction site. "You see," he recalled to me, shifting slightly uncomfortably, "Felupes, they have lots of secrets..." Angelo said that the faces of the Diola men who strode toward the mosque with sticks in their hands were not recognizable; they had transformed into other faces of people that Angelo had never seen before.

As Diola residents were tearing down the mosque, Tchernó's grandson, a man in his early 20s who was born in Susana and who had joined—and then deserted—the military *junta* that had recently overthrown President João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira, retrieved a grenade from his house and went towards the crowd. Tchernó called out to Angelo and told him to stop his grandson, "or they'll really finish us off." When the young man attempted to climb over the fence, Angelo grabbed him and pinned him to the ground, then tied him up in the yard, thus preventing what surely would have turned into a bloodbath. After the mosque was demolished, Alfa, a young Fula man, rode his moped into the crowd and started insulting Diola men. No one touched him, but the crowd hindered his movements and Diola men asked him (in Diola, which he spoke fluently⁷⁸) where he was going. Alfa said he was going to see his brother, Braima, who had stayed in his house behind the mosque during its destruction. Some Diola men said, "Let's catch him and beat him up."

Others countered, “No, leave him alone.” He turned his moped around but could not go fast because the crowd was so thick. When he finally arrived back at his house, his wife said to him in Fula, “Alfa, you better watch out. If those people catch you, they’ll kill you.” Another Fula man came running towards the Diola crowd, shouting, “Before they kill me, I’ll kill ten of them.” A few older Fula women grabbed him and detained him.

After breaking down the mosque’s mud walls, Diola men returned to Acuio to discuss what had happened. A chorus of young men said, “If the state comes to kill us, it’s the young people they will kill, and they will leave the old people alone. But these people causing trouble, we don’t want to see them ever again, so we’re going to break down their houses... Let’s go to those who started this problem, those who *‘pintcha se papas’* [literally: pushed their parents].” According to Angelo, they decided to kill Alfa. Others remember that the elders tried to talk them out of further action of any kind, but the young men insisted. Within an hour of having mobilized the Diola population, the elders were supplanted by the younger generation in spearheading the activities. They led the crowd back to Fulacunda and knocked down a Fula house located just behind the now-flattened mosque. They broke down the house, punching holes in its zinc roof.

Then they went in search of Alfa. When they arrived at his house, Alfa had already escaped out the window. His wife, who is Cassanga from Sedengal, ran to Angelo and pleaded for him to hide Alfa. She appealed to Angelo on the basis of their ethnic kinship, Cassanga and Bagnun being closely related. “Help me and hide him,” she implored. “We are relatives.” As the Diola crowd proceeded to break down Alfa’s empty house, Angelo

hid Alfa in the small abandoned house next to his own, on Susana's main road. As the men were destroying Alfa's house, Diola children started digging up manioc in his yard. The Diola men, in the midst of knocking down Alfa's walls, yelled at their children, chiding them on their inappropriate behavior. One of the participants explained, "You cannot eat or profit from anyone you are warring with. You have to leave everything there." Diola men then went on to break down two houses belonging to a Fula man who had insulted them as they knocked down the mosque's walls, calling them "ignorant asses." At the first house (which was empty by the time they got there, the head of household having sought refuge in the Catholic Mission) the Diola crowd tore down the mud walls, burned the thatch, cut down the mango tree in the yard, and hacked up the long roof poles. After demolishing these houses, they returned once again to Acuio. The elders addressed them: "Well, our plan was just to knock down the mosque. But now the mosque includes all those houses. War has been declared. Everyone should realize that this is war."

The same Fula elder who commented on the unusual use of the *bombolom* recalled the activities in a rather different order:

We saw a group come from the Utem side. Women and men, they passed. They passed within the army barracks. Men, young men, everyone. They went, they passed along and had their meeting on the path to Budgim [at Acuio]. They had their meeting. They returned. They burned this

man's house [indicating Braima, whose house was on the same plot of land as the mosque]. They burned his house too [indicating Alfa]. They knocked it down. They passed on. They came to our mosque that we were building... They took sticks. They broke down the house, they broke down everything. They went to Braima's house, where he has land, his father's land and house. They took sticks. They broke it down until it fell to the ground. They passed on... They did everything, everything. They broke down all of those houses. Not one state official came! Not one!

Fula uniformly express incredulity at the breaking down of these houses. They understand why Diola broke down the mosque, but they do not understand (or at least do not admit to understanding) why Diola then demolished these particular houses. Diola men insist that they targeted these Fula houses based on their judgment that they belonged to the men who had instigated and exacerbated the problems between the two groups. One Diola participant in the action explained: "We throw away a rotten fish so that it will not damage the rest of the catch... [And] we don't have a jail where we imprison people, but we expel people so that they will never return to this place." Breaking down an offender's house is the ultimate Diola punishment, and is tantamount with excommunication. Such disciplinary measures are used among Diola themselves when a community member breaks Diola law, especially in cases of theft.

By mid-morning, the mosque and four Fula houses were demolished, and Diola men went about their regular daily activities. After hiding out for a while, Alfa rode his moped to the army barracks in Varela, 17 kilometers down the dirt road, and told the soldiers there what had happened. Susana's barracks were empty during the entire proceedings; the soldiers had gone on an early morning hike to Kassu as part of their periodic border inspection for Casamance rebel activity. The Varela soldiers radioed other barracks in São Domingos and Incore. During the destruction Fula families remained in their neighborhood,⁷⁹ and when Diola men scattered to their forest groves, the Fula population congregated at the army barracks. The soldiers, who had by then returned from their border patrol, informed them that reinforcement troops would soon arrive. "We waited there [at Susana's army barracks]," recalls an elder Fula man. "Finally, around 3pm, people from Incore arrived." Troops from São Domingos and Incore arrived in Susana on the back of large flatbed trucks. An army commander—Almami Sadjá—who had previously been based in Susana, but had been transferred to Incore, returned to Susana when the conflict broke out. He urged all Fula families to evacuate immediately to São Domingos because Bissau would "bomb the hell" out of Susana to reprimand Diola for their actions. Fula families, especially the older ones, said that they did not want to go, but they were pressured into leaving by the army commander and by the younger Fula. Tchernó Ba, the old Fula man, once told me, his voice rising and filled with emotion, "They [army commanders] said that we should leave, that we should come here [to São Domingos.] It's the state that did this to us. The state itself did this to us. Even if they sit right here, I still say this. The state itself did

this work. They told us to leave. We said, ‘we’re not going to leave... They can kill us. We’ll take the kids away...’ His voice faltered and he began to cry. After pausing for a few moments, he continued. “We took the kids away. We took the kids away... They [soldiers] came to us and said we should leave, because if we don’t leave, there are people who will burn more houses of other people, at night.”

Later that same day, the entire Fula population of Susana (171 people), with the exception of one family, left for São Domingos. They were taken in army trucks and another truck belonging to Acção para Desenvolvimento (AD), the only Guinean NGO active in the region, whose local representative was a Muslim Serekule man living in Susana. Although they left with the expectation to return after the situation in Susana had stabilized, none of them has returned to Susana.

Meanwhile, Sipamiro, having forgone his day’s teaching in Arame, went to his forest grove, where he met up with his brothers. They sat in their shaded alcoves amidst the tall oil palms and drank from their stash of palm wine, calmly discussing the morning’s events. After a few hours, they heard the *bombolom* announce that army troops had arrived, and they returned to the village. “No one was on the street,” Sipamiro told me. “Everything was silent. The only noise came from chickens and roosters.” He stopped by his house to change clothes, and then walked around the corner to the army barracks, where a heated meeting was underway. “Those police [soldiers] were interrogating us. Many people were there. Young people, everyone. Some did not even tap palm wine

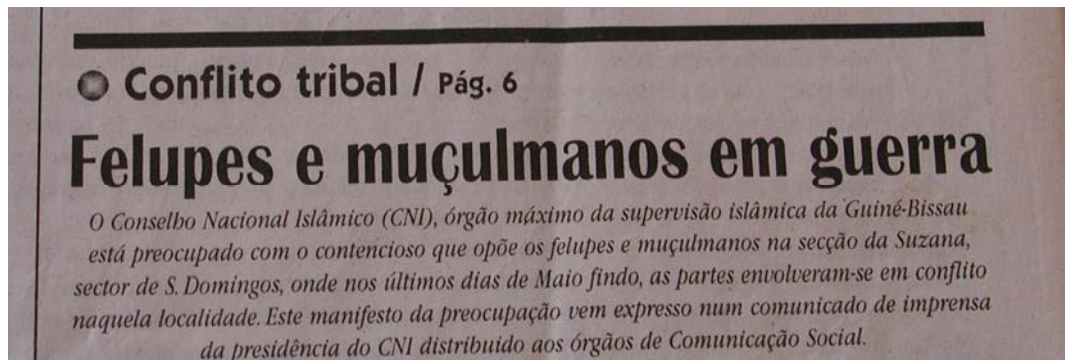
that day.” By the late afternoon, most Diola participants left the meeting to return to their forest groves.

The next day, Tcherno Ba’s house burned down. Later that night the Fula youth club, in the center of Fulacunda, burned down too. Rumors started flying around that Diola men would continue destroying Fula property until all vestiges of their community were erased. But soldiers caught the AD representative—the Serekule man—in the act of burning the youth club.⁸⁰ By some accounts (and current popular opinion in Susana), when the soldiers brought the arsonist to the barracks, the commander who had first encouraged Fula families to evacuate (Almami Sadjá, a Mandinga man) told them to let him go and to keep the fact that they had caught non-Diola Muslim in the act of burning Fula property to themselves. But his second in command, a Manjaco man, refused to be party to the obstruction, and declared: “Now we see that Diola are not creating this problem...Muslims themselves are provoking it.”

Once these events transpired, the atmosphere in Susana changed from one charged with the tension of immanent military reprisals, to one of somewhat wary relief. Angelo commented that “The fact the soldiers caught [the Serekule man], this was Susana’s salvation. If they had not caught him, people would have assumed that it was ‘the children of Susana’ who were burning the houses. They would have shown no mercy... If [he] had not been caught, Susana would have been bombed. No one could have stopped it.” After four days of occupation, the soldiers from São Domingos and Ingore left.

The Aftermath

In the days following May 30th, younger members of the Fula community reported to the Bissau and foreign media that they had been attacked by Diola because they were Muslim. They said that Diola had felled palm trees across the road and broke apart the plank bridge a few kilometers from the village so that the Guinean army and other state authorities would be unable to enter Susana. All of this was reported in the Guinean newspapers, which framed the conflict as one of “Felupe versus Muslims” (*Diário de Bissau*, June 28 and July 6, 2000). In the subsequent weeks, journalists from Bissau, including BBC and RTP stringers, came to São Domingos and Susana to interview Fula and Diola. Both Fula and Diola claim that journalists spoke only to the other side, and both groups complain equally about not having their perspective taken into account.



Headline from *Diário de Bissau* (June 28, 2000)

The weeks and months that followed May 30th were consumed with meetings and various mediation efforts in Susana. All agricultural work was suspended as Susana’s residents held meetings to discuss the matter. During the week, men and women met separately at

their respective shrine sites, and on the market day, they joined in community-wide meetings at the central *hukulahu* in the Katama neighborhood. The content of these meetings largely comprised discussions about what had happened and updates resulting from any meetings that had been held with outsiders. Authorities from the regional and national level (including several ministers) arrived to discuss the case. Even Ansumane Mané—the brigadier general who had led the 1998 uprising against Nino Vieira, and who was at the time the head of the military *junta* in control of the country—came to Susana to evaluate the situation, and, after holding meetings with both Diola in Susana and Fula in São Domingos, he proclaimed that Diola were in the right, but that they should forgive the Fula population and allow them to return to their homes in Susana. At this, an often outspoken Diola elder told Mané that Diola would welcome Fula back to Susana as soon as Mané welcomed Nino Vieira back to Bissau.

Fula insist that Mané sided with the Diola population because of his debt to Casamance Diola rebels, whom he had recruited to fight in the military *junta* campaign against Nino Vieira, and with whom he had a longstanding close association in his gun running activities. One Fula man whom I interviewed in São Domingos insisted that Ansumane Mané had orchestrated the conflict from the start, since he wanted to use Susana as a rear base to aid the rebels in the Casamance conflict. Ansumane Mané was killed shortly after his visit to Susana in a supposed shoot out between newly elected President Kumba Yalla's troops and his own loyalists. The facts surrounding his death are still murky, and President Yalla has refused to allow any outside investigations into the episode.⁸¹

Among many other consequences, Mané's death marked the end of any state mediation efforts in Susana.

Since the incident, several state-led mediation efforts have failed, and Susana's Fula population remains displaced in São Domingos, their abandoned houses being slowly occupied by new itinerant Fula merchants from Guinea-Conakry. All outside negotiation efforts were aimed at peaceably reintegrating Fula families back into Susana. But, in the wake of the May 30th events, Diola positions hardened, and attempts by state authorities to mediate the case ended without reaching a consensus. Even though elders from both sides demonstrated an eagerness to resolve differences early in the mediation process, they were soon silenced by younger men who, on the Diola side, worked actively to prevent the Fulas' return. One Diola man involved in the negotiations explained that when state authorities came to mediate and convince Diola to receive the Fula back in Susana, he said to them:

If you bring them here, we will not refuse. But whatever happens tomorrow, you are responsible for it... If tomorrow an even more serious thing happens than what already exploded here, you are to blame... If you return them [Fulas], fine, we will not refuse you, the state, who are second to God.

The Diola-Fula conflict remains unresolved, although such a state of abeyance really only matters for the Fula. They now live in São Domingos as refugees (they refer to themselves as the “dislocated members of Susana”), many of them unable to pay the rent of their temporary houses, and most of them (again, especially the older members) longing to return to Susana, which they consider their rightful home. Susana’s Fula do not blame Diola for their prolonged refugee status, and insist that they feel no vengeance toward Diola. Fula hold “the state” entirely accountable for their current predicament. Since they came to São Domingos under state orders, they feel they must wait for the state to resolve the situation in order for them to return to Susana. “The state brought us here [São Domingos],” an elder Fula man explained, “Since the time they brought us here up until today, we have not seen them. We went to the police, we went here, we went there, we went everywhere. It’s more than three years since we’ve been here... Until today, they haven’t told us anything. It’s the state that did this work to us, it’s no one else.”

Parsing the Conflict

Was this an anti-Muslim riot, as it was reported in the newspapers? Was it an ethnic conflict? How do the particular actions of various Diola and Fula individuals, seen through the lens of generation, play into the dynamics of the conflict? Finally, how do we make sense of the roles and actions of various state officials involved in the conflict? And how do the perceptions of both Fula and Diola residents regarding these state officials—and “the state” in general—play into the dynamics of the conflict?

State officials and journalists who arrived on the scene quickly cast the event as a religious/ethnic conflict, or as the national newspaper put it, “tribal conflict.” The general perception among Guinean nationals outside the region is that the majority Diola population in Susana expelled the minority Fula population in an act of ethnic cleansing. But a closer look at the details of the case immediately complicates this understanding. Now that I have documented the basic contours of the episode itself and its immediate aftermath, I will delve into these details by examining their religious/ethnic dimensions, generational dynamics, and state/local relations.

Building and Destroying a Mosque

Why did the Diola population of Susana break down the mosque under construction by Susana’s Fula population? Was it to prevent increased Muslim presence in the region?

In Guinea-Bissau in general, there have been recent shifts in religious relations across the country. The current breakdown of religious composition is 5% Christian, 30% Muslim, and 65% Animist (*Recenseamento Geral da População Habitçãõ* 1991). Even though Muslims have not typically wielded political power at a national level, Muslim groups have become a significant force in national politics, particularly since the 1992 opening up of the political system to multiple parties. Party leaders now expend time and energy courting the Muslim vote. Perhaps the most comical recent display was President Kumba Yalla’s “conversion” to Islam in 2002/3. Muslims were, in general, unimpressed, especially since Yalla’s conversion did not seem to have an impact on his heavy palm wine and pork consumption, but Yalla’s farcical performance did indicate, even through

desperate tactics, a perceived need to connect with the country's Muslim population to gird up his rapidly eroding regime.

But, other than on national political fronts, residents in Guinea-Bissau's Northern provinces are not particularly concerned about Muslim influence. In fact, the most pressing concern regarding ethnic/religious dominance during the course of my fieldwork was of increasing Balanta power, due to the almost ubiquitous Balanta occupation of high level military and government positions (Costa Dias 2000), and because of land grabs and other illegal actions of Balanta peasants in villages across the country that demonstrated their protected status in the Yalla regime (Davidson 2003).

Diola attitudes regarding Islam are somewhat complicated based on the religious composition of Diola groups across Senegambia. The Diola population in Guinea-Bissau, southern Senegal, and the Gambia is typically divided into three linguistic subgroups, which can also be roughly distinguished along religious lines. Ediamat Diola are the southernmost sub-group, primarily in Guinea-Bissau; Ediamat are animist, with a recent and small Christian presence. Diola-Kasa are found south of the Casamance River to the Guinean border; this area has had strong Christian and Muslim influence since the late 1800s, and many Diola in this area consider themselves Catholic. Finally, Diola-Fogny are located north of the Casamance River and into the Gambia. Diola residents in this area are almost entirely Islamicized, and have been since the 1930s (Mark 1985, 1992).⁸² Diola in Guinea-Bissau consider Diola-Fogny to be their ethnic kin, suggesting that conversion to Islam does not necessarily erase Diola identity.

Was it just a coincidence, then, that Diola broke down a mosque? Would Diola residents have demolished a different kind of building—say, a youth center or private residence—on this land? Perhaps most important in sorting out the degree to which this was a Muslim-focused action is a review of the recent history of the plot of land on which Fula were building the mosque.

Just the previous year, in 1999, the Fula community in Susana decided to build a new mosque on the main road in the center of Susana. They had a small mosque in Fulacunda, but their numbers were growing, and they also wanted to put a mosque in a more central and visible location so that Muslims who traveled in the area would know that an Islamic community existed in Susana and would therefore feel welcome. The plot of land they chose, however, was a contentious one. It lay directly across the road from the community clinic, and had been the site of a recent effort by the Diola population in Susana and surrounding villages to build an additional healthcare facility. The construction had come to a halt during the previous rainy season, during which the mud walls had collapsed, and the Fula population assumed that the project had been aborted or would be moved elsewhere. This belief was based, in part, on the fact that the land in question had been an old Diola burial ground, when the land dividing Utem from Endongon was dense forest. As one Fula man explained, when Diola men began to build the healthcare facility,

They started to dig a hole there, and they found people's bones and skulls. That's taboo for Felupes. That's why they left it; stopped working... They could not go on. They left the house and it fell down. That's when we requested to put our mosque there. We, ourselves, those bones, we would return the bones that had been dug up there. We would return the bones and cover them with dirt. There was a small tree that stood there – I, myself, went and put those bones by that tree. We buried all of those bones, those human skulls there. All of them.

Diola agree that the land was a former cemetery, but contend that this does not present a problem for building on the land, as long as any encountered bones are appropriately removed. Diola residents in Susana also insist that Fula residents did not inform them of their intentions to build the mosque. As one man recounted,

When they started to build that mosque there, they did not tell any of us. There is no one in Susana who can say, 'They told me.' We did not know what was going on... But we saw that Fulas were beginning to use the mud from the fallen health workers' house. We thought, since there was plenty of it, perhaps they were using it to build their 'prayer house' [in Fulacunda]... So we watched them until... we

saw them starting to measure that plot of land. So people said, ‘Mbeh! But we had reserved this land already for the health workers’ residence. But they, our friends... our brothers... what’s going on?’

Another Diola man corroborates, “If they had seen that they wanted to build a mosque there, they should have consulted us: ‘So, brother, we want to build this thing here, so you tell us if you have intentions of building the health workers’ residence that you told us about.’ But they went ahead and just raised the house and built their mosque there...”

When Diola realized what was happening, they went to the state appointed administrator in Susana, a Mandinga man named Lamine, whose mother was Baiote from Elia.

Lamine had recently replaced the Diola administrator who had originally consented to the healthcare facility project, but who died in 1998. A Diola delegation explained to Lamine that they had already been allocated the land for a building project that they had every intention of resuming. The state authority concurred, and told the Diola delegation not to worry, that he would discuss the matter with the Fula and they would stop building there. Time passed, Fula did not stop building, and Diola became more anxious as the building started to take shape. They returned to the state authority and were once again assured that he would put a stop to the Fula building activities. This happened two more times with no results. Fula continued building the mosque’s walls, and Diola continued sending delegations to the state authority. Fula, for their part, contend that no one ever told them about the Diola complaints, or suggested that they stop building.

Some Susana residents maintain that, even though the Fula population was a small and relatively recently arrived minority in the village compared with the Diola numerical majority and long-term presence, Fula acted with confidence and impunity regarding the mosque construction because they believed they had political patronage in the form of Malam Ba, a Fula police officer posted to Susana who was tight with the Nino Vieira regime. Because he had a high position in the police force during Vieira's time, and he knew the president personally and had his full backing, Malam Ba enjoyed great power in Susana. According to one informant—the Bagnun man born and raised in Susana—Fula residents stubbornly refused to alter their plans regarding the mosque site because Malam Ba “had full power in Susana... He did whatever he wanted to do in Susana; abused his power... beat people up.” It was because of this power and a perceived ethnic-based patronage that members of Susana's Fula community decided to build a mosque at the controversial site. They had planned the mosque building during Vieira's reign, but continued with their plans even after the 1998 war deposed Vieira and Malam Ba left Susana.

After several meetings with no results, a Diola delegation held a meeting with Fula elders. The Fula elders explained the rationale to build the mosque on that site because it was on the main street, so anyone passing by, day or night, would know that there was a place to pray. Diola argued that they had already designated that site for the community health workers' residence. Fula elders backed down and agreed to leave the site alone

and build the mosque elsewhere. They told their sons, but their sons refused to change their plans, and they continued building there.

Once the walls were complete and the long wooden poles that would be used for roofing arrived at the site, Diola decided that they would no longer wait for state intervention, and would instead take matters into their own hands. AmpaDjaponor explains:

We had meetings at the shrine [Acuio]. We said, ‘We sent people [to the state administrator], we returned and returned, but nothing. How many times did we go there? Now, we are fed up. Now we will go to our own court. Now justice is on our hands.

Diola planted a forked stick at the building site. In Diola custom, if a dispute arises over a plot of land—be it rice paddy, forestland, or residential land—one step in mediating the conflict is for one of the parties concerned to plant a stick at the disputed site. This stick signals to all those who are using the land that there is a concern over rights to do so, and that any work being done at the site must stop immediately and all parties involved must meet and discuss the matter. The dispute may be settled amongst only the parties involved, or other witnesses and mediators—such as *comité* members, elders (*amangen*), or the *ai*—may be asked to intervene. In Fula versions of the dispute, they call the stick that Diola placed at the site a “mandjidura,” which is a generic Crioulo word for a stick invested with spiritual power from a particular shrine. Some older Fula men called it a

“xina,” which is an abbreviated Diola word for a spirit or intermediary god (from the Diola *bakinabu*). In Diola, there are several different words for various sticks and the signals or objectives they represent. The general Diola word for a stick with any kind of meaning attached to it is “hubalenahu.” A stick that is used in land disputes is called a “hutukâhu,” and there are separate words for sticks that are used by women and sticks that are used by men for different secular and supernatural purposes. When referring to the stick that was planted at the Fula mosque site, Diola sometimes use the word “ehakai,” which is a stick that is used both in land disputes and for ceremonial purposes in male initiation forests, and sometimes use “hubalenahu” in describing the stick. When speaking in Crioulo they often call the stick used at the mosque site a “mandjidura.” But Diola are consistent in their explanation that the stick was placed there as a signal to call a meeting between the two groups.

A young Fula man (Alfa—the same man who would later ride his moped into the Diola crowd), upon seeing the stick, tore it from the ground and threw it away in the part of the initiation forest from which he knew it came. Since the time the majority of Fula families had moved to Susana, a generation of Fula men and women had grown up in Susana, many of them born of Fula fathers and Diola mothers. They were aware of Diola customs and in all likelihood knew the meaning and intent of the stick placed at the mosque construction site. Diola point to the fact that the Fula man who removed the stick returned it to its place of origin as evidence that he knew exactly what the signal was for, and blatantly provoked Diola wrath by discarding it. This act ended any attempts at mediation between the two groups.

Diola men met in the initiation forest and decided on their action plan. The elders concurred that once the roof structure was in place, they would collectively knock down the mosque. The night before the appointed day, elders spread the word around the village for people to meet at Acuio early the following morning, and to bring sticks.

Whereas the general perception at the national level is that Diola demolished the mosque in a display of anti-Muslim sentiment and then expelled Fula from Susana, Diola insist that they never intended for Fula to leave. They simply wanted to stop the mosque building on the site of a planned community project, and their efforts to do so through state administrative channels were continually thwarted. As for the destroyed Fula houses, Diola insist that their goal was to discipline members of the Fula population who had egregiously violated community norms. These efforts were targeted at particular individuals, not at the Fula community as a whole. One Fula family refused to go to São Domingos, and Diola point to them, saying they have remained unharmed, as proof of their intentions and in refutation to the implied anti-Muslim or anti-Fula motivations of their actions.

Perhaps young Fula men told journalists and state representatives that Diola had attacked them because they were Muslim because they really believed this, although there were no previous tensions between the two groups along religious lines. More likely, young Fula men focused on the putative Muslim aspects of the episode because these would resonate

with national political concerns and potentially garner allies and support from Muslim communities outside the region. In fact, the allegations of anti-Muslim sentiment never went too far, as most people outside the area soon lost interest in this out-of-the-way place.

Generational Dynamics

The actions of young Fula men flag another dimension of the conflict that does not break down neatly along religious or ethnic lines; that is, the inter-generational dynamics vis-à-vis the attitudes and actions of young men versus elder men reveals elements of intra-group difference and discord, an aspect obscured by flattened versions of this event as a religious- or ethnic-based conflict.

An examination of various actors' roles as they break down long generational lines is summarized below.

Table 5: Actions by elders and youth during and after the conflict

Diola	Fula
<p><i>Elders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized meeting at Acuio; gathered crowd and instructed them to break down mosque, but not to engage in any further violence; • Tried to dissuade younger men from engaging in further violent action once mosque was destroyed, but failed; elders supplanted by younger men within an hour of having mobilized the population; • Post-conflict: demonstrated eagerness to resolve the situation, but silenced by younger men. 	<p><i>Elders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When approached by Diola delegation, agreed to stop mosque building at contentious site; but when discussed this with younger generation, they were overruled; • Asked Manuel (a Bagnun elder) to intervene once they saw Diola crowd heading towards mosque; • Elder women restrained angry, young Fula man when he tried to approach the Diola crowd; • Post-conflict: demonstrated eagerness to resolve the situation, but silenced by younger men.
<p><i>Younger men:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decided to break down houses of supposed Fula perpetrators (and perhaps kill one of them); • Above decision based on assumption of young Fula men as instigators and perpetrators of the problem • Spearheaded actions once riot started and led crowd into further destruction, also insisting that the state would hold younger men (not elders) responsible for riotous actions; • Silenced older men during post-conflict mediation process, refusing to accept Fula return. 	<p><i>Younger men:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tore “forked stick” from construction site, inciting Diola wrath; • Tried to launch grenade into Diola crowd; • Rode moped into crowd, insulting Diola men; • Convinced rest of Fula population (especially reticent elders) to obey Army commander and evacuate Susana; • Reported event to press as an anti-Muslim riot

It would appear, from the actions of younger and elder men on both Diola and Fula sides, that elders wielded very limited authority throughout. Although Diola elders initiated the mosque destruction, they were not able to maintain control over events as they spiraled towards further destruction and violence. And while elders on both sides played crucial

roles in preventing further violence by riled up young men, they were unable to prevent the stalemate that ensued from mediation efforts.

The attitudes and actions of younger men on both sides resonate with Paul Brass's (1997) discussion of South Asian riots. According to Brass's analysis, in moments of collective violence, a small faction of *agents provocateurs*—typically young men who mobilize enmity between the groups—play a significant role in stimulating or exacerbating tensions. His focus on these particular actors is meant to challenge analyses of collective violence that assume putative ethnic and/or religious bases for enmity. Identifying the range of roles that participants play in seemingly seamless collective riots not only exposes differences (whether based on generation, gender or other fault lines) within supposedly unified ethnic groups, but it challenges the very notion that ethnicity is the organizing principle that motivates collective action. Instead, examining the roles of particular actors locates accountability in individual actions, and steers away from “leveling” tendencies to collectivize agency and blame, which often produces the empirically inaccurate perception of ethnic-based conflict when the facts point to specific individuals—in Brass's terminology, “riot specialists.”

One curious moment that played out in these intergenerational dynamics was the reversal in Diola claims about whom the state would “blame.” When elders gathered the Diola male population at Acuio, they declared, “If the state comes to kill us, we elders, we'll be killed first.” But after destroying the mosque, younger men used this same assertion in their effort to spearhead continued destruction of particular Fula houses. Young men

believed “the state” would hold them accountable based on their assumption that state officials generally perceived young people, who knew Crioulo and could write, pressured and manipulated innocent and ignorant elders into questionable actions. Young Diola men, themselves, used this same logic when evaluating Fula actions, declaring that the younger Fula men whose houses they targeted had “pintcha se papas” (pushed their parents) into violating community norms.

Such attitudes signal, in part, a shift in the postcolonial landscape around the knowledge/power axis. Simply put, elders had previously maintained the esoteric knowledge—based largely on their rights over spirit shrines—to assert authority and decision-making power over young men. But in postcolonial Guinea-Bissau, new sorts of knowledge—such as literacy, vernacular linguistic ability, and partisan political savvy—have gained currency. Younger men, of course, have greater access to these areas of knowledge through schooling and urban migration and this gives them an edge that leads to changes in intergenerational dynamics. This is perhaps why younger men (on both sides) supplanted their elders’ authority in the midst of the conflict. What is most germane to this particular case is the *difference* in younger and elder men’s actions, and recognition of how this challenges one-dimensional characterizations of ethnic conflict.

The local details surrounding the particular plot of land on which Fula residents built the mosque, the somewhat ambiguous role of religious sentiment (especially regarding Diola attitudes towards Islam), and the particular actions of both Diola and Fula participants

viewed along generational lines all help to complicate this event beyond its distorted rendering as an anti-Muslim riot or a “tribal conflict.” Examining the roles of particular state officials, as well as Diola and Fula perceptions regarding “the state,” adds yet another dimension that furthers our understanding of both the conflict itself and its *post hoc* rendering.

State actors, legibility, and the problems of complexity

Diola and Fula claims about the role of state actors, and the amorphous “state” in general, tend to highlight both the perceived ethnic bias of state officials and their opponents’ motivations as textured by their relationship with particular state officials. Most individuals readily attribute others’ actions to partisan political interest, but do not link their own attitudes or behavior to such motivations. For instance, non-Fula interlocutors insisted that Fula intentions and stubbornness regarding the mosque building could be explained through the role of Malam Ba. Likewise, Fula and other non-Diola commentators on the case insist that Susana’s Diola population never would have broken down the mosque if the PAIGC had still been in power. But the vacuum created in aftermath of the 1998 uprising against Nino Vieira opened up the opportunity for Diola to take matters into their own hands without fear of PAIGC reprisals. These narratives demonstrate that each side viewed their opponents as motivated by national political interests, whereas they considered their own actions untainted by these forces.

At first, I found such assertions puzzling and misplaced. Not only is Susana extremely isolated and undisturbed by anything resembling a state administrative structure, but

Guinea-Bissau at a national level is most readily characterized as a weak state, one whose authority barely exists within the capital, and certainly does not extend into the interior (see Forrest 2003). I was tempted to characterize people's claims that others' actions had anything to do with state power as paranoid, or at least misguided. But these dynamics shed light on certain aspects of postcolonial politics in Guinea-Bissau and the place of national political concerns in participants' narratives of the events. Such perceptions had much more to do with the distinction between Guinea-Bissau as a weak *bureaucratic* state, but a powerful *patronage* state, if only in the public imaginary. That is, the "state" to which people referred when evaluating others' actions was embodied by the particular military and police personnel posted to Susana, whose behavior was based not on the "rule of law" or any other official state mandate, but on personal power and patronage. Susana's residents perceived people's interests and behavior as linked to state actors, regardless of whether those state actors actually wielded *de facto* bureaucratic power, in Susana or elsewhere in the country.

By the time I moved to Susana, the administrative headquarters—one of three buildings in the village built during the Portuguese colonial regime, complete with trademark Portuguese colonial architectural details such as a red tiled roof and a wide concrete veranda—housed a single state-appointed official: a Manajco man serving as Secretary to the *secção*, who spent most of his time chasing down *mafé* and young Diola girls, often in a drunken stupor by 11 am. He was largely ignored by the local population, and the idea that he had any authority or power was risible. Every now and then, he would be informed about the resolution of a local conflict, but his permission was never sought on

any community decisions, nor was his involvement solicited in mediation efforts. He was invited to village-wide gatherings, such as the inauguration of a new market and the launching of the local radio station, but his role at these events was perfunctory and peripheral, and sometimes he was even subtly, but effectively, marginalized and excluded. In classic Diola style, Diola residents never openly confronted him; they were cordial to him, often flattering him in what appeared to me as transparent displays of obsequiousness, but which had the desired effect of outwardly confirming his authority through words, while simultaneously undermining it through quotidian practices.

The notion that any of his predecessors could have played such central roles before and during the Diola-Fula conflict struck me as strange. That Diola would continually consult Lamine, the state administrator who promised time and again to intervene on the Fula mosque building activities, was especially perplexing. Based on my observations of the relationship between Diola residents and the state-appointed official who happened to occupy the red-tiled building while I was a resident in Susana, it seemed out of character that Diola would approach Lamine to intervene on their behalf. Why did they not confront Fula residents directly? And why did they not engage in traditional means of conflict dispute immediately, rather than waiting for the continued efforts at state involvement to fail?

The fact that Diola residents did not approach their Fula neighbors and discuss the matter of the mosque directly with them when they realized what was happening speaks both to the state of Diola-Fula relations at this time, as well as revealing some elements of Diola

interactional style. Even though Fula residents insist that relations between the groups had been largely harmonious until the very day of the mosque destruction, Diola narratives indicate growing tensions and an increasing level of Diola mistrust of their Fula neighbors. I will explore these aspects Diola-Fula relations further in the next chapter. But, in addition to the particular dynamics between Diola and Fula groups at the time, Diola reluctance to confront Fula directly speaks to a general Diola approach to conflict and tension. Even among Diola themselves, if a problem arises between individuals or groups direct communication between the parties involved will rarely, if ever, ensue. Rather, Diola modes of interaction tend to avoid direct confrontation; even when interlocutors disagree with each other they will not express this to each other, and an observer would never know that discord is present. Upon leaving each other's company, each might discuss the matter with family members or neighbors, often expressing their anger or disgust in such a vehement and vitriolic way that, again, an observer unfamiliar to Diola interactional modes would be hard-pressed to connect the two moments. Often, if either party wants to seek resolution to the problem (rather than simply let off steam), he or she would seek a third party to mediate. This might be a friend or neighbor, or if the issue is more serious, an *amangen* to mediate the dispute at the appropriate spirit shrine.

For example, the wife of Susana's state-appointed nurse—an enormous Mancanhe woman from Bolama whom Diola surreptitiously called “engongai” (hippopotamus) behind her immense back—was continuously suspicious of her husband's affairs with local women. For several months, she vociferously accused Marijai of sleeping with her

husband. Every time Marijai would pass her house, on the main road, the nurse's wife would hurl insults at her, calling her "dry ass" and "sack of bones." This kind of direct confrontation was anathema to Diola sensibilities, and as I witnessed these proceedings I remember being struck by how out of place such a mode of communication was in Susana; I had already become accustomed to Diola normative practices around civil and courteous interactional styles, and I found the nurse's wife's behavior to be the height of uncouth behavior. But Marijai took the matter in stride. She never acknowledged the insults as she calmly passed by, she never engaged directly with the nurse's wife, and only later at home would she fly into a verbal rage, concocting far more offensive slurs about the nurse's wife than had been flung at her. After several months, Marijai finally grew impatient, and she decided to contact an *amangen* to hold a spirit shrine hearing. She never spoke to the nurse's wife directly; an intermediary arranged the meeting, and an *amangen* facilitated the process, during which both parties provided testimony on their version of events, and the spirit shrine priest arbitrated the case and pronounced a judgment.

Given Diola interactional and conflict resolution styles, it is not surprising that Diola residents avoided direct communication with their Fula neighbors before exhausting all efforts to deal with the matter through the appropriate intermediary—in this case, the state-appointed administrator. Even though Diola are typically loathe to involve state authorities in any local matters, they were aware that this was not a matter for the *amangen-i*; the land in question was state-owned and had been the site of previous colonial and post-independent state projects (all of which had remained uncompleted and

eventually moved to other—less peripheral and more politically advantageous—areas of the country). Furthermore, the case involved agreements regarding the health worker's facility previously made through the state administrative structure in Susana. And so Diola delegations repeatedly went to Lamine, Lamine repeatedly neglected his duties, and the problem festered until Diola became fed up and, as AmpaDjaponor stated, took “justice into our own hands.”

Did Lamine intentionally sabotage Diola efforts to reach a peaceable resolution because he was Muslim and sided with Fula residents? Or was he simply incompetent? No one will ever know, because Lamine deserted Susana shortly before May 30th. Accounts on both Diola and Fula sides concur that, sensing rising tensions and fearing he would be held accountable, he feigned an illness and left Susana to get treatment. He has not returned since. Some Susana residents suggest that his exit was linked to the shift in national politics in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential run-off, and specifically the ascendancy of the Social Renovation Party (PRS) to presidential power, implying that the PAIGC's defeat also entailed his own loss of backing and authority (note again the tendency to interpret others' actions based on partisan motivations). But Lamine's personal history also complicates the question. Although Lamine was generally considered to be Mandinga and Muslim, his mother was Baiote, from the nearby village of Elia, and he was raised in Diola and Baiote communities, where his matrilineal ties were strong. In Guinea-Bissau, one typically assumes the ethnicity and religion of one's father, but depending on individual circumstances and proclivities, maternal ethnic ties can play a large role. Again, the easy ascription of Muslim allegiance (and hence Fula

patronage) to Lamine's actions belies the complexity of his own life history and competing allegiances.

And yet it is striking how often these allegations of ethnic- or religious-based motivations are wielded to explain various state officials' actions. To what degree were state officials' actions motivated by their perceived ethnic allegiance? Was Malam Ba—the Fula police officer posted to Susana—really enabling Fula to act with impunity? Did Almami Sadjá—the Mandinga/Muslim army commander who came to Susana in the immediate aftermath of mosque destruction, and who encouraged Fula to evacuate so that he could “bomb Susana to bits,” and then allegedly tried to obscure evidence that a Muslim man was responsible for burning the Fula youth center and Tchernó Ba's house—act on the basis of his allegiance to fellow Muslims? And what about Ansumane Mané, who came to arbitrate the conflict and, despite his Mandinga/Muslim identity, announced Diola were in the right, thus prompting Fula participants to emphasize his allegiance to Diola based on his debt to Casamance Diola rebels for their role in the 1998 war, and his overall strategic interests in the region.

Just like Lamine, each of these state actors has his own complex history and unknowable concerns, and occupying a state administrative position does not erase their personal histories. But in the focused light of violent conflict, their actions become available for a range of *post hoc* and ancillary perceptions regarding ethnic- and religious-based bias and abuse of power. Even more, there are pressures on these state actors who are only peripherally embedded in this complex local context to simplify their understanding of

events in order to account for them and decide upon appropriate action. Perhaps these simplifications are contoured by their own allegiances, along whatever lines, as well as their efforts to make these complex social dramas legible (Scott 1998).

In a similar vein, Tambiah offers another useful analysis from his study of ethnonationalist conflicts in South Asia, and introduces the conceptually rich terms focalization and transvaluation (Tambiah 1996).

These are linked processes by which a series of local incidences and small-scale disputes, occasioned by religious, commercial, interfamilial, or other issues, and involving people in direct contact with one another, cumulatively build up into larger and larger clashes between growing numbers of antagonists only indirectly involved in the original disputes....Focalization progressively denudes local incidents and disputes of their contextual particulars, and transvaluation distorts, abstracts, and aggregates those incidents into larger collective issues of national or ethnic interest (Tambiah 1996, 81).

Such processes are evident throughout the Susana case. Accounts of the conflict based on simplistic journalistic renderings reduced the case's complexity and aggravated the situation by distorting and exaggerating Diola attitudes and actions. Furthermore, outside

intervention and mediation efforts by state authorities, military personnel, and other national political players stripped the situation of its complex and multifaceted local texture and twisted it to align with extraneous personal and/or national concerns.

Conclusions

The local details surrounding the controversial plot of land and the back-and-forth efforts to solicit state intervention were never reported, nor did state officials and other mediators concern themselves with these intricacies. In the process, local configurations of these flashpoints got flattened. But why do these simplifications work? In similarly complicated instances of collective violence across the globe, why is the tendency to focalize, transvalue, and simplify so consistently powerful (and ultimately damaging)? Perhaps the simplest reason is that, even if such renditions are not really serving any broader agenda (as the attempt to capitalize on the anti-Muslim character of the riot fizzled out), they help insiders and outsiders “get a handle” on what really happened. This inexorably leads to a reinforcing process: complex events are simplified into “ethnic conflict,” aspects of ethnicity are identified and highlighted in other processes, there is a corresponding pressure to simplify dimensions of difference, and the larger loss is the capacity (or willingness) to think through complicated events and dynamics. In other words, local knowledge is devalued for the sake of manifestly more simple and distorting kinds of knowledge, and this in turn necessitates a de-emphasis of those sources of information and knowledge that are incompatible with these simple renderings.

Unlike competing sociological categories—such as religion, ethnicity, age, etc.—it might be more instructive to develop an expanded view of plurality (Arendt 1958). Newcomers arrive all the time both geographically (as strangers) and temporally (through natality). This continual and constant movement poses a perpetual challenge to deal with the fact of plurality. The next chapter considers some of the ways Diola have confronted this challenge.

Chapter Eight

Settlement History and Strangers: The Dynamics of Incorporation and Exclusion in Diola-Land

The previous chapter sketched out the details of May 2000's "day of destruction" in Susana, and explored several features of the Diola-Fula conflict during the mosque demolition itself, as well as in the immediate aftermath of the episode. This chapter takes several steps backward in time to situate this recent conflict within a wider temporal frame. Focusing primarily on settlement patterns in the region, I trace changing modes of interaction between these groups in terms of their occupation of—and relationship to—the land. I go on to examine Diola-Fula interaction through longstanding patterns of incorporation and exclusion among cultural groups in this area. By revisiting some classic scholarly literature on "the stranger," I consider how each group configures strangers and insiders, and how they mediate these dynamics through intermarriage, boundary maintenance, and other processes of cultural translation. By casting the Diola-Fula conflict within the general problem of "strangerhood," I can reach further back into Diola history and wider settlement patterns in and around Susana, as well as deeper into Diola ideas and attitudes about land, belonging, and boundaries as they pertain to broader questions about social change and continuity.

Although autochthony to this region is debated, it is generally agreed that Diola established residence in the area long before the current Fula population (Linares 1981, 1992). Most Fula families in northern Guinea-Bissau arrived in the mid-twentieth century. The first section of this chapter pieces together Fula arrival stories in Susana,

and gathers more details and insights into the history of the particular plot of land in dispute.

Fula Arrival in Susana

Fula are famous for their widespread presence across West Africa, and even into parts of Central Africa. Although the history of Fula migration and settlement—as pastoralists and semi-sedentary agriculturalists—is well documented in Africanist scholarship (Ajayi and Crowder 1987; Derman and Derman 1973; Fage 1959; Riesman 1978; Stenning 1959), very little of it touches upon Fula presence in Guinea-Bissau.⁸³ Fula comprise 20% of Guinea-Bissau's population, and while they are spread throughout the country the majority of the Guinean Fula population resides in the country's eastern section (Forrest 2003). Although there has long been an itinerant population of Fula merchants from Guinea-Conakry who regularly crossed the porous border between the two countries, many Conakry Fula families settled in Guinea-Bissau in the 1950s and early 1960s, during Sekou Toure's regime. This was around the time when the first Fula families arrived in Susana and settled as *jilas*—traders and small shop owners.

Another Fula settlement in Sangatutu, about 5 kilometers from Susana, was established by Fula men and their families who were posted as soldiers and colonial officials of the Portuguese administration in the area. Many of these families came from Bafatá and other towns in Guinea-Bissau's east. As one Fula man from Sangatutu recounts:

They [his parents and other Fula families] came from Bafatá. They were born near Bafatá. What brought them here...they were taken into the army—the Portuguese army—when land was being opened up. They were taken, they were brought here to Felupe land; they traveled around, sometimes in São Domingos, sometimes in Sedengal, Ingore, Susana. Until they finished their time in the army and they settled.

Once they settled in Sangatutu, several Fula men married Diola and Baoite women from villages around Sangatutu. Also, the Fula *jilas* in Susana married many of the first-generation Fula women born in Sangatutu, who came to Susana and increased the Fula population in the village with their new families. The majority of Fula families arrived in Susana, however, during Guinea-Bissau's prolonged liberation war.

Most Diola villages had been mobilized by the PAIGC's war effort, but Susana and Elia remained exceptions, and sided (or at least complied) with the Portuguese. There was a Portuguese army barracks in Susana, and Diola residents were often conscripted into participating in raids to ambush PAIGC "rebels" in the bush. When the liberation war broke out in the 1960s, many Fula communities around the country became targets of PAIGC and FLING violence given their roles in the Portuguese army and as general colonial bedfellows. At the height of the war effort, PAIGC fighters killed several Fula

families in Sangatutu, “slitting their throats like chickens, even the children.” Mamadu Ba, at the time a recently married Fula man born in Sangatutu, recalls:

It was the war with the PAIGC. That’s what took us out of Sangatutu. The PAIGC people, they came and attacked our village, they killed lots of people, so we ran to Susana.... I was there. At night they [PAIGC] came. They burnt my older brother’s house...My older brother, he escaped and came and called to me, and said, ‘Ha, people want to kill me.’ We left and saw the fire coming out of the top of his house.

Accounts differ as to whether Fula in Sangatutu were rescued by Diola in Susana, or they escaped with the aid of Portuguese soldiers. According to several Susana Diola residents, when they heard about what was happening to Fula families in Sangatutu, they decided to rescue them by bringing them to Susana. Several of Susana’s men went to the Fula settlement at night and brought the remaining Fula families back to Susana (approximately 10 families). As AmpaDjaponor—a Diola man in Susana at the time—remembers, “We went to rescue them when the PAIGC were massacring them.... We went to rescue them, we brought them here, we put them here in our midst, we told them: ‘Well, now this massacre that you suffered there [is over]; you are free.’” Mamadu Ba recalls a slightly different sequence of events. After seeing his brother’s house—and other houses in Sangatutu—on fire,

People from Susana, they did not come to get us. I, I got up, I, Mamadu, I myself. I took a bicycle and went at night to Susana and arrived at the *Posto* [colonial administrative headquarters]. I went to enter the *Posto*, where the cottonwood tree is now. You see, Felupes would do night duty there. I called out: 'Ooo-oooh. Ooo-oooh.' Two times. The person from Susana responded. He said: 'Who are you?' I said: 'It's me, Mamadu.' He said, 'Come here. Don't be afraid.' I told him: 'People of the forest [PAIGC fighters] attacked us.' We went from the *Posto* to the barracks...We told the soldiers. There were not so many soldiers there. They got up with a soldier named João Muloma. We got up and walked out until the bend in the road. When we got there, they told me to go back. I went back to Susana. They went in the night, they came to save our land...The next day, I went there [Sangatutu] to see what to do. In the afternoon, they requested cars. [Portuguese] soldiers came to find us.... We, with families whose houses were burned, we came to Susana.... Others whose houses were left intact, they were not told anything, they stayed there. Then I went into the army. I was conscripted, I was taken into the [Portuguese] army. Those

who were left behind, they [PAIGC] came and attacked again. People there, all of them, they moved to Susana. But that was when I was already in the army...But many of them, they crossed over. They went to the Senegalese side...Almost all of them [population of Sangatutu] went to Senegal.

By that time, the dense forest that separated Utem from Endongon in Susana was starting to be cleared by the Mission and Portuguese authorities. Diola narratives indicate that they provided the refugee Fula families with a plot of land in Susana's center, and told them that, if they wanted to stay, they could build houses there. The idea to place Fula families in the center of Susana was to ensure both their protection and surveillance. Fula families were also given plots of forestland on which to plant small gardens of potatoes, corn, and beans. Over the next several years, Fula built their houses and set up shops, and the neighborhood became known as Fulacunda.

Since the land that became Fulacunda had been "matu fitchadu" (thick and largely impenetrable forest) for as long as Diola in Susana could remember, there was little interest in the area as a potential site for Diola residences. Although well-worn bush-paths cut through the forest, enabling passage between Utem and Endongon, Diola believed that the land was filled with *epurapurai*, ghost-like spirits of those caught between the mortal and spirit worlds. No Diola family was particularly eager to build a house there, and they only begrudgingly cleared the land under forced labor campaigns

mandated by Portuguese colonial officials. Once the refugee Fula families built their houses, they constructed a small mosque in the center of their neighborhood, tucked behind one of their houses, which happened to lie on an ancient sacrificial path used by Diola to walk cows being used for ritual slaughter at the important rain shrine Catit. Diola did not dispute or complain Fula use of this land, although they did not forget it either.

The Plot Thickens

Just around the corner from Fulacunda, the plot of land that was to become such a contested site had been cleared for Portuguese administrative purposes. For centuries, the plot had been buried deep in the *matu fitchadu*, and had served as a burial ground for the Nhakun neighborhood. Once it was cleared and became the site of successive Portuguese colonial (and, later, Guinean state) projects, burial specialists selected a different forested plot, on the other side of Nhakun, to bury neighborhood residents.

During the colonial era, the plot was used for periodic marketing among residents of dispersed Diola villages. Later, a Portuguese engineer came to Susana and dug a deep well there, although the well project was never completed. Then colonial authorities built a school there, but it fell the same year that they built it. As one Susana resident recalls, “Not a single class was ever taught there.” Afterwards, a Diola resident from Mañodjagu who had become a colonial *sipaio*—a police officer and local enforcer of colonial decrees—was granted permission to build a house on the plot. He did so, but the house fell towards the end of the liberation war, and the man crossed the border to take refuge

in Senegal (as did many Guineans who served in the Portuguese army). After independence, Guinean state authorities confiscated the remaining well materials that would have provided Susana's residents access to deep well water and relocated them (as well as any other infrastructural material and supplies left by the Portuguese) to other parts of newly independent Guinea-Bissau. Diola residents insist that this was a form of PAIGC retribution against Susana's population, which had sided with the Portuguese during the war. Immediately after independence, with the removal of Portuguese soldiers and other colonial officials from the area, Susana experienced a general decline in administrative presence and infrastructural resources. Such things were really only felt in the administrative center, and never penetrated into Susana's neighborhoods, but for Susana residents they still indicate a general decline in quality of life since independence, and the beginning of general (and consistent) state neglect of the region. For instance, the Portuguese maintained a generator across from their administrative headquarters (directly next to the infamous plot of land), which provided electricity for the immediate vicinity. The main road that cut through Centro was actually lit by a few streetlights, and one remaining streetlight still stands—unlit for the past 30 years—reminding residents and passers-by of Portuguese presence in the region, and often eliciting narratives of colonial nostalgia. Once independence was declared, the PAIGC removed the generator, and Susana has not seen electricity since.

In the 1980s, residents of Susana and other villages decided that they wanted to build an annex to Susana's health clinic. This has been alternately described as a maternity center or as a housing facility for resident health workers and patients visiting from further flung

villages. The latter project—a patient and health worker residence—emerged as an initiative based on two factors: Susana’s population wants to have more health services, but potential health workers (midwives, nurses, even a doctor) have nowhere to live if posted to the village. Building a residence for posted health workers was, in the minds of most Susana residents, a guaranteed way to attract them to Susana, although such an optimistic attitude did not take into account other inhibiting factors such as the current national shortage of health care professionals, not to mention lack of state interest and funds to invest in health care. The second purpose—to have a place where visiting patients from other villages could stay—probably emerged in the wake of two successive cholera outbreaks in Elia. Generally, visitors from other Diola villages always have a place to stay based on extended kinship networks and Diola hospitality conventions, but the cholera outbreaks strained such norms, and building a patient guesthouse was a way to finesse the issue. As one Diola man involved in the project puts it:

We saw that ... sickness, well people would say that there are contagious diseases, so if ...someone for example had tuberculosis or other things like measles, these are contagious. So, what is one to do when there is no place to stay, just in the forest, so that the disease does not spread to others? That is why we saw that we should build that house. If that house exists, and someone comes from the forest with a contagious disease, then, when he arrives we

will tell him, ‘You have to stay here in this place so that you do not spread this disease among your friends.’

Susana’s residents had continually requested to build the health facility on the infamous plot of land, primarily because it was located on the main road and directly across from the existing clinic. For many years, they were rebuffed because state officials insisted that they had plans for the plot, especially since it still had an unused powered well on it that the Portuguese had put there. But, eventually, like all other colonial machinery in Susana, a state authority took the mota-bomba away to Cacheú, where he and his brothers set up a large cashew orchard and are allegedly using the mota-bomba for their private gain. Since the mota-bomba was taken away, residents in Susana surmised that the plot of land would no longer be reserved for state purposes, so they requested it again. This time, their request was granted, and in the mid-1990s Susana residents obtained permission to build the health facility from the state appointed president of the *comité de estado*, AmpaDjitoto, a Diola man from Djifunco.

Another factor that swayed AmpaDjitoto was a rash of deaths of unmarried young men in the Diola village of Edjaten, 11 kilometers from Susana. In 1997, as one Susana resident recalls, “Not a week would go by without hearing about another boy who had died there, and we were constantly going up to Edjaten for funerals.” At the corpse inquisitions conducted during the funerals, the result was always the same: witchcraft. Although there was never any proof, the obvious explanation to anyone I spoke with was that Edjaten’s men were killing their sons. Diola witchcraft beliefs involve reciprocity of

offerings among one's cohort of witches, and the deaths in Edjaten indicated that witchcraft contracts were being fulfilled by the concentrated killing of young men. Usually, one's brothers' sons are the most desirable offerings from a witch's perspective, but if none are available, witches are thought to resort to their own sons. AmpaDjitoto was well aware of Diola witchcraft practices, and as a "modern" subject and state-appointed authority in the region, he was determined to combine his effort to curb the Edjaten killings with the general effort to enhance access to biomedical healthcare in the administrative section.

AmpaDjitoto sent word to Edjaten for all men to come to Susana, which they did on the appointed day. They presented themselves to AmpaDjitoto at the administrative post and he counted them up and, with military backing, locked them in the Susana barracks. In the afternoon, he told them, "Those who have brothers in Edjaten, go get them and bring them here. The only people who will sleep in Edjaten tonight are women." The men went to get their brothers. AmpaDjitoto kept them imprisoned, without any explanation, for four days. During the day, they were let out and allowed to mingle in Susana and find something to eat, but each evening they were to report back to the barracks where they were locked up. On the fourth day, AmpaDjitoto let them go, but he said that they had not yet received their punishment, and that they were to return to Susana on a date that he named, and they were to bring their machetes and axes.

When the Edjaten men came back to Susana, AmpaDjitoto set them to work on the construction of the health workers' house. First, they cleared and cleaned the area. Then

they formed mud blocks and started building the walls. Each day, they would work from early in the morning until the afternoon, and then walk back to Edjaten in the evening. This continued until the first two levels of the facility were complete, at which time AmpaDjitoto decided that they had paid their dues and he released them from further work. Other villages organized work teams to contribute to the effort, and by 1998, the walls were almost complete.

But all work stopped in 1998, first because Susana's Diola population was fully consumed with its male initiation,⁸⁴ and then because of the "7 de Junho" war, an 11 month popular uprising against the 19-year long regime of President João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira. Many of Susana's men joined the military *junta*, led by Brigadier General Ansumane Mané, which eventually removed President Vieira from power. Other Susana residents were consumed with the extra obligations of providing for their swollen households, as Guineans from Bissau sought refuge in the interior. During the rainy season that intervened, the health facility's mud walls crumbled.

When the health facility project began with the forced labor team of Diola men from Edjaten, one of the Fula men, Braima—who was born in Susana, and whose father had come from the Sangatutu massacre—laid a claim to the land on which the health center construction was taking place. He said that his father had been given the land by the post-independence state, and that he had inherited it. Although Braima had no proof for his claim, and most Diola and non-Diola residents in Susana insist that he invented it, AmpaDjitoto was concerned to treat him equably in order not to raise suspicion of ethnic

favoritism in his administrative practices. AmpaDjitoto suggested that, since the health facility took up only a portion of the plot, the young Fula man could build his house on the other side. Braima built his house contemporaneously with the health facility collective building project, and arranged highly coveted zinc sheets (bought, some Susana Diola claim, from Casamance rebels on the Senegalese border) to cover it provisionally during the rainy season. So, while the health workers' house fell, Braima's house remained intact.

When I asked several Fula men in São Domingos why they decided to build their mosque on that plot of land, given the existing health facility project, they insisted that Diola residents had no use for that particular piece of land. They claimed that the half-constructed health facility had not fallen because of Susana's preoccupation with male initiation, nor due to the outbreak of the war. Rather, it fell because the land had been a Diola burial ground, and Diola found that they could not build on such terrain. As one Fula man stated,

They [Diola] started to dig a hole there, and they found people's bones and skulls. That's taboo for Felupes. That's why they left it, stopped working. They could not go on. They left the house and it fell down. That's when we requested to put our mosque there. We, ourselves, those bones, we would return the bones that had been dug up there. We would return the bones and cover them with

dirt. There was a small tree that stood there - I, myself, went and put those bones by that tree. We buried all of those bones, those human skulls there. All of them.

Diola, for their part, concur that the land was Nhakun's former burial site, but insist that this had nothing to do with their ability to use the land, as all bones had been appropriately removed and reburied. The land is still considered to be state-owned by both Diola and Fula; hence the involvement of state authorities in both the health facility and mosque construction.

But who really owns that plot of land? There is one more twist in the long and complicated story about the controversial plot. A Bagnun man, originally from a village just outside São Domingos, settled in Susana during the late colonial era. He married a Diola woman, and her relatives gave him the land (which was, as previously mentioned, buried in thick forest and used as a cemetery). He was the first to clear portions of the plot, and he used it to cultivate potatoes. He also planted a few mango trees on it that remain until today, providing Susana's children with fat mangoes at the end of the rainy season. Once the remaining land around this plot was cleared, the Portuguese colonial authorities took the land away from the Bagnun man, claiming they had more important community purposes for it (e.g. the well, the school, etc.). The Bagnun man had no recourse (as his brother's family explained to me, "What could he do? 'Forsa madjur'"), and so the land became "state-owned." But both the Bagnun family and Diola residents are aware that the land is neither state-owned, nor owned by Braima's father, nor (any

longer) the site of Nhakun's bones. It bears noting that it is, in fact, a very small plot of land—not even the size of a football field—that has become so mired in controversy and confusion.

Other land issues

The infamous plot in Susana's administrative center was not the only piece of land involved in Diola-Fula disputes. After the majority of Fula families settled in Susana, they began to clear large tracts of land just outside the village to plant cashew orchards. Access to this land was facilitated by a general post-independence shift in orientation regarding land ownership. At the end of the Liberation War, PAIGC leaders declared that "*matu ka ten dunu*" ("no one owns the forest"). Like many people across newly independent Guinea-Bissau, Fula residents put this philosophy into practice by clearing these tracts of forestland on the outskirts of Susana, near Kandembã. It so happened, however, that this land surrounded an important Diola spirit shrine of the same name, and Diola had left the forestland in this area intact, for both religious reasons associated with its sacrality, and practical reasons associated with the war being waged around it. Although Susana's Diola residents were opposed to Fula occupation of this land, they had no means of protesting given the national political climate at the time.

A brief diversion into changing national policies and practices regarding land use might be instructive here. Guinea-Bissau has had, until recently, a particularly laid back approach to land issues. During the colonial era, the Portuguese did not use Guinea-Bissau as a settler colony, and never set up plantation systems as they did in their other

African colonies; thus, land distribution was largely undisturbed throughout the colonial era.⁸⁵ As mentioned above, the immediate post-independence philosophy and practice regarding land was a kind of free-for-all approach, and the PAIGC encouraged people to settle and utilize as yet uncultivated land wherever they chose. Given the small population and large tracts of forestland, it was assumed that there would be enough land to go around. Within the past several years, however, this willy-nilly approach to land use has come under severe pressure. There are a host of factors that have made this approach untenable, including population growth and urbanization, but the single most important factor is the recent explosion of cashews as the nation's most successful export crop. In a country with limited natural resources and an ever-dwindling capacity to sustain itself through subsistence agriculture, cashew farming has become the only way to generate income at all levels of the society, and in many areas, during cashew season, raw cashew nuts have replaced cash as the most utilized form of currency. Now that everyone has an interest in planting acres of cashew trees, forestland has finally come to be seen as a finite resource, and one that needs regulating. In March 1998, three months before the civil war broke out, Guinea-Bissau's parliament passed a land law—the first of its kind since independence—that simultaneously sought to protect peasant holdings and customary land tenure practices, while introducing far-reaching privatization and taxation policies. The land law was shelved during the conflict and its aftermath. In 2001, given increasing land-based conflicts around the country, a new effort was mounted to put the 1998 land law into practice, and, with the financial backing of FAO, researchers and policy-makers began to revisit the new national land law. Although the 1998 land law stands as it was passed, the work of regulating and applying it, as well as building up

local and national institutions capable of enforcing it and preventing land conflicts, remains to be done.

Shifting national policy regarding land use helps explain how recently arrived Fula residents were able to gain and cultivate large tracts of forestland surrounding Susana with little fear of Diola recourse. But this does not account for both Diola and Fula attitudes towards land.

Diola land tenure and regulation

A brief recap of Diola land tenure practices might be useful here. Diola distinguish between two types of agricultural land: forest (*butat*), and wet rice paddy (*butonda*). Land is inherited through the patriline. When a boy reaches marrying age, he can approach his father and his father's brothers and ask for some paddy. The brothers will look at all of their combined holdings, and the eldest father's brother (or grandfather, if he is still alive) will re-divide the parcels, giving some to the boy. The distribution takes place in order of age, but everyone gets what he needs according to their family size. The same system is used for dividing and redistributing parcels of forestland. During the life span of the individual, more fields may be distributed to him according to the size of his family. When a man dies, his land reverts back to his brothers or, if they are all dead, his brother's children.

While patrilineality determines inheritance of land, a man can still borrow unused paddy from his mother's brothers. Beyond inheritance and borrowing, one may acquire land through pledging (see pp. 42-43 of Chapter One).

Diola have a refined and overall well functioning system for distributing land and resolving internal land conflicts at the village level. The land tenure system generally ensures that land needs are met at all stages of the household development cycle, and the pattern of scattered holdings roughly maintains even distribution of land of various quality across residents. Likewise, Diola have effective measures for addressing any conflicts that might arise concerning internal land disputes, and the vast majority of such cases are still resolved without government interference.

As we have learned from a great deal of Africanist anthropology and history, land tenure is not only about the procedures for inheriting and distributing land, but also about a particular group's relationship to that land, the commonplace assumptions that inform their attitudes and practices regarding land use and abuse. Bohannan demonstrate that Tiv "see geography in the same image as they see social organization. The idiom of descent and genealogy provides not only the basis for lineage grouping, but also of territorial grouping." (Bohannan and Curtin 1995: 122). Fulani "long, sweeping cycles of movement" (Bohannan and Curtin 1995: 122) enable them see land as attached to certain points in association with society. One of the ways Diola conceive of land has to do with the relationship between land, lineage, and spirit shrines. Each lineage has, as its "possessions," plots of forestland, rice paddy, and, in many cases, a *bakinabu* (spirit

shrine; pl. *ukinau*) associated with them. When other Diola come to settle amongst them, they will, in most cases, accept them, offer them plots of land, and integrate them into the land tenure system. But they will never give them rights to inherit the *bakinabu*. *Ukinau* that are linked to a certain lineage are never allowed to go to “newcomers,” no matter how long the newcomers have resided and integrated with the “firstcomers.” In many cases, this has caused conflicts within extended families who have integrated their land holdings and households, and for all intents and purposes are considered to be kin, but whose fault line between original and latecomer factions is keenly felt in the denial of *bakinabu* inheritance to the latecomer branch. In Sipamiro’s family, for instance, this is the case between Sipamiro and his classificatory brothers. Many generations ago, Angala and Simeon’s forebears came to settle amongst Sipamiro’s people in Lhikeu, a small hamlet within the forestland currently used by the family to tap palm trees. They were given land and integrated into the family, and they are now considered to be of the same lineage and continue to divide land amongst themselves. But the fact that Angala’s ancestors came and settled amongst Sipamiro’s is never forgotten, and they can never have rights to the *bakinabu*—which happens to be a particularly important one, *Karenghaku*, associated with male initiation—that Sipamiro is supposed to inherit, but that he has rejected. As far as Sipamiro is concerned, this distinction should end, especially as he does not want the *bakinabu*, and it has only caused friction amongst the branches, often resulting in witchcraft and killing off of Sipamiro’s family so that they could be eliminated and Angala’s side could finally take over. But the elders will never accept this change, as it would be a dangerous precedent for others.

In terms of the relationship with land, such associations not only attach a sense of sacrality to an otherwise utilitarian approach to land ownership and use, but land (through its attachment to spirit shrines) is seen not just as a cultivable tract, but an historical tract. Diola history and settlement patterns are indelibly recorded in the land, and even though the functional aspects of land distribution might erase apparent differences between firstcomers and latecomers, rights to land-based spirit shrines encode and maintain them. Like Sipamiro, many people these days who are in a position to inherit ritual authority of a particular bakinabu are refusing to do so. But, even when those designated to inherit ukinau eschew this responsibility—for a wide range of reasons explored in Part Two—the position is not opened up to other (even closely related) lineages. In this way, lineage-based ukinau serve as a permanent record of lineage history, and as an intractable boundary between firstcomers and latecomers.

Such relations are reminiscent of Kopytoff's discussion of the African frontier. According to Kopytoff, "legitimation is couched in culturally valued idiom" (Kopytoff 1987: 71) through both the first-comer principle and ancestral ties grounded in regionally significant mythical events (or in this case, ritual authority) (Kopytoff 1978: 72). They shed light not only on deeper aspects of Diola attitudes regarding land, but also on Diola historical consciousness and processes of (or limits to) incorporation as tied to land-based practices. Additional aspects of this latter dynamic will be explored in the next section. For now, I want to review dominant perceptions of Fula relationship to the land. Once again, I am limited in my ability to account for Fula attitudes themselves. But what is significant in the case of Diola-Fula conflict, much of which centered on disagreements

about particular pieces of land, are the perceptions of Susana's residents, both Diola and non-Diola, regarding Fula land use.

One of my closest informants, Angelo, the Bagnun young man who had grown up in Susana and witnessed the Diola-Fula conflict quite intimately, stressed to me that Fula (and Muslims in general) had a problematic attitude toward land that continually got them into trouble with their nominal landlords and neighbors. When he was trying to convey to me that the mosque destruction was symptomatic of relations that had soured quite a while before actual conflict erupted, Angelo once lowered his voice and told me, "Elis, Fula ku Felupe, e ka mui tu daba bem. [Fula and Diola didn't really get along]." According to Angelo and others the Fula men who were born in Susana—not those who were rescued from Sangatutu—thought that they were "dunus di tchon" [land owners], and wanted to take control over everything "as Muslims do everywhere." From Angelo's perspective, this attitude helped explain why Braima made a false claim to the health facility plot of land, as well as why Fula families cleared large tracts of land in Kandembã and occupied them for their cashew groves. In fact, Angelo (and others) went even further to suggest that it was this same behavior that led to the Fula massacre in Sangatutu. Rather than framing this violent episode in terms of PAIGC versus Portuguese loyalty during the Independence War, these informants insisted that Fula families who had settled in Sangatutu were taking over Arame's land, so Arame residents (who also happened to be mobilized by the PAIGC's war effort) targeted Sangatutu's Fula population.

Diola (and clearly some non-Diola) residents in Susana were wary of Fula land-grabbing tactics, and their history in Sangatutu, combined with their ready acquisition of the land surrounding Kandembã, raised several warning flags for Diola regarding the need to “protect” their holdings and prevent further Fula incursion.

Landlords and Strangers, Incorporation and Exclusion

Issues around land and perceived Fula incursion into Diola territory help explain why Diola remain so adamant about the impossibility of Fula return to Susana. Despite Diola insistence that they “never kicked Fula out” of Susana, most Diola residents refuse to negotiate Fula return, and mediation efforts failed to resolve this issue. But, in addition to a general hardening of attitudes in the immediate aftermath of the conflict and a longer view of Diola-Fula interactions regarding land, another facet of these dynamics involves differences in how Diola and Fula groups regarded each other as permanent strangers or integrated residents in Susana. Revisiting some classic sociological and Africanist scholarship on the concept of strangers, and the dynamics of incorporation and exclusion, helps to situate Diola attitudes and practices regarding their position as hosts vis-à-vis Fula presence in Susana.

In 1979, Shack and Skinner published an edited volume on *Strangers in African Societies*, offering a set of essays that explore the treatment of strangers in precolonial, colonial, and (recently) postcolonial African contexts. The impetus for the volume was to assess the changing dynamics of “strangerhood” across a continent that was undergoing major transformations as new, post-independence polities reconfigured

policies and practices affecting their populations and notions of insiders and outsiders. In particular, the authors were concerned with the intolerance some recently independent African nation-states (most infamously Uganda) displayed toward strangers.

The contributions take Simmel's short essay on *der Fremde* (The Stranger) as a conceptual starting point for their historical and ethnographic analyses. As Shack and Skinner point out in their introduction, most studies of strangers that are nominally based on Simmel's essay perpetuate a misreading—initiated by Robert Park's translation and misapplication of the essay—that transmutes Simmel's stranger from a social type to a cultural model. That is, the American sociological tradition in the wake of Park tended to view strangers as a category of individuals on the far end of the spectrum between “alien” and “citizen,” and addressed the “problem” of strangers as a process of assimilation and incorporation into a larger social whole. Such studies charted the progress (or continued obstacles) toward this ultimate goal, emphasizing the legal status of strangers and stranger groups. But Simmel's strangers, Shack and Skinner stress (and I agree), are not “found at either end of the alien-citizen continuum; they are betwixt and between” (Shack and Skinner 1979: 4). It is Simmel's sense of ambiguity and doubleness regarding the stranger that Shack and Skinner seek to resuscitate in their exploration of strangers in Africa, although most contributors ultimately find Simmel's stranger as an ideal type too limiting for appropriate analyses of strangers in African polities.

Simmel's stranger (unlike Park's) does not need to be assimilated (Levine 1979: 23). He or she is fundamentally a dynamic social phenomenon, someone “who comes today and

stays tomorrow” (Levine 1971 [1908]: 143). The stranger synthesizes detachment and attachment, closeness and remoteness, indifference and involvement.

He is fixed within a certain spatial circle—or within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries—but his position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be indigenous to it (Levine 1971: 143).

Strangerhood is a relational and temporary phenomenon; being a stranger has more to do with unfamiliarity in the intersubjective realm than a quality intrinsic to the stranger. From the host society’s perspective strangers represent uncertainty, as they may harbor munificence or malevolence. A “proper sociology of the stranger,” as Levine makes clear, is only possible when we consider this distinct blend of opposing elements that define strangers (Levine 1979: 29). It is precisely this ambiguity in Simmel’s stranger that makes the problem of strangeness (and stranger groups) continually interesting in new and ever-transforming “spatial circles.”

If people can be close to or remote from one another in many ways... it is the simultaneous pressure of characteristics of closeness and remoteness along any of those dimensions—the very dissonance embodied in that

dualism—that makes the position of strangers socially problematic in all times and places. When those who would be close, in any sense of the term, are actually close, and those who should be distant are distant, everyone is ‘in his place.’ When those who should be distant are close, however, the inevitable result is a degree of tension and anxiety which necessitates some special kind of response.

(Levine 1979: 29)

Sociologists and anthropologists have applied Simmel’s model of the stranger to the collective level when exploring the dynamics among cultural groups. In this way, “relations between ethnic groups have been conceived in terms of attitudes and transactions between stranger communities, and analyzed with respect to the degrees of stereotyping, prejudice, and receptivity that obtains in their relationships.” (Levine 1979: 35). Within Africanist scholarship, early studies focused on the range of modes of incorporating strangers based on different political configurations. For instance, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard’s *African Political Systems* present variations in processes of incorporation contingent upon levels of centralization or statelessness. “In societies lacking ‘government’ ... aliens or strangers are said to lose quickly their foreign identities, their strangeness, and become members of the host community” (Shack and Skinner 1979: 14). In acephalous systems, cultural homogeneity was maintained by forcing foreigners to assimilate (Evans Pritchard 1969), whereas in centralized systems, incorporation and the rights that came with it tended to depend upon descent and/or

contract arrangements. Horton's (1976) central concern in stateless systems is how communities grow by incorporating weak immigrants. Kopytoff, building on these earlier studies, focuses on an earlier community development stage: how immigrant communities get established in the first place (Kopytoff 1987: 31). In his examination of ethnogenesis on the African frontier, Kopytoff demonstrates how frontier societies relied on attracting and maintaining new members. Kinship typically provided the model and idiom for incorporation into these frontier polities (Kopytoff 1987: 40).⁸⁶

Other Africanist scholarship on strangerhood has emphasized the trajectory from stranger to kinsperson (Fortes 1975), the role of strangers as "structural outsiders," who often take on important decision-making roles because they are seen as more neutral and less bound by kinship loyalties, and the predicament of strangers as scapegoats, since "they do not 'quite belong' to the local society, and as such make useful scapegoats for misfortune" (Turner 1957: 147, 151; see also Shack and Skinner 1979).

There are three related points about how the Diola-Fula case offers alternate insights to dominant tropes about strangers, incorporation, and cultural boundaries in Africanist scholarship. The first issue is that Diola attitudes regarding incorporation—whether of Fula strangers or Diola newcomers—does not jive with the predominant view of decentralized polities readily absorbing others through kinship or other forms of cultural assimilation. Second, the Diola case challenges the neat dichotomy present in most contemporary Africanist scholarship that contrasts a precolonial fluid approach to cultural belonging and incorporation with a colonially imposed (and postcolonially inherited)

fixed and rigid sense of identity and boundaries. Finally, the Diola-Fula conflict offers insights into Simmel's central question regarding what happens when strangers introduce non-indigenous ways of being, and hence enables an analysis of a certain kind of cultural translation and boundary maintenance dynamics.

In terms of Diola attitudes regarding strangers, many of the aforementioned longstanding views about strangers and incorporation, particularly in non-centralized political systems, do not ring true. The longer I stayed in Susana, and the more I heard (and overheard) Diola comments that, at first blush, seemed to have nothing to do with the Fula case, the more I understood how complicated it is to be a long-term stranger amongst Diola landlords. For instance, when I spoke with Fula families in São Domingos, they often recounted, unsolicited, their kinship links to various Diola families whom I know. None of these families had ever mentioned their kinship links to the Fula.

Intermarriage between Diola and Fula residents remains one of the starkest differences in attitude along these lines. Almost the same words are used to describe intermarriage, but the tone of each version gives them opposite meanings. Fula narratives often stress the fact that the majority of the younger generation of Fula men—those born in Susana—married Diola women. “We *even* married their daughters,” many Fula often proclaim, expressed in a way that emphasizes their integration in Susana. There is no doubt that, in Fula reckoning, intermarriage was a positive phenomenon for all parties involved. When Fula identify their kinship links with Diola, they are making a case to themselves and their interlocutors that they belong in Susana. Diola residents' silence regarding their

kinship ties with Fula speaks volumes as to their attitudes regarding Fula incorporation (or lack thereof) into Susana society. And when I asked Diola residents in Susana about intermarriage between Fula and Diola families, they uniformly stressed the fact that, while Fula men married Diola women (“They married *our* daughters”), Diola men were prevented from marrying Fula women. They did not see intermarriage as strengthening ties between the two groups and paving the way to enhanced community relations, as it is often cast in analyses of West African interethnic interaction. Rather, Diola viewed the marriage of “their” women by Fula men as a form of theft, especially as all such marriages required conversion of the bride to Islam, and they resented the implicit understanding that if a Diola man was to marry a Fula woman (which never happened), he, too, would be required to convert.⁸⁷

Intermarriage between Diola and Fula residents in this area did not start with the generation of young Fula men born in Susana after the Sangatutu slaughter. Rather, Fula men have been marrying Diola women since they came to Diola-land, and although an outsider would be unable to discern the mixed ethnic backgrounds of many families, further investigation reveals that such inter-ethnic marriages are often several generations deep. When I interviewed a Fula elder who was born in Sangatutu and relocated to Susana during the Independence War skirmishes, he identified several Fula families from his generation and his parents’ generation that had “Diola mothers.” A Fula matriarch in Susana (Tia Hawa), the head of the only Fula family that stayed put when all others were evacuated to São Domingos, had a Diola mother from Caton. Mamadu Ba’s mother was a Baiote woman from Kuladje. Several other Diola-Fula marriages date from this period,

but the Diola presence in the resultant families is invisible to the outside observer.

Members of these families are Muslim, they do not participate in any Diola religious or cultural customary practices, they do not cultivate rice or tap palm wine, and (with the exception of Tia Hawa) they do not speak Diola or Baiote.

Although these only include a handful of families, the pattern is quite clear: Diola-ness all but disappears once intermarriage with Fula occurs. Even though Diola are the majority group in the area, being Fula and Muslim trump Diola cultural presence in these families. This is partly due to the specific gendered configuration of these inter-ethnic marriages, and the general position of women in both Diola and Fula societies. Diola women who marry into Fula families are more susceptible to becoming integrated into their new Fula hosts' ways, given both the mandate for Muslim conversion and Diola women's access to land only through their Diola fathers and husbands. Most ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau are inclined to view ethnic identity as being patrilineally determined, especially given a general tendency towards virilocality among most cultural groups in the area. "Women," as one of my neighbors in Susana put it, "are like the wind." Compared with the solidity of men's position in terms of lineage and land, women are seen as ephemeral and mobile. They may reside in one neighborhood when they grow up, only to move upon each subsequent marriage, including those to non-Diola. This corroborates Fortes's (1969) and Jackson's (1977: 90) separate observations that wives, in virilocal systems, are never fully free from strangerhood. Women's absorption into Fula families is less surprising when viewed within the gendered dynamics of their permanent liminality and "strangeness."

But, beyond its gendered dimensions, Diola perspectives on intermarriage reflect a deeper attitude regarding incorporation into Susana Diola society. The reigning trope on West African coastal groups is that they are hospitable to strangers, and eager and willing to incorporate them (Brooks 1993; Mark 1999). As Brooks contends,

Two sociocultural paradigms of immeasurable significance are found throughout western Africa. The first involves 'landlord-stranger reciprocities,' which promote safety of movement and hospitality for travelers wherever they go... The origins of landlord-stranger reciprocities are lost in antiquity, but their tenets are embedded in the fundamentals of the societies of western Africa... Hospitality and appropriate behavior toward strangers are ensured by the responsibilities of kinship affiliations (real and fictive), by customary law believed to be supported by divine sanctions and reinforced by long usage, by the socialization of children, and by oft-repeated sayings, proverbs, and heuristic stories... One of the most important features of landlord-stranger reciprocities is the privilege of marrying local women, accorded valued strangers... In short, western Africans opportunistically redefine their identities in response to changing circumstances. Remote, even

fictive, kinship ties, special bonds between groups such as 'joking relationships,' indeed social or cultural advantages one can claim or contrive have for centuries facilitated human relationships and expedited trade, travel, migration, and settlement in western Africa (Brooks 1993: 37-39, 28).

Such versions of West African history reflect the predominant view of West African ethnicity as inherently fluid, opportunistic, and situational, and boundaries between groups as porous (e.g. D'Azevedo 1962; Mark 1999). There is an assumption in much Africanist literature that intermarriage indicates (as it does for Brooks) inexorable progress towards the universally strived-for goal of integration. "Marriage," states Beidelman, "converts strangers to kin" (Beidelman 1993: 20). But, perhaps, rather than encouraging such integration, Diola were concerned about this trajectory and its implications for collective identity, and were reacting (whether consciously or not) to a perceived state of boundary confusion.

Most Africanists tend to cast the dynamics of ethnicity, boundaries, and incorporation processes within a stark differentiation between precolonial fluidity of such concepts, and the colonial imposition of cultural/ethnic/racial boundaries and categories. Indeed, as Shack and Skinner comment, in African societies, "there is just enough evidence to suggest that African strangers, and indeed strangers of other racial and ethnic origins, once moved with relative ease between indigenous African polities" (Shack and Skinner 1979: 8). They go on to state,

In the main, both before the imposition of colonial rule in Africa and during the dependency period, indigenous African and non-African strangers were left virtually free to move from one traditional African polity and temporarily resettle in another. They were true strangers in the sense that Simmel meant—immigrants, but not aliens. In the contemporary era of self-government, newly independent African nation-states have increasingly treated *jus in personam* and *jus in rem* as rights to be defined and enforced by the state within its legal and political boundaries. But exercising this privilege of sovereignty has reversed, as it were, the ‘normal’ process of change in the status of strangers” (Shack and Skinner 1979: 5).

Similar statements abound in Africanist (and other postcolonial) anthropology and history, portraying precolonial relationships among stranger groups as largely open to negotiation and incorporation, and boundaries as porous and often non-existent (see Chatterjee 1993; Hawthorne 1998; Kopytoff 1987; Mamdani 1996; Mark 1999; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Even Mamdani (1996), who criticizes the over-emphasis in recent scholarship on the colonial creation of ethnicity, still asserts that colonial rule in Africa, through the establishment and differentiation of customary law, changed the tenor of the relationship between host and migrant. According to Mamdani, precolonial Africa

was characterized by more incorporative, multiethnic relations, especially with the regard to access to land. While my study of the Diola-Fula conflict in Susana supports, in a general sense, Mamdani's approach to ethnicity and ethnic conflict, my consideration of the complexity of landlord-stranger relations in this case suggests a modification of Mamdani's analysis that such polarized relations between host and migrant are the legacy of late colonialism's "regime of differentiation" (Mamdani 1996: 7). While there is no doubt that colonial regimes in many cases radically re-shaped indigenous ideas and practices around identity, ethnicity, and social organization, several elements in this case challenge the predominant view of indigenous West African notions of ethnicity and cultural belonging as inherently fluid. I wonder whether this now standard formulation of precolonial fluidity and colonial/postcolonial fixity regarding cultural identity and belonging is, itself, too rigid. In particular, this case suggests that Diola exclusionary practices pre-date colonial rule in this region.⁸⁸

We have already seen how the attachment of spirit shrines to land holdings helps preserve the history of firstcomers and latecomers to a given area, and Diola unwillingness to erase these distinctions even among settlers who have resided in their midst for generations (and, in some cases, centuries) speaks to a general resistance toward full incorporation and easy "fluidity" across these boundaries. The history of Susana's consolidation as a unified village provides another clue into these dynamics. Susana as an integrated entity is a relatively recent phenomenon; Susana is more of a federation of villages that were joined together during the long period of internecine fighting among Diola villages (throughout the 17th-19th centuries) by a somewhat mythic culture hero

named Ambona. During Ambona's time (around the early 1800s), Diola in this area were scattered in small forest hamlets, often consisting of a single lineage. Hamlets would often raid each other, and incessant fighting among Diola villages is recorded both in Diola oral history and in colonial accounts (Dinis Dias 1946; Girard 1969; Lopes de Lima 1836; Taborda 1950a). Ambona hailed originally from Kassu, a Baiote village about 8 kilometers from Susana, but he was brought to one of Susana's as-yet unfederated villages as a young boy to herd cows for a distant uncle. Ambona grew up to be a great warrior, and conducted many successful raids on outlying hamlets and villages, either scattering their residents or bringing them to settle in one of Susana's villages. After several successful campaigns, Ambona decided that he would make Susana invincible, but in order to do so he would need to unite Susana's still distinct and autonomous wards, as well as its mixed "firstcomer" and "newcomer" population. By this time, most of Susana's neighborhoods were permanently hosting families from conquered villages. In a strategic attempt to strengthen Susana's fragile sense of unity, Ambona and other elders officially prohibited the open expression of "immigrant" origins, hoping to erase such distinctions and create a common identity among Susana's residents. To this day, ancestral origins from one of the outlying and conquered villages, such as Caipa or Sebutul, are not openly discussed. Susana residents downplay "original" and "newcomer" distinctions in the service of greater unity, although these distinctions are still known, and can be recognized through names, lineage histories, land holdings, and whispered (and quickly suppressed) conversations. I was often told, especially by members of "original" Susana lineages, that it was deemed highly inappropriate to openly discuss the fact that they were "real" Susana residents, whereas others were "not from

here.” In some cases, such a remark could be disciplined through a hearing at a spirit shrine and a fine. Susana residents even pride themselves on the fact that they have done away with a status distinction preserved in neighboring villages – that between original inhabitants and slaves (sing. *amikelau*; pl. *emikelai*). *Amikelau* can be glossed as both “slave” and “stranger,” so it holds the simultaneous meaning of “someone bought/sold” and “someone from another village.”⁸⁹ In Susana, no such distinctions are made, and no one can call anyone else an *amikelau*.

Susana’s suppressed immigrant past provides a telling example of how history is manipulated to serve present ends—in this case, the consolidation and unification of a village population for defensive purposes in the context of omnipresent war. But the unexpected result is that the suppression of such distinctions helps pickle them in a particularly potent brine; that which is meant to be forgotten simmers just below the surface and subtly intrudes into social interactions in myriad ways. This phenomenon recalls Kopytoff’s discussion of frontier societies, which upheld an outward appearance of status equality among all members, and strangers in host societies thus became “internal secrets.” This was especially important given the need to maintain adherents in frontier societies through “good treatment” of new members, no matter their formal status. As Kopytoff notes:

An important aspect of good treatment was to make knowledge of their precise status a strictly internal matter. A secret guarded by autonomous kin groups, particularly in

the uncentralized African societies, has always been the secret of ‘who is’ and ‘who isn’t’ a real relative, as opposed to a ‘stranger’ or ‘slave.’ Vis-à-vis the outside world, the strangers could hold their heads high by being publicly defined as relatives... (Kopytoff 1987: 48).

Although Susana residents regard their having abolished *emikelai* distinctions as placing them on the moral high ground relative to neighboring villages, Susana’s Diola still distinguish among various kinds of strangers, encoded in both behavioral and linguistic practices. Other than *amikelau*, Diola have several terms to describe different types of strangers. An *amasorau* is a guest or stranger, and implies a reciprocal and almost proprietary relation between the guest and host. One’s *amasorau* is the person who stays with you, and vice versa, when visiting each other’s villages. *Amasorau* also has a temporary feel to it – someone who visits for a short time but does not settle in the host village. An *abilabilau* is similar to an *amasorau*, but can stay for a longer time and can come from farther away, even Europe. *Alulumau* refers to urban – or, in one Diola glossing, “civilized” – people. This is the term most often employed when referring to whites, or other Africans (Diola or non-Diola) trying to emulate whites. Finally, *apasianau* refers particularly to African strangers, including those from other ethnic groups, who become longtime or permanent residents in Susana. Descendants of such families are likewise considered *epasianai*, even if they intermarry with Diola. Fula families in Susana were often called *epasianai*.

The most relevant aspect of these linguistic and attitudinal observations is that they expose the difficulty of incorporation—for Diola and non-Diola alike—into Susana society. Incorporation and integration, even for other Diola, is not a simple and straightforward affair, as it is made out to be in much of the literature on West African coastal societies. It is an extremely prolonged and sometimes impossible process, and although Susana's Diola readily portray themselves as receptive and tolerant hosts, their deeply ingrained collective reticence to erase or even diminish the boundary between landlord and stranger—which is invisible to the casual observer—cannot help but be felt as exclusion and rejection by longtime residents, especially those who, by virtue of their birthright, consider themselves to be full and equal Susanans.

With regard to the Fula population, this tension is perhaps best expressed in the different narratives regarding Fula arrival and settlement in Susana. When discussing the May 30th conflict, Diola readily point out that Fula—especially those of the younger generation—had “forgotten their own history.” From a Diola perspective, the comportment of certain segments of the Fula population smacks of amnesia—or worse, ingratitude. As one Susana Diola resident reasoned: “If you invite someone into your home, does he then have the right to claim the house for himself and push you out onto the veranda?” In Diola reckoning, Fula were permanent guests on Diola land. But Susana's Fula population—especially those born in Susana—clearly did not perceive of themselves as guests in Susana. Rather, Fula accounts of the conflict are saturated with a sense of belonging, not as guests or strangers, but as “children of Susana.”

Such a difference in perception is further reflected in the different tones through which Fula and Diola residents discuss the conflict, and each other. When I spoke with a Fula elder about the incident, he recounted his continued disbelief, even after three years, that such a thing happened. “Never,” he said, bewildered, “never had this happened before.” Whereas Fula were profoundly emotional about their loss—of Susana as their rightful residence, of their livelihood in the cashew groves, and of their neighbors, friends and family—Diola residents in Susana were unemotional about the episode itself, and silent regarding any personal or familial connection with their former Fula neighbors. To be sure, part of this distinction in the post-conflict context has much to do with Diola having gained the upper-hand, returning to “normalcy” in their village life, whereas Fula families were still feeling the sting of being dislocated, living as refugees in São Domingos. But, even beyond this, Diola residents in Susana never expressed remorse or any emotion at all regarding the plight of the Fula families with whom they had once shared close friendships.⁹⁰ It was clear to me that, while Fula had felt very much like they belonged in Susana, and there was no question of their rightful belonging there, Diola thought nothing of the kind, and even after generations of residence and intermarriage, continued to think of them as temporary guests.

Even early colonial commentaries on Diola norms regarding these issues tend to cast Diola as particularly unbending when it comes to integrating outsiders or modifying cultural practices. “Felupes are considered the most resistant of all ethnic groups in Guiné to the acceptance of our customs,” remarked a Portuguese colonial observer.

“Also, they have few outside influences since they rarely emigrate and they do not allow the establishment of other races [sic] on their land” (Lehmann de Almeida 1955: 618).

Boundary Blurring

One of the remaining questions is, of course, why. Not so much why each side was unaware of the other’s sense of the “relationship,” but why Diola were/are so unyielding when it comes to integrating strangers. Returning to Simmel’s concept of the stranger, the Diola-Fula case enables an exploration into Simmel’s key question: “what happens when people bring *into a group* qualities not inherent in it” (Levine 1979: 35, emphasis in original). As Levine suggests, the stranger

Makes us aware of ourselves by indicating the boundaries of selfhood. The experience of and responses to this mixture of closeness and remoteness, of threat and excitement, is a distinctive social formation which continues to demand attention wherever there are formally bounded groups and others who step across their boundaries (Levine 1979: 36).

An alternate view to the emphasis on the political aspects of ethnicity is one that views boundaries (no matter their bases) between groups as essential for the production and reproduction of identity. Barth (1969) generally receives most of the credit for this insight. This perspective, however, can be recognized in a number of earlier works,

including Simmel's discussion of conflict (1908). As Simmel rightly (and presciently) notes, the most intransigent forms of conflict often occur between groups who are not strangers to each other. "Where enough similarities continue to make confusions and blurred outlines possible, points of difference need an emphasis not justified by the issue but only by that danger of confusion... The degeneration of difference in convictions into hatred and fighting only occurs when there were essential similarities between the parties" (Simmel 1908: 42). This observation is echoed in Watts's (1999) discussion of the "narcissism of minor differences," as well as in Southall's (1972) study of twinship in East Africa. The point here is that the construction and emphasis of difference among groups takes on particular importance and strength in contexts that risk such boundary confusion; difference is instituted and emphasized when similarity threatens to obscure it.

Tambiah asks whether we can push this point even further in an attempt to explain ethnic conflict:

The greater the blurrings of and ambiguities between the socially constructed categories of difference, the greater the venom of the imposed boundaries, when conflict erupts, between the self and the other, 'us' and 'them.'... Can we push this process of creating and repudiating the intolerable 'other' in current ethnonationalist conflict any further? Can we say that it is because that component of 'sameness' that the ethnic enemy shares with you, and because your enemy

is already a part of you, that you must forcibly expel him or her from yourself, objectify him or her as the total other? Accordingly, that component of ‘difference’ from you, whether it be allegedly ‘religious,’ ‘linguistic,’ or ‘racial,’ is so exaggerated and magnified that this stereotyped ‘other’ must be degraded, dehumanized, and compulsively obliterated? (Tambiah 1996: 276).

Although it would be untenable to suggest that such a drive caused this conflict, perhaps Tambiah’s wary hedging provides some insight into why Diola so adamantly oppose Fula return. To be sure, there are other, more easily identifiable factors involved in such a stance, the reclamation of land surrounding Kandembã being foremost among them. But it might be worthwhile to consider the post-conflict hardening of Diola attitudes as, in part, a reaction to increasing boundary confusion between the two groups. As Skinner observes in the conclusion to his edited volume,

The very social mechanisms which should enable strangers to maintain their personal and social detachment—mechanisms that often give their indigenous group its coherence and permit it to perpetuate itself—create conflicts and contradictions between strangers and their hosts. A simple exchange of goods and services between

strangers and their hosts, for instance, generates social bonds and particular attitudes which limit the ability of one group to be absolutely objective in its relation to the other. The more intense the social interaction...the less objective their attitudes toward one another (Skinner 1979: 280).

According to Shack and Skinner, the problem for the host society is to find some way of incorporating the stranger while maintaining some aspects of his strangeness—a process they call “the institutionalization of marginality” (Shack and Skinner 1979: 16). We have seen how Diola are able to do just this with newcomer Diola, by incorporating them into land-sharing and lineage structures but maintaining an aspect of their strangeness through the denial of access to certain hereditary spirit shrines. But, with their Fula neighbors, it was Diola cultural marginality that was being institutionalized, even though Diola were the hosts, landlords, and demographically dominant group. In this way, different responses to different kinds of strangers complicate notions of incorporation, boundaries, and cultural belonging.

Fortes’s distinction between internal and external strangers may be useful here. An internal stranger comes from the same cultural and political community as host group, whereas an external stranger is a foreigner or alien who may be left in peace but cannot be assimilated (Fortes 1975).⁹¹ Werbner picks up on this distinction in his discussion of “indigenous reconstruction” and “exotic reduction” (Werbner 1989). Although Werbner primarily focuses on regional cults in West Africa, much of his theoretical exposition and

conceptual approach is relevant to general problems of strangerhood and incorporation. Werbner opens up questions of power and domination in processes of incorporation by focusing on the incorporation of stranger members into personal security cults (better known in the literature as anti-witchcraft cults). He casts processes of incorporation and exclusion as moments of cultural translation, not just in terms of the anthropologist rendering the “native” culture intelligible, but in understanding the processes through which “natives” understand each other (Werbner 1989: 225).

Following Fortes’ distinction between internal and external strangers, he discusses the different methods of incorporation required for each group. External or alien strangers called for “exotic reduction”—the incorporation of highly diverse stranger elements through the adoption and transformation of external strangers’ cultural codes. Internal strangers, on the other hand, required a process of “indigenous reconstruction”—a renewal or revival of beliefs and practices held to be traditional to the host group. Exotic reduction entailed an appropriation of foreign codes and rituals, a domestication of the unfamiliar in order to master and redefine it. Werbner’s account of personal security cults and the movements of their members across West Africa shows that such processes of appropriated knowledge were unidirectional: the South appropriated the cultural codes from the North, but not vice versa. Thus, the mode and manner of this incorporation process was not (contrary to Faustal de Coulanges’ classic formulation of religious evolution) a matter of boundary transcendence and leveling of differences. Rather, such one-sided incorporation tactics established or reinforced political and cultural dominance of southern groups over northern ones. It was, in Werbner’s apt phrase, “a privileged

transcendence of boundaries” (Werbner 1989: 233). By appropriating ritual codes, southern groups achieved cultural domination over alien strangers. Tracing the history of these cults in West Africa, Werbner notes that the problem of external strangers diminishes and the problem of internal strangers becomes exacerbated in the 1950s with the rise of “quasi-nationalism” and provincialism. “In one mode or another these cults continue to be concerned with inequality, strangers, and a cultural predicament in relation to them. What changes is the kind of stranger that is most problematic, and thus the kind of predicament that most needs to be grasped and managed in and by the cults” (Werbner 1989: 236). Thus, there is a concomitant shift in incorporation mechanisms from exotic reduction to indigenous reconstruction, and hence, from place-bound to person-bound religion.

Werbner’s discussion eventually leads to themes of religious pluralism, conversion, and the necessity of properly historicized regional analysis. But one of his key questions—“how the ritual and organization of the cults relate to the recoding of inequality and differentiation, from one phase of the field to the next” (Werbner 1989: 225)—is significant in the Diola-Fula case. In essence, Werbner is tackling the problem of cultural translation between hosts and strangers in an attempt to make sense of inclusivity and exclusivity as opposite, but sometimes simultaneous, tendencies. This is the closest ethnographic reading of Simmel’s “betwixt and between” stranger into wider dynamics of incorporation, exclusion, and boundary maintenance.

Questions of pluralism and social continuity

At what point do “outsiders” or “newcomers” become outright members of a community, even if they are in the minority, and does their continued marginal status create, eventually if not inevitably, fertile ground for polarization? Although the facts of this particular case suggest that it might have been resolved or prevented through effective administration or a host of other well-timed interventions, this question lurked closely behind people’s attitudes and actions on both sides. Diola, as the majority and “original” residents, expected a certain measure of respect and deference from the “newcomer” Fula. In Diola reckoning, Fula were permanent guests on Diola land, and while Diola hospitality conventions are welcoming and generous, they come with the deeply ingrained sense that guests can never be fully integrated members of the community. Most Diola in Susana readily admit that, had the Fula residents not built a mosque on the controversial site, the same conflict would have erupted over almost anything else. Although such retroactive predictions are impossible to verify, these assertions suggest that friction had been escalating between the groups for a long time. Even those who claim that Diola actions were tied to changes in the national political climate are quick to point out the longstanding tensions between the groups. As one non-Diola Susana resident observes:

If Nino had stayed in power, no Diola would have dared to do anything like this... Fula would have built their mosque and nothing would have happened to it. They would have left it alone. They were afraid of the PAIGC regime. But

after the PAIGC regime left, that's when this started. But the real problem started long before this mosque business. Long before. The change of regime opened up the opportunity to do something that was a long time in coming.

How, then, are such different perceptions about community membership, belonging, integration, and “outsider/insider” relations to be reconciled? Given that the Guinean land law bestows equal weight to state law (*lei positivo*) and customary law (*usos e costumes*), in such cases of inter-ethnic dispute, whose customary law prevails? Is the majority group—the perceived *dono de 'tchon*—always given more weight, and if so, what does this imply for minority rights and pluralism? How can both customary law and inter-ethnic integration be valued and supported? These are all questions that require careful consideration in developing land regulation and establishing institutions to articulate the actions of local populations and state authorities.

In the Susana case, the roles of a range of social actors—young men, state administrators and politicians, journalists, and military personnel—shed light on certain aspects of postcolonial experience in Africa, especially in shaping and interpreting so-called “ethnic” conflict. But perhaps more intriguing—and more troubling—the structural and historical features in Susana, especially those that have a bearing on the conditions of possibility for incorporation and pluralism, help explain how such seemingly rapid polarization between the groups might have actually been brewing for quite some time.

The analytic value of this case lies less in the moment of collective violence on May 30th, which briefly captured and focused national attention on this out-of-the-way place, and more in the ongoing processes of incorporation and exclusion that continue to challenge postcolonial Guinea-Bissau in its effort to become a peaceful pluralistic society.

Epilogue

In October 2002, there was a series of community-wide meetings in Susana to move ahead with plans to build a maternity clinic and health workers' residence. Collective work started in December 2002: a group of women cleared the brambles and brush behind the current clinic in order to make a space for the maternity center, while a group of men cleared the controversial plot of land across the clinic which will be the site, once again, of the health workers' dormitory. Diola men in Susana, led by the secular neighborhood representatives who comprise the *comité de tabanka*, drew up plans for the facility and obtained clearance from the current state appointed administrator, now a Manjaco man.

Both Diola men and women worked collectively for several weeks to construct their respective buildings, and the walls of the spacious health workers' and patients' dormitory were completed in early February 2003, shortly after the women completed the maternity clinic. Both structures were roofed in June 2003, just before the onset of the rainy season. Diola are justifiably proud of their work, which was no doubt spurred on by the collective sense of urgency to utilize the controversial plot of land before any

further claims were laid upon it. In some ways, building these facilities represents a kind of closure for Diola on what they call “our problem with Fulas,” as well as serving as tangible proof of their claim that the land was intended for a project that would benefit the entire community. Fula are quietly resentful of these recent activities. But, for the most part, Fula no longer concern themselves with that specific plot of land. They are more concerned with returning to their houses and orchards and former peaceful lives in Susana.

Conclusions

Man's position in the world is defined by the fact that in every dimension of his being and his behavior he stands at every moment *between two boundaries*...The boundary...is our means for finding direction in the infinite space of our worlds. By virtue of the fact that we *have* boundaries everywhere and always, so accordingly we *are* boundaries (Simmel 1918: 353, emphasis in original).

In the Prologue I argue that stories provide a powerful analytical entrée into complex phenomena by enabling a multiplicity of voices, causes, and connections to be woven together among often disparate topics. I then proceeded to discuss the three main stories that emerged as pivotal in Diola-land during my fieldwork there. Even though the central plot of each story centers on distinct domains—modes of livelihood, religious affiliation, and ethnic relations—they are deeply connected in important ways.

Each section of this dissertation makes explicit a relatively new set of tensions in Diola social life. Part One considers the tension between the central importance of rice and its increasing scarcity. Part Two explores a growing recognition—over a fifty year history—of the tensions between Mission and village beliefs and practices. And Part Three examines tensions between Diola and Fula cultural styles, especially as manifested in land use, work, and host-migrant relations.

Whether the context is one of environmental change, missionary pressure, or conflicts between the two predominant ethnic groups in Susana, the deeper storyline traces how Diola villagers are confronting limits that become especially apparent in moments of crisis. These limits manifest in material, cosmological, social, and moral frames, and they challenge preconceived relationships—on both individual and collective levels—within and among these spheres. Part One focused on the ways that Diola villagers are responding to their own acknowledgement of a dramatic decline in rain and rice. Despite the pressure to change their modes of livelihood and methods of social interaction, most residents are maintaining—and sometimes reinforcing—the very practices that perpetuate and perhaps exacerbate their predicament. This is the essential paradox captured by Abayam’s metaphorical image of “feet in the fire.” Likewise, in Part Two we saw how missionary pressures to change religious beliefs and practices catalyzed Diola reactions to what many perceived as the limits of conversion. The decision of the majority of Diola Christians to participate in traditional male initiation ceremonies, despite PIME prohibitions, exposes the ways in which Diola confront the limits of integrating or harmoniously combining the religious (and social and moral) options and opportunities in

their midst. Finally, Part Three examined a different set of limits, alternately perceived and discussed in material, moral, and matrimonial terms, and textured by particular actors' interests and involvements. Again, pressure on various fronts resulted in a reinforcement of long-established patterns of incorporation and exclusion. As with Parts One and Two, the conflict between Diola and Fula residents in Susana speaks to the tenacity of custom and the endurance of social forms despite changing circumstances.

In some ways, Parts Two and Three follow from the core problem most closely explored in Part One. Efforts to reinforce customary practices, such as male initiation, and desires to establish Diola dominance (or at least exclusivity) in response to perceived Fula encroachments are accentuated because of the very precariousness brought about by the decline in rain and rice. This is *not* to say that environmental change and supposed scarcity have brought about assertions of ethnic-based authenticity and exclusivity. As I have elucidated in each section, the motivations for participating in (or desisting from) male initiation and the lead up to the mosque destruction come from a multifaceted and diverse array of sources and need to be understood in their particularity and complexity. But our attention to those details need not obscure how each of these stories relates to a generalized problem of social change and continuity at the level of livelihood, especially in the Diola context where livelihood is so intimately and intricately bound up with concepts of personhood, social relations, cosmology, and cultural identity.

Boundaries

Throughout the dissertation I explore how these concepts of personhood and configurations of social relations are being simultaneously challenged, reinforced, and transformed as Diola respond to the tensions and structural transformations underway in Guinea-Bissau. Each chapter thus tells a story about boundary exploration and boundary critique in process. The various tensions and dynamics at work catalyze Diola efforts to assimilate a different set of observations—about their natural and social landscape—that have to be evaluated. Likewise, Diola values condition and sometimes constrain their judgments about which observations matter and why. In developing their individual and collective responses, Diola villagers are asking themselves whether they can maintain business as usual, as well as what boundaries are available to them to reconstitute or reinforce. These efforts to recognize and critique boundary judgments uncover conflicts over observations, values, and cultural styles. And the disjunctures among Parts One, Two, and Three reflect, to some extent, the very unevenness of these processes.

The Neo-Boasian concept of cultural boundaries, especially as explicated by Bashkow (2004), may be useful in considering how Diola villagers are engaged in a kind of boundary work.⁹² Boundaries, according to Bashkow's reading of the Boasians, are not "barriers to outside influence or to historical change, but...cultural distinctions that were irreducibly plural, perspectival, and permeable" (Bashkow 2004: 443). By distinguishing boundaries from barriers, we move away from a concept of boundaries that requires viewing cultures as stable and bounded units. Rather, a Boasian concept of boundaries as

porous and plural enables analysts to explore both their dynamism and the multiple purposes they serve. As Bashkow states,

Boundaries are continually being asserted everywhere by the people we study...and they do not serve only illiberal functions like the reinforcement of prejudice and the curtailment of freedom. Boundaries also serve expressive, contrastive, constructive functions in culture. They are meaningful even where they are arbitrary, socially consequential even where they are crossed (Bashkow 2004: 444).

The boundaries Diola villagers maintain between hard work and laziness, knowledge and ignorance, village and Mission, Diola and Fula, and even between life and death are not just a reflection and reassertion of their core cultural beliefs and practices. They are generative and “interested, always drawn relative to particular contexts, purposes, and points of view” (Bashkow 2004: 449). And, more to the point, they underscore the paradoxical character of boundaries: by drawing conceptual lines based on symbolic oppositions between wet-rice agriculture and cashew farming or commerce, women’s and men’s knowledge, Diola and Christian concepts of personhood and time, and Diola and Fula sensibilities, they may actually be opening the possibility of transgressing these very boundaries.

Boundaries actually facilitate the interpretation and integration of cultural difference *within* a culture. Whatever the forms it takes, the experience of foreignness is part of everyone's world, and cultural boundaries, in serving to map, evaluate, and delimit culture, simultaneously *project* it onto the foreign other, ethnocentrically, in the form of the projecting culture's values and self-conceptions. In effect, cultural boundaries are crucial symbolic divisions that enable people's action, thought, and expression relating to, as with other things, the foreign (Bashkow 2004: 452-453, emphasis in original).

Perhaps even more germane than a Neo-Boasian approach to the concept of boundaries in this respect is Simmel's essay "The Transcendent Character of Life." For Simmel, boundaries are also necessary and made apparent by the traffic across them. In his characteristic rhetorical style, Simmel tells us that every boundary is "unconditional, in that its existence is constitutive of our given position in the world, but that no boundary is unconditional, since every one can on principle be altered, reached over, gotten around" (Simmel 1918: 354). This sense of boundary-making is connected to our limited knowledge of the consequences of our actions, our perpetual position between knowing and not-knowing, past and future.

The slightest consideration shows how every single step of our life is determined and rendered possible by the fact that we perceive its consequences, and likewise because we perceive them only up to a certain point, beyond which they become confused and finally escape our vision altogether (Simmel 1918: 354).

This perspective is echoed by David Parkin when he reminds us that, despite a general scholarly (and particularly Africanist and postcolonial) turn to respect for indigenous wisdom, “none of us in our daily lives has as much knowledge as we would like of the long-term implications of our current practices and beliefs” (Parkin 1994: ix-x).

Connecting Stories

Another way in which stories about a particular people, place and time can be powerful is in their resonance with other stories in very different contexts. The detailed portrayals of contemporary Diola lives are important for understanding the particularity of this place and its people, but it is admittedly an out-of-the-way place and not currently on the radar screen of geopolitical interest. But the ways in which Diola are responding to a set of changed circumstances connects with a larger story, in which we all participate, about coping with the acknowledgement of a finite world. Whether we are discussing a wet-rice economy, an oil-based economy, a megalopolis reaching its limits, or an ever more globalized world in terms of our impact on each other and the planet, we all have our feet in the fire to some extent. We sense, and occasionally even admit, that we face pressing

problems. But our responses, like those of Diola villagers, sometimes ignore and even exacerbate those very problems. Thus, even though the case of Diola in Guinea-Bissau might seem like an extreme situation, what Diola villagers are currently intensely experiencing is not so significantly different from what others, elsewhere, confront. Even given the particularities of the conditions and responses in Diola-land, we can identify some broad structural parallels. There is, for instance, something deeply familiar about naming a problem and not responding, or responding in a way that worsens our conditions, or responding in a way that distances us from our nearest neighbors and kin. The contradictory character of such responses is also a hallmark of responses in similar predicaments, even if on a different scale, elsewhere.

As noted in the Prologue, Abayam's evocation of "feet in the fire" is equally compelling in terms of what it exposes and what it eclipses. Recognizing the need to change—that is, feeling the fire's heat—does not necessarily lead to conscious and coherent efforts to change at an individual or collective level. The misleading aspects of a metaphor that suggests intuitive and rapid responses to a felt and articulated problem obscure complex phenomena that tend to reinforce continuity rather than promote change. Throughout this dissertation, I have explored some of the ways that Diola respond to their experience of having their feet in the fire, and how and why these responses can, unto themselves, undercut coordinated efforts to change the conditions of their very predicament. Again, the discontinuity among Parts One, Two, and Three reflects a general principle: change is rarely uniform in all dimensions, and neither are the human alliances in coordinating responses to those changes.

Simmel contends,

That we do not simply stand within these boundaries, but by virtue of our awareness of them have passed beyond them—this is the sole consideration which can save us from despair over them, over our limitations and finitude. That we are cognizant of our knowing and our not-knowing, and are likewise aware of this broader cognizance, and so forth into the potentially endless—this is the real infinity of vital movement on the level of intellect. Every limit is herewith transcended but of course only as a result of the fact that it is set, that is, that there exists something to transcend (Simmel 1918: 358).

Ultimately, what I saw and was able to document during my relatively brief stay in Susana was a particular phase of social change and continuity: the maintenance and sometimes hardening of the very social forms that exacerbate—however unwittingly—Diola villagers’ central problem. How long this can go on, what unexpected pressures and opportunities, and ultimately, what new “structures of feeling” might emerge from this dynamic remain important questions for both Diola residents in Guinea-Bissau, and for our own understandings of social change and continuity.

Endnotes

¹ All personal names, except those of widely known figures in the national political field, have been changed.

² These are not, however, the issues I planned to examine when I arrived in Guinea-Bissau in October 2001. I had come to Susana, the central village in Guinean Diola-land, to study inter-ethnic relations, and in particular to do a fine-grained analysis of a so-called ethnic conflict that occurred in the village in May 2000. Shortly after I began fieldwork in Susana, though, I realized that my proposed research agenda did not adequately address many of the more pressing concerns of the local population, and so I shifted my research in response to the unanticipated empirical conditions I encountered during the course of my fieldwork. My research efforts were guided largely by the events and issues that emerged from observation, daily interaction, and ongoing conversations with community members during fieldwork, and although this was a frustrating and seemingly incoherent process at the time, it allowed me to collect a wide range of information and become aware of topics and themes that I had not considered prior to my arrival in Guinea-Bissau.

³ In this sense, I take as a point of departure Isaiah Berlin's concept of value pluralism. Berlin's gripe with Western philosophy, from Plato onward, is its relentless "pursuit of the ideal," its monistic framework through which, age after age, a single, true, universal goal is sought for (and often imposed on) all humankind. His critique of monism is repeated through many of his writings (see Berlin 1998a; 1998b; 1998e; 2001; 2002). Berlin contends that monism is not only practically impossible, undesirable, and often dangerous, it is also conceptually incoherent. Instead, what we must come to realize, and to grasp with its full implications, is that ultimate ends conflict. Again, Berlin expresses this same thought throughout his oeuvre, and is especially clever at uncovering it in writers previously unrecognized for having made such a contribution (Berlin 1998c), or by bringing attention to lesser known thinkers whose valuable insights in this realm Berlin brings to light (Berlin 1998d; 1999).

⁴ A 1955 colonial source exploring the eating habits of "the Felupe" estimated the population at that time to be 8000 (Lehmann de Almeida 1955: 618).

⁵ I have opted to use the term "Diola" instead of "Felupe" as this is currently preferred among Diola themselves, who consider "Felupe" to be a Portuguese misnomer. The word "Diola" most likely came from Mandinga travelers to the area, and only became accepted internally in the 19th century. In other scholarly literature, spellings for Diola include Jola and Djola. Other Guineans typically refer to Diola as Felupe in their narratives.

⁶ Baum notes the same trading dynamics among Senegalese Diola villages: "[T]here was an economic complementarity within each township that was built on unequal access to certain economic resources. The trade of river products such as fish or salt for the palm wine and palm kernels of the forest reinforced the sense of allegiance to *oeyi* and Hutendookai with bonds of trade and economic self-interest" (Baum 1999: 28).

⁷ See Forrest (1992) for an excellent discussion of Guinea-Bissau's village committees.

⁸ A new wife brings with her the paraphernalia of women's domestic work (rice pounder, cooking pots, baskets, etc.). Such objects used to be furnished by the bride's extended family, but since the early 1970s, young girls are typically sent to work as domestics in Ziguinchor and Gambia, and more recently Bissau, in order to earn enough money to purchase these items.

⁹ The *budjandabu* is an iron-tipped fulcrum shovel Diola and other cultural groups in the area use to till the rice paddies. Usually this is considered quintessentially male labor, but there are some circumstances (such as widowhood) which lead women to use the heavy instrument to cultivate borrowed land.

¹⁰ Similar shrine societies exist throughout the Senegambian region (see, for example Brooks 1993 and Forrest 2003).

¹¹ In the nearby Baiote village of Elia, the *ai* is not subject to many of these restrictions, but he can never leave the bounds of his own village.

¹² The same process was repeated the following decade when Catholic missionaries first came to the area and wanted to set up their base of operations in Susana. Susana's elders again refused, and the mission was

sent off to outlying villages before coming back and insisting—with Portuguese backing—on establishing themselves in Susana (see Part Two).

¹³ The independence struggle which united the causes of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde reflects the lasting nature of the intertwined histories of these two areas. There had also been much inter-marriage between Guineans and Cape Verdeans, especially among the educated elite. Additionally, mobilizing the rural population was a strategic insight of Cabral's, given that roughly 90 percent of population was involved in agricultural production (Lobban and Forrest 1988: 17). Unlike other Portuguese colonies, Guinea-Bissau had only a hand-full of large plantations. Cabral was thus denied the two most obvious gripes for instigating a socialist, anti-colonial revolution: there was no "working class," or for that matter, even a critical mass of disgruntled wage workers, to unite; and, given the historic lack of plantations and white settlers, land shortage was not a problem in most areas.

¹⁴ In Diola villages just a few kilometers closer to the Senegalese border these collective work groups are called "société." Incorporation of Portuguese/Crioulo or French words into Diola typically follows this pattern of proximity to the Senegalese border. Diola in the forest villages where I resided most often use the Crioulo word "asosiason" when referring to these work groups.

¹⁵ It should be clarified that even when Diola co-produce with extended kin and/or cooperative work groups, the rice crop is always stored in the household granary of the conjugal family whose fields were cultivated. There are no communal granaries beyond the household level.

¹⁶ In terms of how this amount relates to the average income in Guinea-Bissau, according to the World Bank approximately 88 percent of the population lives on less than \$1 a day (IRIN: 2003).

¹⁷ Diola wrestling matches involve ceremonies to honor village ritual elders (*ai-i*). Among other expenditures, these ceremonies require abundant rice for collective feasting.

¹⁸ There are many other reasons to resist the wholesale adoption of cashew farming, given massive fluctuations of the value of cashews in the international markets, as well as unpredictable shifts in national policies that regulate the cashew market. Some Diola villagers factored these risks into their decision-making regarding cashew farming, although most expressed more concern over the "laziness" that growing cashews, as opposed to rice, would cultivate among Diola farmers. These concerns seem well-founded based on Temudo and Schiefer's observations of similar dynamics among Balanta in Guinea-Bissau's south: "The forced exchange of rice for cashew nuts which was promoted by the government increased the difficulties to mobilize Balanta youth for rice production. They turned instead to the production of cashew which requires less physical effort and is not as dependent on the weather as rice production... Thus, the introduction of the cashew culture reduced incentives for rice production (Temudo and Schiefer 2003:398).

¹⁹ To be sure, Thompson is neither the first nor the only scholar to consider social change in these ways. But it is rare to find all of these analytical elements within a single, empirically grounded essay.

²⁰ It is difficult, Williams insists, to distinguish between a really new phase with elements that are oppositional and/or alternative to the dominant, from something that is "merely novel" and still part of the dominant (Williams 1977: 124).

²¹ As I will describe in Chapter Four, an *ai*'s death is not immediately revealed among the lay population, and sometimes as many as three months will pass before his death is announced. Senior shrine priests attend to all immediate funerary processes, including burial. Other exceptions to typical burial practice include lepers and slaves (*emikelai*). Lepers are buried quickly, without the usual public funeral dances and songs preceding burial. They are wrapped in a banana leaf rather than in burial cloths. *Emikelai* (and their descendants) are buried in the same cemetery as non-*emikelai*, but their burial has one additional practice: once the corpse is placed in the grave, a cord is tied to their toe. This string extends up to level ground and is tied to a stick or tree near the grave.

²² There is a certain measure of pride in being an *atolhau*, perhaps arising from the certainty of death, the necessity of burial, and hence the universal dependence on their services. *Batolhabu* sometimes tease their friends, jokingly asserting their superiority based on the fact that they can bury them. *Batolhabu* are further distinguished by their exemption from a rule regarding chiefly visitation prohibitions: an *ai* may not enter a layperson's house, unless the head of household is an *atolhau*.

²³ Diola traditional calendrical practices do not number the years, so these school-trained *batolhabu* mark graves with years from the Gregorian calendar.

²⁴ *Ai-i* are not disinterred.

²⁵ There are, however, other posthumous ceremonies conducted by kin, according to the position, rank in a ritual office, or other distinguishing aspects (such as leprosy) of the deceased. These usually take place within the first few years after burial, although some can happen thirty or even fifty years later.

²⁶ Previously, lepers would reside at the *Sambunasu* shrine, where family members would tend to them. The shrine priest is responsible for conducting ceremonies to prevent leprosy from spreading to family members of lepers, even long after their death.

²⁷ In Susana, the last *huwokuñahu* dance was in the early 1980s.

²⁸ You will remember, by contrast, that red is the only color not permissible in burial cloths, thus signaling a necessary distance between death and birth before they can be brought back together.

²⁹ The recent appearance of these trucks has, in part, to do with the prolonged separatist conflict on the other side of the Senegalese border, led by the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC). Given sporadic, low-level fighting—as well as rampant land mines—in the forests around Senegalese Diola villages, palm wine tapping has become a dangerous endeavor. Senegalese entrepreneurs have tapped into the abundant palm wine production in Guinean Diola villages to supply the thirsty Senegalese population. From 2001-2003, trucks laden with empty plastic jerry-cans came to Guinean villages once or twice a week as villagers waited by the side of the dirt road to fill up the 25-litre jugs from their own holdings in exchange for 125 CFA/litre (less than 25 cents).

³⁰ Given virilocality, female work groups within each neighborhood are divided between those comprised of affines and those comprised of agnates. In-married women, however, perform the overwhelming majority of female agricultural labor, partly because unmarried women and girls now often seek temporary work as domestics in Bissau, Senegal, and Gambia. Although they are primarily defined by their collective work activities, work associations are also important social groups and comprise the closest-knit set of relations beyond the family. Most Diola do not get deeply involved in each other's lives and troubles, but members of work associations take on a more active role than most in providing advice and counseling to each other. When I became inducted into a work association, I found that I had suddenly acquired a group of people who felt it was their right and duty to advise me on all kinds of things, often reprimanding me when they thought I had made a social error; they did this much more than my adoptive family ever did. Furthermore, in addition to pooling their labor to work each other's fields, and pooling their earnings to hold a collective feast, the work associations with which I became familiar in Guinea-Bissau sometimes collect dues from their members which they hold for other objectives, whether as a trust for medical or other emergency purposes, or as a way to save money and collectively buy a desired item, like matching cloth skirts that they wear at festive occasions and mark their members as belonging to the same association.

³¹ This is also where I depart from Netting's (1993) otherwise compelling account of smallholders. Although Netting rightly refuses both evolutionary and economically maximizing models to evaluate smallholders as a social form, he over-romanticizes intensive cultivation as an adaptive—even ideal—type, glossing over the fact that some intensive cultivators can no longer maintain their practices in a sustainable way. Most of the characteristics that define smallholders, according to Netting, certainly apply to Diola, especially the observation that “intensive cultivators often differ from extensive (i.e. shifting) cultivators in the values attached to hard work, perseverance, and frugality” (Netting quoted in Linares 1970: 223). However, the aspects of high crop yield and sustainability so central to Netting's argument for a “smallholder alternative,” at this juncture in Diola history, do not (Netting 1993: 9).

³² Even outside observers have noted the centrality of hard work among Diola. When people in Bissau (both Guineans and Europeans) found out that I was living in Diola-land, they typically had two things to say: “Those Diola, they work hard,” and “Diola have lots of secrets.” (I deal with this second observation in the next chapter.)

³³ As in most West African societies, witchcraft can only be used on members of one's own ethnicity, and is most often used among kin. The case of Alfredo exemplifies some of these aspects of work ethic and witchcraft. Tio Alfredo is an elderly Manjaco man who came to Susana in the 1950s to escape brutal forced labor campaigns in his own area. His older brother was already in Susana, and he joined him, working on his nascent peanut farm. He soon settled and brought a Manjaco wife to Susana, and had several children, one of whom is now a teacher in the Susana school and is married to a Diola woman. Tio Alfredo continued to be an industrious farmer, producing an abundant peanut crop when the market was at its height, and substituting peanuts for cashews when that market became more promising. He now has the largest cashew orchard in Susana, and works hard in order to produce enough cashews to trade for sacks of

rice that sustain him and his son's family for the entire year. Many people have told him that, if he were Diola, he would be dead by now. The fact that he works hard does not diminish their resentment towards him, or make him acceptable, because he works hard at something other than rice agriculture and his work yields more than rice agriculture ever could at this point. But since he is Manjaco, they have left him alone.

³⁴ The intersection between these two types of production—agricultural and informational—reminds us of the etymological history of that central, but now often neglected, anthropological concept of culture (see Williams 1983: 87-93).

³⁵ For recent studies that challenge the dichotomy between secrecy—especially around magicity—and modernity, see Lurhmann (1989) and West and Sanders (2003).

³⁶ “Ukai beh” is an abbreviated form of the complete question: “Kama mukai ubeh.”

³⁷ Simmel was clear on this point, too: “Out of the counter-play of these two interests, in concealing and revealing, spring nuances and fates of human interaction that permeate it in its entirety” (Simmel 1950: 334).

³⁸ This aspect of religious knowledge residing within a priest class, and being largely inaccessible to and unquestioned by lay people, made for an initial comfortable (or at least familiar) fit between Diola religion and Catholicism (see Baum 1990: 338).

³⁹ Baum (1999) also discusses Diola techniques for acquiring knowledge in his study of Diola religious history. The two methods Diola employ to learn history, according to Baum, are from stories told by elders and through use of special powers, such as dreams and visions (Baum 1999: 16). Moreover, van Tilburg (1998) explains that girls and women are not instructed in matters of reproduction—such as menarche and childbirth—until they are actually experiencing them. And it would be considered entirely inappropriate for anyone to ask about such matters.

⁴⁰ Early in my stay in Susana, I was instructed on basic norms of privacy, such as yelling out “kon kon kon” when approaching someone's house, to let them know well in advance that someone was coming. Or, when approaching anyone talking in the dark, always saying “Inje muh” (Here I am) to warn the talking people that someone is nearby and within earshot and if they are saying something private, they should stop. Likewise, in the forest, when approaching someone's grove where men sit and drink and talk under the sheltering fronds of oil palm trees, one always announces oneself, in the same way as above, from a reasonable distance. Such norms indicate both a respect for privacy, and reveal the complicity involved in acts of secreting objects or information from intruding eyes and ears by announcing one's immanent arrival. I saw people in Susana exhibit these behaviors regularly, but of course I also saw them being violated.

⁴¹ Quite unintentionally, establishing my own residence apart from my adoptive family's, where I continued to eat every night, enabled a great deal more communication than would have been possible had I remained in a Diola household. I initially decided to set up a separate house when I was still primarily focusing on the conflict between Diola and Fula residents, and I thought a neutral location (e.g. in neither a Fula nor Diola household, and in a mixed neighborhood) would be an important way to position myself as an investigator into the events that surrounded the conflict. This ended up being less relevant than the autonomy and privacy that an independent household enabled for people to stop by and chat about things that they would have been more reserved about (or simply silent) in their neighbors' homes.

⁴² Some Diola found this imperative to share so oppressive that they removed themselves entirely from the context of such norms. I once met a young Diola man from Caton who was making a living as a fisherman in another part of the country. When I asked him why he left the fish-abundant waters of Diola-land, he said he could never get anywhere if he fished in his natal land. “Every time I would return from a day of fishing, I would walk through the village and my fish would disappear. I'd have to give some to this person and that person and this person, and soon enough I had no fish to sell or even eat. No, I had to get away. We Diola, we make it so difficult.” A similar rationale was offered when I inquired into why no one in Susana bothered to fish, even when they complained daily about the lack of fish for their rice. Why go to the trouble to fish if you end up giving it all away to the people you pass on the way home? (See Peterson 1993 for a discussion of these dynamics among foragers.)

⁴³ The experience of widows once again elucidates this economy of information and sheds further light on the inadequacy of the concept of nightmare egalitarianism. As I discussed in the previous chapter, despite the large presence of widows in Susana they remain a largely invisible and silent population. In my own discussions with widows, many stressed to me that they do not talk about their hardships and struggle to survive with others. This raises an interesting problem: if nightmare egalitarianism is based on the attitude

that wealth is morally reprehensible, then why is it that the poorest of the poor are not celebrated, are not valorized as ideal members of the society? What is revealing about the examples above and the predicament of widows is that, for Diola, concealing possessions is not about celebrating poverty, but about performing a kind of equality in self-sustenance. By displaying only objects that everyone else also has, and secreting those that might distinguish one, Diola perform a lack of difference in the material world. The ideal is to be—or at least create the image that one is—in a middle zone of self-sustenance. If one rises above this level, there are diffuse leveling sanctions. Likewise, if—like widows—one falls below, there are consequences of mockery and shame. Displaying or performing poverty is kept very much within the realms of expected and normative material conditions. But widows fall out of this norm. They are silent about their particular kind of poverty because this would expose the shameful fact that they are unable to sustain themselves. And they are invisible to their kin and neighbors because—as a consequence of their extreme conditions—they have become non-persons.

⁴⁴ School is now referred to by either the Portuguese word “*escola*” or the French-based neologism “*elekolai*.”

⁴⁵ My discussions with Maribel on this topic were extraordinarily open, probably due to both the unusual intimacy of our friendship and, more importantly, her recognition that my outsider status—not to mention resources—would be of service to her.

⁴⁶ See Nooter (1993) for an interesting discussion on secrecy and masking traditions in late 19th and 20th century African art.

⁴⁷ This analysis resonates with Fabian’s (1990) key questions regarding power and performance: how Africans in diverse contexts use concealment as a strategic resource for the management of sociopolitical reality, and perhaps most importantly, how these strategies yield unintended consequences.

⁴⁸ Likewise, van Tilburg notes the contrast regarding openness and secrecy with regard to sexuality and reproduction. In the West, and especially in her native Netherlands, openness regarding sexuality and reproduction was seen as essential to health. This contrasts with the silence that surrounds sexuality and pregnancy among Diola.

⁴⁹ A counterpoint to this theme is developed by those who study the use of secrecy—particularly in the form of ambiguity and deception—as a “*weapon of the weak*” (Jackson, 1982; Petersen 1993; Scott 1985).

⁵⁰ We might see Diola responses to their current predicament as a manifestation of this patience, and a logical outcome of their approach to knowledge. Although the lived experience of patience can be an anxious state, it comes with a general confidence that things get resolved with time, according to their own norms, not according to an outsider’s sense of urgency. This can be extremely frustrating to observe, and it can look like no one is doing anything. It remains an open question whether we can, in fact, regard the current period of time as a period of patience.

⁵¹ I am not including here the equally vast literature on the longer history and influence of Islam in Africa.

⁵² As explained in Chapter One, *awasena* is the term Diola use to refer to their religion, and an *awasenau* is a person who participates in Diola traditional religion. *Awesenau* literally means “one who performs ceremonies” (see, also, Baum 1990).

⁵³ Pope Pius XI merged the two seminaries in 1926 when he officially recognized PIME as a Catholic missionary institution headquartered in Rome. Other countries where PIME is currently active include Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cote D’Ivoire, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Mexico, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Thailand, with approximately 550 missionaries spread throughout these countries.

⁵⁴ Translation from Italian by Peter Brown. There are 18 PIME priests and one PIME bishop presently in Guinea-Bissau.

⁵⁵ Even though Padre Marmugi began his school with both boys and girls, it seems that, after a few years, he concentrated solely on boys. Girls had far more domestic duties than boys, and girls were betrothed by the age of 7 or 8, after which time Padre Marmugi had little hope of regaining their attention. Also, girls were often sent to Senegal and the Gambia as domestics in order to earn enough money to acquire the basics for setting up a household once they were married, so their mobility disrupted Marmugi’s plans for a stable Mission education.

⁵⁶ The official name of Susana’s Mission is Nossa Senhora da Luz, although it was never referred to by this name during the course of my fieldwork. This was the original name chosen by the first Portuguese Franciscan priests (many Portuguese missions are similarly named) and kept on when PIME took over the Mission.

⁵⁷ A new church was built on the Mission grounds, and it was being expanded and rebuilt during my tenure in Susana, even though the population of those attending mass was diminishing.

⁵⁸ Other nuns had been posted previously to Bissau and Bor, but they were working as hospital assistants and not engaged directly in missionary work.

⁵⁹ The South American nuns have continued, to a limited extent, their predecessors' health work, although their efforts in this arena have earned them further disdain. The nun currently in charge of the small clinic is a particularly surly woman, with extremely poor interpersonal habits and a patronizing and arrogant attitude regarding the villagers that come—often as a last resort—to seek her help. Many residents who once relied on the Mission health clinic are now reluctant to seek care there, and those who do so often come away with further complaints. Some villagers who have received medicine there claim that the nuns use medication that is past its expiry date, sometimes scratching off the date just in case one of the few literate residents happens to notice.

⁶⁰ Padre Zé also cites another motivation for developing the Mission workshop: by providing a local source of wage-earning jobs, he can stem the flow of rural-urban migration of Diola youth looking to enter the cash economy, often with deleterious and destabilizing consequences for the migrants themselves and their home communities. Padre Zé has noted that it is one of his highest priorities to curb the flow of youth to urban areas, such as Bissau and Ziguinchor, as he sees the city as the site of much moral decay.

⁶¹ My own interweaving of narratives from Diola residents and Padre Zé portrays on paper something that very rarely—if ever—happens on the ground. One of the many things I realized in talking extensively but separately with Padre Zé and his parishioners is the ample gap in communication between them. This has built up over time and through many conflictual episodes, and perhaps it would not have made a difference in most cases, but it does help explain the extent to which motivation and allegations are attributed to either side from a wellspring of mis- (or lack of) communication and a steady erosion of trust.

⁶² This kind of pronouncement on maturity had a profound effect on Sipamiro's life much earlier. When he was 15 years old, he had a close friend who was a soldier in the Portuguese barracks. When the soldier left, he promised to arrange for Sipamiro to come to Portugal to visit him. He fulfilled his promise and invited Sipamiro to his wedding, arranging all of the papers and saying Sipamiro needed only to arrange 17 contas for the round-trip ticket. Sipamiro went to Padre Zé with the letter, and asked to borrow the money, which would be returned when he got back as the Portuguese friend had promised to reimburse him. Padre Zé looked at him and said, "*Abo i muito pikinino yinda. Si bu bai gos, bu ka na riba.* [You are still very small. If you go now, you will not come back.]" Based on this judgment, Padre Zé refused to lend Sipamiro the money, and Sipamiro has never had another opportunity to leave Guinea-Bissau. It is true that Sipamiro might not have returned to Susana—he might have found an opportunity to study more (which has been his lifelong dream), or to work and earn money and lead a different life. But this was, after all, his choice. Padre Zé's interest in keeping his flock in Susana led to a brusque judgment and, as far as Sipamiro is concerned, determined and sealed his fate as a "sufferer in Susana." Padre Zé also determined Sipamiro's life trajectory on another occasion. When Sipamiro finished the Mission school and received his fourth grade certificate, Padre Marmugi arranged for him to work in the Mission *oficina* as a mechanic's apprentice. They started on bicycle repair, and Sipamiro learned the ins and outs of bicycle mechanics. Just as they were starting on cars, Padre Marmugi died. Padre Zé removed Sipamiro from the *oficina* and sent him off as one of the new teachers in the outlying villages. Soon after, in 1975/6, he was transferred to Canchungo to teach classes there. Since then, he has been a teacher, and even though this might seem to be the better career path from a Western perspective, Sipamiro would have much preferred to be a mechanic. Teachers in Guinea-Bissau are all state functionaries, and as the state is generally bankrupt teachers are rarely paid. During the last several years, they are more often on strike than in the classrooms, and even when they are remunerated their monthly salary covers only the cost of one sack of rice, hardly enough to feed a large family.

⁶³ Elders can continue to delay this process for exceptionally good wrestlers. On the other hand, elders will sometimes enable orphans to jump a grade, permitting them to build earlier than their age-peers because "orphans have no one to take care of them, and can start their autonomous lives earlier."

⁶⁴ I was unable to date the initial use of buttons. Diola have had trading relationships with other Africans and Europeans for many hundreds of years, and I can only surmise that buttons became a trading object early on in these encounters. Until very recently, buttons were used only for decoration rather than as a functional item on clothing.

⁶⁵ For a provocative analysis of Diola beliefs about consanguinity and conception see Sapir (1977).

⁶⁶ When I asked Tegilosso what would happen if he suggested to a group of young men today, during one of their youth association meetings, that they take up this system again, he shrugged and said they would laugh at him and call him an idiot. “No one would agree to do such a thing today... Development and civilization have entered Susana.”

⁶⁷ There were actually two other houses with single men, but both men were considered to be outside the normal rules of marriage and family—one was mentally insane and one was a deaf mute—and therefore had atypical households and lives for other reasons.

⁶⁸ This was becoming more typical for youth in Susana. One of my friends, a Diola Christian man, identified this trend as one of the main causes of widows’ problems. “Young men who are old enough to marry refuse to do so,” he told me, “prolonging their youthful activities. They should become responsible, marry, claim their rightful rice paddies, and help their widowed mothers out by providing them with some rice. But they think only of themselves and do not grow up.”

⁶⁹ Susana’s population is, in fact, extreme in this realm. In other villages, such as Caton and Djifunco, the levirate system is still practiced, although it is starting to decline in these farther-flung villages too. The nearby Baiote village of Elia has come up with an interesting adaptation to levirate practices. In Elia, widows always receive a new husband, even if only in name. Sometimes, the new husband will be in Bissau or another city, or will be a very young man for a very old widow. Although the marriage is in name only, if both parties agree it can also be one in conjugal practice. There is no financial obligation on the part of the new husband to provide for the widow and her children. Rather, having a husband in name keeps the Baiote ceremonial system intact; a woman maintains her rights to her deceased husband’s goods—his rice paddy, his forest grove—and her sons take on the arduous work of plowing the paddy for the family. (If her sons are still small, her dead husband’s brothers will take on this responsibility until her sons come of age.) Elia has its own chief who is not under the jurisdiction of the Diola supreme *ai*, and also not limited by many of the restrictions imposed on Diola *ai-i*. He is, however, forbidden to ever leave the bounds of Elia, and in general he exerts a more proactive leadership role than other Diola *ai-i*.

⁷⁰ Even the role of a star in Diola versus Christian symbolism further highlights this contrast. Diola place the star firmly on a young man’s head and manipulate it to convey internal growth and transformation that culminates in the star’s removal. The predominant star in Christianity is, of course, the star of Bethlehem, towards which the wise men move, guiding them along a path to the literal birth of Christianity.

⁷¹ In fact, in recent Diola experience, most changes cited tend to be about deterioration, decline, moral decay, although even these are not conveyed as backwards movement along an assumed—but off-kilter—forward trajectory of progress.

⁷² When I began to contact members of the Fula community in São Domingos, they expressed their eagerness to discuss the events surrounding the May 2000 conflict in Susana. In fact, after my first discussion with a group of Fula “refugees,” other Fula residents who had previously lived in Susana began to seek me out, insisting that I document their version of the events, and afterwards I could rarely pass through São Domingos without being waylaid by Fula residents asking for an audience. Once, when I arrived in São Domingos too late to find transport down the wobbly road to Susana, and I spent the night in a bed set up at the local radio station, a Fula man knocked on my door close to midnight and asked that I record his whispered conspiratorial account, detailing the involvement of various national political parties in orchestrating the events that led up to the conflict in Susana.

⁷³ At first, when I thought this conflict was going to be the centerpiece of my research, I made an effort to display my own impartiality by securing a place to live in a “neutral” neighborhood, on the border between the former Fula neighborhood and the surrounding Diola neighborhoods.

⁷⁴ Here I am reminded of Renato Rosaldo’s account of the feud between Rummyad and Butag groups in *Ilongot Headhunting*, and his narrative, by his own admission, as situated from the perspective of the Rummyads, amongst whom he and his wife, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, resided. When Rosaldo admits, “...we knew all the Rummyads incomparably better than we knew any of the Butags,” I can easily substitute Diola and Fula for Rummyad and Butag (Rosaldo 1980: 67).

⁷⁵ The *bombolom* (Diola: *kagataku*) is a large slit gong used in several Guinean coastal societies as a form of long-range communication. Among the Diola, the *bombolom* is most often used for funerals and major ceremonies, although in the past it was used to announce an outside attack or organize a war effort.

⁷⁶ Others say the first *bombolom* to sound was from Nhakun, not Santa Maria. This would make somewhat more sense, since Nhakun has the spirit shrine Kandembã, which pertains to organized war-like activities.

⁷⁷ In Fula and other non-Diola accounts, people say that Diola men, women, and children participated in the mosque breaking, but in Diola accounts, only adult men participated, although women were made aware of what was going to happen, and they stood nearby and encouraged men by singing songs. Some say that, as men met at Acuió, women gathered at their most important spirit shrine—*Karahayaku*—and then came as a group to the mosque site.

⁷⁸ As one of my informants put it, “If you hear Alfa speak Diola, you would think he is from here.” This level of Diola fluency is rare among non-Diola inhabitants of Susana, even those born and raised there.

⁷⁹ One Diola participant in the destruction noted that Fula families stayed in their neighborhood and watched the proceedings: “They were in the street, watching. They did not come close to ‘the people of Susana.’ They just stayed and watched.”

⁸⁰ With the arrival of reinforcement troops from neighboring towns, Susana’s military population swelled, and the local army barracks (usually quite sparsely populated) overflowed. Several of the temporary soldiers were sent to sleep on the veranda of the small, unoccupied house next to Manuel’s, on the main road. Their proximity to the youth club, and the otherwise empty streets due to the military-imposed 7pm curfew, enabled them to catch the Serekule arsonist.

⁸¹ Since he was elected in February 2000, Kumba Yalla’s presidency was marked by increased instability in all governmental institutions. Yalla was deposed in a popularly supported bloodless coup on September 14, 2003, and replaced by an interim government. Parliamentary elections, which were slated and canceled four times since Yalla dissolved the Parliament in November 2002, took place in March 2004. Presidential elections took place in 2005, resulting in Nino Vieira’s victory. Vieira was president of Guinea-Bissau from 1980, when he deposed Luis Cabral in a coup, until 1998, when he himself was deposed through the widely popular 7de Junho war. Vieira has been in exile in Lisbon since 1999, and returned to Bissau in 2004 to initiate his bid to re-capture the presidency.

⁸² These religious affiliations do not at all mean that Diola-Fogny and Diola-Kasa no longer practice Diola traditional religion. Quite the contrary. These designations are just meant to flag the presence of major world religions among different segments of the Diola population (see Baum 1990, 1999; Linares 1992; and Mark 1985, 1992 for illuminating discussions about the integration of Muslim and Christian practices with Diola religion).

⁸³ Although Fula migratory patterns in the region are well-established, there continue to be longstanding debates as to Fula origin, some claiming Nilotic (or sometimes Jewish) ancestry, other emphasizing central and northern African provenance (Fage 1959; Horton 1976; Levtzion 1976).

⁸⁴ Again, Diola male initiation takes place only once every thirty years in each village. (For a detailed description of Diola and Baiote male initiation practices in the Casamance, see Mark 1992; Schloss 1992; and Thomas 1970). Preparations involve complicated coordination among residents to accumulate and distribute the massive resources involved in sustaining the increase in population—because of returnees and guests. Initiates and most of the adult male population typically remain in the initiation forest for three months. In Susana’s 1998 initiation, men opted to add another month onto their stay.

⁸⁵ This does not hold true for the Independence War period. Many of the current land conflicts stem from the period of instability during the 1960s-1970s, during which major dislocations—by Guineans who fought during the war and those who sought refuge in neighboring countries—created confusion over proprietary rights to land.

⁸⁶ Following Kopytoff, I use the term “incorporation,” instead of integration or assimilation, in order to give full weight to the notion of these groups as corporate entities.

⁸⁷ Most Diola women who married Fula men left Susana with the other Fula families in May 2000, although some have since returned. The experiences of these “inter-ethnic” families are important sites for further analysis in terms of how social actors negotiate conflicting loyalties (ethnic, familial, etc.) in moments of crisis.

⁸⁸ There is some debate as to when colonialism proper started in this region (see pp. 47-50 of Chapter One). Even though Portuguese explorers and traders had been present in the Upper Guinea Coast since the mid-15th century, their penetration into the interior was largely mediated by local elites and trading families (Barry 1998; Brooks 1993; Mark 1999). In the Diola region of what was then Portuguese Guinea, memory of Portuguese presence dates to the early-mid 1900s. Likewise, for the purposes of this analysis, I consider Portuguese colonial impact on the region to date to the mid-1900s.

⁸⁹ Historically, being an *amikelau* did not necessarily imply that one’s work was any different from one’s owner’s. Currently, these status distinctions rarely manifest themselves in daily life, and most younger

residents in villages that preserve these labels are unaware of who belongs to each group. The distinction surfaces only during betrothal rites (*emikelai* can only marry other *emikelai*) and burial practices, in which an *amikelau*'s grave is marked by a string which comes out from the ground and is tied to a stick near the gravesite. In one village near Susana, in which *amikelau* status is preserved in such marital and funerary practices, residents claim that *emikelai* arrived in the village in the form of fish excrement (or, in some versions, fish vomit).

⁹⁰ Such an attitude corroborates the analyses in Shack and Skinner's volume, as Skinner summarizes in his concluding remarks, "...in none of the cases discussed in this volume is there evidence that most of the members of the societies from which strangers were expelled expressed remorse. It can be argued that this apparent lack of concern was due as much to hosts' beliefs about alleged attitudes and practices of strangers, as to salient characteristics of human society itself" (Skinner 1979: 281).

⁹¹ Kramer borrows from Fortes' ethnographic work in his exploration of Akan notions of outsiders (Kramer 1993). According to Kramer, Akan differentiated among *ohoho* (free strangers from another Akan chiefdom), *ntafo* (non-Akan settler/trader), and *odonko* (slaves or potential slaves based on being foreign enough) (Kramer 1993). In general, Kramer examines the ways various African societies categorize, interact with, and incorporate foreigners in order to analyze changes and reinterpretations of strangers upon the arrival of Europeans in Africa.

⁹² Here I am drawing from a set of articles published in *American Anthropologist* (September 2004) that collectively posit a Neo-Boasian reclamation of anthropological concepts—such as culture, cultural coherence, boundary, and a German romantic, counter-Enlightenment view of difference—that have gone out of fashion during 30 years of epistemological critique. Interestingly, several of the authors in this set use the same philosophical anchors—especially Foucault and Bourdieu—that the anthropology they criticize has relied on; for instance, Bunzl (2004) reads Boas through Foucault and Rosenblatt (2004) reads Benedict through Bourdieu.

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