A Joking Nation: Conflict Resolution in Senegal

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Résumé
Le conflit qui oppose le Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance et l'État sénégalais a fait l'objet de médiation par diverses institutions, chacune ayant pour but de mettre fin au conflit. Cet article porte sur l'une de ces interventions qui se prétend issue de la tradition de la parenté à plaisanterie entre les Diolas et les Sérères. Il examine comment la parenté à plaisanterie entre les Jolas et les Sérères devient "instrumentalisée" en tant que méthode de gestion du conflit armé. L'article montre comment une pratique culturelle est transformée pour devenir un instrument de politique et donc, comment la tradition devient politisée. En passant, l'auteur montre qui la logique de l'instrumentalisation s'inscrit dans un imaginaire sénégalais portant sur l'état-nation. L'action inscrit le conflit dans un discours nationaliste et fait l'impasse sur l'économie politique qui est au fond du conflit. Il s'agit donc d'une contribution au débat actuel sur la résolution autochtone des conflits. Les méthodes traditionnelles de résolution des conflits ne devraient pas être comprises en tant que tradition a-historique mais plutôt en tant que geste de ré-interprétation du conflit par les organisations non-gouvernementales et l'État.

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Introduction
The number of armed conflicts in Africa has increased dramatically over the last two decades. In response to the failing attempts at conflict resolution by international institutions, interest has emerged in indigenous modes of conflict resolution. Indigenous conflict resolution is often equated with traditional conflict management. I.W. Zartman's (2000, 4) wide-ranging anthology of conflict resolution in Africa juxtaposes traditional with international methods of conflict resolution. A tacit understanding has it that international endeavors to enforce peace are "modern," while indigenous modes of conflict management are "traditional." But the assumption that traditional practices of conflict mediation can be considered an a-historical category is contentious. This article demonstrates that "indigenous" conflict management practices may not be "traditional" at all. Indigenous conflict resolution in Senegal is as much a product of modernity as the conflict it is meant to resolve.

Conflict resolution in Africa has attracted considerable attention from political scientists. They seem primarily interested in the identification of variables in the making of armed conflicts. These variables are incorporated in theoretical models that should render armed conflicts predictable and provide the knowledge to intervene in them. The models supposedly enable policymakers to identify root causes and suggest formulas for mediators to use to reduce disputes (Deng and Zartman 1991, 5). However, in addition to a formal positivist approach we also need an interpretive study of armed conflicts and their resolution. Anthropologists and historians have recently developed an interest in contemporary political conflicts in Africa (Lan 1985; Hutchinson 1996; Richards 1996; Clapham 1998; Behrend 1999; Ellis 1999). However, the anthropology of conflict resolution and reconciliation has yet to be written (Abbink 2000, 527). This article is meant as a modest contribution to the interpretation of indigenous conflict resolution.

The conflict addressed in this article is the insurgency of the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) supported predominantly by members of the Jola ethnic group, against the Senegalese State. Since the eruption of the insurgency in 1982 numerous efforts have been made to contain it. Such interventions ranged from attempts by the Senegalese army to crush the guerrilla movement, to peace demonstrations by secondary school students. The intervention to be discussed here was remarkably
different in at least one respect: its initiators claimed it was rooted in "tradition" and revolved around the alleged existence of a "joking relationship" between the insurgent Jola and the Serer, another Senegalese ethnic group. Because the Jola and the Serer have this joking relationship, they should not shed each other's blood and live in peace. Not only were the insurgents reminded of this moral imperative, they were also advised by their joking partners to engage in negotiations with the Senegalese regime.

The joking relationship is an old subject in anthropology, defined as "a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence" (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 90). French anthropologists were the first to signal the existence of such relations, denoted as parenté à plaisanterie in French (Labouret 1929; Paulme 1939, Griaule 1948). The British anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) then made joking relationships subject of theoretical reflection. While this article does not revisit this debate, the use of the joking relationship as an indigenous mode of conflict resolution presents an interesting anthropological issue. What we witness here, I suggest, is the appropriation of a tradition by a national regime. Its attributes are incorporated into a body of knowledge to be used by the State and its auxiliaries to pacify a rebel movement. A tradition embodied in practice is thus inscribed into a nationalist discourse and turned into a policy intervention. This article argues that the Senegalese State has canonised joking as a "tradition," appropriated it as a policy, and inscribed it into a nationalist discourse that imagines the nation as made up of ethnic groups related through joking relations.

A History of Interventions
Since the first manifestations of the separatist movement in 1982, many agents have mediated between the insurgents and the State. The first mediation between the MFDC and the Senegalese government was initiated by a number of high-ranking administrators and politicians of Casamance origin. They wrote a report, analysing the causes of the insurgency. The Mémorandum relatif aux événements de Ziguinchor (Décembre 1982 et 1983) was presented to the Senegalese government in order to overcome the mutual incomprehension between the Senegalese regime and the MFDC insurgents. Some of the authors involved in the writing of the report remained
committed to the resolution of the armed conflict, and were eventually involved in the peace initiative discussed below.

Since the publication of the *Mémorandum*, many actors have intervened to induce the insurgents to negotiate with the Senegalese regime. The governments of The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau have at various moments facilitated negotiations between the Senegalese government and the MFDC, presiding over meetings of the two parties at their territories (Marut 1999; Evans 2000; Gasser 2002; Foucher 2003b). The Senegalese government has also appointed various committees to conduct negotiations with the rebels. Other mediators, unrelated to the Socialist Party government, have been allowed to talk to the insurgents, such as Mr Abdoulaye Wade, in his capacity of President of the Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS). Other PDS MPs, such as Marcel Bassene and Omar Lamine Badji, have been allowed to meet the MFDC rebels in the hope that interlocutors originating from different regions of Lower Casamance would be able to speak to the different sections of the MFDC. Not only civilians, but the military themselves have been involved in the peace process, as some retired generals were asked to negotiate. The Roman Catholic Church, for its part, also felt responsible for the resolution of the conflict. (After all, Diaramcoune Senghor, the secretary-general of the MFDC, is a priest.) Members of the Church have made a protracted effort to persuade the insurgents to negotiate. Moreover, various non-governmental associations related to the Church got involved, such as CARITAS. Even the French Ambassador has offered to negotiate.

Interventions in the conflict have been so numerous that a general scepticism regarding their efficacy is preponderant among the Casamance population. Even the national media have become weary of initiatives to resolve the conflict. This is related to the belief that the insurgency has continued so long because some of the involved parties are presumably making a profit out of it. Such claims pertain to the trade in arms, the cultivation of marijuana, the illicit cutting of trees, or the smuggling of precious stones originating in other countries involved in protracted armed conflict. However, it has also been observed that those who negotiated their way out of the conflict (Front Nord in particular), did so on good conditions and have greatly profited from their participation in, and withdrawal from, *le maquis*. So it is perhaps not surprising that the public feels that mediators too earn extraordinary salaries and appropriate the
funds and materials intended to further the peace process for private purposes. Although such suspicion is to some extent justified, the perception of the pursuit of private interests is exaggerated. However, such feelings are part of a widely disseminated distrust of politics. Because *la politique* is seen as a dirty game compromising everyone involved in it, part of the population has taken recourse to what is sometimes thought to be a viable alternative: "tradition."

In other words, as a result of the failure of so many interventions and a general distrust of the political process, an interest in traditional modes of conflict resolution has emerged (Foucher 2003ab). Jola administrators encouraged “traditional” Jola authorities (*chefs coutumiers*, guardians of the sacred groves) to talk to the rebels and induce them to settle for peace. Other initiatives developed at grassroots level, as Jordi Tomàs demonstrates in his contribution to this issue of the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. The inhabitants of Oussouye have revitalised the institution of sacred kingship to discipline the various rogue elements of the MFDC in their constituency. Another initiative was developed by the youth association *Kayajoor* (“encounter” in Jola), which volunteered to bring peace to the region by reconciling adversaries within Casamance society. Their proposed methodology relied on otherwise unspecified “tradition” (*Walfadjiri* 6 March 2002: 2). In a number of ways the inhabitants of Casamance have taken recourse to “tradition” as the ultimate source of peace and reconciliation. Such initiatives are not entirely new: the Association Culturelle Aguène-Diambogne has worked towards the establishment of peace by means of a “traditional” mode of conflict resolution since 1993.

### Joking in Senegal

A myth of origin shared by Jola and Serer tells the story of the sisters Aguène and Diambogne:

One day, while the sisters were sailing down the river, a storm took them by surprise. Their boat broke in two pieces and each sister held on to one part. While Aguène landed at the left bank of the river, Diambogue landed at the right bank. Each of the sisters married and procreated. And so it happened that Aguène gave birth to the Jola, and Diambogne to the Serer.

This myth of a common origin of the Jola and the Serer is fairly well known among the Jola of Casamance. The myth is of considerable antiquity. In 1814 the French traveller Villeneuve reported an oral
tradition according to which Serer and Jola are descended from a common ancestor (Mark 2002, 109). The myth of Aguene and Diambogne clearly presents a charter for the joking relation between the Jola and the Serer. Although the apical ancestor remains unidentified, the myth claims that Jola and Serer are related by blood. It provides the cultural justification that enables them to refer to each other as cousins.

Joking and avoidance characterise particular relations of relatives, clans, or ethnic groups in many societies across the world. Joking is frequent between relatives by marriage and often occurs between a sister's son and his mother's brother (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 97). Among the Jola this relationship gives various rights and obligations to the joking partners. The sister's son (*asumpul*) can take away any item from his mother's brother's compound without giving prior notice. The mother's brother is obliged to lend his sister's son paddies, in case the latter might need some extra land. The relationship is clearly asymmetrical. Yet the sister's son also has certain obligations towards his mother's brother, such as the ploughing of his paddies. He will also be responsible for his mother's brother's body when the latter dies. The *asumpul* will wash and bury the deceased's body (Van der Klei 1989, 93). Joking relations generally include an obligation to mutual assistance and in most cases a person has important ritual roles to play at the life cycle ceremonies of his joking partner. Among the Jola the *asumpul* is the designated person to kill the cattle of his mother's brother at the male initiation ceremony. He then distributes the meat amongst those entitled to a part. In some cases joking partners act as mediators in conflicts in which their partners are involved. However, the most important characteristic of many joking relations is the prohibition against the shedding of the blood of the joking partner (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 112).

Joking relations also exist between patronymic clans. In Senegal such joking relations exist between Diop and Ndiaye, Diallo and Ba, Sonko and Badji. As the same patronym prevails among different ethnic groups, joking relations can transcend ethnic boundaries. Joking relations also exist between ethnic groups. Referred to in Senegal as *kaal* (wolof), *ndendiraagu* (pulaar), or *sanauya* (mandinka), joking relations exist between a number of Senegalese ethnic groups (Villalón 1995, 54; Wilson-Fall 2000, 60; O'Bannon 2002; Smith 2004). In Casamance, for instance, Balante and Fulbe can freely tease each other and do so frequently with regard to their
Muslim piety. Fulbe playfully tease the Balante, arguing forcefully that they are recent converts to Islam. The Balante may concede, but will not hesitate to reply that the Fulbe can frequently be seen drinking palm wine, even today. They will part company in good understanding.

Importantly, joking relationships should be differentiated in symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships [Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 90]. It has been suggested that asymmetrical joking relations have resulted from situations of political domination [Labouret 1929, 251]. As the Jola have never dominated the Serer, or vice versa, this hypothesis does not apply to our case. Moreover, it is clear that Jola and Serer are equal joking partners: both tease each other. The joking often revolves around the precise account of how they are related. Thus Jola and Serer tease each other about which of the two sisters sat in front, and which sat in the back of the boat. The order has connotations of hierarchy. Alternatively, the Jola teases the Serer that he is his slave, to which the Serer will reply that in fact, he is the king of the Jola. These *plaisanteries* constitute the joking relation that has been appropriated by cultural engineers to intervene in the Jola insurgency against the Senegalese regime.

Joking relations create an alliance between otherwise unrelated people. Joking protects the delicate relationship between people who are joined in one set of ties, but divided by others [Kuper 1983, 60]. Such relations are thus said to be another way of channeling conflict. How do these general observations relate to the Jola-Serer relationship? Historically, the relationship between Jola and Serer has indeed been potentially antagonistic. For centuries Serer fishermen have migrated south to settle in Jola villages during the dry season. From these bases the Serer fishermen conducted fishing expeditions in inland rivers and in the Atlantic Ocean. Such seasonal migration became commonplace in the twentieth century, but Cormier-Salem suggests that Niominka fishermen from Sine-Saloum (a Serer group), might have visited Casamance as early as the sixteenth century (Cormier-Salem 1992, 194). There are good reasons to assume that the joking relationship between Jola and Serer has its origins in this long history of contact and potential conflict over scarce resources.

**Organised Joking**

In his capacity of Governor of Fatick, a region predominantly inhabited by Serer, the Jola administrator Saliou Sambou realised that the
Jola-Serer relationship could possibly be used to further the integration of the Jola in the Senegalese nation. In collaboration with the Amicale des Sérères, he organised a Festival des Origines to celebrate the Jola-Serer relationship. Held in Fatick from 31 December 1993 to 2 January 1994, this cultural festival staged Serer and Jola dances, poetry, and music for an audience of Serer and visiting Jola. More than three hundred Jola travelled from Casamance to commemorate their cousinage with the Serer. Another five hundred Jola living in the region assisted the event, securing a marked presence of Jola in the audience. The festival was supported by the government and the opening address by Governor Sambou was attended by the Minister of State Robert Sagna, the Minister of Culture Mrs Coura Ba Thiam, the Minister of Equipment Landing Sane, and the Minister of Hydraulic Works Mamadou Faye. There were other political heavyweights, such as the Mayor of Fatick Macky Gassama, several Members of Parliament, Prefects, and Sub-prefects. In his opening address Governor Sambou sketched the precarious situation of Senegal and the current “partisan violence,” which the cultural festival was to address through a “retour aux sources.” He then went on to tell the myth of Aguène and Diambogne.

While most of the entertainment offered at the festival consisted of parades and performances by theatrical groups, the festival’s highpoint was a boat trip to Sangomar, a peninsula in the Sine-Saloum estuary. Sangomar is the place where the mythic sisters Aguène and Diambogne were allegedly separated by fate. The trip to Sangomar was a pilgrimage to commemorate this event and to celebrate the reunion of Jola and Serer at the Festival des Origines. This pilgrimage was generously covered in the national press and the joking relation between Jola and Serer was mediated as a fact of national significance. One can now see how this relationship is used to incorporate the Jola into the Senegalese nation. The adherence of the Serer to the Senegalese nation is incontrovertible: Senegal’s first President Léopold Sédar Senghor was of Serer extraction. If the Serer belong to Senegal, and the Jola belong to the Serer, it is implied that the Jola belong to Senegal too.

The success of the Festival des Origines was consolidated through the establishment of the Association Culturelle Aguène-Diambogne (ACAD). The statutes of the association state that it should contribute to the establishment of a peaceful solution to the Casamance crisis. Membership of the association was declared open
to all Senegalese — with a special reference to Jola and Serer — and the membership fee was set at five hundred francs per year. The statutes furthermore specified that annual meetings of the association were to be held alternately in Fatick and Ziguinchor, the capitals of the regions historically inhabited by the Serer and Jola populations. The new association should be financially independent.

The driving force behind all of this was Governor Sambou. Born in 1949 in Thionck Essyl, this Jola has made an impressive career in civil administration. With a degree in English from the Université Cheikh Anta Diop, and diploma’s from the Ecole Nationale d’Administration et de la Magistrature and Management Schools in the United States, he quickly rose in Senegal’s administration before becoming Governor of the region of Fatick in 1991. While making a career in the national administration Sambou has always maintained an interest in cultural matters, including “folklore” and “tradition.” As a student at the University of Dakar in the early 1970s he was actively involved in the cultural association of Thionck Essyl. Ever since he has promoted the use of Jola cultural heritage towards the development of Thionck Essyl in particular, and Senegal in general. Governor Sambou, although not openly associated with the Socialist Party (from 1960 to 2000 the dominating political party in Senegal), has many friends in that party. As a high-ranking civil servant he has always displayed unquestionable loyalty to the national government. Governor Sambou’s intervention in the Jola insurgency should therefore be considered as entirely subservient to the national government’s policy. For that reason the MFDC has sometimes brandished administrators of Jola origin like Sambou as Casamanqués (Foucher 2002, 399). The celebration of the Jola-Serer joking relation is indeed subservient to the creation of national unity.

In two interviews he kindly accorded to me, Governor Sambou explained how the joking relation benefited his work in a region predominantly inhabited by Serer. Being Jola, he felt he was highly respected. His opinions were well received. This allowed him to resolve long-standing conflicts between the Serer. In one case, he intervened in a conflict between two villages over the presidency of a local administrative body. While the villages were ready to assault each other, Governor Sambou placed himself between them and said, “the person who will shed the blood of a Jola will experience the consequences.” (Mystical consequences are thought to result from the shedding of the blood of a joking partner). In another feud
Governor Sambou invited the adversaries to respect each other “in the name of the kinship between Jola and Serer.” While these examples give a rather romanticised interpretation of the practice of conflict resolution, it is beyond doubt that joking engenders socialities conducive to the resolution of conflict. It is no coincidence that many administrators in the Sine-Saloum (the region inhabited by Serer) are predominantly of Jola and Tukulor extraction. Since the Serer have joking relations with both of these ethnic groups, administrators clearly benefit from the amicable feelings they generate. In this respect Leonardo Villalón notes that “Tukulor administrators who choose to play on these ties find that they have an advantage over their Wolof colleagues in their interactions with the Serer population” (1995, 54). Similarly, in the region of Ziguinchor, inhabited predominantly by Jola, many administrators are Serer. After the escalation of the armed conflict between Jola insurgents and the Senegalese army in the late 1990s, the Serer Birame Sarr was installed as Governor of the Jola-inhabited region of Ziguinchor. Although such nominations do not necessarily resolve complex conflicts, they do help generate goodwill for the administrators. For instance, when Thionck Essyl celebrated its male initiation in 1994, Governor Sarr and a delegation of Serer were invited to attend the ceremony. Addressing an assembled congregation of thousands of Jola, the Governor joked that he had come to kill the first bull. After all, at Jola rituals it is the responsibility of the joking partner to kill the bull and distribute the meat as he pleases. As a representative of the Senegalese government, Governor Sarr could easily be seen as an administrator imposed on the Jola by a foreign regime. By assuming the role of Serer, he assured that he was seen as a trustworthy ally. Like politicians, the Governor presented himself at this ritual to create a sense of conviviality (de Jong 2002). Governor Sarr explored the joking relationship as a means of promoting allegiance to the national administration.

In establishing ACAD Governor Sambou elaborated a policy already adopted by the Senegalese government. There can be no doubt about the presidential consent for this policy that privileges joking partners to govern each other. What could ACAD possibly add to this? After the association had been registered, local committees were established in Fatick, Ziguinchor, and Thionck Essyl. Such committees then created twinned towns that sent delegations to visit each other’s cultural festivals. ACAD also successfully organ-
ised two more national festivals, the first in Thionck Essyl in 1995, the second in Joal in 1999. (Interestingly, Joal is the place of birth of Senegal’s first president Senghor.) In addition to this, Governor Sambou and ACAD initiated meetings between groups of Serer and Jola. Most importantly, delegations of Serer were sent to Casamance and met with representatives of the insurgency in order to further peace negotiations.

What effect the interventions by ACAD may have had on the conflict remains to be established. The members of ACAD are generally convinced of the efficacy of their operations. Governor Sambou told me that Diamacoune Senghor (Secretary-General of the MFDC) and Sidy Badji (leader of Front Nord) cried when meeting a delegation of Serer, so deeply had they been moved. These meetings may indeed have generated such sentimental feelings, but in interviews supporters of the MFDC have confided to me that they reject mediation by the Serer, arguing that the Jola-Serer cousinage is a fiction. Moreover, they feel that it was a Serer, President Senghor, who betrayed them in the first place. (In his rally for the presidency Senghor allegedly promised political independence for the Casamance region in exchange for support of Casamance politicians. Although the Casamance politicians did offer their support, Senghor is alleged to have subsequently “betrayed” Casamance.) The insurgents realise that the joking relation is now used against them and therefore question its validity. However adamant supporters of the MFDC may be in that respect, it is conceivable that ACAD has contributed to the evaporation of the armed resistance against the Senegalese army. But we cannot be sure of this, as so many other variables need to be taken into consideration. Meanwhile, ACAD has become a formally recognised non-governmental organisation with annual meetings and a bureaucratic structure dominated by a familiar set of politicians. ACAD spokesmen have always denied the validity of my speculation that the majority of its members are also members of the Socialist Party, but the political entourage of ACAD undeniably consists of well-placed politicians. Saliou Sambou, Abba Diatta, and Robert Sagna are members of an old-boys network mobilised to appease their Jola “brothers.” Tellingly, ACAD selected Abdou Diouf as its benefactor. ACAD, while trying to reintegrate Jola insurgents in a national network of joking partners, was itself appropriated by the Socialist Party.
Ethnicization of the Joking Relation

The joking relationship is a form of alliance that privileges disrespect. "The only obligation is not to take offence at the disrespect so long as it is kept within certain bounds defined by custom, and not to go beyond those bounds" (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 103). Obviously, it is not always clear what custom prescribes. The literature often mentions cases whereby the court is asked to settle disputes resulting from "teasing" (Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Mitchell 1956). Although the joking partner is not supposed to take offence at the insults, joking does sometimes result in conflict. Teasing is precarious and requires the consent of both joking partners. If such consent is withheld it is most likely that the "joking" will not result in the relaxation of a precarious relationship, but lay bare all the antagonisms already entailed in it. As Radcliffe-Brown noticed: "Any default in the relationship is like a breach of the rules of etiquette; the person concerned is regarded as not knowing how to behave himself" (1952, 103). To make the existing joking relationship between the Jola and the Serer work in the context of the insurgency was a delicate cultural experiment.

Joking relations exist between people in clearly defined positions and are therefore predicated upon recognised cultural categories. Radcliffe-Brown (1952, 108-10) argues that joking relations emphasise the separateness of the groups involved. Indeed, the joking relation between Jola and Serer is predicated upon the existence of discrete ethnic categories. Of course, ethnic classification is a form of separation naturalised in patterns of intimate behaviour such as joking. In order to understand the historicity of the joking relation between Jola and Serer, one might ask how this system of ethnic classification emerged in the first place. We do know that the construction of ethnic categories was at the heart of colonial and postcolonial forms of governmentality. Throughout Africa, colonial administrations introduced ethnic labels in the administration of the colonial subjects (Amselle and M'bokolo 1985; Vail 1989). In Senegal, the ethnonyms "diola" and "sérère" were used by the colonial administration. I suggest that the use of such ethnonyms may have had an impact on how relations between Niominka fishermen and their hosts in Casamance were conceptualised. Only after such ethnic labels were fully appropriated by the populations designated as such, could the joking relationship between Niominka fishermen and their hosts in Casamance become enacted at interethnic level. A
joking relation between hosts and guests was generalised into a joking relation between Jola and Serer. In that respect the current joking relationship between Jola and Serer should be understood as a product of colonial governmentality. In another context Clyde Mitchell (1956, 37) has suggested that joking relationships came into being mainly after the establishment of colonial rule.

This explains why the joking partners need to communicate through a colonial lingua franca. Villalón (1995, 55) describes an encounter in which Jola and Serer teased each other constantly, not in Jola or Serer, but in Wolof. Villalón rightly points out that they could communicate only through this language. I have myself witnessed how complex conversation between Jola and Serer can become once third languages are ruled out. At an annual meeting of ACAD, the first thing to be decided was which language was to be used for the meeting. Wolof was rejected out of hand, simply because ACAD could not be seen using the language of the "oppressor" (Wolof is the dominant ethnic group in Senegal, and Wolof is spoken by nearly all Senegalese). French, since it was not spoken by all, was not a convenient alternative and Jola or Serer were only spoken by the respective members of their ethnic groups. Moreover, linguistic nationalism prevented the choice of the most frequently spoken Jola dialect (Fogny) over any other. It took an hour of Babel before it was finally decided that every speaker could speak his or her dialect, and that each speech was going to be translated by bilingual speakers. Wolof would have been more convenient.

This case demonstrates, however, that the joking relation is a form of sociality that emerged in a colonial context in order to manage relations between heterogeneous colonial subjects. Today, the joking relation between Jola and Serer is used to resolve the conflict between the MFDC and the Senegalese State. The question is whether a joking relationship is the right instrument to intervene in the conflict. Can a practice that is predicated upon ethnic classification, be used to manage a political insurgency? There is no doubt that the separatist movement was from its inception thought of as an ethnic movement dominated by the Jola. Although the insurgents themselves have always insisted on their regional footing, the Senegalese government has always tried to denounce the movement as a Jola affair (Geschiere and Van der Klei 1986, 226; Lambert 1998). In line with this government policy, ACAD addresses the insurgents as members of the Jola ethnic group rather than, say, citizens. To
demonstrate that such an approach does not necessarily address the problem of the insurgency, let me recall a rather atrocious event. In the last decades, the Jola population has felt increasingly marginalised and has feared for the loss of their traditional aquatic spaces (Cormier-Salem 1993). The MFDC has translated these feelings into a clear message to all immigrant fishermen. On 27 October 1992, thirty-one fishermen were massacred in Cap Skirring. On 11 November 1992 seven men were killed in Pointe-Saint-Georges. All victims were immigrant fishermen. Although not confirmed, it is assumed that Serer fishermen figured among the victims. In this particular instance, the competition for scarce resources apparently overruled the prohibition to shed the blood of a joking partner. The brutal murder of Serer fishermen demonstrates that the MFDC classified the Serer fishermen not as cousins, but as Nordistes without rights of access to local resources. By defining the insurgency as a "Jola" problem, ACAD seems to ignore the political economy of ethnicity. ACAD works on the assumption that ethnic identities are primordial, and negates that ethnic classification and the joking relation that is predicated upon it, are products of a political economy. Instead, ACAD situates the joking relationship between Jola and Serer in time-less "tradition."

*Imagining a Nation*

The discourse of Governor Sambou and those engaged in the political use of the joking relationship seems profoundly rooted in a widespread Senegalese discourse on cultural identity that has its origins in the writings of Senegal's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor and the scholar Cheikh Anta Diop. Throughout Senegal references are often made to Senghor's well-known adage of "ouverture et enracinement." Senghor always emphasised that Africa's future lay in its capacity to assimilate Western values while retaining its most precious African values. This dialectic was most forcefully conveyed in his famous motto: "Assimiler, non être assimilé!" His ideas on the place of Africa in world history were expressed in the ideal of a universal civilisation that should incorporate African values. Before this historical apogee would be reached, however, history had to pass through stages of micro-nationalism (such as African nationalism) that would nonetheless contribute to the end result. The most valuable characteristics of African civilisation would be incorporated in the corpus of values that was to become *la Civilisation de*
l'Universel. The discourse on ouverture et enracinement, although nowadays not as passionately proclaimed as it was back in the 1960s, still echoes in today's Senegalese discourse on development. While the policies of sub-Saharan countries such as Senegal are very much constrained by international financial institutions, politicians have recourse to the enracinement of their policies as an alternative to the global policies imposed upon them. Governor Sambou states that his conflict resolution policy is deliberately meant to create an alternative to the impositions made by Western donors. He rejects a universalising discourse of modernisation and suggests that the Senegalese government should take recourse to "tradition." Sambou believes that enracinement makes policies more suited to the African situation. In fact, Governor Sambou's ideas about the beneficial role of tradition in modern Senegal are part of a widespread discourse that conceptualises "tradition" as a resource with a potentially healing effect. A "return to tradition" (retour aux sources), he argues, should protect the Senegalese against the alienation resulting from modernity. As a matter of fact, the valuation of "tradition" seems to have become a standard element of Senegalese modernity (Senghor 2000).

Senghor's ideas on métissage are still prevalent in the adage of convergences culturelles. The concept of cultural convergence is very much part of today's Senegalese discourse on ethnicity (see, for instance, Diouf 1994). However, equally significant in that respect is Cheikh Anta Diop's oeuvre. He is known for the hypotheses that Pharaonic Egypt was a black civilisation and that all African populations migrated from the Nile Valley to their present habitats (Cheikh Anta Diop 1979). These ideas of Senghor and Cheikh Anta Diop are clearly reflected in the contemporary concern with conflict management. Thus, Senegalese scholars and administrators argue that Jola and Serer have a common ancestry, referring to traits that these ethnic groups are allegedly sharing such as their political organisation, agricultural technologies, words, rhythms, and ceremonies. Such interethnic comparisons are not only made between Jola and Serer, but are extended to all other ethnic groups. These comparisons are used to demonstrate that the Serer are not only related to the Jola, but also to the Tukulor, as the Serer also joke with them. Having established cultural convergence across ethnic groups, the Senegalese scholars and administrators then attribute a common origin to these diverse groups. Significantly, such an origin is invariably located outside Senegal. Thus Serer, Wolof, and Lebou are said to
have a common origin in the Nile Valley, from where they allegedly migrated to their contemporary habitat. Another variant of this quest for communal origins designates Kabu, a sixteenth to nineteenth century polity located on the upper stretches of the Gambia, Casamance, and Cacheu Rivers, as the hearth of several Senegalese civilisations. It is sometimes argued that Jola, Bainunk, Mandinko, and Balante have a common origin there. Such a discourse attributes a communal origin to a number of different ethnic groups and suggests that Senegal — as a set of alliances between ethnic groups — existed prior to the colonial creation of a territory designated as such. In other words, such a discourse permits the imagination of a precolonial Senegalese nation. As Governor Sambou would have it, “Vous voyez donc que tout le monde est frère et que le peuple sénégalais a existé avant la nation sénégalaise.”

This hypothesis and methodology are an obvious legacy of Cheikh Anta Diop. In his Nations nègres et culture [Cheikh Anta Diop 1979], he already suggested a communal origin for the Fula, Tukulor, and Serer in the Nile Valley. His ideas have engendered a specific imagination of the Senegalese nation. Yet, whereas Cheikh Anta Diop limited his analysis to ethnic groups living north of The Gambia, the contemporary intellectual project includes ethnic groups living south of The Gambia. In other words, the endeavour is to include the Jola in the intellectual model that underlies Senegal’s national imagination. This attempt to imagine a more inclusive nation is the result of an intellectual engagement of politicians, high-ranking administrators, and intellectuals. The study of communal origins and what is termed “cultural convergence” is not only pursued in academic contexts. It is also actively promoted by the national government through the organisation of conferences on the theme. In 1994, a conference on Les convergences culturelles au sein de la nation sénégalaise was held in Kaolack. The colloquium had been ordered by President Abdou Diouf to encourage reflection on the historical cultural exchanges between Senegalese ethnic groups. Organised by the Ministry of Culture, it was hosted by Kaolack, referred to as a city of exchanges. Speakers included academics, writers, administrators, and traditionalists. The conference proceedings were published with financial support from French development assistance [Tambadou nd]. Although the MFDC insurgency is not explicitly mentioned, it was very much at the minds of the organisers of the conference. The opening addresses by President Abdou
Diouf, the Mayor of Kaolack (Abdoukaye Diack), and the Minister of Culture (Mrs Coura Ba Thiam), all refer to the "revendications ethniques," "haines tribales," or "tendances centrifuges" that haunt contemporary Africa. The most astounding reference to the conflict is by President Diouf himself, who refers to "micro nationalismes et tribalismes d'un autre âge qui ... ramènent l'humanité vers la barbarie" (Tambadou nd, 10). The colloquium was meant to remedy that regressive trend, as suggested by Minister of Culture Mrs. Thiam:

Le Colloque sur "les convergences culturelles au sein de la nation sénégalaise" magnifiera, vous le savez, l'unité nationale sénégalaise édifiée à partir des brassages opérés par nos peuples au cours de l'histoire. Ces brassages ont abouti à ce miracle que nous demandons à Dieu de sauvegarder, et qui fait que nous sommes tous, quelle que soit notre ethnie, membres de la même et unique famille (Tambadou nd, 19).

Over two days about twenty papers were presented covering various aspects of historical cultural convergence between Senegalese ethnic groups. Governor Sambou presented a paper on the Festival des Origines (Sambou nd). Other papers dealt with similar themes, such as the origins and migrations of ethnic groups and the joking relations between them. In addition to the exclusive meeting of scholars, an inclusive popular gathering was organised in the stadium of Kaolack at which traditionalists recited oral traditions to convey a similar message of cultural convergence to the populace. However, Tambadou observes that the traditionalists abused this occasion to sing praise, instead of transmitting the knowledge deemed appropriate to the occasion. He nonetheless concludes in a positive mood, arguing that the conference successfully established that the cultural unity of Senegal results from historical cultural exchanges — and that the nation is therefore not a political construct. This, he suggests, demonstrates that citizenship in Africa can transcend ethnic identification. From this, I think, it may be concluded that the conference was held not so much to critically examine cultural convergence, but to disseminate the idea to the participants and the wider public and thereby propagate a sense of national identity.

A Joking Nation
The practice of joking is structurally predicated upon difference. In the case of the Jola-Serer joking relation, this is a difference between
ethnic categories. However, the Senegalese scholars and traditionalists who reflect upon the joking relationship between Jola and Serer have embraced the notion of cultural convergence. This ideology of *convergences culturelles* emphasises the exchanges and similarities between the Jola and Serer ethnic groups. For instance, the theorists explore the existence of Serer patronyms among the Jola. The most striking example of such exchange is the name of the leader of the MFDC, Father Diamacoune Senghor. Having a Serer patronym, his Jola identity seems awkwardly impure. Could there be a more convincing fact to demonstrate that the Jola insurgents are in fact part of a Senegalese nation? In the ideology of *convergences culturelles* this fact very convincingly exemplifies the Senegalese history of brassage. However, its discourse reduces the alterity of the other and thereby negates the separation between the two categories. Such is clearly exemplified in the brochure published for the first Festival des Origines: "*Le destin avait séparé AGUENE et DIAMBOGNE, leur fils veulent se retrouver pour TOUJOURS.*" However, its discourse reduces the alterity of the other and thereby negates the separation between the two categories. Such is clearly exemplified in the brochure published for the first Festival des Origines: "*Le destin avait séparé AGUENE et DIAMBOGNE, leur fils veulent se retrouver pour TOUJOURS.*" 

Whereas joking is predicated upon separation, the above quotation suggests that such separation is the result of a fate that needs redressing.

The incorporation of a practice of joking into a discourse on cultural convergence obviously deprives the practice of its structural logic. This is the result of a concerted effort by Senegalese politicians and scholars to reflect upon and transform an embodied tradition into a political programme. Of course, such a reification of culture happens in every instance of the academic gaze. The subject of inquiry is objectified into disembodied analysis, which is subsequently used for political ends. What makes the inscription of joking into a discourse of brassage interesting is that it inscribes a practice predicated upon difference into a discourse predicated upon same

ness. Let us briefly examine this. The notions of métissage, brassage, and *convergences culturelles* do not challenge the right to difference of Senegal’s citizens. But these concepts are inscribed into a national discourse in which difference is only recognised as long as it is merely embellishment of a fundamental sameness: Senegalese nationality. References to ethnic or religious difference are only permitted as long as they do not challenge Senegal’s unity. The recognition of cultural difference in the formula of *convergences culturelles* ultimately inscribes a national project: "*Nous avons cru et continuons à croire que l’unité retrouvée entre les deux cousins à plaisanterie sera*
le début des retrouvailles pour une commune volonté de vie commune de tout le peuple sénégalais” (Sambou nd, 108). The difference between the joking partners is subsumed under a communal “sénégalité.”

Joking allows the joking partners to recognise each other's particularity, while enabling the creation of community (Smith 2004). The kind of community envisaged by Sambou and ACAD is clearly a national community. Their attempt is to incorporate the Jola insurgents into a national community of ethnically diverse subjects. But the theory of the joking relation as employed by the politicians and peace brokers is ambivalent about the civic status of the joking partners. It conceptualises the joking partners both as ethnic subjects and Senegalese citizens (see De Jong 2002; Mamdani 1996). However, it needs to be emphasised that the Senegalese State recognises ethnicity in a tacit way only (Diouf 2004). A formal recognition of ethnicity is politically dangerous. The recognition of difference by the Senegalese State is therefore limited to the recognition of difference in folklore only. This appeared in the practicalities of the peace process itself, for instance, at the signature of the peace treaty on 30 December 2004. President Wade had announced that the event were to be “republican”, not partisan. Party flags and other signs of the PDS party were forbidden. Yet some Jola kings, decorated with their usual regalia, participated in the event and Jola tradition was thus acknowledged. While party politics were suppressed, the expression of ethnic allegiance was allowed. Jola and Serer traditions were given even greater prominence at the opening of the peace negotiations in Foundiougne, a Serer town in the Fatick region. These negotiations were meant to finally resolve the dispute between the MFDC and the Senegalese State and were attended by politicians, representatives of civil society, and various (but not all) factions of the MFDC. At 30 January 2005, these negotiations were opened with a host of festivities in which all manner of Jola and Serer songs and dances were performed. Meetings were scheduled at sacred groves and Serer diviners were invited to investigate the prospect for peace. Not unsurprisingly, they divined that peace would be established for once and for all. “Tradition” was thus invoked to authorise the peace talks and to further the establishment of peace. In spite of all this “traditional” song and dance, disagreements between the various factions of the MFDC soon re-appeared. The acknowledgment and authorization of ethnicity by the State does not necessarily ensure co-opera-
tive citizenship. Unfortunately, the recognition of ethnic folklore negates the political economy of ethnicity that is at the root of the MFDC insurgency.

**Conclusion**

The term "indigenous conflict resolution" is problematic. The adjective "indigenous" effectively qualifies indigenous conflict resolution as a-historical and traditional. The case discussed here suggests that a mode of indigenous conflict management actually originated in an historical encounter. Joking subsequently became a way of managing interethnic relations in a colonial context in which the administration turned ethnicity into a cornerstone of its governmentality. Joking has since become part and parcel of Senegal's cultural forms that moderate interethnic relations. Administrators and cultural engineers have now used this cultural form in an attempt to resolve a political conflict. But the way in which the Jola-Serer joking relation is used to intervene in the MFDC insurgency is cast in a discourse that, however beneficial it may be to nation building, also provides a particular interpretation of the making of the conflict. And this particular interpretation does not address the reasons for the making of the MFDC insurgency. The policy on the Jola-Serer joking relation as an "indigenous" mode of conflict resolution negates the political economy of ethnicity and defines the conflict in cultural terms.

The initiative by ACAD to use the Jola-Serer joking relation inscribes itself in a nationalist discourse that is distinctly Senegalese (see Anderson 1983). This discourse imagines the Senegalese nation as comprising distinct ethnic groups involved in constant cultural convergence. The traditions of these ethnic groups are marked as constituents of relative difference. Such traditions are therefore to be maintained as "folklore," and to be performed at festivals (Mark 1994; de Jong 1999). In Senegal, such canonisation of custom inscribes itself in a nationalist discourse that is the intellectual legacy of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Cheikh Anta Diop. While it has been firmly established that the canonisation of custom usually occurs in a context of nationalism (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Handler 1988), it is remarkable that the canonisation of custom in Senegal inscribes ethnic traditions into a nationalist narrative of métissage. This nationalist narrative posits cultural difference, even though it eventually resumes difference under the sameness of
Senegalese nationality.

Practically, ACAD’s initiative demonstrates that the Senegalese body politic incorporates custom as a policy instrument. Indeed, it has been established that Senegalese politicians seek legitimacy through the attendance of important religious and ethnic ceremonies (Cruise O’Brien 1971; Coulon 1999; de Jong 2002; Foucher 2003a). The canonisation of joking demonstrates that the Senegalese State increasingly relies on reified traditions in its governmentality too. The Senegalese State appropriates tradition and incorporates it into the body politic. The canonisation of customs such as the Jola-Serer joking relation establishes a body of “traditions” that serves Senegalese politicians as a stage for the performance of national identity in diversity. But the difference asserted by MFDC separatism should be situated in a political economy of ethnicity and goes well beyond the body of canonised customs that some imagine the Senegalese nation to be made up of. The ethnic categories that the policy posits are separated from the political economy in which they emerged in the first place. However inclusive the ideology of convergences culturelles, it permits ethnic groups to differ in a cultural sense only and silences matters of political economy.

Notes
1 I have no material to substantiate my claims as far as the Serer are concerned, as I have never conducted fieldwork among the Serer. Villalón (1995, 54-56) provides information on the Serer-Tukulor and Serer-Jola joking relationships that corroborates my argument.
2 See Foucher (2002) for an excellent account of the construction of Jola nationalism. He demonstrates that Jola identity — imagined by ethnologists and the Catholic Church — relied for its distribution on educated Jola (évolués) organised in village associations (associations de ressortissants).
3 Such a reception must indeed be remarkable as the Jola enjoy a very low status in Senegalese society at large.
4 In the last few decades, attendance of the initiation ceremony has become compulsory for every Jola politician who seeks electoral support (de Jong 2002).
5 However, as Marut so aptly puts it, “not all separatists are Jola and not all Jola are separatists” (1996, 80).
6 For the Jola in particular, it matters a great deal whether others celebrate a male initiation and how demanding it is in terms of ordeals for the initiates. The Serer initiation ceremony is considered equally demanding as the Jola ceremony (de Jong 2001).
Governor Sambou in his opening address at the Festival des Origines, 31 December 1993 to 2 January 1994.


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