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"The Woman Who Was More Than a Man": Making Aline Sito Diatta into a National Heroine in Senegal

Wilmetta J. Toliver-Diallo

Abstract
Aline Sito Diatta est originaire de la Basse-Casamance. Durant les années 1940, elle mena un important mouvement religieux dans cette région. Ce présent article propose d'examiner le rôle de Aline Sito Diatta dans cette localité pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale. Ainsi, nous essaierons de voir comment ses actions menées pendant la guerre ont été tardivement ressuscitées dans le Sénégal des années 1980 et 1990. Cette mémoire historique reflète, à bien des égards, la tension politique entre les leaders indépendantistes casamançais et les personnalités politiques sénégalaise. Dans cette histoire, les prestations artistiques deviennent de plus en plus importantes en ce sens qu’elles jouissent d’une influence profonde sur le public. En fait, c’est la mise en scène des héros inconnus qui suscite le plus d’intérêt pour le public. En définitive, cet article s’articule autour de deux axes clés: le premier tente d’analyser la façon dont les mythes négocient avec des notions d’histoire et de politique contemporaines sur des questions d’identité et d’appartenance. Plusieurs auteurs ont utilisé leur identité culturelle afin d’interpréter et/ou réinterpréter les actions de Aline Sito, le cas échéant, leur sens pour la Casamance et le reste du Sénégal. Le deuxième axe de cet article est d’évaluer les représentations des genres dans la place de la mémoire d’Aline Sito Diatta.

Introduction
If the contest over the Casamance was a prominent theme in Senegalese politics in the 1980s, then the debate over the memory of Aline Sito Diatta represents a parallel topic in the country’s history. A young woman in her early twenties, Aline Sito Diatta led a religious revival in the Lower Casamance region during World War II. Her revival centered on her ability to produce rain, which was important for rice production, the staple crop of the Lower
Casamance region. Despite her age and gender, she caught the attention of Diola in nearby villages, as well as of colonial administrators. Aline Sitoe's spiritual message, important to counter climatic distress in the early 1940s, remained controversial; the French colonial administration increasingly believed that her activities were subversive and they ignored villagers' claims that her message was anything but anti-colonial. Unrest in the Lower Casamance region during Aline Sitoe's presence in the area thus muddled French perceptions of her message.

Of interest in this essay is the debate over the revived historical memory of Aline Sitoe. Subsequent discussions over Aline Sitoe's message took place forty years later, in the 1980s, continuing throughout the early 1990s. If her discourse was far from certain during the colonial area, various contemporary narratives are equally contentious and infused in national and regional politics. Finding a place for Aline Sitoe Diatta in the national narrative became urgent in the 1980s with the increasing civil unrest in the Casamance region. Militants from the region protested years of exclusionary politics, and they constantly pressed for more integrative policies and regional development from politicians in Senegal's capital, Dakar. In the 1980s, rebels — most of whom proclaimed membership with the Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) — took to the forests to start military action for a Casamance independent of Senegal. Father Augustine Diamacoune Senghor, the popular spokesman of the MFDC, claimed Aline Sitoe Diatta as a symbol of Casamance unity and resistance.

The Senegalese government entered the dialogue in order to counter any assertions of the exclusion of Casamance figures as part of the list of Senegalese heroes and heroines, as well as to assure Aline Sitoe a place in the national narrative. Artists also took part in discussions as they found, through Aline Sitoe, an exciting new subject for their reproductions. It is the artists that have done the most to influence wider public opinion. Depictions of Aline Sitoe Diatta have passed through three phases: from local rainmaker, to an embodiment of Diola religious and ethnic identity, and, finally, to Senegalese national heroine.

Part of the historian's craft is to determine an historical narrative, yet the process is tangled when heroic figures take on extraordinary status in the memories of others. In this particular case, age-mates and family members of Aline Sitoe from Kabrousse have
not agreed with any of the representations of her. Yet their forced, then voluntary, silence has allowed others outside the village to make use of the rainmaker as they wished. Reflecting on my research on Aline Sitoe in Dakar and Kabrousse, I drew on Florencia Mallon’s (1995) study on nationalism in post-colonial Peru and Mexico as a framework. Mallon argues that counter histories, which oppose the “official view” put forward by the state, point to a community's marginalization within a nation. Ironically, this marginalization helps a community maintain its command over its alternative story. However, when governments attempt to incorporate many stories into the hegemonic one, the narrative has to conform and, as a result, communities no longer recognize their own account.

The most problematic aspect of the various transitions of Aline Sitoe is that, through each transition, she has lost her complex Kabroussian identity and has become, simply, “djigen gu mën gor” or “the woman who was more than a man,” the popular phrase used by Dakarois to describe her. The phrase is rich, suggesting important issues are at stake in the politics of history that I examine in this article. The most apparent question is who really defines history’s heroes and heroines. Hero worshippers and public historians often aggrandize and immortalize leaders; national governments contain and control the memory of certain figures; and kindred, often silenced, memorialize and grieve away from the public stage. But the popular phrase also raises questions about the gender politics of representation. An analysis of Aline Sitoe Diatta’s personal choices suggests that gender roles in the Casamance region were not fixed. It is possible that, as a young woman, she wanted to create her own place in Kabrousse’s social structure. Although artistic representations, in this instance, could have exposed the varying notions of gender within a bounded nation, these notions were, in fact, masked. This article discusses Aline Sitoe Diatta’s reemergence as a critical personality in Senegalese history and politics during the 1980s, before examining interpretations of her by two artists, as well as the implications of these interpretations for history and memory in Senegal.

The Historian’s Narrative
Aline Sitoe was born in Kabrousse sometime from 1920 to 1925. Kabrousse (comprising the quarters of Kadiakaye, Mossor, and
Nialou) is located in the Lower Casamance region. The western-most portion of the village borders the Atlantic Ocean, and its southern border is located just north of present-day Guinea-Bissau. The northern part of the village is approximately two kilometers from present-day Cap Skirring resorts. Similar to most Diola villages, the link between rain, rice, and wealth determines the village’s social and religious calendar system.

Paralyzed in early childhood, Aline Sitoe’s contribution to the rice cycle was limited. This affected her social relations in Kabrousse but would foreshadow her later role in the community. Around 1935, Aline Sitoe left the village for the capital of Dakar, working there as a domestic, as did other young Diola women at the time; the trend continues to this day (Foucher 2002). There, Aline Sitoe married a native of Kabrousse, Thomas Diatta, a dockworker at the port of Dakar; she bore a child, Seynabou (Toliver 1999, chapter 4).

In May of 1942, Aline Sitoe began having visions during which voices told her that she had the ability to pray for rain and end the drought plaguing her village if she returned to Kabrousse. She thus returned to Kabrousse with her daughter but without her husband (he died a few months later in a Dakar hospital). Through sacrificial objects, including cattle, chickens, and balapo rice (a red variety found in the region used for ceremonies), Aline Sitoe organized ceremonies that included songs that she authored, as well as dances to pray for rain. During her first ceremony in June 1942, it rained, thus proving her perceived supernatural powers and spiritual connection to Emitai (Supreme Being) (Thomas 1968, 9; Toliver 1999, chapter 4). On her return to Kabrousse during the 1942 agricultural season, Aline Sitoe clearly created a niche for herself in the community.

As word spread that there was a rainmaker in Kabrousse, surrounding villages sent delegates to learn the rain ceremonies. Aline Sitoe introduced her shrine, referred to as oussahara, to the village as the representation of her divine authority throughout the Lower Casamance region. She offered a twist to Diola cosmology because sacrifices were made, normally, through spirit shrines (or boekin) so her direct relationship with Emitai, while in a trance, was unusual. Notably, not all of her pilgrims were Diola. Kabrousians recount that many delegates came with interpreters and pilgrims came from different religious backgrounds. Her phys-
ical appearance affected her status in Kabroussian society as well. Her religious gifts did not go unnoticed by notables within the village, and she became the second wife to the religious chief, who was also said to be the wealthiest man in the village — Alou Gaye Diatta. This marriage undoubtedly sealed a contract between this powerful leader with a young woman rapidly gaining influence in village affairs.

The local French colonial administration became alarmed by the popularity of Aline Sitoe and the frequent voyages by pilgrims, accompanied by animals, to the village of Kabrousse during the rainy season of 1942. They noticed the number of pilgrims travelling during a crucial part of the rice-planting season, which was highly abnormal. The events of World War II exacerbated French concern. World War II mainly took its toll on the Casamance region through recruitment and attempted rice and cattle buying campaigns. Recruitment never reached the level that the administration hoped for, but in 1941-42 numbers were at very low levels. In October and November 1942, not only did young men hide and flee to Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia, but some sent word that they would not present themselves to recruitment centers.

Although the District Officer assured the colonial government that Aline Sitoe had agreed to stay clear of the political and economic affairs of the colony, government requisitions for rice and cattle were met with harsh resistance. Indeed, a number of the villages did reserve their animals for Aline Sitoe's rain ceremonies, and French colonial reports noted the "massive slaughter of cattle" during the rainy season of 1942.4 During the same period, in a group of villages [Youtou, Effoc and Ayoune] about twenty-five miles from Kabrousse, hundreds of men, armed with bows and arrows, attacked colonial military detachments. The same group of villages also confronted the French over vaccination campaigns. Although pilgrim accounts insist that Aline Sitoe's message emphasized unity and cohesion as a method to end the drought that had been plaguing the region since 1941, the French hastily blamed Aline Sitoe for the insubordination in these villages. They, therefore, removed her and seventeen men from the region in January 1943. Aline Sitoe and Alou Gaye were first sent to Kayes [in the French Soudan], but she was later sent, alone, to Timbuktu, from where, she has since disappeared [Toliver 1999, 235-44].

After the removal of Aline Sitoe from the region, populations
continued to adhere to her message of sacrifices and songs. Physical evidence of her oussahara shrines remained in many villages, but people in Kabrousse refused to talk publicly about Aline Sitoe Diatta out of fear of French reprisals. Reports mention that of the villages that had shown active resistance, Ayoune and Youtou were calmed by February after Aline Sitoe's arrest, but Effoc had been deserted. The village's inhabitants had taken advantage of the porous borders of the colonies of Senegal and Portuguese Guinea. The men stayed in the forest, encountering frequent skirmishes with the colonial army when trying to cross the border, while the women set up new villages across the border. Consequently, three of those arrested with Aline Sitoe Diatta returned to the village in 1946. The others died during imprisonment; eight of the seventeen prisoners died within seven months of their arrests. About a year after the arrest, the administrative reports with updates on the prisoners and the happenings in and around Kabrousse go silent.

The Contest (1980-93)

Not until 1980 was the silence surrounding Aline Sitoe Diatta lifted. Father Augustine Diamacoune Senghor, considered to be the leader of Casamance independence, resurrected Aline Sitoe Diatta as part of Senegal's national narrative. Father Diamacoune held a pivotal conference at the Dakar Chamber of Commerce on the Casamance region. He drew attention to the postcolonial government's lack of concern surrounding Aline Sitoe's disappearance. For Diamacoune, this was further evidence that the government was not serious about developing the Casamance region.

Of course, there had always been interest, before 1980, in the resistance of the 1940s in the Casamance. The Front Culturel Sénégalais (FCS), a Dakar-based movement founded by young artists and activists in 1976, for example, published papers on "unknown heroes who resisted against colonialism" (FCS 1980, 1). Their unofficial publication, Aliin Sitooye Diatta: Vie et Oeuvre, proposed that Aline Sitoe's message was revolutionary, almost Marxist, and definitely downplayed her role as a spiritual leader. They write: "Aliin's message was highly anti-colonial, it was not hardly simple mystical litanies but a call to fight, hard and violent, against the colonial power" (FCS 1980, 11). Although this group found significance in Aline Sitoe's place in history, the national attention her story received from Diamacoune and the threat of
violence in the Casamance in the early 1980s caused her to enter into national debates of cultural and political integration.

In fact, Diamacoune's conference was critical because it came only two years prior to his involvement in recreating the MFDC as a political party in 1982. Diamacoune heard Aline Sitoe's story and songs growing up in Oussouye, also in the Lower Casamance region, which corroborates that some villages in the department of Oussouye continued to perform her rain ceremonies in the region.9 Father Diamacoune attempted to stress Aline Sitoe's spiritual role as he shed light on what he believed to be her contribution to Senegal's anticolonial legacy. She was, he said, the Jeanne d'Arc of the Casamance region. He argued that local forms of thought — indigenous to the Diola — versus external ideologies influenced her message of resistance.

According to Diamacoune, Aline Sitoe's message had social, economic, political, and cultural implications, which were all important for shaping and celebrating Diola identity; she liberated women through her leadership role. In doing so, Aline Sitoe articulated and orchestrated colonial protest. Diamacoune argued that her movement is another example of how the Diola of the Lower Casamance region united to lead an armed rebellion. During our interview in 1996, Diamacoune stressed that a portion of the MFDC occupied the same forest to protest postcolonial policies — drawing explicit and memorable parallels between the two time periods and situating the case of resistance in an historical framework.10 In 1942, the majority of men from Effoc, Youtou, and Ayoune first went to the Santiaba forest to rebel against the colonial polices articulated by Aline Sitoe, according to Diamacoune, but the last of them did not come out of the Santiaba forest until 1962, after Senegal's independence.

Making historical connections are at the heart of Diamacoune's rhetoric. Instead of creating an original party, Diamacoune chose to reclaim the party name, MFDC. The original MFDC was formed in 1947 by Casamançais (not all ethnically Diola) to assure that the regional interests of the South, geographically remote from the rest of Senegal, would be considered in nationalist and independence agendas.11 Diamacoune, himself, had hosted a radio show from the Casamance capital, Ziguinchor, where he called attention to the economic and political isolation of the region as a result of national politics. He increasingly called for Casamance
independence, and the call for independence became more organized and violent in December 1982.

Therefore, Diamacoune's 1980 conference had many repercussions. It revived a history buried in the 1940s. The apparent absence of historical pluralism in Senegal served as one of the many justifications for a separate Casamance. This exclusion from the national narrative suggested to some Diola, such as Diamacoune, that the call for independence would best remedy the problem of marginalization. Aline Sitoe was the best martyr for this agenda because her 1940s call for revival strengthened the notion of "being Diola." She insisted on a certain type of rice to be used in ceremonies; the importance of unity and cohesion in ceremonies; and a return to a social order, which was being ignored proposed revival. Diamacoune was right to stress the cultural importance of Aline Sitoe Diatta for the Diola, but it is not clear whether her radicalism extended as far as Diamacoune would have liked. Diamacoune believed, however, that remembering Aline Sitoe Diatta was critical since he blamed the government directly for the period of "official" silence, which he contended was imposed until 1983. Diamacoune's engagement with national politics coloured his representations of Aline Sitoe as well. He was the first to demand overtly Aline Sitoe Diatta's place in the history of Senegal. His romantic images of a young woman leading organized economic protest — the refusal to pay taxes and to produce groundnuts in a rice-growing region — elevated Aline Sitoe's role from rainmaker to Diola revivalist.

Father Diamacoune's public actions influenced Aline Sitoe's quick transition to national heroine. After the outbreak of unrest in the Casamance region in December 1982, Abdou Diouf, the president of Senegal, attempted to reconcile Aline Sitoe's absence in the official Senegalese narrative during the election years of 1983 and 1988. Despite Diamacoune's request for a research inquiry as early as 1980, Abdou Diouf waited until 1983 before sending a research team to Mali to attempt to uncover the secrets of Aline Sitoe's deportation and disappearance in Timbuktu. A report in Le Soleil details Diouf's 1983 electoral campaign visit in Kabrousse:

Regarding a problem that holds much in the heart of the Kassa — the 1942 deportation of Aline Sitoe, queen of Cabrousse, and of whom we have, since, found no traces — Abdou Diouf gave the assurance that his government will undertake research to
shed light on the exile of the queen Aline Sitoe, in accordance with the covenant with the population of Kabrousse (Diallo 1983, 2).13

The research team completed its inquiry in October of 1983 and returned with a death certificate for Aline Sitoe Diatta; the certificate reported that she died of scurvy on 22 May 1944, suggesting that she may have been deprived of food.14 According to the people of Kabrousse, not one family member was asked to participate or was even consulted before the trip. Diamacoune questioned the validity of the death certificate but argued that the trip to Mali ushered in a new phase that allowed people to ask about Aline Sitoe and end the forty-year silence.

Diouf used his “politics of charm” by naming a stadium after Aline Sitoe in 1986, following a campaign promise he made in 1983 (Chaupin 1983, 4). In his speech, Diouf (1986) eloquently proclaimed: “Aline Sithoe Diatta ... sacrificed herself in order to preserve the honor, liberty, and dignity of our country.” He also made Diola the language of the 1988 National Literacy Week, naming Aline Sitoe Diatta its heroine. In conjunction with National Literacy Week, the government sent a television team to Kabrousse to film a documentary on Aline Sitoe Diatta, but suspicion reigned because most in Kabrousse believed that the government knew the whereabouts of Aline Sitoe. Interviewers framed questions that merely served the government’s aims (Wade 1988 and Comité préparatoire de la semaine d’alphabétisation 1988).

Abdou Diouf, a true statesman, used the appeal and power of public commemorations to foster an image of Aline Sitoe Diatta that would have a more lasting effect on Dakarois. His campaign initiatives did little, however, to quell the unrest in the Casamance region and the MFDC’s quest for independence.

The memory of Aline Sitoe during the 1980s did not completely bury questions about the history of her in the 1940s. Her story, simplified, remained one of resistance to French colonialism. Most made the assumption that if French colonial records, Diamacoune’s speeches, and the Senegalese national narrative spoke of Aline Sitoe’s heroics against French colonial policy, then that is what, indeed, happened. In order to make Aline Sitoe’s story suitable for publication and distribution, she had to become a hero against universal ills, such as internal division and French colonialism. No one questioned the various creators of the narrative.
This is reminiscent of Florencia Mallon’s powerful summation of the price of being integrated into a national narrative: “While it [integration] created spaces in which previous local history could be remembered, it also set the discursive boundaries within which such remembering could take place” (1995, 282).

Aline Sitoe in 1990s Popular Culture

During the intellectual struggle between Diouf and Diamacoune, the history of Aline Sitoe was appropriated by various artists in Dakar. Artists in the late 1980s and early 1990s unconsciously aided the nationalist agenda of Abdou Diouf. Artistic interest in Aline Sitoe raises several questions. For example, with each artistic production, is the imagined Aline Sitoe getting further from the historical one? Or, is this popular presence of Aline Sitoe Diatta actually creating a space for Diola history and tradition to be incorporated into a national narrative? Next, how do individual artists’ conceptions of gender relations influence their representations of Aline Sitoe Diatta?

Thus far, artists (none of whom are from the Casamance) have manipulated public opinion in two ways. First, they have rewritten Aline Sitoe’s actions to attribute to her nationalist intentions. The insistence that Aline Sitoe openly urged a resistance to French colonial policies is misleading. Second, these artists have failed to understand fully and explicate Diola beliefs. As a result, they do not force the public to appreciate the differences that exist within Senegal. Yet these “cultural carriers of memory,” a term coined by Henri Rousso (1991) in his work on the history of memory of World War II in France, have a greater impact on the public because of their mass appeal. Popular culture has a profound effect on history; popular stories shape public memory. Aline Sitoe’s artistic creators have propagated the government’s image of Aline Sitoe Diatta, and these images have been widely used in Dakar and other urban areas (see also Diop 1990). For example, Alioune Kasse’s (1992) song “Aline Sitoe Diatta” and Marouba Fall’s (1993) play, La Dame de Kabrus both molded the psyche of the Dakarois and have done much to shape the public’s memory of Aline Sitoe.15

Alioune Kasse’s song entitled “Aline Sitoe Diatta” is the perfect example of the influence of popular culture on historical memory. At the time the song was released in 1992, Kasse was a hopeful musician whose father, Ibou Kasse, had been instrumental
in the development of mbalax (a contemporary, popular form of Senegalese music) and launched the career of Youssou Ndour, amongst others. The Kasses sing: “Sitoe Diatta, Aline Sitoe, djigen bu men gor” — “a woman who was more than a man” (Kasse 1992). While sitting in a market during a research trip in 1995, I asked whether anyone had ever heard of Aline Sitoe Diatta. Many young men replied, “Sure, everyone knows her.” But when I asked who she was, they simply stated: “She was a great hero, you know, she was a woman who was more than a man.” Alioune Kasse, himself, told me that Aline Sitoe was a hero for him because she had fought against the French during the colonial period; she had been an important resister. Kasse asserts that just as Lat Dior and Cheikh Amadou Bamba are considered important icons of Senegalese history, so, too, should there be role models from the Casamance region.

Another artistic production that praised Aline Sitoe was Marouba Fall’s Dame de Kabrus, featuring the well-known Marie Therese Diatta as Aline Sitoe (Fall 1993). The play, which the playwright dedicated to women resisters, received very mixed reviews. It was praised for elevating the status of Senegalese women by some but also harshly criticized for its oversimplification of an historic figure. Critics accused Fall of “clumsily rewriting history,” while such serious issues were taking place in the Casamance region (Diop 1993, 6). After ten years of unrest, there appeared to be no easy resolution to the problem of the Casamance region, and certain journalists were aware of the dangers of greatly exaggerating the figures involved. Fall countered that in writing a work of fiction, he had stylistic freedom to recreate this episode in history.

But Fall went too far in his characterization of Diatta because, in the play, the character of Aline Sitoe voices concern over ethnic and regional factions in Senegal, and she asserts that the future of Senegal will be fruitful only in unity. Indeed, one of the most striking scenes in the play is Aline Sitoe's monologue on divisions in Senegal. Some characters in the play want Aline Sitoe to fight solely for the liberation of the Casamance region, to which she counters that Senegal is not a cake to be “divided and parcelled.” She continues:

One day, my relative Benjamin Jaata told me that the Whites dominated us because they succeeded not only to break up
Africa, but also to divide the men themselves. What would happen if, at our turn, we amused ourselves by separating ourselves from one another within the same little country? He also said that the future was in the unity of the continent. My concession is to the image of what Benjamin Jaata and all the perceptive men wish! (Fall 1993, 69)

Although Aline Sitoe Diatta worked in Dakar, it is highly questionable that she ever voiced an allegiance to a Senegalese nation. The likeness of the characters to the historical figures that were instrumental in Aline Sitoe's story gives the play a sense of historical realism. Fall's agenda is clear: Aline Sitoe was a unifier, feminist, and fervent nationalist for all of Senegal.

The play has been the most widely accessible historical source on Aline Sitoe through its radio broadcast in 1989 and television broadcast in 1993; Fall's work has been educational although he has distorted Aline Sitoe's historicity. Perhaps in response to the artistic productions of the 1980s, mnemonic devices (another carrier of memory mentioned by Rosso) have appeared. In Dakar and throughout the Casamance region, schools, pharmacies, small businesses, telephone centers, and even resort houses are named after Aline Sitoe Diatta even though the majority of the public has misunderstood her story or taken little interest.

_The Woman Who Was More Than a Man_

Alioune Kasse's song exemplifies that although Aline Sitoe Diatta has taken an unprecedented place in the national story, critical elements of her charismatic nature have been simplified. Aline Sitoe Diatta is discussed purely as an anticolonial resister, a notion that can potentially unite Senegal. To be accepted as a hero in a largely Muslim and Wolof society, Diatta must be propagated as "extraordinary" and masculine — recall Kasse's description, "she was a woman who was more than a man." This does not negate or place value on women's roles in Wolof society. Rather, the phrase illustrates that although gender has played a role in her life, the role of gender in the memory of her as a cultural figure has been downplayed. By its very nature, the creation of heroes has always been reductive, especially under the rubric of nationalism in Africa. Martin Clough (1998), a historian of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, concurs that hero cults endorsed by the government and perpetuated by the public are dangerous because not only do they
promote the "great man" theory of historical change, but they often simplify historical reality, have the potential to be sexist, and promote very presentist agendas.

Two critical points of Aline Sitoe Diatta's history have been glossed over under the rich idiom, "the woman who was more than a man": marital relations and village authority. Relations between sexes in this story are not absent but have not been fully analyzed. Scholars of African women's history have pointed to the sexist attitudes that dominated thoughts of colonial officers, the creation of a legal system that seemingly ignored the presence of women in the colonial state, and the hierarchy created through use of African male auxiliaries during the colonial era, to argue that women's experiences have been imperceptible in broader colonial histories (Van Allen 1972; Chanock 1985; Allman, Geiger, and Musisi 2002). Traditionally, women have been absent from the nationalist discourse of the 1960s and 1970s in scholarly works on Africa. Additionally, noted Senegalese heroes have often been Muslim religious leaders or literary intellectuals. But assuming that a universal colonial experience existed, the expression of this experience without distinctions of class, generation, or gender has proven itself historically impossible (see especially Bradford 1996; Hunt 1988; Thomas 1997). It is on this terrain that I wish to reinterpret the story of Aline Sitoe Diatta since stories of her have not ignored that she was a woman, but have not placed appropriate significance on its meaning.

In the first instance, Aline Sitoe Diatta must be repositioned in her local context. Her early paralysis and early non-participation in the physical labours of rice production become even more momentous.18 This paralysis is critical to the history and myth of Aline Sitoe. Although her family has always argued that Aline Sitoe was handicapped all of her life, popular stories and some scholarly material suggest that she was paralyzed later in life in Dakar as a guarantee that she would return and deliver the message. The paralysis marks an interesting point in the history of marital relations as most described her as an unsuitable wife before her residence in Dakar. Most labour in rice fields is organized around the conjugal unit. Residents of Kabrousse maintain that it was difficult for Aline Sitoe Diatta to find a husband initially. Although she was attractive, her handicap hindered her ability to find a mate.19

This hindrance was tied, no doubt, with women's participation
in rice production. Women played critical and labour-intensive roles in rice production, which include preparing fields by clearing bushes, fertilizing lowland swamps with cow manure, choosing the types of seeds to be planted a particular year, planting and transplanting, and, finally, harvesting the crop (see, generally, Linares 1992; Toliver 1999, 99-107). Women and men worked in larger social units on certain days during the agricultural season; women's associations helped individual women in their age groups perform certain tasks. Divorced or widowed women found male relatives to help them on their plots, but even their ability to produce many varieties of rice was limited. The difficulty for Aline Sitoe Diatta to fulfill women's roles in agricultural production probably influenced Kabrousians' early perceptions of her.

Because of the opportunities opening up in urban centers, Aline Sitoe did not have difficulty finding work as a domestic — first in the regional capital, Ziguinchor, and then in Dakar. Outside of the agricultural realms of the village, she was able to marry another Kabrousian working in Dakar; she was economically productive. When Aline Sitoe Diatta returned from Dakar in 1942 and began her ceremonies, she still, however, could not take part in all aspects of rice production. Yet, by placing herself at the fulcrum of rice production through rain ceremonies, she carved for herself a place in Kabrousse, despite her paralysis. In both religious movements and hero mythic stories in African historiography, there is a link between the attainment of spiritual power, on the one hand, and physical or social limitations, on the other. In the oral traditions that narrate the emergence of the Mali Kingdom in the thirteenth century, the founder of the Empire, Sundiata Keita, and his mother both overcame physical handicaps that foreshadowed a later achievement of greatness in Mande myth and history (Jansen 2001). Shaka Zulu's exclusion from Zulu society as a child foretold his conquering of the society in accounts (Golan 1994).

Equally, female prophetic leaders used their newfound relationships with the supernatural to voice disapproval of societies or address crises within these societies, despite the boundaries of gender roles. For example, Kimpa Vita spoke against the Kingdom of Kongo's involvement in the slave trade and the disarray in the Kingdom in the late seventeenth century; Nonetetha Nkwenkwe urged Xhosa followers to abandon witchcraft following a deadly influenza epidemic; Alice Lenshina in Zambia deplored wife
cleansing rituals and polygamy (Thorton 1998; Hudson 1999; Mulenga 1998; and Edgar and Sapire 1999). Protest without supernatural authority would have heeded them no listeners. It is clear that Aline Sitone Diatta’s unique relationship with Emitai, as well as the pending agricultural crisis, offered her new options in Kabrousse.

After returning from Dakar and confirming her spiritual gifts, Aline Sitone Diatta, now widowed, was given in marriage to the religious chief of the village and one of the wealthiest men in the area. As spiritual figure in charge of the village shrine, he was responsible for the annual rain ceremonies securing a successful harvest. Aline Sitone’s shrine and the ceremony she created were different from his ceremony, but leaders believed that the marriage between the two would assure the protection of the village, “because she was a woman who was very important and Alou Gaye was also someone who had everything, who people listen to, and was also very important.” 20 Though polygamy was not common in Kabrousse, Aline Sitone became Alou Gaye’s second wife. Aline Sitone would not upstage the religious chief and he would, even indirectly, continue to control the rain shrine. Indeed, a relative of Alou Gaye mentioned that the marriage was important for both parties, and that for Aline Sitone, it left her “free to practice her science”. 21

Robert Baum and Marilyn Waldman (1992) argues that Aline Sitone was a “trailblazer” who defied Diola norms since she had a child out of wedlock, was among the first to leave the village in search of work, and married even after she should have been completely dedicated to God. Testimony in Kabrousse opposes this perspective as they acknowledge Aline Sitone’s first marriage in Dakar that produced her daughter. They also contend that a number of Diola youth took advantage of temporary migration to urban areas during Aline Sitone’s era, a trend that continues to this day. The “trail-blazer” theory seeks to demonstrate how Aline Sitone Diatta was extraordinary, yet a different interpretation privileges (and does not mask) the individual’s ability to make decisions that impact historical change. Aline Sitone’s power as a rainmaker trumped cultural and social divisions that typified life in Kabrousse, but only by examining her actions versus her exceptionality, can we understand her significance for changing relationships in Kabrousse. At that time, she did not completely ignore the social structure but sought, instead, to negotiate within it.
The meaning of Aline Sitoe's womanhood has been misinterpreted by both the French colonialists and the MFDC leadership. It might seem that the French were the first to degender Aline Sitoe. She was the only woman arrested in the region in January 1943 during what the French called, "Opération Aline Sitoe" [Toliver 1999, 212-17]. But after further examination, descriptions in colonial reports of Aline Sitoe Diatta's activity before her arrest reveal that there was concern over how to handle female religious figures. Before the outbreak of violence in nearby villages, French administrators considered sending Aline Sitoe Diatta to Tambacounda (southeastern Senegal) to cure her "madness." Colonial administrations unfairly equated mental illness with women who acted outside prescribed notions of gender appropriateness [for an interesting parallel, see Edgar and Sapire 1999]. The French had to neutralize Aline Sitoe Diatta's identity in order to justify her arrest. Ironically, the French did interact with other female Diola spirit mediums but seemed not to handle them as harshly as they did Aline Sitoe. Meanwhile, Father Diamacoune's elevation of Aline Sitoe Diatta suggests that the relationship between the sexes in Diola households in the Casamance region differed from Islamic, Wolof, and French norms. Diamacoune, a Diola-Kassa of Oussouye, had a better notion than Alioune Kasse or Marouba Fall of how gender might have impacted Aline Sitoe, a Diola-Haer (another sub-group of the Diola specific to Kabrousse), as well as her position in the community. Diamacoune has never omitted an analysis of Aline Sitoe's female-ness when discussing her symbolism. On the national level, however, there has constantly been an absence of the transformative role that Aline Sitoe Diatta may have played in certain villages in the Casamance region; her myth has not been fully exploited in this regard. A full integration of a local culture into a national one would have to incorporate various ethnic groups and acknowledge their respective traditions and gender roles. Even while Marouba Fall constantly discusses Aline Sitoe Diatta's womanhood, he equates her role as saviour of the Senegalese nation as being tied to her natural maternal instincts.

**Kabrousse Remembers**

In Kabrousse, confirming my growing alarm at the other stories circulating about Aline Sitoe in Dakar, a relative of Aline Sitoe told
me, "Nobody tells anything true about her." 24 Another said, "All of us cannot correct those stories told about her but someone like you who is here asking questions can. To correct that, writing is necessary; we do not have the tools of writing to deny them." 25 The informant explained the intellectual priority given to the written over the oral word. Another analysis might also acknowledge the public’s interaction with the media. The spoken word has not necessarily been influential yet; aural and visual representations have done much more to inform or misinform the public.

Popular sources, including those mentioned above, have helped to inaugurate the Diola into the national history. Senegal may be embarking on another transition in Aline Sitoe’s history as people in Kabrousse are more willing to talk about her. Villagers in Kabrousse have always been cognizant of the memory of “Operation Aline Sitoe.” The arrests during that period affected a number of families. The three released prisoners recounted their internment experiences to their offspring and within Kabroussian circles. Annual rain ceremonies continue to include songs taught by Aline Sitoe, as well as songs created in honour of Aline Sitoe. Aline Sitoe Diatta remains, for Kabrousse, an envoy from God who was able to talk with the Supreme Being in dreams and trances.

It may be that her religious significane is misunderstood only outside of Kabrousse. Most in the village had remained silent for so long because they believed that the last time they spoke publicly, the colonial government carried out mass arrests. Yet these memories recall the humanness of Aline Sitoe and the explanation of social changes that took place within a village during the colonial period. Ceremony and sacrifice regain the center of what has become, in nationalist narratives, resistance to colonial power. They also provide appropriate questions to ask of the more popular stories and a way to analyze the differences. Most importantly, they recall that, in a single nation, the colonial experience could be lived many different ways. Thus, Aline Sitoe could still be considered a heroine, but the substance of her contributions could be understood within the changing environmental, as well as social and political, structures.

The previous mistrust of the government persists, as does the suspicion that Abdou Diouf used the memory of Aline Sitoe Diatta for political purposes. Despite their proximity to the current unrest, most testimonies in Kabrousse were not imbued with the
cultural nationalism espoused by Diamacoune even though they stress Aline Sitone's message of unity amongst the Diola and peace. The French convicted her of treason because they believed she was an enemy of the Empire. They accused her of preaching insubordination by commanding populations to refuse to pay taxes or contribute to the war effort for the colony. Nevertheless, in all the interviews conducted in Kabrousse, no one would connect Aline Sitone Diatta with the unrest in the 1940s in the Casamance region. Everyone argued that Aline Sitone only preached messages of peace and never asked populations not to produce groundnuts, send their sons for military recruitment, refuse vaccination campaigns, or sell their rice. Kabroussians all agreed that she had prophesized that one day the whites would leave the Diola to their own governance. Interviewees also asserted, however, that Aline Sitone concerned herself only with rain for rice.

Inclusion of oral testimony in Kabrousse would challenge the "official view" and most popular stories circulating in Dakar. As Diatta introduced her own shrine, she defied local norms by circumventing the usual ways of access to Emitai, but neither her youth nor her gender affected others' adherence to the oussahara shrine. Yet, the challenge of incorporating Kabroussian memories of Aline Sitone Diatta into the larger debate remains. Family members and other inhabitants of Kabrousse can choose to enter the debate and contribute to it or they can make use of their marginal status to control locally the preservation of their memories. In the first instance, they risk having their contributions appropriately refined to fit a nationalist story, while in the latter case, they can choose their methods of remembrance.

Conclusion

The national fervour over Aline Sitone has begun to die down since the mid-1990s, and she has settled into her role as djigen bu men gor; nevertheless, this expression seeks, by its very notion, to distort the historical memory of Aline Sitone Diatta. Perhaps it is compelling enough that this young woman, aged twenty to twenty-five years at the time of her arrest in 1943, has been considered as an important resister to French colonial policies, without acknowledging the interesting ways she herself sought to involve herself in the Kabroussian life cycle. Indeed, Diatta's spiritual gifts did allow her to substitute for some of her shortcomings — the paralysis in
her childhood that limited her contributions during the agricultural season. But it was Diatta’s awareness of this disjuncture that pushed her to such spiritual stature. The events surrounding the public memory of Aline Sitoe Diatta are not an unusual case. The Senegalese government has done nothing unique in perpetuating a particular image of Aline Sitoe Diatta. The story of national histories dictates that the search for common themes and convergence are integral components of political stability. Acknowledging, as opposed to dismissing, the many factors influencing public memory and affecting popular histories is the real, but necessary, challenge. Popular presentations offer evidence of debates over politics and historical agency. However, Aline Sitoe Diatta’s story is particularly rich because of the many layers of memory and the implications of each. The contest over how Aline Sitoe Diatta should be remembered was foretold in her life story — the controversy over her message during her lifetime parallels the later national struggle of others’ memories of her.

Notes

1 My narrative of Aline Sitoe Diatta will differ slightly from those proposed by Jean Girard in the late 1960s and by Robert Baum in the early 1990s. It is important to remember that our research aims differed considerably and that my narrative is heavily influenced by the oral testimony I collected in Diatta’s natal Kabrousse, something missing from many previous interpretations of her life. I use the spelling Aline Sitoe Diatta, but, in each instance that I quote another source, I have respected their orthography of her name.

2 Interestingly enough, the resorts formerly belonged to Kabrousse.

3 Louis Vincent Thomas believes that Aline Sitoe lucked out and attributed the rainstorm of her first ceremony to a chance tornade, a rainstorm preceded by heavy winds, although not a tornado. Although a respected scholar of Diola cosmology, in this instance, Thomas seemingly ignores the relationship between rain (emitai) and the Supreme (Emit); Kabroussians have never seen rain as a natural occurrence, but always as a gift from God.


5 The administration in the Casamance subsequently burned Effoc.

6 The official Final Report for this affair regarding Aline Sitoe contains the
interrogation reports and the subsequent sentencing of all of those arrested. "Note de Service [Instructions pour le Chef de Subdivision]," 6 Octobre 1943, no. 496, ANS, 11D1/226. See Toliver (1999, 235-44), for the list of the accused, death certificates, and details of the subsequent release of three prisoners, including Aline Sitoe Diatta's second husband, Alou Gaye. The subsequent Annual and Regional reports generally talk about the economic state of the region and other political affairs without making reference to Aline Sitoe, the prisoners, or happenings in Kabrousse.

7 Sembene Ousmane, a native of Casamance, produced one of the earliest popular contributions to the public memory of the unrest in the Casamance during World War II. The film, Emitai, mirrors the history of the Floups rebellion. There is a disconnect between the Floups rebellion in Effoc and Aline Sitoe's activity in Kabrousse; she is not mentioned in the film although Sembene stresses the role of women in the resistance to French colonial demands during the war. Ousmane Sembene, Emitai (New York: New Yorker Films, 1971), filmstrip.

8 Landing Savané was an integral member of this group, which did not seem to draw attention outside of a certain intellectual circle. See also Babacar Diop Bubu and Ousmane Ndongo, email to the author, 26 December 1997.

9 My conversations with Father Diamacoune were limited to his interest in Aline Sitoe as an historical and cultural symbol. It is during these conversations, including the taped interviews, that he elaborated his hypothesis on Aline Sitoe's significance for the Casamance and, in particular, for the Diola. Father Diamacoune Senghor, interview by author, Ziguinchor, 7 April 1996 and 6 May 1996.

10 Father Diamacoune Senghor, interview by author, Ziguinchor, 7 April 1996.

11 The original leaders of the MFDC, Emile Badiane and Ibou Diallo, eventually joined Leopold Senghor's Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais (BDS).

12 Father Diamacoune noted an instance in the 1970s when people of Ouossouye wanted to name a recently constructed cultural center after Aline Sitoe; government officials forced the removal of the placard. Father Diamacoune Senghor, interview by the author, Ziguinchor, 7 April 1996.

13 Diallo mistakenly noted that Aline Sitoe was arrested in 1942; she was arrested in January 1943. The Parti Africain de l'Indépendance (PAI) candidate, Majhemout Diop, also stressed Aline Sitoe's role in healing and integration. See Touré (1983).

14 On my research trip to Timbuktu, I discovered that the name on the official copy of the death certificate on file at the Mairie of Timbuktu was not that of Aline Sitoe Diatta; it is difficult to determine, however, whether her name was changed by authorities.

15 For another example of Aline Sitoe's memory in popular culture, see Diop (1990).
See Alioune Kasse, interview by author, Dakar [Medine], 23 October 1995. Since then, Youssou Ndour’s talks of Aline Sitoe in a song entitled, “Miss,” a dedication to young Senegalese women. He repeats Kasse’s term by singing: “Aline Sitoe, djigen ju men gor.”

Marouba Fall, interview by author, Dakar [Pikine], 21 March 1996.

C. Diatta, interview by the author, Kabrousse [quarter of Nialou], 12 May 1996; D. Diatta, interview by the author, Kabrousse [quarter of Nialou], 31 August 1996; J.B. Diatta, interview by the author, Kabrousse [quarter of Nialou], 16 May 1996; M. Diatta, interview by the author, Kabrousse [quarter of Mossor], 24 August 1996; and J. Diatta, interview by the author, Kabrousse [quarter of Mossor], 18 August 1996.


I. Diatta interview by the author [quarter of Mossor], 18 August 1996. Some village politics that are much to complex for the scope of this article were involved; see Toliver (1999, chapter 4).

A. Diatta, interview by the author, Kabrousse [quarter of Nialou], 21 May 1996.

“Opération Aline Sitoe” refers to the military and police plans to arrest Diatta and the seventeen others arrested. For details, see Toliver (1999, 212-18).

In colonial reports, Colonel Sajous, the District Administrator, wanted, as well, to arrest Gnacofoosso, a prophetess of Youtou, during the same unrest, but they could never locate her and she is believed to have fled to Portuguese territory (Guinea-Bissau).

K. Diatta, interview by author, Kabrousse [quarter of Nialou], 6 June 1996.

A. Diatta, interview by author, Kabrousse [quarter of Nialou], 21 May 1996.

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Studies 21, no.3: 401-32.


