

THE ISSUE OF DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES IN CASAMANCE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH

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Abstract : This article focuses on the problem of displaced persons in Casamance, a region that has been in the grip of an armed conflict for nearly 40 years. The objective is to report about these displaced persons by highlighting, on the one hand, their strategies for settling in other areas, known as reclassification villages, and, on the other hand, to shed light on the displaced persons' modes of adaptation in the face of the anti-personnel mines that are buried in certain areas of Casamance by the MFDC rebels. The examination of the issue of displaced persons in the context of Casamance is relevant to the understanding of internal migration dynamics in this region, where a situation of neither war nor peace has prevailed for several years.

Keywords : Conflict, displaced, antipersonnel mines, Casamance

LA QUESTION DES DÉPLACÉS ET DES RETOURNÉS EN CASAMANCE PROBLÉMATIQUE ET RECHERCHES

Résumé : Cet article s'intéresse à la problématique des personnes déplacées en Casamance, une région en proie à un conflit armé depuis près de 40 ans. L'objectif est de rendre compte de ces déplacés en mettant en évidence, d'une part, leurs stratégies d'installation dans d'autres zones, appelées villages de reclassement, et, d'autre part, de mettre en lumière les modes d'adaptation des déplacés face aux mines antipersonnel enfouies dans certaines zones de la Casamance par les rebelles du MFDC. L'examen de la question des personnes déplacées dans le contexte de la Casamance est pertinent pour la compréhension des dynamiques migratoires internes dans cette région, où une situation de ni guerre ni paix prévaut depuis plusieurs années.

Mots-clés : Conflit, personnes déplacées, mines antipersonnel, Casamance

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Introduction

According to Gildas Simon (1995), "crisis migration is another important aspect of population movements in the world; it is "one of the [often] terrible drivers of human migration dynamics" (Simon, 1995: 107). For several years, crises have been the cause of population movements in many countries. These crises can take various forms insofar as they can be due either to natural disasters such as global warming or drought, or to jihadist movements lurking in the shadows of certain areas of certain countries, or to rebellion movements that are rampant in a given place, or to wars (Israel, Palestine, Syria, the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, Libya, etc.), or to the persecution of a particular community, as is the case with the Muslims (Rohingyas).. Thus, at the global level, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there will be 103 million forcibly displaced persons in the world at mid-2022 because of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order, including 48 million internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2022).

In Africa, data from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies estimates that for the year 2020, twenty-nine (29) million people were forcibly displaced (internally displaced, refugees, asylum seekers) in Africa. This represents an increase of 16% over last year. Renewed hostilities and increased violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), Ethiopia, and the Sahel are the cause of this increase. Of these 29 million, 72 percent are internally displaced, showing that most Africans displaced by force are not primarily seeking to cross borders, but to get out of harm's way. As part of an analysis of the problem of displacement, this article will focus on Casamance, a region that has been affected by armed conflict for nearly 40 years, resulting in the displacement of many people.

After having proceeded, in the first instance, to a description of the methodology and a clarification of some concepts, we will examine, in the second instance, the origins and the beginnings of the armed conflict that is raging in this region by focusing the analysis on the MFDC, the main rebel movement that has been waging hostilities against the Senegalese army for several years, and the dissensions that exist within this movement by examining the position of the movement's main leaders. We will then examine the movements of displaced persons that have contributed in large part to the creation of the so-called "villages of reclassification. The conflict has also led to the concealment of anti-personnel mines in certain areas of Casamance, the consequences of which are still being felt by the population.

1. Clarification of the concepts of refugee, displaced, returned

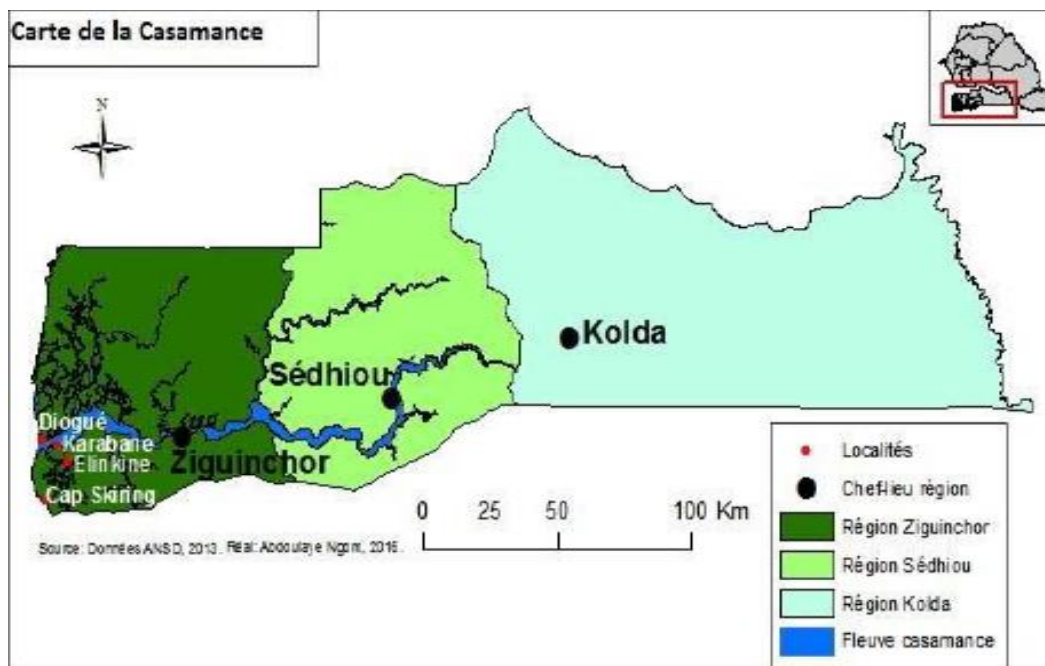
There are three categories of displaced persons in Casamance. On the one hand, there are refugees, i.e., displaced persons who have sought protection in certain neighboring countries, such as Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, and the Gambia. Refugee status is defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention as "a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality,

membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. Other displaced persons who had fled the conflict to other areas within Casamance found it necessary to return to their original villages after several months or even several years, when the situation in these villages had improved significantly. These displaced persons are thus called returnees insofar as they have returned to their villages. This distinction between refugee, displaced and returnee is fundamental in the context of Casamance because it highlights the shifting nature of the displaced person in this region.

2. Methodology

The article is based on data from a series of surveys conducted over time (Delcroix, 2013, 2021) at regular intervals from 2017 to 2020 in Casamance with 60 displaced persons and impacted by the Casamance conflict. Seventy-seven (77) interviews were conducted with displaced persons in Casamance. Thirty (30) interviews were also conducted with leaders of NGOs, associations, and other resource persons in Casamance. Given that we had set ourselves the goal of conducting a long-term investigation, we developed a methodological approach that consisted, first, of building and establishing a relationship of trust with our interviewees, which allowed us to conduct life stories (Bertaux, 2016), semi-structured interviews, observations, and informal discussions on several occasions with the same people in several sites in Casamance (Ziguinchor, Kolda, and Sédhiou).

Map 1: Map of Casamance



Source : Ngom, 2017

2.1. Materials and methods

Interviews, life stories and observations complemented each other during all the phases of our fieldwork on several sites in Casamance, thus allowing us to inscribe our epistemological posture, on the one hand, in a multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus, 1995) and, on the other hand, in a socio-anthropological approach that "aims to be as close as possible to the natural situations of the subjects' daily lives, conversations, routines, in a situation of prolonged interaction between the researcher in person and the local populations, in order to produce knowledge in situ, contextualized, transversal, aiming to give an account from the point of view of the actor of ordinary representations, usual practices and their indigenous meanings" (Olivier de Sardan 2008: 41). This allowed us to probe in depth several issues related to the problem of displaced persons in Casamance, and to shed light on the way in which displaced persons adapt to their new environment. To avoid bias, the interviews were conducted in Wolof and then translated into French.

3. Some elements of presentation of Casamance

With an area of more than 28,000 square kilometers, Casamance comprises three administrative entities: the regions of Ziguinchor, Kolda and Sédhiou. In 2021, the total population of Casamance is estimated at 214,6872 inhabitants according to the projections of the ANSD (National Agency of Statistics and Demography of Senegal). This figure is obtained by adding the populations of the three regions that make up Casamance: Ziguinchor (706554 inhabitants), Kolda (848348 inhabitants) and Sedhiou (591970 inhabitants). In the Ziguinchor region, the Diolas are the main ethnic group, but there are also Peulhs, Mandingues, Manjacks, Serers, Poulars, Wolofs, etc. The Diolas are subdivided into three subgroups: the Diolas Fogny in Bignona, the Diolas Kassa in the department of Oussouye, and the Diolas Blouf in the prefecture of Tendouck. The region of Kolda is populated mainly by the Peulhs, while the Mandingues dominate in the region of Sédhiou. This diversity reflects the mixture and cultural intermingling that characterizes this region of southern Senegal. The different ethnic groups live together in perfect harmony with many The "joking relatives" are very characteristic of the country of Teranga. In the village of Elinkine and the islands of Djogué and Karabane, there are also nationals from Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Ghana, and Burkina Faso, due to the development of fishing activities. The socialization rites such as the *bukut* and the *kankourang*, for example, give Casamance its cultural richness.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The Casamance conflict

Casamance has been rocked for several years by a conflict between the separatist movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) and the Senegalese army (Marut, 2010; Diedhiou, 2011; Manga, 2012). The origins of the conflict date back to December 1982, following a peaceful march organized by the MFDC towards the

governance of Ziguinchor. This march was subsequently repressed in a bloody manner by the Senegalese authorities, who also made numerous arrests, including that of the movement's leader at the time, Abbé Augustin Diamacoune Senghor. The movement's sympathizers and supporters hid in the forest of this region to set up a rebel movement to secede from Senegal and claim independence for Casamance. Initially armed with cutlasses, spears, and handmade rifles, the rebels have over the years acquired weapons and artillery that allow them to fight and hold their own against the Senegalese army in the region (Ngom, 2020).

The MFDC includes several rebel leaders, each of whom claims autonomy for Casamance. For several years and until his death on January 17, 2007, the main leader was Abbé Augustin Diamcouné Senghor. Leading a very important faction of the movement in the north of the region, César Atoute Badiate is the commander of the armed troops and is the real warlord of the MFDC. He is responsible for most of the abuses and attacks orchestrated by the MFDC in the region. Because of the differences between the various rebel leaders, the MFDC has been fragmented for several years.

Indeed, one of the main warlords who leads a faction of the separatist movement in the north of the region, Salif Sadio, has seen his dominance challenged by other rebel leaders, by César Atoute Badiate who leads the northern wing of the movement. At the same time, the authority of Mamadou Nkrumah Sané is being challenged by Salif Sadio. The examination of these internal rivalries shows the dissension that exists between the different rebel leaders as well as the fragmented nature of the MFDC (Marut, 1994), especially since the death of its first and principal leader, Augustin Diamcouné Senghor.

4.2. The problem of displaced persons and returnees in Casamance

The situation of instability, which reflects a situation of "neither war nor peace," has resulted in the displacement of thousands of individuals over the years, especially in rural areas. There is therefore a significant difficulty in accurately counting the number of displaced persons in Casamance. Figures are available, however, from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), although they date from 2010. An assessment report on the situation in Casamance by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2010) estimates that in 2010 the total number of internally displaced persons in Casamance was between 10,000 and 40,000, although in the absence of a comprehensive assessment the figures are unreliable. In 2013, estimates range from 20,000 to 40,000 IDPs in Casamance (OCHA, 2013). These figures, while showing the number of displaced persons resulting from the conflict, must be understood, and taken with some caution, as it is impossible to put an exact figure on the number of displaced persons since the beginning of hostilities between the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance and the Senegalese army.

Many villages have been abandoned by the population because of armed violence perpetrated by MFDC fighters and clashes between the MFDC and the Senegalese army. These population displacements are not solely attributable to the armed conflict

insofar as "armed exactions are not the only causes of population displacements in Casamance, there are also social causes such as cases of lies, denunciations, slander, etc. The denunciations, lies and denunciations were factors that pushed those who were victims of them to displace to other skies" (Gueye, 2014: 204). Due to the presence of certain branches of the independence movement in the villages, the populations no longer have access to land to devote themselves fully to their agricultural activities, since the rebels have taken control of it. The armed conflict that has persisted in Casamance for more than three decades has had significant repercussions on the lives of local populations, resulting in the displacement of many individuals, particularly in the villages. Indeed, the occupation and seizure of land by the separatist movement in the depths of the Casamance forest has forced people to flee their villages and abandon their fields, which allowed many of them to survive.

4.2.1. *Displaced persons from the Casamance conflict and reclassification villages*

The populations fleeing this situation have found refuge in other villages commonly called "villages of reclassification," where they hope to start a new life and continue their activities, mainly agricultural. We do not have exact figures on the number of reclassification villages, but we can say that there are many of them throughout the Casamance territory. The reclassification villages are territories that have been set up to accommodate those displaced by the conflict to allow them to be safe and to develop their activities on site. It should be noted, however, that while some displaced persons have settled in these reclassification villages, others have chosen to go to the city, specifically Ziguinchor, where they hope to find refuge with a relative, friend or acquaintance, even though it will be very difficult for them to start a new life since they have been forced to flee the place they have always known.

During periods of calm in the hostilities between elements of the separatist movement and the Senegalese army, the desire and need to return to their villages is expressed by the displaced, but remains uncertain, as fighting can resume at any time, despite the numerous sweeps carried out by the military to stabilize the areas under the control of the MFDC. The fact remains that many individuals, unable to start another life once in town, have returned to their villages. The problem is that once they return, they are forced to restart their activities with new means, as many infrastructures were destroyed during the clashes or ransacked by the MFDC rebels, who also scared off some foreign investors, as Kora points out :

"The rebels who have been present in our region for several years have scared off many investors who wanted to develop their activities here. They have been afraid to invest because of the risk of losing, as the situation is not stable. I believe that because of this, many factories and companies have had to close, and this has led to an increase in unemployment, especially for us young people. And I must say that there is a lot of wealth here in Casamance, just the fruits, which are abundant here, can be transformed by companies, but as the situation is not stable and people often hear or read through the newspapers that there are clashes between the Senegalese army and elements of the MFDC, then they fear to invest in the region. The conflict is thus contributing to youth unemployment and family poverty. The armed conflict has

scared away many investors and the economy of our region. " [Kora, 28 years old, Single, mechanic]

In addition, people who decide to return to their villages during periods of calm not only have to find a means of subsistence, but also face problems of access to clean water, electricity, health services, sanitation, and so on. This situation is due to the conflict and especially to the presence of certain factions of the MDFC in the vicinity of certain villages. When displaced families left their villages, they rushed to safer areas to live with relatives or to find livelihoods and improve their living conditions.

In doing so, they became strangers in the villages or towns where they settled after leaving their home areas without land or economic resources (Ngom & Sène, 2021). In addition to this somewhat chaotic situation in Casamance, which makes it extremely difficult for displaced persons to settle permanently in these villages, robberies and recurrent acts of violence take place on the Ziguinchor-Sénoba road, particularly in the run-up to the holidays (end of year celebrations, Eid el kebir, Eid el fitr...), despite the strong presence of the Senegalese army along this road to ensure the security of the population.), despite the strong presence of the Senegalese army along the road to ensure the safety of the population.

Elsewhere in the Kolda region, atrocities and thefts of livestock or various materials by heavily armed individuals also occurred in some villages, contributing to increased poverty among these populations already heavily impacted by the armed conflict. Acts of vandalism and banditry frequently occur in some villages in the most remote areas of Casamance. Indeed, one of the most harmful consequences of the conflict is undoubtedly the development of banditry in the region, which is most often attributed to the rebels, although the reality may be quite different. Given the "no war, no peace" situation that prevails in the region, the number of displaced persons is sometimes increasing and sometimes decreasing, making it very difficult to accurately estimate the number of displaced persons, especially since the beginning of the conflict.

4.2.2. Displaced persons from the Casamance conflict and anti-personnel mines

The issue of displaced persons in Casamance is inextricably linked to the issue of anti-personnel mines that were discovered in 1988. These landmines were planted by the MFDC separatist movement in several areas of Casamance, particularly in the forest, which poses a great danger to the population. In some villages in Casamance, many people have fallen victim to these antipersonnel mines, as shown by the Emergency Mine Impact Survey (EUIMC) conducted by the non-governmental organization Handicap International. Between 1996 and 2005, barely ten years, six hundred and sixty (660) people were affected by these mines buried in various parts of Casamance.

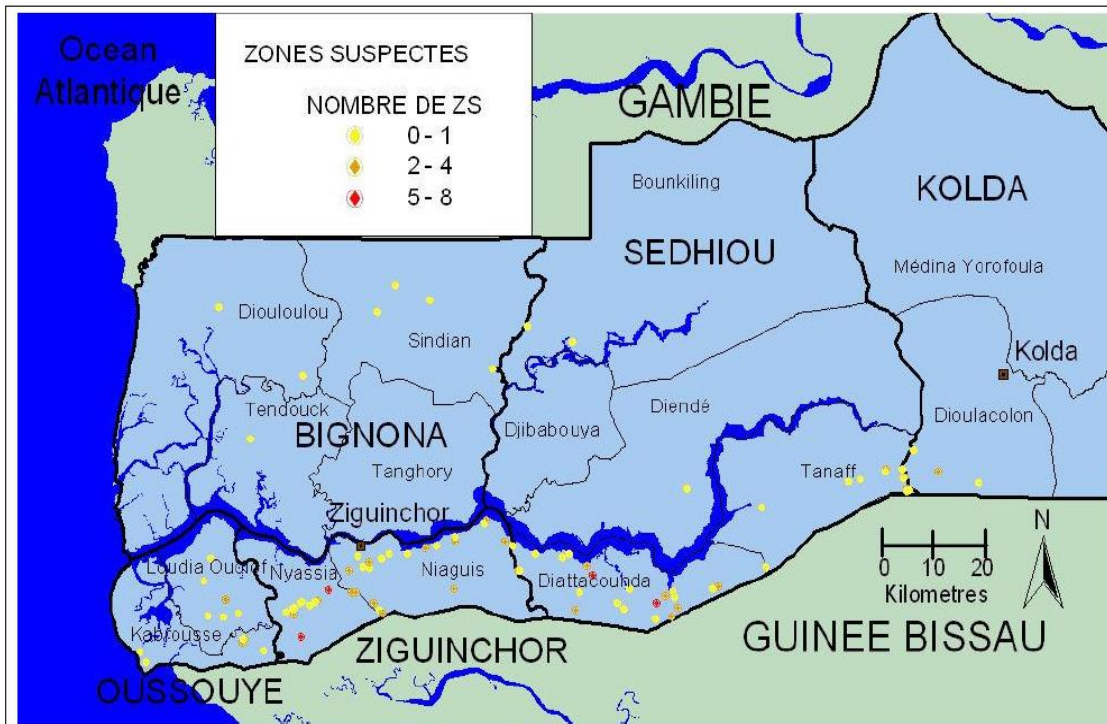
According to this study, the regions of Ziguinchor and Sédhiou are the most affected and eleven (11) districts are reportedly affected by these mines: Bounkiling, Diattacounda, Dioulacolon, Diouloulou, Kabrousse, Loudia-Wolof, Niaguis, Nyassia, Sindian, Tanaff, and Tendouck (Handicap International, 2006: 7).

In this regard, it is important to highlight the important role played by Handicap International in the various demining operations that this organization has been carrying out for several years in the region. In addition, the presence of anti-personnel mines in certain areas, particularly in arable land, is leading to a decline in agricultural activities in Casamance, as people living in the villages are increasingly afraid to exploit certain areas in the forests controlled by MFDC elements, as Ansoumane explains:

"We used to have many fields in the forest, and we used to cultivate millet, peanuts, sorghum and many other things to support ourselves. But since the beginning of the armed conflict, it is no longer possible for us to cultivate all these fields. Now we only cultivate the fields that are located near our houses because it is safer. As you know, there are many anti-personnel mines in Casamance, which are implanted in several places, particularly in the forest. These anti-personnel mines can be blown up at any time, especially since we do not know the exact location of the mines, so you see, it is very delicate. Even if there are demining operations that have been carried out for several years here, the risk is always present. For example, when we go into the forest to look for wood, it is our lives that are at stake, because we can either come across an MFDC rebel or suffer the amputation of a leg following contact with an antipersonnel mine. Much of the land that is suitable for cultivation and that constitutes a source of income for us has been abandoned. This has increased the hardship on families, especially those who rely on agriculture for their livelihood". [Ansoumane, 34 years old, Married, Farmer]

Thus, the farmers who have only their fields as their main means of subsistence feel a constant sense of frustration and fear. Many rice fields have been abandoned by the population because of these anti-personnel mines, which remain very difficult to locate. While these agricultural activities are the main source of income for these populations and are very much threatened by these "devices of death," displacement to other locations is becoming one of the strategies of many individuals and families to ensure their budget balance.

Map 2 : Suspected mine areas in Casamance



Source: Handicap international, 2006

Conclusion

The main objective of this contribution was to show that due to the presence of an armed conflict in Casamance, a context of "neither war nor peace" instability prevails. This context has had repercussions on the daily life of the populations living there and, by ricochet, on the economic activities of the region which have experienced a clear decline in recent years, thus accentuating the unemployment and poverty of the populations who are consequently forced to leave their places of residence to go to other places where they consider themselves much more secure. These places, called villages of reclassification are.

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