

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND CIRCUMCISION AMONG THE DIOLA IN RURAL SENEGAL

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In Senegal, a child's education starts early in life, since according to a proverb, "A tree already grown cannot be straightened." A child still crawling on all fours is watched carefully by his mother. She is the guardian of the hearth. The father, provider of material well-being, has other daily activities. Both contribute to the child's education.

The mother is responsible for the child's food. She admonishes him to sleep on his side to encourage a healthy physical development. She does not allow him to sleep on his belly or his back, for it is believed that sleeping face down diminishes one's life chances, and sleeping on one's back creates bad dreams. During his first three years, a child imitates adult activities, such as cooking.

In rural areas, around the age of four or five, a boy's education becomes different from a girl's. A girl is encouraged to do household work and is introduced to agricultural tasks. A boy is responsible for keeping goats, sheep and even cattle. He will then learn to work the fields with his father and will join a group of boys his own age. Members of this group help one another in cultivating peanuts and weeding.

Male circumcision is a social institution among many of the peoples of Senegal, but nowhere is it more important than among the Diola. The rite of circumcision is governed by firm rules shared throughout the ethnic community whose economic and cultural life rests on this ethical foundation. According to tradition, circumcision takes place every 15 to 20 years. Each village undertakes the ritual ceremonies at the same time.

The purpose of circumcision is to admit young boys to the community of men as responsible members. It is required of them in order to marry. The sequence of

events during the period of circumcision — isolation from the family, tests of endurance, instruction and learning and return to the family — permanently marks the life of a young man.

- Isolation for three to four months in the sacred grove separates the young from their nuclear families and enhances learning. The length of time has now been reduced because of the conversion of many Diola to Islam or Christianity and the introduction of non-traditional formal education.

- Tests of endurance build a sense of responsibility toward the group of young men and toward the society as a whole. One must give proof of courage and withstand physical and psychological pain.

- Civic and moral instruction aims at transforming the young initiates into responsible members of the community of men.

- Their return to family life marks their attainment of adult status in the community.

The internal structure of circumcision rituals is known only by the Diola. It originated with the creation of sacred groves in the ancient villages of Boulouf, Fogny and Lower-Casamance. Recently founded villages do not have the right to practice circumcision.

During the two days that precede entrance into the sacred groves, certain rites must be performed. These are shaving the head, benediction with sacred water and protection by the forge.

- Shaving the head is done in a sacred spot found in each section of a village. It takes place, for instance, near the sacred post named Boukeg in the Diédhiou family section of Niankite-Fougaye. The rite protects the child from bad luck; if it is not respected by the parents of the future initiate, he will have bad luck for the rest of his life. A second part of the ritual takes place

at the Battum forge belonging to the Diédhiou family at Niankite in the Fougaye section. This defends against malevolent spirits that cause childhood diseases and against certain sorcerers. Libations made near two sacred posts protect the child against all evil.

- The sacred water rite also takes place in each section of the village. Initiates from the villages of Niassarang and Kagnarou receive their benediction in the village of Niassarang one day prior to their entrance in the sacred grove. A blessing is made to the water in a depression between two sections of the exposed roots of a *fromager* tree located in the Essyl neighborhood. The initiates are grouped and isolated from women at this time because the sacred water can damage women's normal reproductive development. It makes young women become infertile, pregnant women abort, and women of post childbearing age have menses for the rest of their lives.

- A ritual at the forge protects initiates from dangers that could strike them in the sacred grove. Whoever seeks the blessing of the water of the forge is safe and whoever fails to do so becomes a leper. Blacksmiths heat iron glowing red, then dip it into water. That water is sprinkled on the future initiates. For Fogny, the ritual takes place in the villages of Niankite, Suelle, and Diakine among the Diédhiou families, who alone are in charge of the forge.

CIRCUMCISION IN KAGNAROU VILLAGE

According to Diola tradition, entrance into the sacred grove must be sanctioned by the spiritual beings who reside there. Men in charge of the sacred grove appoint the person who widely announces the date on which the initiates may enter. The day is usually selected according to the ancestral, lunar calendar.

The eve of the entrance into the sacred grove is marked in the various village neighborhoods by celebrations that include shooting off firearms. Villagers are divided into two groups, and those from the Bapolondioc neighborhood are the first to circle the fromager tree four to seven times. In Niankite village it is those from the Fougaye section who circle the fromager tree. At this time, gunshots increase, and singing is accompanied by flutes, horns and the clash of metal objects. These shooting demonstrations take place in the after-

noon and evening, sometimes longer. Foubalot Badji, the great sorcerer from Bignona county, makes future initiates invulnerable with a traditional meal that protects them against swords, knives, arrows and bullets.

Finally, on the next day, the day appointed by the spirits for entering into the sacred grove, the opening ritual is carried out by those who belong to the oldest neighborhood. At Kagnarou, since people from Bapolondioc refused to agree to the conditions requested by their grove, they delegated the solemn opening to people from the Kassana neighborhood. After that section, Kansy, Dialamantang, Baliyoeng, and others follow. A huge crowd led by dancers follows the future initiates. Women come behind singing. They have tears in their eyes at the thought that their sons may not return after their stay in the grove. Some carry a jug of water or *dolo*, a drink made from millet flour, water, and a special plant reserved for the initiates. A line at the edge of the grove marks a boundary beyond which strangers and women cannot go.

There the initiates are given a drink of water or *dolo* and then enter the grove in single file. The rhythm of gunshots increases. Women and visitors must return to the village.

At Mlomp village in Bignona county, the shaving ritual is performed in front of a large crowd on the day the initiates enter the grove. Shaving is done with a knife or razor blade. When a future initiate is shaved, a tuft of hair is left near the forehead. Women carry smoldering bunches of palm nuts whose copious smoke distracts evil spirits. The initiates' remaining tuft of hair is removed near a fromager tree chosen for that occasion in each neighborhood. In the Fogny area, the tuft is removed at the ancestral home of the founder of a section.

In Mlomp, rituals take place alongside holes from which earth was dug to make mortar for building houses. The initiates circle a hole seven times, preceded by their mentors. Women are not allowed to take part in this procession.

All Mlomp neighborhoods go to a central grove located in the South for the initial testing of their initiates. The priority for entrance is the same as in the Fogny and Boulouf areas. Those from the oldest neighborhood enter first. All must obey the rules and wait at the outskirts of the grove. If ancestral priorities are not respected, severe consequences await the erring neigh-

borhoods. Deaths, disappearances and cases of insanity may result for those who disobeyed. Grove spirits harass group members until ancestral rules are followed and sacrifices made. Once the first part of the ritual at the central grove has ended, men surround the initiates, who carry branches with green leaves. A procession to each of the other sacred groves then follows.

Gunshots cease. All that can be heard is the singing of men that calls forth courage and willpower from each initiate about to receive the ancestral seal of circumcision.

The rituals that take place inside the grove concern the Diola people only. To reveal them would result in death or insanity.