

RAMON SARRÓ

THE POLITICS  
OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE  
ON THE UPPER  
GUINEA COAST  
ICONOCLASM DONE  
AND UNDONE



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## THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE ON THE UPPER GUINEA COAST

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RAMON SARRÓ

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS  
for the International African Institute, London

## For Marina

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Edinburgh University Press Ltd  
22 George Square, Edinburgh  
[www.euppublishing.com](http://www.euppublishing.com)

Typeset in Plantin  
by Koinonia, Bury, and  
printed and bound in Great Britain by  
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham, Wilts

A CIP record for this book is available from  
the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7486 3515 3 (hardback)

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is difficult to acknowledge help in a work that took so long to complete and led me to so many different countries. Let me briefly revisit them. In Guinea, my thanks go primarily to the people who accepted my stay among them in the Baga and Susu villages and in the cities of Kamsar, Boffa and Conakry, as well as to Asekou Sayon Kerra, the preacher the reader will soon meet. The staff at the Ministry of Science and Technology in Conakry were always very supportive. At the University of Conakry, Dr Erhard Voeltz initiated me into the study of Baga language. Dr Marie-Yvonne Curtis was an excellent co-researcher both in Guinea and later in France. Professors Ismael Barry and Aboubacar Touré made very useful comments on a paper I gave in 2001, which provided me with very good ideas as to where to go next. Above all Guineans, Aboubacar Camara – ever since we met in a wedding ceremony in 1993 – has been an extraordinary colleague with whom to conduct fieldwork, learn the language and discuss personal and anthropological issues.

This study emerged after a long gestation in Anthropology, British style. Over the decade of the 1990s I was linked to University College London, at the time undoubtedly the Mecca of West Africanists, and later to the LSE and to Oxford, as well as spending the best part of a year in Paris as an exchange PhD student. Acknowledgements in London are due first and foremost to the Africanist team that every Friday night used to gather around the charisma of Murray Last in the West Africa Seminar – supervisors, mentors, examiners and friends: Philip Burnham, Barrie Sharpe, Richard Fardon, Paul Richards, Barbara Hendrie, Mike Rowlands, Richard Fanthorpe, Nick Argenti, Marie-Nathalie LeBlanc, Kate Longley, Christopher Fyfe, John Peel, James Fairhead, and non-Africanist colleagues such as Josep R. Llobera and Allen Abramson. They all read or heard parts of this book and gave me hints on how to improve it. Charles Jedrej and Richard Fardon examined my PhD thesis in 1999. Together with excellent verbal comments, they both provided lengthy reports raising questions and providing suggestions that were later very helpful to my later field visits and in the preparation of the book. While in Oxford I often discussed aspects of my work with David Parkin, Wendy James and H el ene Neveu Kringsbach.

They not only managed to make Oxford feel like a warm city but brought valuable ideas and suggestions to the seminars I gave and the chapters they read. St Anne's College, where I was the Ioma Evans-Pritchard Junior Research Fellow for two years, proved to be a wonderful place to think about the research and prepare future fieldwork. Their financial help towards two months of fieldwork in 2001 is gratefully acknowledged. Among my Oxford colleagues I would like to single out André Celtel, who convinced me that I needed a personal copy-editor before even thinking of sending so much as a chapter to anybody else, and offered his services. I thank St Anne's College for making this hard work worth his time. Little did I know that, in addition to correcting my grammar, André would be such an astute reader of my earliest manuscript, which he very elegantly improved.

David Berliner has been a companion in Guinean studies ever since 1998. Without the long discussions with him in Oxford, Conakry, Lisbon and Brussels, my knowledge of both Guinean issues and anthropology in general would be much more limited and much less interesting. The fact that his fieldwork took place among the Bulongic, a group of Baga farmers I could only visit superficially and whose language is completely impenetrable even to other Baga-speaking groups, has greatly improved my knowledge of the whole region and provided me with very interesting comparative insights.

In Paris, gratitude goes first and foremost to Roger Botte, without whose encouragement and hints I would never have started to work on coastal Guinea. Marie-Paule Ferry spent hours discussing with me our respective linguistic material on Baga Sitem. The late Father de Banville, who in 1996–7 was in charge of the archives of the *Congrégation des Pères du St-Esprit* (Chevilly Larue), was an intelligent partner with whom to discuss the material I was consulting, as was his successor Father Vieira. Other French scholars who have helped me at different stages, giving feedback on papers or draft chapters, include Jean-Loup Amselle, Marie-Christine Cormier-Salem and the knowledgeable historian Michel Brot, who guided me through the rich material at the Archives d'Outre-mer (Aix-en-Provence) and through Guinean colonial history.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Bruce Mouser read the entire manuscript at a truly incredible speed and made very valuable contributions, as did Mike McGovern, whose landmark work on Guinea and perceptive views on recent Guinean history, and on political anthropology in general, have been of the greatest importance to me. Victoria Coiffam offered very timely advice when we coincided in Chevilly Larue in 1995 and in Conakry in 2001.

In Barcelona, Joan Bestard, Josep M. Casasús and Xavier Barnadas were very supportive and critical readers, as were (equally supportive, though less critical) my parents Artur and Irene. I also thank Professor Ferran Iniesta for inviting me to participate in his research project on democratisation in

Africa, thanks to which I could fund two months of fieldwork in 2003, and to CIRIT, who funded my initial fieldwork in 1993–5.

The final manuscript has been written at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon. I am grateful for many comments on the late versions by my colleagues João Pina-Cabral, João Vasconcelos, José Mapril, Ruy Blanes, Susana Viegas and Wilson Trajano Filho. I also thank the Institute of Social Sciences for human and financial support, and for allowing me to conduct fieldwork in Guinea in 2003. And I thank Ezequiel Correia for the preparation of the maps.

Preparing this edition for the International African Library has been a big challenge, and the very prudent and careful advice, criticism and suggestions of the series editor, Professor John Peel, are fully acknowledged. Benjamin F. Soares and Louis Brenner were, as I later learned, the two anonymous readers of the manuscript I first submitted. I could not have hoped for two more helpful readers, who prompted me to great lengths of clarification and improvement in a very demanding and at the same time constructive way. Mike Kirkwood, copy-editor for the International African Institute, has offered excellent help, going well beyond the call of duty in the preparation of the final manuscript. Of course the usual disclaimers apply.

Last, and probably first, it is my pleasure to express my gratitude to Marina P. Temudo, who not only read every single chapter as many times as I wrote it, but on many occasions helped me express my own ideas in sharper ways than initially occurred to me. More importantly, she came to Guinea in 2003 and, as an accomplished ethno-agronomist specialised in the rice-farming communities of Coastal West Africa (mostly those of Guinea-Bissau), she helped me design the last interviews and surveys and corrected misconceptions I had built up over the years. The argument presented in this book would not look very similar to the one the reader is going to read without her input, both during fieldwork and while I was writing up the final version. I hope that by dedicating this work to her I may start to express my gratitude for her presence in this study and in my life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ramon Sarró read social anthropology at University College London (PhD 1999). In 2000–2 he was the Ioma Evans-Pritchard Junior Research Fellow at St Anne's College, Oxford. Since 1992 he has conducted extensive field research in Guinea. His other works include *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches* (with David Berliner). He is based at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, where he leads a European (NORFACE) project on African Christianities in Europe.

# GLOSSARY

## A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

In order to make this book more fluent for English readers not familiar with the International Phonetic Alphabet, I have used an approximate spelling of Baga Sitem words and names of places using the Latin alphabet. I ask the reader to meet me half-way in one respect: the letter c in Baga Sitem words is to be pronounced as the English ch (in ‘chat’). In this glossary, however, I include, in brackets, the correct pronunciation using the following symbols from the International Phonetics Alphabet:

### Consonants

- k – voiceless velar stop, as ‘c’ in English ‘car’ or ‘k’ in ‘okey’
- c – alveo-palatal voiceless affricate: as ‘ch’ in English ‘chat’
- ŋ – velar nasal, as ‘ng’ in English ‘sing’

The other symbols used for consonants (‘p’, ‘f’, ‘t’, etc.) are pronounced as in the usual Latin alphabet, except for the symbol ‘gb’ in the word *gbenka*, which in Baga Sitem is one single plusive consonant with double articulation.

### Vowels

In the Baga Sitem language, eight vowels are regularly noted (Ganong 1998: 11–12):

i	ə	u
e		o
ɛ	a	ɔ

ə (schwa) – high central unrounded vowel

i – high front unrounded vowel

u – high back rounded vowel

e – mid front unrounded vowel

o – mid back rounded vowel

ɛ – low front unrounded vowel

ɔ – low back rounded vowel

a – low central unrounded vowel

The language spoken by Baga Sitem, called by its speakers ‘cəbaka cətem’, is a Niger-Congo language with noun classes. In general, when using the plural I have followed Baga Sitem rules (thus, I write one *abanka*, ‘ward’, but

several *cibanka*, ‘wards’). Yet I have not applied this rule when speaking of ‘Baga’, ‘Fula’, ‘Bulongic’, ‘Malinké’, ‘Susu’, or any other ethnic group well-known to the English readership, whose plural forms may be constructed in many different ways, according to the grammar of each language. In some rare instances, when introducing terms from different languages, I have constructed the plural simply by adding an ‘s’ at the end, as other authors working on the same region have done before me.

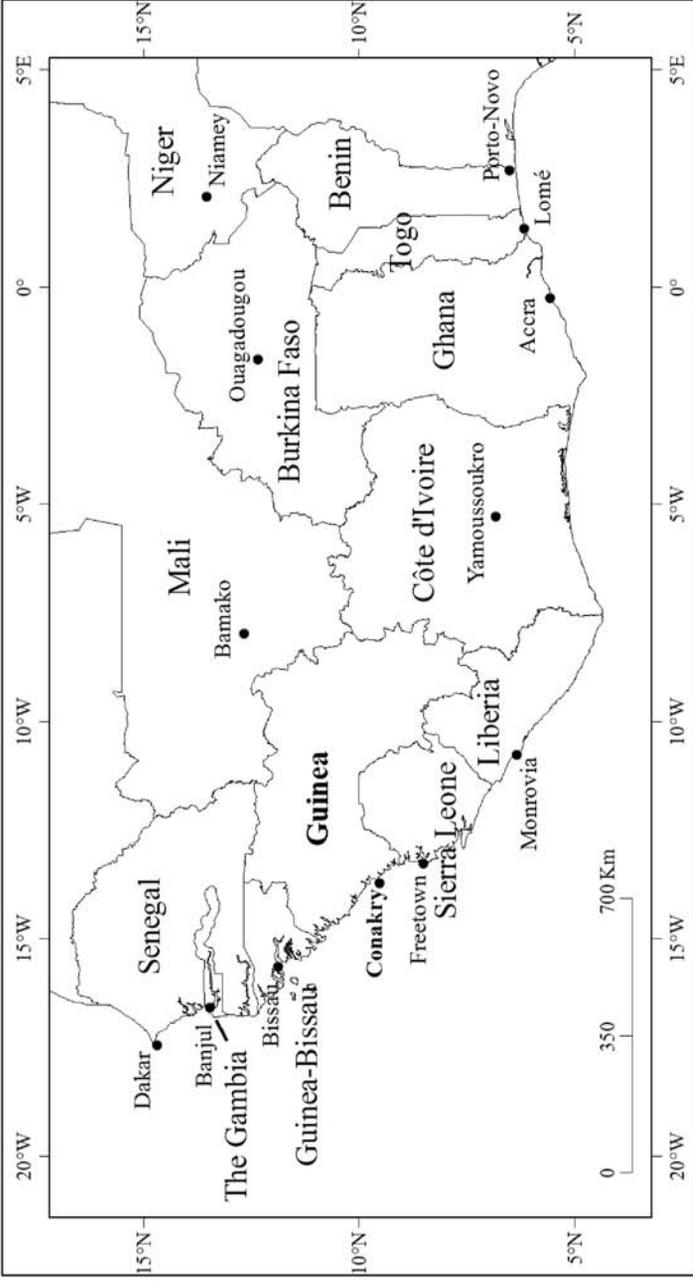
## GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK

Singular/Plural [Phonetic]	English
abanka/cibanka [abanka/cəbanka]	ward; courtyard
abol [abol]	a female spirit and a male cult around it
acol/col [acɔl/cɔl]	medicine; ritual object
acen/cen [acen/cen]	dog
afan [afan]	sacred wood
amanco/manco [amanco/manco]	spirit in charge of a ‘spirit province’ or of a region within it
amanco ngopong [amanco ŋɔpɔŋ]	male initiatory spirit, also known as <i>kakilambe</i> (its Susu name)
ane [anɛ; contraction of ana ɛ]	who
aparan/aparanga [aparan/aparaŋa]	grandfather (in some villages, <i>aparen</i> )
antof/ntof [antɔf/ntɔf]	earth
ateken [atɛkən]	a cult for married women
atof/tof [atɔf/tɔf]	territory
capafo [capafɔ]	hidden or indirect speech; the skill of speaking about something through allegories and metaphors
dacar [dacar]	slavery
dare/sidare [dare/sədare]	village
Dabaka [dabaka]	the place where the Baga people live
dale/sədale [dale/sədale]	rice field
defi [defi]	death
derem [dɛrəm]	oath; contract with a spirit
deser [deser]	witchcraft
dimba/sidimba [dɛmba/sɛmba]	a headdress; also known as <i>nimba</i>
dinda [dɛnda]	there
dukulum/sukulum [dɔkulum/sɔkulum]	bush
dim/sim [dim/sim]	voice
dim din [dim din]	one voice; consensus
fum/afum [afum/fum]	person

gbenka [gbɛnka]	a young men's cult
kanu/canu [kanu/canu]	god
kel/cel [kel/cel]	hoe
keleser [kələsər]	to break up; to destroy
kesoto [kəsɔtɔ]	to obtain
kibere [kəbɛrɛ]	to enter
kiderem [kədɛrɛm]	to make a contract; to swear an oath
kides [kədəs]	to settle; to ask someone to sit down
kides wube [kədəs wəbɛ]	'to settle a chief', a crowning ceremony for colonial (and probably precolonial) chiefs
kikenc [kəkɛŋc]	to circumcise; initiation dance
kidi [kədi]	to eat
kidi molom [kədi molom]	initiation (literally: 'to eat secrets')
kile/cile [kilɛ/cilɛ]	work group
kilop [kəlɔp]	strangler fig ( <i>Ficus spp.</i> )
kicere [kəcərə]	to know
kicerene [kəcərənɛ]	to know each other
kitam [kətam]	to be able to; to be stronger than
kiyi [kəyi]	to be
kiyi de [kəyi dɛ]	to be there; to exist; to be alive
kor/cor [kor/cor]	belly; patrilineal descent group
kop/cop [kɔp/cɔp]	plough
kibok [kəbɔk]	to cry; to wail
kele/cele [kɛlɛ/cɛlɛ]	granary
kilo/wolo [kəlɔ/wɔlɔ]	house; patrilineal descent group
kilo disre/wolo disre [kəlɔ disrɛ/wɔlɔ disrɛ]	patrilineal descent group (literally: 'inside the house')
kilo kupong/wolo wopong [kəlɔ kɔpɔŋ/wɔlɔ wɔpɔŋ]	oldest house of each descent group and ritual centre of the group (literally: 'big house')
kinger (kəŋɛr)	to close; the ritual actions glossed as the 'closing of the earth'
kifontre [kifəntərə]	to go to bed
kilip [kəlɪp]	to finish
kipise [kəpɪsɛ]	to dance; dance
kisɛrɛ	to be a <i>wuser</i>
kiyo [kəyɔ]	to have; to do
komne [komnɛ]	a children's male cult
kota [kɔta]	(Susu borrowing) a specific object of item of knowledge held as a private (or family) 'secret'
kosu	our

kusunka/cisunka [kusunka/cəsunka]	doorway; patrilineal descent group
kusumpur	to catch, to seize
teleng/meleng [telerŋ/melerŋ]	song
tes/mes [tes/mes]	thing, deed
malo [malɔ]	rice
malo mabaka [malɔ mabaka]	floating rice (literally: ‘Baga rice’ or ‘rice of the Baga’)
malo madale [malɔ madalɛ]	mangrove swamp rice (literally: ‘rice of the rice fields’)
mes mabaka [mes mabaka]	‘the things/deeds of the Baga’, i.e., Baga history and customs
moko [mɔkɔ]	today
ncoko/anco [ncɔkɔ/anco]	mother’s brother
nde [nde]	over there
ngonk/yonk [ŋɔnk/yɔnk]	spirit
nɔ	here
nonofor [nɔnɔfɔr]	pity; sympathy
powolsene/yowolsene [pɔwɔlsene/yɔwɔlsene]	toy
somptup	the name <i>amanco ngopong</i> receives in some villages
tewe/mewe [tewe/mewe]	name; reputation
tolom/molom [tolom/molom]	secret; mask; pain; cult
tonkure [tonkure]	a young men’s cult
wan/awut [wan/awut]	child
wan wurkun [wan wɔrkun]	boy
wan wuran [wan wɔran]	girl
weker/ceker [wɛkɛr/ cɛkɛr]	monkey
wube/abe [wɔbɛ/abɛ]	chief
wubakcerne/abakcerne [wɔbakɛcɛrne/abakɛcɛrne]	landlord
wucar/acar [wɛcar/acar]	slave
wucikra/acikra [wɛcɛkra/wɛcɛkra]	stranger, visitor
wuder/ader	newcomer
wufo wubaka/afɔ abaka [wufɔ wubaka/afɔ abaka]	‘non-Baga’ (expression used by elders to refer to non-initiated younger people)
wuka dotɔf/aka dotɔf [wuka dɔtɔf/aka dɔtɔf]	native to a village (as opposed to <i>wuder</i> and <i>wucikra</i> )
wumen/amen [wɛmɛn/amɛn]	ritual specialist who counteracts the evil actions of the <i>wuser</i>
wuran/aran [wɔran/aran]	woman
wurkifin/arkifin [wɔrkifin/arkifin]	spirit (different to <i>ngonkɛ</i> )

wurkun/arkun [wærkun/arkun]	man
wurok/arok [wærok/arok]	sister's son
wulipne/alipne [wælipnæ/alipnæ]	elderly man who has completed the initiation cycle (literally: 'he who has finished')
wutem/atem [wætēm/atem]	old man
wutemp/atemp [wætēmp/atēmp]	young, unmarried man
wuser/aser [wuser/aser]	witch



Map 1 West Africa



Young girl playing with a *Dimba dacol* headdress