

## **Municipal Elections in the Inner Niger Delta (Mali) or “Those Who Look for the Power Are among Us”.**

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At the beginning of the nineties, Mali has undertaken the decentralization of the state, a huge administrative reform. Officially, it was presented as an ideal tool which would bring development and democratisation at the local level via the multiparty game and local elections. Based on the voluntary villages' gathering, Mali has established three decentralized levels of authority: regions, circles and municipalities. The implementation of the main phases of this reform has widely relied on the leaders and local powers. Furthermore, the decentralization has quickly been understood as being an opportunity to restore the ancient order and to relegitimize the “traditional powers”. Although few studied in rural areas, the municipal elections and the electoral processes are at the moment among one of the most visible aspects of this reform for the local actors and concern directly the exercise of power. Punctuated with three local elections, a decade has passed since the creation of the municipalities.

This anthropological paper is about the case study of a rural municipality and its chief-town in the Inner Niger Delta. Based on two ethnographic fieldworks (ten months and seven weeks), I've observed a large mobilization of the local political elites in order to “win the municipality” during the local elections whereas the municipality is often perceived as an empty shell without real stakes. Thus, I propose observing and discussing the following questions in a diachronic perspective. What are the present stakes of being a town councillor? How does the local political competition take place in this municipality? Which are the rules and the resources of the political game? Who are the candidates in contention for the elections? How are “traditional” structures (as e.g. kinship or hierarchical relationships) used in order to mobilize potential voters? What do the alliances and the political transhumances mean for the political actors? That asks the questions about the maintenance and the renewal of the local political elites and the role of the elections in the municipal arena.