

## **Local Elections, Elites and Political Generations in the Inner Niger Delta (Mali)**

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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 the 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. First point, in a diachronic perspective, I suggest discussing the idea of the progressive constitution of political elite at the local level, its maintenance and its renewal partly because of the municipal elections. Then, I propose developing the following second point. The ethnographic data bring to light the existence of different political generations which cross the multiple belongings of the political actors (ethnic groups, social status, gender, kinship, etc.). These political generations have their own relationship with the politics. This situation leads to some progressive transformations of the representations of the politics perceptible on the long term. That has an impact on the local political game and has to be taken in account when we question about the social change.