

Boubacar Barry

***Senegambia: Advocating for a  
Regional Historical Perspective***

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# 1. REFLECTIONS ON HISTORICAL DISCOURSE AND ORAL TRADITIONS IN SENEGAMBIA<sup>1</sup>

In his last novel, Cheikh Hamidou Kane describes the role of the griot, guardian of oral traditions in Senegambian societies:

Silence is their testing ground. To express this race without writing, they dug their way into and pounded at the silence, which remained intact, enfolding them in its dark immensity. In the silence, they dug out grottos of rhythms, lit by the flash of guitars, deep valleys of legends. For thousands of years, before writing, working from within and on all sides, began to stitch the black world into itself with its gossamer thread, the griots, with their voices and the instruments they had devised, were the demiurge creators of this world, and its only witnesses. They exalted it, filled it with dignity — with weight, as they put it. They raised it above itself, sustained it on the battlefield and preserved it in glory and tradition. In so doing, they persevered against silence and oblivion, against time the destroyer. And so, Farba Mâsi Seck, griot of the Diollobé of the Fouta Toro, knew all about the power of silence.<sup>2</sup>

Thus it was the griot's dual function to break the silence of oblivion and to exalt the glory of tradition. This history built on an apprenticeship of oral tradition passed down from generation to generation has in the past few years been researched extensively by modern historians who through university training have learned how to write history based on a comparison of written and oral documents. Today, however, they appear to have privileged written sources whose information has simply been rectified or confirmed by oral traditions. In most cases, historians have not sufficiently analyzed the internal logic of these oral sources as

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<sup>1</sup> Dedicated to Mamadou Diouf, whose article "Historical Representations and Political Legitimacy in Senegal, 1960-1987" was the main inspiration for this reflection.

<sup>2</sup> Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Les Gardiens du Temple*. Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1996, pp. 7-8.

they have other historical discourses that could have been transmitted for the very purpose of recounting History.

In that regard, it is essential to understand how society in general revives oral traditions to respond to immediate needs or how these same societies confine whole chapters of their history to silence for a specific reason. Societies in the Senegambia have been treated in two parallel types of historical discourse that at times interpenetrate and flow along side by side, while never meeting at other times. This further complicates the difficult task of the historian in our oral society, which was eclipsed for an entire century of colonization.

#### THE GENESIS OF ORAL TRADITIONS IN SENEGAMBIA

Speaking of the Galam in his book *Les Portes de l'Or*, Abdoulaye Bathily enlightens the reader about the difficult conditions for learning oral traditions in the Gajaaga. According to Mamadou Talibe Sisoxo,

“Our master tells us to sit down around him. He tells us to get up. Once we are standing, he gives us a stalk of millet. He begins to speak. He recites three words (passages) for us. He tells us: ‘Tonight, you will learn them. You will recite them to yourselves all night.’ The next day when we get up, he gathers everyone together and interrogates you about what you have learned the night before. You recite. After finishing that, he gives you some more words (passages).

Every day, we start from the beginning of the story, at the point where we had stopped the night before, and this goes on for seven years.

The same word that you learn for seven years cannot escape you. Over seven years, we had three masters in succession, but each of them made us relearn from beginning to end. Those masters were Tamba Waranka for three years, Dawda for two years. Both of them are Sisoxo. My father Talibi for two years. In all, that totals seven years.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Abdoulaye, Bathily, *Les Portes de l'Or, Le Royaume du Galam, VII-XVIII siècles (The Golden Doors: The Galam Kingdom, 7th-18th Centuries)*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 189, p. 28.

This long, hard apprenticeship bears witness to the importance of the griot as the appropriate retainer of oral traditions. Niane Djibril, in *L'Épopée Mandingue de Soundjata*, confirms this eminent role of the griot in the preservation and transmission of oral traditions.

I am griot. This is me, Djeli Mamadou Konaté, son of Bintou Kouyaté and of Djeli Kedian Kouyaté, master in the art of speech. Since time immemorial, the Kouyatés have served the Keita princes of the Mandingo. We are sacks of words, we are sacks that enclose infinitely ancient secrets; we are the memories of peoples, by word we breath life into the deeds and songs of kings before the young generations. My word is pure and stripped of any lies; it is my father's word; it is the word of my father's father.<sup>4</sup>

This teaching and the transmission of knowledge are codified within the griot caste, which Sory Camara rightly named “the people of the word.” The endogamic system that relegates the griot to the lower caste of the *ñamalaka*, explains the distrust mingled with fear that these people inspire. But that further explains their gift of speech; oratory exhibits, epic and genealogical songs, lyric chants and first and foremost through the monopoly they exercise as guardians of the secrets of the past.

For that reason, their everyday behavior, habitual language and songs not only remind nobility what they must strive to be, but even more – and this is perhaps the more intriguing aspect of the matter – they offer the spectacle of a group with negative reference. Their function is also the extraordinary development of mediation structures that reestablish communication in a society where social relations all seem marked by considerations of hierarchy, authority, etiquette, deference and reverence.<sup>5</sup>

The griots, as retainers of oral tradition, have preserved and handed down from generation to generation the magnificent song of Mali and particularly the epic tale of Soundjata, the glory of

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<sup>4</sup> Djibril Niane Tamsir, *Soundjata ou l'Épopée Mandingue (Soundjata or the Mandingo Epic Tale)*. Présence Africaine, 1960, pp. 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> Sory Camara, *Gens de la Parole, Essai sur la contribution et le rôle des griots dans la société Malinké (People of the Word: An Essay on the Contribution and Role of Griots in Malinké Society)*. Paris: Kharthala, 1992, p. 12.

Mali, which has been published in several versions by Niane Djibril Tamsir and recently by Youssouf Tata Cissé and Wà Kamissoko. A chain of knowledge that can be qualified as initiatory, the founding myth of the Mali Empire has been kept intact, despite the vicissitudes of that empire. Soundjata's memory is kept as intact as a rock. Wà Kamissoko is proud to be linked to his ancestors, the Kamissoko Doréba, who were eyewitnesses to the event that brought the Mande into the realm of history. Moreover, they were the confidants and eulogizers of the most valorous kings of that country. This traditionalist of the pure and powerful verb took great pride in recounting the key moments of a heritage handed down by the ancestors to be carried on in history through song.

Wà Kamissoko, a gifted storyteller, also told tales of his country's rivers, hills, gods, institutions, myths and legends, in addition to its history, tribulations and expectations. Wà Kamissoko understands Mandingo society intimately, for he mastered many areas of traditional knowledge, including that of mythology, cosmogony and graphic signs, whose study is said to be reserved only for initiates of the grand *djo*, Mandingo initiatory societies, and particularly those of the *komo*.

But this knowledge is sacred and consequently, there has always been a secret side to its transmission which the teller is obliged to protect. There is always a way to say things. Each word has another meaning, another significance. Wà Kamissoko had agreed to make the essential elements of the knowledge of which he was a depository available for research, yet without betraying the Manden or tearing away the veil of the secret, which must continue to protect the sacred domain.

In summarizing the function of a griot, Youssouf Tata Cissé says that Wà Kamissoko considered the word "*Djali*" – griot – to be one of the handsomest titles that the Manden could have endowed to a socio-professional group, for it meant "*knowing how to discern truth and knowing how to accept it, at whatever cost; knowing how to speak the truth everywhere and to everyone; persuading men to work with honor and dignity; repeating ancient things, in other words, history; singing the valorous deeds of the brave and the righteous; denouncing the vices of thieves and*

*riffraff; entertaining the public by offering music, song and dance; celebrating festivals and ceremonies.”*

His mythic stories also took a didactic approach to the manner in which things were founded at the beginning of time. These accounts provide precious information about the Mandingo civilizations and concurrently reveal the indisputable bonds between the former and the civilizations of ancient Egypt. They speak of sacred animals, of protective divinities and cultural and everyday objects such as the Wagadu “Sa ba,” the giant snake protector of the Wagadou and distributor of prosperity. The origins of gold, the Wagadou and the Manden are attributed to Sa ba. Indeed, it is a feature of the historical Mandingo historical tale to constantly call on legend and even on myth as factors for legitimating or authenticating a situation, a formation, an explanation or an event.

Hence Soundjata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire, occupies an exceptional place. A miraculous birth, a difficult childhood, distant exile and reign of power add up to greatness and splendor. In this saga, legend disputes with epoch and history; in it, Soundjata appears to be the liberator of the Manden; he is the emperor who carries out his rival’s the initial program of his rival, Souma Woro: the abolition of slavery and of the slave trade in its states. He is the political leader who raises the country’s prestige, the impassioned patriot who opens the Manden to progress. In short, “Simbo” is the hero *par excellence*; his memory remains astonishingly alive in the minds of the Malinké; for everyone, he remains the most illustrious figure in West African medieval history.

But this sage who retains so much knowledge is aware of his limits when he says that it is not everyday that a man can master his innermost being and his science. “*When I am happy and when I feel that those who listen to my tales are attentive and therefore interested, I become myself again; I then fill up any container in which I may be placed.*”<sup>6</sup>

Just as for Shaka, Soundjata’s saga exemplifies man united with magic power, allowing a glimpse of the countenance of the

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<sup>6</sup> Youssouf Tata Cissé, *Wà Kamissoko, La Grande Geste du Mali, Des origines à la Fondation de l’Empire (Wà Kamissoko, The Magnificent Song of Mali, From its Origins until the Foundation of the Empire)*. Kharthala, 1988, pp. 1-36.

gods behind man's imprint. The epic tale is also that of a hero who symbolizes the birth and destiny of a people until his death. The beauty of this language stems primarily from this union and the beauty of life when everything begins, with birth.<sup>7</sup>

The first remark about this trajectory of oral tradition is the importance given to the myths about how kingdoms were founded. Soundjata, just like Shaka for the Zulus, occupies a privileged place and has not yet met his match in Mandingo oral traditions. The same holds for Ndiadyan Ndiaye for founding the Jolof Confederation for the Wolofs, and for Koly Tenguela, who founded Fouta Toro for the Toucouleurs. Even when imitators have initiated wide-reaching actions, tradition has attempted to attach them to the founding father. This applies to Tirimakhan, conqueror of the Kaabu, who by his military action managed to expand Mali to the west, where Soundjata's tradition is even more alive to justify his conquest. All the leaders of the Kaabu down to the last ruler, who perished in 1867 in the flames of the Battle of Kansala, endeavored to hook onto the myth of Soundjata the founder because of his unparalleled courage.

Samba Gelaajo Jeegi, the prototype of the *ceddo* prince, is also associated with the founding myth of the Denyanké kingdom incarnated by Koli Tenguela. Samba Gelaajo Jeegi (1725-1731) is the prototype of the warlord whose exploits, passion for risk, temerity and courage feed the legendary tales of the Fouta Toro griots. Samba mo lamatako – “Samba Who Never Reigned” (for having usurped power without being properly enthroned), with his famous stallion Umulatum and frightful shotgun, Bubu Lowake (“Buba That Need Not Be Loaded”) symbolized the violence that prevailed on the Fouta Toro political scene from every angle. Samba Gelaajo Jeegi was the epitome of the *ceddo* chief, who with his army of rifle-toting *Sebbes*, waged 45 battles during his rule, all to the rhythm of the “blood drums” (*dadde yiyan*) and to the war chants or “blood laden” voices (*bawdi peyya yiyan*). This poetic evocation of *ceddo* song through Samba Gelaajo Jeegi's epic tale is still sung today by the *Sebbes* in their war songs (*gumbala* or

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*.

*lenngi*), accompanied by “blood drums” and blood-laden voices. The *gumbala*, a hymn to bravery and courage, is first and foremost an epic song of death in which the *ceddo* assumes his destiny as a warrior, his fidelity to his ancestors and to the ethics of his caste. Hence, the most striking feature of the *gumbala* is its virile poetry woven with violence and death, outrageous feats and excess. *Gumbala* poetry is poetry of the macabre, a hymn to the warrior and his mount, to his rifle and his spear.

That one over there is the man who said:  
 By my mother’s prayers  
 By my father’s prayers  
 Don’t kill me, my God, with a shameful death  
 Don’t let me die in my bed  
 Surrounded by the cries of my children  
 And the moanings of old men.

Like the *lenngi*, chants sung only by *Sebbe* women for marriages or circumcision, these are heroic songs evoking disdain for death and the preservation of honor. It is a great communion reaffirming the adherence of future married couples to the *Sebbe* cast and their readiness to renew the values they are expected to perpetuate. Unfortunately, however, this era in which Samba Gelaajo Jeegi lived is evoked outside its true historical context dominated by violence born of the slave trade, which conclusively explains the emergence of this type of warlord nourished on the *ceddo* ethic.<sup>8</sup>

This does not mean, however, that oral tradition ignores the scissions and profound upheavals in political rule that these empires or kingdoms experienced after the demise of the different Founders: Soundjata of the Mali Empire, Ndiayan Ndiaye of the Jolof Empire, or Koli Tenguela of the Denyanké Empire. The great departures were accounted for ideologically by an attempt to create a new founding myth, and this is obvious for the most recent events from the 17th to 19th centuries, for which oral and written

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<sup>8</sup> Boubacar B. Barry, *Senegambia and Atlantic Slave Trade (English version)*. Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 88-93.

European or African sources have provided more information. This departure in historical accounting is essentially marked by Islamization and the establishment of new theocratic regimes rooted in Islam. Changes in regimes often occurred as a result of armed rebellions and rarely in a peaceful fashion, leading to different ways of obscuring or interpreting the past. One goes from a total rewriting of this past to oblivion or silence tending to erase the history of a previous regime in order to create a new founding myth.

It is symptomatic that the Mansa Kankou Musa, who is so highly praised by written sources as the most prestigious ruler of Mali, is viewed by oral traditions as the source of ruin and spoilage of the Mande treasures. In fact, this pilgrim king who depressed the price of gold in the medieval world by squandering Soundjata's treasures at Mecca, set out in an attempt to atone for an inexpiable error, according to Wà Kamissoko's version dedicated to Soundjata, "Mali's Glory," the "Liberator."<sup>9</sup> In that respect, tradition is at odds with the hagiography of historians touting African nationalism, who have glorified this lavish pilgrimage.

But the split is even more obvious with turnovers of regimes and the establishment of Moslem theocracies in the Fouta Djallon and Fouta Toro. In the Fouta Djallon, this involved holy wars led by Moslems, who seized power from the old Djallonké aristocracies. Hence, the beginning of the Moslem era in 1725 was the starting point of a new history tending to erase the past if not to describe it in a manner justifying the successful Moslem revolution. The tarikhs written by the Moslem elite supplanted oral tradition in order to consolidate history and vindicate the new Islamic order. This was more apparent in Fouta Toro where the new Moslem regime reached something of a compromise with certain solid pillars of the Denyanké regime, which had already profoundly affected the economic, political and social structures of the Fouta Toro. Some dignitaries maintained prerogatives in many provinces while at the same time accepting the new Moslem rule at the

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<sup>9</sup> Youssouf Tata Cissé, *Wà Kamissoko, Soundjata, La Gloire du Mali, La Grande Geste du Mali, Tome 2 (Wà Kamissoko, Soundjata, Mali's Glory, The Magnificent Song of Mali, Vol. 2)*, Kharthala, 1991, p. 5.

central level. The Denyanké regime had so marked Fouta Toro history that the new Moslem regime was unable to eliminate that glorious past incarnated by Koli Tenguela or Samba Gelaajo Jeegi.

So the two traditions – that of the *ceddo*, expressing the courage and warrior spirit of the heroes of the Denyanké regime personified by Samba Gelaajo Jeegi, and the other Islamic, relating the ascetic nature and piety of religious leaders such as Suleyman Bale, Abdel Kader or El Hadj Umar Tall – continued to exist side by side. This superposition of the two traditions is evident and still alive in the collective memory, even if the manner in which these two traditions are regarded reflects the social status of everyone in Fouta Toro. The two versions of Samba Gelaajo Jeegi's saga presented as doctoral theses at the University of Dakar by Abel Sy and by Amadou Ly are intriguing examples. Besides variations on the different themes that can still be found in the Fouta Toro, the two authors obviously perceived Samba Gelaajo Jeegi's saga quite differently. It was my privilege to sit on the two juries when the theses were defended. It is quite evident that Abel Sy, because of his *Sebbe* roots, had a more internal, sympathetic regard of that epic, which he had taken to heart. Moreover, he came to defend his thesis with his sister, and together, they sang the saga of Samba Gelaajo Jeegi with unparalleled charm, in the pure tradition of their land. In contrast, Amadou Ly, who belongs to the Torodo class that ousted the Denyanké, cast a cooler, more critical look at the hero and tended unintentionally to justify the Moslem revolution.<sup>10</sup>

However, this has done nothing to deter from the fact that the Samba Gelaajo Jeegi tradition is still alive and well in the Fouta, despite the success of the Moslem revolution. This is so true that the celebrated Futanké singer Baba Maal sings about the prowess of Samba Gelaajo Jeegi the *ceddo* as well as the praises of Thierno Saïdu Nur Tall, the descendent of El Hadj Umar. The symbiosis of collective memories reveals the Futanké people's tacit acceptance

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<sup>10</sup> Abdel A. Sy, "La Geste Tiedo (Song of the Ceddo)", Thèse de 3<sup>o</sup> cycle, Faculté des Lettres, Dakar, 1979-1980, 676 pages.

Amadou Ly, "L'épopée de Samba Guela Diegui, Etudes d'une version inédite (The Epic of Samba Guela Diegui, Studies of an Unpublished Version)", Thèse de 3<sup>o</sup> cycle, Dakar, 1978.

of the past while elsewhere, people insist on keeping silent about the events preceding the Moslem revolution – in the Fouta Djallon, for example.

At any rate, Moslem traditions have a tendency to obscure the pagan past and to attach the founding Moslem leaders who were founders of Moslem theocracies in the 17th, 18th and the 19th centuries to Moslem ancestors who were the Prophet's close companions. This chronological telescoping is frequent, while oral traditions also attempted to turn founding fathers such as Soundjata or Ndiadyan Ndiaye into Moslems, at a time when Islam was hardly the pillar of the reigning power. But the most important phenomenon is definitely the manner in which these oral traditions are set, and the passage from spoken to written word.

#### THE SETTING OF ORAL TRADITIONS

The passage from the spoken to the written word occurred very early on, at least the writing of history in Arabic, Pular, Wolof or Mandingo by Moslem scholars. The most ancient accounts are undoubtedly the *Tarikh Es Soudan* and the *Tarikh El Fettâch* written in the 17th century relating the end of the Songhay Empire, but also the events prior to the ancient empires of Ghana and Mali. The tarikh tradition was born and would be developed in the Moslem theocracies of the Fouta Toro, the Bundu and the Fouta Djallon, affording educated Moslems the opportunity to write about major events they had personally witnessed in Arabic or in Pular utilizing Arabic script. These are direct testimonies, just as much as they are interpretations of historical facts, i.e., a certain form of written history.

These tarikhs, carefully handed down from generation to generation, are multiple and widespread, and they have also been modified by the addition of more recent events. Moslem theocracies also created a new genre of scholars who were not necessarily griots, who until then had a monopoly on oral tradition and thus on history.

Griots still continued to play their traditional role, while their conversion to Islam gradually induced them to record their

historical knowledge in the form of notes or *tarikhs*, which they handed down from generation to generation, father to son. However, these notes were often jealously kept *aide-mémoires* that permitted them to exercise their talent – to recount history verbally – and to play their role as men of the word in an orally oriented society.

Indeed, despite Islamization, only a small number of people could read Arabic, and for that reason some scholars began very early on to write in African languages while using Arabic script. The purpose of Thierno Samba Mombeya's declaration in his work *Le Filon du Bonheur eternal (The Lode of Eternal Happiness)* written in Pular in praise of the Prophet, was to make it easier for the silent majority to gain access to knowledge about Islamic precepts. This sparked a veritable cultural revolution that engendered secular written literature of every kind. The passage from the oral to the written word had been made, and the two forms of expression would survive together, complementing one another. However, despite the progress made in the dissemination of written texts, oral tradition remained preponderant in most Senegambian societies, which obstinately resisted Islamization until the 19th century with Cheikh Umar Tall's movement.

The colonial conquest at the end of the 19th century constitutes a major break from this form of historical expression conveyed by oral traditions and *tarikhs*, which would be eclipsed by the colonial school and the denial of African societies' historical value. A double-tiered society was created, divided between a traditional elite jealously holding on to its ancient knowledge and a colonized elite obliged to learn in school about the history of its conquerors only to make it more scornful of its own past. This overt will to exclude the history of the majority of the population marginalized by colonial school is one of the ideological pillars of a system of domination. But one can hardly deprive a whole people of its history, or prevent it from reliving or recounting its history, because it has personally experienced that history.

From the very beginning, Faïdherbe, crafter of the colonial conquest of Senegal, manipulated the oral traditions and cultures of Senegambian societies to reflect French colonial interests. As Mamadou Diouf pointed out, this was the beginning of Africanism;

the metamorphosis of a history through script and Islamic influence were hence able to delimit a memory and a historiography specific to colonial society as it was being formed, drawing on both the European and the Senegambian past. The establishment of the *Ecole des otages* (Hostage School) in 1857 to win over the “sons of chiefs” to the French effort would enable Yoro Diaw to publish (in French this time) the first accounts of Wolof oral tradition in the *Le Moniteur du Sénégal* newspaper.<sup>11</sup> A proliferation of texts of African origin followed, written both by the old-guard elite and the new elite trained in colonial school. Gaden, Delafosse and Gilbert Veillard played a vital role in collecting and publishing in French, stories orally transmitted or written in African languages or in Arabic.

In 1913, Delafosse published *Chroniques du Fouta sénégalais*, translated from two unpublished manuscripts by Siré Abbas-Soh, who had recorded his memories kept after reading a work produced a century before by Tafsirou Bogguel Ahmadou Samba. Siré Abbas Soh, renowned for his knowledge of local traditions, had memorized this book and then filled it out by adding events that occurred in the Fouta afterwards, up until the colonial conquest. Delafosse obviously edited the almost identical versions of the two manuscripts into a single text, which he then translated without the originals.<sup>12</sup>

In 1935, Henri Gaden also published *La Vie d'El Hadj Omar, Qacida en Poular* by Mohammadou Aliou Tyam. Tyam and Cheikh Umar were life-long friends, and Tyam accompanied the former on all his campaigns. For Gaden, this privileged witness, who attempted to write an objective biography of the holy man, had fulfilled his task as a historian. He wrote Qacida in Pular in order to reach the largest number of those unable to read Arabic. The Qacida is a long poem of 1185 verses designed to be memorized and sung or recited in a modulated voice. The poor and the blind sang passages as they went begging from door to door. Students

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<sup>11</sup> M. Diouf, “Représentations historiques et légitimités politiques au Sénégal, 1960-1987” (Historical Representations and Political Legitimacy in Senegal, 1960-1987), in *Revue de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, V. 34, Paris, 1989, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Delafosse, *Chroniques du Fouta sénégalais, traduites de deux manuscrits arabes inédites de Siré Abbas Soh*, Paris: E. Leroux, 1913, p. 328.

and traveling marabouts would sing it in the mosque and many would gather just to listen. These works were within everyone's reach, while the *tarikhs* and *qacidas* written in Arabic were accessible only to a small elite. Compared to the text of *Chroniques du Fouta sénégalais* published by Delafosse, Gaden was careful to furnish the Pular version, which served as the basis for the French translation.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this admirable effort to collect written or oral traditions of the Senegambian past, one is nonetheless struck by the skeptic regard cast by someone like Delafosse upon their content or scientific nature. For Delafosse, from the historical viewpoint, “*the chronicles cannot claim to provide the scientific truth sought by the Western mind; the marvelous, in our opinion, holds too important a place in these accounts, but the same circumstance is found in the history of all peoples, at the beginning of what we can precisely call the historical period, which in the Fouta only began when Europeans came in to occupy the country.*”<sup>14</sup>

Until recently, in fact, the study of African and Senegambian societies would be dominated by colonial ethnology centered on a static vision of history. Trained historians would only appear later, with the nationalist movement. Throughout the colonial period, however, both the traditional and the colonial elite resorted to history to claim or negotiate privileges from the colonial power, which imposed its new legitimacy on the territory's people and resources. Yoro Diaw was indubitably the first to attempt to collect the oral traditions of Wolof kingdoms by using a chronological structure with exact dates, due to his training at “hostage school.” Those memoirs (which are forever lost) were published by Rousseau in 1929 and 1933. This created a chain of the written transmission of Wolof oral traditions, going back to publications in *Le Moniteur du Sénégal* in 1863 and up until *Esquisses Sénégalaises* in 1966, published successively by Azan, Gaden, Rousseau and Monteil. These authors used the notes of Yoro Diaw, who had received his

<sup>13</sup> Mohammadou Aliou Tyam, *La Vie d'El Hadj Omar, Qacida en Poular*. Transcription, Traduction, Notes et Glossaires par Henri Gaden, Paris, Institut de l'Ethnologie, 1935, p. 239.

<sup>14</sup> M. Delafosse, 1913, p. 6.

information from his father, the *Brak Fara Penda* (interviewed by Azan in 1863). Yoro Diaw then transferred that knowledge to Amadou Wade, who actually dictated his chronicle to Bassirou Cissé, a librarian at IFAN in 1941, before it was published in 1966 by Vincent Monteil.

In this case, there is obviously a chain of transfers and a concern to record in writing this tradition dominated by the recounting of outstanding facts for each regime, with an unusual preoccupation to frame the events chronologically. From the methodological viewpoint, we have already focused on the problems caused by the limitations of this chronology based on the span of reigns and dynastic lists, concurrent with the risks of having such tradition watered down as it is re-written by others based on authors' notes. But it is important to mention the commendable tendency to set oral accounts in script, with all the risks of deforming them in the process. Authors often borrowed from the written sources at hand, while editors like Rousseau introduced other information to fill out or clarify Yoro Diaw's memoirs for the Western reader. But the fact remains that Yoro Diaw was the principal source for the history of the Wolof kingdoms, even though his texts lack the flair and style of the great sagas that generally characterize oral traditions.<sup>15</sup>

Even better, history was used increasingly to legitimize privileges and bolster negotiating leverage with the colonial powers. Hence, Rawane Boye, a descendant of the Mantels of the Toubé, a province located near Saint-Louis at the mouth of the Senegal River, claims his rights by drawing support from oral tradition and the "fact" that Toubé inhabitants were French before all the other indigenous people, since Boye's ancestors were the ones to render the island to the French. In so doing, he brushes off the claims of the Brak of the Walo, who according to all reliable sources turned the island over to the French in 1659.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Barry, Boubacar, "La chronologie dans la tradition orale du Waalo, Essai d'Interprétation." Comité International des Sciences historiques, Tome I, Editura Academia Romana, 1980, pp. 516-535.

<sup>16</sup> Rousseau, R., "Le Sénégal d'autrefois, Papiers sur le Toubé de Rawane Bouye." *Bull. Comm. Et. Hist. et Scient.*, AOF, TXIV, p. 23 (Senegal of Olden Days: Papers on the Toubé of Rawane Bouye).

Likewise, in 1912 Amadou Duguay Clédor wrote about the Battle of Guilé, in which Albouri Ndiaye of Djolof fought the *Damel* Samba Laobé Fall of Kajoor. An essay written by Faidherbe to Coppolani, “Les Gandiols Gandiols au Service de la France,” follows this work. Amadou Duguay Clédor’s case is interesting, for even though he did not have access to the archives of that period, he still strived to produce a historian’s work by collecting and cross-checking the various oral traditions to ensure the coherency of his text. This holds true not only for his description of the Battle of Guilé but also for his efforts to correct errors about the history of the Cayor *damels* that had slipped into the *Moniteur du Sénégal* publications and related issues in 1864.

This was apparently the first time that Clédor demanded the right to write history because of his intimate knowledge and his access to information without requiring an interpreter as intermediary. But indisputably, the most important factor is that his attempt to write history dovetails with the nascent Senegalese nationalism of the time, and reflects its ambiguity above all. Clédor claimed his adherence to Senegal – by this we mean the Colony – and to France, the Great Motherland. He was a product of this major contradiction in the colonial project, which was obliged to depend on the indigenous populations to create “Great France.”

In 1912, this teacher and son of a Spahi, the squadron created in 1843 which played such a primordial role in the French conquest, was well aware of racial discrimination and called for equality. He fervently opposed the creation of a category of teachers from the indigenous managerial corps, which since 1904 had excluded them from the metropolitan corps with all its advantages. More significantly, he demanded France’s recognition of the many bloody sacrifices made by his peers for the Consulate and the Empire during the tumultuous times of the French Revolution and by their descendants who had served during the Senegalese period under Faidherbe, Pinet Laprade, Brière de l’Isle and Canard.

Amadou Duguay Clédor, who later became mayor of Saint-Louis and President of the Colonial Council, delivered a speech on December 27, 1927 during the festivities held in honor of the Squadron of Senegalese Spahis, which was to be dissolved as of

January 1, 1928. In a powerful speech, he exalted the Senegalese Spahis' combative zeal and the sacrifices they had made in conquering the Empire for France. On that occasion, he declared, "*I am the son of a Spahi of the Squadron, that Squadron that for us Senegalese will remain the school of sacrifice and devotion to the Motherland*" – compared to those he designated as El Hadj Omar's fanatical warriors – Lat Joor's bands and the famous prophet Amadou Cheikhou. He rendered homage to Spahis of Senegalese origin such as his father, and to those of French origin such as Villiers, making no distinction between the two groups; furthermore, he had no qualms about identifying with France's work. Reviewing all the victories against the enemies of France in Senegal, Dahomey, Mauritania and in Morocco, he rendered brilliant homage to that Squadron, which for Senegalese represented tradition within a context of centuries-old sentiments of loyalty to the French.

The brevity and detached tone of Lieutenant Hullo's response contrasts with Clédor's emotional delivery. In his speech, the Commander of the Senegalese Spahi Squadron fails to cite any Senegalese name along with those of Chevigné, Latour and Potin, whose heroism is offered as an example of the squadron's armed feats over 84 years of existence. The only allusion to the Saint Louisians is their attachment to their glorious Squadron, for which a hall of honor and two of its banners would be entrusted to the city of Saint Louis. For Lieutenant Hullo, this silence and oversight are explained by the fact that "*the pacification of our possessions in West and Equatorial Africa is to put it briefly, a fait accompli.*" The colonial system was at its zenith and could act as it wished from thereon, restricting the rights of Senegalese, particularly those originating from the communes of Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Dakar and Gorée, who were considered to be French citizens, and imposing rules of exception to the others, i.e. the large majority of the indigenous population living inland.<sup>17</sup>

But the frustrations of the four communes' French citizens and those of the indigenous populations inland were not long in crystallizing and by their linkage, in sparking Senegalese nationalism.

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<sup>17</sup> Amadou Dugay Clédor, *La Bataille de Guilé*, Dakar: N.E.A., 1985, pp. 176-185.

## HISTORICAL DISCOURSE AND NATIONALISM

This nationalism was founded on a major ambiguity, for the aspiration to gain rights equal to those of the French contradicted with the colonial reality of denying the indigenous populations their identity *a priori*. One after another, the nationalists appealed to colonial memory as well as the wealth of oral historical traditions to claim their place in the sun. Several historical discourses were developed based on diverse motives to lighten the way for the hesitant struggles for this emergent, ambiguous nationalism.<sup>18</sup> As Diouf pointed out, the construction of a mixed memory – that of the four communes, and that of assimilation capable of claiming a dual European and African heritage, bowed to the dynastic traditions due to colonial exclusion, and established the bases for royal families' ambitions centered around political power and land claims. This essentially Wolof dynastic tradition marginalized family and village traditions, thereby emphasizing the profound contrast between an aristocratic ethic and a day-to-day ethic.

The first split was primarily due to the opposition of the new indigenous elite which had just gained citizenship in 1946, represented by Senghor, compared to those originating from the four communes represented by Lamine Guèye who advocated assimilation. Here we see the emergence of two types of memory: that of the griots who served the traditional chieftaincy, the vehicle of the colonial administration; and the memories of the Moslem communities' brotherhoods, who were structured and focused around the colonial economic logic of the groundnut. The religious brotherhoods virtually controlled the peasantry and attempted to preserve their religious autonomy from both the colonial administration and the chief system inherited from an aristocracy defeated by France at the close of the 19th century.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Mamadou Diouf in his groundbreaking article "Représentations historiques et légitimités politiques au Sénégal, 1960-1987," illuminated a new way to thinking about historical discourses. I will settle here for specifying the place of oral traditions in this nationalist rhetoric, which spans approximately from the accession of citizenship in 1946 to the advent of the multiparty system in 1974. In fact, the same political class dominated during this period prior to independence and afterwards.

<sup>19</sup> Mamadou Diouf, 1989, pp. 14-15.

In 1948, the split between Lamine Guèye and Léopold Sédar Senghor led to the foundation of BDS, the *Bloc des Masses Sénégalaises*, which was forged from the marabout networks in the rural world. Senghor invented Negritude to restore the values of the black world and to renovate them by linking them to French values. Hence, the Senghorian ideological triangle of Negritude, *Francophonie* (the French-speaking world) and African Socialism was built with a dual memory – that of Faidherbe as the creator of that modern Senegal with Lat Joor, its traditional pole, at his side. But Negritude privileged ethnology over history with the aim of creating an African, even a Senegalese identity different from that of the West. This did not prevent Senghor from advocating racial mixing, which he believed to be the best way to arrive at a universal civilization.

The griot's word and traditional storytelling were viewed from the perspective of their poetic rhythms, which explains the importance Senghor attached to poetry, literature, theater and art. When history was brought into play, it was to choose Lat Joor as the national hero incarnating the aristocratic traditions and values of dignity and sacrifice as a cornerstone for the national ideology of independent Senegal under the single party. For Negritude, oral traditions were episodes that should serve to fortify sentiments of national unity. Considered above all as chronicles and legends, writing them down and their literary merit took precedence over their content, in fact over Africa's history, which Senghor relegated to the background throughout his rule.

Besides prehistory – which was privileged – Senghor considered math, philosophy and the teaching of Latin as the ideal disciplines. Nevertheless, he was determined to safeguard the colonial archives of Senegal and French West Africa (AOF), which were the only ones to have been maintained locally in the entire French colonial Empire. Their exhibition on the first anniversary of independence represented 300 years of Senegal's written history. This emphasized the new government's preference for the written document as the main source of the budding nation's history.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mamadou Diouf, 1989, pp. 16-17.

Senghor established the Dakar Center for the Study of Civilizations armed with its own review, *Dembe Ak Tey (Then and Now)*, a series focusing on myths and designed to collect, transcribe and preserve the oral traditions, as a means of entrenching writing over oral transmission. It was indicative at the time that most of Senghor's political opponents and those who disagreed with Negritude ideology were professional historians, aside from Majmout Diop, who incidentally wrote an essay on the history of social classes in Senegal and Mali. Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye Ly, Moctar Mbow and Assane Seck all fit into this category in the early years of independence.

In his work *Nations Nègres et Cultures* (Negro Nations and Cultures) published in 1955, Cheikh Anta Diop was the first to base his political action on the recognition of African history going back to the origins of civilizations – for Egypt was Negro. Cheikh Anta wanted to renew Africans' confidence in themselves. The reconstruction of African history opened Africa to universal concepts through Pharaonic Egypt and the affirmation of African cultural unity legitimized his Pan Africanist and federalist thinking. His preference for pre-colonial Africa contrasted with Senghor's preference for the colonial period. Like Senghor, however, Cheikh Anta Diop ignored the oral traditions and monographs, which were not included in the Egypto-Pharaonic scheme and consequently in the cultural unity of the Continent. Africa had suddenly claimed its place in history with fanfare and Cheikh Anta Diop privileged the continuity of this history, which is why he stressed the similarities between the institutions of pre-colonial Africa and those of ancient Egypt.

Contrary to the ideals of Negritude and the French-speaking world, he assigned African languages a primordial role as a means of achieving modernity. This explains the irreconcilable political differences between the two men, as well as Cheikh Anta Diop's *de facto* excommunication by the French academia and his marginalization at the Dakar University for his entire life. But until the end, Senghor avoided full confrontation with Cheikh Anta Diop. Ironically, although Senghor organized the Festival of Negro Arts to celebrate Negritude, it was Cheikh Anta whom the

Festival crowned as the African intellectual who had most influenced his generation. Indeed, Cheikh Anta Diop's paradox is that he privileged intellectual debate promoting the unity and total liberation of the Continent and the rehabilitation of African dignity, but confined himself to a line of political opposition within the narrow limits of Senegal's nation-state, in contradiction with his federal project. The effect was so deleterious that despite his decisive action in the construction of an African history by Africans, his direct influence on the development of field research was limited.<sup>21</sup>

This was also true for the second great historian Abdoulaye Ly, who wrote the first thesis on the history of Senegal, published in 1958. He studied the capitalist connection between the continents via the Atlantic in the 17th and 18th centuries. He took particular interest in the role played by Senegambia in that connection. This professional historian, due to his direct involvement in politics, lacked the time to delve further into the internal study of Senegambian societies beyond his political works such as *L'Etat et la Condition Paysanne (The State and the Status of the Peasants)* to justify the break from the colonial economy. Like Cheikh Anta Diop, he advocated immediate independence and a total break from the colonial system. This explains his split from Senghor after Senegal cast its positive vote, although he did return to the government briefly, between 1965 and 1970. Political activities also hindered Abdoulaye Ly from teaching history to the young generation of historians raised under independence, who were only able to meet the founding fathers of the Dakar School off campus, through political struggle.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> At the time, Cheikh Anta Diop was primarily famous for having published in succession:

- *Nations Nègres et Cultures*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1954;
- *L'Unité Culturelle de l'Afrique Noire*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959; and
- *L'Afrique Précoloniale*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960.

<sup>22</sup> His most celebrated work of the period is *La Compagnie du Sénégal* (Présence Africaine, 1958). 30 years later, in a lengthy postscript to a re-edition of this seminal work, Abdoulaye Ly links his working hypotheses on history with later research findings at the Dakar School. His writings on contemporary history after his retirement from politics and IFAN are proof of this eminent historian's vision of Senegal straddling the nationalist movement and the patriotic struggle against neocolonialism.

In fact, the rediscovery of oral traditions arose primarily from the second generation of professional historians, who took an interest in West African pre-colonial history. Their study of how societies developed in every area during that period generated much interest in the 1960s. In the tradition of Cheikh Anta, they had to prove that Africa did indeed possess a history worthy of the same interest as the great empires of the middle ages and that with the slave trade and colonization, it had suffered aggressions with disastrous ramifications.

That history, glorification of self and accusation of the Western civilizations gave birth to a myriad of works by professional historians who fully exploited the oral traditions along with African or European written sources. The first work to be based exclusively on oral traditions was indubitably *Soundjata ou l'Épopée Mandingue* (*Soundjata or the Mandingo Epic Tale*) by Djibril Tamsir, published in 1960. Niane was the first professional historian to have spectacularly rehabilitated the griot as traditional depository of the past. From his viewpoint, the Griot reigns the Throne of History, even if he is obliged to keep secrets, which explains his mastery in the art of paraphrasing. The success of *Soundjata* remains unparalleled to this day, even though Niane did not provide the Mandingo version of his text published in French. Through this text, which undoubtedly can be compared to Thomas Mofolo's *L'épopée de Chaka* (*The Epic Tale of Shaka*), the oral traditions established their legitimacy with written documents.<sup>23</sup>

This change in mindset gradually transformed the method of approach of African historians interested in African history. Throughout Senegambia as elsewhere in Africa, the methodology for the collection, transcription and interpretation of oral traditions was born. Vansina's publication of his methodological work on oral traditions stimulated others to use that source to reconstruct entire chapters of the Continent's history.

In Senegambia, the Dakar School, with Sekéné Mody Cissoko, Thierno Diallo, Oumar Kane, Mbaye Guèye, Boubacar Barry and Abdoulaye Bathily, would play a vital role in this effort to rebuild

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<sup>23</sup> Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Soundjata, L'épopée Mandingue*. Présence Africaine, 1960.

the past. These historians had the advantage of knowing African languages, which are the main keys for gaining information from the guardians of oral tradition. The manifest will of historians from the North American school such as Philippe Curtin, Martin Klein, David Robinson, Lucie Colvin, etc. to employ oral traditions on the same footing as written documents is also noteworthy. They published major works on the history of the Senegambian pre-colonial kingdoms, giving prime of place to internal history from the economic political and social perspectives.

Yves Person's monumental study on Samory remains an important reference. Person meticulously reconstructed the great adventure of Samory's unrelenting resistance to colonial conquest and the effort to construct an Empire on the ashes of the Mali Empire. His work is a prime example of the judicious combination of written documents and oral traditions through the systematic collection of ancient oral accounts along with eyewitness accounts of those who survived the great Samory adventure. For twenty-odd years, he retraced Samory's itinerary across West Africa, from the Niger River to the fringes of the forest in the south. This Breton nationalist was a passionate defender of African languages and cultures; he re-instilled confidence in our generation, who had the privilege to explore the internal history of Senegambian societies for the first time. The work undertaken by the Dakar School owes much to his teachings in Dakar and in Paris and especially to his commitment to the utilization of oral traditions.<sup>24</sup>

All of the research issuing from the Dakar School – on the Waalo Kingdom by Boubacar Barry, on Fouta Djallon by Thierno Diallo, the Gajaaga by Abdoulaye Bathily, the Kayoor by Mamadou Diouf, on Fouta Toro by Oumar Kane and on the Xaaso by Sekéné Mody Cissoko – reposes on the combined use of written documents and oral traditions and essentially covers the pre-colonial period between the 15th and 19th centuries. This is history written by

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<sup>24</sup> I still recall how he insisted that I conduct a chronological study of the various Brak reigns using the many dynastic lists published by the Waalo traditions. This exercise revealed to me the crucial importance of chronological order in oral tradition, despite a few nebulous factors that some historians have used as pretext to deny any historical value in oral traditions.

sons of the motherland who have preferred to study the kingdoms corresponding to their respective ethnic groups. This aligns with the vision of decolonizing African history; it is first and foremost a political history that concentrates on the dynastic traditions, although on some points the historians focus more on the economic and social changes because of the slave trade and colonization.

From the methodological viewpoint, oral traditions are primarily considered to be documents of another kind which are collected to complement chiefly European documents. For that purpose, historians consult archives that have been systematically researched in the different deposits of Africa and Europe and which have revealed the existence of major documentation. After the history of nationalism, with this generation, we step into the history of decolonization, which privileges the history of African societies as locomotives of their own history.

Indeed, the Dakar School's second generation collaborated with other historians hailing mainly from Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Zaire to create the first *Association Panafricaine des Historiens* in 1972, with the intention of decolonizing our history following to the formula proposed by the Algerian historian Mohamed C. Sahli. Hence, for Ki-Zerbo, history is the fundamental lever for raising our national conscience in the realization of African Unity, and taking charge of our own destiny. Not only was it imperative then to make a dignified entrance into history, but also to appropriate it in order to provide perspective on the actions of the new generations, who had an almost prophetic mission to regenerate Africa.

In 1975, in Yaoundé, the Association expanded to include African historians from English-speaking countries. For certain Africanists in Europe and America, however, the two quotations on the first page of the Association's publication, *Revue Afrika Zamani* demonstrated a will to exclude them. For our generation, the real issue was to appropriate our history and create a greater capacity for research and the teaching of African history in Africa. This would serve as the basis for consolidating the emerging nation-states without losing sight of Cheikh Anta Diop's goal of Continental unity. Cheikh Anta was actually the star of the Yaoundé Congress, where for seven hours straight, he spoke to our genera-

tion, who had only known him through his writings. The history of decolonization, just as for nationalist history of which it is a prolongation, has its limits and contradictions, which primarily reflect the difficulties of constructing a nation-state based on frontiers inherited from colonization. In the euphoria of re-conquered national sovereignty, history was put back on the agenda and ensured full acceptance. But history faced increasing challenges, given the conflicting demands of a society undergoing profound changes inherent in the erection of a nation-state.

#### HISTORICAL DISCOURSE AND NATIONAL IDEOLOGY

The nationalist ideology that appealed to Africa's glorious past was slowly but surely replaced by another kind of national ideology: that of single-party unanimity, indeed, of the party-state. This unanimous expression of history in the restricted framework of boundaries inherited from colonization contradicted with the historical reality of populations straddling several frontiers of the new independent states. The nation-state imprisoned history in a double strait jacket of unanimity and silence that intended to erase differences and contradictions in the competition for obtaining the wealth and power nation-state.

Depending on the country, national ideology led to a specific historical discourse drawing from the diverse oral traditions as much as from history disseminated by the works of the new, university-trained historians. All while proclaiming national unity, the resistance of the national hero chosen at the moment of independence was exalted enthusiastically as an example for the new generations. Lat Joor was designated as Senegal's national hero, as were Samory Touré and Alfa Yaya for Guinea, while Mali turned to Soundjata, founder of the Mali Empire.

Oral traditions were honored and radio broadcasts proliferated with accounts told by griots, whose role as retainers of the collective memory had been restored. But this recourse to history was uneven. Some kingdoms were showcased because of the role they played before colonization, and primarily due to their dominant place in the post-colonial nation.

In Senegal, therefore, the collective Wolof memory dominated both in studies and in the accounts of oral traditions. More significantly, due to the powerful influence of the Mouride and Tidjani brotherhoods in the groundnut basin at the heart of Senegalese economy, historical Islamic representation tended to replace the dynastic traditions. The heavy political clout of the brotherhoods, who controlled the rural world, explains this tipping of the balance and the flourish of oral traditions praising their founding fathers – Ahmadou Bamba for the Mourides and Malick Sy for the Tidjanes.

The technique remained identical, however, for the new oral traditions followed the model of the dynastic traditions to exalt the virtues of the founding fathers. Their miraculous deeds were played up, like the colorful tale about Ahmadou Bamba's exile and his acts of resistance against the colonial power. Emphasis was placed on whatever would help consolidate the movement's cohesion and respect of the Mouride or Tidjani hierarchy while attaching their successors' actions to those of the Founding Fathers – the perfect models – whose lives and noble deeds in many ways resembled those of such legendary heroes as Soundjata or Ndiadyan Ndiaye. A certain dialogue was being developed in which imagination shaped recent history as it was being formed.

This history was propagated through the radio and multiple publications in book or newspaper form. The public actually became infatuated with history. It is during this period that Ibrahima Baba Kaké launched the radio show "Mémoire d'un Continent" from Paris, which weekly broadcasted accounts by professional historians and traditionalists or simply eyewitness accounts of veterans from the struggle for independence. More importantly, he also launched his collection *Les grandes figures africaines* to celebrate heroes who had resisted the French conquest such as Samory, El Hadj Umar and Bokar Biro. Borrowing from the colorful language of the oral traditions, career historians have endeavored to make this new written history easily accessible to the larger majority by combining written documents and oral accounts, which have been collected on a large scale in recent years.

The influence of the epic nature of such accounts was highlighted in our work on Bokar Biro, for which the numerous chronicles

and tales of the Fouta Djallon published by Alfa Ibrahima Sow<sup>25</sup> were chosen as background and models. In this work, I simply introduced a chronological framework, which is often missing in the epic accounts told by griots, in addition to information gleaned from archival documents, which unveil the Machiavellian strategies of the French in their colonial conquest. Paradoxically, even for such recent times, the oral traditions or written chronicles often obscure the French presence and France's action in the colonial conquest.

The aim was to arrive at a glorification of the national hero in response to the needs of the moment during this pivotal phase of decolonization.

Ibrahima Baba Kaké's collection has been highly successful, for it responds to a need, a thirst for knowledge about our history by the masses, which do not have access to scholarly works. Still, such popularization is limited to that small minority that has learned French. We will have to wait until this work on Bokar Biro is translated into Pular so that history can be brought back to life for the masses, who continue to listen in their mother tongues to the tales told by griots, whose word is now being conveyed by the modern media of audiovisual information.

This reveals a fascination for history, with a sort of symbiosis between the historical discourse of professional historians works and that of the oral traditions, which play up the great men and key moments of African history, namely its political history. Baba Kaké's collection is easily accessible because of the modest price of the pocketbook version, which is completed by a luxury edition of the collection entitled *Les Africains*, published by Jeune Afrique under the editorship of Charles Julien. These same towering figures reappear in the two collections to celebrate the past but also to indirectly justify the actions of the new presidents, fathers of nations in the making. They served as a pretext to justify the

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<sup>25</sup> B. Barry, *Bokar Biro, le dernier grand almamy du Fouta Djallon*, N.E.A., 1976. *Collection des Grandes figures africaines*. The same bibliography was also published in the collection *Les Africains*, before it was published in Pular. It was inspired by Alfa Ibrahima Sow's publication, *Chroniques et récits du Fouta Djallon*, Paris: Librairie Cklincksieck, 1968.

sacrifices the people were expected to consent to unanimously if they hoped to forever eradicate the traumatic experiences of colonization and the slave trade. They also served to muddle the logic of a domestic situation that the masses found increasingly difficult to bear.

With relative intensity, the new governments of Senegal, Mali and Guinea developed this national history to mark a clean break with the colonial past and create new models drawn from the bottomless reservoir of African values communicated through oral traditions.

The main error committed by the nationalist-oriented historians and by like national ideology, was to consider oral traditions to be equivalent or complementary to written documents. As sources, these traditions were only supposed to be treated critically, just as for the written documents that historians and nationalists so carefully consulted to complete knowledge about the African past.

Clearly, these oral traditions primarily conveyed a historical discourse that was manipulated depending on their holders' societal needs; this explains why such huge blocks of silence also punctuate these various types of historical discourse. In fact, the heaviest silence weighs on Africans' participation in the slave trade that was perpetuated for several centuries and had long-lasting repercussions on the Senegambian societies. Apart from the number of prisoners taken during the numerous wars between Senegambian kingdoms mentioned occasionally by oral traditions, they literally ignore this slave trade, which was essentially pieced together from the archives and reports of European travelers. The fact that the victims were carried beyond the Atlantic might explain why the memory of their suffering was instead preserved in the Americas, with the specific aim of combating slavery. Africa the Motherland thus became the focal point for millions of slaves who refused to forget so they could survive in a society where racism was the very foundation of their servitude. At that level, Mamadou Diouf in *L'Histoire du Kajoor au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, perfectly emphasized the necessity to consider these oral traditions as a form of historical discourse on par with the scholarly works of professional historians who mainly used written documents as

their basis. The manipulation of oral traditions heightens awareness of the populations' concerns, who interpreted their history depending on their needs at a given time.

Hence, after Senghor's departure in 1981, Senegalese nationalism combined with Negritude and *Francophonie* ideals yielded to the spirit of national revival advocated by Senghor's heritor, Abdou Diouf. The son was obliged to kill the father so to speak, due to the failure of the nation-state and an unprecedented economic crisis that scattered national unanimity to the winds. Senghor's one-party, modern state was undermined by political and cultural multi-party demands. The resignation of the "Last of the Empire" (*Le Dernier de l'Empire*), a term coined by Sembène Ousmane in his novel by that title, renewed hope for a true break with colonial thinking.

But national revival, which had worked well 20 years earlier in Guinea for Sékou Touré and in Mali for Modibo Keita in their efforts to rediscover their African roots, was used to fabricate a national identity at any price and generate several memoirs, entrenching a power that no longer had any control over its populations or its own economic decisions.<sup>26</sup> The oral nature of African civilizations was reaffirmed and griots regained their position in society as guardians of this memory contained in oral traditions.

National revival was expressed in the dual New School/National Cultural Charter through two channels – one traditional, one modern, the historian and/or the griot and journalist according to Mamadou Diouf. Historian Iba Der Thiam, who had become the Minister of National Education, played a major role in organizing grandiose commemorative ceremonies to found a new political legitimacy through the reclaiming of Senegalese values. But the Government no longer had the means to impose silence or national unanimity as the single party regime had for the first two decades. Dissident opinions and particularisms were overtly expressed as people turned to history and oral traditions were revived to justify one cause or another. The reconstruction of the collective Mouride brotherhood's memory expresses the dynamics of a return to the

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<sup>26</sup> M. Diouf, 1989, pp. 16-17.

source and justifies the revolt of the brotherhood's new Khalife, Abdoul Lahat.

In that same thrust, the centennial celebration of the death of Lat Joor – until then Senegal's only national hero – inspired an equitable sharing of the glory with other regions, each celebrating its hero. Thus heroes like Mamadou Lamine for Eastern Senegal, Maba Diakhou for the Sine Saloum, Aline Siteo Diatta for the Casamance, etc., were all glorified on the same footing as Lat Joor in celebrations and commemorative events by historians and traditionalists. But the simple evocation of history was not enough for the government to contain the centrifugal forces that were accumulating because of its incapacity to contain the political and social crisis.

In the Casamance, the armed rebellion of the Joolas expressed an extreme case of the rejection of national unity established on the tyranny of colonial history, which still legitimized the modern State in Senegal. Furthermore, Fouta Toro populations, feeling either defenseless or desperate, also sought refuge on their native soil and claimed exclusive rights to the advantages created following construction of the dam on the Senegal River. During this national crisis, regional, village and local traditions were evoked at every level help them voice their grievances. It was then that professional historians either fell silent or turned towards current history to participate in the political debate being played out increasingly in private newspapers and among the many opposition parties recognized by those in power. Historians have used the oral testimonies of the latter witnesses to study the colonial period but particularly the present.

Paradoxically, it was through the literary medium that the great epic texts of oral traditions were again brought back to life. The numerous versions of the Samba Gelaajo Jeegui saga, like those of the Kajoor era, are the works of literary scholars who are primarily interested in poetry and the study of literature in African languages. This commitment to African literature reinforces the importance of oral traditions, which are thus solicited by disciplines other than History. Nevertheless, it is urgent to promote closer collaboration among the various disciplines, which all need to

collect, transcribe and translate the oral traditions before using them. Indeed, in the final analysis, they are still our main sources for bearing witness to our civilizations rooted in oral traditions.

#### CONCLUSION

It is difficult to conclude this reflection about oral traditions because so many avenues of research are suddenly open to us. For years, historians have privileged the collection and utilization of oral traditions in their works, while neglecting reflection about their functions in a society rooted in oral traditions.

It is evident that oral traditions, beside their testimonials and the information they can contain, are historical discourses first and foremost. The first users, who privileged their aspect as oral documents in contrast or as a complement to written documents, neglected that aspect.

The dynastic traditions, which are more numerous, focused more on political history, and it is only now that historians are taking an interest in village and family traditions, which enable us to explore the daily lives of populations as much as social conflicts, demographic and climatic evolution.

Charles Becker correctly pointed out that external sources are privileged compared to internal sources in the re-writing of Senegambian history.<sup>27</sup> He and Mohamed Mbodj are staunch advocates of the collection of village oral traditions. This means that oral traditions of every shape and kind have earned their place in the making of African history.

The methodological approach to these oral traditions is being refined increasingly by professional historians such as Henriette Diabaté, who wrote an “Essay on the Methodology of Oral Sources and Stories Concerning the Sannvi of Côte d’Ivoire (*Essaie de méthodologie des sources orales et Histoires à propos du Sannvi de Côte d’Ivoire*).” The multiple versions of the sagas of Soundjata and Samba Gelaajo Jeegui are still vivid in the

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Becker, *Réflexions sur les sources de l’histoire de la Sénégambie*, Paidenma 33, 1987, pp. 148-165.

collective memory and bear witness to the distant past. It is also true that traditions continue to be produced by societies as they develop, recounting their current adventures, for they are primarily historical accounts, after all.

The primary and immediate problem is that we live in a society moving at several speeds, with three categories of elite sharing the historical terrain. They are: a) professional historians from the French educational system that shaped the Modern State; b) the Arabic-speaking elite trained in Arab countries in the Moslem style; and finally c) the traditional elite who jealously guard their knowledge. The junction has yet to be made between these three types of retainers of knowledge. This partly explains the crisis of the post-colonial State, which still imposes a common historical identity on plural societies experiencing their specific histories over extended periods of time.

This crisis is all the more acute because the political, ruling elite has become alienated from its history and privileges the colonial model. Only modern singers such as Youssou Ndour and Baba Maal have successfully formed bridges between the historical discourses tapping into these different elitist groups' sources of knowledge, while the latter spurn each other. For the moment, only these musicians bear a message that appeals to African societies as a whole, extending beyond national borders. In the meanwhile, we must await the coming of an intellectual and political leadership that can speak the language of African societies, one that is respectful of their full spatial, social and chronological dimensions. For now, however, the profession of Historian is certainly a hard one to practice!

## WRITING HISTORY IN AFRICA AFTER INDEPENDENCE: THE CASE OF THE DAKAR SCHOOL

At a time when Wisconsin with Jean Vansina and Philip Curtin, Birmingham or the S.O.A.S with John Fage and Roland Olivier, and Paris VII with Catherine Coquery all claim to have fathered African historical studies, it may be presumptuous to speak of the Ibadan, Dar Es Salaam, Makerere or Dakar Schools as offering alternative ways of regarding and writing African history.

This automatic reference to schools outside Africa – in America, England and France – takes us straight back, alas, to the old colonial vision of the colonies themselves as intellectually void or dependent. This was what prompted Mohamed Sahlì to write his pamphlet, “Decolonising History” in the mid-sixties, in the hope of ushering in a new way of regarding the history of the Maghreb. Of course, many non-Africans have played an active part in developing African historical studies, and indeed in that great adventure of decolonising minds and received ideas on Africa, previously regarded as a continent with no history and no civilisations. But the fact remains that many of them continue to ignore both the writings of African historians and the deep-seated motivating factors behind the daily battle those historians find themselves waging in their own societies. That is why we need to retrace their intellectual trajectory to gain a sound idea of where they now stand in relation to their own past.

Alongside Ibadan with Dike and Ajayi, Dar Es Salaam with Temu and Rodney, and Makerere with Ogot, the Dakar School with Cheikh Anta Diop and Abdoulaye Ly has played a leading part in this mighty process of decolonising Africa’s history and, beyond that, rewriting it to meet their own societies’ needs. Essentially concerned with the writing of history in all its forms, they have not always given sufficient thought to their own intellectual itinerary, to priorities in research and teaching, and – above all –

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to the best ways of communicating the results of their research. For the writing of history is indissolubly bound up with the social consciousness of a group and a class, and one of its aims is to solve the problems inherent in preservation of the essential structures of the existing legal and political edifice.

How do the concerns of African historians connect with those of their western academic counterparts as they focus together on Africa. What, above all, are the distinctive features of that insider's view which they take of their own societies in the various phases of the struggle to achieve independence and then build nation states – all the way up to the present crises, which are raising the whole question of the historian's role in our society again with new acuity.

Disregarding the artificial distinction between English-speaking and French-speaking historians, there is a large measure of similarity between the concerns of the various African schools, which have gradually become independent academic centres for teaching and research on African history. For reasons of time and space, this retrospective account of the writing of history in Africa will focus on the Dakar School, which we have had the good fortune to know from the inside for the last thirty-five years without a break.

#### THE DAKAR SCHOOL AND THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

The first collective exploration of history-writing in Africa can be found in the pages of the book published in 1986 by Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury, who asked a number of historians, both African and non-African, the basic question: What kind of history? For what kind of Africa? In that book, Mamadou Diouf and Mohamed Mbodj tackled the issues emphasised by the historians of the Dakar School, while Martin Klein explained the difficult academic conditions which had impeded the development of historical studies. By going to the heart of the matter, both articles opened the way to retrospective reflection on the intellectual trajectory followed by the Dakar School in its fight against silence and forgetting.

Africa's main problem in fact is that it has an ancient history, but that study of it was parenthesised by a century of colonial rule. At the same time, the recent rediscovery of that history, in the last thirty years, has spawned a vast amount of writing in both French and English, which the elites, and even more the population at large, are still a long way from digesting. Yet a country which stops thinking about its past is bound, in the long term, to lose sight of the truth and go dangerously off-course.

The Dakar School is closely linked with the founding of the IFAN (the *Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*, which later became the *Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*) and the History Department at the University of Dakar, which produced several generations of historians from the 1950s on. It is distinguished by its multi-national, and also multidisciplinary character. Dakar indeed is a rallying point for that entire French West African and French Equatorial African intelligentsia which the colonial power tried to mould in its own image.

For a century, ethnology was the main ideological instrument which those powers used to back an assimilation policy of the kind which robs indigenous peoples of their identity. When the reaction set in, history was at first regarded as a means of liberating the African continent, in so far as studying Africa's past was one way of legitimising the anti-colonial struggle. From the very beginning, the historian's trade was itself deeply embroiled in this national liberation struggle. Looking back, this helps us now to understand the vital part played by the two historians Cheikh Anta Diop and Abdoulaye Ly in the birth and development of the Dakar School, which they influenced more by their involvement in the patriotic struggle than by their teaching. The publication of Cheikh Anta Diop's *Nations nègres et cultures* in 1955 and of Abdoulaye Ly's *Compagnie du Sénégal* in 1958 marks a decisive epistemological break in colonial historiography, since they immediately make African history serve African liberation. It is true that the domination of colonial ethnology had never, during the colonial era, totally disqualified history as a key to understanding and studying African societies. In spite of the brutal way in which they had

been conquered, and their political and social structures destroyed, those societies had clung jealously to stories of their distant past, stored in their tenacious collective memory and nurtured by the oral traditions relayed by the griots and the Tarikhs written by the Muslim scribes.

The griots, rightly termed people of the spoken word by Sory Camara, transmitted from one generation to the next epic tales of the exploits of Soundjata, founder of the empire of Mali, or the warriors of Samba Gelajo Jeegi, commemorated in verse of virile strength, in which violence and death are the recurrent themes. They also transmitted memories of the great migrations, such as that of Koli Tenguela and his people, who traversed the whole of Western Sudan before founding the kingdom of Danyanke on the banks of the Senegal River. Oral history has its limitations, but the griots transmitted – lovingly and with unequalled mastery of the spoken word – the deeds and exploits of African societies for the precise purpose of giving the past a voice.

In his novel, *Les gardiens du temple*, Cheikh Hamidou Kane conveys their role as the guardians of tradition vividly when he writes: “Silence is their testing ground. To express the race without writing, they dug their way into, and pounded at, the silence, which remained intact, enfolding them in its dark immensity. In the silence, they dug out caverns of rhythm, lit by the flash of guitars, deep valleys of legend. For thousands of years, before writing, working from within and on all sides, started to stitch the black world together with its fine thread, the griots, with their voices and the instruments they devised, were the demiurge creators of this world, and its only witnesses. They exalted it, gave it dignity and, as they put it, weight, raised it above itself, sustained it on the battlefield, and preserved it in glory and tradition. In doing all of this, they strove against silence and forgetting, against time the destroyer. And so Farba Mâsi Seck, griot of the Diallobé of Fuuta Toro, knew the power of this silence.”

Gradually, as Islam spread, the Muslim elite started to record the past in writing, in Arabic or in African languages using Arabic characters. The oldest of these records are certainly the Tarikh es Soudan and the Tarikh El Fettach, mainly written in the seventeenth

century, which relate the end of the Songhai Empire, but also events which went before, concerning the ancient empires of Ghana and Mali. The Tarikh tradition was born and developed in the Muslim theocracies of Fuuta Toro, Bundu and Fuuta Jallon, which were founded in the eighteenth century. It generated a series of texts written in Arabic, Wolof and Mandingo, and also a certain kind of secular written literature, embracing all the genres and complementing the oral tradition.

The colonial conquest in the late nineteenth century produced a major break in the transmission of history via oral tradition and the Tarikhs. Making it a principle that African societies had no history, the colonial school developed an ambiguous science – African studies – emphasising ethnology at history's expense. In this way, colonial ideology devised a way of writing history which was specific to the emergent colonial society and drew both on Europe's and Africa's past. Thus Yoro Diaw, a product of the *Ecole des otages* founded in 1857, published (this time in French) the first orally transmitted tales concerning the Wolof kingdoms in the newspaper, *Le Moniteur du Sénégal*, from 1863 on. Later, Henri Gaden, Maurice Delafosse and Gilbert Vieillard played a vital role in collecting, and publishing in French, stories orally transmitted or written in African languages or Arabic.

In 1913, Delafosse published the *Chroniques du Fouta Sénégalais*, a translation of two unpublished Arabic manuscripts in which Siré Abbas Soh had set down his memories of a book written a century before by a certain Tafsirou Bogguel Ahmadou Samba.<sup>1</sup>

In 1935, Henri Gaden published the life of El Hadj Omar, *Qacida*, written in Fulani by his life-long comrade, Mohammadou Aliou Tyam. Written in Fulani to reach a mass readership, the *qacida* is a long poem of 1185 verses, which is meant to be learned by heart and then sung or recited.<sup>2</sup> This laudable effort to collect the written and oral traditions of the Senegambian societies' past in no way modifies the obstinate colonial prejudice that the African

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Delafosse, *Chroniques du Fouta Sénégalais*, translated from two unpublished manuscripts by Siré Abbas Soh, Paris, Leroux, 1913, 328 pp.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammadou Aliou Tyam, *La vie d'El Hadj Omar, Qacida en poular*, published by Henri Gaden, Paris, Institut d'ethnologie, 1935, 289 pp.

peoples have no history and enter history only when colonisation intervenes. This explains in fact why the study of African societies was dominated until very recently by colonial ethnology, fixated on a static vision of Africa's development. Throughout the colonial period, however, the African elites, both traditional and colonial, used history as a weapon in demanding or negotiating privileges from the colonial powers, which unswervingly imposed their new writ in managing Africa's people and resources.

Interest in history continued to grow, notwithstanding the negative attitude to the past of African societies displayed by the colonial powers, which sought to assimilate them to western culture, educating them to turn their backs on African realities. Thus Yoro Diaw's writings on the Wolof kingdoms, published in *Le Moniteur du Sénégal* in 1863, were taken up by Gaden and Rousseau in 1929 and 1933, and then by Bassirou Cissé in 1941, before being published in *Les Esquisses Sénégalaises* by Vincent Monteil in 1966.

But it was Amadou Duguay Clédor who, in his 1912 book on the battle of Guilé, first claimed the right to write the history of Kajoor because of his intimate knowledge of the country and, above all, his access to information without needing an interpreter. The most important point, however, is that his attempt to write history is closely bound up with the birth of Senegalese nationalism, ambiguous though this may be in terms of the colonial project.

This primary teacher, the son of a spahi, was aware of racial discrimination and demanded equality in the name of the sacrifices which his ancestors had made for France from the stormy days of the French Revolution on. His call, which he repeated as President of the Colonial Council in 1927, fell on deaf ears, and it was not long before the frustrations felt by the citizens of the four communes and the peoples of the interior crystallised and, flowing together, gave birth to Senegalese nationalism.

#### THE DAKAR SCHOOL AND THE NATIONALIST INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

This nationalism was based on a major ambiguity because the quest for equal rights with the French conflicted with the fact of

colonialism, which *a priori* denies the identity of the indigenous people. The nationalists successively invoked the colonial past and oral historical traditions to claim their place in the sun. Several historical approaches were devised according to need, to mark out the uncertain struggles of this ambiguous emerging nationalism.<sup>3</sup> As Diouf says, the development of a mixed memory, that of the Four Communes and of assimilation which could claim a dual African and European heritage, was replaced, as a result of colonial exclusion, by dynastic traditions, to provide a foundation for the political and land claims of royal families. This chiefly Wolof dynastic tradition sidelined family and village traditions, underscoring the sharp contradiction between an aristocratic ethic and an ethic of day-to-day life.

The first break was mainly due to the opposition between the new native elite represented by Senghor, which had just achieved citizenship in 1946, and the people of the Four Communes represented by Lamine Gueye, who advocated assimilation. So two types of memory were emerging: that of the griots, which served the traditional chiefs system (part of the colonial administration), and the brotherhood-style memory of Muslim communities which were organised around the groundnut colonial economy. Religious brotherhoods supervised the peasant world and tried to retain their independence from both the colonial administration and the chiefs system inherited from an aristocracy defeated by France at the end of the 19th century.<sup>4</sup>

In 1948 the split between Lamine Gueye and Leopold Sedar Senghor gave rise to the BDS, the *Bloc des Masses Sénégalaises*, which relied for support on the marabout networks in the country-

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<sup>3</sup> Diouf, Mamadou, in his innovatory article on representations of history and political legitimacy in Senegal between 1960 and 1987 (“Représentations historiques et légitimités politiques au Sénégal, 1960-1987”), opened up a luminous prospect for reflection on historical discourse. Here, I wish merely to point out the place of oral tradition in this nationalistic discourse, which prevailed approximately from the accession of citizenship in 1946 to the advent of the multiparty system in 1974, for it was in fact the same ruling class that held power during that period, both before and after independence in 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Diouf, Mamadou, 1989, pp. 14-15.

side. Senghor invented the concept of Negritude to restore the values of the black world and inject new life into them by combining them with French values. Thus Senghor's ideological triangle of Negritude, French-speaking world and African Socialism was built up with a dual memory, that of Faidherbe as the creator of this modern Senegal and, at his side, the traditional pole, Lat-Joor. But Negritude placed greater emphasis on ethnology than on history in order to create an African or Senegalese identity different from that of the West. This did not prevent Senghor from advocating racial mixing, which he saw as the best way to achieve the civilisation of the universal, and therefore modernity.

The griot's words or traditional storytelling were viewed from the angle of their poetic rhythm, whence the importance Senghor attached to poetry, literature, drama and art. When history was brought into play, the aim was to choose Lat-Joor as the national hero personifying the aristocratic traditions and values of dignity and sacrifice and provide the basis for the national ideology of independent Senegal under the iron rule of the single party. According to the concept of Negritude, oral traditions were episodes which should serve to strengthen feelings of national unity. They were regarded above all as chronicles and legends; their writing and literary merit took precedence over their content, and in fact over African history, which Senghor set aside throughout his rule.

Apart from prehistory, which received special attention, Senghor viewed mathematics and philosophy, together with Latin, as the prime subjects. He nevertheless made efforts to preserve the colonial archives of Senegal and French West Africa, which are the only ones to have been kept on the spot in the whole French colonial empire. The exhibition of the archives – 300 years of written history of Senegal – on the first anniversary of independence showed that the new state preferred written documents as the main source of the emerging nation's history and was firmly set in the mould of the colonial heritage.<sup>5</sup>

Senghor set up the *Centre d'Etudes des Civilisations* (Centre for the Study of Civilisations) in Dakar, with a journal called *Dembe Ak Tey*, a series focusing on myth and designed to collect,

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<sup>5</sup> Diouf, Mamadou, 1989, pp. 16-17.

transcribe and preserve oral traditions as a means of entrenching the predominance of writing over oral transmission. At the time, significantly, most of the political opponents of Senghor and the ideology of Negritude were professional historians, apart from Majmout Diop, who incidentally wrote an essay on the history of social classes in Senegal and Mali. They included Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye LY, Moctar Mbow and Assane Seck in the first years of independence.

In his book, *Nations Nègres et Cultures* (Negro Nations and Cultures), published in 1955, Cheikh Anta Diop was the first to base his political action on recognition of the history of Africa, which dated back to the origins of civilisation – since Egypt was Negro. He wanted to restore Africans' self-confidence. The reconstruction of African history opened up Africa to the universal concept of the Pharaoh and the assertion of African cultural unity legitimated his pan-African and federalist approach. His preference for pre-colonial Africa contrasted with Senghor's preference for the colonial period.

But like Senghor, Cheikh Anta Diop disregarded the oral traditions and monographs that did not fit in with the Egypto-Pharaonic scheme of things and therefore the cultural unity of the continent. Africa thus gained a firm foothold in history and Cheikh Anta Diop placed the accent on the continuity of its history, which is why he highlighted the similarities between the institutions of pre-colonial Africa and those of ancient Egypt.

Contrary to the ideas of Negritude and the French-speaking world, he assigned a key role to African languages in achieving modernity. This makes it easy to understand the irreconcilable political opposition between the two men, the *de facto* excommunication of Cheikh Anta Diop by the French University and the fact that he was sidelined at Dakar University all his life. But to the end Senghor avoided an intellectual confrontation with Cheikh Anta Diop, who was established by the Festival of Negro Arts, held by Senghor in 1966 to celebrate Negritude, as the African intellectual who had left the greatest mark on his generation.

In actual fact, the paradox surrounding Cheikh Anta Diop is that in the cultural debate he placed the emphasis on unity, the

total liberation of the continent and the restoration of African dignity, but politically he confined himself to opposition within the narrow limits of the nation-state of Senegal in a manner contrary to his federalist idea. As a result, despite his decisive role in the compiling of African history by Africans, his direct influence on the development of field research remained limited.<sup>6</sup>

The same is true of the second great historian Abdoulaye Ly, who wrote the first thesis on the history of Senegal, published in 1958 under the title *La Compagnie du Sénégal* (The Senegal Company). He studied the capitalist connection between the continents across the Atlantic in the 17th and 18th centuries. He was particularly interested in the part played by Senegambia in this connection. As a professional historian directly involved in politics, he did not have time to make a more detailed internal study of Senegambian societies, apart from his political writings such as *L'Etat et la Condition paysanne* (The State and the Status of Peasants), designed to justify the break with the colonial economy.

Like Cheikh Anta Diop, he advocated immediate independence and a break with the colonial system. Whence his split with Senghor after the YES vote, although he joined the government for a few years between 1965 and 1970. Like Cheikh Anta Diop, because of politics, Abdoulaye Ly did not teach history to the young generation of historians of independence, who joined the founding fathers of the Dakar School off campus in the political struggle.<sup>7</sup>

In intellectual terms, Senghor, Cheikh Anta Diop and Abdoulaye Ly may be said to be the three leaders who made the strongest mark on ideas in this part of French-speaking Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> At the time, Cheikh Anta Diop owed his fame above all to having published in succession:

– *Nations Nègres et Cultures*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1954.

– *L'unité Culturelle de l'Afrique Noire*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1959.

– *L'Afrique Noire Précoloniale*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1960.

<sup>7</sup> His most famous work at that time was *La Compagnie du Sénégal*, Présence Africaine, 1958. When this seminal work was republished 30 years later, Abdoulaye Ly in a lengthy postface established a link between his working hypotheses on History and the later research findings of the historians of the Dakar School. His writings on contemporary history after his retirement convey clearly the broad vision of this historiographer who straddled the nationalist movement and the patriotic struggle against neocolonialism.

They were irreconcilable rivals in the political arena, and also straddled the two crucial periods of the nationalist independence movement and the struggle for power during the nation-building phase. So they were ubiquitous in both intellectual and political terms, and each in their own way left a deep imprint on the Dakar history school, which extended well beyond the narrow confines of contemporary Senegal and embraced all areas of knowledge.

Through his poetry on negritude, Senghor drew attention to the specific features and contribution of African civilisations. By asserting the prior existence of African civilisations, Cheikh Anta Diop claimed the right to history with a view to Africa's resurrection in a spirit of unity. In his history of the connection between continents, Abdoulaye Ly pointed up Africa's dependency and the need to break the colonial pact.

In my view, it is still too soon to assess the respective influence of the three men because feeling still runs so high on their divergent political positions, which continue to inform the debate on Africa's future. In any event, the second generation of historians of the Dakar School first endeavoured to complete this task of rehabilitating African societies for the specific purpose of decolonising history, and in any case telling history according to their own vision of the past, in that euphoric phase of national independence when hopes were so high.

The period between about 1960 and 1980 was marked by an unprecedented proliferation of history production by the historians of the Dakar School in close collaboration with French, British and American historians. As a result of decolonisation, it was now professional historians who not only taught African history, which had been introduced into secondary school and university curricula, but also conducted large-scale research in all fields. It must be said that the pre-colonial history of West Africa received special attention thanks to the rehabilitation of oral traditions as sources in addition to written documents. Following in the footsteps of Cheikh Anta Diop, it was essential to prove that Africa had a worthwhile history with the great mediaeval empires and that it had suffered assaults with disastrous consequences in the form of the slave trade and colonisation.

This history, which glorified Africa and designated the West as guilty, produced a wealth of writings so diverse that it is hard to trace their path through the various themes, motives and especially cross-influences. It was first and foremost a full-scale cultural renaissance which in the space of two decades covered all spheres of thought, with the new-found history forming the backbone of the liberation of an entire continent, which was now supposed to resume the initiative. The first overview of pre-colonial black Africa by Jean Suret-Canale, published by Editions Sociales in 1958 and 1961, and the publication of *Soundjata* or the Mandingo epic by Djibril Tamsir Niane in 1960 were undoubtedly the start of an unprecedented production of historical research.

The former outlined the themes which were to be researched in depth over the ensuing years, while the latter definitively rehabilitated the oral tradition handed down by griots as a prelude to the great consolidated work *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire* by Joseph Ki-Zerbo, who in 1962 undertook the colossal task of returning to Africa's roots in order to unravel its entire past down to the establishment of the OAU. Ki-Zerbo already heralded the desire of African historians trained in their profession in Western or African universities to assume responsibility for their past – their whole past – and above all write it down to form that nourishing soil from which new nations can and must draw spiritual resources and reasons for living.

The great movement for the recovery and rediscovery of African history was under way; it was to sweep the entire continent and rally countless professional historians of all origins to rewrite that history as part of the great adventure of the decolonisation of minds. This history was continental and pan-African, but also regional and especially local, in the form of monographs recording the multitude of kingdoms and the wide variety of institutions before colonisation. The second generation of historians of the Dakar School paid special attention to the pre-colonial period, that of the great empires of the 8th to the 15th centuries and also that of the slave trade which preceded the colonial conquest from the 15th to the 19th century, while emphasising the various forms of resistance to colonial supremacy.

From this standpoint of rehabilitation of the past, Yves Person's monumental study of Samori was undoubtedly a landmark. He meticulously reconstructed the great adventure of Samori's stubborn resistance against the colonial conquest, and above all the task of building an empire on the ashes of Mali. This comprehensive work, which addresses all the main themes of African history, long-distance trade and political and military history, paved the way for the long series of monographs combining the judicious use of written documents and oral tradition and the eye-witness accounts of survivors of the great Samori adventure. This Breton nationalist was a passionate advocate of African cultures and languages, and did much to restore the confidence of the second generation of the Dakar School, who were privileged for the first time to explore the internal history of West African societies and states.

All the Dakar School research – on the Waalo Kingdom by Boubacar Barry, the Fouta Djallon by Thierno Diallo, the Gajaaga by Abdoulaye Bathily, the Kajoor by Mamadou Diouf, the Fouta Toro by Oumar Kane, the Xaaso by Sekene Mody Cissoko and so on – chiefly concerned the pre-colonial period from the 15th to the 19th centuries. It was history written by local men, who opted for studying the kingdoms where their ethnic roots lay, and whose language they had the advantage of knowing. This history based on monographs was primarily political history focusing on dynastic traditions, although on some points the authors showed interest in social and economic change due to the slave trade and colonisation.

This effort on the part of the Dakar School was extensively buttressed by historians of the American school such as Philip Curtin, Martin Klein, Walter Rodney, David Robinson and Lucie Colvin, who took part in the publication of major works on the history of pre-colonial kingdoms in Senegambia, placing the accent on their internal economic, political and social history. Apart from Yves Person, Jean Boulègue and Charles Becker, French historians continued to focus on colonial history and depend on archives for their research, which dwindled steadily as they withdrew to France. In any event Dakar became a key centre of thought and discussion on African history, and the meeting-point of African historians returning from French universities to teach African history in the

new African universities in Abidjan, Conakry, Bamako and Ouagadougou.

The themes addressed also varied from one historian to another because of the scale of the task of reconstructing and rewriting a history going back thousands of years which had been set aside for a century. Mamadou Diouf and Mohammed Mbodj tried to draw up an inventory of those themes, which is far from covering all the interests of the Dakar School historians. In this rediscovery and reconstruction phase, factual history centred on political history was inevitable. Very early on, however, two main trends emerged, modelled on the concerns of the two founding fathers of the Dakar School, Cheikh Anta Diop and Abdoulaye Ly.

Cheikh Anta Diop, in a manner slightly similar to the philosophy of Negritude, directly influenced research on political and social institutions, which more or less aimed to document the cultural unity of black Africa and the capacity of Africans to create an environment conducive to their development. He thus contributed a great deal to the renewal of political and economic anthropology, with the work of Yaya Wane on the Toucouleurs, that of Pathé Diagne on traditional political power in black Africa, that of Boubacar Ly on honour in the Wolof and Toucouleur family and that of Abdoulaye Bara Diop on Wolof society. The shift from colonial ethnology to economic and political anthropology and the sociology of social change was completed, grounded on increased confidence in African societies' capacity to adapt and renew themselves, as against the stereotyped view of Africa as static since the dawn of time.

It matters little that the endless debate on the African mode of production and the class struggle took over on the other side of the Atlantic; the work of the Dakar anthropology school enabled historians to mark out the different stages of the social and political evolution of West African societies in time and space in each of their monographs on the Soninke, Wolof, Mandingo, Peul and other kingdoms, even if they sometimes ran counter to Cheikh Anta Diop's main thesis on the cultural unity of black Africa.

In fact, if properly understood, the history of pre-colonial kingdoms over the centuries shows not only the diversity of political

and social institutions but also the inequality and the process of class struggle prevailing in our highly structured societies. Gradually the concept of traditional African democracy and the existence of an unchanging specificity of Africa were challenged by historians who increasingly underscored the fact that the capitalist system had made Africa dependent.

That was where Abdoulaye Ly, author of *La Compagnie du Sénégal*, directly influenced the studies on dependence and the capitalist connection between continents. In his book, he had already started to establish a theory of the capitalist connection between continents, inspired by the laws of capital accumulation which govern the dialectic relations between the expansionist centre of capitalism and the periphery that it exploits and dominates. In an essay written in 1994 and after the re-edition of his book, he rightly reviewed the origins of the debate twenty five years earlier. In actual fact the debate initiated by Eric Williams in his book, *Capitalism and Slavery* published in 1944 was reactivated by Abdoulaye Ly's book *La Compagnie du Sénégal* in 1958 and illustrated in terms of internal change in African societies by Walter Rodney in *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast: 1545 to 1800* in 1970 and Boubacar Barry in *Le Royaume du Waalo* in 1972.

Meanwhile Philip Curtin, running against the tide, had inflamed the debate with the publication in 1969 of his book, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, in which he drastically reduced the slave trade figures without considering the trade's effects on African societies. But it was in fact Samir Amin's preface to *Le Royaume du Waalo* that restored its full depth to the debate in the long term with a study of the capitalist connection between the continents from the times preceding the slave trade era to our daily experience in the era of African independence coupled with neocolonial dependence.

As a result the work of the Dakar School on the pre-colonial period, viewed from the angle of the adverse effects of the slave trade on Senegambian societies, was raised to the level of the debate on the historical origins of underdevelopment and the present forms of dependence in neocolonial societies. Historians met up with the economists of dependence at a time when Marxism was

accepted by all as a method and approach for understanding the economic, political and social problems of the Third World.

It matters little that for practical reasons the Dakar School's work was confined to the pre-colonial period, assisted in the task of reconstruction by talented North American historians such as Philip Curtin, Martin Klein, David Robinson, George Brooks, Lucie Colvin, Allen Howard, Lamine Sanneh, Winston McGowan, Lansine Kaba and of course Walter Rodney. In those euphoric years of reconstruction of the pre-colonial past, each monograph was impatiently awaited as a vital aid to penetrating the obscurity of the "dark centuries" as Raymond Mauny strikingly put it.

It must be said that in many cases the others' concerns coincided with those of the Dakar School, which concentrated on internal history with its full political, economic and social scope. It must be added that this second generation did not have time to deal with recent history, which was handled by the economists of dependence headed by Samir Amin, and especially anthropologists such as Claude Meillassoux, Donald Cruise O'Brien and Jean Copans, not to mention novelists and film-makers such as Sembène Ousmane, who was already criticising the serious flaws of the new neo-colonial society.

At that time the salient features of the Dakar School were firstly this interdisciplinary approach to the past and present and secondly the daily political struggle against the inadequacies of the post-colonial state which was gradually imposing the one-party system. Most historians like Abdoulaye Ly, Cheikh Anta Diop and later Ibader Thiam and Abdoulaye Bathily were absorbed in political action. Research on Islam as a religion challenging the traditional order and rebuilding Senegambian societies to cope with the impact of the slave trade was the chief innovation in the work of Kane, Barry, Bathily and Diouf, although the Islamicisation process was not always pointed up for lack of documents, apart from the work of Lamine Sanneh on the Jakanke.

In all its research, the Dakar School rightly stressed internal change as well as external factors such as the slave trade and colonisation under whose impact Senegambian societies lost their autonomy. This approach was more or less shared by other historians,

apart from Philip Curtin, who contradicted our thesis on the Waalo in his review of the book and criticised it with distinct virulence in his book, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa/Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, published in 1975. On pretence of “decolonising history” from a deliberately “Africa-centered” perspective, as Abdoulaye Ly put it, Philip Curtin leads us into an impasse barely within the limits of history, economics and anthropology, in which Senegambia lives in isolation on the fringes of the world economy without in any way feeling the impact of European intervention. Our reply was delayed for quite a while, because for other reasons another history of Senegambia had to be rewritten at the same time, taking account of its huge hinterland, which was targeted by Atlantic trade as early as the 15th century, with a study of both the impact of the slave trade and the internal contradictions of Senegambian societies from the perspective of comprehensive history. The history of Senegambia had to be set right.<sup>8</sup>

The debate is still in progress: Philip Curtin’s spiritual heir, James A Webb, has just reactivated it in his book *The Desert Frontier*. Although Curtin’s theses on the number of slaves and their impact on African societies have been widely criticised and challenged by Joseph Inokiri, Jean Suret-Canale, Charles Becker and even his former students like Paul Lovejoy – not to mention the many studies by Abdoulaye Bathily and others – James Webb continues to expand on his master’s conclusions, asserting that the trans-Saharan slave trade was more substantial than the Atlantic slave trade in Senegambia in the same period. In 1995 the historians of the Dakar School had other concerns to deal with, relating to the crisis of the post-colonial state: starting a recount of the number of slaves was not on their agenda. Too bad if the Atlantic has not yet supplanted the Mediterranean and the Sahara in Africa’s relations with the rest of the world. Everyone will have something to gain from globalisation!

But the most important task for the second generation of the Dakar School in the 1970s was to create the conditions on the spot,

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<sup>8</sup> Boubacar Barry, *La Sénégambie du XVe au XIXe siècle, Traite négrière, Islam et la conquête coloniale*, L’Harmattan, Paris 1988. *Senegambia and Atlantic Slave Trade* (English version), Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 88-93.

in Africa, for independent production and thinking on the history of their societies, without complexes or monopolies. It was this second generation that set up the first Pan-African Association of Historians in 1972, with other historians from Abidjan, Cameroon, Zaire and Congo – mainly French-speaking Africa. The aim was to decolonise our history, in the words of the Algerian historian Mohamed C. Sahli, and to act, as Ki Zerbo put it, as the basic lever for the growth of our national awareness with a view to achieving African unity and assuming responsibility for our future. It was not only a matter of securing Africa's rightful position in history, but also of taking responsibility for that history in order to light the way for the work of the new generations, whose almost prophetic task was to regenerate Africa.

The two quotations on the front page of the journal *AFRIKA ZAMANI*, published by the association once it had been expanded to include African historians from the English-speaking countries and the Maghreb in Yaoundé in 1975, were felt by some Africa specialists in Europe and America to reflect a policy of exclusion. In actual fact, our generation needed to take over its own history and create on the spot, in Africa, a greater capacity for research on and teaching of African history in order to provide the basis for consolidating the emerging nation-states without losing sight of the unity of the continent as advocated by Cheikh Anta Diop. The latter was in fact the star of the Yaoundé Congress, where he spoke for the first time, for seven whole hours, to our generation, who had known him only through his writings.

For a variety of reasons the leading English-speaking historians in Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya such as A.F. Ajahi, Adu Boahen and B.A. Ogot cold-shouldered this pan-African association, which was in practice dominated from the outset by the French-speakers who had taken the initiative of setting it up. The English-speakers had forged ahead thanks to scientific journals supported by powerful and long-standing associations like the Historical Society of Nigeria, and they did not understand the offer of co-operation made by the historians of Dakar, Abidjan and elsewhere, who were to remain under the yoke of the French universities for a long time to come.

Martin Klein has shown a real understanding of the Dakar School's difficulties in freeing itself from that yoke, due to the continuing institution of the "*thèse d'Etat*" doctorate, which until recently prevented the university from having actual professors to supervise independent research before the crisis spread throughout the continent. Paradoxically they shared with Joseph Ki Zerbo, Cheikh Anta Diop and Djibril Tamsir Niane the responsibility of directing the publication of the eight-volume history of Africa under the auspices of UNESCO. Meanwhile Africans continue to meet in the corridors of conference halls in Europe and especially America, where the annual conference of the ASA attracts thousands of participants.

The history of decolonisation, like the nationalist history from which it stems, has limitations and contradictions which primarily reflect the difficulty of building a nation-state on the basis of the borders inherited from colonisation. In the euphoria of newly-recovered national sovereignty, history is now on the agenda and has gained full acceptance. But it faces increasing challenges from the conflicting needs of a society undergoing profound changes as part of the building of the nation-state.

#### THE DAKAR SCHOOL AND NATIONAL IDEOLOGY

It is difficult at this stage to make a chronological and thematic separation between the liberation movement writings of the decolonisation period and those of the post-colonial State as part of the ideology of national construction. Both phases are closely intertwined insofar as it is the same historians who are astride both periods and the new generations are merely continuing the extremely arduous task of reconstructing their past. But it is increasingly the case that African historians, in their capacity as citizens, are confronted with the problems linked to the building of the nation-state based on domestic democracy, with the different forms of dependence and also with widespread manifestations of the crisis of identity which call in question national unity. What are the many forms taken by historiography and what answers can be provided by historians to the host of questions raised by their own societies?

Professional historians trained in universities are not alone in writing or telling about history. Henceforth, they must share this task with other custodians of the African past, griots, Muslim scholars, musicians and film-makers, not to mention the manifold forms of audio-visual communication aimed at satisfying the ever-increasing thirst of the public for their rediscovered history.

In the academic sphere, the third and fourth generations of historians of the Dakar School gradually turned away from the pre-colonial period between the 15th and the 19th centuries in order to explore the history of colonisation in its different forms of exploitation, political and social conflicts and intellectual development. With this in mind, more and more numerous students often produced remarkable studies on much aspects as economic history, the trends in traditional chieftainship, the trade union movement and political parties. In so doing, they closely combined the systematic analysis of archives with field studies in an effort to record, before it was too late, the last testimonies of those who underwent forced labour, fought in the First World War or belonged to the French National Assembly.

In short, we witnessed an unprecedented surge of activity sustained by the undoubted enthusiasm of these first generations of the era of independence that had the good fortune to study African history from primary school onwards. Due mention should be made retrospectively of the work of those who persevered as far as the doctoral thesis, such as Iba Der Thiam on trade unionism, Mohamed Mbodj on the groundnut economy, Babacar Fall on forced labour, followed by more and more specialised studies such as those on alcoholism in Senegal by Ibrahima Thioub and the prison system by Ousseynou Faye, etc.

But the major problem of the Dakar School was that the teachers of this second generation of historians, until the 1980, remained hampered in their university career by the need to obtain the state doctorate which provides the qualification for lecturing and acting as director for advanced studies. This meant that students at Dakar, after obtaining their masters degree, had to prepare their doctoral thesis in Paris, mainly under the late Yves Person or his successor Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch. Despite the goodwill of

these two eminent Professors who cannot be suspected of any trace of colonialist sympathies, this situation had a certain influence on the orientation of historical studies even beyond Dakar, for this academic “trusteeship” extended to Abidjan, Bamako, Ouagadougou and the banks of the Congo throughout the former colonial empire. Yves Person, in both Dakar and Paris, left his mark on the monographs on the pre-colonial kingdoms, which closely associated oral traditions with documentary archives. Catherine Coquery, on the other hand, whether in Paris or Dakar where she came to lecture, made a major contribution to the development of studies on the economic and social history of the colonial and contemporary period.

In our opinion, she does not do justice to Yves Person by describing as factual history these studies which the latter launched in Dakar with the second generation of historians, which she deliberately ignored in her recent review of French-speaking historians published in the journal *Politique africaine*. She only quotes those who completed their doctorate with her in Paris VII, on her own ground where, despite her omission, she made a major contribution with the historians of the Dakar School who learned their profession with this second generation before coming to pursue their studies on the banks of the Seine.

This merely raises the problem of the “trusteeship system” which remained too long in place and which indirectly slowed the process of scientific independence on the part of our University which failed to reform in time before the advent of the turbulent crisis of the Nation-State. That is precisely the tragedy and the paradox of this University whose spiritual Father, Cheikh Anta Diop, recognised as such since his death in 1986, was throughout his lifetime denied the privilege of an official teaching post. But this did not prevent numerous students from undertaking studies on ancient Egypt and becoming, a disciple of Cheikh Anta Diop, although not taught by him, people such as Théophile Obenga who had the luck to collaborate with him or Babacar Sall and Moussa Lam who lecture to-day at Dakar.

Gradually, the Dakar School expanded in order to cover, in its research work and teaching, all periods of African and non-African history from pre-history to the present days. Yoro Fall

worked on cartography in the middle ages, Mamadou Fall on Vietnam, Penda Mbow studied Islam in the Middle East and Birahim Diop has specialised in western medieval archaeology. The list of centres of interest was thus long and full and really showed that the ambition of the Dakar School was to cover all history. The concentration of studies on Africa in fact corresponded to the moment in history when Africans were regaining control of their own destiny.

But this historiography was affected by the growing pains of the postcolonial State whose fluctuating fortunes were to leave their mark on the way history was perceived both by historians and by the populations directly concerned.

The nationalist ideology which had appealed to the glorious past of Africa was gradually replaced by the national ideology of unanimity based on the single party which moreover coincided with this State. This unanimous expression of history within the narrow framework of the frontiers inherited from colonisation contradicted with the historical reality of the populations which found themselves astride several frontiers of the new independent States. The Nation-State imprisoned history in the two-fold strait-jacket of unanimity and silence with the aim of erasing differences and contradictions in the competition for obtaining the power and wealth of the Nation-State.

In the various countries, the national ideology gave rise to a specific historical discourse drawing on the different oral traditions as well as on the history resulting from the work of the new university-trained professional historians. While proclaiming national unanimity, writers exalted with varying degrees of emphasis the resistance of the national hero chosen at the time of independence to serve as an example for the up and coming generations: Lat-Joor for Senegal, Samory Touré and Alfa Yaya for Guinea, while Mali chose Soundjata, founder of the Mali Empire.

Oral traditions were in vogue and the different radio stations broadcast in any number of accounts by griots whose role as custodians of the collective memory was rehabilitated. But this invocation of history was not practised to the same degree everywhere. Certain kingdoms had an advantage owing to the role they had played prior

to colonisation and, above all, thanks to their predominant place in the post-colonial state.

In Senegal, for example, the Wolof tradition took precedence both in academic studies and in accounts based on oral traditions. Further, owing to the power of the Mourides or Tidianes Brotherhoods in the groundnut basin at the heart of the Senegal economy, Islamic history tended to supplant the dynastic traditions. The considerable political weight of these Brotherhoods which controlled the peasantry explains this change of emphasis, together with the blossoming of oral traditions celebrating the Founding Fathers: Ahmadou Bamba for the Mourides and Malick Sy for the Tidianes.

This history was circulated through radiobroadcasts and the publication of a variety of books and periodicals. There was a real craze for history. It was at this time that Ibrahima Baba Kake began broadcasting from Paris his programme “*Mémoire d’un continent*” with weekly accounts by professional historians, traditionalists or simply the first-hand testimony of independence fighters. He backed this up by publishing the collection *Les Grandes Figures Africaines* in praise of the heroes of the period of resistance to conquest, such as Samory, El Hadj Umar or Bokar Biro. Professional historians, using the colourful language of oral tradition, endeavoured to bring home to the majority of the population the new academic history using a combination of written documents and oral accounts which had been collected on a large scale in recent years.

In our own work on Bokar Biro, we have stressed the epic qualities, modelling this style and content on the numerous chronicles and tales of the Fouta Djallon published by Alfa Ibrahima Sow.<sup>9</sup>

The aim was to achieve glorification of the national hero in response to the needs of the moment in that transitional phase of decolonisation.

The success of this collection is undeniable for it corresponded to a need, a thirst for knowledge of our history on the

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<sup>9</sup> Barry Boubacar, *Bokar Biro: Le dernier Grand Almamy Djallon*, N.E.A., 1976, collection *Les Grandes Figures Africaines*. The same biography was also published in the collection “Les Africains” before being translated into Pular. It was inspired by the publication of Alfa Ibrahima Sow *Chroniques et Récits du Fouta Djallon*, Klincksieck, Paris 1968.

part of the majority of the population, which had no access to academic writings. This popularisation was nevertheless limited to the minority which had undergone French schooling and it was not until the same book on Bokar Biro had been translated into popular that the majority of the population could read about their history, while continuing to listen in their native languages to the stories of the griots made available through the modern audio-visual information media.

There was undoubtedly enthusiasm for history and a sort of symbiosis between the works of professional historians and the oral traditions, both of which concentrated on the great men and the major moments of African history, namely its political history.

The series published by Baba Kake, easy to acquire owing to the moderate price of the pocket edition, was supplemented by a luxury edition of the collection *Les Africains* published by Jeune Afrique under the editorship of Charles André Julien. The same leading figures appeared in both collections in order to commemorate the past but also to justify indirectly the action of the new presidents and fathers of the emergent nations. They provided a pretext for justifying the sacrifices which the populations have to accept unanimously in order to wipe out for ever the trauma of colonisation and the slave trade themes, which in turn served to stifle the reasons for criticising the present domestic situation which the people found more and more difficult to accept.

The main error committed by the historians of nationalism and by the national ideology, however, was to consider oral traditions as equivalent or supplementary to written documents. In this respect, Mamadou Diouf, in his history of the Kajoor in the 19th century, clearly highlighted the need to consider oral traditions as a historical discourse on a par with the academic works of professional historians who make use essentially of written documents. The manipulation of oral traditions gives insight into the preoccupations of the people who reinterpret their history in accordance with the needs of the moment.

After the departure of Senghor in 1981, for example, Senegal nationalism with its combination of *négritude* and *francophonie* gave way to the nationalistic reflex advocated by his follower

Abdou Diouf. The unprecedented economic crisis shattered national unanimity. The modern unitary State of Senghor was undermined by manifold grievances both political and cultural in character. The resignation of the “last representative of the empire,” to use the expression coined by Ousmane Sembene, raised hopes of a true break with colonial logic.

But the national revival which twenty years earlier enabled Guinea under Sékou Touré and Mali under Modibo Keita to re-discover their African roots, was used to fabricate at all costs a national identity and to mobilise several memories in order to entrench a power which had no further control over the people or economic decisions.<sup>10</sup>

The national revival found expression in the tandem new school/national cultural charter through two channels, traditional and modern, historian and/or griot and journalist according to Mamadou Diouf. The historian Iba Der Thiam, appointed Minister of Education, played an important role in organising grandiose commemorations designed to found a new political legitimacy by reappropriating Senegalese values. But the State no longer had the means to impose silence or national unanimity as during the first twenty years of the single party. Dissident and particularist tendencies were openly expressed by resorting to history and above all to oral traditions, updated and adapted to suit the mood of the day.

Similarly, the celebration in 1987 of the centenary of the death of Lat Joor, until then the one and only national hero, was shared equally with the other regions which each celebrated their respective hero: Mamadou Lamine for eastern Senegal, Maba Diakhou for the Sine Saloum, Aline Sitoé Diatta for Casamance and others, were the subject of celebrations and commemorations on the same footing as Lat Joor by both historians and traditionalists. But it is not enough for the State merely to evoke history in order to contain the centrifugal forces emerging at the result of its own incapacity to contain the economic, political and social crisis.

The armed dissidence of the Joola of Casamance expressed the extreme case of the rejection of national unity based on the

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<sup>10</sup> Diouf Mamadou, 1989, pp. 16-17.

tyranny of colonial history which continues to legitimise the modern state of Senegal. Even more, the populations of Fuuta Toro, defenceless or desperate, took refuge in their native soil in order to claim the exclusive benefits the dam across the River Senegal. At every level, people evoked their regional, village or neighbourhood traditions, to express their grievances in the context of national crisis. This was the moment when professional historians took militant action in the political arena or turned to contemporary history to participate in the political debate which was increasingly confined to private newspapers and the numerous opposition parties recognised by the central authority.

With the advent of the multiparty system, a historical debate now became possible in order to take into account the concerns and aspirations of the populations and the complexity of the crisis in the postcolonial State. Confronted with the multiple failures of the Nation-States, the discussion launched by Cheikh Anta Diop in his work on the economic and cultural foundations of a Federal State of Black Africa was taken up again by economists such as Moctar Diouf in his work on African economic integration (*L'intégration économique africaine*) prefaced by Cheikh Anta Diop and by historians in our own work entitled "Senegambia from the 15th to the 19th century."

At a time when states are creating numerous regional organisations such as OMVS, OMVG, CEAO or CEDEAO to solve the problems of development while jealously preserving their national sovereignty, our work on Senegambia was designed to illustrate the historical and geographical unity of the region in order to overcome the present-day frontiers of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry. The aim was to show that the present fragmentation of this region is in contradiction with the historical evolution of the peoples of Senegambia and hampers all possibility of economic and social development. One cannot develop a region while running counter to the history that shaped it.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Barry Boubacar, *La Sénégambie du XV<sup>ème</sup> au XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, l'Harmattan, 1988. This overview paved the way for regional history, while doing justice to the host of monographs on Senegambia in the last quarter-century, which needed to be put into perspective.

It is owing to the topicality of the discussion on integration that the Association of Senegalese Researchers organised a round table to be attended by Cheikh Anta Diop, Moctar Diouf and Boubacar Barry. On the eve of the proposed meeting, cruel destiny struck the late lamented Cheikh Anta Diop and it was only one year after his death that the same debate was eventually organised in his memory. By the irony of fate, Dakar University already bore the name of Cheikh Anta Diop who had in his lifetime elevated the *mystique* of African unity to its highest level. Ten years after his death, he still remains a symbol thanks to the pertinence of his vision of the continent's future in its historic continuity. He was prepared to compare his ideas for a Federal State of Black Africa with those of the economist, more concerned with the viability of regional economic projects and with the standpoint of the historian who shows a preference for small regional areas which are historically and geographically more homogeneous. The question remains open and it is easy to understand, owing to the myth which still surrounds the person of Cheikh Anta Diop, why the recent reinterpretation of his work by François-Xavier Fauvelle cannot be heard in this university which did not give its founding father the opportunity to speak during his lifetime.<sup>12</sup>

More and more, the historians of the Dakar School were to become involved in the day-to-day debate in order to share in the

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<sup>12</sup> François-Xavier Fauvelle, *L'Afrique de Cheikh Anta Diop*, prefaced by Elikia Bokolo, Paris, Karthala, 1996, p. 237. We have scarcely time in this article to discuss the contents of this work which is likely to re-launch a controversy as heated as the one sparked off by *Nations nègres et cultures* some fifty years ago. But it poses the problem from the outset of the understanding which others have of the path we have followed in attempting to reappropriate our past. I shall not discuss the recent attempts by Philip Curtin to excommunicate Africans and their descendants, American Africans, from the teaching of African history in American universities on the pretext that their presence created the risk of "Ghettoizing African History" to the detriment of the Whites. Cf. the article by Philip Curtin published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 3, 1995 and the many reactions triggered by this article at the special panel organised during the annual meeting in Orlando of the African Studies Association. The major problem in fact is that African studies in general, and African History in particular, are still in a ghetto within the American system. There are those who wish to continue controlling this ghetto as it stands!

analysis of the current situation previously monopolised by political scientists and anthropologists. Accordingly, Mamadou Diouf, historian, and Momar Coumba Diop, sociologist, collaborated in publishing the first work analysing the up-to-date political situation in Senegal under Abdou Diouf. The success of this enterprise induced Momar Coumba to produce a collective work on the course of events in this same country, “*Sénégal – Trajectoire d’un Etat*” with the participation of an interdisciplinary team, which testifies to the intellectual vigour of the Dakar School which is by no means restricted to the discipline of history.

Indeed, the Dakar historians are now present on all fronts of reflection and action, despite the undoubted limits imposed by the institutional crisis of the University on the production and teaching of history. The recent republication of *La Compagnie du Sénégal* forty years after the first edition provides an opportunity for the author to take stock of the historical works of the Dakar School as an expression of self-affirmation but also as a token of the continuity of its quest for truth. Abdoulaye Ly has also shown that the historian is ageless – he belongs to every period, including the present day.

#### CONCLUSION

It is difficult at this stage to characterise the Dakar School as “culturalist” compared with the Schools of Ibadan and Dar Es Salaam which are said to have given precedence to the “African initiative”, or the South African School described as “social”. The separation between elitist and popular history is not an adequate explanation for distinguishing the Marxist-nationalist tendency from subsidiary studies in the Indian context. This brief review of the historical output of the Dakar School illustrates the complexity and multiplicity of the subjects or concerns of the historians, which evolved over time. We have endeavoured to trace the different stages in this evolution, which reveals among other things that the Dakar School shares with its counterparts a primary concern, namely the fight for history.

It is true that under the influence of Senghor’s *Négritude* and the idea of cultural unity as a foundation for federalism defined

by Cheikh Anta Diop, one might describe the Dakar School as culturalist owing to the intensity of the debates on cultural problems which the latter gave rise to. But the Dakar School is also the place where the debate on dependence has been taken farthest, with the collaboration of economists like Samir Amin and historians like Abdoulaye Ly, Boubacar Barry and Abdoulaye Bathily who gradually developed the theory on the historical origins of under-development and the different forms of dependence.

It is no mere coincidence that it was at Dakar that the Association of African Historians was founded in 1972 and that the CODESRIA was set up in 1973 at the instigation, *inter alia*, of Boubacar Barry and Samir Amin. Very early, Dakar had the privilege of developing interdisciplinary studies. This explains the difficulty of classifying this School in one single category, whether elitist, popular or nationalist. Ultimately, it shares the same preoccupations as the other Schools. In this paper, we did not have time to dwell at length on the relations between the Dakar School and those of Ibadan and Dar Es Salaam, etc. Walter Rodney, for example, belonged to both the Dakar and the Dar Es Salaam Schools.

It remains that the major split that can be detected at this stage is perhaps the multiplicity of approaches concerning a continental, pan-African History compared with regional or local history. Pan-African History with major overviews such as the UNESCO General History and local histories in the form of monographs on the different kingdoms or national histories of the post-colonial States have been given priority over regional history which is gradually emerging. It is in this context that the CODESRIA organised in 1989 at Ndjamena a seminar to launch the project on the study and drafting of regional histories for each of the five major regions of the continent, in response to the aspirations for regional integration of the Nation-States which have proved their inadequacies.

The territorial reorganisation which is taking shape in Africa with the independence of Eritrea and the whole movement of regionally-based rebellions against the established authorities strengthens us in the conviction of the need to concentrate on regional studies in order to break free from the colonial logic. The

seminar organised at Bamako by CODESRIA on democracy to relaunch the Pan-African Historians Association and its journal *Africa Zamani* clearly shows that historians more than ever require an institutional framework in order to develop and satisfy both the elitist and the popular needs of the citizens in relation to their past. We trust that this conference organised by the University of Cape Town will usher in the historical reintegration of the continent as a whole.

# HISTORY AND PERCEPTION OF FRONTIERS IN AFRICA FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURIES: THE PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN INTEGRATION

## INTRODUCTION

Africa is the most fragmented continent in geopolitical terms and also the most cosmopolitan in terms of the diversity of its population. In that context, as so aptly stated by Joseph Ki Zerbo, the question of integration lies more than ever at the heart of the problem, namely the “African evil”. It is therefore vitally important to set this problem in a relevant and equitable framework. That is why integration should be understood in terms of its threefold dimension:

- the historical and cultural dimension in vertical terms;
- the spatial and economic dimension in horizontal terms;
- the social or organic dimension.

The components of this three dimensional framework are neither separate nor compartmentalized. They appear in the form of an integrated system, while taking account of the overall framework of the global system.

The theme of history and perception of frontiers requires us to elucidate the role of the spatial and economic dimension in the quest for regional integration on a continental scale. The unrequited dream of African unity has unfortunately come up against the forces of inertia inherent in a fragmented territory whose history essentially dates back to the nineteenth century, at the time of the colonial partition which fashioned the configuration of the frontiers of the states today. Current crises demonstrate how the populations are dissatisfied to live within the frontiers of nation-states and raise the question of the management of this colonial heritage which defined frontiers that are both artificial and arbitrary.

The crises have affected as much the major states such as Congo, Angola and Nigeria as the smaller ones such as Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

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Paradoxically, these crises have been, first and foremost, a reflection of the internal conflicts which have had repercussions externally and indirectly raise the question of redefining frontiers or even a new territorial, economic and cultural area likely to consolidate peace and ensure the safety of the populations. This goes well beyond the question of frontiers whose history needs to be viewed over the long term if we are to understand the current challenges of regional integration and the unity of the African continent.

#### THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

The existing layout of the frontiers of the African states was fashioned virtually at the end of the nineteenth century. The colonial conquest subjected the whole of the continent by force, to European domination, with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia. The dividing up of the continent put an end, in most cases, to an internal process of restructuring of territory by social and political forces linked to the history of the continent over the long term.

The frontiers are therefore the result of a lengthy history which must take into account of well beyond the accidents of colonial partition if the internal forces of fragmentation and unification of the continent are to be understood. For practical reasons, our attention will focus on West Africa in order to achieve a better grasp, in spatial and temporal terms, of the destruction factors which can account for current difficulties in reintegrating viable territories in geographical, economic and political terms.

By going back solely to the eighth century, we can witness the succession in West African territory of the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai which ensured a degree of regional integration built around the River Niger. What stand out in the history of these vast political formations is not so much the frontiers whose outline remains vague but the capacity of those states to cope with the complementarity of the ecological areas between the Sahel, the savannah and the forests. This West African territory was then opened to the outside world via the Sahara which linked the Niger valley to the Maghreb and, beyond that, to the Mediterranean. The loop of the River Niger thereby constituted the framework of

this territory whose confines extended as far as the Atlantic Ocean to the west and south, to Lake Chad in the east and to the Sahara in the north.

Obviously, the Atlantic Ocean did not play a major role in trade between Africa and the rest of the world until the major discoveries of the fifteenth century. However, inter-regional trade ensuring the complementarity of the ecological areas was highly developed and based essentially on respect for the autonomy of the communities which were engaged in transit trade from one area to another. Consequently, the major function of the vast empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai was to ensure that the roads were safe whereby specialized merchants, such as the Dyula, the Hausa, the Soninké and the Berbers, could develop long distance trade based on mutual respect between native and itinerant tradesmen.

A major feature of the way the territory was organized was a decisive decentralization policy which provided substantial autonomy even to those regions which had been conquered by armed conflict as was the case of Kaabu at the heart of the Empire of Mali. The notion of frontier was very vague and did not, at that time, determine the centre of gravity of territorial conflicts. Instead, there were migrant flows in all directions thanks to the existence of vast areas which could absorb any population surpluses. The valleys of the rivers Niger, Volta, Senegal and Gambia were therefore the main poles of attraction for the populations of the savannah and the Sahel. Similarly, there was a gradual drift of Berbers and Fula southwards in search of new pastures and an advance by the Mandike, Akan and Hausa towards the forests which still made up the barrier between the savannah and the Atlantic Ocean. Attention need not be given here to the vicissitudes and cycles of succession of the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai in this West African territory which was entirely oriented towards the confines of the Sahara. They were the Saharan cities of Awdaghost, Djenné, Mopti and Timbuktu, the Hausa cities, which attracted the southern populations of the forest and the savannah in the context of trans-Saharan trade.

The orientation towards the north and to the confines of the Sahara was gradually disrupted by the opening up of West Africa

towards its Atlantic coastline from the fifteenth century onwards. The major maritime discoveries marked the beginning of a long period of competition between the caravel and the caravan. The battle of Tondibi in 1591 marked the end of the Songhai Empire and, with it, the decline of the Saharan cities, while the creation of trading posts at Arguin, Saint Louis, Gorée, Cape Coast and Accra, etc. ensured the success of Atlantic trade and the reorientation of West African trade towards the coastline.

Meanwhile, the slave trade established for several centuries an era of violence and restructuring of the states of West Africa. The great empires disappeared, giving way to extreme political fragmentation. The new slave-trading states gave priority to man-hunts to the detriment of territorial conquest and strengthened their position through a policy of centralization and militarization. Likewise, thanks to a monopoly on the arms and slave trade, these states forced defenseless peoples to live turned in on themselves in areas of refuge to escape from the manhunts, thereby creating tracts of no-man's land. For example, the Wolofs of Waalo and the Tukuleurs of Fuuta Toro gradually deserted, during the course of the eighteenth century, the northern bank of the River Senegal for the southern bank and paid taxes to the Moors of Trarza and Brakna in order to ensure in vain their safety.

In this context of violence between and within states, the population then had to choose between seeking impregnable refuges or building a strong state which could guarantee their safety within its borders. This was the case of the theocratic states of Bundu, Fuuta Jallon and Fuuta Toro which guaranteed the safety of Muslims within their frontiers. It was also the case of the Ashanti and Dahomey in the Gulf of Guinea who strengthened their power in order to subjugate their neighbours more effectively. A main feature, however, of West Africa was the absence of any more political structures, thereby considerably limiting trade in products, though not that in arms and slaves. Accordingly, throughout this long period, the kingdoms preserved their physiognomy without any significant change in the layout of the frontiers resulting from the dismembering of the great empires at the end of the fifteenth century. The chief goal of kingdoms such as the Ashanti, Dahomey, Fuuta

Jallon, Mossi, Ségou, Kajor and Kaabu, etc., was to maintain control over the ports for the slave trade or, quite simply, ensure the safety of the caravans on their way to the coast. It was not until the nineteenth century, with the abolition of the slave trade, that new restructuring of the states occurred, linked to various socio-political movements generated by the gradual success of legitimate trade in goods instead of slaves.

THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE WEST AFRICAN AREA  
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The decline of the slave trade, in spite of illegal slave trading which continued until the second half of the nineteenth century, set in motion major economic and social transformations which were the cause of migrations in all directions and, more particularly, territorial restructuring engendered by the conquest. Throughout West Africa there was evidence of the phenomena of population migrations from the savannah towards the forests and the coastline to enter into direct contact with European trade which now favoured new products such as groundnuts, coffee and palm oil. There were also the Mandé migrations in the belt of woodland from Guinea to Côte d'Ivoire which gave rise to the Dyula revolution, led by Samory, whose chief aim was to build a vast empire extending along the entire right bank of the River Niger as far as the Atlantic.

In parallel to this movement, the populations of Senegambia, particularly the Tukuleurs of the River Senegal valley, took on the Fergo under the leadership of Cheikh Umar in order to conquer by battle the whole of the left bank of the Niger up to the Bandiagara cliffs. These two movements inspired by the *jihad* were aimed at recreating a pacified political and economic territory corresponding to the earlier empires of Mali and Songhai. For both Cheikh Umar and Samory, territorial conquest to the detriment of the mosaic of smaller states was the only means of recreating a new supernational territory likely to guarantee safe trading and to counter the territorial ambitions of the Europeans from the coastline.

Earlier, the Ashanti, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, had conquered the coastal states, following the

example of the Dahomey, in order to establish their sovereignty as far as the ocean. The Ashanti controlled the greater part of the future colony of the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana. Similarly, in the mid-nineteenth century, Fuuta Jallon, a continental kingdom, conquered the Kaabu and established its sovereignty over all the southern rivers from the Gambia to Sierra Leone. It was also the case of the empire of Sokoto which expanded southwards, forcing the kingdom of Oyo to move towards the coastal areas of Nigeria.

All these territorial conquests, which extended the frontiers of the older states or encouraged the birth of new larger states, were different forms of adaptation to the abolition of the slave trade. There was also a response to the beginnings of the colonial conquest policy which opened an era of conflict over sovereignty between the European powers and the states of West Africa.

The outcome of this confrontation is familiar enough. It led not only to the defeat of all the states but also and more particularly to the dividing up of West Africa between France, Britain, Portugal and Germany. This colonial partition, before the end of the nineteenth century with slight modifications in the early twentieth century, continues to determine the dividing line of frontiers between the present-day states after the granting of independence in 1960. However, over and beyond this perennity of frontiers defined at random according to colonial conquest, the major factor remains that colonial partition brought to an end internal processes for restructuring the territory which subsequently had difficulty in surviving the debacle.

That was all the more so for the new states of Cheikh Umar and Samory who did not have time to establish their new empires and to consolidate their frontiers which changed according to their victories and their defeats. They had to contend with the resistance of the older African states conquered by force and particularly with the relentless advance of French and British colonial imperialism which sought to decapitate their movement for the revival of West Africa. These unfulfilled conquests left a bitter taste of failure for their initiators and a feeling of resentment among the peoples conquered by force of arms. They do, however, represent, aside from the colonial partition, the only recourse, the

only reference in the collective memory with regard to the current fragmentation of West Africa. Recovering the impetus for unity which began in the nineteenth century is a prerequisite for eliminating the distortions of the Berlin Conference which sanctioned the dividing up of Africa.

COLONIAL FRONTIERS AND THE  
DE-STRUCTURING OF THE WEST AFRICAN AREA

The colonial conquest was the result of a violent process which enabled the European powers to acquire vast territories to the detriment of the African states in the debacle following defeat. From their bastions on the coastline, the loop of the River Niger served as the focal point for this conquest where rivalry between European powers randomly fashioned the physiognomy of the present-day frontiers of the West African states. France, which acquired the lion's share in terms of conquered territory, wasted no time in organizing the new colonies into the Federation of French West Africa. The outline of the frontiers of each colony has its own history and reflects contemporary interests in the framework of the Federation's centralization policy and in the context of rivalry with the neighbouring colonies under British or Portuguese rule.

Conversely, Britain won the vast, rich area of Nigeria, that of Ghana and Sierra Leone and the questionable prize of Gambia, while the Portuguese remained confined in Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde islands off the coast. Spoilsport Germany hung on to Togo until the First World War when that country was subsequently divided up between France and Britain.

The colonial conquest, by putting an end to attempts at the internal restructuring of the West African area with El Hadj Umar and Samori, undertook a new restructuring of land which went far beyond the typical fragmentation of this area over the centuries. At the same time, however, this restructuring of land entailed the creation of new frontiers which reflect, first and foremost, the conflicting preoccupations of the various colonial powers.

Under the supervision of France, French West Africa was given a federal system managed by a Governor-General who was

in full control of the administration of the colonies and had special prerogatives with regard to currency, health, education and defence. The Governor-General served therefore as a link between the Lieutenant-Governors at the head of the various colonies and the Ministry of Overseas Territories responsible, on behalf of France, for running the colonial empire as a whole. Such horizontal integration ensured the free movement of people and goods within French West Africa to the exclusion of the British and Portuguese colonies which were closed to French subjects and vice versa. However, this was conducted in such a way as to be of sole benefit to the mother country which required each of its colonies to specialize in the production of raw materials according to the needs of the time. Senegal and particularly the groundnut basin therefore became the main economic pole for the slave trade which tapped labour from the neighbouring colonies of Guinea, Sudan and Upper Volta.

Within French West Africa itself, border conflicts were largely limited by the arbitration powers of the Governor-General for coping with the specific characteristics and diverging interests of the various colonies. The major aim was, first and foremost, to minimize communication and trade between the French colonies and those attached to the United Kingdom and Portugal through a policy of systematic reorientation of trading routes towards the respective capitals of each colony on the coast in the direction of the mother country.

The British colonies were less centralized than French West Africa on account of the absence of territorial homogeneity. Nevertheless, the Bathurst-Freetown-Accra axis and Lagos established durable links with Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria which acquired a distinct identity in the form of enclaves and, for a long time, gave West Africa its present fragmentation.

At the same time, the relocation of the centre of gravity of West Africa from the River Niger loop towards the Atlantic was strengthened thereby creating a durable imbalance between the coastal countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana and the enclaved countries of the hinterland such as Sudan and Upper Volta. Furthermore, this was compounded by the division and more particularly the imbalance between the coastal area which had been developed

and the hinterland left to its own devices as a supplier of labour, thereby creating disparities between the north and south of Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey and Côte d'Ivoire. The demarcation line was also to be found between Liberia and Mauritania, between the coastal area and the hinterland whose fate was similar to that of totally enclaved colonies without access either from the sea or from the Sahara which had been closed to caravan traffic.

The frontiers were then governed according to the interests of the colonial powers to the detriment of the populations divided by new customs, and linguistic and administrative barriers. Accordingly, the creation of enclaves was to disrupt over some time the ecological complementarities of West Africa as a whole. Furthermore, there was the division of populations which, in the past, belonged to the same political entity. Henceforth, the Ewe were divided up between French Togo and British Ghana, the Yoruba between Nigeria and Dahomey and the Hausa on either side of the frontier between Nigeria and Niger. Such fragmentation was even more marked in Senegambia, particularly in the south where the Joola, Mandinke and Fula belonging to former Kaabu were divided up between the two Guineas, Gambia and Senegal. Worse still, the River Gambia cut the colony of Senegal in two, thereby creating a major imbalance between south and north which was the cause of the Joola rebellion in Casamance.

Nevertheless, colonial frontiers also played a regulatory role for the populations that crossed them according to circumstances in order to escape repression, the levying of extortionate taxes and military conscription. Similarly, there were also labour migrations which often ignored the frontiers which had been made penetrable thanks to ethnic solidarity linking populations on either side of them. This led to greater mobility of the populations in West African territory in spite of the existence of frontiers. Such mobility corresponded more to the requirements of colonial development which gave priority to the coastal areas to the detriment of the hinterland or reserve of cheap labour. This drift of population from the hinterland towards the coast is the most significant phenomenon of our times even if the overall physiognomy of West Africa remains fragmented.

Modifications to frontiers were very rare during the colonial period as the colonial powers had, in general, abided by the conventions signed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a view to defining the confines of each colony more precisely. Upper Volta alone was twice the subject of dismembering when one part was attached to Côte d'Ivoire and another to Mali. However, the French colonial domain seemed better integrated on account of the federal government which governed French West Africa from Dakar.

This federal unit was, however, to experience even greater fragmentation with the 1957 outline law which gave the colonies greater autonomy. Opposition between the advocates of maintaining the Federation and autonomists was a dominant feature of the latter days of the French colonial empire. Finally, the Balkanization of French West Africa opened the way for independence and the process of building the nation-state in the context of frontiers inherited from colonization while accentuating the fragmentation of West Africa.

#### FRONTIERS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATION-STATE

Accession to independence opened up new prospects for the African peoples who found themselves torn between two contradictory objectives, that of unity and that of the construction of the nation-state. In spite of the ideals of the pan-African movement, the new states, meeting at the OAU conference in 1963, made sacred the frontiers inherited from colonialism in the aim of avoiding conflicts. That decision opened the way for the construction of the nation-state and the individual venture in the race towards development.

Apart from the short-lived federation of Mali which brought together Senegal and Sudan and the abortive union between Ghana, Guinea and Mali, political unity remained a symbol framed in the constitutions of the nation-states which had chosen to consolidate the colonial frontiers. In West Africa, the federal structures of the FWA were dismantled with the exception of the currency which continues to link the new states but, above all, continues to link them all to France. Subsequently, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania

were to issue their own currency thereby contributing to even greater fragmentation of West Africa in a similar way to what had happened in East Africa within the former federation linking Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The physiognomy of West Africa became even more fragmented as, apart from the use of English, French and Portuguese, no organic link in political terms emerged to strengthen relations between the 16 new states which locked themselves up within their national frontiers. Even Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde islands which had taken up arms to secure independence under the leadership of a unified party, divided into two separate states. From then on, within the framework of the nation-state, border controls were strengthened as well as customs barriers, thereby reducing official relations between states which turned their backs on each other.

Nevertheless, border conflicts during the early years of independence were exceptional apart from disputes which opposed Mali and Burkina Faso, and Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, which were ultimately settled peacefully. On the other hand, there was evidence of even greater territorial fragmentation insofar as Guinea closed its borders to its neighbours, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, for many years on account of political disagreements between their leaders. This was also the case for Mali which cut off relations with Senegal and encouraged them with Côte d'Ivoire after the disintegration of the Federation, thereby severing age-old links created by the Dakar-Niger axis. Similarly, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire were at loggerheads while encouraging competition between their two economies based on cocoa according to the political disagreements between Kwame Nkrumah and Houphouët-Boigny. Frontiers were closed or reopened according to political conflicts between the states without taking account of the interests of the populations which continued to move to and from according to their needs and particularly according to the extroverted development of the states.

The Senegal River, for example, which had never actually been a frontier throughout history, was to become a barrier between Senegal and Mauritania which banned the crossing of the river in the wake of a conflict between the two countries in 1988. Worse still, the areas on either side of the frontiers became a form of no-

man's land abandoned by the nation-states which concentrated their development efforts on the more ostensibly useful areas along the coast where most of the capitals are situated. From north to south, Praia, Nouakchott, Dakar, Banjul, Bissau, Conakry, Freetown, Moravia, Abidjan, Accra, Lomé, Cotonou and Lagos, namely in 13 states out of 16, the capitals are located on the coast and their economies are focused outwardly while leaving all the hinterland totally neglected. Such outward-looking development has reinforced the archaic nature of the frontiers which have thereby contributed to reducing trade between the West African states. In the smaller and the larger countries alike, separate development soon betrayed its limitations within the framework of the nation-state. To the economic crisis was added a political crisis which revealed the weaknesses of the nation-state founded on strong centralization and the despotic methods of single-party government. All this contributed to intensifying the social and political imbalances which threatened the very foundations of the nation-states within their frontiers.

It is paradoxical to observe that the current crises which threaten the integrity of states such as Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea-Bissau are not the results of the border disputes which have brought them into conflict with their neighbours. In most instances, the populations have difficulty in expressing themselves within the frontiers of their respective states where they are stifled. This dissatisfaction with life within the frontiers has led to various forms of crisis which are likely ultimately to bring about the implosion of the states.

This has been reflected by the Biafran war of secession from Nigeria, that of Casamance in Senegal, without forgetting the civil wars of an ethnic nature in Sierra Leone and Liberia and the Tuareg rebellion in Mali and Niger. Mention must also be made of the conflict between Senegal and Mauritania which exceptionally led to the systematic repatriation of the respective populations from one country to another, thereby creating, a problem in the ratio of Moors on the one hand to populations of Wolof, Fula and Soninke origins on the other. Worse still, this conflict has not only maintained the river as the frontier between the two states but also

as a line of ethnic demarcation between the Moors and the other black populations which have been forced back into Senegal. These new refugees have come to join the Tuareg who left Mali and Niger for the neighbouring countries thereby disturbing the regional balance as a whole.

Indirectly, all these conflicts pose once again the problem of frontiers the control of which has proved to be a major obstacle to regional integration. The question certainly is not one of modifying, existing frontiers in order to create further imbalances but rather of eliminating anything which can contribute to hindering a genuine policy of reintegration of the West African area which is suffering from excessive fragmentation without any internal logic for the development of all its constituent parts. This calls for a new vision of the notion of frontier commensurate with the imperatives of regional integration.

#### FRONTIERS AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Faced with the practical limitations of separate developments, the states felt the need, very early on, to group together on a sub-regional, regional or continental scale in order to develop intra-African trade and make investments of common interest. There followed the development of a variety of subregional organizations such as OWS, OMVG, CILSS, CEAO and CEDEAO, to name but those within the West African framework, without taking account of the numerous organizations at the OAU level and within the United Nations system. The economic vocation of these organizations has revealed, first and foremost, the desire of states to resolve development problems but, more particularly, the determination to avoid any political debate on unity. The States, which are more preoccupied with consolidating their hegemonic power at the domestic level, are not ready to cede any measure whatsoever of their national sovereignty, embodied in artificial frontiers inherited from the colonial partition. It is this paradox which accounts for the failure of most plans for regional integration.

In fact, the existing layout of frontiers is an obstacle to any genuine policy of integrated development for our states which

turn their backs on each other. In West Africa, there are several instances which point to the inadequacy of the frontiers in relation to the requirements of integrated development. For example, a feature of the western area, which we call Greater Senegambia, is the considerable fragmentation of its territory shared between six states which include Senegal, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau and part of Mauritania, Mali and Guinea-Conakry. Similar fragmentation is to be found also in the central area bringing together Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin. There is also the existence of major hinterland states such as Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso whose major handicap is the absence of outlets to the sea and their proximity to the Sahara which does not lead anywhere. Nigeria alone, by its very size, combines all the advantages and disadvantages of the other regions with the major handicap of disunity which is a feature of this country torn between the various nationalities of the northern, eastern and western regions. Accordingly, Nigeria brings together the full range of problems of regional integration, thereby illustrating the importance of controlling frontiers in relation to other economic, political and cultural factors. In spite of its size, Nigeria not only needs a well-balanced federal system but also greater openness towards its neighbours to ensure more fluid movement through its frontiers.

The absence of complementary economies contributes to creating the problem of frontiers which have become the purveyors of goods imported from elsewhere and the beneficiaries of which draw advantage from the disparity between currencies and customs duties. West Africa needs planning, for the development of its resources in order to respond first and foremost to the needs of its populations on the whole. This objective cannot be attained without a development strategy that goes beyond the existing layout of frontiers.

The case of Greater Senegambia in the western area is typical of the negative impact of existing frontiers and the shortsightedness of national policies. In this particular area, the three major rivers of Senegal, Gambia and Niger, which belong to six states, are largely under used, in relation to their potential, for genuine regional integration. On the contrary, the three rivers are controlled

separately by three subregional organizations: OMVS which brings together Mali, Senegal and Mauritania; OMVG which includes Senegal, Gambia and the two Guineas; while lastly, the Niger River Authority is the responsibility of Guinea, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. River Senegal and River Gambia have their sources in the upper reaches of Fuuta Jallon in Guinea and flow into the ocean less than 500 kilometres away. Both river valleys are shared by six states which ignore each other and are therefore incapable of ensuring the complementarity of these two rivers in order to meet their vital needs in river transport, agriculture, stock breeding and energy production, without taking account of the other sectors of the mining industry.

The River Gambia has a natural vocation for navigation as ocean-going vessels can go up the river as far as 300 kilometres inland without any need for infrastructure. It is the quickest and least expensive route to reach Mali and then to connect with the River Niger by rail. But this requires vision if Gambia, this small country which cuts Senegal into two, is to retrieve its regional vocation which, beyond the Senegalese borders, could open all of western Mali and northwestern Guinea to river and maritime communication. This requires that the River Senegal should act as a regulator of the water flow in this fragile ecological area of the Sahel, where intensive stock-breeding could be combined with the production of electricity. This main activity of stock-breeding would not exclude market gardening and the production of millet which the populations of the north have always practised instead of imposing rice growing on them, as is the case. Rice production should return to its natural region, that of the southern rivers between Gambia and Sierra Leone where the Joola, Landuma, Nalu and Baga populations have acquired age-old skills in rice-growing techniques. We now know for sure that these populations were systematically sought after by the slave traders to ensure the transfer of technology which enabled the development of rice growing in South Carolina.

This complementarity between the two rivers would solve the conflict between Mauritania and Senegal by opening the river to the major north-south movements of cattle on a larger scale. It would

also solve the problem of the rebellion in Casamance which degenerated after the occupation of Guinea-Bissau by the Senegalese army.

The Senegal River cannot be a watertight frontier if the populations on either side of it are to have any future through greater freedom of movement of people and goods. This is also true of Casamance which can only develop and live in the framework of a more open minded attitude on the part of Senegal towards its neighbours in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry. Casamance shares with these southern regions a number of cultural values but, more particularly identical economic potential which is complementary with that to be found in the north of Gambia and the Mauritanian and Malian Sahel. It is on this level that politicians are responsible in controlling conflicts through a vigorous integration policy extending beyond the frontiers of each state. Each of these countries has a key role to play as regards its position in relation to its neighbours to remove from the frontiers all the venom which poisons the existence of the local populations and hampers their development.

Mauritania has a major role to play in linking the Maghreb with Africa south of the Sahara on condition that it accepts its two Moorish and black constituent parts on an equal footing. Senegal has a privileged position and a vital role to play as the gateway of the continent towards the Americas and Europe, on condition that it opens up unreservedly to its neighbours by facilitating communication with Mali, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau and by building a bridge on the Gambia and Senegal rivers to put an end to its current isolation.

The same applies to Guinea-Conakry whose future is linked to its openness towards its neighbours and the linking of its four natural regions to their environment beyond the frontiers. It can play a particularly important part in the regional integration process by extending Greater Senegambia to Sierra Leone and to Liberia which would cease to be mere maritime enclaves without any hinterland. Naturally, a bridge on the Gambia River would put an end to the division of Senegal into two. Consequently, Gambia should stop holding on to hypothetical sovereignty and ensure that its river acts as a meeting point for the peoples of Senegambia and a means of reaching Niger. Guinea-Bissau, like Sierra Leone and

Liberia, should open up to the continent so as to ensure that their maritime facade has a hinterland beyond their borders. Therefore, if each state were to adopt a more open approach towards its immediate neighbours, it would be possible to re-establish the homogeneity of Greater Senegambia as a subregion within West Africa.

This pivotal role would in fact be a centre of gravity for regional integration which would overcome and correct the existing anomalies of the colonial heritage. Such a role could be played respectively by Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria, without excluding Togo and Benin. However, these countries must above all have the ambition to open up to the loop of the River Niger by re-establishing, ecological complementarity between the forest, savannah and Sahel and, above all, by providing a direct link between the Sahara to the north and the Atlantic to the south. This objective had not been achieved by the great empires of Mali and Songhai before the fifteenth century. This may in part account for their defeat and decline as soon as the Europeans took them from the rear by occupying the Atlantic Coast in order to link Africa directly with the rest of the world.

Enclaved countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger should accept to co-operate and make access to the Atlantic a priority for the whole of the River Niger loop area. The revival of the Niger valley is one of the conditions of survival for West Africa which, once it has been soundly established on the Atlantic shores, can reconquer the desert routes in order to re-establish relations beyond the Sahara with the Maghreb and Egypt. This will contribute substantially to helping, the African continent recover some of its homogeneity, pending an opportunity to ensure its unity as a whole thanks to a similar process in East Africa, Central Africa and southern Africa. The main objective is undoubtedly to help the continent to recover the unity and homogeneity it has lost since the fifteenth century and which justifies today that the political map, drawn up according to external criteria, artificially divides the continent into Africa north of or south of the Sahara that is quite distinct from southern Africa, to such an extent that present-day generations have stopped dreaming of a Cape Town-Cairo axis which would cross another Dakar-Mogadishu axis.

Frontiers are certainly important but they have nothing to do with this other vision which would consist in ignoring them or quite simply removing their traces in order to ensure the reintegration of the continent. Africa is a most fragmented continent in political and economical terms and is consequently vulnerable to all forms of crisis, the current manifestations of which are but a prelude to the implosion of states whose populations are dissatisfied with the lives they lead within existing frontiers.

The only way of getting out of the current deadlock is to remedy as soon as possible the internal imbalances created by the unilateral construction of the centralized nation-state which has ignored the existence of different nationalities within the new states. The fear of tribalism has led the pioneers of independence to flee any national debate especially as the single-party regimes and military regimes put fetters on all democratic freedoms very early on. It is this practice of the arbitrary which continues to prevent Nigeria from recognizing the existence of various nationalities, such as Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. These nationalities, each with more than 20 million souls, belonged in the past to distinct political entities before the advent of colonization.

It is obvious that the territorial unity of Nigeria is not incompatible with the existence of a federal system which would grant greater autonomy to the various nationalities as a mark of respect for minority rights. There is little point in maintaining artificial territorial unity, without any democratic process. It is likely in the long term to be the cause of civil war and to hasten the implosion of the states, whether large or small. The current crises raise the acute problem of frontiers and the notion of national sovereignty. The armed intervention of ECOMOG has become the main activity of the CEDEAO whose primary vocation is the economic integration of the states of West Africa. ECOMOG and particularly Nigeria intervened in Liberia and Sierra Leone while Senegal and Guinea have entered Bissau to bring civil wars to an end and reinstate those heads of state who were threatened by the armed rebellions. The recent crises in the Lake Region have caused all the states in the subregion to intervene in one way or another, thereby creating solidarities which

extend well beyond the frontiers of the states. Without directly raising the problem of the redefinition of frontiers, these regional crises reveal the need for a global solution to the management of territory by nationalities which span several states.

Regional integration as well as a rigorous decentralization policy, combined with the redefinition of citizenship in Africa, are the alternative to the deadlock created by the nation-states as heirs to the colonial partition.

How to redefine a multi-ethnic or multinational state which would extend beyond existing frontiers is the major challenge facing Africa in the twenty-first century. Rather than modify the frontiers, the task will be to abolish them either through the unification of a number of states or by granting dual nationality to all Africans, namely that of the place of birth and that of the place of residence through encouraging the free movement of people and goods. Until such time as political unity has been established between two or more states, the granting of dual nationality is a palliative to ensure the movement of populations and to compensate for the restrictive nature of frontiers.

It is certain that for want of integrating Rwanda and Burundi within the larger neighbouring states of Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, the frontiers need to be opened to provide an over-spill for the population surpluses of the upper plateaux. Better still, they should be given dual nationality and a more autonomous territory should be created, centering on the major lakes in relation to the east and west of the continent. Africa can boast of much unoccupied land which is not used on account of the fragmentation of the continent and, more particularly, the absence of communication infrastructure which makes frontiers even more absurd. Mozambique alone, some 3,000 kilometres in length, keeps the gateway to the ocean closed to all the states of southern and even Central Africa as Lubumbashi is nearer to the Indian Ocean than to the Atlantic. There is no shortage of examples of imbalances of this kind created by the existing layout of frontiers, both in Central as well as in West Africa.

In point of fact, the ultimate remedy would be the unification of certain states and the establishment of a policy of decentralization

to ensure more autonomy and greater cultural homogeneity in those geographical areas that are most viable in economic terms. That is the price to be paid for the cultural revolution without which there can be no progress. It is linked to the promotion of national languages which have been condemned to vegetate under the pretext of national unity and have fallen captive to the narrowness of frontiers and the simplistic idea of the nation-state. In actual fact, Nigeria is incapable of developing languages such as Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo which are spoken by more than 20 million people. Elsewhere, the pretext put forward is the excessive number of languages even if certain minority languages in a country are spoken on the other side of its frontiers by millions of speakers. Mande and Fula are languages of communication which cover all of the countries of West Africa. What needs to be done, as with dual-nationality, is to cultivate bilingualism or trilingualism which is part of the everyday life of the populations, to the exclusion of the Anglophone, Lusophone or Francophone elites of the nation-states who acquired their privileges in the context of the colonial system.

On account of the structural underdevelopment of Africa in all fields, regional integration and even the reintegration of fragmented territory, have become a dire necessity. Reintegration, which could develop industrialization on a large scale, inevitably brings into question the role of the state in the management of space and the mobility of people. The OMVS, for example, which has invested millions in developing the land of the River Senegal valley with its energy and navigation schemes, is likely to become redundant if the problem of the Mauritanian refugees is not settled and particularly if freedom of movement between the three countries is not guaranteed. The settlement of political disputes and decentralization are the necessary steps for any regional integration policy and accordingly the prerequisite for the peaceful handling of border disputes.

#### CONCLUSION

Reflection on frontiers stirs up the debate on the current limitations of attempts to build the nation-state in Africa. We must leave the

Berlin Conference via the front door if we are to re-establish a link with the internal dynamism of the populations by recreating viable geographical and economic territories which are likely to guarantee safety and cultural development. Instead of denouncing ethnic problems or running away from the demands of unity, we must launch a debate on nationalities and the relationship between states and nations. That is the condition, today, for grasping all that is at stake in the integration of African territory. The scale of current crises throughout the continent reveals, first and foremost, the absence of any political and intellectual leadership likely to pinpoint all the obstacles to regional integration and the advantages which the existing states might derive from opening up their frontiers. The peaceful control of frontiers combined with an internal policy of decentralization and democratization may help to set in motion a revival of Africa in a context of unity. Recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination and the right to secession by Ethiopia after 30 years of war against Eritrea may constitute important steps towards the questioning of the frontiers inherited from colonization and the hallowed status of the nation-state.

#### ACRONYMS

OAU	Organization of African Unity
FWA	French West Africa
OMVS	Senegal River Development Organization
OMVG	Gambia River Development Organization
CILSS	Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States