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*Social History in
French West Africa:
Forced Labour, Labour Market,
Women and Politics*

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Contents

1. Forced Labor and Labor Laws in French West Africa, 1900-1946	5
Introduction	5
The end of the slave trade and the imposition of forced labor	5
Labor by decree	8
Geneva Convention vs native law	12
Resistance and reform	13
2. Manifestations of Forced Labor in Senegal: As Exemplified by the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum Kaolack, 1943-1956	16
Introduction	16
Convict labor on the Kaolack salt works	24
Conclusion	32
3. From Shortage to Excess: The Evolution and Current Configuration of the Labor Market in Senegal	35
Introduction	35
Labor shortage and instability	36
Private sector and public sector:	
A change in roles on the job market	43
The era of adjustment, unemployment and excess	51
Conclusion	64
4. Women and Senegalese Political Life – Arame Diene & Thioumbe Samb: A Portrait of Two Women Leaders, 1945-1996	66
Introduction	66
The context of Senegalese political life	67
Shared characteristics	70
Two different fortunes	73
A close look at two life stories	77

1. FORCED LABOR AND LABOR LAWS IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA, 1900-1946

INTRODUCTION

During the first half of the twentieth century, social issues in French West Africa (FWA) were dominated by the system of forced labor¹ which reflected the nature of colonial intervention in the mobilization of indigenous manpower.

France justified the practice, similar in many respects to the “*corvée*” which the French Revolution had abolished, by insisting on the so-called “educative value of work” and the success of the colonial enterprise. Although forced labor was criticized as an outdated and uneconomical form of mobilization of the indigenous labor force, the practice nevertheless continued beyond 1946.

Outside the context of slavery, such a paradoxical situation could only be rationalized within the philosophical framework of a colonial system which considered indigenous as being no more than simple working tools without basic human rights.

THE END OF THE SLAVE TRADE AND THE IMPOSITION OF FORCED LABOR

The abolition of the slave trade, by ending the massive export of African manpower created a new situation that forced the colonial system to introduce alternative ways of securing and using that manpower in the colonies, such as in the production of cash crops. The status of the slave thus changed from export product to producer of raw materials. Additionally, colonial expansion raised new demands for manpower within the territories. In the end, and despite strong pressures from abolitionists, the three methods devised to solve the shortage of labor were all derived from or related to slavery. They illustrate the slow process of slave emancipation in West Africa as it moved from captivity to

¹ See Fall, (B.), 1993, *le travail forcé en Afrique occidentale française (1900-1945)*, Paris, Karthala, 446.

“*engagés à temps*” (contract labor) and to “*villages de liberté.*”

These three forms of labor, all derived directly from slavery, marked the transitional phase between the slave era and the period of forced labor that would emerge later by French decree. It was under such a colonial system of “*legitimate commerce*” that captives were employed on plantations of the Rivières du Sud in Coastal Guinea when the Atlantic slave went into decline. The mulatto descendants of European and American slavers and Muslim traders who control the export of slaves redirected captives into commodity production.² John Ormond, the slave dealer, Paul Faber, and the slave-trading Lightburn family were notorious planters who were involved in both trade and agriculture. In 1830, they owned about 12,000 slaves.

In service that further extended colonial military conquest, slaves were enrolled as porters or as “*tirailleurs sénégalais.*” Other captives, if they accepted the status of being “*engagés à temps*”, were promised engagement by their own masters *or by* the administration as ordinary tenants, they were to *pay rent* for a period of 10 or 12 years after which they would be emancipated. From 1818 to 1844, there were over 3,077 “*engagés à temps*” registered in the colony of Senegal. They were mainly employed by the inhabitants of Saint-Louis and Gorée or conscripted by the colonial administration as workmen in the Waalo agricultural project. In 1826, out of 2,500 people working at the Waalo, one fifth were slaves, redeemed as contract laborers. This approach to labor recruitment was inspired, incidentally, by the example of British post-emancipation “apprenticeship.”

In 1887, Colonel Gallieni began the cynical implementation of the so called “*villages de liberté*” in French Sudan. Escaped captives were organized in different villages established at strategic points along the railway in order to provide workmen and porters for French colonial expansion. Denise Bouche, the historian, has noted that “for Gallieni and Archinard the villages of

² Klein, (M.), 1988, «Slaves resistance and slave emancipation in Coastal Guinea» in Miers, (S.) & Roberts, (R.) (eds), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, Madison, the University of Wisconsin Press.

liberty were excellent palliatives to the shortage of labor.”³ Between 1887 and 1911, there were 155 such villages in French West Africa. Most of them were in French Sudan where a total of 17,600 liberated captives were settled in 98 villages.

Along the way, these solutions were officially presented as humanitarian missions. Their true nature was, however, progressively revealed. In 1925, a decree dated October 22 had been passed organizing salaried free labor. However, very few areas were affected by the decree. The continued use of forced labor prevented the emergence of a free labor market in FWA.⁴

Up to 1930, forced labor predominated in FWA because the colonial administration was eager to supply private enterprises with very cheap manpower which, in addition, could be forced to work under inhuman conditions. The shortage of labor and arguments about “the mentality of natives” were used to justify a system in which a mixed regime of forced and free Labor gradually emerged, under a colonialist economy that emphasized cash crop production. The dominant view at that time may be summarized in the observation that: “It is complete ignorance of the mentality of the natives if one believes that they will come, by themselves to propose to be recruited by the settler. It has been proven that without pressure from the colonial authority, the natives would not trade their miserable and lazy but free life for remunerated labor.” It was believed that only the use of constraint could in most cases overcome “the inertia of the natives.”

Indeed, as early as 1901 a report to the French Minister of Commerce had made the point that “the Negro does not like work and is totally unaccustomed to the idea of saving; he does not realize that idleness keeps him in a state of absolute economic inferiority. It is therefore necessary to use the institutions by which he is ruled, in this case slavery, to improve his circumstances and afterwards gently lead him into an apprenticeship of freedom. Scorning work, the Negro is not aware that, for us, work ennobles

³ Bouche, (D.), 1968, *Les villages de liberté en Afrique occidentale française*, Paris, Mouton.

⁴ Miers, (S.) & Roberts (R.), (eds), 1988, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, Madison, the University of Wisconsin Press.

a man's character, it is necessary to pass through an interminable stage before giving him freedom such as we understand it."⁵

LABOR BY DECREE

Five forms of forced labor eventually emerged from the three direct derivatives of slavery: *requisition*, *prestation*, "*deuxième portion du contingent militaire*", *mandatory penal work*, and *compulsory cultivation*.

Requisition of manpower was the first coercive measure used by the colonial administration to deal with the shortage of manpower. Although the measure had been practiced for many years, colonial legislation never addressed the issue as such, and its problematic nature was widely ignored. Generally, requisitioned workers, were engaged in a variety of tasks. For example, in laying out the telegraph network in FWA, the colonial administration with the support of indigenous chiefs used requisitioned workers to cut down, transport, and position telegraph poles. Requisitioned workers were also used to haul barges and unload shipments belonging to European and Lebanese traders.

On other occasions, they were mobilized as porters particularly in areas where access was difficult. Porters had to carry administrators on hammocks, with their luggage. In Guinea where before 1914 portage was the main mode of transportation, the entire output of rubber, from the Région Forestière to Conakry on the coast, was carried by porters.

About 55,000 porters were annually enrolled in this *Corvée*. Imprest labor was also used in other public works related to the construction of railways, such as the Kayes – Bamako (1882-1902), the Conakry – Niger (1900-1914) and the later railways of Jolof and Baol (1923-1927) in Sénégal. Until 1919, conscript labor was quite common. The majority of the workers were mobilized by coercion, and in most cases colonial authorities directly intervened

⁵ Lestideau, (E.), 1907, *La question de la main d'œuvre dans les colonies françaises et spécialement dans celles de l'Afrique occidentale française*, Rennes, Imprimerie A. Guillemin et Voisin.

in the process. A paramilitary force named “*gardes cercles*” and recruiters *were* the primary auxiliaries for the administration and traders. These means, however, progressively changed becoming more subtle.

To avoid the potential problem of a violent rejection of recruitment by coercion, the colonial administration sought and obtained the support of influential indigenous chiefs. Here, French colonial policy sought to take advantage of the fact that “relations between chiefs and peoples in African villages were nested in a complex of affinity and power far more subtle than distinctive between slave and free labor.”⁶ Ironic in thus exploiting the moral influence and authority of the chiefs, French colonial policy would progressively undermine them, by transforming them into instruments of colonial policy.

After World War I, pressure from the International Labor Organization (ILO) forced France to develop less obviously coercive forms of labor recruitment. As a result, two new forms of forced labor, *prestation* and “*deuxième portion du contingent militaire*” (second portion of military service) appeared. Both mobilized a large indigenous work force.

Prestation was a form of *corvée* manifested as a tax paid in the form of work on public projects. This was in addition to taxes generally paid in cash. Before 1912, an “*arrêté*” or decree authorized administration to punish those who refused to perform such work. But was an *arrêté* dated November 25, 1912 that effectively solidified the system of *prestation*, and in 1918 the Lieutenant Governors of each colony in FWA were authorized to apply the system.

Prestation consisted of requiring the labor of tax payers on public work projects for periods of between 8 to 13 days every year according to the territory. During two decades (1920-1940), the variety of projects included the construction of buildings and roads, airfield maintenance and so forth. Thus, about 90 percent of

⁶ Cooper, (F.), 1989, «From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse» in *American Ethnology*, Vol. 16, N°. 4, Nov. 1989.

35,000 kilometers of roads were built under the supervision of “the commandants de cercles.” And in Sénégal alone prestation labor in 1923 generated 4,969,840 workdays.

Since little provision was made in the colonial budget for payment of wages to African labor, the commandants inevitably relied on the coercive use of labor as a form of taxation. Workers mobilized under the regime of prestation were not remunerated. Only a portion of food was given to each worker and even this was not guaranteed. Among the frequent abuses of prestation were the retention of the “prestataires” longer than the allowed period and practice of using the same workers twice. The guarantee that workmen would not be sent to work on sites located more than five kilometers from their villages was routinely ignored.

The “*deuxième portion du contingent*”, primarily, consisted of using conscription into military service to assign a certain fraction of the annual recruits to active duty in administrative work instead of army service. A lottery system was used to choose the recruits who would be mobilized for forced labor. The lottery followed the selection of those chosen to serve as *tirailleurs Sénégalais*, the prima instrument of enforcement used by the colonial administration. A decree dated October 31, 1926 authorized the enlistment of men from among those examined found fit, but not needed by the military authorities, to be used for public work. They were thus constituted into “*tirailleurs - la pelle*” – soldiers with tools – as they came to be known. From 1928 to 1946, the decree allowed the assignment of 57,718 “second portion” workers to the building of the famous “*Office du Niger*” Installations in French Sudan, and the Dakar-Niger Railroad. The peak in recruitment occurred in 1941 and 1942 when 4,700 and 5,550 men respectively, were enrolled as soldier-workers in the colony.⁷ The same decree also provided the legal basis for sending workmen to private cotton and sisal plantations in east Sénégal and French Sudan.

⁷ Echenberg, (M.) & Filipovitch, (J.), 1986, «African Military Labor and the Building of the Office du Niger Installations, 1925-1950» in *Journal of African History*, 27, Nov. 1986.

The inhuman working conditions of the “second portion” are illustrated by the August 1945 report of a committee headed by former Governor General of FWA, Reste: “Out of a thousand soldiers-workers employed, 921 suffered from general morbidity and 19 died of dysentery over a four and half month period.”⁸ The report went on to conclude that the Office du Niger was a complete failure in both human and economic terms.

The practice of *mandatory penal labor* that assigned prisoners to work on public sites was a French tradition that was transferred to the colonies. The practice would eventually be considered by the ILO as a form of forced labor. In FWA, it was commonly used to provide supplementary manpower for public work projects. Prisoners were mobilized for work such as the repair of quays, railroad construction, and the maintenance of government buildings. Generally, mandatory penal labor did not involve the mobilization of large numbers of people. However, arbitrary arrests by the *commandants de cercle* usually resulted in assignment to work sites.

Finally, *compulsory cultivation* was an old form of forced labor practiced by the colonial authorities under the so-called “*les champs du Commandants*” to increase agricultural production. For colonial theorists, the practice was justified by their perception of Africans as a barbaric, indolent, and improvident people, who had been predisposed to primitive attitudes by the primitive nature of their agricultural economy. Thus, to educate the Africans and develop a modern agricultural economy in the colonies, the colonial establishment needed to use pressure to impose and improve production especially of cash crops. In the Ivory Coast, for example, the development of coffee and cocoa plantations after 1930 was accomplished by compulsory cultivation and by the conscription of workmen for the benefit of French settlers.⁹

An important consequence of this policy was the forcible labor migration of the Mossi in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso)

⁸ ANSOM – AE (DEF), 369/4 – *Rapport de la Commission Reste*, Août 1945.

⁹ Asiwayu, (A.I.), 1976, «Migration as a revolt: The example of the Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta before 1945» in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 17, N°. 4, 1976.

who were considered a “*réservoir*” of manpower for coastal planters. Thus, from 1932 to 1946, 50,000 workers were recruited each year for coffee and cocoa plantations. The coercion increased the flow of migration labor into the neighboring British colony of Gold Coast (now Ghana) from the usual number of 75,000 to 100,000. The ratio of increase was interpreted as a form of passive revolt against French rule.

GENEVA CONVENTION VS. NATIVE LAW

To provide a legal umbrella for the complex coercive labor policies, the colonial administration passed the so-called “*Code de l’indigénat*” – The Native Law – which forced African chiefs to recruit labor for private enterprises and public works duties. There already existed a tradition of a form of *corvée* or servitude within African societies in which frequent struggles for the control of power among the African aristocracies occurred. Under *corvées* imposed by African chiefs, the indigenous populations (both free men and slaves) were subject to exaction and labor. The French exploited this tradition of *corvée* and in the process subjected Africans to conditions of extreme brutality and violence.

The intellectual colonial establishment attempted to redefine labor as an assignment of requisitioned manpower to private enterprises. The attempt was primarily designed to provide a legal framework within which the utilization of forced labor could be justified. In seeking to nullify the essence of forced labor – that is the use of extra-economic constraints to put an individual to work without considering the nature of the employer (public or private) – the colonial state found itself in opposition to the Geneva Convention of 1930 which identified, and condemned, the five forms of forced labor that were used in the colonies. It was shortly after this international labor Convention (at which Blaise Diagne, Deputy of Sénégal and Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, unsuccessfully defended the colonial position) that France passed a bill on August 21, 1930 to regulate its coercive labor policies. Instead of “*travail forcé*” the term “*travail obligatoire*” was officially adopted. The law was a hypocritical piece of legislation

designed to mislead the ILO. And it was later denounced by De Coppet, Governor General of FWA, in 1937 in these terms: “We lie in France, in Europe, in the entire world, in Geneva and at the International Labour Organization when regulations and circulars in hand, we speak of the organization of public work in the colonies. We dishonor colonial administration and we demoralize our civil servants by asking them to apply, on paper only, regulations inapplicable in practice.”¹⁰

RESISTANCE AND REFORM

The peak of coercive mobilization of manpower *occurred* from 1920 to 1936. Until 1936, weak reaction against colonialism by the indigenous population in FWA allowed the long practice of abuse and exaction. The only significant form of reaction against forced labor was desertion, which might be considered to be a *form of* spontaneous and individual rebellion. Slaves and con-script laborers thus appear to have had the same reaction, despite the different nature of the oppression that they faced. Desertion rates were generally high, and the lowest recorded rate was 20 percent. At notoriously abusive sites such as Samé, Diakandapé, and Marakala in French Sudan; Kindia and Coyah in Guinea; and Wassadou and Koutal in Sénégal, workmen deserted in large numbers. For these workmen, desertion was probably the only viable form of reaction against oppression. Furthermore, the composition and the origins of the labor force help explain the predominant resort to desertion. The workers were generally deported from various regions and were subject to all kinds of exaction under the Code de l’indigénat. As a result, there was an absence of the kind of cohesive structure that could mount and sustain a massive and unified resistance.

Still, other forms of response gradually appeared, namely, sabotage and the refusal to work. On the plantations and at public

¹⁰ ANS. K8 (1): *Lettre du Gouverneur Général De Coppet au Ministre des Colonies*, Dakar, 25 Janvier 1937.

work sites rejection of forced labor often took obvious forms like, refusal to work, or more subtle forms such as the absence of zeal that colonial discourse invariably referred to as “negro laziness.”

In the late 1930s, the resistance to forced labor became massive. Complaints about the quality of food, working conditions, absence of remuneration, and about the brutality of the supervisors became more and more frequent. Between 1937 and 1945, there were instances of collective occupation of work sites, including management headquarters. Still, on the whole, resistance to the colonial oppression of forced labor was mainly passive.

The first real reform of forced labor came with the rise to power of the Popular Front in France and, more specifically, after the appointment of De Coppet as Governor General of FWA on August 8, 1936. In 1937, De Coppet instituted the system of “*rachat des prestations*” which allowed Africans to redeem their prestations in cash. Prior to his appointment, only a few people, had the right to do so. The *rachat* policy was successful and gave the administration a new possibility to increase the budget and to hire skilled workers for the construction of roads.

World War II meanwhile accelerated the development of African nationalism, and provided France with a context for reassessing its colonial policy. At the Brazzaville Conference in 1944, France announced important changes in its policy in the overseas territories. Following a report on indigenous manpower in FWA presented by André Latrille, Governor of the Ivory Coast, the Conference strongly recommended the abolition of forced labor and the progressive development of a free labor market within five years. With the end of World War II, the situation became more favorable for the implementation of changes recommended by the Brazzaville Conference.

Thus, when the French National Constituent Assembly started its work, in October 1945, the representatives of overseas territories argued that there was an irreducible contradiction between the conception of French Union and the regime of inequality and discrimination which characterized the relations between the colonies and France. During the most repressive years of its colonial enterprise, France had been forced to use

euphemism to mask its brutal labor policies and to avoid repercussions from the Geneva Convention. However, following initiatives by its African parliamentarians, the Assembly voted in a succession of reform laws and decrees. The decrees dated December 22, 1945 and February 20, 1946, abolished the system of penalties which had been a centerpiece of the “*Code de l’Indigénat*.” Then, a bill presented by Ivory Coast’s Félix Houphouët-Boigny abolished forced labor altogether on April 1, 1946. The bill stipulated the free character of labor and prohibited all direct and indirect constraints on recruitment and place of employment.

With the end of forced labor, voluntary wage labor became the principal mode of recruiting workers in FWA, as it had been in certain territories of Sénégal. The shortage of manpower which prevailed was reduced, and eventually a surplus of workers appeared. The accelerated spread of a free labor market also gave a strong boost to the struggles of trade unions for progressive social legislation. All this development climaxed in the passage of the Labor Law “*Code du travail d’outre-mer*” on December 15, 1952. Still, not until 1956 were certain forms of forced labor (for example the secondary military portion, and the penal labor at the société du Sine Saloum, Kaolack, Sénégal) finally abolished in French West Africa.¹¹

¹¹ Fall, (B.), 1989, «The Residue of Forced Labour in Senegal – The Case of Society Salins of Sine-Saloum: 1943-1956», in Zegeye (A.) & Ishemo (S.) (eds), *Forced Labour & Migration: Patterns of Movement within Africa*, Oxford, Hans Zell, pp. 269-288.

2. MANIFESTATIONS OF FORCED LABOUR IN SENEGAL: AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE SOCIÉTÉ DES SALINS DU SINE-SALOUM KAOLACK, 1943-1956*

INTRODUCTION

It has long been held at Kaolack that the returns from the salt works of the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum have never been good. It is as if the salt-workers were pursued by a curse, whose origins lie in a conjunction of poor salaries and, above all, the composition of the work-force between 1943 and 1956. The greater part of the permanent work-force employed by the company during this period was provided by prisoners condemned to hard labor and engaged in the disagreeable, harsh and underpaid task of salt extraction. This provided the motive for the establishment of the prison camp at Koutal in 1944, a paradoxical solution to the shortage of labor in a colony where forced labor played so small a part when compared with other territories of the Federation of French West Africa, such as Sudan, Guinea or the Ivory Coast.

One fact, however, is indisputable: the case of the Société des Salins du Kaolack offers a clear illustration of the survival, reincarnation one might say, of forced labor in Senegal ten years after its official abolition by the enactment of the Law of Houphouët Boigny on 11 April 1946. The need to supply the

* A previous version of this paper had been published in Zegeye, (A.) & Ishemo, (I.) (eds), *Forced labour & Migration: Patterns of Movement within Africa*, 1989, Hans Zell Publishers, London, Munich, New York, pp. 269-288.

I would like to thank Mr Pipien, Administrative Director of the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum who suggested this line of research and provided valuable information about the identities of my informants. I am also grateful to my colleagues Doudou Gaye, Abdoul Sow and Mohamed El Bachir Diop and to Babacar Ndiaye, employees of the salt works, who offered great assistance during the course of my enquires.

This article is based on information gathered between 18 and 21 April 1987 and in May 2001 at Kaolack and Koutal from former and present employees of the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum. Consultation of documents series K, particularly K334: Labor Situation of the Salins du Sine-Saloum, 1945-1963 (National Archives of Senegal) has enabled me to place many items of information within context.

colonies of the Federation of French West Africa with salt was advanced as an official justification for using governmental coercion rather than offering good wages as a means of recruiting labor. This archaic procedure of making prison labor available to private enterprise, as exemplified by a study of the salt works of Kaolack, throws an unexpected light on social problems in the Federation.

The reconstruction of the period when forced labor predominated in the Société des Salins de Kaolack comes up against a certain silence of shame, as many former prisoners who chose to continue working with the company after completing their sentences are at pains to hide their convict past. This is understandable, as their social status is at stake. The difficulty, however, is less serious than it might be as those who claim to have been contract laborers admit that they shared the same working conditions as the prisoners from Koutal. The only information concerning direct implication in the system of forced labor is likely to be censored.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SALT AND THE CRISIS OF LABOR

Kaolack's Vocation as an Exporter

Founded in 1914 on the initiative of the French company, les Salins de Midi, the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum was devoted to the extraction and sale of sea salt from the left bank of the River Saloum, 4 kilometres to the south of the town of Kaolack. From the beginning, the company was beset with difficulties and, between 1914 and 1924, salt production was less than 5,000 tonnes per annum. Only after 1940 did production exceed 10,000 tonnes.¹ The growth of the port of Kaolack, which was the most important groundnut exporting port in West Africa from 1931 on,² and its connection to the Dakar-Niger railway, provided an important market for the Société des Salins, namely, Senegal and, above all,

¹ Ibrahima Diouf, "Position of Salt in the Senegalese Economy" (University of Dakar, submitted for Masters Degree in Geography, 1977).

² A. Dessertine, *A Secondary Port on the West African Coast* (Senegal, Kaolack Chamber of Commerce, 1959).

French Sudan. In fact, the requirements of Senegal were largely met by traditional salt-workers exploiting the salt marshes of the Gandiolais, Bargny and the Lower Saloum Valley, production varying between 9,000 and 12,000 tonnes p.a.³

In 1940, the war situation proved most favorable for developing the activities of the salt works at Kaolack, and its role as an exporter was rapidly clarified thanks to a dynamic commercial policy taking advantage of the fact that European coasts were blockaded. The opportunity was, therefore, provided for the Kaolack salt works to substitute its product for rival salt originating from Spain, and to undertake supplying the West African coast. The new commercial policy was, however, successful only as a result of the intervention of the colonial government from 1943 on. The High Commission of French Africa raised the status of salt to that of a strategic product and decided that the Kaolack salt works should be responsible for supplying salt to the Federation of French West Africa. A note from the Directorate General of Economic Services, dated 14 December 1943, gives formal notice of the decision of the federal authorities, who considered it essential for the economy of the Federation that its colonies, particularly those lying to the south (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Togo and Dahomey) should be regularly and copiously supplied with salt. It was the war situation that determined the value of salt, as it was felt that distribution of large quantities of this commodity on the market would stimulate the local population to bring in raw materials essential for the war effort.⁴

There was, however, a considerable difference between the demands of the Federation for salt, estimated at 95,000 tonnes in 1944, and the stagnant production of the Kaolack salt works. It is true that in 1944 the company achieved a record production level of 22,957 tonnes compared with 14,118 in 1943, 13,433 in 1942 and

³ National Archives of Senegal (hereafter NAS), K334 (26), "Labor Situation Salins du Sine-Saloum – 1945-46." Letter from the Governor of Senegal to the Governor General of the Federation of French West Africa concerning the labor force of the Salins du Sine-Saloum, St-Louis, 27 February 1944.

⁴ NAS, K334 (26), Note on salt from Sine-Saloum – Labor – Dakar, 14 December 1943.

13,727 in 1941.⁵ Nevertheless, the shortfall was still greater than expected by the federal authorities. The solution to the problem seems to have been sketched out in correspondence exchanged between the Director of the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum and the Governing Secretary General of the Federation towards the end of 1943. In a letter dated 5 December 1943, M. Mondeil, Administrative Director of the Kaolack salt works, pointed out to the Governor General of the Federation of French West Africa that to meet the salt requirements of the Federation would require the political will to take “appropriate measures at the right time.”⁶

Labor: A Source of Difficulties

For Mondeil, the difficulties of the company had arisen at least in part from damage to factory machines, bad weather conditions having prevailed in 1941 and 1942, but the principal troubles arose from labor problems. By the beginning of the 1943 season, defective machinery had been repaired, but problems of labor recruitment remained dominant, all the more so as Mondeil’s request for aid from the local administration at Kaolack and from the government of Senegal had proved ineffective.⁷ As a result of this shortage of manpower, the company was obliged in 1942 to abandon 20,000 tonnes of salt to the rain. In the opinion of the administration of the salt works, the lack of support from government authorities lay at the heart of the problem of the shortage of local workers. State intervention in the recruitment of labor was seen as the key that would enable the company to meet the salt requirements of the Federation of French West Africa. On many occasions, Mondeil forcefully underlined his willingness to undertake joint studies with the public authorities of such working conditions and salaries as might attract labor to the salt works.⁸

⁵ NAS, K334 (26), Administrative letter from the Director of Salins du Sine-Saloum to the Governor General of the Federation concerning salt supply to the Federation, Kaolack, 17 May 1944.

⁶ NAS, K334 (26), Administrative letter from the Director of Salins du Sine-Saloum to the Governor General of the Federation concerning salt supply to the Federation, Kaolack, 5 December 1943.

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

Government assistance had, however, already been deployed in the season of 1943 to help the company's recruitment problem, a fact which Mondeil glossed over in order to bring pressure on the new Governor General to provide continuing assistance for the company in recruiting necessary labor after that year. In fact in 1943 the Governor General, Hubert Deschamps, had already supported Mondeil's analysis that the principal difficulty to be overcome was that of the labor force.⁹ As a result of the difficulties the company had experienced in recruiting a voluntary labor force to engage in the huge task of salt extraction, the Governor General had exceptionally authorized the Commandant of the administrative district of Kaolack to make 100 prisoners available to the company.

In order to expedite the suitable exploitation of the salt marshes and to maintain the prompt despatch of salt stored on the banks of the Saloum, the administrative authorities inclined towards the employment of civilian conscripts. This first attempt concerned a small contingent of some 50 conscripts raised from members of the local population not engaged in agriculture.¹⁰ For Hubert Deschamps, this system was by its very nature provisional, and the salt works were expected to recruit voluntary labor after the end of the agricultural season.

The harmony of views between the Governor General and the administration of the salt works only lasted long enough to ensure one successful season, as Mondeil knew perfectly well that he was in no position to fulfil his promise to attract voluntary labor to the works. Poor pay for hard labor held no attractions for the local population. Only government intervention could assure a supply of local labor.

This situation may be considered typical of cases when the attempt to establish capitalist enterprises near populous areas comes across the difficulty of attracting voluntary labor from the working population. In such cases, mediation by the colonial

⁹ NAS, K334 (26), Note from the Governor General of the Federation concerning transportation of salt from Kaolack to the Southern colonies, Dakar, 19 July 1943.

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

government proved necessary for the enterprise to attain the stage of development required before it could switch to voluntary recruitment and to do without government help with the work force. It is strange that such a case should occur in Senegal as late as 1940-50.

A number of factors explain why, in general, forced labor played such a small part in Senegal, among them being the early establishment of the French presence, the political life of the four communes (Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Gorée and Dakar) and, above all, the role played by the groundnut economy in the increased development of trade.

As early as 1933, the Governor General noted that Senegal was living largely under a system of free labor, and salaries were determined according to the law of supply and demand.¹¹ When forced labor was formally abolished in 1946, a large labor market was established. This freeing of the work-force was marked even in rural sectors, despite the instability of labor. Some manifestations of forced labor, however, continued in the form of using men of the deuxième portion, that part of men enrolled in the army who were not required for military duties. Thus, on 20 September 1946, a total of 3,024 men were being forcibly employed on two work sites. In Dakar, work at the Yoff airport, drain construction in the port employed 1,524 deuxième portion men. At the same time, a further 1,500 were employed at Richard Toll between 1943 and 1947 in order to overcome the difficulty of finding local labor for the works of the Mission d'Aménagement du Sénégal (MAS) owing to the low local population density and, above all, to its antipathy to being engaged in earth construction works.¹²

This attempt to avoid the provisions of the law of Houphouët Boigny by maintaining the men of the deuxième portion was vigorously denounced, and between 1944 and 1946 the forced laborers themselves were engaged in active protests. The most

¹¹ NAS, K19 (1), Letter from the Governor General of the Federation to the Minister for the Colonies, Dakar, 3 February 1933.

¹² NAS, K335 (26), Letter from the Direction Generale de A.P.A.S. to the Minister for France Overseas, Dakar, 19 April 1946.

impressive demonstrations occurred on 27 September 1946 on the public highway and involved workers barracked at the camp at Yoff.¹³ Their protests were also picked up in France. “Is Forced Labor Abolished?” was the title of the issue of A.O.F., organ of the French section of the workers international (S.F.I.O.) dated 21 March 1947.¹⁴ Political and social agitation finally forced the government to put an end to the practice of keeping men of the deuxième portion. The Decree of 18 November 1948 determined on the early liberation of the last recruits to the deuxième portion, starting from 15 February 1949.¹⁵

Curiously enough, no mention was made in the Decree of the forced laborers working at the Kaolack salt works and the fate of these penal laborers was enveloped in silence. Thus, the hell of these salt-workers continued because public opinion was quiet. The government, and still less the Société des Salins, had not run into opposition as a result of using this type of forced labor. This shows how vulnerable and voiceless were those detainees who were in a state of moral rupture from society. They were available to be worked as hard as their employer chose.

Ineffective Solutions to the Labor Problem

The establishment of the salt works company occurred in a socio-economic context that should have proved favorable to employing an indigenous work force. In Senegal, sea salt was extracted during the dry season that follows the period of agricultural activity. At this time, agricultural workers should have been available, as their principal activity – groundnut cultivation – took place during the wet season from June to November. Thus, the active season for salt-workers (November-May) corresponded with a slack season for the agricultural worker. This time could, in theory, have been devoted almost totally to salt extraction and have fulfilled a

¹³ NAS, K360 (26), Report of the Commandant of the Gendarmerie Section of Dakar, Dakar, 28 September 1946.

¹⁴ NAS, K360 (26), SAR (Amadou Babacar) “Is Forced Labor Abolished?” in A.O.F., 21 March 1947.

¹⁵ NAS, K260 (26), Note for the High Commissioner concerning the employment of the deuxième portion, Dakar, 5 January 1949.

complementary function, vis-à-vis the activities of the agricultural calendar.

This favorable context failed, however, to release a flow of voluntary labor to the salt works of Sine-Saloum. Two factors are significant here. First, the particular nature of the salt workers' labor. Extraction took place in conditions of extreme harshness, involving high temperatures (35-40°C) and under a blazing sun. In addition to the high humidity of the environment, rapid changes of temperature made the working of the salt beds yet more painful. There can be no doubt that extracting the salt was a harsh and distasteful task. The process introduced by the Société des Salins du Kaolack, namely "culturing" the salt through the evaporation of salt water under the influence of natural factors, principally sun and wind, followed by extraction of sea salt, required great effort in contrast with the traditional means of salt extractions, performed mainly by women. Second, the low salary offered for laboring on the salt works hardly sufficed to attract men to engage in the work even temporarily. Low remuneration for labor added to difficult working conditions thus explained the poor response that confronted the Société des Salins du Kaolack whenever it attempted to recruit workers.

The decision of the Governor General of the Federation to bring government support to the company in order to maximize its production consequently introduced a new era into the life of the enterprise. From 21 December 1943, the Governor General insisted that the Head of the Colony of Senegal should study with Mondeil the company's labor problems, as they had not yet been satisfactorily resolved.¹⁶

According to Mondeil it was indispensable that there should be 250 permanent workers at the site from December each year in order to ensure packaging and distribution, while an additional 400 men would be necessary temporarily from mid-April in order to maximize salt production, i.e. a total of 650 workers per season.¹⁷

¹⁶ NAS, K334 (26), Letter from the Governor General of the Federation to the Governor of Senegal concerning the work of the Salins du Sine-Saloum, Dakar, 21 December 1943.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

The Governor General agreed that recourse to civilian conscripts should only be a last resort because of the very nature of the salt extractions. It was also felt that this method might adversely affect the labor market and the morale of the local population, particularly if conscripts were called on to perform harsh work that prisoners had not completed adequately.¹⁸

It was decided, then, to follow up the experiment of using penal labor but on more rational basis. The new procedure that was promoted consisted of two complementary strategies. The first consisted of assigning a contingent of workers from the penal work-force to labor at the salt works. The company would, thus, be able to call on a stable work force of 150 to 200 men originating from the prison camp at Kelle, which was to be transferred to Koutal in the suburbs of Kaolack. This work-force could also be augmented by a certain number of prisoners of better condition coming from Kaolack prison. The second strategy consisted of progressively encouraging the salt works to conform to the laws of the labor market. In order to achieve this, the company was to put into practice methods that had proved successful at Dakar and elsewhere and that entailed the employer progressively providing food, clothing and accommodation for unscripted laborers.¹⁹ In this way, the company would be able to build up a body of voluntary workers capable of forming a stable nucleus for the work-force.

This approach largely determined the composition of the work-force of the Kaolack salt works until 1953, when recourse to penal labor was abandoned.

CONVICT LABOR ON THE KAOLACK SALT WORKS

It was established practice in Senegal to assign convicts to various public works. These workers were used for a variety of tasks: constructing tow-paths, repairing quays, constructing and maintaining the network of roads, as well as working on official buildings and accommodation. However, they had never before been used as supplementary labor. Use of convicts for public

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

works had been classified by the International Labor Office (ILO) as a form of forced labor. Unlike views on the use of workers of the deuxième portion, this position held by the ILO was never contested at Geneva.²⁰ This throws yet more light on the obsolete nature of prison labor being made available to the Société des Salins du Kaolack.

Fluctuating Work-force

The need to provide workers for the salt works led to the decision of the authorities to establish the Koutal prison camp, situated on the road between Kaolack and Nioro, 5 kilometers from the salt works. The position of the camp was determined by the need to provide labor for the works, while avoiding land subject to flooding. The government of Senegal notified the Société des Salins that the camp would be operative from 14 April 1944 and would hold 200 prisoners.²¹ The camp was to intern able-bodied prisoners condemned to hard labor, dangerous re-offenders and certain other internees.

In addition to this measure, the Commandant of the administrative district of Kaolack was authorized to give his official support to the company in maintaining its voluntary work-office. The euphemism of “official support” amounted to heavy-handed pressure on the local population to engage in work in the salt works in exchange for a derisory salary, food, commodities and 10 meters of cloth at the end of the season as a gratuity.

The efforts deployed in setting up the Koutal camp did not, however, have the desired results. A report drawn up a month after the opening of the camp shows a startling failure. Out of a total of 214 prisoners, only 87, that is to say 40 per cent, were still available for work at Kaolack. The remaining 137 were either ill, incapable, or employed in work required to maintain the camp.²²

²⁰ Fall, B. (1993), *le travail forcé en Afrique occidentale française (1900-1945)*, Paris, Karthala, p. 263.

²¹ NAS, K334 (26), Letter from the Governor General to the Governor General of the Federation concerning the labor force at Salins du Sine-Saloum, 27 February 1944.

²² NAS, K334 (26), Administrative letter from the Director of the Salins du Sine-Saloum to the Governor General of the Federation concerning the salt supply to the Federation, Kaolack, 17 May 1944.

The report of the Inspector of Administrative Affairs and the Governor of Koutal camp showed that improvisation and haste had presided over its establishment. Old materials had been used, and the corrugated iron had holes in it. This was enough to justify using a contingent of prisoners to rebuild the camp.²³ The disappointment of the company at this was all the greater because the rate of defection of voluntary workers greatly accelerated at the same time. Of 800 men engaged at the beginning of May 1944 there remained only 300 on 12 May, which was further reduced to 200 by 17 May.

To try to overcome this difficult labor situation, the Governor of the administrative district made available 100 new prisoners from the civil prison at Kaolack. In the opinion of Mondeil, however, this supplementary force was totally inadequate. For, if during April 1944 the company had been able to raise 45,000 tons and put 12,000 tons under shelter, while preparing to pack and ensure the despatch of 6,000 tons, it was probable that the company would not be able to achieve half that figure for May unless the labor situation were corrected. The company ran the risk of having to abandon half of its production on the banks of the River Saloum.²⁴

Two factors together explain the serious defection of laborers from the salt works. First, the instability of the work force was accentuated with each agricultural season. The voluntary workers were demobilized at the approach of the period of cultivation. Mondeil recognized that as soon as the rates of purchase for the next groundnut harvest were announced, together with the food grants for the producers, the rate of desertion of workers would increase greatly, with the work-force falling from 800 men to only 200 within a fortnight. The policy of trying to motivate salt workers had hardly any effect. This is not surprising since, despite the harsh and distasteful nature of the work, the company did not seem

²³ NAS, K334 (26), Report to the Governor General of the Federation and the Governor of Senegal concerning the situation of the Prison Camp of Koutal, Koutal, 6 June 1944.

²⁴ NAS, K334 (26), Letter from the Director of the Salins du Sine-Saloum to the Commandant of the Administrative District of Kaolack, Kaolack, 12 May 1944.

disposed to offer attractive salaries. In consequence, it was unable to face the rivalry of the local labor market.

Secondly, the harsh working conditions encountered in salt walking made their effects felt on the workers from the prison camp. There was a long working day, from between 10 to 11 hours, inadequate quantities of food of poor nutritional value, and a disciplinary system based on humiliating the worker. It is easy to understand the high level of unavailability of workers from the Koutal prison camp.

The only reaction of the authorities was to be disturbed about the inadequacy of the work force. From Alger, the Commissioner for the Colonies claimed to be troubled about the repercussions on the work force following the arrival of *navétanes*, migrant workers arriving in Central Senegal from Sudan and French Guinea. On 25 May 1944 only 200 prisoners were still working in the salt works. This number was clearly insufficient, all the more so as harvesting continued until July, and a minimum of 400 more workers was required if the salt supply was not to be jeopardized. This necessitated the provision of yet more laborers by the colonial administration if the anticipated production was to be maintained.²⁵ Confronted with the forceful instructions of the Governor of Senegal, the Commandant of the administrative district of Kaolack resorted to the customary practice of conscripting civilians to satisfy the requirements of the salt works.

With the completion of works on the prison camp of Koutal in 1945, the number of men available stabilized at 200 prison laborers divided into three camps, named A, B and C respectively. The prisoners were made available to the Kaolack salt works from February until July.

Draconian Working and Living Conditions

Every morning at dawn the prisoners were taken from the camp at Koutal to the salt works, a distance of 5 kilometers. In close file and chained two by two the prisoners were submitted to a forced

²⁵ NAS, K334 (26), Telegram from the Directorate of Colonies to the Governor General of the Federation, Algiers, 25 May 1944.

march under the vigilant eyes of the official guards. On arrival, they were separated into teams of 20 to 30 men and assigned to different production tasks.²⁶

The first stage was harvesting or extracting sea salt from the salt tables. This was the most grueling task. The thick layer of salt was scraped up by hand or with the help of a shell. This operation was known as “battage”. The salt was then put in moderate sized baskets and carried 200 or 300 meters from the salt tables before being poured out in small heaps. The second stage was to wash the salt, a process aimed at separating sodium chloride from impurities. After washing, the salt was stocked in mounds known as “camelle”. Sifting and crushing took place at the base of the camelles. These were the only two stages of the process that were mechanized. Lastly, the salt was placed in sacks and weighed before being carried by hand to the quay for transportation. An account of the working conditions prevalent in the salt works between 1943 and 1956 reveals a horrifying picture. Public opinion accommodated itself to the spectacle of this living death only because such purgatory was sanctioned by the crimes of the prisoners. The exceptional nature of this work force was accentuated by the repressive nature of control and surveillance of the work force.

The general rule was to apportion labor to fulfill tasks in a given time. Workers were thus driven to the very limit of their strength. The work rhythm was controlled by the demands of the task. The working day was long, never less than 10 hours, according to a former prisoner.²⁷ Moreover, the system practiced to discourage desertion was fearful. The prisoners were chained at all times, and wore fetters to which a heavy ball was attached. Their food was provided by the company. Twelve prisoners whose conduct had inspired confidence were assigned to the kitchen.

²⁶ Conversation with A. G. who entered the salt works in November 1950 and has worked there 35 years, Kaolack, 17 April 1984.

²⁷ Conversation with D. S., workman third class at the time of his retirement in 1977; taken on in 1946; fetter marks were still visible on his feet, Kaolack, 20 April 1984.

Large casks were used as cooking pots, and when cut served as huge bowls. The ration consisted of maize-flour soup.²⁸

In this area, the difference between practice and theory is striking. In theory, the prisoners had a right to two meals a day, and the Assistant Public Attorney thought it desirable that those employed in particularly heavy labor should be provided with a hot drink on awaking.²⁹ According to regulations, meat should have been provided five times per week (350 gm per day for workers, 250 gm for non-workers). The monotony of this diet was to be varied twice weekly by the distribution of fish. The cereal ration for each day was as follows: rice or millet for workers was 375 gm and for non-workers, 250 gm; barley or semolina for workers was 340 gm and for non-workers, 225 gm. In addition, they were entitled to 60 gm of oil per day. As in the case of other forced laborers, however, these rations were not provided. All witnesses agree that the rations were inadequate. Overwork was not compensated for by a correct diet. A mission of inspection by the assistant procurator complained of the lack of protein. Many men were found sick or dead in the work place. Some canals were used as cemeteries according to a former prisoner.³⁰

The shocking allegations collected by the mission of inspection were corroborated by a check report on the prison camp drawn by Assistant Public Attorney Cosson. The report reveals certain characteristic aspects of prison life. Sanitation was defective. Out of a total of 203 prisoners, 23 were ill in hospital, of whom 15 were suffering from influenza. Two deaths from pneumonia were recorded on 4 October 1945 and 30 December 1945. This hardly surprised the mission of inspection, who had noticed in the courtyard a prisoner lying naked under a blanket against a wall and spitting blood. On their authority they had insisted that he should be taken to the quarantine hospital 350 meters from the camp.³¹ The camp

²⁸ Conversation with I. S., typical of the second generation of workers at the salt works, born in the works compound in 1940 and employed under contract since 1968. His father had to work at the salt works for 30 years.

²⁹ NAS, K334 (26), Report on the condition of the Prison Camp at Koutal, Koutal, June 1944.

³⁰ Conversation with A. G., Kaolack, 19 April 1987.

³¹ *Ibid.*

did not itself have an infirmary, and those who had fallen ill were sent to the quarantine hospital. Serious cases were treated at Kaolack. In principle, the camp should have been visited by a doctor every week, but as the mission found out, according to reports in the special register, the last visit had taken place on 14 June 1945, which is to say six months previously.³² Hygiene also left much to be desired. There were three wells in the camp, one of which was so polluted it was unusable. The conditions explain the high levels of morbidity and mortality.

Many prisoners had no clothing other than a thin blanket to protect them against the local cold and humidity. In the opinion of the Assistant Public Attorney the complaints of the prisoners about the lack of clothing were perfectly justified. After the intervention of the Prison Surveillance Commission and a visit by the Médecin-Colonel, Head of Sanitary Department of Kaolack, the camp Governor said he hoped suitable clothing would at last be distributed to prisoners.³³

The overall impression gained from the inspection of the camp strongly suggested that the system ought to be abolished, all the more so as production, which had risen to 45,000 tons in 1945, no longer corresponded to demand, and the employment of voluntary labor should have sufficed to produce adequate salt to meet purchasers' requirements.³⁴

The Governor General, Pièrre Cournarie, did not however agree with the views of the Commission supporting the abolition of the Koutal prison camp. According to him, the maintenance of the camp would be justified for years to come as the production of the salt works ought not to fall below 50,000 tons. He felt that in 1946, the Société des Salins du Kaolack ought to supply the colonies of the Federation with 68,100 tons. Besides, there were still difficulties in recruiting voluntary labor. The regulatory intervention of the state would remain essential even if, as Cournarie acknowledged,

³² *Ibidem.*

³³ *Ibidem.*

³⁴ NAS, K334 (26), Letter from the Governor General of the Federation to the Governor of Senegal concerning the Prison Camp at Koutal, Dakar, 30 March 1946.

it was obvious that at a time when France was proclaiming the doctrine of free labor in West Africa, it was neither possible nor desirable for the government to procure forced labor for a private enterprise.³⁵ The only possible form of government assistance that could be envisaged was to maintain the camp at Koutal while improving conditions. Thus, the privilege granted to the Salins du Kaolack was to provide a special work-force flying in the face of social development already sanctioned by the provision of the 1946 Law of Houphouët Boigny.³⁶ An island of forced labor thus benefited from government protection, which guaranteed low wages and withdrew the enterprise from the need to face competition in the labor market. For, during the period between the end of the trading season and the beginning of agricultural activity, that is to say when the salt works were active, a large number of *navétanes* and unemployed hastened to the commercial port of Kaolack to assure the despatch of groundnuts until the beginning of the winter season. They were not attracted by offers of work at the salt works, however. Moreover, even when there was a serious increase in unemployment from 1950 on, which was only partly absorbed by the annual groundnut and trading season, the unemployed did not seek work with the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum.³⁷

Thus, despite the legal suppression of forced labor, coercion was used between 1946 and 1956 to assure a supply of workers at the salt works from February until the end of July each year. The Société des Salins du Kaolack employed an average of 300 workers, between 150 to 208 being provided by the prison camp of Koutal. During the period when salt was harvested, the salt works employed up to 500 workers for three months.³⁸ The non-prison labor was recruited thanks to the propaganda of recruiting agents supported by the administration, the targeted population consisting of penniless *navétanes* who had had a bad season.

³⁵ *Ibidem.*

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ NAS, 2G 52/71, Regional Labor Inspectorate of Southern Senegal, Kaolack Annual Reports for 1952-53.

³⁸ NAS, 2G 56/30, Regional Inspectorate of Southern Senegal, Kaolack Annual Report, 1956.

The Société des Salins only modified its policy of forced employment from 1956 when mechanization of salt harvesting was introduced. Moreover, the opportunity of progressively establishing a stable core of voluntary workers allowed the company to build up a work-force whose destiny was identified with its own. The majority of these men were former prisoners who had served out their sentences and whose conduct and experience of the salt works led to them being taken on as contractual laborers. To this category of workers, who had broken off relations with society and often with their families, the Salins du Kaolack offered accommodation within the work site. This form of reintegration established firm links between the laborers of the salt works and the enterprise itself. The change in the regime of labor was completed in 1956, when the mechanization of salt harvesting effected an 80 per cent reduction in the normal labor force.³⁹

The Salins du Kaolack were then able to dispense with penal labor from Koutal. The prison, nonetheless, was not closed down. Prisoners were sent to work in quarries and in public works at Kaolack.

CONCLUSION

The case of the Société des Salins du Sine-Saloum illustrates well the industrialization started early in the colony of Senegal. The administrative district of Kaolack, situated at the heart of the groundnut basin, had already extended a welcome to the Lyndiane Cannery, established two years before the salt works. This agro-industrial unit was first devoted to the production of preserved meat before orienting itself rather to the canning of fish. It is true that the experience of this enterprise did not prove profitable,⁴⁰ but it is indicative of French imperial policy in introducing processing industries into Senegal. If this liberal strategy which assigned to

³⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁰ Mohamed Mbodj, "Attempt to establish an Agro-Industrial Plant in Senegal: The Cannery of Lyndiane (Sine-Saloum) 1912-1919", in *Enterprise and Entrepreneurs in Africa XIX-XXth Centuries* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1983), Vol. 1, *Laboratory 'Knowledge of the Third World'*, pp. 351-65.

overseas territories the function of producing the greatest amount of raw material at the lowest cost developed in Senegal,⁴¹ it is necessary to note that one of its characteristics was the minimization of labor costs. This practice, however, seldom harmonizes with the principle of the freedom of labor. On the contrary, state intervention in the recruitment of the work force acts as a break on the development of social legislation. Moreover, by offering a protective wing to certain enterprises unable to face competition, the government may be considered to have hindered technological innovation. This paradox of colonial policy is manifest in the case of the Salins du Kaolack.

Compared with other colonies of French West Africa, the labor regime in Senegal was peculiar in one respect – free labor was dominant, whereas elsewhere mobilization of the labor force, at least until 1946, was assured by government coercion. This has often served as a screen hiding from view the practice of forced labor in the colony.

In Senegal, as elsewhere, government intervened in the recruitment of labor for private enterprises. From 1920 till 1940, the Société des Plantations de la Haute Casamance (Kolda), the Compagnie des Cultures Tropicales en Afrique, established at Wassadou (Administrative District of Tambacounda), the Société Industrielle des Mines de Falémé-Gambie and the Société Agricole de Lat Mirque (Kaolack) were all content for a long while to rely on the government for the supply of labor.

In the case of the Société des Salins du Kaolack, however, the peculiarity of the procedure lies in the composition of the work-force assigned to the salt works and the long duration of this practice. Recourse to this type of forced labor had been officially deplored since the Geneva Conference of 1930, but attempts to justify it were based on the importance of supplying the Federation of French West Africa with salt. This reveals the social conservatism flourishing within certain enterprises. The coercion of labor to supply the salt works with a work-force necessary for its operation

⁴¹ Jacques Marseille, *Colonial Empire and French Capitalism – History of a Divorce* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1984), p. 275.

was not an exceptional procedure arising solely from the war situation, however. The use of penal labor and government assisted recruitment lasted until 1956, ten years after the provisions of the Law of Houphouët Boigny legally suppressed forced labor.

Thus, the intervention of the colonial state enabled the Salins du Kaolack to continue with this cheaper solution rather than totally mechanizing the harvesting of salt. The maintenance of this social cancer was only possible because those condemned to hard labor were, in the public mind, worthy objects of opprobrium. As a result, a certain complicity underlay relations between government and public opinion. The prisoners were exposed to horrific working conditions, and held in conditions that were an affront to the rights of man. As laborers, they were subject to both physical and moral distress. Humiliated, underpaid and worked to the limits of their endurance, the salt-workers seemed to be damned souls laboring under a curse that darkened for many years the fate of those at the salt face.

The mechanization of salt harvesting, brought about in 1956, marked a turning point in the social policies of the Salins du Kaolack. From then on, a new era opened up for the enterprise which was now forced to face competition in the labor market. The myth of the curse, born of its past, however, has not as yet faded completely from the consciousness of Kaoack.

3. FROM SHORTAGE TO EXCESS: THE EVOLUTION AND CURRENT CONFIGURATION OF THE LABOR MARKET IN SENEGAL*

INTRODUCTION

The object of this contribution is to establish that the present employment crisis in Senegal can only be comprehended through a long-term analysis. In this study, we propose to follow the beginnings of salaried labor in relation to the emergence of a so-called *modern economy*, in which the private sector and then the public sector alternated as the main employers. The balance began to shift around 1960-62 when the country gained international sovereignty, but especially when it lost the former French West Africa (AOF) market, which triggered a latent crisis in the industrial world.

Jobs were already affected, but this shift downward was further exacerbated by the government's political debauchery, for the state had become the main supplier of jobs while also re-absorbing labor demands almost entirely. In 1979, implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs exposed the gravity of the crisis. Imbalances became obvious, revealing excess in the labor supply. The state's disengagement from the job market seems to have stimulated a boom in the so-called *informal sector* and modified the labor market structure.

This study takes account of the constraints that generated those imbalances: the economic crisis linked to the groundnut, the

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industrial crisis and the effects of urbanization and rapid demographic growth. Finally, the study points out certain characteristics of a labor market dominated by an overabundance of diversely qualified labor and the attitude taken by the decision makers when faced with predictable development trends.

LABOUR SHORTAGE AND INSTABILITY

In the *rent economy* (“*économie de traite*”) dominated by groundnut cultivation, the French colonial government did not merely settle for using the local labor force. It launched a campaign to attract labor using various incentive mechanisms. In so doing, this economy shaped the first outlines of Senegal’s labor market and the features of its labor force.

Groundnut Cultivation and the Glimmerings of a Labor Market

Just as in all the former French West Africa (AOF) countries, it was the establishment of the colonial system and a rent economy that in Senegal gradually created a labor force partially disassociated from its domestic, self-sufficient community. The Senegalese colony was thus integrated into the world economic system through the subordination of local productive activities when cash crops were introduced. This brought an end to the massive exportation of the labor force in the form of slaves who were purchased and sent to the “New World”, i.e., the American Continent. The objective from then on was to set the local populations to work according to the needs of metropolitan France. The mobility of the workforce was organized between the central territories and the interior regions – pools for labor – and the coastal zones where the economic poles were structured around cash crops: the groundnut in Senegal, rubber and then banana in Guinea, cotton and sisal in Sudan, coffee and cocoa in Lower Côte d’Ivoire.

In the groundnut economic space, the labor system was slightly affected by administrative constraints regarding the heavy monetarization of social relationships and the special and particularly ancient ways of installing groundnut cultivation.

Compared to the other former AOF territories, the Senegal's labor force was in a singular position in certain ways. With this colony's more intensive integration into the trade relations system, the free labor system dominated throughout, subjecting the peasantry to profit-making production in the context of the *rent economy*.¹ The expansion of groundnut cultivation, precocious industrialization and urbanization were highly instrumental in structuring an employment market very early in the game. This evolution revealed, in the context of a *rent economy*, a labor market that was at first nebulous and then apparently stable, and finally suffered an obvious imbalance between its supply and demand.

The boom period for the groundnut economy (1840-1930) proved to be an era of prosperity for peasants. They reaped much higher incomes than Dakar laborers. This factor explains why the labor force still remained very closely linked to the rural world and hence appeared to fluctuate. This mainly involved unskilled laborers who, during the dry season, would turn to urban centers in search of tide-over income.

During this prosperous period of the Senegalese economy, the colonial administration refrained from intervening in the immediate production processes. Nevertheless, it was aware of the weakness of the productive forces and the strong attraction that groundnut growing had for French West Africa Federation populations. The colonial state promoted conditions for the free circulation of farm labor. The groundnut bowl in the Senegalese colony became an economic pole draining workers from neighboring colonies (Sudan and French Guinea) every season, while the latter colonies' cash crops were only developed later on.

Groundnut cultivation therefore constituted an important labor demand. It was observed at the time that the indigenous population “cannot successfully supply the extra labor and calls upon the labor force in the regions, which have remained faithful to the traditional food crops.”² The absence of any

¹ Founou-Tchuigoua (Bernard), *Fondements de l'économie de traite au Sénégal*, Paris, Silex, 1981, pp. 52-53.

² Latil (Marc), “La pénurie de main-d'œuvre dans les pays sous-développés et sous-peuplés” in *Annales Africaines de la Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Economiques de Dakar – 1958*, p. 18.

strict administrative constraints engendered the labor market. But this market was dependent on the vagaries of farming. Additionally, the most accepted form of remuneration was more like tenant farming. Salaried remuneration was still in the very early embryonic stage.

The major migratory flow thus created into the groundnut basin was known as the “navétanat”. In 1944, 41,772 migrant workers participated in groundnut growing and harvesting in exchange for payment that would enable them to pay off their taxes and purchase imported products. In 1954, 43,959 *navétanes* or seasonal workers were recruited. But beginning in 1960, the working mass shrank and finally stabilized at a yearly average of 25,000. Government intervention was generally limited to readjusting this *labor force supply* based on the law of demand. Indeed, this migratory movement was largely determined by fluctuations in groundnut market prices.³

Agriculture remained the principal source of cash income for the rural world, with nearly half of the population (46%) living more or less directly from the groundnut farming sector. While it is true that farming occupied 70% of the active population in the country, this activity was also marked by structural underemployment. This is largely due to the farming calendar, which depended heavily on climatic variations. The period of farming activity extended over five to six months. The “off-season” corresponded to widespread unemployment disguised as an extremely low-yielding activity. The main cash crops were rain-fed crops.

Even today, the progress gained in irrigated cultivation and the practice of so-called off-season activities has had only mitigated effects on the rural labor force and is a far cry from eliminating underemployment in that sector. The extent of agricultural underemployment is not known. It is estimated that for all of the farming regions in Senegal, approximately one active farmer out of two (1/2) is underemployed.⁴ Rural underemployment is apparently one of

³ David (Philip), *Les Navétanes: Histoire des migrants de l'économie arachidière en Sénégambie*, 1891. Dakar – Abidjan-Lomé, N.E.A.

⁴ International Labor Office, *Pour une politique d'emploi au Sénégal*, Addis Abeba – ILO, 1982, p. 81.

the reasons rural dwellers flee to the city, which has become the privileged outlet for rural world problems and a field of opportunity for salaried work offers.

The Beginnings of Salaried Work and the Start of Labor Legislation

One observes that with the early urbanization of Senegal, opportunities to recruit workers arose very early on, thus offering employees on various worksites the opportunity to acquire skills either by on-site training or through professional training schools. Salaried work developed relatively well in towns such as Saint Louis, Rufisque, Dakar and Thies. The existence of this salaried work force made it possible to meet the needs of businesses and work projects in Senegal. Senegal even supplied workers to the other AOF and AEF (French Equatorial Africa) colonies. The basic core of the job market consisted of this category of skilled workers.

The labor supply was created under the effect of fiscal constraints and then maintained by administrative recruitment. Salaried work emerged as one form of remuneration, but without it being imposed as the distinctive stamp of the labor system. And yet, the demand continued to rise, due to an increase in manpower needs (construction of transport infrastructures, operation of companies, administrative services, the boom in cash crops). But colonial policy remained dominated by the weakness of investments in improvements and the option to minimize labor costs. The colonial administration resorted more to holding back on wages than to using them as an incentive when recruiting workers.

Hence, one can distinguish a dual labor system that co-existed through free salaried labor and forced labor.⁵ The administration would determine the dominant type, acting more like an accomplice protecting private interests, who were ill disposed to allow the law of supply and demand to operate. In Senegal, this situation prevailed until 1930. But in the other AOF territories, forced labor was the predominant system until 1946.

⁵ Fall (Babacar), *Le travail forcé en Afrique Occidentale Française: 1900-1946* – Paris, Karthala, 1993, pp. 300-303.

The colonial government's interventionist attitude in labor recruitment is evident throughout the first half of the 20th century, hobbling the formation of a labor market and the establishment of labor laws. One very explicit example is the case of the salt mills of *Société des Salins du Sine Saloum* where, despite the legal suppression of forced labor by the Law of April 11, 1946, the Administration decided to supply workers to that firm. It was by the brunt of the penal labor force living in Koutal that *Salins du Sine Saloum* was able to stay out of competition, thereby retarding the mechanization of handling operations. It was only in 1956 that the company began loading material using flat wagons and fork trucks and bagging material mechanically.⁶

This is a good case in point of the prevalence of the colonial government's interventionist measures in its recruitment of labor in a territory such as Senegal, where freedom of work had been proclaimed very early and was even imposed as the predominant form of labor with the 1930 crisis. Until 1937, wages were freely debated between wage earners and their employers, even if the latter were not obliged to observe any regulation. In pursuance of the general decree of March 29, 1926, another decree only set the minimum wage for workers at that time. But this text was not really observed. Social conservatism prevailed and delayed the application of social measures inspired by legislation for the Metropolis. That situation only modified when there was a shift in the balance of power in France. Hence, the Popular Front's arrival would foster the passing of certain labor laws already in force in France. Under the influence of the March 20, 1937 decree authorizing trade unions, collective conventions were drawn up setting the working conditions and minimum salaries for African workers in the commercial and industrial sectors. Then, in April 1937, for the first time, a new decree granted each territorial governor the power to set a minimum wage, which was called the

⁶ Fall (Babacar), "The Residue of Forced Labour in Senegal – The Case of Société Salins of Sine Saloum: 1943-1956" in Zegeye (A.) & Ishemo (S.), eds., *Forced Labour & Migration: Patterns of Movement within Africa*, Oxford, Hans Zell, 1989, pp. (???)

salaire de manœuvre ordinaire. Social and union agitation led to the signing of new collective contracts between 1938 and 1939.

With the outbreak of World War II and especially the Vichy regime, all union activity was forbidden. It was only in 1943 that talks reopened between employers and labor unions to adjust minimum salaries and the cost of living. Moreover, this war time was characterized by successive contractions and expansions in the labor market due to policy changes and their immediate repercussions: a stabilization in salaries until 1941, followed by increases as industrialization on the Cap Vert peninsula gradually expanded.

Industrialization actually intensified after communications with the Metropolis broke down in the first half of 1942 and especially with the rallying of the AOF. The consequence was an increase in the work force, and hence overbidding by the employers, who wanted to keep the services of a severely limited work force for themselves.

The International Conference of Philadelphia held in April 1944 encouraged the re-instatement of minimal salaries and stressed the need to establish a minimum living wage, a rational working tool for setting more equitable wage rates. Furthermore, by the end of 1945, every sector suffered strikes rooted in demands for salary raises. Some continued into February 1946 and all were followed by a new general salary adjustment and the rejection of the discriminatory base that structured the different salary scales.⁷

A look at minimum wage trends between 1938 and 1948 reveals two distinct periods in its development:

- The first period lasted from January 1938 to February 1945. It was marked by a relatively low hike: in 1938 the index was at 100 and at 285 in May 1945.
- The second period covering June 1945 to February 1948 recorded several relatively major hikes. They correspond firstly to successive minimum wage adjustments to the cost of living and

⁷ Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS), K 453 (19): *Salaires minima africains du secteur privé à Dakar 1938-1948*; and Cooper (Frédéric), "Le mouvement ouvrier: le nationalisme au Sénégal – La grève générale de 1946 et la grève des cheminots de 1947-48" in *Historiens – Géographes du Sénégal*. No. 6, 1991, pp. 32-33.

secondly to an improvement in working conditions for the “*manœuvre ordinaire*” with salaries being set based on a rational budget. The index rose from 235 in the first semester of 1945 to 571 in December 1945, then to 885 on June 13, 1947. By February 1, 1948, it had reached 1,142.

Such an evolution is justified by the low workforce on the one hand and by the instability of the labor force, on the other hand. A manpower survey conducted in Dakar in 1939 revealed a total force of 10,062 workers broken down as follows: 5,415 permanently engaged and 4,647 temporary workers.⁸ In 1943, 25,938 workers were hired without a written contract by public services and private firms. In 1948, there were 84,100 salaried workers or 31.9% of workers in all of French West Africa compared to 26.6% in Côte d’Ivoire and 14.7% in Guinea. Because of its role in the AOF federation, Senegal had the largest number of wage earners, both African and European (12,300 units, i.e., 71.1% of the entire workforce in service in the AOF).⁹

Due to this fact, the instability of the labor force explains why the government turned to forced labor in the cities. In fact, it often happened that the Senegalese colony would be confronted with a labor shortage because of constant fluctuations caused by populations being moved around between rural zones providing labor and the urban centers. Reports on the labor force readily acknowledged that between the months of May and October, the administration resorted to issuing requisition orders to ensure that services at the Port of Dakar and the Thies rail yards continued to function.

This labor force remained unstable: agriculture attracted a part of the labor force that was truly seasonal, for workers would return to their fields from April until November. During this period, the labor market was generally characterized by a dire shortage of workers, especially unskilled manual laborers. The trend towards stabilization of this labor force was spotted back in 1952, when it

⁸ ANS: K257 (26), *Enquête au sujet de la main-d’œuvre à Dakar*, 1939.

⁹ Naville (Pierre), “Données statistiques sur la structure de la main-d’œuvre salariée et de l’industrie en Afrique Noire” in *Le travail en Afrique Noire*, Paris – Présence Africaine, No. 13, 1951, pp. 279-284.

was observed that, particularly in the groundnut bowl in Kaolack, the large firms did not suffer from this lack of unskilled laborers. The labor inspector of Kaolack queried whether one should view this phenomenon as the beginning of a definite abandonment of farm fields due to the draw of the city on the one hand, and on the other hand, because of the paucity of income offered from working the land. This migration gradually built up a mass of laborers and other urban wage earners that modern economy employed either in the private sector or in the public sector.

PRIVATE SECTOR AND PUBLIC SECTOR:
A CHANGE IN ROLES ON THE JOB MARKET

The structure of modern salaried employment reveals that the public and private sectors, depending on the period, have long served as levers in the modern economy employment supply, to varying degrees. Paradoxically, up until the post-independence era, the private sector was the main employer because of an industrial fabric strongly stimulated by imperial economic policy.

The Industrial Boom Followed by Prolonged Crisis
Industrialization began with the creation of the first oil refinery, SEIB (*Société Electrique et Industrielle du Baol*), which was installed in Diourbel. Other oil refineries gradually moved in, fostering the export of oil as early as 1927. By 1933, this induced the French Government to fix quotas on Senegalese oil exported to France. Between 1930 and 1938, half a dozen industries were operating in other branches of activity: beer breweries, cookie factories and soap, liquid air, sack and packaging material plants.

After 1945, the industrial fabric expanded incredibly. World War II and the transport problems created by the country's participation in the war effort accelerated the industrialization process. In addition to oil refineries, soap factories, metallic industries and many other new cottage industries were rapidly introduced to process local products and furnish consumer goods to a booming colonial market. Furthermore, FIDES, the Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development, injected major capital into the

economy and financed numerous infrastructure projects. Under that funding, the Ports of Dakar, Kaolack and Ziguinchor were enlarged; a strategic roads program was implemented; construction of the University of Dakar began; the Dakar-Niger railroad line was extended; and modern maintenance services employing 3,000 workers were installed in Thiès.

Between 1948 and 1958, there was an industrial boom stimulated by FIDES investments. An incentive environment was created by the reduction of energy costs and a loan policy for private businesses through the Central Fund for Economic Cooperation (CCCE). Furthermore, special fiscal breaks were offered to encourage private investment.¹⁰

This policy made the private sector the biggest employer in the colony of Senegal. In 1957, of the 94,272 salaried workers counted, 73,535 or 78% were employed in the private sector. But beginning in 1960, the breakup of the AOF Federation reduced job opportunities in the Senegalese industry, which was thereafter cut off from a market of sixteen million (16,000,000) consumers. The young Republic of Senegal's tight space (with a market of only 4,500,000 people) condemned industry to restructure. The new political environment generated a latent crisis that affected the industrial makeup from then on. The slow decline and then stagnation of jobs in this sector is a good reflection of the shockwave that rocked the industrial world.

Table 1: Industrial Work Force, 1960-1989¹¹

Year	1960	1974	1978	1989
Size	13,400	27,700	29,000	30,000

While there was a recorded increase of 14,300 jobs for the period of 1960-1974, it is worth pointing out that for those 14 years,

¹⁰ Organisation Internationale du Travail, *Politique et Stratégie d'industrialisation en Afrique: Effets sur l'emploi et la distribution des revenus – Cas du Sénégal*. Addis Abeba – BIT, pp. 6-10.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, & Berg (Elliot) Associates, *Adjustment Postponed: Economic Policy Reform in Sénégal in the 1980s*. Report prepared for USAID – October 1990, pp. 120-126.

the average hiring rate was 1,021 units per year. This is an indicator of the low labor demand. Between 1974 and 1978, there was a drastic slowdown in employment absorption, with only 1,300 jobs created, equivalent to a yearly average of 350 units. The low labor demand remained a constant and was further aggravated by an increasingly overt crisis. The same trend was strengthened by the stabilization of job numbers for the period of 1979-1989. Most apparent is the paucity of jobs offered by the industrial sector, which suffered heavily during this time. Hence, this sector employed only 30,000 workers representing about one percent (1.22%) of the total eligible population estimated in 1989 at 2,400,000 persons.

There are many reasons behind the hard times now beleaguering the Senegalese industry. First of all, ever since African countries gained their independence, the national market has naturally proven to be too narrow for the large-scale industrial projects initially conceived for the former AOF countries. Furthermore, the national market was very small itself because it mainly targeted only urban dwellers, who were big consumers of manufactured products. City dwellers disposed of incomes that were largely depleted by the crisis that began back in the late 1960s.

Then, between 1960 and 1979, overprotection of the import substitute industries became a major handicap for this sector, which was largely noncompetitive besides. In fact, most of the factories (cement, oil, sugar, etc.) enjoyed a *de facto* monopoly that only accentuated their weak competitive abilities and the tendency to place lesser quality products on the market that held little attraction for local consumers. This situation evoked two major consequences: the development of fraud nurtured by an environment increasingly affected by the intense development of global trade; and the various industrial plants' low productivity.

Today, industries have a production capacity utilization rate of about 50%.¹² The oil refinery branch is a good illustration of this

¹² Guillaume - Gentil (Anne), "L'industrie: un secteur dans la tourmente" in *Marchés Tropicaux – Spécial: Perspectives du Sénégal*, 19 avril 1991, pp. 1014 -1017.

weakness in Senegalese industries: SONACOS's four factories (in Dakar, Diourbel, Kaolack and Ziguinchor) dispose of a nominal trituration capacity of 920,000 tons – and yet, since 1983, none has been unable to produce more than 450,000 tons on the average.¹³

These factors combined with particularly high production costs (labor and energy costs are three times higher in Dakar than in Abidjan and communications and taxes and customs duties are heavy) pinpoint the fragile nature of this sector and emphasize its poor competitive edge. The labor factor has suffered the contradictory effects of this crisis, with reductions in the number of wage earners and raises in the hourly minimum wage (SMIG).

Hourly SMIG trends between 1970 and 1989 reveal that this rate rose from 50.60 CFAF to 201.06 CFAF; in other words, it increased fourfold. There were decisive raises in November 1974, when the rate nearly doubled from 66.91 F to 107.05 F. Then in July 1982, it reached 183.75 F. This rate stabilized at that level until July 1989, when it was carried to 201.06 F.¹⁴ These diverse raises were primarily caused by hikes in the cost of living, which intensified beginning in 1974 to such a point that the government and employers found it difficult to avoid salary readjustments.

Moreover, these minimum wage raises appeared to be concessions made to the unions in compensation for modifications in the Labor Code, notably the passing of Law 80/01, which made it easier to fire employees, facilitated wage cuts for companies and helped them reorganize in order to improve their performance.

This also caused many job losses due to factories being closed or to staff downsizing justified either by a slowdown in activity or by the mechanization of certain links in the production process.

The CAFAL match factory (*Compagnie Africaine Forestière et des Allumettes*) had already opted for intensive mechanization in 1960, therefore making a very strong statement about the intensive nature of Senegalese industry – in other words, that it required little use of manpower. The factory also managed to reduce its staff

¹³ Wane, Amadou Tidiane, "L'explosion à la SONACOS - L'autre dimension" in *Sud Hebdo*, No. 205, 16 avril 1992, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Tableau de bord annuel de la situation sociale au Sénégal*, Edition 1990. Annexe Statistique, p. 60.

numbers from 900 to 130 while maintaining the same volume of production. Another good example is illustrated by the oil refineries, which eliminated 584 jobs between 1966 and 1971, leading to a staff reduction of 3,340 to 2,756 employees.

This grim scenario has not been changed by the creation of jobs as expected from activity in the Dakar Industrial Free Zone, which has proved very disappointing in that respect. The area reserved to receive investments is still in a wasteland (of the 450 hectares planned, only 60 hectares were fitted out and developed by the end of 1991). In 10 years (1976-1986), thirteen companies approved for a total investment of 5.1 billion CFAF or nearly half of the investments made in the free zone and for 900 anticipated jobs went bankrupt.¹⁵

In December 1991, only 8 industrial plants employing about 400 persons were active. The average number of employees was very low (50 per company) compared to the hiring rates of industrial concerns in other free zones – in Haiti, for example, which records an average of 250 workers per firm, or Tunisia, with an average of 120 employees per firm, or Mauritius, finally, with 114 workers per active unit.¹⁶ The Industrial Free Zone's case reveals a lot about the Senegalese industrial crisis, for despite tax breaks and exemptions reducing some production factor costs and the reform of the investment code in 1989 authorizing more flexible employment, the Industrial Free Zone's lackluster performances reveal that the public powers are still not targeting the factors of inertia properly.¹⁷ This diagnosis generally holds for the entire industrial sector.

Between 1970 and 1984, industrial production rose slightly in volume at the rate of 0.8% per year. Since 1985, it has been nearly stagnant. This has brought a drop in profits and very weak investments. The reforms introduced with the New Industrial Policy (NIP) have not been very encouraging. Attempts to improve productivity

¹⁵ Camara (Amadou M.), "Analyse critique d'une stratégie de développement industriel pour la promotion des exportations et la relance de l'emploi au Sénégal: la Zone Franche industrielle" in *Le Plan structural d'ajustement et de l'Emploi au Sénégal*, Codesria/PAGD/BM, 1992, p. 17.

¹⁶ Camara (Amadou M.), 1992, pp. 17-18.

¹⁷ Camara (Amadou M.), 1992, pp. 23-38.

have resulted either in job losses or in businesses folding. At any rate, the NIP has induced a severe shrinkage of the job market. Currently, the industrial sector is plagued by its low labor demand: it can only absorb a small portion of the 100,000 young people entering the labor market every year. This situation also stresses the increase in the labor supply.

While subsequent to industry's expansion, this sector remained one of the main employers of Senegalese wage earners until 1964, the current crisis has sapped its energy and capacity to be an important lever in regulating the labor market. Its labor demand has become very weak, and almost nonexistent. The premier employer has slowly yielded to the public sector.

*The Public Sector, the Labor Market and the
Shape of Imbalances in Labor Distribution*

The place attributed to the public sector in Senegalese economy has long been exaggerated. In fact, it occupied a modest part of the economy for the entire colonial period. Statistics reveal that the phenomenon of the *government as main employer* is not a colonial legacy. While it is true that Senegal was highly instrumental in the administrative operation of the other AOF territories, the size of the workforce and the public sector's place should henceforth be analyzed while reconsidering the importance attributed to stereotypes that falsely link a heavy Senegalese administration to the colonial period.

A close look at the number of wage earners and their distribution in the private and public sectors shows that these trends only began to reverse starting 1965-1970. These statistics support the argument for a new interpretation of the way that the labor market in Senegal has developed.

The trends in the public sector salaried workforce reveal much about the role played by the public sector, i.e., the government, in the configuration of today's labor market. In 1948, the portion of wage earners in the public sector was very small at 14.62% of the entire workforce in the colony at the time. This incredible imbalance was only corrected slowly. Ten years later (1957), there were still only 20,737 workers in the public sector,

Table 2: Salaried Work Force Trends in Senegal: 1948-1990¹⁸

<i>Year</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>Total</i>
1948	12,300	71,800	84,100
1957	20,737	73,535	94,272
1961	22,000	83,345	105,345
1965	33,591	49,409	83,000
1979	54,151	67,284	121,441
1983	68,084	59,392	127,476
1989	67,733	54,419	122,152
1990	73,000	52,000	125,000

representing 21% of wage earners. During the entire period of industrial expansion, the ranks in the public sector slowly grew from 9,248 employees in 1944 to 20,737 in 1957, scarcely doubling in 13 years. In 1961, 22,000 were hired by the civil service, or 20.88% of all salaried workers. Between 1957 and 1961, there was even a decline, indeed a regression in the total number of wage earners in the public sector in relative value. This is indicative of the private sector's and especially industry's real capacity to absorb job seekers, which was still being concealed. The slow rise suddenly accelerated between 1962 and 1965: the workforce stood at 33,591 then, or 40% of all wage earners. This doubling took place over three years. The shift in the labor force began when the

¹⁸ This recapitulation of salaried labor force trends in Senegal was achieved by compiling various sources, which were compared in order to dispose of a homogenous series that could be used as a working hypothesis. The ambition of this process/methodology was to open a path of research for studies bearing on the quantitative evaluation of the salaried work force and employee number trends in the modern, wage-earning sector. To that end, readers can consult the following bibliographical references:

- § Naville, (Pierre), "Données statistiques sur la structure de la main-d'œuvre salariée et de l'industrie en Afrique Noire" in *Le Travail en Afrique Noire*, Paris, Présence Africaine No. 13, 1951, pp. 279-284;
- § Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS), 2G57/36 *Rapport de l'Inspection du travail Sénégal*;
- § *Tableau de bord annuel de la situation sociale au Sénégal*, MEFP, Edition 1990, p. 62.

industrial sector crisis became obvious. At that point, the government replaced the private sector. By 1979 it employed 54,151 people, or half of all wage earners in Senegal.

From 1962 to 1979 then, the government really saw a boom in employment. In terms of absolute value, during this whole period known as the “*twenty glorious years of employment*”, it was the main employer, offering jobs to almost all graduates, but was not very demanding in terms of applicants’ professional qualifications. Its concern at the time was to recruit “nationals capable of occupying the posts left vacant by departed colonizers. The end of colonization had freed up new jobs, which those in power were hasty to fill in order to establish a policy for rapid economic and social development.”¹⁹

The trends in the wage-earning workforce also make it easier to understand its drop in numbers compared to the rest of the working population between 1957 and 1989: it represented 7.62% in 1957 but dropped by nearly half in 1979 to 4.26%. This downtrend continued in 1983, reaching 4.1% while it represented only 3.1% of the work force in 1989. Such a parameter emphasizes both the modern economic system’s diminished ability to absorb a labor supply that continued to pour into the market, but above all the small proportion of wage earners compared to the shape of the labor market overall.

The size of the working population and its development over the past fifteen years are indicators of the urban working population’s distribution imbalance between wage earners in the formal sector and the rest of the working urban population. In fact, between 1976 and 1988, there was an impressive increase in the active population – that part aged 10 and older and people of working age. It rose from 1,960,000 to 2,308,490. The urban fraction of this active population represented 27% in 1988 against 6% in 1960. Dakar alone, with 1,096,344 active inhabitants, concentrates 70% of all urban active persons who are broken down as follows: 556,267 males (50.7%) and 540,077 females (49.3%). There are usually 585,222 people working, or 53.4% of the Dakar active

¹⁹ Sar (Mbaye), *Etude sur la sociodynamique de l’emploi au Sénégal*, Dakar – DIRE, Janvier 1990, p. 5.

population. Those actually engaged represent 442,132 persons (75%) and the unemployed 143,090 (25%). Youths represent only 30.2% of this active, working population and women 36.16%. The inactive population represents 46.6% of the working-age population. It consists mainly of women at home (40%) and school children (49%).²⁰ Such a population distribution between those working and those not working reflects the gravity of an enormous burden that those working must bear: as a rule, someone who works supports at least two people.²¹ In 1989, a survey conducted by IFAN\ORSTOM established that each working person supported 2.7 persons. For certain socioeconomic categories, the burden carried by each working individual has even been estimated at 3.5 people.²²

Given the economic environment's weak capacity to supply jobs, the unemployment level has become a vital index for deciphering the country's employment crisis. Holders of higher education degrees, commonly called "les maîtresards", are eloquent expressions of the employment slump.

The arrival on the market of college and technical college graduates went almost unnoticed. For a while, they were automatically absorbed into the work force. Moreover, the state's hiring capacity was amplified by the existence of a vast semi-private sector consisting of rural management companies. The case of ONCAD, the National Office of Development Cooperation and Assistance is very edifying in that respect. ONCAD had 6,000 workers on its payroll when it was dissolved in 1981.

THE ERA OF ADJUSTMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND EXCESS

The reform of semi-private companies either by drastic downsizing of personnel or by laying off most of the staff, added to the state's

²⁰ Commissariat Général à l'Emploi & Direction de la Prévision & de la Statistique, *Rapport définitif de l'Enquête Emploi, Sous-Emploi, Chômage en milieu urbain*, Avril\Mai 1991, Région de Dakar.

²¹ Thiam (Khadidiatou Tall), "Remodelage de l'environnement urbain à Dakar: Analyse des pratiques spatio-economiques des femmes sénégalaises" in *Publications du Centre du Sahel*, Québec, 11-12 mars 1993.

²² IFAN & ORSTOM, *L'insertion urbaine: le cas de Dakar*, Dakar – Mars 1992, p. ???

gradual withdrawal from the employment market and modifications in labor laws to allow greater flexibility in the labor force,²³ all highlighted the political power's new approach starting in 1979.

Adjustment through Labor Reduction

Starting with its acceptance of the structural adjustment program in 1979, and based on the requirements of the donor experts (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc.), the government, which had become the principal employer, decided to implement a series of measures intended to reduce its spending by attacking the wage bill, which represented 60% of current spending. "*Adjustment through the Labor Force*" thus consisted of several components: 1) setting employee quotas with very strict control of recruitment levels in the various ministerial departments; 2) deceased employees or those going into retirement were not replaced; 3) physical control of government wage earners; and 4) the reform of civil service work files. A Wage Bill Monitoring and Control Unit was also set up. First attached to the Prime Minister's Office, then transferred to the General Secretariat of the Presidency, this structure became an "observatory" of the public sector work force and was domiciled at the *Ministry of State for Government Modernization*.²⁴

Until 1988, this type of adjustment through the labor force had only modest results: even with the stabilization of the work force and a freeze on salaries, the state's payroll increased at the rate of 8 to 10% a year: there were 67,000 workers representing an annual cost of 110 billion francs. In 1989, the will to lighten this wage bill inspired a new operation known as "*départs volontaires*" providing incentive for civil servants to retire early. The government's offer was met favorably by some categories of government

²³ For labor law reforms, see Ndiaye (Issac Yankhoba) & Samb (Moussa): "Neutralisation ou flexibilisation du droit du travail: de l'ajustement économique à l'ajustement juridique" in Fall (Babacar) ed., *Ajustement structurel et emploi au Sénégal*, Dakar, Codesria, 1997, pp. 103-131.

²⁴ Following the ministerial shuffle which occurred after the May 1993 legislative elections, this Wage Bill Unit was transferred to the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Planning. The mobility of such a structure would be seen in the rather disorganized manner of controlling labor force size depending on the poles of influence among the ruling powers.

workers, with a positive outcome statistically. Between 1990 and 1992, the 3,772 early retirements recorded almost matched the number anticipated (4,300).²⁵

However, an evaluation remains to be made of this policy, which was not founded on a study of those posts that might have identified the many workers subsidized by the government with monthly salaries in addition to social security benefits, without such payments having anything to do with the performances required by the administration. This issue unveils the practice of patronage that often motivated much recruitment. But one wonders whether the state's "modernization policy" was not underpinned by a staunch will to challenge one of the pillars of national heritage. The political obstacle still seemed too heavy to allow the government to apply its policy of *Less Government, Better Government*.

From that point on, any measures tending to rationalize the civil service have most often remained at the stage of the good intentions proclaimed during negotiations with experts from the international financial institutions. Among wage earners, there is a tendency to adapt and/or rather to look for stopgap income.

With the real drop in buying power for salaried workers, moonlighting has in fact become almost an unwritten yet accepted rule to compensate for lost income. Jean Pierre Lachaud makes the following valuable observation for most of the French-speaking African countries: under the effect of wage deterioration due to the structural adjustment programs, "for many people, the civil service remains a guaranteed income allowing them to exploit those *opportunity zones* that generate income but are not very propitious for increasing productivity."²⁶

At any rate, the measures taken until then only emphasized the limitations of the "*Adjustment through the Labor Force*" option. Furthermore, they were at the root of social tension and obliged the state to provide concessions depending on the political climate

²⁵ Source: Secrétariat Permanent de la Commission des Départements Volontaires/ Ministère Délégué Chargé de la Modernisation de l'Etat /Primatue.

²⁶ Lachaud (Jean Pierre): *Le désengagement de l'Etat et les ajustements sur le marché de travail en Afrique francophone*, Genève, IIES, Série de recherche No. 96, 1989, p. 30.

and/or social situations, faced with pressure from workers who were more active union-wise. This was true for health workers but especially for those in the education sector (unfreezing of regarding procedures, re-establishment of advancement commissions, back pay and some allowances paid up).

The job crisis stimulated a boom in the so-called informal sector. Long qualified as the “refuge sector”, the informal sector slowly became the primary provider of jobs. The administration/private duo transformed into an administration/private/informal triptych. Beginning in 1987-88, there was a major break away from the classic structure of modern employment with the new role played by the informal sector in the modern economy. A second trend reversal occurred when the informal sector emerged as the principal employer in cities. Based on the table breaking down the working population between 1986 and 1991, it can be established that 60% of workers were found in the informal sector.²⁷ The modern sector occupied scarcely 17.8%, taking an astonishing shift downward due to repercussions from the structural adjustment policies. It is also apparent that employment in Senegal was leaning more and more towards “informalization”. But as Philippe Bocquier points out, informal employment overall (informal wage earners and the self-employed) has not replaced formal employment.²⁸ On the other hand, this sector has contributed greatly to easing unemployment. However, it is not a cure-all for the job crisis, which has become more apparent as unemployment grows.

*A Labor Market Dominated by
Unemployment Expansion*

The rhythm at which urban unemployment is developing is still not well known. It does not seem to follow work force trends. In 1960, the unemployment rate was estimated at 6.8% compared to an

²⁷ Cf. Chapter 2 of this work: Niang (Abdoulaye): *Le secteur informel: un recours à la crise de l'emploi*, p. ???

²⁸ Bocquier (Philippe): “Les mutations du marché de l'emploi dans les pays en développement: le cas d'une ville ouest-africaine”. Montréal, 10 septembre 1991, Publication *Villes et Développement*, Groupe Interuniversitaire de Montréal, p. 18.

active urban population of 255,728 or 16% of people working in Senegal. To date, this low rate can be traced to the role gradually assumed by the state as main controller of the labor market while masking the unemployment situation through a voluntarist recruitment policy for years. This situation arose either because of budget cutbacks or because industrial and commercial firms went bankrupt. Another factor was that masses of people were returned to Senegal by its bordering neighbors who, after gaining independence, chose to replace the Senegalese civil servants and managers in their countries with their own nationals.

The year 1964 is a significant landmark in the rise of the number of officially unemployed, that is, workers who at one time in their lives obtained a working contract and then lost their salaried position for any reason, and then were unable to find another job (be it with or without a wage), since then. Until 1964, the Labor and Social Security Bureau listed 1,177 workers laid off due to downsizing. Above all, it revealed that as a result of steps taken to reduce ranks in the French Army, more than 2,500 Senegalese workers were thrust into the labor market. The development of unemployment, which mainly affected Dakar, emphasizes the role played by the Cap-Vert Region as a receiving basket, for it absorbed all the rural dwellers who came to the urban areas in search of work. In 1964, the Manpower Office estimated that there were 60,000 jobless persons.²⁹ Between 1970 and 1976, the unemployment rate rose from 11.2% to 14.9%, which was already high compared to the period between 1960 and 1970.

It was when the government began to withdraw from the labor market in 1980 that this phenomenon became obvious. Indubitably, the gravity of the unemployment situation was reflected in the low number of graduates from colleges and technical schools hired by the public and private sectors. Statistics show a rapid development of the youth unemployment, with the number of graduates registered growing from 820 in 1984 to 2,500 in 1989.

Less because of its number than its symbolic burden, this dramatic anomaly raised a great public outcry echoed by policy-

²⁹ Ministère de l'Information et du Tourisme: *Le Sénégal en marche: Le Code du Travail*. Dakar, 1965, p. 733.

makers. In fact, this type of unemployment is a striking indicator of the crisis plaguing the educational system (gap between training and employment) and the sluggish nature of the economy, thereafter poorly prepared to absorb the elite that has supposedly acquired the “qualifications” conferred by obtaining a diploma delivered by the universities and major professional schools.

The spread of unemployment became a way of interpreting the social malaise and one of the major effects of the structural adjustment policies. It became an imperative for decision makers and those conducting social research to acquire full understanding of the real unemployment rate and the levels of segmentation in the labor market.

Early initiatives concentrated on understanding the unemployment caused by an amplification of the urban crisis fed by tension in the labor market. Unfortunately, still only approximate indicators are available in that area. Between 1976 and 1986, according to statistics provided by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the unemployment level could be evaluated at 27% by differentiating between that part of the population of working age (estimated at 65.5% of the total population) and that part of the population that is really working (estimated at 38.5% of the total population).³⁰ This first estimate gives an idea of the extent of unemployment and underemployment.

Another unemployment index is illustrated in the table below showing the percentage of people employed for every 100 inhabitants.

Table 3: Employment Trends for 100 Inhabitants³¹

<i>Year</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1969/70	27.3
1974/75	26.7
1984/85	27.8
1988/89	22.8

³⁰ Sar (Mbaye), *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³¹ *Tableau de bord annuel de la situation sociale au Sénégal*. Edition 1990, Annexe statistique p. 29.

While in 1969/70, 28 out of 100 people had a job and hence supported 72 others, the decline in jobs is very easy to verify in the table. By 1988/89, 23 out of 100 people were employed. This drop in the employment rate provides double insight into unemployment levels and the existence of ever growing pressure on the job market.

The government's most systematic undertaking in obtaining a profile of the labor market in Dakar and particularly the unemployment rate, was recorded in April/May 1991 when it conducted a survey on "*Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment in the Urban Areas – The Dakar Region.*"³² This survey set a global unemployment rate of 24.4% – 23.2% for men and 26.6% for women. This confirms that unemployment had worsened, chiefly affecting youths and women. But this rate is highly debatable because it concerned the *absolute unemployment* rate. It only considered "those who are out of work and are actively seeking it." By deciding not to include "the discouraged ones" in the unemployment rate, those who compiled the report introduced a bias intended to lessen the gravity of this phenomenon.³³ The concept of "*absolute unemployment*" is irrelevant in Senegal; it only dresses up the statistics. Therefore, to push it to the fore is to collaborate with an ideological purpose: to distort the real picture about unemployment. The decision makers should have considered the real rate for the working population, which was 30%. Nonetheless, this rate is closer to the estimate made by the RAPID III model (Resources for Analyzing the Population and Its Impact on Development) designed under the aegis of the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Planning. This model evaluated the unemployment rate at 27.7% in 1988. But, although the unemployment rate improved slightly, dropping to 24.4%, this phenomenon has taken on serious proportions since 1976. The categories affected the most are

³² Commissariat Général à l'Emploi & Direction de la Prévision et de la Statistique: *Rapport définitif de l'enquête Emploi, Sous-Emploi, Chômage en milieu urbain*. Avril/Mai 1991, Région de Dakar.

³³ One might wonder to what extent the pre-electoral context may have influenced the methodological option of that survey's designers. At any rate, it has at least been established that the publication of those results was delayed because of the impact such data might have had on the political scene at the time.

Table 4: Distribution of Unemployment Rates by Sex and Age, 1976-1991

<i>Year</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Youths</i>
1976	17.6	12.0	28.5
1988	23.5	23.1	33.4
1991	23.2	26.6	31.9

young people in the 20- to 24-year-old group with an unemployment rate of 34.6%. Women are the most affected by unemployment at that level, reaching a peak of 44.3% for the 20- to 24-year old group.

Regardless of the rate considered, the unemployment rate is very high in Senegal. and it is further aggravated by urbanization, which in African countries renders the labor supply particularly elastic. The city of Dakar is a very good illustration of this effect.

The Urbanization of Dakar:

A Destabilizing Factor for the Labor Market

In Sub Saharan Africa the urban phenomenon is a major concern, for rapid demographic growth in the cities is occurring without any connection being made with the development of economic production capacities. Scarcely any correlation is made between the rhythm of demographic growth and need to set up receiving structures. In independent Africa, urbanization was not seen as a corollary or motor for any kind of economic development. It did not arise from agricultural mechanization that created relative overpopulation; instead, it resulted from the deterioration of rural living conditions and was therefore basically an agricultural crisis. "The big cities popping up in Africa and America contain a huge mass of workers looking for jobs who live in highly populated neighborhoods. This mass is constantly being renewed: while some find a jobs and others return to their villages, new migrants flow in constantly to swell these floating populations of the great urban centers."³⁴

³⁴ Latil (Marc), 1958, p. 20.

The city of Dakar and its suburbs: Parcelles Assainies, Pikine and Guédiawaye, are perfect illustrations of this assessment, which was made by looking at that urban population's development:

Table 5: Population of Dakar, 1955-1992³⁵

1955	1960	1976	1988	1992
38,600	374,700	813,317	1,490,400	1,735,000

Between 1976 and 1992, Dakar recorded a very high growth rate at 4% annually, or a yearly increase of 55,000 people. In fact, it receives a large part of the migrants coming from other urban areas of the country, and nearly 30% of all migrants. Every year, 36,000 new migrants settle in Dakar. That crucial factor that brings terrible pressure to bear on the labor market. This situation gives growing reason for concern considering the city's low activity rate. A similar situation is found in most African capitals, indeed, in the Third World. In 1979, Abidjan was already recording an annual migratory influx of 80,000 souls.³⁶ Unquestionably, Mexico City's case is the most extreme, for it lives a daily drama, receiving 2,000 people a day, while it lacks the economic vitality to reduce so much pressure on the job market.

Dakar has been a magnet for ages, and has held onto its privileged strategic position, its administrative status (as former AOF capital and then as the capital of Senegal beginning in 1958) and to the infrastructure installed there.

According to the employment survey conducted in 1973/1974, Dakar had a concentration of 88% of the industrial concerns and nearly 80% of the jobs in the modern sector. The Cap Vert Regions harbored 71.5% of wage earners in Senegal and centralized 83% of

³⁵ Thiam (Khadidiatou Tall), Cf. "La taudisation de la Médina à Dakar" in *Historiens & Géographes du Sénégal*, 4-5, 1989 and "Remodelage de l'environnement urbain à Dakar: Analyse des pratiques spatio-economiques des femmes sénégalaises" in *Publication du Centre du Sahel*, Québec, Canada, Mars 1992.

³⁶ Antoine (Philippe) & Savané (Landing), *Urbanisation et migration en Afrique – Conférence UEPA*; Nairobi 1990; p. 14.

the wage bill. In 1988, Dakar was home to 80% of the Senegalese urban population. The urbanization rate rose from 34% in 1976 to 39% in 1988. The reason behind such an imbalance was that regional population distribution does not hinge upon local farming and pastoral potential. Such a situation makes it harder to implement a rational labor utilization policy by a sectoral redistribution of production capacities. This is a good illustration of the low impact that regions other than Dakar have on the job market.

The Job Market Flooded with Workers

Since 1960, the labor supply has been quite elastic due to diverse factors:

- First of all, the demographic growth rate, which has been extremely strong in Senegal, like everywhere else in the Third World. The working population best expresses the weight of this burden: from 1957 to 1989, it grew from 479,084 to 3,541,088, an annual growth of 95,687 units. Between 1960 and 1988, city workers multiplied by 4.5, increasing from 16% to 27% of the total work force.
- The drought that struck in 1969 aggravated problems for agriculture, whose main crop (the groundnut) hovered around 500,000 tons/yr. As a direct effect, rural family income levels dropped. The observation can be substantiated here and in several other countries that a drop in productivity and rural family incomes turns a large portion of underemployed workers into the classic unemployed masses whose privileged destination is the urban job market.

Between 1976 and 1981, the labor market was flooded with an average of 45,540 additional job seekers yearly, with early retirees and deaths accounted for. About 55% of this extra labor came from the rural areas and nearly 33% these new workers were women, about one-third (32.8%) of whom lived in urban areas.

In 1989, the number of new job seekers rose to 100,000 annually, and the majority of them lacked any professional skills.³⁷

³⁷ Berg (Elliot) Associates, 1990; pp. 112-114.

This estimate does account for the arrival of the masses deported and repatriated from Mauritania starting in April 1989 who also entered the job market. It is easy to imagine the gravity of the situation that arose from this unexpected influx of nearly 70,000 people. When Senegalese citizens attacked the little shops run by Mauritians, this did little to ease pressure on the labor market. In fact, it only intensified with the repatriation of Senegalese from Zambia and Liberia.

Table 6: Employment Supply and Demand Trends, 1980-1990³⁸

<i>Year</i>	<i>Demand</i>	<i>Supply</i>	<i>% Supply/Demand</i>
1980	10,583	762	7.20
1982	10,585	1,590	15.02
1984	7,035	1,222	17.37
1986	10,679	714	6.68
1988	17,336	664	3.83
1990	10,373	323	3.11

This evolution in supply and demand stresses the manpower office's poor command in placing job seekers. But the table still shows a trend marked by imbalances and the low job rate recorded. The table even reflects that the imbalance worsened beginning in 1988 when it was decided to remove the manpower office's monopoly on placement services.

Finally, this table indicates that the labor market has become a mockery of the market concept. The game of supply and demand is now played out in the labyrinth of interpersonal relationships. Job openings are negotiated in the general network of "who knows who" inside of companies.³⁹ Patronage is the rule. It is symptomatic to note that 71% of people seeking jobs rely on the informal network

³⁸ Source: Manpower Office, Dakar.

³⁹ Interview with Mrs. Ndèye Diallo, Labor Inspector and IPRESS Personnel Director (Employee Contingency Fund), March 27, 1992, Dakar. Thierno Ly, Head of the Labor Statistics Department at the Labor and Professional Training Ministry, holds the same opinion. Cf. Interview held on April 2, 1992 in Dakar.

of social relations. Experience reveals that an applicant's chances of being hired are now proportional to the social and/or political clout of his protector, who either puts in the former's application or sponsors it for him.

This phenomenon has dominated the market, particularly since the end of the "*glorious era of full employment*" for degree holders that was assured by the state. In fact, one's professional qualifications – even specialized at times – are no longer a shoe-in for recruitment by the industries or the public sector. The low insertion rate for graduates from technical colleges – the National College of Technology (ENSUT), the Thies College of Engineering (EPT), the National Center for Professional Skills (CNQP) and the Senegalese Association for Training and Insertion Assistance (ASAFIN) (*l'Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Technologie, l'Ecole Polytechnique de Thiès, le Centre National de Qualification Professionnelle and l'Association Senegalese d'Aide à la Formation et à l'Insertion*, respectively) illustrates this new fact which reveals, rather, the economy's limited capacity to absorb new arrivals on the labor market from then on.

A table depicting the placements for ASAFIN graduates shows gaps in hiring rates: the building, electricity and equipment sector records the lowest unemployment rate, while job offers are very limited in mechanics (automobile and construction) and in the service sector (accounting and secretarial services). In an effort to deal with the poor placement record of its graduates, in 1990, ASAFIN was obliged to launch a new program it called "*Assistance in Business Management*", consisting of 15 production and training units offering 50 young people the opportunity to go into business while instilling them with love of the work ethic as the key to success.⁴⁰ This change in orientation was one response to a saturated labor market.

Actually, the professional qualification coefficient appears today to be less and less of an operable discriminating factor. In the reserve of manpower available on the market, larger numbers of laborers are working side by side with skilled workers, foreman and even highly specialized managers.

⁴⁰ Interview with Mr. Talla Kane, Director of ASAFIN – Dakar, 4/14/92.

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that the skilled technician segments, notably in electronics, remain products that are mainly sought by industry. But even there, hiring still depends on an applicant's personal relations.

One of the rare sectors where market mechanisms can be identified is the educational sector. There is apparently a surplus in the labor demand in that area, especially for teaching in the middle and secondary cycles, which has taken in graduates from the University of Dakar's School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Science and Technology. However, repercussions from the structural adjustment plans are now being felt in the reversal of trends between supply and demand in this sector.

Based on statistics provided by the Directorate of Higher Education, one observes that of the 25,000 youths graduating, only 4,000 are likely to be absorbed into the modern economic system. This enormous disparity paints a good picture of the severity of unemployment among educated youths. It affirms a partial shift towards an overabundant labor supply. The cry of alarm can be heard everywhere: earning a university degree or an advanced technical diploma no longer guarantees a job in Senegal.

This means that university graduates are obliged to join the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed masses. This is surely one of the most serious problems faced by Third World countries. This exposes the patent failure of human resource planning policies and/or simply a blatant lack of foresight.

And yet, this major phenomenon whereby rural labor flows into or is transferred into cities and particularly into Dakar, was clearly detected as early as 1966. At the time, however, problems connected with the impact of demographic growth on development objectives were only considered halfheartedly in terms of strategies and measures for handling development issues. One could even say that had they been more perceptive, the policymakers could no longer have fooled themselves about the capacities of the so-called modern sector.

The 5th Plan (1977-1981) was very explicit on this matter:

The modern sector is not yet capable of offering salaried employment in sufficient numbers to absorb all this extra manpower.... We

will have to rely on the unstructured traditional sector to relieve pressure from the urban labor market.... The fact remains that the additional labor supply generated as much by rapid demographic growth as by the rhythm of urbanization, is disproportionate to the absorption capacity of the economy's modern sector, and that at least half of the young people entering the labor market will be obliged to look for work in the unstructured urban sector.⁴¹

This statement clearly shows the limitations of the "modern" sector confronted with demographic pressure; it is an admission that an impasse has been reached in the national employment policy, which is founded unilaterally on the formal wage-earning system. It was actually a call for help asking the informal sector to absorb the excess manpower on the labor market.

CONCLUSION

The long existence of a rent economy relying on the groundnut and the colonial system's needs fostered the emergence of a work force that demanded money for its services very early on. The elimination of the various forms of administrative coercion in recruitment facilitated the formation of a labor market. But its outlines were slow to form for many reasons, including labor instability and the gradual elaboration of labor laws.

A spontaneous game seems to have been working between supply and demand, which revealed a mild labor shortage during the growing season. That situation prevailed until the mid-60s. After that time, the private sector and particularly industry, seemed to lose wind and became incapable of supplying jobs for all the applicants entering the labor market.

For a while, the state took over the private sector's role by imposing itself as the country's main employer. But the economic crisis revealed in 1977/78 combined with the effects of rapid demographic growth and rampant urbanization accentuated the excessive labor supply. Beginning in the 1980s, a new trend appeared

⁴¹ République du Sénégal, *Vème Plan Quadriennal de Développement Economique et Social* (01 juillet 1977 – 30 juin 1981). Dakar-Abidjan, NEA, 1977, pp. 20-21, 25. (Senegal's 5th Four-year Plan for Economic and Social Development, 7/1/77 – 6/30/81)

with the state's programmed withdrawal from the labor market. But "adjustment through labor" was not a good policy for jobs. On the contrary: it was by creating an environment that encouraged economic activity and entrepreneurship that the active population was able to get involved in various productive activities instead of being doomed to idleness. This is the main lesson to be learned from the FIDES period, when the colonial government fostered the industrial boom by combining a policy in which loans were granted to firms, with tax breaks and cost reductions for certain factors of production, namely energy.

If the state were to apply an adjustment measure right now by renouncing the income it draws from its direct and indirect fiscal policy⁴² and by removing the monopolies granted to certain firms on a few strategic products (cement, sugar, rice, water, electricity, petroleum, etc.), the general economic climate would change for opportunities to create businesses and consequently jobs and revive savings and domestic consumption. But instead, people are finding jobs in the expanding service sector, without actually calling it a true revival of the Senegalese economy.⁴³

Such a situation only further emphasizes the distortions that are characteristic of Senegal's labor market and highlights the limitations of the «modern» sector thrust upon an economy that is still predominantly agricultural and heavily dependent on inconsistent climatic conditions. The imbalance between supply and demand is shaping the labor market and underscores the existence of an ever-growing tension constantly released by high unemployment levels. The informal sector then becomes an alternative, acting indisputably as a decompressor. But one wonders how much longer this can continue, considering that what is known about the number of wage earners in the modern sector, the unemployment and under-employment levels and the capacities of the informal sector, is still hardly satisfactory to this day.

⁴² Cf. Amadou Talla Guèye, "Impacts du programme structurel d'ajustement sur l'emploi au Sénégal" in *Programme structurel d'ajustement et l'emploi au Sénégal*, GNT CODESRIA – PAGD, Dakar, Juin 1992.

⁴³ IFAN & ORSTOM, *L'insertion urbaine: le cas de Dakar*, Dakar, Mars 1992, p. 104.

4. WOMEN AND SENEGALESE POLITICAL LIFE – ARAME DIENE & THIOUMBE SAMB: A PORTRAIT OF TWO WOMAN LEADERS, 1945-1996*

INTRODUCTION

Senegalese historiography rarely presents political leaders in the form of portraits. The best-known examples are devoted to famous leaders who once assumed or are currently assigned to high office in the hierarchy of political parties and/or Government. We are riding against this trend by writing this paper. It sketches the profiles and analyzes the political itinerary of two women who have left their mark in the development of Senegalese politics: Arame Diène and Thioumbe Samb.

This paper is compiled from various collected sources, followed by interviews held with these two woman leaders. Their testimonies are an integral part of the corpus of information collected by the oral history workshop at Cheikh Anta Diop University. The interviews were conducted in 1994, 1995 and 1996.¹

The methodology used to collect information was based on free discussion using a thematic guide. To ease the flow of conversation, each informant was encouraged to recount her life according to her perception of the role she played in certain events. Preliminary meetings served to pinpoint interview objectives and their anticipated results. First contacts served to break the ice and establish confidence between the informers and the research team members.

The main difficulty involved transcribing the accounts collected in Wolof (one of Senegal's national languages) and converting it to French. Our illiterate narrators were unable to validate their testimonies once they were written down. Nonetheless, we managed to

* This unpublished paper has already been presented in the following seminars: "Oral History – Words and Voices", organized in 1996 by the International Institute of the University of Michigan in Bellagio (Italy), then in Ann Arbor, Michigan (USA). I must thank David William Cohen, Fred Cooper and the other participants in those seminars for their observations and suggestions. The paper was reworked so it would comply with the requirements of a scholarly publication.

¹ Kane, A. (1994-1995), "*FEMMES ET POLITIQUE: Des récits de vie et/ou de pratiques de quelques militantes sénégalaises*", Mémoire de Maîtrise – UCAD.

check the transcripts' accuracy by listening to the recorded interviews over and over.

Through these testimonies, two women of the Senegalese political world – Arame Diène and Thioumbe Samb – each recounted her own “life story”,² i.e., her reading of major events that served as milestones in her career. This document reconstructs the course of two political adversaries, drawing from the material collected.

In order to clarify the impact of these testimonies analyzed as primary sources, it is appropriate to recall the context of Senegalese political life, which gives some sense to the singular nature of these personalities, whose careers are revisited and then placed under scrutiny.

THE CONTEXT OF SENEGALESE POLITICAL LIFE

Although first limited to the inhabitants of the four communes enjoying French citizenship, Senegalese politics goes back far in history. It is marked by the elections organized to appoint a single representative for Senegal to the French Parliament. It was actually in 1848 that the colony of Senegal acquired the right to elect a deputy. Until 1914, however, only whites and mulattos were appointed by legislative elections.³

In 1914, a black man was elected as Deputy to the French Parliament for the first time. His name was Blaise Diagne. When he died in 1934, Galandou Diouf succeeded him in parliament and dominated the political scene until 1941. After World War II, the electoral framework was enlarged by the Lamine Guèye Law of 7 May 1946, which granted French citizenship to all nationals of the Overseas Territories. The political sphere expanded.

² Bogumil, J. (1987), “Le récit de vie entre la mémoire collective and l’historiographie” in F. Montal and J. Bogumil (under the direction of) *Récits de vie et mémoires vers une anthropologie historique du souvenir*, L’Harmattan, 1987, pp. 213-246.

³ Johnson, W. (1971), *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Powering in Four Communes de plein exercice*, California: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.

The political leaders all emerged from the elite clique formed by school. Lamine Guèye distinguished himself first of all by his status as an attorney holding a juris doctorate. His talent as an orator and his sense of public relations also proved to be solid assets for this statesman. Léopold Sédar Senghor was a renowned qualified grammar professor. Cheikh Anta Diop and Abdoulaye Ly, who both held PhDs in the social sciences, combined their political activities with their profession as historians. Caroline Diop, the first woman to be elected to sit in the Senegalese National Assembly, was a teacher who received her diploma from the *Ecole Normale des Jeunes Filles de Rufisque* (a teachers' college). Having a proper education conferred one good status and allowed one to gain access to positions of responsibility. Given the limited number of women who attended school, the political elite was male-dominated.

And yet, while women did assume positions of high responsibility beyond their traditional function as mediators in the conveyance of political power during the precolonial period and especially during critical periods for Senegalese states and kingdoms, one is obliged to admit that the colonial era was a moment of eclipse for women, especially in the political world.⁴ Indeed, Rokhaya Fall does well to explain that “the introduction of export cultures left to man’s devices would eventually further marginalize women in society.... Women would not accompany men’s integration into society’s modern sector. They were driven away from salaried work and enrolled in school very rarely; in a nutshell, they would be confined to the traditional sector for a long time to come.”⁵ The pivotal role assumed by women in so-called subsistence societies and consequently in the “spaces of power”⁶ that were recognized for them were gradually diluted in the secondary changes suffered by the colonial system.

It was in the wake of World War II, marked by the rise of the nationalist movement, the development of political parties and

⁴ Fall, R. (1992), “Femmes et politique en Afrique: L'exemple du Sénégal” in “Yewwu Yewwi (Pour la libération des femmes) – Femmes et crises politiques en Afrique”, Symposium Notes, unpublished.

⁵ Fall, R. (1992), *Ibidem*.

⁶ Coquery, C.V. (1994), *Les Africaines – Histoire des femmes d'Afrique noire du XIXe au XXe siècle*, Paris, Editions Desjonquères, pp. 64-65.

the expansion of the constituency after French citizenship was granted to all inhabitants of the Overseas Territories, that women reappeared on the political scene and became an electoral stake to be reckoned with.

Courted by the leaders of political groups because of their political clout (approximately 52% of the electoral college) and their capacity to mobilize other sectors at the social level, they were still victims of prejudice. Moreover, they were often granted weak positions in decision-making circles. They were only represented symbolically on managerial bodies (political bureaus or steering committees of political groups). They were assigned to coordinate activities at political meetings and rallies. As Arame Diène put it, they were the ones who “did the applauding.” Colorfully dressed, they brought a note of gaiety to these types of meeting. The prevailing image of women who participated in political life was that of fashionable ladies adding a touch of folklore.

Beginning in 1945, however, women won the right to vote and carried substantial electoral weight because of their actual participation in the many episodes of political competition. Even though they were the ones to bring home the votes and seal victories, they were still confined to symbolic representation. Mrs. Caroline Diop is one illustration of this.

A famous educator and great orator wielding substantial influence over the constituency, she became involved in political activity as early as 1945. And yet, she was only elected and inducted as the first female member of Senegalese Parliament in 1963. This means that women’s lack of access to responsible positions was the flip side of their electoral and political clout.

This situation largely explains the paucity of women in Senegalese historiography. It is also difficult to describe women’s roles in the Senegalese political game when the historian only uses the classic, official sources. French historian Michelle Perrot eloquently shows that “women constitute ‘the silences in history’ despite the recent emergence of a feminine presence and voices in places that were forbidden or unfamiliar to them until then.” According to Michelle Perrot, “silent zones still subsist, however, and as far as the past is concerned, an ocean of silence, linked to the unequal sharing of the traces, of the memory and even more,

of the history of that tale that has ‘forgotten’ women for so long, as though they were doomed to the obscurity of reproduction, and – incredibly – as though they were outside of time or at least outside of any events.”⁷

This paper proposes to break that silence by taking a look at the accounts of two women who can be categorized as intermediary cadres in Senegalese political society. Moreover, it attempts to reconstruct the political careers of these two women who are atypical compared to the profile of female militants issued from the *élite évoluée*, that “enlightened group” trained in the tradition of the French assimilation schools. Arame Diène and Thioumbe Samb are in fact the products of popular tradition. They never attended school, and yet they gradually imposed themselves on the political world and became leaders of feminine activism. They both followed singular paths, but paths that were also divergent and above all marked by different fortunes.

SHARED CHARACTERISTICS

Both women have strong personalities and a great capacity for mobilizing people around a cause. They also come from the same social setting, that of the Lebou ethnic group and community, which is an indigenous population of Dakar. The other major similarity in their careers is their character as “self-made women.” Indeed, while the political leaders for the majority arose from the *élite évoluée* educated in French school, these two women are products of the “popular culture.” They did not attend French school and for that reason are categorized as “illiterate.”

Nonetheless, both played a determinant role in the women’s movement of their respective party. Arame Diène is affectionately called “*La Mère*” – the Mother of the Socialist Party,⁸ while Thioumbe

⁷ Perrot, M. (1998), *Les femmes ou les silences de l’histoire*, Champ – Flammarion, p. 1.

⁸ *Parti Socialiste* (PS – Socialist Party), The party created by Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1948 as the *Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais* (BDS – Senegalese Democratic Party) and which dominated Senegalese politics from the pre-independence era until the elections of February-March 2000 that brought its defeat and elevated Attorney Abdoulaye Wade, Secretary General of the *Parti Démocratique Sénégalais* (PDS), as third President of the Republic of Senegal.

Samb was once Vice President of the *Union Démocratique Sénégalaise* (UDS)⁹ Women's Movement and founding member of the *Union des femmes du Sénégal* (Women's Union of Senegal).

Arame Diène and Thioumbe Samb both entered politics in 1945/1946, at the ages of 19 and 20, respectively. But they were active in rival political groups until 1983.

Arame Diène declares not without pride that she “entered politics in 1945/1946 following a family tradition.” Her parents belonged to the Lebou dignitary echelon.

We were behind Goux Alfred, who is a ‘toubab’ (a white man). We fought to support Goux, the Mayor of Dakar. This choice was dictated by our loyalty to Galandou Diouf, Goux Alfred's ally and my father's friend, first and foremost. When Galandou Diouf died, only Goux remained. He was the one that we knew here in Dakar. When Lamine Guèye declared that he would run against him, I stayed with Goux because of family tradition. Lamine Guèye was certainly very popular and he was really on top of issues. He was a child of Senegal, originally from Saint-Louis. But he lived in France and there were no bonds between him and my family. By the grace of God, Lamine Guèye and his party, the Black Block, won the elections in 1948.

When Senghor became involved in politics along with Lamine Guèye, Arame Diène's family remained faithful to Alfred Goux. Taking advantage of the (subsequent) break-up between Guèye and Senghor, Goux joined the *Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais* (BDS) created by Leopold Sedar Senghor, thus finding support from Dakar's Lebou community.

Arame Diène reveals that “Senghor came to join our platform and decided to go with us. The Lebou elders, who were all dignitaries, were still there: my grandfather Alieu Codou Diène, Ousmane Diop Coumba Pathé – who is the father of Mamadou Diop, the current Mayor of Dakar, El Hadj Falla Paye – the father

⁹ The *Union Démocratique Sénégalaise* (UDS) was the Senegalese Section of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (African Democratic Movement) created by Houphouët Boigny in Bamako on October 18, 1946. Until the 1950s, this party incarnated the expression of radical nationalism against the pro-colonial reformism defended at the time by Léopold Sédar Senghor's BDS.

of Alioune Badara Paye, former Director of the Dakar Trade Center, El Hadj Ibrahima Diop – at the time the *Grand Sérigne* (religious leader) of Dakar, El Hadj Assane Ndoye and Mbaye Diagne Dégaye.

The old dignitaries got together and talked with Senghor, promising to support him. They told him, “If you have our support, you will beat Lamine Guèye.” The political agreement sealed between Senghor and the Lebou community largely determined the choice of Abasse Guèye, a dominant figure in the union movement, as fellow candidate for the position of Deputy for Senegal.

Abasse Guèye is an authentic Lebou who at the time occupied the important post of the Trade Unions Secretary General. In the first elections held in 1946, Lamine Guèye’s *Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO) and Senghor’s BDS shared the two seats. But in the 1951 elections, BDS carried both seats. Abasse Guèye was then elected and the Lebou community seemed satisfied with the electoral pact it had concluded with Senghor.

It was on that same basis of support for Abasse Guèye that Thioumbe Samb became involved in politics. She explains:

Since Abasse Guèye was a Lebou, all Lebous supported his candidacy for deputy. My husband, who at the time was a member of the Senegalese Democratic Union (UDS/RDA) had given me permission to join the ranks of the BDS youth movement. After the BDS victory, I ceased my first activity and rejoined my husband in the Senegalese Democratic Union.

Both women give meaning to their commitment to politics. As Arame Diène forcefully pointed out, “Politics was different then from what it is today, yes, indeed! In those days, if someone wanted to be a candidate for elections... it was the supporters who financed his campaign.... In Senghor’s case, it was his followers’ commitment and money that facilitated his election... men as well as women contributed.”

Arame Diène is quite emotional about supporters’ loss of political ethics, for they now haggle over “honors” in the Socialist Party (PS). She speaks of the obvious difference in commitment and motivation between supporters of the past and those of today. And she is quite outspoken in saying that:

Nowadays, it is chiefly self-gain and material interests that motivate people's political commitment. They join one group or another for monetary reasons.

Criticism of "political nomadism or transhumance" is heightened when Arame Diène finds consolation in the purity of feelings that convinced followers of her generation to battle for one cause or another. This same bitterness overcomes Thioumbe Samb when she exclaims, "the problem today is that it's all a game, with misappropriation of funds, partying...."

Regarding their intellectual profile, Arame Diène and Thioumbe Samb are the antithesis of the models molded for the enlightened elite who earned their diplomas in French school. These ladies never warmed any school benches, but they feel honored to have been among the first woman activists to experience those heroic times when their parties were being built. Arame Diène recalls with pride that "at the time, it was us ignorant ones, the dummies, who applauded; we fought, got into scrapes and fielded insults – all of that, until our party could stand on its own two feet!"

Thioumbe Samb clarifies why she never attended school: not everyone went to school because the Lebou in particular refused to let girls attend. School was seen as a way of falling to the wayside. It corrupted one's soul by trickery. It was "the place where one learns to conquer without being right," according to the views of the marabout of Samba Diallo, the protagonist in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's book, *Ambiguous Journey*.

But faced with school as forced upon them by the Europeans, the first children sent there for instruction were captives. Gradually, the sons of chiefs and then other children followed. Girls had to be protected, for they were considered to be the guardians of tradition and the souls of culture. They were not supposed to have contact with the French school system.

Beyond these similarities, these two women's careers followed drastically different paths.

TWO DIFFERENT FORTUNES

Thioumbe Samb was formed by the UDS/RDA, a nationalist radical party created in Senegal after the Constitutive Congress of the

Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (Democratic African Movement) held on October 18, 1946. This party banked enormously on training its followers in order to face the ostracism and repression perpetrated by the colonial power. Thioumbe Samb observed that the strength of the UDS headed by Abdoulaye Guèye Cabri and Bâ Thierno lay in the education and training of its members. For, she says, “the other political groups only prepared their members for fights, casting insults and applauding, (while) the UDS/RDA emphasized educating women.”

Thioumbe Samb remembers:

Young high schoolers were our teachers; they taught us after 6 pm, after their classes ended. Amadou Racine Ndiaye was sent to teach those of us who lived in the Geule Tapée neighborhood. He also taught us how to perform certain formalities – for example, how to affix our seal at the end of a document... because we would form delegations to ask permission of the governor’s representative to hold various meetings and political assemblies... since we were only authorized to assemble in movie houses, we would talk to the owners, who would allow us to rent their halls between 3 pm and 8 pm. We did that in order to educate the female members and raise their conscience so that they could take control of the country once independence was gained.

In 1957, the BDS and UDS/RDA, which were the two major groups, merged to establish the *Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais* (BDS), which became the *Union Progressiste Sénégalaise* (UPS – the Senegalese Progressive Union), predecessor of the Socialist Party (PS). Since 1947, it has preserved a near-hegemony over the Senegalese political scene and modeled the behavior of actors in that political arena.

When the BDS was created, however, part of the UDS/RDA rejected the new party’s pro-colonial line of reform. They prepared to set up a political group that drew on traditions combating colonialism. Thioumbe Samb was fully involved in this political tendency, which at the time was headed by a pharmacist from Saint Louis, Majhmout Diop. Their project led to the creation of the *Parti Africain pour l’Indépendance (PAI)* in 1957. Between 1957 and 1983, Thioumbe Samb stood out as the most highly visible female

leader of the PAI, which joined the opposition front at the close of the colonial period and after Senegal gained independence in 1960.

But in 1983, Thioumbe Samb returned to the Socialist Party with illusions of lending a hand to the country's reconstruction under the leadership of President Abdou Diouf. In a way, this turnabout marked the end of a political career. It was a failure, for this conversion instead turned into a forced withdrawal from the political scene.

This was an ironic turn in history for the woman who had fought so long for independence, first as an activist in the *Union Démocratique Sénégalaise, Section du Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (UDS/RDA – Senegalese Democratic Union – Democratic African Movement Section)*, then with the African Party for Independence (PAI). These political groups were representative of the nationalist wing in the fight against the colonial system.

At the personal level, her rival Arame Diène, activist in a group that first advocated pro-colonial reform and then neocolonial reform – the Senegalese Democratic Bloc (USB), which became the Senegalese Progressive Union (USP) and finally the Socialist Party (PS) – enjoyed a happier fate. In 1983, her political and social careers reached their apotheosis with her election to the National Assembly as a Deputy. She had attained the summit of her political aspirations. She had the last word on those intellectuals who only joined the party for ulterior motives. Arame Diène reveals acute political perspicacity when she analyzes her advancement. She views her nomination to the deputy candidates' list as a change in times and political values in the national context.

In 1981, Prime Minister Abdou Diouf succeeded Léopold Sédar Senghor as President of the Republic. He got down to building a different legitimacy. The 1983 elections were held in this context. Arame Diène replays her audience with Abdou Diouf regarding the choice of candidates for parliamentary seats, who were to be named by the Socialist Party.

...I went to see him in my capacity as regional head (for Dakar), because no one could take any (other) woman and ignore me, for I was the one who had won the region. I said to him '(Mr.) President

of the Republic, I have come to see you because I heard that you were going to name eight women for the deputies' list and I am the regional leader. When Senghor was in, our movement carried enough clout to elect me, but if had I wanted to be deputy, he would have rejected my request because he only believes in people with diplomas, but you know what the real situation is, and I am part of the Lebou reality.'

He replied to me, 'If the Regional Union presents you as a candidate, then I will put you on my list.'

Well, my Union nominated me without a hitch. My comrades also nominated my replacement, Ramatoulaye Seck. By the grace of God, we were both elected. There was another woman named Aïda Mbaye, Head of the Tambacounda Regional Union – she was originally from Saint-Louis as well but had not attended school. She was nominated by her Regional Union and then elected to the National Assembly.

For Arame Diène, Diouf's succession to the Presidency induced a change of values and criteria used for promotion. As long as Senghor was President of the Republic, she had put a cross on receiving any honors, including the post of Deputy. She explained, "If Senghor were still in, I would never be a Deputy. Senghor only believes in diplomas. Abdou Diouf also believes in diplomas, but he knows what things are really like. He has combined diplomas with realities."

Arame Diène interprets this change in the assessment of how promotions were awarded as progress. For, as she indicates, "in the 1988 elections, there were four of us – two women and two men; therefore, it seems to me that things certainly are (*sic*) evolving...."

Back in 1983 already, there were two "dumb females," Aïda Mbaye and myself, seated in the National Assembly, but we made an impact there. Arame Diène is aware of having come a long way. She also views her appointment as the crowning point of her patience and sense of political timeliness.

She reveals her satisfaction when evaluating her political career philosophically and with a touch of humor, "because politics is not a sprint – it's a marathon. If you are in a hurry, you won't get anywhere; you must go step by step, very slowly. Look what I had to go through before becoming a deputy in 1983."

It is this determination that incites her when she measures the difficulties encountered in participating in the parliamentary institution game. She recounts the incident that brought her recognition as a full-fledged member.

When I was elected as Deputy for the first time, during a parliamentary session, I was seated next to a male deputy and asked to take the floor. He told me in a bantering tone, ‘If you ask for the floor, no one will give it to you because we speak French here.’

‘I retorted, ‘Oh, really? Well, then today, the National Assembly is going to explode (she chuckles) because if I have to stay in an Assembly where I cannot speak, then I am leaving.’

I raised my hand and the President of the National Assembly told me, ‘Alright, Arame, I will write down your name; you can express your opinion in Wolof, for we can’t elect someone who can’t be allowed to speak, can we? (more chuckles).’

I was the first to speak in Wolof in the National Assembly.

In this institution and during parliamentary sessions, Arame limited the range of her interventions: “I did not speak when there were sessions concerning defense (or) finance... but as soon as discussion opened about the peasantry, health, women and youth, I would speak up – in Wolof, of course, but what I said was clear and comprehensible to everyone; we all understand Wolof.”

By assuming such an attitude, Arame Diène refused to play “*représentation-alibi*.” Quite the contrary – she was proud of her office as a Deputy and insisted on serving in that capacity for all it was worth.

Pride and deception are the two primary factors that appear after close scrutiny of these two woman leaders’ political careers.

A CLOSE LOOK AT TWO LIFE STORIES

The exercise of reconstructing these two women itineraries’ reveals the entire range of historical discourse reuttered based on oral sources. By reconstructing the word of these two women who never attended French school, they were allowed to tell their own story. They began to recall events and rediscover, through the weave of facts, the sense and logic of their political engagement.

They also showed the extent to which they were able to interpret events in which they were prime participants.

The two personalities evoked here belong to the ranks of the “forgotten ones” in Senegalese historiography for two reasons. First of all because collective memory is generally male memory. And secondly, because they are neither heroes nor stars in the political world. They are ordinary citizens accidentally invited to tell the story of their lives. Once they have moved beyond the surprise that researchers should be interested in their careers, they realize that their political activities have become invisible and participate in rewriting history in another way. From that point on, they gain confidence in themselves and set down to telling and describing their concerns, their state of mind, and even their judgment of history. Their testimony is brought forth not just to blow their own horns; it is, rather, the reconstruction of a certain memory, a past revisited with undisguised nostalgia.

Arame Diène is satisfied that she has remained faithful to a political tradition and that her efforts were rewarded. Her commitment compensated after 37 years of activism has prompted her to repeat that politics is a long-distance race. She is aware of remaining a part of the people and hence shares honor and disappointment with her extended family. Her career is a model that was able to gain prestige due to changes in the political climate. Her sense of the way that relationships in power play evolve enabled her to negotiate her access to the office of deputy, which had long been reserved for the political elite educated in French schools.

From then on, she was separated from the anonymous fate of that great mass of woman activists who work for the glory of other (male) political leaders. She became an actor and insisted on assuming a primary role in her Lebou community. Hence, she feels honored by the social prestige she enjoys within the Socialist Party and socially.

The portrait of Arame Diène as a satisfied woman contrasts drastically with that of Thioumbe Samb, the disappointed and bitter leader now retired from the political scene. Thioumbe Samb, an activist from the very beginning who fought for independence, now feels frustrated and marginalized. She is not a part of what she

calls “the beneficiaries of independence.” Living in the quiet neighborhood of Fann Hock, she leads an almost solitary life in her modest townhouse that was once PAI headquarters. This retired lifestyle is a stark contrast with the lively ambiance radiating from Arame Diène’s family compound located in the working-class neighborhood of Medina in Dakar.

Thioumbe Samb makes no secret of her bitterness. This PAI activist who was arrested and thrown into prison in Saint-Louis in 1960 during the municipal elections regards herself as a martyr. “We women who fought for independence are forgotten today,” she declares. Her disappointment is even more acute because she was a victim of humiliation and repression under Senghor’s regime, and went underground with the PAI between 1960 and 1976.

Driven by her conviction that the PAI should be legalized, she launched herself into the political arena, still standing beside Majhmout Diop, between 1976 and 1983.

1983 marked a fatal turn in Thioumbe Samb’s life, when she decided to rejoin the Socialist Party, which she had fought against for 36 long years. After the first two months of a show of cordiality, she was met by the hostility of her new allies, who perceived her as a rival. Between the two leaders, past enmities were replaced by Arame Diène’s fear that the new recruit might crystallize feelings by developing a trend among the women in the Socialist Party’s Dakar wing.

Thereafter an active member of the Socialist Party, Thioumbe Samb felt uncomfortable in her new group. She realized too late that her deception was the price to pay for a fatal choice – the renunciation of her past as an activist in the opposition front. Her political gullibility was likened to instability. She is the big loser in the game of political alliances played successfully by Abdou Diouf when he focused on widening his political base between 1981 and 1985.

Arame Diène can therefore strut before Thioumbe and proudly proclaim that she is a long distance runner who has won. Thioumbe Samb’s only consolation is to cling to a past when, back in 1957, the PAI decorated her with the Gold Medal of the Women’s Union of Senegal. She shows visitors her photo collection as added proof of the prestigious roles she assumed in Senegalese political life.

It is hard not to feel her disappointment and indeed the drama she is suffering, considering the extreme indifference of those around her. Sharing Thioumbe Samb's deception, one woman on the research team commented at the end of the latter's interview that "history is not fair." But perhaps we should also understand that irony is also a part of history!