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## WOMEN IN SENEGAL'S POLITICS AND SOCIETY

### PRIESTESSES, PRINCESSES, PRESIDENTS?

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"Heroines du quotidien" is how Senegalese film-maker Sembène Ousmane described the women of his country – heroines of everyday life. Their position in Senegal, one of the poorest countries in the world, is often unenviable – as in many countries, they are always the first victims of poverty, violence, injustice and oppression. Women are discriminated against in Senegalese family law and have no rights to land ownership.<sup>1</sup> The country's laws are in need of intensive revamping in order to reflect the gender equality that has been trumpeted by both the outgoing government of President Abdoulaye Wade and that of his successor Macky Sall. Despite the many mechanisms of discrimination in all areas of Senegalese society, it still possesses the fundamental requirements to achieve the effective and efficient participation of women in its political, social and economic development. One of these fundamentals, and an important one, is the status of women in Senegal's pre-colonial history. As in many other countries in Africa, during this era women were held in high esteem. They were considered to be the bedrock of society and often held high positions as priestesses and rulers.

1 | Traditional and Muslim inheritance law is responsible for this discrimination, cf. Adama Coulibaly, "Acces des femmes á la terre au Sénégal. Trois femmes sur quatre n'ont pas accès á la terre", <http://cncr.org/spip.php?article441> (accessed 18 Feb 2013).

## THE ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN PRE-COLONIAL SENEGAL

In the past and still today, women have played their part in Senegal's society and politics, but in very different contexts. Senegal's population is extremely diverse, consisting of over 20 distinct ethnic groups with very different social structures. The north, an area that in terms of both climate and society is considered part of the Sahel region, is dominated by strictly hierarchical social structures. The largest area of present-day Senegal was ruled by the ancient West African empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai.<sup>2</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries they were replaced by smaller Senegalese kingdoms that form the basis of the country's current 14 regions: Walo and Futa Toro in the north, Diolof, Kayor and Baol in the central north and Gabu, Sine and Saloum in the central south. The empires and kingdoms were all run on a caste system that was partly the result of the division of labour, as in medieval Europe. Such caste systems continue to thrive among certain ethnic groups of the former empires, particularly the Manding, Wolof, Toucouleur and, to some extent, the Serer. However, the strict hierarchical system was combined with a traditional form of democracy.<sup>3</sup> From the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, women often played important, even leading roles in the societies and governments of these realms,<sup>4</sup> particularly as the mothers, wives and sisters of kings,<sup>5</sup> but also as queens in their own right and later as fighters against the forces of colonialism.

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The southern part of Senegal (the present-day regions of Casamance and part of Kedougou), was and remains home to many ethnic groups with largely egalitarian social structures, such as the Diola,<sup>6</sup> Balante and Mankagne in

2 | Cf. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Die Geschichte Schwarzafrikas*, Peter Hammer Verlag, Wuppertal, 1979, 137-153; *Histoire Générale de l'Afrique IV.: L'Afrique du XII<sup>ème</sup> au XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, UNESCO/NEA, 1985.

3 | Cf. Pathé Diagn, "De la démocratie traditionnelle", *Présence Africaine*, 97, 1976.

4 | *Ibid.*, 32.

5 | Boubacar Barry, *Le Royaume du Waalo. Le Sénégal avant la Conquête*, François Maspéro, Paris, 1972.

6 | Cf. Françoise Ki-Zerbo, *Les sources du droit chez les Diola du Sénégal*, Karthala, Paris, 1979.

the lower Casamance and Guinea-Bissau, and the Bassari,<sup>7</sup> Beydik and Coniagi in the Kedougou region and in Guinea. They have a fundamentally democratic concept of political participation that also includes women. The votes of older men and women are afforded greater importance because society holds them in great regard. Older women are considered to be the guardians of tradition and often serve as priestesses. Succession is generally matrilineal, (through the mother's line). This has been the subject of intensive research within Diola<sup>8</sup> and Bassari<sup>9</sup> societies, and explains why women in ethnic groups with egalitarian or matrilineal structures play a significant role in all political, economic and spiritual decisions. For example, it was and still is quite common for women to be priestesses in Diola society.<sup>10</sup> Women often play an important role as mediators between the spiritual and material worlds, but they are also indispensable in mediating social conflicts such as the separatist fighting in the Casamance.<sup>11</sup>

Before Islam became the predominant religion in West Africa, matrilineal succession was common amongst many of the region's ethnic groups. Even today, many Senegalese identify themselves by their maternal line.

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In pre-colonial society, matriarchal rule was also widespread among many Senegalese groups. In contrast to matrilineal succession, where the male successor of the king's sister inherits the throne, in the matriarchal system women control both power and resources. They often allowed their eldest son to administer these resources, but they had the final say.<sup>12</sup> The Senegalese lawyer Fatou Kiné Camara has

7 | Cf. Pierre Gnanga Boubane, "Impacts des valeurs et des religions traditionnelles dans la promotion de la citoyenneté", *Dakar, Le dialogue interreligieux*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Dakar, 2012, 10.

8 | Cf. Odile Tendeng Weidler, "Développement social dans la société diola", in: *Religion et développement social*, [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_31260-1522-3-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_31260-1522-3-30.pdf) (accessed 18 Feb 2013), 34.

9 | Cf. Jean Girard, *Les Bassari du Sénégal. Fils du Caméléon*, Harmattan, Paris, 2000.

10 | Cf. Odile Goerg (ed.), *Perspectives historiques sur le genre en Afrique*, Paris, Harmattan, 2007, 198.

11 | Cf. Séverine Awenengo Dalberto, "Ethnicité Joola et genre: femmes et constructions identitaires en Casamance au XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle (Sénégal)", in: Goerg, n. 10, 209.

12 | Cf. Issa Laye Thiaw, "Le matriarchat, source de l'acquisition des biens et de légitimation des pouvoirs politiques dans le ►

conducted research on how female power is legitimised by their spiritual power, and stated: "Women are the guardians of knowledge. The power of knowledge (both scientific and mystical) and the position of women in Africa are closely linked, women hold the command staff (or royal sceptre) as a sign that it is they who have the knowledge."<sup>13</sup>

## PRE-COLONIAL AND ANTI-COLONIAL HEROINES

When history lessons in Senegal turn to the question of powerful women, the first names mentioned are those of Queen Ndieumbout Mbodj and her sister, Queen Ndate Yalla, who ruled over the kingdom of Waalo on the Senegal River in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. They were

forced to defend their kingdom against invasions by the Maurs from the Trarza region of present-day Mauretania and against the advances of the French colonial forces.

**Although power officially lay with her husband, it was Linguere Ndieumbout who actually headed up the government and signed the treaties with the French.**

Although power officially lay with her husband, it was Linguere (Queen) Ndieumbout who headed up the government and signed treaties with the French. After her death, Linguere Ndate Yalla took over as head of state and ordered a military campaign against the French invaders under General Faidherbe. But she was defeated and forced into exile in the neighbouring kingdom of Kayor, where she died just one year later – the last queen of Waalo.<sup>14</sup>

"Death is better than slavery" was the motto of the "Amazons of Nder",<sup>15</sup> who set themselves on fire on a Tuesday in November 1819 in order to escape slavery. During an attack by Maur invaders, the women of the village of Nder dressed up in their absent husbands' clothes and fought against the soldiers, forcing them to retreat. Their pride wounded, the soldiers marshalled their forces and returned. The women gathered in a large hut and set themselves on fire, driven by their desperation to become heroines and symbols of national pride.

*Sénégal d'autrefois", Projet de Temple des femmes initiées, COSEF, CREDILA, IDHP, Dakar, 2007, 30.*

13 | Cf. Fatou Kiné Camara, *Pouvoir et justice dans la tradition des peuples noirs. Philosophie et pratique*, Harmattan Etudes africaines, Paris, 2007, 193 (translation by the author).

14 | Barry, n. 5.

15 | Cf. Sylvia Serbin, *Reines et heroines d'Afrique*, Sepia, Paris, 2011.

The passenger ferry that links Dakar with the southern region of Casamance bears the name of a heroine from the colonial era: Aline Sitoé Diatta. During the early years of the First World War, this royal priestess from Kabrousse

**Aline Sitoé Diatta sparked a civil resistance movement across the whole of the Casamance region and was finally imprisoned in 1943 and deported to Timbuktu, where she died shortly afterwards.**

in the Casamance called on the people of the region to resist French colonialism and to refuse the compulsory surrender of part of their rice harvest to the colonial troops. She sparked a civil resistance movement across the whole of the Casamance region and was eventually imprisoned in 1943 and deported to Timbuktu, where she died shortly afterwards. Aline Sitoé Diatta has become a symbol of the resistance, but also of cultural pride. Among the Diola, the king is also a priest, which explains the high symbolic value of Aline Sitoé Diatta for the status of women in Diola society.<sup>16</sup>

But recalling the many women who held positions of power in pre-colonial times should not blind us to the fact that women have been and remain severely under-represented in Senegalese politics. However, after a gender parity law was passed by the National Assembly on 24 May 2010, they now make up almost half of all MPs in the Senegalese parliament. But forty years went by between Caroline Faye Diop, the first female MP (1963-1978), later Senegal's Social Minister and the country's first female Prime Minister, Mame Madior Boye (2000-2001). Three women have been candidates for the presidency: in 2000, Marième Ly was the first, and for a long time the only, female presidential candidate in Senegal. However, she withdrew her candidacy shortly before the election. It was not until the elections in 2012 that two women stood for the presidency: law professor Amsatou Sow Sidibé and fashion designer Diouma Dieng.<sup>17</sup>

16 | Cf. Fatou Sarr, "De Ndaté Yalla à Aline Sitoé, un siècle de résistance", Communication faite au Musée de la femme de Gorée, 2007, [http://sengenre-ucad.org/Ndatt%E9\\_Yalla%20\\_%E0\\_%20Aline\\_Sitoye\\_Diatta.pdf](http://sengenre-ucad.org/Ndatt%E9_Yalla%20_%E0_%20Aline_Sitoye_Diatta.pdf) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

17 | Yandé Diop, "La présidentielle de 2012 Les sénégalais pas prêts à confier les rênes à une dame", 7 Feb 2012, Rewmi.com, [http://rewmi.com/\\_a56303.html](http://rewmi.com/_a56303.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

## **WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT UNDER SENGHOR, DIOUF, WADE AND SALL**

The number of women at ministerial level is still very low. The first governments of the socialist Senghor era (1960-1980) had only two women cabinet members, while under the (also socialist) administration of Abdou Diouf (1980-2000) three to four women were given ministerial posts. The proportion of women increased slightly but not significantly in the liberal governments, increasing from five to eight. In view of the fact that the Senghor cabinets were smaller (20 ministers), whereas later under President Wade they expanded to 40 ministers, it is clear that the numbers of women in government actually stagnated. It is, however, to the credit of Senegal's third President, Abdoulaye Wade (2000-2012), that he appointed Mame Madior Boye, an internationally-renowned lawyer and Senegal's Justice Minister since 2000, to the position of Prime Minister in 2001.<sup>18</sup> But perhaps the fact that Boye was not a member of a political party contributed to the fact that she was replaced just two years later. She and her government also attracted strong criticism after the "Diola" ferry capsized<sup>19</sup> in September 2002.

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After the change of government under Macky Sall in October 2012,<sup>20</sup> seven women were given ministerial posts.<sup>21</sup> Two key ministries are now headed up by women. Third in the political hierarchy, lawyer and human rights activist Aminata Touré is proving to be a fresh breeze for the Senegalese judiciary. She has taken some difficult and unpopular

18 | Cf. "Les femmes au Sénégal", *Cahiers de l'Alternance*, Centre d'Études des Sciences et Techniques de l'Information (CESTI) and KAS, Graphi Plus, Dakar, 2006, 83-84.

19 | Cf. Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé, "Regierung Senegals gerät nach Schiffskatastrophe ins Wanken", KAS-Länderbericht, 7 Feb 2002, <http://kas.de/senegal-mali/de/publications/897> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

20 | Government of the Republic of Senegal, <http://www.gouv.sn/-Le-Gouvernement> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

21 | The government of 26 Mar 2012 comprised 25 ministers, since 12 Oct 2012 it has been 31, but the proportion of women remained unchanged.

decisions,<sup>22</sup> particularly with regard to the criminal prosecution of high-ranking members of the Wade regime. The lifting of parliamentary immunity for three former ministers in order to investigate their alleged appropriation of state funds sent shock waves across Senegal at the beginning of 2013. These accusations are now being vehemently contested by the former ruling PDS party, which is now in opposition.<sup>23</sup>



Former Prime Minister Mame Madior Boye was harshly criticised after the “Diola” ferry capsized in September 2002. Here she meets survivors. | Source: © Seyllou / picture-alliance / dpa.

Next in the hierarchy comes the Health and Social Minister Awa Coll Seck, who, like Aminata Touré has had an international career and is a widely-respected expert. She has set clear and systematic goals for her health reforms and is keen to work closely with the trade unions that have shut down some parts of Senegal’s health system for weeks on end.<sup>24</sup>

22 | B. Dione, “Aminata Touré ministre de la justice: ,Il n’y a aucune dimension politique ou politicienne””, *Le Soleil online*, 18 Dec 2012, [http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=23623](http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23623) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

23 | Cf. Agence de Presse Sénégalaise (APS), “Les Libéraux et démocrates veulent faire annuler la levée de l’immunité parlementaire de trois députés”, 10 Jan 2013, [http://www.aps.sn/articles.php?id\\_article=107724](http://www.aps.sn/articles.php?id_article=107724) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

24 | Eugène Kaly, “8<sup>ème</sup> congrès du SUTSAS: Awa Marie Coll Seck demande aux syndicalistes d’arrêter la rétention des données sanitaires”, *Le Soleil online*, 22 Dec 2012, [http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?id=23730%3A&option=com\\_content&view=article](http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?id=23730%3A&option=com_content&view=article) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

Three female ministers from the socialist era were reinstated after the election victory of the liberal Macky Sall as part of a grand coalition formed before the presidential election in order to stand against Abdoulaye Wade. Aminata Mbengue Ndiaye, the socialist mayor of the state capital Louga was appointed Minister of Animal Husbandry. Responsibility for agriculture was split away from this post, and such politically-motivated actions explain the country's large number of ministries. Khoudia Mbaye of the former communist LD MPT party was appointed Minister for Urban Development and Habitat, and former socialist luminary Mata Sy Diallo, who is now a member of the Social-Democratic party, looked after trade and industry for the first three months of the government, but had to step down for health reasons. With his appointment of Arame Ndoeye as Minister for Regional Planning and Administration<sup>25</sup> Macky Sall sent a message: his colleague of many years on issues of decentralisation and a committed member of the Alliance pour la République APR Yakaar, Macky Sall's party (APR) was to be the person who would reform Senegal's decentralisation policy and streamline the regional authorities. This appears to be laying the foundations for the continued success of the APR Yakaar at the local elections in 2014.

Aminata Tall served for many years as a minister and Chief-of-Staff under Abdoulaye Wade and was also mayor of Diourbel. Over recent years she has stepped away from Wade, setting up her own political group, which then merged with Sall's APR.<sup>26</sup> After his election victory, he once again appointed the experienced politician and administrator as Chief-of-Staff, a move that astonished and even enraged some of his party colleagues.<sup>27</sup> When

25 | Interview with Arame Ndoeye about the challenges of the regional authorities: "Mme Arame Ndoeye, ministre de l'Amenagement du Territoire et des Collectivites locales: 'Le Sommet Africités permettra de situer le rôle et la place des territoires dans la construction du continent africain'", *Le Soleil online*, [http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=23204](http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com_content&id=23204) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

26 | Cf. Arona Basse, "Fusion entre Apr et Set Sellal: Aminata Tall et Macky Sall, pour le meilleur et pour le pire", *Seneweb.com*, [http://seneweb.com/news/Politique/\\_n\\_81960.html](http://seneweb.com/news/Politique/_n_81960.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

27 | *SenewebNews*, "Aminata Tall sur les attaques dirigées contre sa personne: 'J'ai demandé à ma base de ne pas réagir'", *Seneweb.com*, [http://seneweb.com/news/Politique/\\_n\\_81556.html](http://seneweb.com/news/Politique/_n_81556.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).



the President of the Economic and Social Council died in the middle of January, Macky Sall quickly appointed Aminata Tall as his successor.<sup>28</sup> Now a woman is heading up the country's second most important institution, as since the Senate was abolished in October 2012, the Economic and Social Council has been expanded to become the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, making it the most important body in Senegal after the Parliament.<sup>29</sup> Before last year's elections, Aminata Tall was viewed as a possible presidential candidate – the future will show how her career develops.



Awa Coll Seck, minister for health and social security, has set clear and systematic goals for her health reforms. | Source: Robert Scoble / flickr (CC BY).

## **WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT**

Caroline Faye<sup>30</sup> was the first MP to take a seat in Senegal's National Assembly. The elementary school teacher and wife of MP and Minister Demba Diop was elected into parliament

28 | Cf. APS, "Aminata Tall portée à la tête du Conseil économique, social et environnemental", [http://aps.sn/articles.php?id\\_article=108065](http://aps.sn/articles.php?id_article=108065) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

29 | The members of the Council are hand-picked by the Head of State and appointed for a five-year term to act as counsellors to the government, Parliament and the courts. The selection of its members is not impeccably democratic, but then this was also true of the now defunct Senate, where two-thirds of senators were appointed by the President and one-third by the so-called "big voters" with close ties to the regime.

30 | Cf. also: CESTI and KAS, n. 18, 78.

during the second legislative period of independent Senegal in 1963 and for many years was the only woman among 80 MPs. Caroline Faye was also the only female board member of the political office of the Bloc démocratique sénégalais (BDS), the forerunner of the PS, the Socialist Party of Senegal under the country's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor. Later she was Chair of the Socialist Women's Association of Senegal for many years. In 1964 she became Deputy Secretary-General of the Pan-African Women's Association and Vice-President of the Senegalese Women's Union. In 1978 Senghor made the widow of Demba Diop – who was assassinated in 1967 – Minister for Women and Social Affairs.<sup>31</sup>

In 1973, exactly ten years after Caroline Faye entered Parliament, Awa Dia Thiam<sup>32</sup> became the second woman to win a seat.<sup>33</sup> She had also honed her political skills in the Socialist Party, which was effectively the only party in Senegal at the time. After another ten years, the "Mother of the Socialist Party", Adja Arame Diene,<sup>34</sup> joined the National Assembly, where she represented the interests of Senegalese women until 2001, just four years before her death. The Chair of the Socialist Women's Association was the first MP to push for the national Wolof language to be allowed in parliament. Until then, the sole official language was French, despite the fact that it was spoken by only ten per cent of the population. With this, Arame Diene made a significant step towards greater linguistic democracy in parliament and society.

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In 1978, the liberal Coumba Ba was the first opposition female MP to be elected to parliament. She entered the house immediately after the liberal Parti Démocratique

31 | Ben Cheikh, "Hommage: Caroline Faye, pionnière de l'émancipation de la femme", *Le Soleil online*, 23 Mar 2011, [http://lesoleil.sn/?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2751](http://lesoleil.sn/?option=com_content&view=article&id=2751) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

32 | Cf. CESTI and KAS, n. 18, 81.

33 | APS, "Awa Dia Thiam, deuxième députée du Sénégal: Une grande militante tombée en politique par un curieux hasard", 27 Jun 2012, [http://aps-sn.net/articles.php?id\\_article=98525](http://aps-sn.net/articles.php?id_article=98525) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

34 | Dakar actu, "Adja Arame Diène, la fidélité érigée au rang de culte", 21 Jun 2012, [http://dakaractu.com/\\_a25638.html](http://dakaractu.com/_a25638.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

**The next generation of female politicians had rich parliamentary and ministerial careers, among them Aminata Tall, the current Chair of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council.**

Sénégalais (PDS) was founded by former opposition politician and later president Abdoulaye Wade, and she represented the party in parliament from 1978 to 1983 and again from 1988 to 1998. The next generation of female politicians had rich parliamentary and ministerial careers, among them Aminata Tall, the current Chair of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council. Like Awa Diop and Aida Mbodj, she was to become one of the first really strong women of the liberal regime, and indeed had already held ministerial and parliamentary posts before Abdoulaye Wade came to power in 2000.<sup>35</sup>

Although strong women in the major parties have played their part in parliamentary debates and decisions and the proportion of women in politics has grown steadily, it is still clear that up until the last legislative period in the National Assembly women were very under-represented.<sup>36</sup> The figures speak for themselves: in 1963 the proportion of women stood at 0.8 per cent, by 1983 it had grown to seven per cent and to 13 per cent in 1993. By 2010 the figure still remained below 25 per cent. It was only with the passing of the gender parity law in 2010 that the number of women in the National Assembly rose to 43 per cent.<sup>37</sup> The legislative proposal was passed by the National Assembly on 24 May 2010, followed by the Senate shortly afterwards, stating that at least half of the candidates parties put up for election had to be women.<sup>38</sup> However, absolute gender equality was not achieved due to various procedural difficulties. Thus, for example, in the 2012 parliamentary elections only one party had a woman at the top of their list of candidates. Women continue to be the minority in the Executive Committee of the National Assembly, making up just six out of 16 members.

35 | Cf. CESTI and KAS, n. 18, 87-89.

36 | Cf. Aissatou De, "Femmes à l'Assemblée nationale du Sénégal", *Démocratie, où est tu?*, COSEF, Dakar 1999, 63-70.

37 | Cf. Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé, "Parlamentswahlen in Senegal", KAS-Länderbericht, Jul 2012, 2, [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_31564-1522-1-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_31564-1522-1-30.pdf) (accessed 21 Jan 2013); Souleymane Faye, "Percée des femmes à l'Assemblée nationale", Inter Press Service (IPS), 12 Jul 2012, [http://ipsinternational.org/fr/\\_note.asp?idnews=7122](http://ipsinternational.org/fr/_note.asp?idnews=7122) (accessed 21 Jan 2013); AFP, "L'Assemblée nationale adopte la loi sur la 'parité absolue'", *Jeune Afrique*, 15 May 2010, <http://jeuneafrique.com/Article/DEPAFP20100515185422> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

38 | AFP, *ibid.*

## WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES – FROM MAYOR TO PRESIDENT?

The political parties reflect social structures, so it is hardly surprising that the active members of many political parties tend to be men. In some of the parties, strong women have become “figureheads”, such as Aminata Mbengue Ndiaye and Aissatou Tall Sall in the PS or Aida Mbodj and Aminata Diallo in the PDS. Their real political weight tends to become obvious in the local elections. The aforementioned politicians were mayors of their cities or towns,<sup>39</sup> but it is still the case that only seven women hold mayoral office across Senegal’s 166 towns and communes.

**Only seven women hold mayoral office across Senegal’s 166 towns and communes. At least the number of women on city and local councils has increased slightly over recent years.**

At least the number of women on city and local councils has increased slightly over recent years. But it remains to be seen whether the gender parity law will lead to a significant rise in the number of women elected in the local elections due to be held in 2014. The Vice-President of the Regional Council in Thies, Elene Tine, was for many years the party spokesperson for the Alliance des forces de progrès (AFP), led by the current President of the National Assembly, Moustapha Niasse. But when this popular and charismatic politician failed to be given a ministerial post or the top position on the party list, she stood for election as the second candidate for the party under Marabuts Djamil Mansour Sy and was elected to parliament.<sup>40</sup>

The real work takes place at party level. As long as almost all the party leaders and chairs are men, equality for women in Senegalese politics is still a long way off. There is only one female party leader: Marième Wone Ly founded the Parti pour la Renaissance Africaine (PARENA) in the 1990s. In 2000 she was the only woman to stand against President Wade, but withdrew her candidacy. However, her failed attempt to gain the Republic’s highest office did not dent her success as a political opinion-former. Ly supported Wade during his whole term of office and after Macky Sall’s victory in 2012 she let it be known that she was once again

39 | Koffigan E. Adigbli, “Les femmes toujours marginalisées dans les élections”, IPS, 2 Apr 2009, [http://ipsinternational.org/fr/\\_note.asp?idnews=5287](http://ipsinternational.org/fr/_note.asp?idnews=5287) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

40 | Cf. Gierczynski-Bocandé, n. 37, 3.

prepared to work with the government.<sup>41</sup> In this way she showed herself to be a politician who was open to compromise, but in doing so demonstrated a lack of clear profile. She also has no local political base, as was the case with two other female candidates in the 2012 presidential elections.

**Amsatou Sow Sidibé failed to achieve even two per cent of the vote in the presidential elections in 2012, and other female candidates such as fashion designer Diouma Dieng also lagged well behind the two per cent mark.**

In the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections, the law professor and Director of the Senegalese Institute for Human Rights and Peace at the University of Dakar (Institut des droits humains et de la paix, IDHP), Amsatou Sow Sidibé, took over as head of a citizens' movement without party status and represented them as a presidential candidate. But Sow Sidibé failed to achieve even two per cent of the vote, and other female candidates such as fashion designer Diouma Dieng also lagged well behind the two per cent mark – to no-one's surprise. Observers were more astonished to see how the utterly politically inexperienced Diouma Dieng made it onto the list of candidates, whereas Amsatou Sow Sidibé and her Organisation CAR Lennen<sup>42</sup> (Convergence des acteurs pour la défense des valeurs républicaines/Convergence of stakeholders for the defence of republican values) had been on the political scene for some time before these elections.<sup>43</sup> Amsatou Sow Sidibé's commitment to equality for women, peace and the fight against injustice was not rewarded with success in the presidential elections, but she is now involved in the political decision-making process as an advisor with ministerial status.<sup>44</sup>

41 | Cf. "Transhumance: Marieme ly wone de parena veut abandonner abdoulaye wade pour Macky Sall", *Seninfos.com*, <http://seninfos.com/index.php/actualite/7745> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

42 | Cf. Sénégal 2012, "Amsatou Sow Sidibé Profile Page", <http://sunu2012.sn/index.php/component/comprofiler/userprofile/91.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

43 | Cf. Mansour Ndiaye, "Amsatou Sow Sidibé reparle de sa candidature en 2012: 'Je ne joue pas!'" (Amsatou Sow Sidibé spricht über ihre Kandidatur: 'Das ist kein Spiel für mich!'), *L'office*, 9 Mar 2011, <http://looffice.sn/AMSATOU-SOW-SIDIBE-REPARLE-DE-SA.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

44 | Cf. Tapa Tounkara, "Amsatou Sow Sidibé nommée ministre-conseiller de Macky Sall" (Amsatou Sow zur Beraterin mit Ministerrang ernannt), 9 May 2012, *Rewmi.com*, [http://rewmi.com/\\_a61444.html](http://rewmi.com/_a61444.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

It appears likely that Senegal will have to wait some years to have a female president, as there seem to be few obvious candidates among the younger generation of women in the political parties. But the situation can quickly change. More and more committed young women are beginning to emerge to the forefront of political parties and civil society organisations.

## **LAW AND RELIGION:**

### **WHAT IS THE POSITION OF WOMEN?**

In view of the high status afforded to women in the pre-colonial and pre-Islamic societies of West Africa, it is clear that the colonial era and the spread of Islam have both played a major role in diluting the economic role of women. In Senegal, depending on the particular situation, three different legal systems apply in family and land law:<sup>45</sup> traditional, Islamic and modern, the latter of which being arguably the most influential. This is problematic, since the laws are based on French family law from the de Gaulle era and on the Code Napoléon.

**The colonial era and the spread of Islam have both played a major role in diluting the economic role of women.**

Therefore, in Senegalese family law the husband is still the head of the household. He makes all the family decisions such as where to live. The massive spread of Islam across the country, particularly since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has also led to discrimination against women in cases relating to family and land. In Senegal, inheritance is governed by modern laws, but, if the family desires so, it can also come under Sharia law. According to experts, this Islamic law represented progress for the position of women in Arab societies during the Middle Ages.<sup>46</sup> But in the modern state of Senegal with its matriarchal traditions,<sup>47</sup> the parallel application of different legal systems no longer seems appropriate.

45 | Cf. Serge Guinchard, "Le mariage coutumier en droit sénégalais", *La revue internationale de droit comparé*, 1978, Vol. 30, No. 3, 811-832.

46 | Cf. Abdou Aziz Kebe, "Islam, droits de l'Homme et famille", *Communication au Forum universitaire régional, Famille et droits de l'Homme en Afrique de l'Ouest francophone*, Université de Ouagadougou, 25-28 Feb 2008.

47 | Cf. Fatou Kiné Camara, "Les femmes et le pouvoir politique dans la tradition noire africaine", *ANKH*, No. 18/19/20, 2009/2010/2011.

Thus, in practice it is not uncommon for a woman's inheritance to only be half that of a man.

Senegal's women lawyers<sup>48</sup> of the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (AJS), the Senegalese Women's Council Conseil Sénégalais des Femmes (COSEF) and numerous other women's organisations have long been fighting for equality before the law. The prestigious Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (African Institute of Basic Research, IFAN)

attached to Dakar University set up a gender laboratory<sup>49</sup> under the feminist professor Fatou Sow Sarr. In 2009 the AJS organised a symposium on family law with the aim of harmonising Senegalese family law. Senegal

**Senegal has signed countless international conventions on women's equality but implementation has so far been inadequate.**

has signed countless international conventions on women's equality but implementation has so far been inadequate.<sup>50</sup> There have been one or two successes, such as the requirement for equality on party lists, but there remains a great deal to be done. Women still do not have the same rights to agricultural land as men. Many practices considered normal in the past<sup>51</sup> were complicated by the introduction of colonial and Islamic laws. Among the Serer and Diola, women had always managed the land, whereas nowadays it is difficult for them to have any land control at all.

The AJS is pressing for changes in the law to allow women and men the same rights to agricultural land, and they are raising awareness among lawyers, certain politicians and women's organisations across the country. They have had some successes in a range of areas. The President of the AJS, Marie-Delphine Ndiaye, stresses that their work has led to women now being able to insure their husbands and children, and to children being permitted to take their mother's nationality.<sup>52</sup> The current Minister of Justice,

48 | Cf. *La Citoyenne. La revue de l'Association des Juristes Sénégalaises*, Dakar, Jul 2007, 7.

49 | Cf. Laboratoire Genre et Recherche scientifique à l'Institut Fondamental D'Afrique Noire (Ifan), <http://www.ceafri.net/site/spip.php?article39&artsuite=3> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

50 | Symposium sur l'harmonisation du code de la famille avec la constitution et les conventions. Signées, ratifiées et publiées par le Sénégal Rapport scientifique du symposium organisé par AJS, FKA et UN droits de l'homme, Dakar, Jul 2009.

51 | Cf. Thiaw, n. 12.

52 | Cf. AWA, "L'AJS pose la problématique de l'accès des femmes à la terre", <http://awa-net.net/L-AJS-pose-la-problematique-de-l> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

Aminata Touré, is an active and committed member of the AJS, along with the former Chair of the Constitutional Council, Mireille Ndiaye, the former Chair of the Supreme Court, Andresia Vaz, and of course former Prime Minister Mame Madior Boye, who is currently working for international organisations. The African Union Commission appointed her Special Representative for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, and she also often acts as a mediator in African conflict regions.

Penda Mbow, a university professor in medieval and religious history, has been working for women's equality for many years through her commitment in the association "Citizens' Movement" (Mouvement Citoyen) and her academic activities. She has particularly opposed the attempts by fundamental Islamist organisations to impose Sharia law on family law: "Islam and modernity are not incompatible. If we approach the texts with a 'reflexive method of interpretation', then Islam allows Muslims to make their own personal interpretations that reflect the changes taking place in society. Faith is not the abdication of intelligence; on the contrary, Islam is a religion of knowledge. The development of the family, women and the relationship between Islam and politics cannot and should not be challenged."<sup>53</sup>

The activist professor, who has often come under attack by Islamist extremists because of her bluntly expressed opinions, was awarded the Pope John Paul II Peace Prize<sup>54</sup> in 2011 for her outstanding contribution to inter-religious dialogue and to understanding between religions and nations. In Senegal, Mbow is treated as a figurehead for civilians' movements because she has been working for greater grass-roots democracy, transparency and participation since the Senghor era. Trust Africa singled her out for praise for upholding these principles.<sup>55</sup> After the election

53 | Cf. Penda Mbow, "Contexte de la Réforme du Code de la Famille au Sénégal", *Droit et Cultures. Revue internationale interdisciplinaire*, L'Harmattan, Paris, No. 59, 2010.

54 | Cf. Foreign Office of Senegal, Embassy in Vatican, "Penda Mbow reçoit le Prix Jean-Paul II pour la paix", <http://ambasenromevatican.over-blog.org/article-penda-mbow-re-oit-le-prix-jean-paul-ii-pour-la-paix-74466794.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

55 | Cf. OMD3 de TrustAfrica, "Penda Mbow Sénégal", Mar 2011, <http://omd3blog.trustafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Penda-Mbow.pdf> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).



of Macky Sall she declared her readiness to work constructively with the new government, and she was appointed the President's personal representative to the International Organisation of La Francophonie.<sup>56</sup>

Although the often blind association of traditional and modern law and religion has frequently led to discrimination against women, it should also be noted that women have played their part in Senegal's religious sphere. The patriarchal, Abrahamic religions are of course male-dominated in terms of their hierarchies, and the name of the Casamance ferry is all that is left of the pre-colonial high-priestess. But in reality, women are a driving force behind Senegal's religious life, as much for Muslims<sup>57</sup> and Christians<sup>58</sup> as for the traditional religions. Within their organisations they are working to achieve greater democracy, more dialogue and an active civil society.

**In reality, women are a driving force behind Senegal's religious life, as much for Muslims and Christians as for the traditional religions.**

Many women's groups are involved in the fight against the genital mutilation of girls, child marriage and early pregnancies. In the south east and south of Senegal, female genital mutilation is still a common traditional practice. Although it has been illegal for over ten years, the custom has not died out.<sup>59</sup> A solution to this problem can only be found by synergising the actors and actions of the legal system and by raising awareness.<sup>60</sup> Countless civil society

56 | Cf. "Sénégal: Penda Mbow nommée Représentant personnelle de Macky Sall à la Francophonie", *Diasporas.fr*, 22 Dec 2012, <http://diasporas.fr/senegal-penda-mbow-nommee-representant-speciale-de-macky-sall-a-la-francophonie> (accessed 21 Jan 2013); *Afrik.com*, "Femmes et religion au Sénégal: quel espace aujourd'hui?", 14 Mar 2009, <http://afrik.com/article16421> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

57 | Cf. *Afrik.com*, *ibid*.

58 | Interview with the President of the Catholic Women's Association, Clémentine Diop: "Les femmes catholiques plaident pour le retour du dialogue", *Seneweb.com*, 18 Feb 2009, [http://www.seneweb.visiobooks.com/news/Societe/\\_n\\_21237.html](http://www.seneweb.visiobooks.com/news/Societe/_n_21237.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

59 | Cf. Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé, "Recht haben oder Resultate? Der schwierige Kampf gegen Mädchenbeschneidung in Senegal", *KAS-Länderbericht*, 20 Apr 2010, [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_19375-1522-1-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_19375-1522-1-30.pdf) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

60 | Cf. "Abandon de l'excision, programme conjoint: L'Unfpa engagé dans le processus d'abandon total de l'excision d'ici 2015", *Le Soleil online*, 5 May 2012, [http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14877](http://lesoleil.sn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14877) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

organisations, particularly women's organisations, are active in this area, and are also tackling the issues of child marriage, early pregnancy and school enrolment for girls. For example, FAWE Senegal is working with teachers and providing girls with scholarships and other incentives to stay in school.<sup>61</sup>

## WOMEN ARE ORGANISING

Various women's associations have come together to form federations, such as the Fédération des Associations des Femmes du Sénégal (FAFS),<sup>62</sup> in order to promote the interests of women and girls in a focused and effective way. They are working to improve female representation in specific areas and in positions of power generally, along with promoting access to the full range of school education for girls. The association also fights for equal opportunities in all areas and for more education and awareness-raising with regard to social issues, healthcare and politics.

At grass-roots level, in the villages and towns, just about all the women are organised. Every village has women's groups in the form of savings or credit clubs that are now involved with greater or lesser success in the economic life of the community. Even the women pounding the millet, washing the clothes and cleaning the houses in the slums of Dakar have come together to form self-help groups. These groups are quite necessary, because life for women in Senegal is extremely hard. It is appropriate to echo the well-known Senegalese film-maker Sembène Ousmane and call them all "Heroines of everyday life": these washerwomen of Dakar, salt prospectors of Fatick, roadside peanut sellers and the village women who haul water, wood and food for miles in order to feed their families.<sup>63</sup>

**Every village has women's groups in the form of savings or credit clubs that are now involved with greater or lesser success in the economic life of the community.**

61 | Cf. ExcelAfrica, "FAWE-SENEGAL: Une force de plaidoyer pour la réussite des filles à l'école", 3 Feb 2011, <http://excelafrica.com/fr/2011/02/03/education-fawe-senegal> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

62 | Courants de Femmes, Fédération des Associations de Femmes Sénégalaises (FAFS), [http://courantsdefemmes.free.fr/Assoces/Senegal/FAFS/fafs\\_senegal.html](http://courantsdefemmes.free.fr/Assoces/Senegal/FAFS/fafs_senegal.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

63 | Cf. "Les damnées de la capitale", in: CESTI and KAS, n. 18, 111-125.

Small groups often join together at a higher level in order to receive educational and other assistance. Village groups organise themselves into district groups and district groups into regional groups. One example of the way groups have worked together to form an efficient production and distribution network is Groupe de recherche et d'appui aux initiatives féminines (GRAIF).<sup>64</sup> It began with just a few groups coming together and now comprises more than 100 women's groups with over 6,000 members. The initiative began with three women's groups that planted beans together during the rainy season, selling the harvest at a profit and investing the proceeds. This resulted in an association headed up by Josephine Ndione that offered its members educational opportunities in areas such as literacy, family planning, health, civic education and leadership. Over the last few years it has been successfully running the production and distribution network for local produce in three of the country's regions.<sup>65</sup> The training in political leadership has also led to an increase in the number of women on the local councils in the areas involved – proof positive that education and information not only improve women's standards of living but also result in increased political representation.

## WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

**Media reporting makes a significant contribution to changing people's perceptions. Certain women have had a major influence on the Senegalese media and have played an important role in improving the image of women.**

The fact that the public image of women in Senegal has changed over recent years is also in part thanks to the media. Media reporting of course makes a significant contribution to changing people's perceptions of the needs, problems and rights of women.

Certain women have had a major influence on the Senegalese media and have played an important role in improving the image of women in society, including Annette Mbaye

64 | Cf. Joséphine Ndione and Séverine Benoit, "Critères, conditions et démarche d'appui du GRAIF (Thiès, Sénégal)", Jun 2001, <http://base.d-p-h.info/fr/fiches/premierdph/fiche-premierdph-5599.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013); see also: Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé, "Forum über die Rolle der Frauen in der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft. Mehr als 2,000 Kleinunternehmerinnen feierten ihren Erfolg in Wirtschaft und Politik", KAS conference paper, Mar 2010, [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_19090-1522-1-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_19090-1522-1-30.pdf) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

65 | Cf. CESTI and KAS, n. 18, 130 et seq.

d'Erneville,<sup>66</sup> Eugénie Aw and Diattou Cissé Badiane. The 87-year-old D'Erneville has been a trailblazer for women and for Senegal's media. She was one of the first women of the colonial era to study in Senegal and France. After returning home she was for many years programme director of the national radio station, RTS, even before the country gained its independence.<sup>67</sup> In 1957 she founded the first African women's magazine, *Femmes du Soleil* (Women of the Sun), which was later to change its name to *Awa* (Eva). She also wrote children's stories<sup>68</sup> and contributed to various magazines, and in 1994 she established the Henriette Bathily Women's Museum on the former slave island of Gorée.<sup>69</sup>

The journalism academy at the University of Dakar Centre d'Études des Sciences et Techniques de l'Information (CESTI) was headed up for six years by the internationally-renowned journalist Eugénie Aw – the first woman to be appointed head of a major university institute. Eugénie Aw has had an eventful career: she was imprisoned twice when she was a young politician in a banned party, went on to study journalism in Paris and was one of the first female journalists to work on the national daily newspaper *Dakar Matin*, later renamed *Le Soleil*.<sup>70</sup> For the catholic magazine *Afrique Nouvelle* she investigated the conflict regions of East and Central Africa. As a renowned expert on women in communication, media and conflict, community radio and

66 | Cf. Senegal Célébrités, "Biographie Annette Mbaye d'Erneville", <http://senegalcelebrities.com/biographie-annette-mbaye-d-erneville.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

67 | The University of Western Australia (archive), "Annette Mbaye d'Erneville", 23 Dec 1995, <http://afit.arts.uwa.edu.au/MbayeErnevilleAnnette.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

68 | Radio France Internationale (rfi), "1. Annette Mbaye d'Erneville (rediffusion)", 30 Dec 2011, <http://rfi.fr/emission/20111230-1-annette-mbaye-erneville-rediffusion> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

69 | Musée de la Femme Henriette Bathily, <http://mufem.org> (accessed 21 Jan 2013). D'Erneville's son, the film director William Mbaye, produced the documentary film "Mère bi" (The Mother), painting an impressive portrait of this media pioneer in Senegal. Cf. "Annette Mbaye d'Erneville: Mère-bi", African Women in Cinema Blog, 21 Sep 2010, <http://africanwomenincinema.blogspot.com/2010/09/annette-mbaye-derneville-mere-bi.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

70 | Bassératou Kindo, "Eugénie AW Rokhaya, Directrice du centre d'étude des sciences et technique de l'information de Dakar (Sénégal): 'J'ai fait la prison deux fois dans l'exercice de mon métier'", lefaso.net, 7 Oct 2010, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article38839> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

development<sup>71</sup> and as the chair of many journalists' and media experts' organisations, Aw is a clear example of how the role of "media woman" can make a lasting contribution to changing society's perception of women.



Eugénie Aw is considered to be a media pioneer. She directed the Academy of Journalism, CESTI, in Dakar from 2005-2011. Depicted here (on the right) with graduates (left and middle) and the author (second from the left) at a graduation ceremony in 2010. | Source: © KAS Dakar.

Diattou Cissé Badiane, the third outstanding example of a woman in the Senegalese media, was head of the media union SYNPICS.<sup>72</sup> Under her leadership, SYNPICS grew to become one of the country's most influential trade unions and achieved many goals that no-one had even dared to imagine just a few years before. These included fair collective wage agreements for journalists in all media and their use in various press outlets; improvements to the position of women in the media; and the expansion of press freedom while still respecting journalistic ethics. On TV, the journalist also did not mince her words when defending the interests of women in the media and society.

71 | WorldCat Identities, "Aw, Eugenie", <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no2010-95634> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

72 | Ndèye Fatou Diouf, "Diatou Cissé sort par la grande porte", *Sud Quotidien*, 5 Dec 2012, [http://sudonline.sn/diatou-cisse-sort-par-la-grande-porte\\_a\\_11485.html](http://sudonline.sn/diatou-cisse-sort-par-la-grande-porte_a_11485.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

Simply by being role models, these three media pioneers have contributed to changing perceptions of women by the media and in the media – and also in politics. During the colonial era and shortly after independence, women were considered to be somehow tarnished if they expressed themselves in public, particularly if they went up against prevailing opinion. But these committed women broke down taboos, in the process enduring mockery and derision, prison sentences and threats – and in the end achieved greater freedom and rights for the women of Senegal.

Senegalese women authors have also played their part in the struggle for women's rights. In her award-winning novel "Such a long letter",<sup>73</sup> Mariama Bader crafted a monument to the liberation of women from family constraints and polygamy.<sup>74</sup> Research and teaching at Senegalese universities is still male-dominated, but more and more women are gaining professorships, and some of these female professors have become internationally renowned. But it is still likely to be a long time before the University of Dakar has a female rector.

## BUSINESSWOMEN AND MORE

Businesswomen are both rare as well as common in Senegal, depending on one's understanding of the term. As previously mentioned, Senegal has many women's groups that produce, market and even export local products. In this area, women are much more active than their male colleagues – they initially organise themselves in order to improve their family's standard of living, and sometimes they achieve remarkable results. But in "big business" businesswomen are rarities. Almost all the country's large corporations are run by men and there are very few female managers. The largest national employers' association, the Conseil National du Patronat (CNP) has one association of businesswomen among its members – a first for Senegal. This association includes a woman who runs a successful

**Senegal has many women's groups that produce, market and even export local products. In this area, women are much more active than their male colleagues.**

73 | Cf. Mariama Ba, *Une si longue lettre*, NEA, Dakar, 1979 (En. *So Long a Letter*, Virago Press, 1982).

74 | See "Mal an der Reihe", *Der Spiegel*, No. 8/1981, 16 Feb 1981, <http://spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-14326804.html> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

road construction company and over 60 company founders and managers of small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>75</sup>

One woman achieved a great deal of power and influence in the business world during President Wade's time in office: Aminata Niane,<sup>76</sup> Director of the National Agency for Investment, Promotion and Major Projects (APIX). She lost her job when the new government took over, but shortly afterwards was appointed as an advisor with ministerial status to President Macky Sall, focusing on investment and economic issues.<sup>77</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although women are under-represented in large corporations, the political parties and the media, they still represent an economic force in Senegal that should not be underestimated – and not just as consumers. Their engagement in all areas means that women are driving the country's development. Women's initiatives at both top and grass-roots level have led to some unexpected

successes. The lasting economic success and

**Mothers are determined to educate their children, and particularly their daughters. As a result, more women from poorer sections of the population are gaining positions of power.**

entrepreneurial creativity of women in the lower rungs of society have allowed them to improve their standards of living. Mothers are determined to educate their children, and particularly their daughters, who are now

entering professions that were previously the exclusive domain of men. As a result, more women from poorer sectors of the population are gaining positions of power and working to improve women's rights and rural development. This trend will not be threatened by temporary problems such as the crisis in Mali. Over decades of effort, women have succeeded in raising awareness of women's rights and they are prepared to fight to see them become reality.

75 | Several businesswomen's associations are listed, including an advisory organisation for businesswomen linked to the CNP. Cf. Trade Point Sénégal, "Liste des organisations patronales et syndicales", <http://www.tpsnet.org/OrganisationPatronale.asp> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

76 | "Aminata Niane (Sénégal)", *Les Afriques*, <http://lesafriques.com/100-africains/aminata-niane-senegal.html?Itemid=195?articleid=9633> (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

77 | "Macky allonge la liste des ministres-conseillers: Aminata Niane ex-Dg de l'Apix consacrée", *Senego*, 14 Sep 2012, [http://actu-senegalaise.senego.com/macky\\_36028.html](http://actu-senegalaise.senego.com/macky_36028.html) (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

However, it is still true that women are most affected by extreme poverty, along with exploitation, abuse and violence. Despite these and all the disadvantages women face when taking up higher positions in society, the situation of women in Senegal is steadily improving. There are countless signs that over the years to come women will continue to gain economic power and political influence. It is not entirely absurd to suggest that the next President of Senegal could be a woman. As Fanta Diallo, deputy mayor of the Dakar's Point E district says: "Angela Merkel in Germany, Helen Sirleaf Johnson in Liberia – we're right behind you!"

With these words, she sums up the success story of modern women – and for African women this also means looking back at the role of women in pre-colonial times. Women were priestesses, they were princesses, and now they are casting an eye at the office of president. But having a woman in a top position is not what really counts. The most important thing is providing truly equal opportunities for women and men from urban and rural areas alike. Many women would of course be delighted to see a female president. But real success is ensuring that every girl goes to school, is given the ability to make her own decisions about what she wants from life and is enabled to play an active part in her country's development.