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SENEGAL – AN ETHNIC MOSAIC

HISTORICAL AND MODERN FOUNDATIONS OF A DIVERSE YET COHESIVE COUNTRY

Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé

Senegal, a small country on the westernmost tip of Africa between the Sahara and tropical forest, between ocean and savannah, is home to a large number of ethnic groups and nationalities that live in remarkable harmony with one another. More than 50 ethnic groups and a similar number of nationalities have melded in Senegal into a family of peoples: there is virtually no xenophobia or ethnic and religious conflict. A glance at the country's historical, geographical and sociocultural background sheds light on the development of the integrated nation that is Senegal.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Senegal's ethnic mosaic has emerged over centuries. It began with the great West African empires of the Middle Ages, was accelerated by triangular trade and colonisation and now serves as a successful example of an integrated country in a way that seems almost anachronistic in the present African context.

Great West African empires

The gold empire of Ghana (800–1087) encompassed parts of the present-day states of Mauritania, Senegal and Mali; its successor, the empire of Mali (1235–1400) was even more extensive and the empire of Songhai or Gao (1461–1591) covered almost all of West Africa between the Sahara and the rainforest. The gold wealth of the great empires was legendary and sparked an economic and

cultural blossoming in West Africa¹ whose fame spread far beyond the borders of Africa. Travellers and researchers from Europe and the Maghreb came to Timbuktu especially to see the rare manuscripts in the University of Sankoré. The rulers of Mali established a well-structured and hierarchical confederation of states that nowadays might have formed a foundation for the much-discussed African Union, at least at West African level.

It was at the time of the great empires that the European penetration of the continent from the west coast began. In the 14th century Portuguese traders reached the Casamance via the river of the same name; 1442 saw the start of the European slave trade in Africa, and in 1626 the first French arrivals settled on the coast of Senegal. The French colonisation of Senegal commenced in the mid-17th century with the founding of the capital Saint-Louis, although official colonial policy is dated only from the annexation of Senegalese kingdoms in the 19th century.²

The influence of the slave trade on the ethnic diversity of Senegal is obvious since a large proportion of slaves from all over West Africa were taken by European and African slave catchers to the island of Gorée off the coast of Dakar. The slave island was for some a terminus but for many the point of departure for the voyage over the ocean. Despite Gorée being only a transit station, the slave trade brought people from numerous ethnic groups throughout West Africa to Senegal. The European slave traders often entered into "African marriages", from which sprang a new population group, the mulattos. Over the years some of the girls who were the offspring of such liaisons acquired a dubious reputation. Many of them became wealthy as slave traders or later as merchants. They called themselves "Signares", derived from the Portuguese title for a mistress, *signora*.

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

2 | Ki-Zerbo, n. 1, 444 et sqq.

The melting pot of Senegal in the colonial era

During the actual colonial era³ from 1889 (protectorate agreement) until independence in 1960 Senegal, with Dakar as its capital, became the centre of the French colonial empire in West Africa, the AOF (Afrique Occidentale Française). The residence of the governor general was in Dakar and it was there that his consultative council met; all parts of the colony were administered from Dakar and people from all over the colonial empire settled in the capital – administrative officials, workers, students. Senegal acquired a special position: only here, where colonial administration was centred, was there something approximating a transport and educational infrastructure. The Senegalese inhabitants of the “four communes” of Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée and Rufisque, in which a large number of French people lived, had the privilege of being French citizens, with all the corresponding rights and duties, while the “rural dwellers” were regarded and treated as subjects of the French republic. People born in the four communes had the right to vote – Senegal could send deputies to the French national assembly. Discrimination on the one hand and inclusion on the other: what is certain is that colonial policy was one of the reasons why the Senegalese came into contact with various non-African politicians and thinkers at an early stage and had an active political and intellectual life before the end of the colonial era.⁴

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Senegalese administration officials were despatched to all corners of the colonial empire, while the Senegalese army, the “tirailleurs sénégalais”, upheld order from the Atlantic to the Niger. Comprising soldiers from all the countries of French West Africa, this army provided France with crucial support in the two world wars and gave rise to a spirit of solidarity that had an extensive impact on the cohesion of the ethnic community in Senegal.

3 | *Histoire Générale de l'Afrique VII: L'Afrique sous domination coloniale, 1880-1935*, UNESCO/NEA 1987.

4 | Ki-Zerbo, n. 1, 555 et sqq.

The period of colonial rule brought to Senegal a range of nationalities and this diversity has continued to be a hallmark of the country's development post-independence. There are still more than 25,000 French people living in Senegal, working mainly in teaching, research and business. Three thousand French soldiers remain stationed in the country, although the majority are due to be withdrawn by 2013. It is hard to estimate the number of Lebanese who were brought in by the French colonial masters to work in the wholesale and intermediate trade; the majority have dual nationality and are thus also Senegalese citizens, working predominantly in trading and medical occupations. There are probably more than 70,000 of them. Another legacy of colonial times is the large number of people from Benin (formerly Dahomey) and Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), many of whom came to Dakar in the 1950s as students or as soldiers in the colonial army and settled there. They, too, frequently have dual nationality, speak Wolof – the language of Senegal – and travel back to their home countries only on special occasions. They are fully integrated into the Senegalese community – more so than the Lebanese, who on the whole do not marry Senegalese women. During the colonial era, however, many students from Benin returned to their own country at the end of their studies, earning Benin the nickname of the “Latin Quarter” of Africa.

Post-colonial exiles in Senegal

West African students were not the only people drawn to Senegal. Senegal's relatively early access to democratic decision-making mechanisms based on the French model and the early political activity in the colony undoubtedly played a crucial part in the establishment of democratic structures soon after independence.⁵ Despite the fact that the party landscape did not open up until ten years after independence and the media landscape not until the early 1980s, within the African context Senegal was nevertheless viewed as a model of a free, democratic country and attracted political exiles from all of the neighbouring countries. Senegal has always taken

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5 | Cf. *Cahiers de l'Alternance. Sénégal 1960-2010. Construction d'un Etat Nation*, KAS / CESTI, Dakar, 2011.

in political exiles, especially during the times of repressive dictatorship in Guinea under Sekou Touré, in Mali under Moussa Traoré and in Burkina Faso, and in periods of civil war such as have affected the Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Exiles from Rwanda, Burundi, Central Africa, Congo, Gabon and a number of anglophone and lusophone countries have also settled in Senegal and integrated into the ethnic community. The United Nations Refugee Council in Dakar accepts present-day refugees in crisis situations; for example, hundreds of political refugees were cared for in Senegal after the conflicts in Mauritania and Guinea and the civil war in the Ivory Coast. However, large numbers of exiles do not register with the authorities and are taken in by the population in border areas, especially in the regions of Kedougou, Kolda and Ziguinchor. Deposed African dictators have also decamped to Senegal in order to take advantage of the country's democratic freedoms and avoid prosecution and punishment. The former President of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo, who was expelled after a coup,

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is buried in Dakar, where he spent the last years of his life. The admission of the country of Chad's former head of state, Hissène Habré, has attracted attention worldwide. Having found asylum in Dakar, Habré has been enjoying the much-vaunted Senegalese hospitality for more than 20 years and thus symbolises the international disagreement on the treatment of former dictators. From time to time other exiled heads of state and political opponents have also taken up residence in Dakar or received active assistance from Senegal including Diawara from Gambia, Vieira from Guinea Bissau, Alassane Ouattara, the current president of the Ivory Coast, and Moussa Dadis Camara from Guinea.

This leads one to ask why Senegal extends its "teranga" or hospitality to dictators labelled by human rights organisations as mass murderers, such as Hissène Habré. In early January 2012 Senegal again reaffirmed its refusal to extradite Habré to the International Court of Justice in The Hague due to procedural errors. Human rights organisations have been calling for Habré's extradition for years, while throughout the same period successive Senegalese governments have refused to accede to this demand. Two years ago President Wade sought international financial

assistance to enable the country to set up a new court of justice that would be empowered to indict Habré and possibly other African dictators. However, such large sums of money were requested that the United Nations and the World Bank refused to contribute. There are certainly questions to be asked about the competence of the Senegalese courts to prosecute foreign dictators. But is this the only reason why Senegal steadfastly refuses to extradite Habré – either to Chad or to Belgium?

The university as a cohesive factor before and after independence

In 1902 Dakar became the capital of French West Africa. A year later the colonial administration introduced a standardised education system in which African languages were banned under threat of punishment. The African school-children were to be assimilated into the French culture. The entire elite of the colonial empire was brought together in Dakar's few high schools, forming close relationships that were consolidated during subsequent university studies in France and after their return to Africa.

It was in France that Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first president of Senegal after independence, met the Haitian Aimé Césaire, the later mayor of Port-au-Prince, and the writer Leon Gontran Damas from French Guyana. They founded the journal "The Black Student" and later formulated the concept of "negritude", a movement that promoted pride in black culture and encouraged its revival. Negritude was not confined to Africa; it encompassed all black population groups in the Caribbean and the Americas and became a source of underlying cohesion for black intellectuals, especially in French-speaking countries. Senghor's negritude and the extension of the idea of "world civilisation" found resonance even in Germany.⁶

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With the founding of the pan-African research institute IFAN in Dakar in 1938 and the Dakar Institute of Higher Education in 1950, which became a university in

6 | Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé, "Frankfurt am Main 1968: Verleihung des Friedenspreises des deutschen Buchhandels an Senghor. Anerkennung und Missverständnis", *Etudes Germano Africaines*, 20-21, Dakar (2002/2003).

1958, the intellectual elite of sub-Saharan Africa acquired a centre of research and learning – and West Africa gained a centre of cultural encounter at a high level.

During colonial times and to an even greater extent after independence, Dakar was a gathering point for students from all over West Africa. Many university institutes still bear witness to this in their names: veterinarians study at the “Interstate School of Veterinary Science and Medicine”, journalists at the “West African Academy for Journalism”, CESTI; in addition, large numbers of Maghrebi students attend the medical and pharmaceutical faculty. The students live together on a campus that is far too small: originally designed for 5,000 students, it has been repeatedly extended and now accommodates 70,000. Despite all the physical problems, campus life is largely peaceful, with conflict between ethnic groups or religions virtually non-existent. Students from almost all the franco-phone countries of Africa and even from anglophone and lusophone ones study in Dakar. There are large communities of students from Burkina Faso, Benin and Gabon and also – especially since the outbreak of the civil war – a large number from the Ivory Coast.

After the earthquake in Port-au-Prince in January 2010, the Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade offered 150 Haitian students a new home and invited them to continue their studies in Dakar with a state bursary. The

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Senegalese students, most of them from poor backgrounds themselves, welcomed them with solidarity and without complaint – in other countries the reaction might well have been different. Students from the Comoros

Islands and other African countries whose state support has been withdrawn by their home country for political or other reasons are taken in by Senegalese students. The student dormitories are hopelessly overcrowded, but foreign classmates are not left without a roof over their heads, and canteen tickets are shared with them too. While demonstrations – some of them violent – are not uncommon at the university, triggered by non-payment of grants or shortage of teaching space, foreign students have never yet been the target or the cause of such protests.

The universities, especially those of Dakar and Saint-Louis, are in many ways a microcosm of Senegalese society. The remarkably harmonious coexistence of ethnic groups and religions that can be observed within the universities reflects the social cohesion that prevails throughout the country.

SOCIOCULTURAL BACKGROUND

Senegal's historical development as part of the great multicultural empires and the elective home of people of numerous ethnicities and population groups is an underlying factor in its social cohesion. Sociocultural structures that have grown up over centuries contribute to an open and receptive society of a sort rarely seen in Africa. A class-based social structure emerged long ago at the time of the great empires and led to a social division of labour comparable to the European estates system of the late Middle Ages.

Social structures and sociocultural factors

This structuring and hierarchical organisation in the great West African empires was spread in particular by the peoples of the Mandé group (Manding, Socé, Bambara). Large parts of Senegalese society are dominated even today by post-feudal structures. This applies in particular to the Wolof, Fulbe and Manding, the inhabitants of the savannah, but also to some of the Serer. The southern parts of the country, by contrast, are inhabited by a number of smaller ethnic groups such as the Diola, Bainouk and Mankanya in the Casamance and the Bassari in south-east Senegal, whose social structure is built on an egalitarian model and who operate on the basis of democratic principles. Senegal is thus, as the words of the national anthem written by Leopold Sedar Senghor proclaim, the "union of springs and ocean, of steppe and forest" and simultaneously a union of different communities that have come up with original ways of avoiding conflict based on structural divergence.

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“Joking relationship”

The term “joking relationship” describes an original social mechanism by means of which differences are playfully exaggerated and puffed up before being calmly set aside. The “joking relationship”, which has developed from a myth, assumes the function of a social and family catalyst. The stories of their origins told by various ethnic groups often involve two siblings, who were then separated; in consequence the ethnic groups are related. Their members can permit themselves certain freedoms and even attack each verbally. An example is the Fulbe and the Serer, who have a “joking relationship” with the Diola.

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This efficient mechanism functions not only at private or social level but also in national conflict management. The intermediaries in the separatist conflict in the Casamance⁷ are frequently Serer, and negotiations between rebels and members of the government often take place in Serer regions. The “joking relationship” also exists between different age groups, where it serves to prevent or defuse intergenerational conflict, and even between the bearers of different names, who thus represent different family clans, who can draw on this mechanism to overcome differences and prevent conflict.

The collective consciousness of different Senegalese ethnic groups, which has its roots in a shared myth and is underpinned by the mechanism of the “joking relationship”, represents a stabilising factor for the whole society that should not be underestimated.

Hospitality

Whether as a result of its 700 kilometres of coastline, its borders with five other countries, its social structures or its specific historic characteristics, the Senegalese people – or rather the Senegalese community of peoples – are considered particularly open-minded and hospitable. The inhabitants of other African countries like to describe

7 | Cf. Stefan Gehroid and Inga Neu, “Caught Between Two Fronts – In Search of Lasting Peace in the Casamance Region”, *KAS International Reports*, 10/2010, 78-102, <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.20669> (accessed 6 Dec 2011).

Senegal as the “land of hospitality” (in Wolof: “teranga”), and the name is probably deserved. There are numerous anecdotes of travellers happening to be near a Senegalese family at a mealtime and being immediately invited to eat or even stay the night with them. In Senegalese families more food than is needed is always cooked for the chance guest who may appear. Leftovers are given to the poor, even if the families themselves are poor. As a result hunger is a rare phenomenon, at least in Senegalese towns and cities.

However, “teranga” involves more than just generosity and willingness to share; it is a way of living, the key element of which is respect for the other person and recognition of his uniqueness and dignity. This is accorded in particular to strangers, who in Senegalese society are immediately welcomed and accepted. It may sound idealistic but it is also the reality of life.

Although historical developments and geographical proximity have favoured a close coexistence of ethnic groups, religions and peoples in Senegal, the importance of the national self-image cannot be overstated: the Senegalese ethnic mosaic would be unimaginable without “teranga”. This is probably also a reason why high-ranking Senegalese individuals are repeatedly called on as intermediaries in ethnic and national conflicts in other African countries.

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Language

The legacy of French colonisation is the language that was refined by Senghor. It was the language of the pan-African negritude movement. The official language of the colonial army was also French, although the language actually spoken was Wolof, the most widely used Senegalese national language. The colonial army and the Senegalese traders who followed it and who settled in all the countries of West Africa contributed to the spread of Wolof throughout West Africa. This language is still a unifying factor in the Senegalese ethnic mosaic. Senegalese of all ethnic backgrounds and those who have arrived as immigrants all tend to speak Wolof. By comparison with other African

countries, the relatively homogeneous linguistic and cultural scene in Senegal is striking. The Wolof language is the usual means of communication; it is spoken by 36 per cent of Senegalese as their mother tongue but understood by more than 95 per cent of the population. This places Wolof well ahead of French, the country's official language, which is spoken by less than a third of the population. Immigrants from African countries and elsewhere fairly quickly learn Wolof – the Senegalese *lingua franca*.⁸

GEOGRAPHICAL BASIS OF THE MOSAIC

The population of Senegal (12.8 million) is made up of around 20 ethnic groups. The country is surrounded by four other states; in addition there is the enclave of Gambia. What in other contexts would prove the stuff of conflict instead has a unifying effect in Senegal. The ethnic groups

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that have been splintered by arbitrarily drawn colonial boundaries are a cohesive force between the different countries. Extensive contact between the Senegalese and Guinean Fulbe, or between the Senegalese and Guinean Bassari in south-east Senegal is the

norm, with families living on both sides of the relatively permeable border with Guinea. The same holds true for the Manding and the Wolof in Senegal and Gambia, the Diola and the Bainouk in Senegal and Guinea Bissau and the Toucouleur in Senegal and Mauritania. It may be only the ethnic group of the Serer and their sub-groups in the Thies region that is not "bi-national" – although according to the Senegalese historian and nuclear physicist Cheikh Anta Diop⁹, after whom Dakar University is named, these people came from the Nile and hence are related to both the Fulbe and the Wolof.¹⁰

The permeability of the country's borders leads to continuous and regular exchange between the inhabitants of Senegal's border regions and the neighbouring countries. In addition to this regular cross-border traffic, a large pro-

8 | Cf. Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé, *Senegal, eine historisch gewachsene Nation*, Dakar, 1989, 5.

9 | Cheikh Anta Diop, "L'Unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire", *Présence Africaine*, Paris, 1959, 1982.

10 | "Nations nègres et Culture", *Présence Africaine*, Paris, 1954, 1964, 1979.

portion of Senegal's population comprises people from the neighbouring states who have settled in Senegal for a variety of reasons, among which political and economic factors head the list.

Guinea

According to the embassy in Dakar, the Guinean population of Senegal numbers more than two million – an impressive figure. The Guineans thus represent the largest of all Senegal's migrant groups; they have their own associations, health insurance schemes, lobbying organisations and sections of political parties in Senegal and are hence well organised and present in public life.

Even before independence, Guinea's geographical proximity to Senegal resulted in frequent exchange between the two countries. Many Guineans studied in Senegal and then returned home. Not until the dictatorship of Sekou Touré was there large-scale emigration, especially of the Fulbe, from Guinea to Senegal. Sekou Touré, the figurehead of "African socialism", declared the country's independence from France in 1958, ahead of other colonies, and thus excluded Guinea from the development strategy of the post-colonial West African union. He banned and murdered many of Guinea's intellectuals, played up ethnic division and favoured his ethnic group, the Sussu (part of the Manding group), while the Fulbe, who make up more than 40 per cent of the population, were harassed and marginalised. As a result a number of intellectuals fled to Senegal, where they were welcomed with open arms. Despite Guinea's wealth of natural resources, its inhabitants had and have little prospect of material advancement, and unemployment is very high. Many people move to neighbouring Senegal in the hope of earning a livelihood and supporting families left behind in Guinea. For example, large numbers of the fruit sellers on the roadside in Senegalese towns are Fulbe from Guinea. They have built up an organised network for selling fruit and established their own savings banks and credit clubs.¹¹

11 | Savings and credit clubs for women where each person deposits a certain amount per month. Once a month, one of them receives the total amount of money, each month someone else. The women thus obtain a small capital to start an income-producing activity.

Guinean political parties are also represented and active in Senegal. At times of severe repression entire segments of the opposition have settled in Senegal. When elections are held in Guinea, the Guinean embassy in Dakar is not the only place where people can vote: there are polling stations for Guineans in the larger towns and cities, and an election campaign is held in Senegal. Meticulous arrangements were made in Dakar for the runoff in the Guinean presidential elections in June 2011; both Alpha Condé and Sellou Dalein Diallo conducted major election campaigns in Dakar. Large posters bearing the two candidates' portraits and election slogans could have caused an uninformed observer to believe himself in Guinea.

When Condé emerged the winner on election day in Guinea, the Fulbe in northern Guinea demonstrated in protest: in Dakar Diallo had a two-thirds majority. The Fulbe accused Condé of election fraud, quoting Diallo's majority in the election results in Senegal as "evidence" – perhaps forgetting that the Guinean population in Senegal is comprised predominantly of Fulbe.

As long as ethnicity remains an election issue in Guinea, there is a risk of further population movements from Guinea. However, even large-scale immigration has never caused friction between the nationalities in Senegal.

Even during the first round of the presidential elections there had been persecution and maltreatment of Fulbe in northern Guinea, who immediately fled across the border to Senegal. As long as ethnicity remains an election issue in Guinea, there is a risk of further population movements from Guinea to Senegal. However, on account of the social mechanisms that have already been described, even large-scale immigration has never caused friction between the nationalities in Senegal. Many Guineans feel safe and secure in Senegal, unlike in their homeland – a paradox, but also a sign of hope.

Mali

The 50,000 Malians registered with the Malian embassy are only a fraction of the Malians actually living in Senegal; even embassy staff put the number of Malians in Senegal at more than 500,000. The links between Mali and Senegal date back to the great West African empires; the Mali Empire was the forerunner of the modern state and of the short-lived Mali Confederation that preceded it

in 1958.¹² Senghor and Modibo Keita did not succeed in realising this pan-African dream: the federation collapsed within a few months of its founding and Keita became the first president of Mali. The dictator who followed him, Moussa Traoré, forced numerous Malians into exile in neighbouring Senegal. Other Malians fled to Senegal during periods of drought and in search of an economic livelihood. For example, thousands of Malians worked on the groundnut plantations in the Kaolack region during colonial times. Nowadays Malian immigrants work as traders, craftsmen, construction workers and artists. Many are also employed in international organisations or as teachers at the universities. Like the Guineans, the Malians in Senegal have set up small health insurance schemes and associations. The number of Malian students in Senegal is estimated to be 800.

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However, the official and estimated numbers of Malians resident in Senegal conceal those who have by now become fully naturalised: they have gone so far as to adopt the Senegalese version of their names and become Senegalese.

The Dakar-Niger railway line that links Dakar with Bamako and the Niger River is the root of a quite specific relationship between Senegalese and Malians. Just as there is a part of Bamako called Wolofobougou, the "town of the Wolof", there is a part of Dakar called the Bambara quarter. There is also a district of this name in Thies, in Kaolack, in Tambacounda – in all the cities along the route of the railway. Construction work began in 1924; the workers from Mali and Senegal spread out along the route, started families and stayed put. The railway became a symbol of Senegalese-Malian unity, regardless of political differences.

Cape Verde Islands

A similar integration phenomenon is apparent in the emigration of inhabitants of the Cape Verde Islands to Senegal. Of the million Cape Verdeans of the archipelago that lies in the Atlantic 400 kilometres west of Dakar, two-thirds live outside the islands, many of them in the USA

and Europe and even more in Senegal. Initially by sea and now by air, Cape Verdeans emigrate to Senegal. In former times they worked mainly in the construction and painting trades, but they are now found in all occupations. Many have exchanged Creole, the Cape Verdean variant of Portuguese, for the national Senegalese language Wolof; they have either dual or only Senegalese nationality and have abandoned any thought of returning to Cape Verde. Like the immigrants from Guinea and Mali, the Cape Verdeans frequently marry Senegalese, so that the boundaries between the nationalities are steadily dissolving to the benefit of national and West African cohesion.

Guinea Bissau

Another former Portuguese colony, Guinea Bissau, does not always maintain conflict-free relations with neighbouring Senegal. Many ethnic groups from the Casamance live on both sides of the border; the traditional capitals and priestly residences of the Diola and the Mankanya are located in Guinea Bissau. However, the rebel conflict in the Casamance overshadows dealings with Senegal's south-western neighbour. The republic, which did not become independent until 1974, embroiled the Portuguese in a war of liberation that continued for decades. Many fighters who did not join the national army upon independence then supported the Casamance separatist movement. Although the various governments of Guinea Bissau always assured neighbouring Senegal of their support in the fight against the rebels who were active on both sides of the border, their contribution often amounted to no more than agreements and promises.

Without the political and economic instability in Guinea Bissau, the war economy which is the greatest obstacle to ending the conflict in the Casamance would not have been possible on this scale.

The Senegalese army intervened "helpfully" in the military coup against President Vieira in 1999 but was then defeated in a trench war, which sullied relationships between the two countries for a considerable time. Even now the situation in Guinea Bissau still poses a risk to peace in the southern region of Senegal.¹³ Without the political and economic instability in Guinea Bissau, the war economy –

13 | Cf. Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé and Stefan Gehrold, "Guinea Bissau: President Assassinated, Constitution Remains in Force", *KAS International Reports*, 03/2009, <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.16373> (accessed 15 Dec 2011).

involving the trafficking of arms, drugs and people – which is the greatest obstacle to ending the rebel conflict in the Casamance would not have been possible on this scale.

In the course of African integration the country has become francophone, thereby signalling its will for better regional integration. However, while the economic situation remains unchanged, many of the country's inhabitants will continue to emigrate to Senegal, or align themselves with the rebels in the subtropical forests of the Casamance.

Gambia

On the other side of the Casamance lies Gambia, the anglo-phone enclave in Senegal that by virtue of its geographical position divides the country in two. It contributed in no small way to the emergence of frustration and in the 1990s to the rebel conflict in the Casamance. The then president Abdou Diouf helped the Gambian president Diawara remain in office during a coup in 1981; a short-lived Senegal-Gambia Federation was created and then collapsed. However, Gambia's situation is far from comfortable. Its enclave position sometimes leads to overreaction against its "big brother", expressed in activities such as sudden closure of the few border crossing points, increases in customs duties or the blocking of ferries over the Gambia River.

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The current president of Gambia, Yaya Jammeh, is committed to friendship between the two states, and yet the Gambian authorities are accused of offering insufficient resistance to Senegalese rebels who penetrated the country. In Gambia these rebels find shelter, food – and weapons. Gambia's ambivalent attitude to the Casamance conflict does not foster liking between the two neighbours. In February 2011 Senegal claimed that a consignment of arms from Iran, destined for the rebels of the Casamance, was lying in the port of Banjul. This scandal caused a temporary rupture of diplomatic relationships between Senegal and Gambia, although the Gambian president Yaya Jammeh and his foreign minister Mamadou Tangara denied that a transfer of weapons had taken place. Relationships were resumed, as they had been repeatedly in the past. In

the closing months of 2011 the rebels of the Casamance, using ultra-modern weapons, unleashed a number of attacks on Senegalese military units, killing more than 15 soldiers and taking hostages. The high technical specification of the weapons in the rebels' arsenal in the past year could be a sign that Senegal's concerns regarding the supply of Iranian weapons to the Casamance via Gambia were justified.

Gambia's role in the rebel conflict should not be underestimated. A number of Senegalese politicians accuse President Jammeh of supporting the rebellion in the Casamance, either directly or indirectly. It is impossible to check whether there is any truth in these charges, although there

The range of economic activities open to Gambia is very limited. Farming, fishing and tourism are the only sources of income apart from the revenue from customs duties and taxes levied on imports and exports from and to Senegal.

is a relatively plausible argument that would support them: on account of its enclave position the range of economic activities open to Gambia is very limited. The country occupies a strip of land sometimes only 20 kilometres wide between north and south Senegal, divided in the middle by the Gambia River, and has almost no resources of its own. Farming, fishing and tourism are the small state's only sources of income apart from the revenue from customs duties and taxes levied on imports and exports from and to Senegal. The only way into the Casamance – other than by making a detour of nearly 1,000 kilometres – is via Gambia. Every day, therefore, the fees charged for crossing the river by ferry and the customs duties levied on goods so transported flow into the Gambian state coffers. And cross-border transactions are not restricted to legal ones: observers suppose that the trade in arms destined for the Casamance rebels is an important source of income for many high-ranking Gambians.

However, despite the political and economic differences, relationships between Gambians and Senegalese at the level of the general population are relatively friendly. Several thousand Gambians live in Senegal, share the same culture and languages (Wolof and Manding) and have integrated into society.

Mauritania

The Senegal River forms Senegal's northern boundary with Mauritania. Senegal has less in common with Mauritania than with its other neighbours: the light-skinned Arabic-speakers in the north do not seek contact with the Negroid Mauritians on the Senegal River and to some extent still look on black people as slaves. Although slavery was officially abolished in 1980, it still exists in many parts of Mauritania and has even increased in the wake of urbanisation, which brings with it an increased demand for labour. Despite the ban slaves are still kept, and freed slaves (Haratin) encounter major problems in society. In 1998 slavery became a criminal offence listed in the register of crimes, but despite criminalisation many (although of course not all) white Mauritians continue to keep slaves.

Nevertheless, several thousand Senegalese live in Mauritania, frequently working as craftsmen. Thousands of Mauritians work in Senegal as small traders.

In 1989, however, an incident occurred the consequences of which still sour relationships between the two countries. On an island in the Senegal River a Senegalese farmer killed a Mauritanian shepherd who allowed his animals to graze on his fields. Soon after-

In 1989 a Senegalese farmer killed a Mauritanian shepherd who allowed his animals to graze on his fields. Soon the conflict fanned out across Mauritania and a veritable massacre of the Senegalese population began.

wards the conflict spread to the village; it then fanned out across Mauritania and a veritable massacre of the Senegalese population began. Several hundred Senegalese were killed and the rest fled. Black Mauritians were also attacked and escaped across the border. Senegal organised an airlift. Despite warnings from politicians of all colours, the arrival of the first refugees in Dakar was reported in the media and a backlash was provoked: angry Senegalese, most of them young, killed Mauritanian traders, especially in poorer parts of the city. The police and army, although deployed immediately on a large scale, were unable to contain the public anger; the best they could do was prevent further escalation. The Mauritanian traders were sent back home. In the years that followed they have gradually returned. The exiled Senegalese have likewise returned to Mauritania – only the black Mauritians did not consider going back. A large-scale awareness-raising

and integration campaign by the UN refugee agency¹⁴ was needed before the majority of the refugees, who numbered more than 20,000, could be persuaded to return home. Those who remain now live in Senegalese villages south of the Senegal River and are adamant that they wish to stay in Senegal.

China

The final country from which emigrants have travelled in significant number to Senegal is China. Following Senegal's independence, China supported the socialist government under presidents Senghor and Diouf. Shortly after his election to office in 2000, the liberal president Abdoulaye Wade broke off relationships with China and commenced development cooperation with Taiwan. But China's charm offensive produced results, and in 2008 Senegal resumed contact with China.

While Taiwan's involvement had consisted mainly of funding development projects and promoting some business contacts, the resumption of contact with China caused events to take a new turn: Chinese investors discovered Senegal as Eldorado.¹⁵ Major investors are building supermarkets and setting up car import businesses and factories, but it is the small investors who are attracting particular attention. Hundreds of small traders from China have now moved to Senegal and have turned a relatively well-situated part of Dakar into a Chinatown much to the detriment of the Senegalese traders but to the delight of buyers, who welcome the very low prices wholeheartedly. Although the Chinese traders came to Senegal mainly for economic reasons, some have already integrated into society and are valued as hard-working and reliable business partners.

14 | Abdoul Aziz Agne, "Sénégal, retour des réfugiés mauritaniens – 2500 personnes bloquées par un arrêt définitif de rapatriement", *Wal Fadjri*, 20 Jan 2011, <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/201101200555.html> (accessed 6 Dec 2011); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Le HCR reprend le rapatriement des réfugiés mauritaniens au Sénégal", 19 Oct 2010, <http://unhcr.fr/4cc048fbc.html> (accessed 6 Dec 2011).

15 | Cf. Stefan Gehrold and Lena Tietze, "Far From Altruistic – China's Presence in Senegal", *KAS International Reports*, 11/2011, 90-118, <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.29405> (accessed 6 Dec 2011).

THE PROBLEM: SEPARATIST CONFLICT VERSUS NATIONAL UNITY?

Is the southern region of Senegal, the Casamance, falling out of the great ethnic mosaic? Doesn't the separatist conflict show that quite a number of the inhabitants of the Casamance don't feel that they belong to the Senegalese people? Ask this question of any Senegalese, except perhaps the rebel leaders, and they would vehemently deny it. The conflict has arisen from a combination of factors: geographically separated from the rest of the country, surrounded by politically unstable countries with militias and easy access to weapons, the Casamance is a difficult part of the country to reach. Flights are irregular and expensive; the sea journey is a long one. In addition, political decisions from independence to the present day have effectively marginalised the population of the Casamance. Senghor and his successor Diouf frequently sent governors from the north to the Casamance; there they embodied the power of the state but were unfamiliar with local social and cultural practices and sometimes failed to treat the population appropriately.

From the outset the main problem was the allocation of land. Since independence all farmland in Senegal has been state land and cannot be sold. However, traditional land cultivation rules exist in each region, including the Casamance. For years the governors allocated large areas of land to groundnut growers from the north. This was extremely frustrating for farmers living in the Casamance: large areas of farmland were taken away from them and new crops were introduced. The inhabitants of the Casamance had always been self-sufficient, growing their own rice and other products. As a result of post-colonial land policy the native farmers have now gradually lost their livelihood base. Their frustration led to the founding of the MFDC (Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance), which was initially a movement campaigning for the rights of the Casamance population. It became radicalised, called for independence and went underground. Weapons were easy to come by, from Guinea Bissau, from Gambia, from Guinea. When the Cold War ended in the early 1990s weapons became ever easier to

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obtain; the movement steadily became better equipped and split into factions. In time a veritable war economy developed, based on the production and trafficking of drugs and weapons. Those who profited from this were not only the rebels themselves but also high-ranking political figures in Senegal and neighbouring countries. It is clear to the fighters that they will not achieve their aim of state independence. Despite this, the trench warfare between the civil population and agents of the state goes on and will continue as long as powerful economic interests are at stake.

A number of observers assumed, especially at the start of the conflict, that this was an ethnic and religious conflict involving the Diola and other ethnic groups in the south who are largely Christian. However, this theory does not stand up to scrutiny, because the independence movement attracts members of all the ethnic groups and religions represented in the Casamance. Ziguinchor, a veritable melting pot, has now become a cosmopolitan regional capital in which more than 20 ethnic groups from the south, the remainder of Senegal and neighbouring countries live together, on the whole peacefully and harmoniously. The rebel conflict is a political movement that has resorted to violence to achieve its aims of greater recognition in the national context, economic advancement and greater autonomy as a stimulus for economic development. However, the spiral of violence has become self-perpetuating and now state and non-state actors, as

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well as some of the separatists themselves, are seeking to restore peace. The separatist movement is deeply divided among those who support peace and those who oppose it. The Casamance conflict is symptomatic of

the consequences of post-colonial development disparities, and it is imperative for the peaceful future of West Africa that it be resolved. Almost all the presidential candidates for the elections in February 2012 have put this issue at the top of their agenda: Senegalese country-wide regard it as the main task facing the new president.

OUTLOOK: PAN-AFRICAN UNIFICATION INITIATIVES

Senegal seems predestined to play a fundamental role in the African unification movement. Senghor, the country's first president,¹⁶ remained faithful to the pan-African ideal to the end of his days. His successor, Abdou Diouf, also defended the idea of African unity and Abdoulaye Wade is investing energy, time and money in pursuing the ideal. He has played a key part in NEPAD, the pan-African development plan, and is doing everything possible to turn individual aspects of the plan into reality. An example is the creation of the "great green wall", a belt of forest that is due to stretch from the Atlantic to the Nile and which Senegal is already cultivating.

Although the economic success of such initiatives is not yet assured, the ethnic mosaic of Senegal at least provides a starting point at societal level, and is hence a model for the peaceful development of the entire African continent.

16 | Cf. Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé, "Leopold Sédar Senghor – Staatsmann, Humanist und Dichter", *KAS-Auslandsinformationen*, 4/2002, <http://kas.de/wf/de/33.362> (accessed 15 Dec 2011).