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The *Sénégal 2000* Research Programⁱ

Momar Coumba Diop

Abstract

This article is an overview of the principal accomplishments of the research program known as the “Sénégal 2000 project,” which undertook an examination and analysis of Senegalese state and society at the dawn of the new century. A team of social scientists and historians of different generations, nationalities, and disciplinary backgrounds worked together over a period of years to produce an impressive series of works, presented mostly in the form of edited volumes published by CODESRIA Editions Karthala, on Senegalese economy, politics, culture, and society. Given the current climate of anti-intellectualism and persistent pressures to narrow social science research agendas, this overview of the Sénégal 2000 project serves to highlight some of the real issues at stake in today’s era of political, economic, and social restructuring in Senegal and in West Africa. In doing so, it frames some of the dilemmas and choices that are faced by those who, in their diverse ways, are shaping the future of this region. The author is Momar Coumba Diop, a principal coordinator of the Sénégal 2000 project, and current director of the Centre de Recherches sur les Politiques Sociales (CRE-POS), BP 6333, Dakar-Etoile, Sénégal.

ⁱThis article is reprinted, with permission, from the fall 2004 issue of the newsletter of the West African Research Association (WARA). Our original objective was to publish all the research results by the year 2000. The original title of the project was “Senegal: from ‘Socialism’ to Structural Adjustment, What Politics and Policy for the 21st Century?” This essay was translated by Catherine Boone, University of Texas at Austin.

Introduction

The work entitled *Sénégal 2000* emerged from the collaboration of researchers with diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Starting in 1987, our central objective was to chart the political economy of Senegal. In the first phases, we worked with very limited means because our major concern was to safeguard our intellectual autonomy, and to play a role in shaping the orientation and character of scholarly work that was being produced at the time on Senegal.¹ We also wanted to stake out a presence in the academic world here by producing research with implications that would extend beyond the Senegalese context. This task required us to go through many drafts, and many debates and revisions, before we could even begin to engage the larger theoretical questions that interested us.

We deliberately chose, at the beginning, to concentrate our efforts on the Senegalese state and its personnel. This research agenda was not that of foreign foundations or funding agencies, nor that of the Senegalese government, and still less that of its various advisors and backers. We did not allow anyone to tell us what to study, or to define the research questions or the manner of approaching them. We knew what had to be done. Beyond our work on the Senegalese state per se, we had great political ambitions for our country: through our academic work and through engaged citizenship, we wanted to contribute to a transformation of the living conditions of majority of the population.

The importance of this agenda was such that several members of our research group were drawn progressively away from tasks connected more directly to career advancement. That is why, even today, several

among us have not finished our Thèses d'État², or have decided not to write them.

Multiple, Long-Standing Questions

Since the end of the 1980s, three research programs have been undertaken within the general parameters outlined above. The first traced the processes of state-construction, with an emphasis on successive reorganizations within the state apparatus itself, popular resistance to state domination, and the political and economic stakes of the economic reforms of the 1980s. Our initial goal was to work out a real "biography of the Senegalese state" that would describe the changes and ruptures that had been taking place in state structure and state personnel since the end of the 1970s. In constructing the analysis, we refused to be constrained by the orthodoxies of the two dominant intellectual traditions of the day: Marxism and nationalism.

In the first book, *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf* (Diop and Diouf, 1990), we examined the transfer of power from Léopold Sédar Senghor to Abdou Diouf. The year 1987 was interrupted by a surgery that would take me, definitively, away from teaching. As we resumed and continued the work, discussions with Jean Copans encouraged us to focus squarely on the Diouf regime itself. It is true (as some friends rightly pointed out to us) that we were obsessed by questions of the state and state power, but we were not the only ones — the state itself was the focus of most theses and dissertations written at the time.

Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf identified, with clarity and precision, the political, cultural, and economic agendas of those who assumed power in the post-Senghor

period. It traced maneuvers they undertook to reinforce the foundations of their political domination, including strategies aimed at weakening the counter-hegemonic moves of the political opposition parties, fragmenting their efforts and those of the trade unions, and coopting and/or marginalizing their leaders. We analyzed the political and economic maneuvers that produced chronic instability in the trade unions linked to the state, as well as in the National Assembly. The object of these maneuvers was to preempt the formation of a strong political bloc that would have been able to challenge the ruling class.

The political and cultural logics of state discourse were also examined. This allowed us to clarify two processes. The first is the process that promoted the construction of the hegemonic, dominant class, which has been marked over time by successive crises of political integration. The second is the worsening of Senegal's economic problems and the implementation of structural adjustment programs in this country. We also looked at constraints on the process of regional integration, especially in the context of an analysis of relations between Senegal, Mauritania, and the Gambia.

Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf also sought to draw light on the functioning of the state bureaucracy, examining in particular the transition from the first generation of leaders to the second. In spite of all the unflattering portraits that have been painted of African state bureaucracies, our work showed that the Senegalese bureaucracy (like the state bureaucracies of a good number of other African countries) was able to bring about an organized transfer of power. We then decided to extend this analysis to other African countries. Our objective was to put the Senegalese case in broader theoretical perspective, and then to identify various "paths" by which

the first generation of African heads of state organized (or failed to organize) conditions for their own succession. With the support of CODESRIA³, Mamadou Diouf and I produced a working paper that served as a basis for putting together a team of African researchers (Diop and Diouf, 1990c). Thus began an odyssey that, through many theoretical debates and tensions that inevitably emerge in an undertaking of this nature, would eventually culminate almost ten years later in *Les Figures du Politique en Afrique* (Diop and Diouf, 1999).⁴

A better understanding of how the state functions

Sénégal: Trajectoires d'un État (Diop 1992) was the next project undertaken with the support of CODESRIA.⁵ The objective was to write a political economy of Senegal that would be placed in a broader context, and with attention to a broader array of questions, than had been the case in earlier works. Our working title was "Political Economy of the African Crisis: the case of Senegal" this evolved into "Senegal 1960-1990: Trajectories of an African Democracy." Even though our scope of vision was larger than it was in our earlier work, this project still reflected what our friends called our "obsession with the state."

A group of about ten university researchers with diverse specializations was pulled together.⁶ The members were Mohamed Mbodj (we called him "Inge" because he was our resident computer expert), François Boye, Mamadou Diouf, myself, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Aminata Diaw, Paul Ndiaye, Lat Soucabé Mbow, Babacar Diop [Buuba], Tafsir Malick Ndiaye, Ndèye Sow, and Abdou Sylla. We also brought in a journalist, Moussa Paye, and two demographer-statisticians, Waly Badiane

and Babacar Mané. And even though he did not participate directly in this work, Amady Aly Dieng ("Le Doyen") has to be included as a member of this group because of the long and passionate discussions we had with him.⁷

Some of the members of our group had participated in the drafting of *Sénégal 2015*, a planning exercise sponsored in 1988 by the Senegalese government (François Boye, Mamadou Diouf, Paul Ndiaye, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, and Mohamed Mbodj). In the course of the preparation of *Sénégal 2015*, important work had been done on the changing structure and nature of Senegalese society, and on changes in economic structure. Incorporation of this work into a governmental planning exercise had, however, limited discussion of many themes and aspects that were particularly interesting to us, as university researchers.

We felt it was necessary to contextualize this material in a discussion of the evolution of the state itself, and to think more deeply about political practice and social dynamics, in order to explain the growing economic problems of our country and to come up with real solutions. We thus decided to retain a focus on the logic and rationality of the state itself, and to identify as carefully as possible the social, economic, and political constraints within which it operated. We wanted to identify cycles of growth and crisis, and to underscore the origins and the rentier logic of the Senegalese political and economic elite. We traced the logic of institutions, rather than their formal structure and mandates, and stressed the relations of power expressed in and through them. In this work, some of the contributors did indeed identify signs of the exhaustion of the model of political management that was put in place around the time of independence.

This work was subjected to very meticulous scrutiny

and evaluation. All the papers were read and marked-up by all the contributors. André Lericollais participated in this process. Next, all the contributors read the entire draft of the completed manuscript. We met together at CODESRIA, which was located in Fann-Résidence at the time. Vigorous debate ensued, most notably perhaps over papers dealing with Senegal's foreign policy. Abdoulaye Bathily, Kader Boye, Francine Kane, Boubacar Barry, and Charles Becker read all the papers and participated in these debates. Finally, before publication, the distinguished Senegalese scholar Abdoulaye Ly subjected the entire book to a very probing critique. His remarks, contained in an eight-page note dated September 1991, helped the editors with the last additions before the book went to press.

Soon thereafter, we completed this research program by extending it along third axis of investigation. *Le Sénégal et ses voisins* (Diop, 1994) took fuller account of the international dimensions of our subject. We asked, for example, what one should make of the fact that it was thanks in large part to important external financial support⁸ — the counterpart of its political (Ly, 1984) and economic dependence (Rocheteau, 1982) — that Senegal was able to aspire to a position of regional leadership, all the while responding to the numerous financial demands of the rentier elite that held in hostage the political life of this country?

Looking back over these works, I realize that *Le Sénégal et ses voisins* marks the end of our "obsession" with the state. Publication of that work coincided with an important recomposition of the team brought together for *Sénégal: Trajectoires d'un État* (translated into English in 1993 by Ayi Kwei Armah).⁹ Certain members of our group left, but new researchers joined in, namely the historians

Ibrahima Thioub and Ousseynou Faye, and our late and sorely missed colleague, Moustapha Kane.¹⁰ We began a new phase of our work, one in which we would no longer rely exclusively on Senegalese scholars to write about Senegal.

Multiple perspectives on Senegal

Sénégal 2000 is part of the extension of the works mentioned above. It deals with the period from 1960-2001. The goal was to track changes and discontinuities in the political, socio-cultural, and economic domains, and to analyze the responses of both state and society to these transformations. We did not focus on the state only; it was also a matter of asking about evasions, deflections, and distancing from the state, and identifying some of the diverse and unexpected results of these processes.

One notable aspect of this project was the size of the team engaged in the work: more than 40 researchers were involved. Some brought to the table their experience managing externally-funded development projects. Another distinguishing aspect of the project was that it brought together researchers of different generations and different research specializations (some to address some very specific lacunae in the literature on Senegal). We also invited colleagues like Donal Cruise O'Brien, Jean Copans, and Sheldon Gellar to "revisit" the terrain of their earlier work, or to rewrite certain aspects of their work on Senegal. The idea here was to generate different perspectives on Senegal — from researchers of different generations, specializations, and nationalities. The political-institutional perspective that was privileged in our earlier work was not encouraged here. We did not intend to focus in particular on relations of power within

the ruling alliance, or within the political cartel at the center of the political system (including the leaders of political parties, the marabouts, the editors of influential journals, and leaders of the largest professional associations).

The results of this work were published in three volumes. The first, *Le Sénégal contemporain* (Diop, 2002a), began as a reflection on political cultures of Senegal, but ultimately aspired to be an intellectual, social, and cultural history of the country. We attempted to render visible different “life worlds,” and to deal with initiatives and innovations in culture, and in knowledge, that have occurred on the margins of the state. We considered the “national question,” and also paid attention to dissonances arising from the different physical and theoretical terrains of our subject matter.

The second volume, *La Société sénégalaise entre le local et le global* (Diop, 2002b), focused on local and global constraints, especially as they shape the dynamics of the rural world and changes with the peasantries. It examined social movements in terms of their origins, goals, and expressions. Authors also took up questions having to do with Senegal’s insertion into the world economy, the question of borders, international migration, and relations between the government and its foreign creditors.

The third volume — *Gouverner le Sénégal: Entre ajustement structurel et développement durable* (Diop, 2004) — was devoted to the economic situation of the country and its relation to the functioning of its political institutions. It helps clarify the reasons why, up until now, the international financial institutions have stressed questions tied to the reform of state institutions and of “governance,” particularly in the wake of a major wave of anti-state measures undertaken by Abdou Diouf

and his collaborators. This volume complements the analysis provided in *La construction de l'État au Sénégal* (Cruise O'Brien, Diop and Diop, 2002), which shed light on the nature of the political elite that led Senegal to independence, analyzed relations between the state and various social actors, and examined the effects of economic reforms implemented from the late 1970s onwards. It followed the gradual erosion of the political system put in place by Senghor, in spite of important measures taken to appease the demands of the middle class, which led up to the electoral defeat of Abdou Diouf in March 2000.¹¹

Alongside these works, some members of the *Sénégal 2000* group participated in the drafting of a study of information and communications technology. The resulting book, *Le Sénégal à l'heure de l'information, Technologies et société* (Diop, 2003), originated in a meeting that took place in Geneva in January 1999 that brought together Thandika Mkandawire, the Director of the United Nations Research Institute, Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, and me. The UN Research Institute was willing to support work on this question in the context of Senegal, and was able to support ten researchers to do it, all the while allowing us complete liberty to define the themes of the research, the objectives, and the methodologies of analysis.

Conclusion

This essay has tried to mark key moments in an "expérience de pensée incessante" in which we always strove to question and revise the results of our own earlier work. This is why *Sénégal 2000* was indeed able to document, at least in certain domains, key evolutions

of Senegalese society from 1960 to 2001. It marks the end of an impassioned intellectual journey. For some of us, the moment has come to explore other theoretical territories, in other ways, and in a less collective manner. It is impossible, right now, to know where this will lead. Yet the team put together in the late 1980s has now been reinforced by the younger researchers who were incorporated after that time. The moment has arrived for these younger scholars, along with others, to expand and deepen the analyses presented in earlier publications, to correct them in a severe and even hostile manner if necessary, and to do so as university scholars, in ways that have always been specific to those not beholden to the powers that be. They are well advised to avoid the temptations of oversimplification and demagoguery, as well as the temptation to practice social or intellectual exclusion.

The work of studying and writing about Senegal will never be a job reserved exclusively for Senegalese. It is impossible to think about the work done on contemporary Senegal without taking into the account the important contributions of Vincent Monteil, Paul Péliissier, Louis-Vincent Thomas, Jean Girard, Jean Copans, Sheldon Gellar, Donal Cruise O'Brien, Charles Becker, Christian Coulon, Martin Klein, David Robinson, Ferran Iniesta, Catherine Boone, Guy Rocheteau, Philippe Couty, Didier Fassin, Samir Amin, Bernard Founou-Tchuioua, René Collignon, Leonardo Villalón, F. Dumont, Gérard Salem, Philippe Antoine, Henri Collomb, András Zempléni, Robert Fatton, and many others who are impossible to name in such a short space.

Our work should never be focused exclusively on research specific to Africa only, or to Senegal in particular. The real objective must be to draw upon African

experiences to produce work of universal meaning. To do this, we should not rely on hand-me-down approaches and modes of analysis. Short-cuts and jerry-rigging can encourage shoddy or shallow work, with devastating consequences for our own research and for the quest to produce new understanding.

Endnotes

- ¹ The only financial support we had in the preparation of *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf* was the contribution of Boubacar Barry, who took responsibility for the costs of preparation of the manuscript.
- ² Required for promotion to what, in the US system, is the rank of Full Professor.
- ³ Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
- ⁴ In addition to Mamadou Diouf and myself, the group was made up of Abouhani Abdelghani (Maroc), Tessy D. Bakary (Côte-d'Ivoire), Rafâa Ben Achour (Tunisie), Tshikala Kayembe Biaya (Congo-Zaïre), Nana K. A. Busia Jr (Ghana), Jibrin Ibrahim (Nigeria), Mbonko Lula (Congo-Zaïre), Ghaouti Mekamcha (Algérie), Abdoulaye Niandou-Souley (Niger), Jide Owoeye (Nigeria), Amadu Sesay (Sierra Leone), Luc Sindjoun (Cameroun).
- ⁵ At the same time, with the support of Richard Stren, we created *Sociétés-Espaces-Temps*, but it proved to be difficult to sustain this as a periodical, which is what we originally intended. After a 1992 issue devoted to the crisis of African agriculture, which contained papers presented at a 1988 conference, we converted this to a book series. The first was *Le Sénégal et ses voisins* (Diop, 1994). The second book, published with Karthala, was devoted to sustainable development in the Sahel and contained papers that had been prepared for a seminar organized by l'Ecole Nationale d'Economie Appliquée (ENEA).

- ⁶ Of the members of this group, six have now left Senegal.
- ⁷ On Doyen Amady Aly Dieng, see the paper I wrote with M. Diouf, "Notes sur la trajectoire d'un dissident africain," published in *Wal Fadjri*, 17 janvier 2001.
- ⁸ Relations between the ruling class and its foreign partners were restructured profoundly after the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. The devaluation meant, among other things, a tightening of constraints imposed by "structural adjustment" and of conditions of access to external resources, which played a central role in financing public spending. Devaluation also led to an acceleration of the privatization of the economy.
- ⁹ See also M.-C. Diop (1993).
- ¹⁰ On the contributions of these colleagues, see my essay in Diop (2000a).
- ¹¹ See Momar-Coumba Diop, Mamadou Diouf, and Aminata Diaw (2000).