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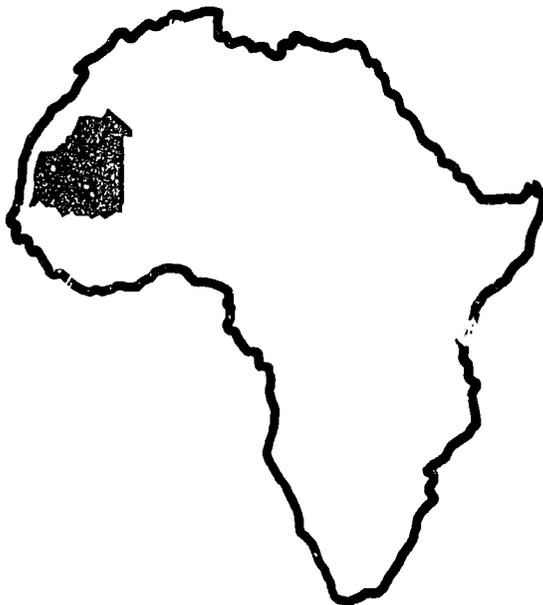
## RAMS PROJECT

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SOCIOLOGICAL PROFILE:

THE MOORS

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RAMS

SOCIOLOGICAL PROFILE

THE MOORS

by

Sociological Unit

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PART ONE

HISTORICAL SURVEY

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

We might well begin this study with a truism: first, the present socio-economic situation of Mauritania in general and of Moorish society in particular is the result of a historical process in which forces favoring stability and continuity have, whether through lack of knowledge or of power, not always been able to dominate those forces tending toward disintegration and crisis. Secondly, the changes affecting the world of the Moors have not been even and homogeneous in their impact upon the whole society. To evaluate the relative importance of each of these two sets of factors (factors of continuity and factors of change), to clarify the tensions, dislocations, blockages and imbalances resulting from their evolution, and to measure their impact on Mauritania's current development problems, we shall proceed according to the following scheme:

In the first part, we shall present a short historical overview designed to help recapitulate, in broad outline, the establishment of Moorish society. In the second part, we shall analyze the structures of this society, past and present, from twin aspects: the aspect of material resources and that of social organization.

In essence, then, this study will be a bibliographic introduction in which an effort will be made to highlight those factors which could be at the root of Mauritania's current underdevelopment.

### HISTORICAL SURVEY

The structural history of Mauritania's Moorish population may be schematized into three periods:

- From prehistoric times to the 13th Century:

Berber populations settle in the Western Sahara. To all intents and purposes they become definitely Islamized after the Almoravid conquests at the end of the 11th century.

- From the 13th to the 18th Century:

As a result of a long-drawn-out series of confrontations, succeeding waves of Arab tribes; the latter are driven steadily southward.

- From the 18th Century: European traders exert increasing influence on Moorish affairs.

This increasing European influence culminates in the occupation of the country by French troops in 1902. In 1960, Mauritania like other ex-colonies of French West Africa (AOF), attains independence.

I. The Prehistoric Period - Antiquity - The Period of Islamization

We know now that the Sahara was not always the immense, arid waste that presents such a formidable challenge to travelers today. There is ample evidence that the area was inhabited, particularly during the Neolithic period. Little is known of the first inhabitants of the Sahara area, but the general opinion is that they may have been cattle herders and sedentary hunting populations of black stock. This has a bearing on our topic: as we shall see hereafter, several authors have not hesitated to establish a direct connecting link between, on the one hand, these proto-Saharan populations and their putative progeny, (known to oral tradition as the "Bafour", cf. Lucas 1931), and the present population of "Haratin", on the other hand. Whatever the validity of these arguments, it is a fact that "Lybico-Berber" warrior groups ("Garmantes", "Gaetules"), using light chariots and horses, invaded Cyrenaica in the second half of the 2nd millennium B.C. Their vanguard reached the Western Sahara between the 1st and the 4th Centuries (Vernet 1979, La Chapelle 1930). With them they brought, from the onset of the Christian era, that animal invaluable in Saharan life, the dromedary. In all likelihood, with the influx of these conquerors the black populations were either driven southward or reduced to vassal status.

"So the ethnic picture presented by Mauritania in the protohistoric period is clear: camel-riding Berber nomads forced the aborigines southward; these left survivors only in a few scattered oases, sometimes down to medieval times. (Some of the Haratin of the present day are descendants of these survivors)". R. VERNET (1979, p. 41).

We must add that the effects of the desertification process, a process begun far back in time (between 11,000 and 6,000 B.P., the period back to which the present climate dates: P. ROGNON, 1976), must have played a decisive part in this slow, inexorable southward movement, which continues to this day.

For the entire period stretching from the Berber invasions to the beginnings of the Almoravid movement, the historical record on the Western Sahara remains fragmentary; it is heavily dependent on second-hand, even third-hand reports mainly preserved to Arab chroniclers and geographers (Mauny 1961, Cuoq 1975).

Nevertheless, as far back as the 8th century, most of these records indicate that the trans-Saharan caravan trade whereby products from the African Sudan (gold, ebony, asbestos and ivory) and from the Sahel region (gum, cowries, ambergris, oryx skin shields and slaves) were exchanged for North African and Mediterranean products (copper, glassware, drugs, iron utensils, woolen garments, silk goods and paper) was important. In the 10th century salt was a key commodity in this trans-Saharan trade.

The interest generated by this trade, heightened by legends of the fabulous, golden wealth of the Sudan region, was so lively as to move the Moroccan monarchy to try several times to grasp control of it through the use of military expeditions. In 1511, one of these expeditions actually captured far-off Tombuctoo.

Tribes of nomadic Berbers (Messoufa, Lamta, Gazoula, Lamtouna, Gdala) through those territories the caravan trails crossing the Western Sahara ran, often to their cost, do not seem to have been organized under any central authority.

Their lifestyle and their social organization, as far as we can surmise from the sparse gleanings the chroniclers have left us, generally foreshadow the ways of the Moorish tribes today.

No doubt they quickly came under the influence of neighboring powers on their northern and southern borders, particularly Sijilmasa to the north and the kingdom of Ghana (8th ? - 13th Centuries) to the south, where proto-Soninke populations seem to have been powerful. The "Azer" tongue, a Soninke dialect intermixed with Berber (Charles Monteil 1939), in use among the black Ksour populations of Ouadane and Tichitt (Masna) a few dozen years ago, seems to be a survival from that remote period when the Soninke (Sarakolle) ruled these areas (Mohamed El Chennafi 1970). Islam, introduced into the area in the 7th and 8th Centuries, continued to make inroads in the wake of the caravan trade.

In the 10th Century, the Sanhaja Berbers controlled the important commercial center at Audaghost; that town is now identified with near certainty as having been sited at the present Tegdaoust, near Tamchakett (S. and D. Robert, Jean Devisse 1970). It was among these Islamized Berber tribes that the Almoravid movement arose in the 11th Century. In a few years, it was destined to conquer the whole of the Western Sahara

and a sizeable part of the Iberian peninsula. The Ghana Empire was reduced to vassal status. But in 1087 Abu Bakar Ben Amer, leader of the Almoravids in the South, died; from then on the movement rapidly lost steam. While the other great Sanhaja leader, Yussef Ben Tachfin, continued his conquering sweep across North Africa, Abu Bakar's cohorts lost their cohesion and, as a matter of logical course, their authority over the regions they had conquered or vassalized. The Ghana Empire, though much reduced in strength, regained its autonomy. From the 12th Century on, the populations of the areas now known as Tagant and Hodh fell very definitely under the influences of the great political systems of Sahelian Africa: Ghana (until the 13th Century), Mali (from the 13th to the 16th Century), Songhai (15th and 16th Centuries) (Désiré Vuillemin et al. 1964, Charles Vanacker 1979, S. and D. Robert, J. Devissé 1970). Old caravan centers like Tichitt (founded in the 12th Century ?) and Oualata (12th Century ?) seem at one time to have been drawn into the spheres of influence of these states (D. Jacques-Meunié 1957, 1961). In the case of Oualata the relationship was closer. Ouadane, founded by the Idawalhaj (13th - 14th Century ?), and Chinguetti, founded by the Idawali (12th Century ?) made up, together with Tichitt and Oualata the prototypical generation of Mauritanian market-towns (Alamin 1911, 1958).

These centers rose to prominence at a time when the remnants of the Mauritanian Almoravid movement were beginning to suffer seriously

from the encroachments of a new and dangerous force in their traditional pasture-lands: the Magil Arabs.

## II. THE INSTALLATION OF MODERN MOORISH SOCIETY (13TH-18TH CENTURY)

We need to be wary of the half-baked schematizations so dear to French historians of our regions (Gautier, La Chapelle, Marty, Amilhat). Their reductionist schemata tend to explain most of the area's history from the arrival of the Arabs in terms of the working out of rivalries pitting Arab against Berber right from the start. This ineradicable antagonism is in its turn supposedly superimposed on an even more ancient ethnic conflict, the conflict between the Zenete and the Sanhaja branches of the Berber world.

The reality is less neat, more complex than these schemata suggest. The Magil did not reach what is now Northern Mauritania at the same time; and among them, only the descendants of Hassan, ancestor of Mauritania's Hassans, are of relevance to us.

In the 15th Century, the Oulad Rizg and the Oualad Nacer settled in Tiris and Aftout, while the Oualad Daoud settled in Adrar and Hodh.

The 16th Century saw the arrival of the Oualad M'Bareck.

The Brakna and the Trarza only settled in the area in the 17th Century. This staggered order of arrival is part of the reason for the conflicts which punctuated this entire period and sometimes pitted rival Arab elements against each other (as in the Battle of In Titan, in 1631, involving the Mghafra and the Oulad Rizg). More frequently,

the parties involved were unstable, motley coalitions in whose composition ethnic loyalties were no longer a factor (as exemplified in the part played by the Kounta, the Ahel Sidi Mahmoud, the Oulad Nacer and the Brakna <sup>1/</sup> in the internecine wars the Idowich waged among themselves and in their confrontations with the Oulad M'Bareck, with the Adrar Emirate, etc. Amilhat 1937).

One of the most significant of these conflicts was certainly the "Charr Bebbe" War. In this war, lasting nearly thirty years (1644 to 1674), a coalition of Berber forces fought a Hassani bloc drawn principally from the Trarza and the Brakna. The defeat of the Berber forces signalled the definitive ascendancy of the Hassani group, if not over the whole of Moorish society, at least over its central and western sections: Adrar, Trarza, Brakna (Marty 1919, 1921; El Yédali and I. Hamet 1911).

The end of the "Charr Bebbe" War saw the establishment of the first Moorish emirates. Brakna and Trarza were established at the end of the 17th Century, while the Adrar Emirate developed gradually in the first half of the 18th Century. Under the energetic leadership of Mohamed Chein (1733-1788) and his son Mohamed (1788-1822), who laid the foundation for the Tagant Emirate, the Idowich liberated themselves from Oulad M'Bareck dominance. The Tagant Emirate grew to considerable influence in the interminable reign of Bakar Ould Soueid Ahmed (1836-1905).

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1/ Tribes, not regions.

In South-East Mauritania, the Hodh, a virtual museum of tribal history where all the remnants of erstwhile powerful tribes meet, entered the 19th Century as subjects of their old vassals the Mechdouf, after undergoing a long period of domination by the Oulad M'Bareck. Toward the end of the 19th Century their political importance in the region was comparable to that of the four emirates mentioned above.

References to the existence of these "great powers" in Moorish society should not create illusions of any tremendous grandeur. In the section of this study dealing with social structure, we shall show just how circumscribed and precarious the power of these emirates actually was. And we should make it clear right from the start that this power of the emirates was so fragile that it never controlled the whole Moorish world. Specifically, it scarcely touched the eastern and southern reaches of that world, where large tribal confederations moved. (Some of these were admittedly only recently formed, or had only lately risen to power: e.g. Ahel Sidi Mahmoud, Regueihat). Many tribes of marabouts were independent of the Emirates.

Lastly, the authority of the Emirates was obliged to come to terms with a number of religious heads who sometimes wielded considerable power. These chiefs were all the more dangerous as rivals because they were occasionally tempted to enter the military arena, and also because their constituency included the spiritual world: e.g. Cheikh Sidi El Mokhtar El Kounti and his son Cheikh Sidia El Kebir (Stewart 1973).

This, then, is a society made up of a mosaic of different groups, each intensely jealous of its identity and its independence, at all times proud of their roots; a society in which the razzia, a form of predatory raid with all its limitations and its rules, was long regarded as the quintessentially noble pursuit; a society in which the most solemnly consecrated alliances (matrimonial exchanges played a considerable part in the diplomacy of the Emirates) might at any time be fractured by a senseless quarrel between two shepherds at a watering trough; a society, in short, so riven with blood feuds and vendettas that everyone in it has at least one hereditary enemy. In this society, it was difficult for a ruling power to emerge strong enough and sufficiently just in its operation, to achieve a real national consensus among the Moors.

In fact, it was mainly in Southern Mauritania (Trarza, Brakna, and, to a lesser extent, Tagant) that the power of the Emirs was able in some measure to flourish and expand. The reasons for this, as we shall see, are closely linked with the activities of European traders along the Atlantic seaboard, and later along the River Senegal.

### III. TRADE, COLONIZATION and DECOLONIZATION

European attempts to find a foothold in Mauritania go back as far as the 15th Century. These attempts continued, with changing fortunes and at the behest of various powers, until France occupied most of the Moorish homeland (1902-1934).

In 1443 the Portuguese landed at Arguin. In 1448, they established what was then called a factory post at Ouadane. In all probability, there were ample supplies of gold, ivory, slaves and ostrich feathers to keep the trade between Saharan caravans and Portuguese merchants going. But the factory post at Ouadane did not last long (Mond 1978). For a considerable time contacts along the coast-line between Africans and European merchants and sailors took the form of a "Silent Trade".

In the 17th and 18th Centuries conflicts intensified between European powers (Holland, Brandenburg, France, England) for the control of the seaboard stretching from Arguin to Saint Louis in Senegal: this was the indispensable outlet for the export of a product abundant in the area - gum arabic. The result of these conflicts, dubbed the "Gum Wars" (Delcourt 1952), was that the French remained in unchallenged control of the coast. From this time on an increasingly important portion of the trans-Saharan trade was diverted toward the sea routes.

The effect of such a diversion on the business of the old caravan centers, and its fateful impact on populations whose resources and lifestyle were closely bound up with the caravan trade, can easily be imagined. The historian Boubacar BARRY (1972) for one, has advanced the bold view that the "Charr Bebbe War" was one of the expressions of the conflict which pitted trans-Saharan commercial interests (in the main represented by the Berbers) against interests tied to the trans-Atlantic trade (linked to the Hassani coalition).

However, that may be, the fact is that from that time on foreign intervention in Moorish society would continue to grow. To ensure that the trading "ports" were supplied with as much gum as possible, the French companies established at Saint Louis made annual ("customary") payments to selected notables. The payments, made in kind, comprised an extremely miscellaneous assortment of goods, the most sought-after being the well-known "Guinea fabric" of the "Chandora" and "Nile" varieties, which has become the traditional dress of the entire Moorish society.

The "customary payments", used as a manipulatory expedient, first by the merchants of Saint Louis and later by the colonial administration, developed into a key instrument for controlling both the Moorish social hierarchy and the consumption patterns of the whole Moorish society. In fact, the system of "customary payments" has played a significant contributing role in the shaping of these consumption patterns. Because they endow their recipients with considerable material power in a society essentially dependent on agricultural and foraging resources, these payments have been largely responsible for the tendency of the Trarza and Brakna Emirates to adopt a rather monarchical style at certain periods.

The payments very clearly and decisively sharpened appetites and aggravated competition between aspirants to this same source of power. To reach it, brother slaughtered brother, and uncles and nephews did not

hesitate to murder each other, etc. (as was evident in the series of bloody assassinations that rocked the Trarza Emirate between 1860 and 1904). Nevertheless, the payments could create in the minds of certain Emirs (Mohamed El Habib of Trarza, 1827-1860) the idea-perhaps illusion would be a better word - that they possessed autonomous power.

Starting from the mid-18th Century, the French moved to put an end to such fragile ambiguities. Using everything from punitive expeditions to full-scale campaigns (Faidherbe's campaign of 1854-1856), from skirmishes to raids, they ended up undertaking an undisguised colonization campaign at the beginning of the 20th Century, after the Berlin Conference had ratified the partition of Africa.

This colonization campaign did not really end until 1934 (Gillier 1926, Gouraud 1945, Vuillemin 1962).

In a country supposedly bereft of natural resources, colonial power, motivated as it was principally by strategic and security considerations, was bound to be somewhat superficial. The government was satisfied to administer the territory from a few urban centers usually built to serve ad hoc purposes. But the imposition of taxes, the construction of new communications networks, the more or less spontaneous stimulation of new consumption needs and tastes, all helped the market economy not only to spread faster but also to tighten its hold on the society. (The colonial school system, even if it only affected

a tiny fraction of the population, played a part in this, as did the urban entourage that grew around the administrative post -- the people Hamid El Mauritaniy, 1974 has termed the "colonial boyocracy").

Power then became centralized in the hands of the colonial administration. And the administration did not hesitate to use it when necessary to crush any potentially independent authority centers, to coopt those who acquiesced in emasculating compromises, and to boost new elements committed to its colonial interests. The consequences of this centralized domination for the evolution of Moorish society were profound.

With the triumph of colonization, the process started by European merchants in the 17th Century, a process destined to lead Moorish society from partial dependence to total submission to French economic and political dictates, reached its conclusion.

We shall leave the delineation of its effects for later. For the moment, we shall simply point out that from the perspective of a nomadic world view, colonialism manifested itself in the form of a phenomenon that was not only alien, but also oppresively bothersome: the phenomenon of frontiers.

The tangled web of personal bonds which in the past, more than any other factor, gave every Bizani (Moor) a sense of identity (bonds of rank, status, caste, family, clan and tribe) would in future have to make room for the faceless rules and regulations of States.

The new phenomenon affected the cycles of nomadic movement, pasture areas, and even the settlement of population groups. Colonialism, working its way upward from the south, speeded up the process of agglomeration and sedentarization among the Moors of the Sahelian-Sudanese belt. It also cut off the great Northern raiders from their traditional sources of livelihood, stranding some of them beyond Mauritania's northern borders (Jean Arnaud 1973). Colonialism involved the whole Moorish population, from the first to "submit" to the last recalcitrant "dissidents". That unity of the Moorish world, the Shingit, to which several authors (Ahmed Ben Alamin 1911, Marty 1916, Monteil 1940, O. du Puigaudeau 1967, Monod 1967, C. Taine-Cheikh 1979) have drawn our attention as a discernible phenomenon even though it has never given rise to political unity, was balkanized by colonial administrative fiat. And the fragments were portioned out between Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Western Sahara and Mauritania.

The extremely costly Saharan War - which gobbled up nearly 35 % of Mauritania's 1977 budget, compared to a meager 2.1 % for rural development - is part of the long-term fallout from this arbitrary fission set off by the colonial powers.

The colonial period, as far as Mauritania is concerned, ended on November 28, 1960. But by then all the factors likely to deprive Moorish society of control over the mechanisms of its regeneration were already present. These factors include the cities, those new centers of wealth

and power (Bonte 1972, Arnaud 1976); markets, brought within easy reach by communications networks and vehicles, selling goods that have become staples; and last but not least, a centralized administration which sees to it that all this trafficking is carried on safely and with due propriety.

What we are considering, then, is a process of disintegration. The key characteristics of this process should be much more clearly discernible in the light of the crises besetting Moorish society: wars, drought, famine.

We have sketched, in very broad outline, the major stages by which the Moorish population settled in Mauritania. We shall now proceed to study the way the society operates.

## PART TWO

### ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MOORS

Moorish society, fundamentally dependent on the Saharan environment, its homeland, has always been an agricultural and pastoral society counting chiefly on animal husbandry for its livelihood. The insightful statement by Robert Capot-Rey (1953), to the effect that Moorish society depended overwhelmingly on the dromedary and slavery, is a succinct and accurate description of the situation. The breakdown of trans-Saharan trade, a breakdown starting as far back as the end of the 15th Century; the consequences of colonial occupation; and the aggravating onslaught of the relentless, ever-advancing desert--all this has more than merely changed the Moorish world; it has upset all the economic and social foundations of that universe. Nomads made up 75% of Mauritania's population in 1964; in 1977 they were down to only 33% ("Second Results" 1977). In our study, we shall first outline the changes in the material environment of the Bizani (Moors); after that we shall look at changes in the organization of the society, properly speaking.

#### I. THE ECONOMY OF THE MOORS

Under this heading, all we propose to do is to provide a modest survey of factors which, in the past as well as now, have conditioned the lives of all Moors. In style, this exposition is deliberately descriptive; that does not prevent us from hoping that it might help locate

problems, lags, distortions, breakdowns in functioning - all those prevalent symptoms which for one reason or another have come to characterize the prevalent underdeveloped situation in Mauritania; we also hope the study might help indicate possible ways of remedying the situation.

Perhaps at this juncture we need to make it definitively clear that throughout this exposition, our conceptual starting points are the traditional resources and social organization of the Moorish world. We shall discuss changes that have transformed this world. But our primary focus will be on these traditional resources and social structures since it is from them that Moorish society derives its specific identity. Difficulties and problems arise precisely from the points of contact between these traditional factors and what we call, for the sake of convenience, "the modern world". It is on these points of contact that we need to concentrate in our thinking about those notorious development bottlenecks we shall be discussing again farther on. For the moment we shall discuss what Moorish society produces, what it consumes, how its different products are circulated and distributed.

#### 1. PRODUCTION

The key areas of production are the twin areas of animal husbandry and agriculture. Food-gathering activities, hunting, fishing and salt extraction, together with handicraft production, used to play a supplementary role in meeting the modest needs of Moorish society.

A. ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

All the essential features of Moorish life are centered around animal husbandry--to be more precise, the raising of one animal, the camel. The camel, aptly named the ship of the Sahara, gave the nomads a means of transportation especially suited to the desert climate and to the kinds of trips sometimes made necessary by long-distance raiding expeditions; beyond all that, the camel also served as a living larder storing meat, milk, wool, and, in extreme emergencies, even water. In the North camel herding is linked with the rearing of sheep and goats; it gradually yields place to cattle-herding in the areas adjacent to what was, only a few years back, the Sudanese climate zone. We must also remember that the principal export products of the Moorish economy derive from animal husbandry.

In point of fact, it would be enough to mention such problems as animal stock, fodder, pasture land, water, skills and equipment, products and their varied uses, pathology and therapy, rituals, beliefs, etc., to give a comprehensive idea--or at any rate a pretty good idea--of the importance of pastoral activities in the life of this society.

It is easy, quite without any prior, dogmatic desire to prove functionalist theses, to lay bare the nexus of bonds, interlinkages and dependency relationships which tie these different factors to one another and involve them so intimately in the Moorish social structure that they condition and reflect its divisions, specializations and hierarchies (shepherds, well-sinkers, craftsmen, marabout-healers etc.).

Here we shall simply pick out a few essential points bearing more directly on the evolution of social relationships, in as much as this evolution itself has an impact--negative or positive--on Mauritania's economic development.

a) PASTURING AND STOCK-HERDING

Moorish animal husbandry, whether the animals in question be dromedaries or zebu cattle, has always been of an extensive, range-roving type. To the challenge posed by the scarcity and low quality of available fodder, Moorish herders have responded by developing long-range mobility and great flexibility (Dubie 1937); Trancart 1940; Leriche 1953; Toupet 1977; Feral 1948).

We know that among the great nomadic groups, the search for fresh pastures, reinforced by strategic considerations, could sometimes motivate yearly treks ranging around 2,000 kilometers (UNESCO 1961). We shall leave geographers and soil specialists to work out an analysis of natural conditions responsible for these pasture ranges, which vary considerably from one region to the other, and from one season to the next. Charles Toupet (1977) citing work done by Madame H. Gauthier-Pilters and H. Gillet in Chad, as well as by Charles Rossetti and Naegele, gives figures for dry fodder yield in these pasture areas varying from between 334 and 615 kilograms per hectare in the case of a stand of askaf fodder (Nucularia perrini), to 8,600 kilograms per hectare for some types of Sudanese grass. Confirming Naegele's findings, Toupet pointed out the contrast between the sparseness of rag fodder

(1000 kilograms of vegetation yield per hectare) and the abundance of swampland fodder (8,000 kilograms of vegetation yield per hectare). The author mentions the toughness and adaptability of different Sahelo-Saharan plant species, as well as their notable tameness. Again referring to figures given by Madame Gauthier-Pilters, he underscores the observation that though the dromedary could logically be expected to eat a daily ration of 30 to 40 kilograms of green fodder, its actual consumption was as low as 10 to 20 kilograms. A medium-sized zebu cow would, in comparison, consume 25 to 30 kilograms of green fodder in the rainy season and 6 to 10 kilograms of hay in the dry season.

On the basis of these data, different specialists estimate that an area between 6 and 12 hectares would be needed to support one of these large ruminants per year. In sub-desert and desert zones the area required would be much larger.

We must remember these data when discussing the advantages of sedentarization, the size of the animal population that can be maintained in the region under scrutiny, or the varied types of problems which could result from overgrazing.

It is particularly important to locate areas of responsibility precisely in order to shed appropriate light on practical development options oriented toward the livestock sector.

In our historical introduction, we touched upon a few of the consequences of French colonization: the society suffered considerable losses in terms of men and especially of livestock during the first great

colonization campaigns, and continued to do so until the 1930's; but once these initial haemorrhages became a matter of history, colonialism contributed significantly to population growth and to an increase in livestock. The main reasons for these increases were the establishment of a number of health and veterinary posts throughout the country, the conduct of a few vaccination campaigns, and the abolition of the lawless of razzia raids. This predatory practice, in effect, became henceforth the exclusive privilege of the colonial government and its agents. All these changes resulted, logically enough, in a demographic and spatial overload, an overload which in turn had to have repercussions on the delicate balancing mechanisms of the Moorish ecosystem (J.P. Hervouet, 1975).

Several specialists emphasize the destructive role of some types of livestock (goats) and the negative activities of shepherds, who are at times regarded as active agents of the desertification process, owing to their penchant for stripping trees for fodder, setting bush fires etc.

Other specialists, for instance J.P. Hervouet (1975), accuse the Moorish shepherd of incompetence. Comparing him to Peulh shepherds who make it a habit to accompany their flocks, sometimes even leading them, guiding them as they browse, these specialists say the Moorish shepherd is, by contrast, a rank amateur: his attitude to his flock essentially detached, his interest in the sheep overwhelmingly determined by the cash profit he hopes to gain from them. The truth, though, is that the shepherds, generally recruited from vassal groups (Aznaga), ex-slaves

(Haratin) or slaves (Abid), have built up over the long generations a rich store of experience. Admittedly, the practice based on this experience may have become somewhat perfunctory from sheer repetitive routine, but it is still, in general, admirably suited to the rural environment. (In this connection, traditional lore credits Deyloul, the shepherd folk hero of the Alichandhora era Touabir, with great wisdom--a significant fact).

We must also point out that the store of skills and techniques is in danger, doubly threatened as it is by deteriorating natural conditions on the one hand and by the accelerated alteration of the institutional and ideological frame of reference (caste systems, slavery) designed to provide it with psychological rationalizations, on the other hand.

With the introduction of the cash nexus, shepherds, who in the past drew nearly all their remuneration in kind from the dairy products they generated, are now paid cash wages. It is doubtful whether this development is conducive to the preservation of the traditional technology of the rural environment, especially since that traditional technology is already facing active competition from mechanical gadgets, with all their apparent labour-saving prowess. Animal husbandry is not only the dominant activity of the Moorish countryside; it has also become an important source of employment in the modern, capitalist sense.

Quite apart from the many ancillary occupations traditionally associated with animal husbandry--most handicraft occupations were devoted to the manufacture of tools directly involved in animal husbandry: milking-bowls, well-drills, harnesses, shears and clippers etc.--animal husbandry

used to offer, and still does offer, a very interesting assortment of jobs in the categories of well-drilling and shepherding.

In the recently sedentarized settlements of Boutilimit region, we have noted that in each settlement (comprising between 10 and 30 tent-households) there is at least one well-sinker (normally a Hartini working with the help of his children) who provides water for the cattle; one or two shepherds detailed to herd sheep and goats; and finally, in cases where the settlement possesses milch-camels, a camel-herd.

That completes the picture as far as shepherding and the problem of pasture lands are concerned. It must be added that as a rule, in Moorish society, access to pasture is free. The only trammel on this freedom of access comes from possibilities of control over access to watering holes. In effect, these watering holes are generally owned by tribal communities. In time of need, these communities can restrict access to such water holes or even deny access altogether to outside individuals or groups.

b) WATER

In the peculiarly dry universe of Saharan and Sahelian Mauritania, the water problem is a constant preoccupation.

Apart from perennial natural springs (guetta, plural: glat) or seasonal springs (Zaya, plural: zi) whose waters sometimes contain disease-carrying microbes (bilharzia) or encourage the development of an unhealthy atmosphere (malaria), the water needs of Moorish society are met from wells (hasi, plural: hesyam). These are drilled in dry river

basins after flood time. There are also wells of a type called ogla (plural: ogol); these are somewhat deeper than the hesyan type, but just as precarious, since like the archan they are unlined. Lastly there is the bir (plural ebyar) or hissyan, to use the proper term; its depth (traditionally measured in units called wagfa, equivalent to the height of a man with arms stretched upward) may vary from 20 to over 60 metres. The bir well is lined in the traditional manner, with straw and tree-trunks. Since the 1950's, cement-lined wells have also been added at the initiative of government authorities. In theory these modern wells are government property; in practice, however, they quite often become bones of contention in ownership disputes. Furthermore, formerly the traditional wells were maintained by the communities that dug them; but since 1959 the maintenance crews responsible for maintaining the modern wells have disappeared.

It is perfectly likely, what with the recent drought and migration away from the area, that many traditional and modern wells have become unuseable, not just from lack of maintenance, but simply from disuse. A well too long unused expires.

As for water-pumping techniques, apart from a few windmills and diesel motor-powered pumps, which incidentally pose bothersome maintenance problems, they have remained almost entirely dependent on traditional methods: the delou (a leather bag), the rche (a long strip of ungured hide), and the t-teynna, a pulley made out of selected hardwood: teychit (Balanites Aegyptiaca), imijij (Grewia Bicolor).

The problems have actually been worsened these past several years by the combined effects of the drought and population settlement.

In effect, if the number of animals needing water has fallen, water consumption itself has probably risen, on account of all the changes in life style (hygienic, nutritional changes etc.). The boring of holes for water, and the transport of the water to the settlements, have traditionally been arduous tasks, especially at the end of the dry season, when humans as well as livestock are much debilitated; now these tasks have increasingly grown all the harder to carry on, precisely because the requisite animal power is not available.

The problem is crucial for much of the rural population; they are obliged to keep animals for pumping and carrying water, feeding them on extremely expensive commercial fodder.

Human life depends on water; so does animal life. As a rule, animal life, mobility, health and productivity all depend in large measure on adequate water supplies.

c) PRODUCE

The Moors get practically all the products they need for their frugal existence from their livestock: milk, meat, wool, leather. Special mention must be made of milk, the fundamental staple of nomadic diet. As for meat, it is a much treasured nutritional supplement. In this essentially mobile society, it should not be forgotten that animals are also used for transport.

Charles Toupet (1977) gives the following figures on milk and meat

productivity in the Moorish economy in particular and in the Sahelian economy in general. These figures have only a comparative, not a definitive, value, because the yields in, dependent as they are on particularly unpredictable climatic conditions, are extremely varied.

- Daily Milk production:

|        | Dry season   | rainy season    |
|--------|--------------|-----------------|
| Camel  | 6 to 7 liter | 10 to 12 liters |
| Cattle | 3 "          | 8 "             |
| Sheep  | 0.5 "        | 1.5 "           |
| Goat   | 0.5 "        | 1               |

Toupet, citing a study by S.K. KON (1959) stresses the point that the camel yields the richest milk, liberally laced with vitamin C.

- Meat production

|                    |               |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Camel              | 130 kilograms |
| Bull (4 years old) | 150           |
| Cow                | 100           |
| Sheep              | 70 "          |
| Goat               | 12-15 "       |
| Lamb               | 12-15 "       |

It would be desirable to relate these figures to the needs and actual consumption figures of the nomads, if accurate figures could be obtained.

At any rate, Moorish shepherds have great skill in recognizing good

milk-producing strains and, as far as possible, perpetuating them through the judicious use of studs (vhal, plural: vhul) in selective breeding.

They also know how by means of castration to raise physically more robust and temperamentally more docile pack-animals and young males particularly prized in the slaughterhouse business.

We shall revert later to other products (wool, hide). It may be impractical to give a statistical estimate; nevertheless, it is possible to point out that in times past, production was sufficient to provide adequate raw materials for the periodic replacement of tents and the manufacture of a truly variegated range of craft goods, especially leather artifacts (mats, bedspreads, bags, harness, cords, etc.).

Simple yet very finely executed tanning techniques using local plants (Acacia Nilotica pods, Acacia raddiana bark, Commifora Africana) make it possible to obtain leather of truly extraordinary quality. This is an aspect of Moorish life particularly endangered nowadays: the drought and its consequences--destruction of livestock and vegetation, wholesale rural depopulation--threaten it with extinction.

Before we move beyond this chapter on products, we should point out that wool, which in the past was so highly valued as to be used for currency (the rtal of spun wool, about a kilo in weight, was used as legal tender in many transactions) is now in the process of being entirely superseded in the tent-making industry by strips of fabric imported from Mali (qiv) or recycled pieces of cloth (from old clothes, sisal bags, etc.).

It would be true to say that the products of Moorish animal husbandry are wholly consumed by the producers themselves. This applies to the general economy, with the exception of live animals, which have always constituted a predominant part of the external trade of the Bizani world. And, except in times of natural disaster such as drought, only sterile female animals, overaged stock and young male animals get sold.

#### CONCLUSION ON ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Every single aspect of the lives of these Saharan nomads is deeply marked by the constant proximity, the almost innate familiarity of humans with animals, especially as regards the camel which in the eyes of all Moors is the prince of beasts, second in status only to the thoroughbred racehorse. Manifestations of this closeness are evident in all areas of the society's material life: (nutrition, clothing, housing, handicrafts); they are equally evident in the various cultural spheres (folk proverbs, tales, poetry, law). Animal husbandry practices themselves reflect the close bonds of affection tying the Moor to his flocks: the knowledge of each individual animal's peculiar traits, the tone of its voice, its pedigree, its veterinary case history, and its psychological moods, so to speak, are all personal, emotional indications of these links. We need to take care not to lose sight of the unbreakable nature of these ties between the Moorish families and their animals, when dealing with accusations of "irrational behaviour" leveled by some specialists against Sahelian stock-breeders, both Peulhs and Moors, on the grounds that out of sheer superstitious attachment they maintain

useless, supernumerary stocks less and less able to subsist on an environment whose resources are nearing exhaustion. Contrary to these structures, we think Pierre BONTE (1975) is perfectly correct when he points out that this accumulation of livestock is in fact profoundly rational within its original context (the Saharan and Sahelian economy), as long as this context was not overwhelmed and made dependent by the market economy. Providing the mode of savings best adapted to natural conditions in these arid territories, the accumulation of livestock has always been a restricted, family-based activity, dependent principally on slave labor, until recent developments transformed its practice. It was not likely to turn into a means of social ostentation and economic speculation until the capitalist economy imposed its domination on the Moorish world. The recent years of drought, as we shall see, have merely accelerated this phenomenon.

#### AGRICULTURE

Climatic and soil conditions, whose evaluation we leave to specialists, here again determine the essential characteristics, possibilities and scope of agriculture in the land of the Moors. This is as true of oasis agriculture as it is of the dry or irrigated farming practiced in the Southern reaches of the Moorish world. We shall here concentrate on bringing out the social aspects of this agriculture.

##### a) THE OASES

Oasis agriculture is based on the date-palm tree. Some traditions place its appearance in Mauritania as far back as the era of the mysterious "Bafour" (Munier 1955).

It has spread steadily since medieval times, from the Adrar region to Tagant, then to Assaba. Munier estimated that in 1955 there were 565,000 date-palm trees (Munier 1955); in 1960, according to Agriculture Department estimates quoted by Charles TOUPET (1977), there were about 805,000 trees. Today there should be a total of around 1 million.

In the oases, the cultivation of date-palm trees is linked with that of cereals (wheat, barley) and vegetables raised on irrigated land in the shadow of the palms.

i. AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES

Generally speaking, agricultural techniques are quite simple; and the care of palm grove varies a great deal from one region to the next, from one grove to the other, and even from one owner to the other. There are so-called wild groves of palm trees which remain uncultivated throughout the year, no one going to them except during the brief harvest season (El Moinam). Then, there are other groves which, on the contrary, are given meticulous care and attentively watched over all year round (Atar, Tidjikja).

Date-palm cultivation, using rudimentary, locally-made tools (hoes, hatchets, pruning shears, the gellac) is generally--though neither exclusively nor always--the work of slaves (Haratin and Abid).

Farm land holdings, when not jointly owned, are modest; exceptions are the few large properties recently built up under colonial government patronage (especially in Atar).

The entire system of cultivation, and in particular the system of gravity-powered irrigation traditionally based on pendulum wells, now partially superseded by motor pumps- this entire system of intensive farming limits the cultivable land area. There is also, as we have already pointed out, the additional pressure of severely restrictive natural conditions.

In Adrar and Tagant, where the cultivation of palm-trees goes back a long time, the trees are planted by the most reliable method, from shoots. In Assaba, however, where the cultivation of Phoenix Dactylifera is much more recent, kernels and stem buds are planted - a much less reliable method, which yields a high proportion of male and infertile plants (Toupet 1977).

In the oasis palm-groves, the palm trees benefit from the horticultural care given the plants grown beneath them: watering, fumigation, pruning of the jerid, and, most of all, weeding. They are artificially fertilized by the agricultural workers themselves. In June-July comes the harvest, coterminous with the liveliest period in the lives of the Ksour (guetna, O. du Puigandeu 1937). The quality of the date yield varies enormously: from the much prized Tijoub variety to the Kerbar, a type often pounded and fed to goats. Yield quantities are just as variable, ranging from 45 to 180 kilograms, depending on the type planted, the care given to it, and the ecological context (Munier 1955, Bonfils 1955, Toupet 1977).

The bulk of the yield is consumed where produced. The remainder is preserved in goatskin-leather bottles and marketed.

The plants intercropped with the date palm (wheat, barley, millet, tobacco, henna, mint), while taking up only a very limited amount of space, do provide an important dietary supplements as well as significant sums of extra cash earnings to the Ksour.

The last fifteen years or so have seen an increasing diversification of these plants intercropped with the date palm (tomatoes, carrots, radishes, lettuce, etc.). This diversification is connected with a discernible expansion of the local market, and the evolution of gastronomic tastes.

Among serious technical obstacles hampering date-palm cultivation, pride of place must be given to the water problem. In these last several years rain precipitation figures have fallen catastrophically; as a consequence, the underground water-bearing strata of the oueds no longer receive fresh influxes of water. The water therefore gets brinier. Furthermore, even when it does not dry up completely, it can only be reached after wells have been sunk to increasingly greater depths--depths which seriously affect the output of pendulum wells<sup>2/</sup>.

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2/ Studies conducted in Egypt and Algeria, cited by Munier (1955 and Charles Toupet (1977), have demonstrated that the number of liters of water one man can draw from depths of 2, 3, 5 or 5 meters is 3,000; 1,500; 1,300 and 1,250 respectively. Munier also adds that at depths in excess of 7 meters, the pendulum well (achailal) loses its usefulness.

The specialists also stress the point that too many trees are clustered together on the cultivated land area. Apparently there are as many as 400 to 500 date-palm trees per hectare, when the optimal total ought to be no more than 200 (Munier 1955, Bonfils 1955, Toupet 1977).

A further problem is that the plants are not properly cared for; in some cases they are actually ill-treated. For example, in their attempts to get rid of certain plant parasites such as the dreaded Cochineal bug (taka), some agricultural workers imagine they have dealt with the problem when they perfunctorily wash off the parasite's track marks from the leaves with water. Others go so far as to set the tree trunks on fire. Possibly they kill the bugs this way; but quite often they end up killing the trees in the bargain.

The above remarks should not lead us into the misconception that the Moors do not know how to look after their oasis date-palm trees. TOUPET draws attention to the great amount of labor expended on washing down the fronds every day in the Tichitt area, from the time the trees begin to bear fruit till the fruits reach maturity. This washing down is necessary to rid the bunches of filmy deposits of salt that would hamper their growth. Generally, palm cultivation requires so much technical know-how, so much coordination (as in the climbing of the trees at harvest time), and so much strength (for drilling wells, etc.), that it becomes in truth a skilled occupation. It is also hard work, generally assigned to the most unfortunate stratum of Moorish society, the slaves and the Haratin.

In this connection, an appreciable number of records from the colonial period (Colonial Administration reports from Adrar and Tagant) and the late 1950's (Bonfils) bring us a very clear echo of the disastrous results of the emancipation of slaves as far as the oasis economy was concerned.

Let us now turn to a consideration of the social and legal conditions governing work on the palm estates.

ii. SOCIAL AND LEGAL CONDITIONS

Like all land in Moorish country, oasis farm land bears the imprint of a collective, tribal landholding system. Family and individual landholdings are generally subordinated to this overall collective context. Thus the names of the country's major palm groves promptly bring to mind the names of the tribes who own them: Chinguetti belongs to the Idawali and the Lagheal; Atar, Akjoujt and the lands adjoining them belong to the Smassid and Ideichilli tribes; Ksar El Barka and Rachid belong to the Kounta; Tidjikja belongs to the Idawali, etc.

It is precisely to preserve collective tribal rights as such that numerous palm groves have been turned into habous property, i.e., inalienable tribal property. On such land, only the yield from invested labour can constitute the object of a valid commercial transaction (purchase or sale).

A consequence of this situation is that certain collective responsibilities devolve on the owners, especially responsibilities connected with the cultivation of palm groves. Thus, a holder of usufruct rights who neglects the maintenance of the land in question might find himself sentenced by the jema'a (clan assembly) to pay the wages of a person assigned to work on the land set aside for him (TOUPET 1977).

This involvement of a person from outside the tribe, often a Hartani remunerated through a kind of sharecropping lease arrangement, brings us to a discussion of forms of association, of sharecropping arrangements, in the oases (Martin 1939, Dubie 1953, Toupet 1977).

The prevalent forms of contract arrangement are three:

- The sharecropping lease: this establishes a bond between a landowner (normally a "white" Moor) and a farm worker (normally a Hartani).

Under this type of contract, the landowner provides land and wells, while the Hartani supplies plants. When the palm trees start to yield, that is, about five years after planting, the palm grove is split equally between the landowner and the Hartani. In Adrar, the sharecropper gets only one-third of the palm grove.

- A second mode of association has to do with palm grove maintenance: "the worker (often, as usual, a Hartani) must water the palm trees 36 times a year, plant a hedge around the palm grove, clear the tree trunks of dead branches (jerid), fertilize the palm trees, and harvest the fruit when ripe. His reward is a fifth of the harvest" (Toupet 1977, p. 276).

Often the worker chooses other modes of remuneration: he can get a fixed percentage (arch) or a measure of the yield of each tree: called an abboun, this measure is the quantity that can be contained in clothing spread in the hollow triangle between a person's knees and waist when he is seated tailor-fashion. Finally, the worker can opt to pick up the dates which drop from the palm trees (Kernaf, ikernaf)-"to glean, so to speak" (Tcupet 1977, p. 277).

A third type of contract covers the crops grown under the palm trees. Its provisions are extremely variable. Sometimes the Hartani worker keeps the whole of this yield for himself, and the landlord is satisfied to have him look after his date-palm trees. In other instances, particularly in the Tagant, the worker only gets half the yield. In addition, to all these payments stipulated in the contract, the Hartani or the Abid (slave) is also obliged to pay fees periodically to this particular master or that one, as an earnest of his personal relationship with him. All this should give us some idea of just how hard working conditions are for primary producers on the oasis farms, and how little they get for the work they do.

This is not a system calculated to motivate the Haratin to stay in the agricultural sector. It has in fact caused a good number of farm workers to desert the palm groves the moment legal and material conditions (viz: the proclamation of the abolition of slavery by the colonial authorities, the rise of new urban centers, transportation

improvements) made it feasible to do so. The consequence of this desertion has been not only a shortage of manpower but also a serious deterioration in the technological capital of the oases.

Needless to say, any scheme aimed at changing this state of affairs for the better has to come to terms with the need to improve the status of the primary producers.

b) FARMING ON FLOOD PLAINS AND IN DAM-IRRIGATED AREAS

For a long time permanently settled Moors and even semi-nomads have carried on other types of agriculture whose importance in the Bizan economy continues to grow in close correlation with the continuous, long-term southward migration and the sedentarization that goes along with it.

i. TECHNIQUES AND PRODUCTS

Here again, natural conditions, especially conditions of precipitation (Toupet 1977) impose their laws on agricultural practices involving very scanty material capital. The hoe and the axe are the main instruments of this type of farming which, until recently, was carried on in ignorance of the plough and the wheel.

On both dam-irrigated farms and farms dependent on rain water, the chief crop remains millet (Sorghum gambicum, called taghallit in Hassani language, and Sorghum cernum, called bechna in Hassani). These are often inter-cropped with white beans (Vigna siniensis, called adlagan in Hassani) and watermelons (Citrullus Vulgaris, called voundi or chirkach in Hassani).

Yields are usually low. Charles Toupet (1977) gives figures of 6 to 7 hundredweight per hectare for sorghum, the only commercially important crop, and 4 to 5 hundredweight for the other cereals, and for watermelons. Total yield, already at the mercy of unpredictable climatic conditions, suffers in addition from the depredations of certain natural pests: locusts, "millet-eaters", rats, etc. Very often, too, yields are affected by lack of seed, and by the inadequacy of available labor, as the area cultivated (watered land, flood plain, or artificially irrigated land) reaches a certain size.

It is precisely to reduce their dependence on the caprices of climatic conditions, even if only partially, that the Moorish populations have learned to erect dams across the basins of the main oueds. Some of these dams have been in operation since the end of the 19th century.

In most instances, these dams are frankly ramshackle constructions amounting in fact to nothing more solid than an earthen dike layered over with a facing of flat stones. The builders are mostly Haratin and members of other subject groups.

Since the late 1950's, the colonial administration, followed by the Mauritanian government, have had a number of dams built. While these new dams are in principle sturdier than the traditional constructions, they also happen to be much more expensive.

The dams, which have at times helped nomadic groups settle down, have not been uniformly positive in their effects. Apart from encouraging predictable damage such as soil exhaustion, these dams have also

been manipulated for political electioneering purposes (Toupet 1977); such abuse had led to chaotic siting, and, with some areas getting a multiplicity of dams all bunched up close to each other, to situations bordering on the absurd: all too often dams belonging to different tribes are built along the same oued. The practice has led to numerous confrontations, especially in particularly dry years, when downstream dams are starved of water.

With this observation, we turn to a consideration of social conditions determining agricultural practices in dam-irrigated areas and flood plains.

ii. SOCIAL CONDITIONS

The general observations we have already made about the traditionally tribal nature of Moorish landholding practices apply equally to flood-plain farms and farms on rain-watered land. The all-pervading importance of this problem in Moorish rural life is underscored by the prevalence of long-lasting disputes, sometimes degenerating into extreme violence, right down to this day.

Formerly, family land rights, held in the context of tribal ownership, only rarely went together with the practice of the landowners working the land themselves.

As in the oases, most of the work in these areas is also done by the Haratin. The methods by which they are paid for their work vary widely (Martin 1939, Dubie 1953, Toupet 1977).

Contract provisions vary from region to region. They also vary according to whether the Hartani belongs to the same tribe as the landowner.

In the Tagant, Trarza and Brakna areas, the general rule stipulates that a Hartani farm worker, if he comes from the same tribe as his landlord, and depends on him for nothing but the soil the works on keeps 90% of his harvest, delivering to the landlord only the remaining tithe.

In Adrar region, if the landlord supplies half the seed in addition to the land, he is entitled to half the harvest.

It would be appropriate at this point, by way of a conclusion to this exposition on agricultural conditions, to emphasize the point that a crucial development has taken place, beginning with the onset of colonial occupation, and steadily picking up speed these last several years. The key manifestations of this movement are, first, an accelerated southward migration of the Moorish population, especially the Haratin, motivated by a desire to benefit from the comparative protection the colonial authorities afforded them against their traditional overlords; and secondly, an increasingly wide spread process of permanent settlement, a process which in our time has resulted in a proportions between nomads and sedentary communities, as pointed out above. We shall take up the multiple implications of this evolution later.

For the moment, let us simply underline the importance of its impact on agriculture, both in terms of the ever-increasing numbers of people

involved, and in terms of the social relationships attendant upon it. The fact is that the Haratin, gathered together in self-governing villages, show a rising tendency to want to break free of the bonds that tied them to their traditional masters. And they are also posing the problem of land ownership in new terms: "the land to those who till it".

As for the landowners, they have lost a labor force which was refractory even when it did not simply disappear, following the lure of distant places. So, they are beginning, admittedly with rather ill grace, to resign themselves to working the land.

All this brings up to the conclusion that inside Moorish society itself, the entire traditional equilibrium, based largely on the economic and political hegemony of nomadic herdsmen, is falling apart. Those who stand to gain from this disintegration, at least potentially, are the erstwhile subject groups, now permanently or semi-permanently settled and carrying on agriculture as their main occupation.

C. CROP-GATHERING--HUNTING--FISHING

In this society over which, we must remember, destitution hovers perennially, crop-gathering, hunting and fishing at times bring in appreciable supplementary income. In certain marginal cases, these pursuits may even become exclusive, quasi-hereditary occupations.

a) CROP-GATHERING

This involves a wide variety of products, from medicinal herbs to tanning bark, including a wide assortment of wild fruits particularly suitable for supplementing the diets of the slaves and the Haratin, which are worse than inadequate.

Still, the only one of the plants involved which has given rise to significant commercial activity is gum arabic. In former times, this was obtained in large quantities from Acacia Senegal trees along the Senegal river between the Trarza and Assaba areas. This commodity, which also figures in traditional medicine and nutrition (Mokhtar O/Hamidoun, 1952; Mohamed Salem O/M'Khaïtirat 1959), actually played a pivotal role in commercial transactions between Southern Moors and European traders for two centuries and a half (Delcourt 1952, Father Labat 1728, La Courbe 1685, Durand 1802, Cultru 1910). Slaves did the picking of the product. In general, they were harshly treated, and the total yield has fallen considerably since the inception of colonization. The relative emancipation of the slaves is only part of the reason for this fall; a further contributing cause is the drop in demand occasioned by competition from synthetic substitutes.

What with the harsh effects of a dozen or so years of drought on the forest vegetation, and the total overturn of social relationships, the gathering of gum arabic has dwindled into a practically insignificant activity.

b) HUNTING

Hunting plays only a marginal economic role, in fact. So instead of going into lengthy disquisitions on its economic value, we could expatiate on its psycho-social significance, especially on the fact that it was closely linked with martial activities in general, and in particular with the still very lively craze for target practice in Moorish society.

Against the background of the ravages of the drought and the Sahara War, such a discussion would not be entirely out of place: it would help envisage an effective environmental protection policy. However, we shall here simply indicate the existence of a group, numbering at most some three hundred individuals, now threatened with extinction. For this group, hunting (eked out with a dash of stock thieving on the side) was not just the one source of livelihood; it also provided the ubiquitous nexus of their entire life style. The group is the Nemadi, a caste within Moorish society. Because of its picturesque character, this group has had far more attention devoted to it in ethnological literature than its real importance in Moorish society warrants (Marty 1930, Brosset 1932, Garbou 1917, Gabus 1952, Laforgue 1926).

c) FISHING

The Imraguen fisherfolk have been made notorious by factors very similar to those that have put the Nemadi hunters in the limelight. Operating along the Atlantic seaboard, this group appears on record as far back as the 15th and 16th centuries in Portuguese accounts. In those

accounts they are described as having practically the same traits they exhibit to this day. The group is tiny, numbering at the most a few hundred people of dependent status; (Haratin or vassals). They rely on extremely rudimentary techniques for fishing in very rich waters. Socially they are looked down upon; economically they are brutally exploited. Up until 1937, these fishermen were obliged to pay seven separate fees to seven separate overlords out of the very chancy hauls they managed to bring in (Lotte 1937, Gruvel 1906, Gruvel and Chudeau 1909, F.X. Pelletier 1975). Being the only fisherfolk among the Moors, the Imraguen are better off than the Nemadi in one sense: the commodity they depend on is not in as immediate a danger of exhaustion. On the contrary, it is actually a commodity of permanent commercial value. This is particularly true of mullet roe, which goes into the making of a kind of Mauritanian caviar nicknamed "poutargue". In fact, it is precisely because their fish is so valuable that the Imraguen, after suffering exploitation at the hands of feudal despots (exploitation by warlords having been superseded by the religious manipulation practiced by the marabouts), have now come under the power of the ocean-fishing companies. Since 1919, when the Société Générale de la Grande Pêche was incorporated, these companies have subjected the Imraguen to increasingly damaging competition, while dictating the most stringent terms for the purchase of the Imraguen haul.

#### D. SALT MINES

Before we conclude this chapter in traditional resources, we should touch on the salt mines. This is necessary not because these mines are currently of any economic importance, but because they do have a historical and sociological significance. Salt mining, in fact, played a key role in Moorish trade during the precolonial era. The old caravan centers of Ouadane, Chinguetti, Tichitt and Oualata owed much of their ancient prosperity to the salt trade. And finally, on the sociological level salt mining served as a nerve center for a whole network of power relationships, patron-client links, and bonds of dependency in which, as is so often the case in Moorish society, the owners--in this case the Kounta of Ouadane, the Emirs of Trarza--are seldom the workers: dependent Aghzazir, Haratin et al. (Gaden 1910, Mère 1916 Diego Brosset 1932, Duchemin 1951).

All things considered, domestic salt mining should be potentially capable of supplying Mauritania's domestic needs. But any attempt to revive the salt mining industry should begin with a determined effort to abolish or at least to lessen the traditional feudal exploitation that grew up around it.

#### E. THE HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY

One cannot leave out handicrafts in any discussion of production in Moorish society. The Moorish Handicraft industry, closely connected with the society's total lifestyle, produces an enormous variety of

artifacts ranging from the moungach (thorn-removing tweezers) to the jehfa ( a magnificent ladies' palaquin for camel-back riding), with all the society's necessities and luxury articles in between. And all this productivity is based on local raw materials (wood, leather), though metal (iron, copper, silver, gold) is imported; the techniques developed, for instance in jewelry, are sometimes highly ornate, even though the tools used are simple (anvil, hammer, drill, punch and bellows).

Traditionally, craftsmen used to receive their payment in kind (in the form of milk, cereals, livestock), within a context of patron-client relationships tying them to their warrior or marabout overlords. But since colonization the handicraft industry has come under the influence of the cash nexus as a result of the Moorish society's disintegration under the impact of several factors: the breakdown of nomadic husbandry, followed by sedentarization and urbanisation; the weakening of traditional tribal and hierarchical bonds, changes in taste, which trends increasingly toward "luxury" items (jewelry, silver, teapots, ashtrays, gift-boxes, etc.) and away from the useful artifacts that were traditionally in demand.

Furthermore, this evolution is not only evident in a shift from utilitarian production to luxury production; it also reflects a profound change in the life style and tastes of the Moors themselves: in the past the silver anklets called akhelkhal, plural akhakhel, were considered the Moorish woman's most prestigious items of jewelry (O. du Puigandeu 1967, Gabus 1955, Delarozière 1976); nowadays hardly any jeweler makes

them any more.

This is another area in which a considerable set of skills is dying out. Moorish craftsmen have in many instances showed a remarkable flair for assimilating novel elements into their repertoire of skills. A good example is the panache with which they recycle all sorts of jetsam from the industrial world. The question is: to what extent will all this talent survive the destruction hovering over all the structure of the Moorish world?

In fact this question concerns more than the material production of the craftsmen; simultaneously and inextricably, it concerns the survival of the craftsmen themselves as a specialized group within Moorish society. It is a question we shall take up again later.

This brief survey of the rural Moorish society's resources seemed necessary to us as a means of making clear the structural framework undergirding the total social edifice we are called upon to examine. At the end of it, the conclusion we come to is precisely that the twin bases of this social edifice, viz.: the institutions of pastoral nomadism and slave labor, are at the moment undergoing a crisis of unprecedented proportions. What we see happening is a generalized and practically irreversible deterioration of every aspect of production in the rural world of the Moors. Meanwhile a slow change in attitudes toward manual work, generally looked down upon, is beginning to take place.

The weakening of the society's abilities to produce what it needs to satisfy own needs is pushing Moorish society into increasingly more

pronounced patterns of dependence. We shall look at some of the clearer symptoms of this deepening dependence when we turn to an examination of consumption patterns among the Bizan.

## 2. COUNSUMPTION

The harshness of environmental conditions has conditioned a certain ascetic attitude to life in Moorish society; under Islamic guidance this asceticism has developed into an ideology of self-abnegation and perseverance in the face of trials. In principle such an ideology is hostile to any hedonistic tendencies, and inimical to all acquisitiveness motivated by ostentation.

There is an anecdote, perhaps apocryphal but nonetheless eloquently illustrative of this official contempt for wealth: in certain families not so long ago, so the story goes, it just was not done to wear new clothes--such behavior was considered vulgar, in poor taste. So servants got to wear new clothes first. When they were no longer new the owners were free to wear them.

This rationalization of poverty, quite obviously, is morally functional in an environment in which people have to use a great deal of energy and considerable ingenuity merely to survive. On the plane of actual behavior, however, the ideology does not entirely exclude aspirations to wealth, pomp and circumstance; after all, in this same universe, largesse, generosity and the ability to spend without thought of return are exalted qualities. So modest though its resources may be, Moorish

society is neither immune to inequalities of income, nor, in these last several years, is it impervious to an attendant phenomenon: the increasing polarization of rich and poor. But how, among the Moors; is wealth defined?

As far as the traditional rural world is concerned, the answer is easy. The Moors are before all else pastoral nomads. And we have expatiated at some length on the importance of livestock in their lives. We can therefore dispense with long explanations as to why, from the point of view of these people, being rich means above all else owning large herds of livestock. This was axiomatic in precolonial times. In those days livestock and savings were practically one and the same thing and herds were not merely the preferred form of accumulation--they were the mother-lode of all wealth.

Ownership of livestock made possible a range of wealth-distributing arrangements which could involve the sharing of dairy products--milk, wool, meat--among members of a settlement; the herding of animals by servants, who gained some sustenance therefrom; the giving of various kinds of long-term (mnaha) to clients or needy relatives. Through the working of such arrangements livestock ownership made it possible to establish and to maintain social networks based on relationships of allegiance and solidary interdependence. Without these networks wealth had no meaning. As a matter of fact, in the conditions of endemic insecurity typical of the Moorish countryside up till the 1930's wealth could simply not have been accumulated or protected in the absence of such social networks.

Within the institutional framework of the razzia--a combined military and commercial expedition in whose conduct motives of economic gain were often dominant, and which constituted the chief occupation of the warrior group -- livestock was both the means used and the ultimate objective of all military operations. Because swift mobility was crucially important in this type of operation, race-horses and camels acquired considerable prestige; they were a wealth-generating form of wealth, in effect. And the Moors had a perfectly hard-nosed awareness of the importance of these animals: Ahmed Ould M'hamed, Emir of Adrar (1871-1891), dying of gunshot wounds in an encounter with a group of Ideichilli adversaries, and wanting to make his last wishes known to his successor Ahmed Ould Sid Ahmed, first commended the family horses to his care, and only then proceeded to demand vengeance against his killers (Ahmadou Mahmadou Ba 1929).

Today the race-horses have practically vanished from the scene; but camels, already sought after in the past, have become even more so, their attraction reinforced by their greater resistance to the drought of the last several years. Add to this the fact that since 1973 all taxes on livestock have been suspended, and the fact that the newly rich are stampeding to invest their assets in herds of camels is bound to appear not so astounding after all. And then camels are not the only objects of speculation or ostentatious acquisitiveness:

A rich man, a rich Moor, to be precise, has to own herds of all the other types of livestock reared in his region: cows, sheep,

goats, donkeys. He must also own lots of slaves, and, in the oasis regions, he must own palm trees, as a matter of course.

These norms derived from a rural, pastoral civilization still influence the economic behavior of a very large majority of Moors. However, they are in the process of being superseded by forms of savings and wealth accumulation directly derived from the capitalist world and the town it has created. The general and steadily increasing infiltration of imported consumer goods--ranging from razor blades and transistor radios to sedans -- in the day to day life of the Moors, helps with every passing day to speed up this change and to widen its scope.

Thus the wealthy man of today is likely to have the bulk of his possessions in town, or even abroad. He probably is a commercial agent with a monopoly over imports of a particular product line (cars, office equipment, mass-consumption food items such as milk, couscous, macaroni, noodles, spaghetti). Or he might own a real estate business, enjoying contacts with the State Marketing Board, which is about the only outlet for large-scale deals. He owns houses as well as a luxury car, preferably a Mercedes Benz. In addition, he owns retail shops which he gives to young relatives to run. Finally, he owns livestock herds. Increasingly, though, such herds tend to fall into the pastime category. They are becoming what we advisedly term "secondary herds", by analogy with European-style secondary residences. In other words, the owner of these herds hires someone to look after them, and as a rule takes no

further notice of them save during his vacations, or his weekend rest periods. This still puts him in a position to make substantial profits from the herds, for example by selling a portion when conditions are right.

The existence of these vacation-time livestock herds shows the limits of the Moorish world's integration into the capitalist leisure market, in the area of nutrition, clothing or housing.

#### A. NUTRITION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE

In the first part of this study we limned the material foundations of the Moorish universe, making sure to highlight the fact that this society's production system provides extremely sparse food resources. We now proceed to give more precise, though still generalized, information on nutrition and nutritional changes in Moorish society. (Data collected from an inquiry will provide a more exact and more detailed picture).

We shall start by pointing out that the general institutional frame of reference which provides a context for Moorish nutritional practices is the Malekite variety of Islamic faith. This denomination gives explicit rules governing the nutritional behavior of its adherents. The relevant basic stipulations are to be found in Versés 115 and 116 of the Surat of the Bees, in the Koran:

"Allah forbids you to consume only these: the flesh of a dead animal, blood, pork, and whatever has been consecrated to any but Allah. But whosoever, without intending rebellion or transgression, is forced

to consumed such, Allah shall forgive him and be merciful unto him." (Blachère Translation 1966).

Donkeys, mules and horses are not eaten either, though they are not specifically forbidden. It is probable that in this case habits carry more weight than legal institutions.

Islam condones the eating of all sea-food.

Still, this liberal dispensation has failed to root out the long-standing prejudice, quite independent of religious values, which Moors (with the exception of the Imraguen) harbor against fish.

Moorish dietetics are very closely inspired and conditioned by the sparseness typical of the Saharan environment. According to popular lore, it is preferable to eat a large quantity of a single staple, just one a day. The most sought-after food item (for men) is meat. This is cooked either by boiling or by roasting directly in sand. It is also eaten dried or smoked -- a form in which it keeps a long time, apparently without losing its nutrient value. Fish is extremely unpopular among the Moors, who are particularly offended by its smell. Where it can be sold fresh, it tends to insinuate itself into urban diets in the form of the Senegalese dish called Cibujen, meaning, in Wolof, rice with fish.

Milk is the fundamental staple of traditional Moorish diet, much more basic than meat (since the slaughter of animals is in fact rare).

It is drunk fresh or curdled and diluted, in a concoction that may be sugared and which is the national beverage of the Moors--Zrig. Milk was in former times almost the only nourishment of many herdsmen, especially during the rainy season, when the animals usually produce adequate supplies.

At such times it was possible for people, especially women, following the custom of forced feeding aimed at fattening themselves, to consume stupendous quantities of milk.

This practice of forced feeding has played a very important part in Moorish socialization. Now it is dying out for reasons both material (milk is scarcer because of the drought and the consequent decimation of livestock) and cultural (esthetic tastes are changing).

The custom of forced feeding probably has its roots in the poverty inextricably associated with the Saharan environment, in the anxiety generated by this poverty, and in the desire to escape its hold by stockpiling reserves of human adipose tissue, somewhat after the fashion of the camel's hump. At any rate, the custom has helped turn the Moorish woman into an idle creature, almost an invalid, a prestige object whose value is, or rather used to be, proportional to her corpulence.

This practice, added to the status defined for women by religion or custom (women being regarded as minors in law, women being obliged to wear voluminous clothing covering up the entire body, etc.), has

played a major contributory role in relegating women to a marginal role at all levels of active life. From an economic point of view, this is even more dysfunctional when we consider that these days, with increasing sedentarization and urbanization, women are tending to lose even the role they had in the production and reproduction of material goods and cultural values in the traditional rural milieu, a role including the creation of tent homes and furniture, and the education of children.

Coming back to the question of milk, we should note that for the last few years, it has been coming mainly from commercial and international aid sources. The reason, once again, is the catastrophic situation of livestock. This shift in the source of milk, which makes the Moorish world even more dependent on imports, came about in a matter of a few years.

We can see the same evolution when we examine the other ingredients of Moorish diet. For the last couple of decades, rice, almost all of it imported, has at least partially replaced millet, long Mauritania's most copiously consumed cereal staple. The people of the Ksour areas (Ouadane, Chinguetti) provide Moorish society with about the only fruit it consumes, namely dates. They also make certain sweet foods from wheat and barley, especially cakes. Finally, in recent years water-melons, beans and green vegetables have been introduced in different forms into the diet of the settled agricultural populations.

Techniques for preserving the society's various food items are either very crude or quite simply nonexistent. This is a problem obviously deserving special attention, especially since sedentarization has removed certain obstacles connected with nomadic norms, such as the desire to reduce movable property to the essential minimum.

There is, notably, no technique used in this society for the long-term preservation of milk; the only milk-derived product processed to last a long time is butter. Yet the fact is that numerous settlements produce more milk than they consume, especially in the rainy season; sometimes they simply let it go to waste.

Grain is stored in extremely rickety granaries, usually made of straw. This does not always protect the harvest adequately against the ravages of pests, inclement weather etc. This problem needs to be studied and solutions devised.

It would be inappropriate to end this discussion of Moorish diet without mentioning tea. Tea is a beverage of relatively recent vintage in Moorish life, having been introduced from Morocco around the middle of the 19th century by the Oulad Bou Sba (Leriche 1951). But it has grown into a prime ingredient in Mauritania's day to day life. Enjoying pride of place in family consumer budgets (Andrianamana 1979), tea is no longer simply a food item; it has reached the highly dignified status of a social ritual. It is nothing less than the standard accompaniment of every conversation and every reception, the drink every visitor is offered.

More clearly than any other product, tea symbolizes the increasing and evidently irreversible dependence of Moorish society on the import market. For tea, the national beverage of the Moors, is actually imported: green tea leaves from the People's Republic of China, sugar mostly from the European Common Market. In the 1950's the Mauritanian Youth Association (A.J.M.), embryo of a Mauritanian national consciousness, seemed to sense in a rather inchoate way the strangeness of this situation: comparing tea to a sedative dulling the people's fighting spirit, the Association advocated limiting the standard number of glasses offered at tea-drinking sessions to two instead of the three required by conventional propriety.

The same trend toward dependence is discernible in the evolution of taste in matters of dress and housing.

#### B. DRESS AND SOCIO ECONOMIC CHANGE

For a long time Moorish dress fashions have been dominated by the monopolistic hold of the so-called "Guinea fabric", whose dark blue dye fades right on to the wearer's skin, giving rise to the exotic touristic stereotype of the Moors as the "blue people". In recent years, however, under the influence of styles and models spread by the urban leisure classes, Moorish dress fashions have become highly diversified. They have also become highly expensive.

This rise in consumer demand is not backed by any increase in local textile production; in fact it is not backed by any local textile

production, period. In traditional Moorish society children did not usually wear any clothes at all till the age of eight or ten, for adult clothes, the practice was to use just as much material as was functionally necessary. As a result the women's mlhaf (singular: melhafá) and the men's draric (singular: darraa) were not half as capacious as they now are. And members of the society generally took pains to use imported fabrics as economically as possible, so that, for instance, not so long ago the baggy trousers worn by men, (called serwal, plural: serawil), used to be made with recycled material salvaged from their wives' and sisters' cast-off mlhaf robes. Today, however, we see a diversification in quality and an increase in quantities of clothing material often patently bordering on the artificial: technicolor fabrics are in vogue, ordinary and relatively inexpensive fabrics (a cotton percale boubou costs 500 to 600 ouguiya) are steadily losing out to more expensive fabrics. The change in tastes is doubtless more profitable from the fashion-designers' point of view: (a hand-embroidered "Bazin" fabric boubou can cost 5,000 ouguiya and even more).

Such an evolution may have something to recommend it from the viewpoints of comfort and aesthetic taste; but it certainly tightens the hold the foreign market has over Moorish everyday life, to the great advantage of the fashion industry.

We come up against this same rising trend toward ostentatious tastes when we turn to an examination of changes in the area of housing.

C. HOUSING AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE

In the rural Modrish milieu, the traditional house is the rectangular tent of sheep's-wool material. Its dimensions vary, the standard being about 7 meters by 10. Normally, each independent family owns a single tent. Only important notables occasionally have two each. In such cases the second tent serves as guest quarters for passing visitors. In the homes of important marabouts, it might also serve as a library or a student dormitory.

The tent is made by a young woman's relatives when she leaves her family home to live with her husband. It is sewn together from separately woven woolen strips, and every two or three years the tent is repaired, its worn-out strips being replaced with new. In times past the wool required in tent-making could easily be obtained by shearing a flock of sheep (everyone had some sheep), by purchasing the necessary quantity of wool, or by getting it as a gift; the work required was done by communal labor (touiza) with the women of a settlement participating. But these days, on account of the drought and its consequences, wool has become much harder to find. As we have already noted, the drought has already resulted in massive rural depopulation coupled with an unprecedented sedentarization movement: for instance, Nouakchott grew from a population of 5,867 people in 1961 to 134,986 in 1977 ("Second Results" 1977). These changes have affected housing patterns. There has been a rapid decline in the construction of woolen tents, while that of white

canvas tents has risen. The canvas tent is of luxury quality when it comes from Eastern Mauritania, where it is made of strips of fabric imported from Mali's Goundam region; when made of recycled material it is of modest quality. Sudanese-type straw huts are also on the rise, as are shanties put together from bits and pieces, so much in evidence in the Capital's slums.

Unfolding rather suddenly in the catastrophic conditions of the drought years, the 1970's, the evolution in the way the Moors relate to their living space has happened, quite clearly, in a decidedly spontaneous manner, without the controlling influence of any planning or orientating agency. And the ecological, sociological, psychological and other consequences of this evolution have not been fully evaluated.

Something might have been done--perhaps something could still be done--at least in the urban centers, to turn the architectural and city-planning heritage of the old Saharan cities to good account; or even to put to good use archeological information on the medieval towns, now vanished, like Tegdoust or Kumbi Saleh. Such an initiative would be informed by a special sensitivity to the need to conserve the natural, esthetic and social environment through creative use of local materials etc.

We are compelled to admit that city planning and architecture in Mauritania today are not informed by any such sensitivity. Architecture and city planning are to all intents and purposes under no control; which

is to say that their development is at the mercy of wealthy individuals. And the chief preoccupation of such individuals is assuredly not the conservation of the Mauritanian environment.

The urban environment of a city such as Nouakchott (J.R. Pitte, 1975), is an eloquent object lesson on the results attendant on maverick urbanization and speculation.

Where individual choice is concerned, that is to say, at the level of individuals with sufficient income to have freedom of choice, we find the same tendency to overweening ostentation we have seen several times before: the richest people build multi-story villas with maybe fifteen rooms, among which the most important, like so many display windows, exist to serve only one purpose: to give the world outside something to gape at.

In the choice of furniture and household utensils, traditional products are also increasingly despised, and the market is flooded with imported artifacts and junk from the industrial societies: traditional wooden bowls have been supplanted by enamelled steel plates from China or Morocco; in the tents of nomads goatskin leather-bottles have been replaced with metal kegs and rubber barrels.

Housing also, evidently, is going through the same kinds of changes affecting the totality of Moorish consumption patterns. Moorish society is by necessity austere in its consumption habits. But it has had imposed on it, with the help of models alien to it, rhythms and types of

consumption patterns which are putting it entirely at the mercy of the world market.

The most disturbing aspect of this transformation is that far from acting consistently according to the logic of capitalist development, Moorish society is in fact preserving and reinforcing types of economic behavior (such as the destructive indulgence of luxury tastes, the giving of gifts) derived from pre-capitalist, even anti-capitalist institutions (marriage arrangements, tribal kinship). This is the dysfunction we intend to lay bare in a more detailed scrutiny of the mechanisms of property circulation and distribution in Moorish society.

### 3. CIRCULATION - DISTRIBUTION

In this last section of our survey of the material bases of Moorish life, we shall first of all say a few words about transportation means and modes. Then we shall provide a brief overview of relationships between the market and non-market economies, our purpose being to clarify further the concluding remarks just made about consumption patterns.

#### A. TRANSPORTATION MEANS AND MODES

Several times in the course of the preceding parts of our exposition, we stressed the role played by trans-Saharan exchanges and trade in the precolonial area.

The caravan trade ran principally along a North-South axis, interlinking a number of sometimes very active market-cities. Ahmed Oul Alamin,

author of El Wasit (1911) informs us that at the peak of its prosperity Chinguetti could despatch caravans of 30,000 camels to the Idjil salt mines. The figure is possibly somewhat hyperbolic. Still, it is noteworthy that at Timbuktu the grand total of the Kounta clan's camels despatched to fetch salt from Toadenni (Azali) could easily reach 5,000 to 6,000 head as recently as the 1950's (Genievre 1947). Tradition has it that in the 16th century, when Tichitt was a walled, battlemented city -- it is now three-quarters in ruins -- caravans were at times obliged to wait in very long lines to get unloaded. Even leaving aside the great trans-Saharan caravans, we might mention the numerous small convoys made up of a few camels and even asses; such convoys traditionally made it possible for pastoral nomads to go shopping in town for clothes, tea and a few provisions, mainly cereals, at the beginning of the dry season, in the lean period before the harvest season.

It is clear, then, that formerly caravan transport played a principal part in the socio-economic life of the Moors, first by virtue of its role in the exchange trade, secondly on account of the business it generated in the Saharan station-towns, and thirdly by its impact on animal husbandry.

Caravan transport, and specifically trans-Saharan caravan transport, lost ground steadily as trade with European mercants developed on the Atlantic coast and along the Senegal River.

Three subsequent developments have knocked it out definitively: the first was colonialism, harbinger of the automobile; the second was the drought, and the third was the recent war. In its descent into ruin the caravan trade dragged down with it all those centers not readily accessible by motor transport. This in spite of the fact that numerous places still exist which for a long time to come will remain inaccessible to anything but animal transport. What needs to be remembered is that in order to resuscitate these ancient caravan cities that are now dying out, like Ouadane, Chinguetti, Tichitt, Oualata, a way has to be found to give them back at least a modicum of their past function as transportation centers -- even if all that can be done at the moment is to turn them into modestly active tourist centers.

Changes in transportation means and modes are largely responsible for the deterioration of the Moorish society's life-style and productivity.

The building of roads, the introduction of motor transport, the coming of the locomotive and the airplane, all these innovations have had a decisive impact on traditional migratory channels, nomadism and sedentarization, and signally transformed social relations. (There are, for instance, increasingly greater opportunities beckoning dependent people, the young, and women, to break free of traditional bonds of subjection). The relative insulation and isolation which, until the 1950's, typified the Moorish universe, have now in a really profound sense been shattered. And the market economy, long confined

to the cities and their immediate outskirts, has begun to infiltrate into every corner of the society.

B. THE MARKET ECONOMY AS RELATED TO OTHER FORMS OF DISTRIBUTION

The exchange system in traditional Moorish society depended largely on gift-giving and the non-reciprocal payment of certain fees-- or at any rate the payment of fees without any immediate return. The effects of this traditional system are still operative in today's urban, sedentary society.

Servants and the young are obliged, according to the system, to pay dues in kind or in the form of labor to their masters and elders; subject groups and clients owe tribute and gifts to their overlords.

In return, the masters must maintain their prestige through demonstrating a flair for generous behavior, by supporting griots (chroniclers and poets), needy parents and indigent dependents, for instance.

Life's major rites of passage (baptism, marriage, death, etc.) are celebrated with expensive feasts; such feasts are, for the ruling group in Moorish society, occasions for income redistribution. But these celebrations are now subject to such intense inflationary pressures that the custom of redistribution has lost touch with its traditional function as a precious occasion for the affirmation of group solidarity.

We shall postpone till later the detailed discussion of these ceremonial exchanges. Let us simply state that because these exchanges have evolved into cash transactions under increasing pressure from the market economy, they are in the process of losing their meaning as genuine manifestations of the Moorish society's network of alliances and solidarity relationships. Instead, the ceremonial exchanges increasingly express the Moorish society's entanglement in the European originated market universe -- and this in the most wasteful way possible.

We now come to the end of our examination of the economic bases of Moorish society, an examination in which we have discussed in sequence the society's production patterns, its consumption habits, and the way it circulates and distributes wealth.

To round out this brief discussion, a few statements are in order:

Our argument could give rise to a suspicion that we are attempting to rehabilitate the concept of "self-reliant subsistence". In fact such a suspicion is partially justified. Self-reliant subsistence -- the ability independently to meet one's subsistence needs -- may not be exactly synonymous with prosperity; but it does at least mean independence and self-sufficiency. Now the problems we have been cataloging throughout the preceding pages are essentially problems and difficulties arising from the destruction of a system which previously subsisted on its own resources. We would therefore be inclined to assert that

if today the system is characterized at a number of points by the existence of developmental blocks and bottlenecks, this is only because the system itself in its entirety has had its development blocked.

In saying this, we have no intention of giving the old system a halo of perfection, nor of lending it the sanctity of martyrdom. We have, as a matter of record, discussed that old society's shortcomings, its weaknesses, its contradictions. In addition, we have recapitulated the part played by the drought and the recent war in the process of destruction which has reduced Moorish society from the vigorous autonomy it enjoyed in times past to a dependence on the world market economy which grows more pronounced with every passing day. All we now intend to do is to point out where the major responsibility in this process of destruction belongs.

The analysis of Moorish social organization will enhance our ability to evaluate the effects and the limits of the society's involvement in the world market economy.

## II. MOORISH SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Several times in the preceding pages we have adumbrated the organizational complexity of Moorish society. This society is characterized by a tangled web of dependency relationships, allegiances and alliances, all products of a history brimming with all kinds of conflicts. These relationships govern the lives of all members of this society without exception, no matter what their rank. The social structures

and the psychological attitudes they generate are closely connected with the organization of the society's material foundations, which we have just described. But these social structures and psychological attitudes also seem to have greater staying power than their material underpinnings in the destructive confrontation with the conquering market economy. They manage to survive even when their material foundations have completely disappeared.

In our continuing exposition, we shall first examine problems related to individual behavior, kinship and power. After that we shall proceed to the analysis of Moorish social stratification.

#### 1. KINSHIP AND POWER

Specific manifestations of individualism exist in Moorish society; but the society as such does not recognize individuals. In this milieu all persons from the moment of birth themselves involved in a nexus of relationships determined chiefly by kinship.

##### A. THE FAMILY

The monogamous family is the basic unit of Moorish society (de Chasse 1977, 1979). Each family is clearly differentiated from others in spatial terms, a family normally having one tent to itself. Though multiple bonds unite it with larger collective groups such as the settlement, the section and the tribe, each family in principle manages its own affairs in complete autonomy, under the husband's control. In the traditional milieu this unit very often included one or several dependents, mostly slaves.

Data relating to the Moorish family and its size need to be handled with care if they are to yield useful information. This<sup>k</sup> is especially true in the case of data on household consumption patterns. We could cite figures from the 1964 SEDES study to the effect that among nomadic Moors the average family comprises 4.2 persons; according to 1977 national census figures, however, the figure is 4.84 ("Second Results" 1977). We could also, following the example of the same 1977 census, highlight the contrast, when the total Mauritanian population is taken into account, between nomads and settled populations, among whom the average family size is 5.88 persons; between Moors and Black Mauritanians (the average figure is almost 8 persons among the Soninkes of Guidimakha, and more than 6 among the Pular farmers of Gorgol); between rural and urban populations (families are smaller on the average in Nouakchott and the mining towns of Zouerate and Nouadhibou).

It is easy to forget that in the current situation of Moorish society, and under prevalent norms governing relationships between its different members, these figures are useful only as approximations; it would be quite wrong to draw inferences from them about, say, family budgets.

The fact is that Moorish society has always respected and continues to respect the demands of social solidarity and generosity. Hospitality, for instance, is a duty. And these demands often embrace quite a number of persons. As a result, any economic calculation based on precise numerical data is not merely impossible--it is practically aimless,

because the social actors themselves have neither the desire nor the option of planning their budgets in any way.

To take an example: in the nomadic settlements, if a person happens to receive gifts, or takes delivery of a consignment of goods, he is obliged to share them with all his neighbors. By the same token he must routinely set aside part of his income for the upkeep of his dependents and needy relatives.

New exigencies come in the wake of urbanization and sedentarization. For instance, everything has to be purchased, and there are new needs to be met. Nevertheless, the norms of solidarity derived from the traditional milieu are still quite well preserved, especially among the poorest strata: numerous households offer hospitality to brothers, nephews, cousins, and treat them just like part of the family.

It needs to be pointed out, that this system, like the entire economic and social organization of the Moors, is showing increasingly patent signs of stress. The most dependable pillars of the society, especially the rules governing matrimonial alliances, have gone through some rapid changes in recent years.

Among the Moors females used traditionally to get married early, sometimes as young as 12 or 13; men married relatively late, between the ages of 25 and 30 as a rule (Beyriés 1937). And it was almost mandatory among the "nobility" that marriages involve certain preferred kinship relationships: the ideal was for the groom to marry a parallel paternal

cousin (Fe FP). As a general rule, marriages were arranged by parents. Dowry was paid in kind (livestock) to the bride's parents, who in turn used it to establish the newly-married household. As long ago as 1937, the colonial administrator Beyriés wrote about the rapidity with which all these rules were changing. Parents are beginning to lose their prerogatives, men are marrying earlier, increasingly choosing their own brides, while young women on their part marry later and sometimes reject the husbands forced on them. (3)

This evolution was instigated by colonialism: the colonial government and its school system progressively subverted the authority of traditional education; respect for parental control and the authority of elders weakened. All these changes have freed the marriage market from old controls. At the same time the system has been laid open to penetration by the cash economy. The resulting concatenation of factors has subjected the dowry to such intense inflationary pressures that these days, in certain marriages, the figures are simply out of sight. The number of guests invited to wedding banquets easily exceeds a thousand. Other phenomena such as polygamy and marital instability may, at least partially, be explained by reference to these same factors of change. (A 1954 study of the Central Senegal Basin showed that even then Moorish women contracted 1.32 marriages each on the average).

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(3) A 1954 study cited in Boutillier *et al.*, La Moyenne Vallée du Sénégal, 1962, quotes the average age of Moorish women at the time of their first marriage as between 23 and 28 years.

The rural exodus and the sedentarization movement of recent years have simply accelerated a drift already under way. The influx into the urban centers, involving young men for the most part, has worsened the imbalance in the sex ratio: in the large urban centers it has put men in a preponderant majority, while in the rural areas there are places where these days only women, children and old people live.

On the one hand this flight from the rural areas to the urban centers boosts the inflationary rise of the dowry, worsens instability within families, and aggravates the continuing subversion of traditional marriage norms. On the other hand it condemns beves of rural women, supposedly waiting for cousins who have long since vanished with the urban influx, to permanent spinsterhood.

What needs to be recognized is the fact that Moorish "communalism" to adopt the term used by Julius NYERERE to describe forms of solidarity typical of African societies (Y. Benot 1972) - together with its main-pring, kingroup marriage, whether we commend it as a positive ethos uniting people within Moorish civilization, or condemn it as a negative survival blocking the road to development, is at the moment undergoing transformation which seem destined to destroy it altogether. (4)

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(4) The weakening of kinship criteria in Moorish marriage practices is already mentioned in the study by Boutillier *et al.*: only 37% of marriages surveyed were kin marriages. Of these 27% were between cousins four times and six times removed. Among the Peulhs the comparative figure is 65%; for the Toucouleurs it is 56.5%.

A caveat: 38% of the Moorish sample surveyed was made up of farm workers, i.e mostly Haratin, for whom the imperatives of kin-group marriage are not of any great importance.

Yet, we shall doubtless be told, larger-scale manifestations of the kinship-based communal spirit, such as "tribalism" and "regionalism" whose negative effects on development everyone recognises, are far from dying out; in fact they are spreading and expanding.

#### B. TRIBES AND TRIBALISM

The truth is that Moorish society presents itself and conceives of itself as a gathering of tribes. Every individual identifies and projects himself as a member of a tribal group.

On the surface this notion of tribal adherence may seem simple enough. But on examination it turns out to subsume extremely varied meanings.

A tribe means first of all a name; more than a name, it means a label, reaching back to a common ancestor. Every Moor reputedly belongs to a specific eponymous Oulad (literally "Sons" in Hassani language) or an Id ("Sons" in Berber). We use the word label advisedly, because in fact the claim of descent from a common ancestor is generally true for only a limited fraction of the tribe's actual members. For instance, in 1944, out of the 1579 tent households belonging to the Oulad Ebieri tribe, only 280 families were strictly speaking considered to be descendants of the eponymous ancestor. The remainder comprised immigrants, dependents, freed slaves, artisans et al. (Dubié 1953, quoted in Chassey 1977). And there are tribes whose recent formation, melting-pot composition (e.g. the Ahel Sidi Mahmoud of Assaba) or extreme receptivity to immigrants (e.g. the Regueihat) have made them exceptionally energetic and aggressive.

Beyond providing a name, a tribe offers its members an economic and institutional framework for managing their lives.

We have already seen that arable land, watering troughs and pasture ranges controlled by the tribe were held as the collective property of the tribe as a whole, and were used, maintained and guarded in the name of the tribe.

This territorial aspect is quite important in the evaluation of tribalism or tribal patriotism--love for the land of the ancestors, land for which they fought and on which they were buried; land from which all a tribesman's historical consciousness and personal memories derive. And its importance is reinforced by a set of customs and institutions by virtue of which the tribe becomes a veritable political entity.

It is fashionable in this regard to contrast the so-called republican style of power in tribes run by marabouts, where the tribal assembly (jemaa) plays the key role, with the autocratic or kingly style of power in tribes dominated by warlords, where the chief's individual weight is much greater (Dubié 1937).

What is really involved, with just a few exceptions, is a matter of differences not in kind but in degree. The issue at stake has more to do with jurisprudential legalism than with the scope of personal power: as a rule, marabouts were more scrupulous in the observance of Islamic laws than were the warlords. Indeed, despite the fact that in certain families, the exercise of power is more or less determined by heredity (this applies as much to marabouts as to warlords), traditional political

power in Moorish society has always been frail. Even in the four Emirates whose founding we discussed in our historical introduction (Trarza, Brakna, Tagant, Adrar), Moorish political power never succeeded in establishing anything more solid than embryonic forms of these specialized institutions (administrative, judicial, military and police organs) present at the birth of every state.

A paradoxical question arises: is the seriousness of the tribal problem today not in fact a consequence of the weakness of precolonial tribal institutions? The question is germane precisely because all these tribal institutions have been subverted--and yet the tribes have not disappeared.

Before we get into this question, let us recall that tribal solidarity, nurtured and kept vigorous by incessant conflicts--the unifying effect of external danger is axiomatic--was actually a protean insurance and social security system covering eventualities such as accidents, war, disease and old age. So beyond its geographical and sentimental meaning, tribal solidarity had a very precise economic meaning for all tribespeople. It was imperative to make this clear before any exposition on the ideological nature of tribalism. Because we are also dealing with an ideology which invokes the Koran and the Hadith as ultimate fundamentals.

A couple of paragraphs back, we wondered about a possibility that might at first glance seem odd: whether in fact the weakness of tribal institutions has not helped tribalism itself to survive. What this means

is that the very nature of the tribal phenomenon--imprecise, mental, ideological--afforded it a kind of natural protection, even when its material bases might have disappeared.

Possibly this is another aspect of the question; at any rate we think it again necessary at this juncture to turn back to history in an effort to shed light on the strange dialectic animating Moorish society: a society currently dominated by a lumpen capitalism which uses tribalism while in turn being used by tribalism.

The truth is that in the precolonial era the tribal frame of reference was not just a context generating solidarity; it also served to perpetuate relations of dependence and oppression: the oppression of the weak by the strong, the subjection of marabouts to the warlords, the domination of slaves and subject groups by their overlords. All this was extremely well understood by the architect of French colonialism in Mauritania, Coppolani.

For, in order to make capital out of the contradictions within Moorish society, which at the turn of the last century was ravaged by innumerable conflicts, Coppolani advocated a policy of "pacification" with regard to the "oppressed groups", i.e. the marabouts and subject groups, coupled with military operations designed to crush the resistance of those opposed to colonialism's officially "peaceful" penetration.

In this process tribal organizational structures, especially the institution of chieftancy, were put under severe pressure.

(Ahmed Ould Mohamed Saleh 1959). Bit by bit they lost their function as an autonomous expression of the Moors' collective needs; more and more, they became a tool of interference and manipulation used by the colonial administration against the Bedouin society. From this time on the mandate given to handpicked and coopted chiefs (coopted in the specific sense of being paid a cash subsidy and thus "made faithful", to borrow an expression from Hamid El Mauritaniy 1975), was a comprehensive mandate including tax collection, recruitment of colonial army auxiliaries (goum), and the encouragement of children to enrol in schools.

Not even the practice of religious was able to escape the new order: the granting of official permission to take up collections and to go on trips known as Ziara, from which the major marabouts made most of their income, now became a means of rewarding a brand of religious piety which, even if it was not a direct accomplice of the colonial officials, was at least benevolently disposed toward them. In our opinion, these are a few of the factors one might highlight in an attempt to deal with the money-oriented and pseudo-capitalist brand of capitalism in vogue today. Everybody deplores the hydra-headed manifestations of this pseudo-modern tribalism: favoritism, nepotism, regionalism, and layer upon layer of featherbedding appointments at all levels of the Civil Service; but then everybody goes right on indulging in them. The consequence: it is not just the development effort that is hampered; even the elementary matter of establishing a minimally trustworthy, credible and efficient administration is a problem.

What is likely to be the future fate of this tribal phenomenon ?

The government of MOKHTAR OULD DADDAH insistently made official speeches proclaiming its desire to abolish the tribal system. If the poor results that government achieved after twenty years are anything to go by, one might be forgiven for thinking that tribalism is not about to just go away.

The strategy of letting the traditional institution of chieftaincy die out by simply not replacing dead chiefs did not succeed in its aim: nor did the substitution of numbers (Region I, Region II etc.) for administrative regions hitherto identified with tribal names end tribalism. Indeed, some of the officers who engineered the coup d'état of last July 10, in their anxiety to distance themselves from MOKHTAR OULD DADDAH's old regime, actually aspire in all ingenuousness to restore tribalism (see especially the first speeches made by MOUSTAPHA OULD MOHAMED SALEK).

In spite of all this, it might be possible to speculate that this vague, intangible tribal phenomenon, already partially eroded by the encroachments of the market economy, will in future find it increasingly hard to survive the pressures of a society in which wealth, measured in cash, establishes itself more clearly every passing day as the yardstick of all values. In this regard, the tribal system will merely go the way of all the hierarchies and values of traditional Moorish society.

## 2. MOORISH SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Within Moorish society, tribal organization is coupled with an inter-group hierarchy whose characteristics come very close to those generally accepted as defining castes. Among these characteristics endogamy and a professional division of labor are particularly noteworthy. In effect, every Moor belongs by birth to one of the following groups: warriors, marabouts, vassals, craftsmen, griots, Hartani (freed slaves), and slaves.

On what criteria are these differentiations based? How strict are they? Do they constitute an authentic caste system? These questions are by no means merely academic. If we could answer them adequately, we would put ourselves in a position to understand why the division of labor referred to above continues to exercise such a strong hold on Moorish society today, even though that society has become sedentary, urbanized and bureaucratized.

Let us, to start with, take a look at the different groups making up Moorish society. We shall then proceed to essay a few answers to the questions just asked.

### A. THE WARRIOR CLASS

The warrior class originates from successive waves of Arab settlers reaching the Western Sahara from the end of 13th century. Called Hassan in Arab, they have been politically dominant in Moorish society since the Charr Bebbe War of 1674. In terms of numbers alone they are not all

that many; according to a 1965 SEDES study cited by F. de Chassey, they constitute no more than 15% of Mauritania's Moors. But they have enjoyed hegemonic power in the society, a power based on their readiness to make frequent and direct use of violence.

In times past members of the warrior group have not been above the use of violence occasionally pushed as far as terrorism. To keep alive the fear they inspired in other strata of the society, they could resort to summary executions, mutilation and torture, all designed to put recalcitrant people in their place (I. Hamad 1914).

By such means the warrior group generated a steady income for itself, collecting fees from their subjects and clients (Gerhard 1910, J. Durant 1947, Abinière 1949).

Violence, together with rapidity of movement, was of central importance in the basic occupation of this group; a hybrid combination of blood sport and commercial business, the institution of the razzia raid.

Diego Brosset (1935) has given an admirable description of this dangerous way of life, with all its oppressive vicissitudes and its harsh grandeur. It is a life style with its own distinctions: the petty brigand (hseysini) bound by the laws of neither God nor man, is not to be confused with the noble Emir, a magnanimous horsed figure capable of risking his life in the line of duty or in the service of honor.

Still, for both the unadorned hassani and the noble Emir, the basic means used to secure a livelihood is the immediate application of violence.

With the advent of colonialism, this group has been put through some very rapid changes.

The colonial government, by monopolizing the use of violence, drastically narrowed what Hervouet has termed the warrior group's "area of adventure". This was a decisive trammel on the activities of the group, who, unlike the marabouts did not as a rule possess much property of their own (Dubie 1953).

The warrior group's situation could have become downright catastrophic if the French administration had not decided, for political reasons, to compensate them for the loss of feudal rights they had traditionally exercised over their subjects. Thus a series of rulings provided for the (theoretically) definitive redemption en bloc of fees due from numerous subjects. In this exercise, sometimes families of livestock herdsman had to give up half their livestock at one fell swoop. The process of redemption went on till well into the 1940's. For instance, the colonial government paid compensation for the principal rights to land in South-West Mauritania, called the bakh, to the controlling warriors in 1939; compensation for rights involving the Imraguen was paid in 1944.

These compensation transactions in effect legitimized the power

relationships operative before colonialism. In so doing they helped reestablish the traditional hegemony of the warrior class on new foundations. In addition, the warriors' domination was accorded ample recognition by virtue of the official status given the institution of the Emirates.

The new order offered advancement opportunities, and those elements most closely connected with the colonial administration profited handsomely from them: members of the warrior group through taking jobs as auxiliary soldiers, marabouts by becoming interpreters or education officers. But the warrior group's old life style had given it no great aptitude for peaceful forms of competition, so they were obliged to resign themselves to the prospect of seeing marabouts (or sometimes even members of the vassal groups), who were more familiar with intellectual and business affairs, pushing them steadily out of a considerable part of their traditional position of dominance.

Nowadays, with just a few exceptions, most Moorish traders and businessmen of any importance are marabouts. As for the warrior group, its members seem to have found employment opportunities in line with their old occupation: they show a preference for the armed forces; in fact the majority of highranking Moorish officers originate from this group. We might note that even in industrialized societies, army personnel are often said to constitute a caste, what with their penchant for in-group marriage and their strong tendency toward self-perpetuation, etc.

In the countryside, where the presence of the central government has never been more than sporadic and superficial, a few major warrior families have apparently managed to maintain some of their old vigor. This is particularly true of the families of the Emirs of Tagant and Trarza.

Finally, we have to point out that though the material characteristics associated with membership of the warrior group have changed considerably, the group's psychological make-up has resisted change rather stubbornly: their concern with social rank, their contempt for other groups they consider their inferiors, their aversion to manual and productive work, all are signs that traditional mind-sets are still very much alive among them. The same kind of psychological resistance to change typifies the marabouts.

#### B. THE MARABOUTS

To put the matter in extremely simple terms, it could be said that in the traditional Moorish social hierarchy the marabouts (singular: mrabit, plural: tolba) come next after the warriors. The warriors in fact generally look down on the marabouts, accusing them of cowardice and dishonesty; the marabouts, in turn, have tended to hate the warriors on account of their brutal behavior, their ignorance, and their disdain for Islamic precepts. After all, religious piety and knowledge are the supreme values of the marabout's milieu.

Going beyond our schematic simplification, we could discuss the more subtle categories used by the warrior Sidi Meila of Trarza to define marabouts and warriors both in relation to each other and as they relate to other groups. We quote:

"The true Maghvri (noble Emir) is a man of honor and a man of religion.

The true Zawi (marabout) is a man of religion and a man of honor.

The common Hassani (warrior) is a man of honor without religion.

The common Mrabit is a man of religion without honor.

The Hseysini (small-time Hassani) is a man with neither honor nor religion.

The Mraybit (small-time Mrabit) is a man with neither religion nor honor.

(Mohamed El Mokhtar Ould Bah 1969 pp. 31-32)."

This series of definitions is quite an accurate presentation of the two-headed Moorish social system, both in the way it orders the categories, giving the warriors pride of place, and by its symmetrical structuring. In reality, after all, the marabouts play a leading role in Moorish society, usually next of the warriors, sometimes ahead of them. The marabouts outnumber the warriors: according to the 1964 SEDES study already referred to, the marabout group constituted 36% of Mauritania's Moorish population. In addition, they were better prepared than the warriors to resist the effects of colonial occupation.

Fact is, the basis of the marabout's power did not lie in the use of violence; it lay in their economic and ideological importance in Moorish society.

a) THE MATERIAL ELEMENT

The marabout tribes owned almost all the wells, arable land, oases, livestock and slaves in the society. They also exercised a de facto monopoly over the caravan trade and other business. The first great Moorish fortunes were built up, well before the colonial era (Stewart 1973), by the principal marabout families, especially the families of the chief leaders of the religious brotherhoods. For all the reasons we have already mentioned, the establishment of the colonial regime only gave this phenomenon of marabout advancement scope for further growth (Dupie 1953).

The accumulation of wealth by marabouts which began in this way was very closely linked to the religious functions of the priestly class. In the first place the many gifts given by disciples to their marabout mentors constituted and still constitute a decisive contributing factor, but hardly the only one. A second factor, the specific quality of the relationship between the marabout and his disciples (telamid) works to the same effect: the increase of marabout wealth.

The marabouts' wealth, in effect, is no longer uniquely based on direct ownership such as in slavery, nor on the threat of immediate, repressive, material violence such as the warriors use against their vassals. Marabout wealth is equally, in fact preponderantly, based on the mysterious forces--supernatural forces which the marabouts are supposed to be capable of unleashing.

These marabouts, "administrators of the occult"--to borrow a phrase used by Marc Bloch, 1947, to describe the ecclesiastical orders of medieval Europe's feudal society--thus did not have to invest time or energy in the supervision of their servants. The servants worked as free agents, managing and husbanding their wealth for them on a scope and with a zeal quite impossible under conditions of slavery. With this observation we come to a consideration of the second essential component of marabout power: the religious dimension.

b) THE IDEOLOGICAL MAINSPRING

As is well known, Moorish society is 100% Muslim. But within the general adherence to Islam there are different degrees of religious conviction, different styles of religious observance. Ahmed Ben Alamin (1911), discussing at the turn of the century what elements of Muslim law had disappeared from the country of the Moors (Shingit) and what still remained, wrote in his book Wasit:

"Among the marabouts blood feuds have disappeared; in any case murder is rare. However, they are orthodox in other respects."

"As for the warriors and most of the vassal groups, they do not fear to commit perjury. They do not obey any of Allah's laws. Among them women are excluded from inheritance. And they covet the orphan's property". (p. 532).

Admittedly, these are the words of a marabout. They therefore have

to be taken with at least a few grains of salt. Nevertheless, they do point to an essential truth about Moorish society: religious orthodoxy and the powers it confers are the preserve of the marabouts.

Marabout specialization in religious affairs is indicated by the almost exclusive control the Zawaya exercise over the instruments of production and reproduction of religious piety: the educational system and the religious brotherhoods.

#### i' THE TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Traditional education in Arabic was to all intents and purposes the exclusive preserve of the marabouts. In general, the education of slaves and vassals went no farther than the recitation of the Koran's opening Surat, the Fatiha.

A few warrior families arranged to have their children somewhat better educated. This better education, however, scarcely went beyond the learning of a more or less substantial chunk of the Holy Book.

To quote Ahmed Ben Alamir once more: "Among the marabouts there is not one man or woman who cannot read and write. And even supposing that this was not the case in some other tribe, it would be a rare phenomenon, involving no more than 1% of the Zawaya". (p. 517).

In reality, even though the rudiments of education are truly generalized among the marabouts themselves, significant inequalities remain between men and women (Leriche 1952), between different tribes, and between different regions.

Education was carried on under very difficult circumstances, typified by that scarcity of resources whose effects on all levels of Moorish social organization we have repeatedly noted. The educational system lacked equipment, instructional material, management, funds for teachers' salaries, methods, syllabuses, outlets for school-leavers, etc. These inadequacies turned the system into the static, stereotyped and cliquish fiefdom of a narrow coterie of priests. Surveys of Mauritanian libraries and books show that within the educational system theologico-legal commentaries and literary tomes outnumber technical and practical texts overwhelmingly (Massignon 1909, Mokhtar Ould Hamidoun and Adam Heymowski 1975). On the level of basic literacy, the overall achievements of the traditional educational system are rather disappointing: according to 1977 census statistics, out of an aggregate 17% literacy figure, 15% are literate in Arabic or French ("Second Results" 1977).

Slightly different figures provided by a 1978 UNESCO study indicate that 10.3% of Mauritania's population are literate in Arabic. The UNESCO figures refer to the total population of Mauritania: i.e., they include black African population groups, who are obviously less involved in traditional Arabic-medium education than the Moors. And even among the Moors we have seen that the only group seriously involved is the marabout group. As far back as 1937, Beyriés observed that the traditional educational system was in decline. Currently, that same system feeds appreciable numbers of teachers, officials and students into

Mauritania's secondary school system. This phenomenon has spread since the implementation of the New Educational System (1972) aimed at a more thorough-going Arabization of the educational system (P.P.N. 1978).

It has both positive and negative aspects.

Even leaving aside the general lowering of standards attendant on the exercise, (a deterioration that is perhaps inevitable in a transitional phase <sup>5/</sup>, it is still a fact that the new system has resulted in the carrying over of a number of shortcomings from the traditional system, chiefly in the areas of teaching methods and syllabus content, into the wider public system. And the shortcomings thus transferred derive from the marabout group's need to perpetuate its power.

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|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 5/ Total number of primary school teachers, 1976-1977:   | 1668      |
| Number of male and female student monitors and pupil teachers (i.e. those with the lowest qualifications)..... | 709       |
| Arab-medium monitors.....  | 262       |
| French-medium monitors.....  | 101       |
| Arab-medium pupil teachers.....  | 133       |
| French-medium pupil teachers.....  | 178       |
| In 1977-1978 the basic situation was as follows:   |           |
| Total number of the teaching establishment.....  | 1765      |
|  | of these, |
| Number of monitors and pupil Teachers.....   | 790       |
| Arab-medium monitors.....  | 321       |
| French-medium monitors.....  | 109       |
| Arab-medium pupil teachers.....  | 135       |
| French-medium pupil teachers.....  | 180       |

(Ministry of Education 1977, 1978)

That said, it still remains to be pointed out that education is not the only ideological tool used by the marabouts to generate their power. There is also the practice of religious piety, which in fact constitutes the prime tool of marabout power. Of that practice the movement of religious brotherhoods is the most massive and often the most lucrative manifestation.

ii. THE BROTHERHOODS

The brotherhood movement, a phenomenon very common in the Muslim world, is a movement associated with individual, as opposed to institutional, organized religious piety. It has had a key role to play in the establishment and evolution of Moorish society.

If one were to attempt an exhaustive treatment of the subject, one would have to scrutinize this notion of religious piety, to take a close look at its generative conditions, to study its features and its effects, and to find out how it spreads. Ultimately, these are issues better dealt with in a gestalt theory of magical and religious phenomena, and we need not get embroiled with them here. With the aim of shedding some light on the role of the marabout class in Moorish society, we shall restrict ourselves to giving a few brief pointers. First of all, there is the fear of death, and the fear of chastisement in the hereafter--the general and basic question of the soul's salvation. This is precisely where the Holy Man, the Saint, comes in: he is the guide, the advocate, the intercessor for mortal humans in the presence of the divine powers.

Hence, for example, the desire of the faithful to have their corpses buried near a Saint's, so that the Saint can plead for them during the post-mortem interrogations everyone has to undergo the moment the soul expires from the body.

Then there is the weighty influence of a general determinism believed to rule over a universe populated, according to the popular Moorish consciousness, with a teeming assortment of varied beings: (devils, spirits both benevolent and malevolent, vampires, etc. Laforgue 1932). Everybody, according to this popular cosmogony, has to live with these silent, ever-present beings, for good or ill.

It is in the management of this shadowy universe that the Saint, the marabout and the healer find their precise vocation. It is no mean vocation: in an environment where resources are worse than uncertain, their vocation is unique in bringing in a literally miraculous income. It is the only income with the amazing power to actually go up in those critical periods when all other incomes are going down. After all, it is mainly when people have problems - economic, social or psychological - that they flock to the marabout. Still, we must not be too one-sided in our evaluation of the phenomena of marabouts and religious brotherhoods. It needs to be pointed out that these phenomena do not function merely as a hustle the holy masters use to con their disciples out of their wealth or labor. The marabout has reciprocal responsibilities: he must be capable of extending a helping hand to his disciples; he must be

generously hospitable to passing travelers; he must give alms to those seeking them; and he must give of his wealth to his own masters, in case he has any. The colonial administration conjured up an image of the brotherhood movement based on its own paranoid readiness to imagine interconnected conspiracies all over the place, controlled by some mysterious, far-away plotter. The image was false. The brotherhoods, if we ignore their mystical paraphernalia and their initiatory rites, constitute a specific manifestation of the exploitative (and also solidary) mechanisms prevalent in traditional Moorish society. The great branches of the religious brotherhood movement (Qadiria, Tijania) may no longer have much of an organized presence in the Moorish world; but some of their more or less recent offshoots seem to have kept a considerable deal of their vigor: examples are the "Eleven Seeds" Tijania sect formed by the disciples of Hamahulhah, the Hafidia branch of Tijania Islam practiced by Menne Abee Ould Mohamed Ould Tolba and Cheikh Brahim Niass (of Kaolack, Senegal); the peculiar little ghoudf sect founded at the start of the 19th century by the Boussati Cheikh El Mokhtar Ould Taleb Amar Ould Nouh; etc. Finally, there are two small agricultural communities which have grown up on the basis of devotion to a religious head: the community of the Abel Adde at Boumdeid, and the one founded at the beginning of this century at Agoueinit, not far from Nema, by Cheikg Tourad Ould Abbas, grandson of Cheikh Mohamed Fadel (Mohamed Lemine Ould Hammoni 1959). In terms of numbers all these groups are only of marginal importance in Moorish society, and there are certain Chioukh

(plural of Cheikh) who, though they have no organized following, or do not belong to any brotherhood, enjoy prestige of a more lucrative type because they are reputed to possess miraculous powers. One such is Yacoub Ould Cheikh Sidia of the Boutilimit region. A singularly lucrative practice is that of Nadher, which involves the promise of a present to the Cheikh if some wished-for event does happen. Often the faithful make these promises without ever having seen the Cheikh in question. In broad outline, then, these are, in our opinion, the essential factors we must keep in perspective when examining the role -- past and present of marabouts in Moorish society. We have discussed the economic and ideological importance of this group, an importance closely linked with their privileged position in the educational and religious institutions of one of the very few pastoralist societies ever to succeed in maintaining and developing a substantial literate culture.

We have touched on the fact that this class enjoyed conditions enabling it to adjust better to colonial occupation than did the warrior group. It is noteworthy that the colonizer's strategy did not stop short of exploiting rivalries and disagreements between the two groups the better to dominate them (R. Armand 1906). We need to add, finally, that the marabouts continue to wield a very great deal of power within the Moorish society's structures, in spite of the changes in the situation that slowly began to take place with the onset of colonialism, and in spite of the weakening of the traditional educational system and the

influence of the brotherhoods. Indeed, marabouts are extremely important in the state power structure (de Chassey, 1978, has shown how members of the warrior and marabout groups have in tandem accomplished the crossover from the apex of the traditional social pyramid to the apex of the modern state's bureaucratic pyramid).

### C. SUBJECT GROUPS

We see, then, that the warriors and the marabouts occupy the apex of the Moorish social hierarchy. From that position they used to exercise--and they still exercise--a politico-religious control over the other groups, based on a hereditary division of labor. Who are the groups so dominated, and how have they evolved?

#### a) THE VASSALS

The vassals are survivors from prior populations either thinned out or destroyed by successive waves of invaders, mostly Arabs. Remnants of erstwhile powerful tribes reduced to vassal status after wars in which they ended up at the losing end, the vassals have a place in Moorish society midway between the nobles and the slaves. In fact, under this rubric are categorized a number of disparate groups who have only their vassal status in common.

#### i. THE BONA FIDE VASSALS

The vassals, strictly speaking, are those groups bonded to pay tribute. Called Aznaga or Ashab in the Hassani dialect, they are not very many, amounting to no more than 5% of the total Moorish population, according to the 1964 SEDES study.

In times past they were almost exclusively dependent on their overlords, the warriors.

Specializing normally in animal husbandry and herding, the Aznaga were subject to arbitrary taxation and could be called upon to do forced labor whenever their overlords wanted. They had to pay a multitude of fees to their overlords - the ghrama, the horma, the mouna, the bakh, etc., - theoretically as part of conventions of solidarity and protection between them and their overlords.

Within the system the warrior overlord could call upon his serfs to pay his debts; he could take contributions from them to buy a horse, to marry off one of his daughters, etc. During seasons when milk was plentiful, he frequently boarded his daughters with them for fattening.

The Zenagui (singular form of Aznaga) was normally cowed into a state of awe for his overlord by virtue of repeated and frequent punishments and impositions.

Some marabout tribes maintained similar power relationships with some of their dependents. With the substitution of a few terms, the Zenagui would be analogous to the Telmidi (disciple), while the ghrama fee would have its counterpart in the gabdh.

We have already discussed the effects colonization had on the power of the marabouts and the warriors; we have also mentioned compensation paid by the administration (or with its blessing) for the abolition of vassal tribute: some compensation arrangements were still

under negotiation in the Tagant region as recently as 1951 (Aam Elfda, the Year of Compensation).

Nevertheless, we must emphasize the fact that even though in a general sense the situation has been evolving in a direction favoring the liberalization of traditional dependency relationships in their most rigid and brutal forms, the vassal groups are still very much under the moral - and sometimes material - domination of their traditional masters.

This is particularly true of the marabouts, as their relationships with the Imraguen demonstrate.

ii. THE IMRAGUEN

We have already mentioned the existence of this peculiar group in Moorish society, where it is the only group making its living almost exclusively from fishing. It is a group mostly composed of Vassals and ex-slaves, strung along the Atlantic seaboard in tiny clusters.<sup>(6)</sup> Until 1944 the Imraguen had to pay their overlords, mostly warriors, a series of fees that were exorbitant when related to their meager income. These fees were: the Tjikrit or personal tax; the Darraet Ahel Amar Ould Bouchareb or the Ahel Amar Bouchareb wardrobe tax; the Taghadert or the fishery tax; the Dkhoul lebar or the seafarer's licence; the Chrabelhasi or the license to drink well-water; the Ivije, yet another personal tax; the Lebest Seddoum or the Seddoum wardrobe tax (Thomas 1946, Lotte 1937).

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(6) A 1939 census quoted by Thomas places the total Imraguen population at 306. Nowadays their number is no more than 5-6,000.

The redemption from the warrior group of all these impositions on Imraguen income has very palpably eased the exploitation of the Imraguen fishermen by the warrior group, even if it has not ended that exploitation altogether. But their exploitation by the marabouts, based on the power of magico-religious beliefs, seems to have continued (F.X. Pelletier 1975).

Then there is the continuing exploitation practiced by the fishing companies. These companies buy a portion of the fish hauled in by the Imraguen from them. But at the same time their own fishing activities put increasingly dangerous pressures on the marine resources on which the Imraguen depend for their livelihood.

ii. THE GRIOTS

Among the dependent groups, we must mention the griots. The griots are a very marginal group, numerically speaking. Counted together with the craftsmen, the whole lot comprises no more than 2% of the total Moorish population. And the griots are a minority even among the craftsmen. Traditionally, the griots (genealogists, poets, guitarists, singers, and composers) used to be attached to the principal warrior families. These days, in their efforts to survive the disastrous conditions besetting Moorish society, the griots have taken to a kind of syncretic show-business that is partly traditional -- they provide entertainment and

excitement at big wedding parties -- and partly capitalist -- they organise concerts, charging entrance fees (M. Guignard 1975).

iv. THE CRAFTSMEN

The craftsmen are of obscure origin. Like the griots, they too were traditionally attached to marabout or warrior families or tribes.

These marabouts or warrior overlords extended protection and material aid to the craftsmen in case of need. In return, the craftsmen owed them payments in kind, the specific items depending on the craftsmen's special skills (say, metalwork or carvings from men, leatherwork and hairdressing services from women). Rewards for these services were more or less precisely fixed by traditional rules.

As we have already noted, in Moorish society most craft production was aimed at supplying the nomadic milieu with useful artifacts necessary for housing, animal husbandry, transportation, etc.

Since colonization the bonds tying the craftsmen to their former patrons have loosened considerably. The craftsmen were in the vanguard of the rush to the urban areas. Once arrived in town, they have turned with determined energy to the production of luxury items, in response to demand created by the bureaucratic and European elite.

Most of the current urban population of craftsmen are therefore jewelers. Their incomes vary widely, from a few hundred ouguiya to several thousands monthly.

There are, however, some craft occupations which seem capable of giving rise to factory-type industries; examples are the coal-furnace-making and the pipe-making trades

v. THE NEMADI: A MARGINAL GROUP

The Nemadi are a small group of hunters in the Akle and Djouf regions, beyond Tichitt and Oualatta. The group's members have different origins, but in spite of that they seem to function as a sort of caste. Other Moors look down on them; sometimes they even hate them, on account of their notoriety as livestock rustlers. As if that were not enough, they are also thought to serve as informers to razzia raiding parties. In the last three years, because of the war situation, the Nemadi were compulsorily sedentarized by state fiat. The way things look now, the group seems doomed to extinction (Marty 1930, Garbon 1917, Laforque 1926, Brosset 1932, Gabus 1952).

SLAVES AND THE HARATIN

From the economic point of view, the slaves and the Haratin are more important than the Nemadi. According to the SEDES study quoted by F. de Chasse (1977), in 1964 slaves and the Haratin constituted 3% and 26% of the total Moorish population. The slaves function as shepherds, well-sinkers, farmers; in fact they are the society's most active workers. They are also the most unfortunate group in that society. What are the features of slavery in Moorish society? And what is the history of its evolution?

Probably slavery in Moorish society is as ancient as the society itself.

A significant amount of evidence indicates that at least some of the black slaves of the old Saharan cities are survivors from a population which inhabited the area before the arrival of Berbers and Arabs. Medieval Arab historians and geographers scarcely mention slave trading activities along the caravan routes of the Western Sahara. In the entire history of the Moorish land there is no known instance of a slave market. The most ancient slaves in Moorish society are known by a Berber name: Namma.

To the original population of inhabitants enslaved in the crush of Berber and Arab invasions, an endless stream of fresh captives, either bought or kidnapped from the Sudan region, was added. Kidnappings were still frequent as recently as the 1930's.

Slaves generally lived under difficult conditions. In the traditional Moorish society their treatment, including starvation diets, whipping and even torture, was so harsh it sometimes bordered on sadism (Fondacci 1946, Alamin 1911).

In theory, slavery was supposed to be regulated by very strict Islamic laws; in practice scarcely anyone heeded these laws. The condition of the slaves varied according to categories: the more ancient categories of slaves, namma and tilad, were better treated than the more recent tarbiyya slaves. Their condition also depended on the type of

masters they had, and on the prevailing economic situation: slaves were among the first victims of famines which periodically ravaged the Moorish world. Apart from being direct victims, more of them also got sold during such catastrophes (Marty 1927). In point of law, slave status means total dependence of the slave on the master: the master is entitled to sell his slave; he can make the slave's daughters his concubines at whim; and he is the only legal heir to any property the slave manages to own.

This situation has gone through a number of changes under the impact of factors we have analyzed above.

In the first place there was colonialism, under which the equality of all human beings before the law was formally proclaimed. But the changes wrought by the direct activity of the colonial administration were less effective than the more indirect fallout in helping to change the status of the slaves (Fondacci 1946). For instance, the colonial government at one time established "Freedom Villages" purportedly to receive and settled escaped slaves; but, in the very words of the villagers themselves, the "Freedom Villages" rapidly degenerated into "Villages of the Governor's Slaves" (Denise Bouche 1950).

The occupation of the right bank of the Senegal River as from 1902 speeded up the southward migratory movement and the settlement of slaves in large farming townships, the adouaba (singular: adabai, literal meaning: villages). These agglomerations of people, like those which

grew up around the colonial administrative posts and were for a long time basically populated by people formerly belonging to the dependent groups, came to be in their own right a means of self-defense for escaped slaves. There they were safe from the risk of person-to-person confrontations with their old masters--confrontations that threatened their freedom.

The migratory movement into the farming villages, urban areas and even foreign countries was therefore an ongoing reality well before the last decade of drought came to swell it to its present well-known dimensions.

Nowadays slavery is dying out in Moorish society; the reasons for its demise are essentially material reasons, chief among them being the disasters that have crushed the animal husbandry industry. The fact that slavery is on its way out, however, does not mean that problems of subjection and dependency have been solved.

The truth is that in traditional Moorish society, even enfranchised slaves, the Haratin, normally kept up client-patron relationships with their former masters. These relationships involved the payment of numerous dues; or, as we have observed repeatedly, they took the form of a sharecropping arrangement in cases where the Hartani was a farm laborer.

In poor years such sharecropping arrangements became extremely burdensome. They became downright intolerable in cases where the old landlords dropped the more normal habit of sending a caravan (ravga) from

time to time to collect the dues, and simply came to settle within a few hundred meters of his Haratins' homes (adabaye), with the undisguised aim of extorting his own consumption needs directly from what they produced. This kind of situation was known to happen in recent years.

So the accelerated sedentarization of nomads begun in the early 1970's shifts the problems of dependency relationships and land tenure from an old context into a new frame of reference.

The Moors have been compelled by the decimation of their livestock herds to resort to farm work. It is a sort of work for which they have neither aptitude nor interest. So, basing their claims on land tenure rights vested in principle in the tribe, they have been trying in a number of places (such as the Chogar Gadel lands in Macta Lahjar region) to challenge rights already won by the Haratin. Their aim in thus posing such a challenge is to try to restore their absolute control over the land areas in dispute; failing that, they hope to make as much capital as they can out of a situation in which the primary producers would be forced to remain in the cramping position of sharacroppers.

Clearly, this situation generates conflicts and tensions which are partly responsible for the rural exodus: in particular, the Haratins and the slaves, in moving away from the countryside, are not only escaping economic privation; they are also leaving behind a set of social relationships. The slaves and Haratins, constituting in many adouaba a practically homogeneous group (Chambon, undated study), have

been sedentarized much longer than their former masters, and have learned to be independent of them. Wherever the power equation favors them, they resist the former masters, refusing to yield land whose rightful owners they consider they are, by right of the labor they have invested in it.

With the disappearance of their livestock, the nomads find themselves increasingly compelled to do without slave labor, on which almost all Moorish production depended.

In fact the disaster of the last decade, superimposed on changes inherited from colonial times, seems to have brought together all the factors needed for the final abolition of slavery in Moorish society.

It is long since gum collection, which used to absorb a lot of slave labor, became merely a marginal pursuit in the rural economy. And livestock, whose husbandry kept a large part of Moorish slave labor occupied, has mostly been wiped out by the drought. Improvements in transportation (the Kiffa-Nouakchott highway has been particularly important in this respect), sedentarization, and rapid urbanization have brought about novel social combinations and created conditions of anonymity totally at variance with those isolated conditions without which the oppressive social relations of the past could not have been maintained.

The wage economy has made steady inroads into the countryside. This encroachment is also linked with the disappearance or the reduction of traditional means of exchange, chiefly livestock, or with the taking

over of livestock by businessmen employing wage labor. This kind of takeover was connected with the dizzying slump in livestock prices in the early 1970's: milch cows were sold for as little as 1,500 francs CFA (\$ 7.50) each in Trarza. All these factors have helped decisively to weaken relationships of dependence and slavery as they used to exist in Moorish society scarcely twenty years ago. More than that: colonization, the drought, and the Saharan war speeded up the process of southward migration and the sedentarization of the population. In so doing they helped definitively to upset the internal balance of Moorish society, a balance dependent on the demographic, economic and political hegemony exercised by nomadic herdsmen, mostly Arabo-Berber marabouts and warriors, over the settled farming population, mostly black Africans. Henceforth, in Moorish society, settled populations would outnumber nomads, farmers would outnumber herdsmen, and Haratin would outnumber "white" Moors.<sup>7/</sup>

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7/ For quite some time the Moors themselves as well as observers of Moorish society (Dubie 1953, Lieutenant Julien 1947) have made the demographic observation that the white Bizan population tends to thin out and decline in numbers in proportion as they get settled in the humid Sudan zone. The expression "agall min ahrar Id-Aghzaimbou" illustrates the observation. It means "rarer than the white Moors of the Id-Aghzaimbou tribe". The tribe referred to settled in the Chemama area after a war with the Tagouant tribe in the reign of the Emir Amar Ould El Mokhtar early in the 19th century. Once settled, the tribe became practically reduced to its Haratin members. Apparently, their enemies the Tagouant had had better consultants. "Choose," their sage had advised them, "the land where hunger is the prevalent disease and the jackal the dominant animal". He meant the northern desert regions. According to popular tradition, which is often so boldly hyperbolic, the ululations announcing the birth of a son in an aristocratic id-Aghzaimbou family were broadcast from neighborhood to neighborhood starting from Chabariyya, 18 kilometers from Podor, all the way to Tiris, more than 1,000 kilometers distant. Today, only two "white" Moorish families remain among the Id-Aghzaimbou: the Abel Enahoui, settled among the Idawali; and the Ahel Ahmed Ould El Mokhtat, gravitating into the sphere of influence of the Ahel Cheikh Sidia of Routilimit.

Conclusion: The Moorish Social Hierarchy

With the discussion of slaves and Haratin we come to the end of our concise survey of classes or castes in Moorish society.

But two questions remain: is it correct to use the term castes? And how do the ongoing processes of change affect the Moorish social hierarchy?

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, the relevance of these questions does not derive from a merely academic need to find methodological rationalizations for a particular classification. The questions are relevant also because they help shed light on the present situation and future destiny of the groups enumerated; and they make it possible to assess the flexibility or inflexibility with which they adapt to an environment undergoing profound upheavals.

Among educated Moors the traditional view has it that the original division of labor in Moorish society had a tripartite aspect. On this issue this Moorish view agrees with several reports emanating from the Indo-European world in antiquity and in medieval times (vide M. BLOCH, Dumezil, Duby, etc.). Legend has it that it was the Almoravid chieftain Abou Bakr Ben Omar who, in 1087, on his deathbed in Tagant, decided to divide his disciples into three groups: the warriors were to propagate Islam at the point of the sword and to defend the areas thus conquered; the marabouts were to be responsible for education and justice; and the vassal group was to support the preceding two.

However, there are numerous reasons for thinking that this tripartite design is an a posteriori rationalization current mostly among the marabouts, and aimed almost exclusively at satisfying their own needs. After all, we have in fact observed that the warriors are by no means ardent Muslims, and that the defense of Islam is about the last thing on their minds. Besides, the vassals, on whose shoulders the support of the first two groups is supposed to rest, are so ludicrously few, being at the most only 5% of the Moors, that the whole schema should be received with skepticism. Lastly, the griots, the craftsmen, the Haratin and the slaves are all left out: in effect, more than half the Moorish population is unaccounted for.

Certain authors, (like C. Hamès, 1977), have sought to demonstrate similarities between the Moorish social hierarchy and the Indian system of orders (Varna) and castes (Zati). But there is a vast difference between Moorish social stratification and the minutely detailed and coherently codified Indian system as we know it from the Dharma-Shastra.

In the first place the terms for order and caste have no equivalents in Hassani, the Moorish dialect of the Arabic language. But even beyond that, the Indian system derives from a metaphysical and cosmological matrix in which, somewhat Platonically, a social class has a functional and organic anthropomorphic analog: e.g. the mouth, the feet, the thigh, the arm. Now this type of matrix is absent in Moorish society.

It is a society in which there is no trace at all of that hierarchic scale of purity which provides the Indian caste system with its organizational scaffolding, at the absolute bottom of which are the outcast untouchables.

There is not even a clear-cut hierarchy among the different groups constituting Moorish society. Granted, the warriors and the marabouts are at the apex and the slaves occupy the base. But in between the top and bottom we know of no operative criteria which make it possible to rank the vassals, craftsmen, griots and Haratin, according to precedence.

Furthermore, nowhere in Moorish society do we find the sort of dietary taboos inextricably bound up with the Indian caste system.

Finally, it does not seem as if any group in Moorish society has ever been totally or exclusively confined to the occupation theoretically reserved for it.

Even leaving aside tribes such as the Kounta and the Ahel Sidi Mahmoud which simultaneously combine the functions of marabouts and warriors, there are numerous examples of warriors who turn marabouts, becoming tiab or penitents. Conversely, there are examples of marabouts tribes which have taken up arms and proceeded most implacably to wage the bitterest of wars, like the war between the Ida Ouali and the Ida Belhacen, or that between the Ideidiba and the Oulad Ebiery in the middle and at the end of the 19th century.

In fact all Moors, in varying forms and degrees, practised animal husbandry, the occupation theoretically reserved for the Aznaga or vassals. Music was in practice not the monopoly of the griots. And there have been cases of craftsmen metamorphosed into excellent warriors, an example being the Oulad Rgueig who compose the palace guard of the Emir of Trarza.

None of these groups within Moorish society insists on strict endogamy, though in other respects the distribution of spouses follows relatively tight hierarchic regulations. Thus, for example, it is extremely difficult for marabouts to consent to their women marrying outside their class. In fact the question arises only when warriors are the suitors involved; the other groups are automatically excluded. But marabouts have the option of taking wives from all the other groups.

To use an analogy based on blood groups, we could say the marabouts are "universal recipients"; slaves, on the other hand, would be called "universal donors", since they can scarcely ever marry women outside their group though all other groups can take wives from theirs.

The warriors are entitled to take wives from all other groups, but only give them to the marabouts. Vassals may take wives from all groups except the warrior and marabout groups; it is rare for vassals to give their women away to any but warriors and marabouts.

In such a system, it is obvious that the distribution of wives reflects not so much the imperatives of caste endogamy as an anxiety to keep intact a hierarchy based on a non-too-rigid division of labor.

Throughout our exposition on the Moorish social structure and its material foundations, we have shown how the entire system has been eroded by colonialism and the encroachment of the market economy. We have examined the symptoms of this encroachment: the weakening of traditional power arrangements and their subversion by the cash nexus; the decline of the precolonial educational system; the monetarization and inflation of dowry payments. We have shown how the drought of the 1970's and the Saharan War worsened this erosion, swelling the southward population movement, enhancing sedentarization, and massively aggravating the depopulation of the countryside. And to wind up the study, we have sought to avoid too rigid a conception of the Moorish social hierarchy, bringing out its subtleties, and showing that it contains contradictions and evolutionary seeds that might help it adapt to the new context within which the Moors have had to move ever since they were colonized and sedentarized.

The social framework we have outlined above may be found intact in isolated rural spots, but in the urban areas it is gradually dying out. In fact some Moorish aristocrats go so far as to complain that in these urban areas the old roles have been reversed: former dependents who used to work for them, having fled rural penury to settle in town, now try when they can to hustle a living out of their old masters.

Still, we constantly have to refer back to the traditional social hierarchy to explain the current urban, capitalist stratification and the accompanying rise of new classes. On this score we have already noted that warrior and marabout elements have together managed to shift from the apex of the traditional hierarchy to the apex of the modern elite structure. We need to add a corollary: former slaves and Haratin have been relegated in large numbers to menial functions within the same modern structure, as laborers, factory workers and domestic servants. Even more specifically, we could trace the influence of the traditional division working in the capitalist enclaves of today's Moorish society. This would probably reveal the reasons why the commercial sector and the bureaucracy are so overstaffed: the Civil Service regularly eats up 80% to 100% of the state budget (Ould Cheikh 1979). After all, this is a society which traditionally has looked down on manual work, and whose members were on the whole unaccustomed to any form of investment or long-term budgeting.

Unless we wish to consider the people themselves and their whole life style as an obstacle to development ("Everything would have been perfect in the colonies", said Albert Memmi, "had there been no natives"), with the understanding that development means capitalist development, we are obliged to conclude, from our entire discussion, that at all those points where Moorish society is resisting the total domination of capitalist relationships, the amount of resistance it puts up is precisely the amount of resistance capitalism itself wants to put up with.

### III. GENERAL CONCLUSION

The composition and installation of Mauritania's Moorish population as it was scarcely a dozen years ago happened over a long period of frequent upheavals. To recapitulate the main points, we have discussed the aboriginal presence of a negroid population in the Western Sahara during the Neolithic Era; it was probably the vassalized remnants of this population whom the first waves of invading Berbers enslaved. Next, we took up the issue of the role played by these Berber immigrants. It was they who, working chiefly through the Almoravid movement, helped to establish Islam definitively in the areas under study. We have given a concise account of confrontations between the Berbers and incoming Beni Hassan Arabs, whose vanguard reached the Tiris area around the end of the 14th century. In discussing the partial triumph of the Hassani troops at the end of the Charr Bebbe War in which they fought against a Berber coalition led by the Oman Nacer Eddin, we pointed out the emergence among them of embryonic state organizations in the form of Emirates--the Tagant Emirate providing an exception to the rule. But the focus of our historical survey, considering that the central preoccupation of this study was that it should help shed light on a strategy for economic development, was on the impact of the trans-Atlantic trade and colonization on Moorish society. We have taken pains to point out the disintegrative effect these phenomena have had on all the Moorish world's economic and social structures.

In the field of economics we have examined the society's production, especially its production of commodities linked to the livestock industry, the foundation of the nomadic life style. We have also discussed consumption patterns and the circulation and distribution of goods within the society. Our discussion led us to the main conclusion that the traditional mode of production, now irreversible placed under the domination of the market economy, had deteriorated steadily in all its aspects.

Social structures have followed the same pattern in practically every area. And the drought of the last several years, together with the Sahara War, has turned this deterioration into nothing less than a full scale catastrophe.

The entire lifestyle of the Moorish people, centered on nomadic pastoralism, has been radically altered by these developments. The sedentarization process and the massive rural exodus which affected Moorish society in the 1970's did not simply entail changes from place to place or a modification in spatial relationships. They also entailed a total upheaval in forms of production and employment, nutrition, hygiene, housing and marriage patterns.

The catastrophic climatic conditions of this last decade, falling within the context of economic and institutional transformation inherited from colonialism, have completely snapped all the internal balancing mechanisms on which Moorish society used to depend. The Moorish social hierarchy was traditionally based on the demographic, economic and

political hegemony of Arabo-Berber nomadic herdsmen of the warrior and marabout classes. Now this old hierarchy is confronted with the assertion of power on the part of sedentary farming groups made up mostly of black ex-slaves.

Our mandate in this study was to locate factors in Moorish society which, from an organizational or institutional point of view, could constitute obstacles to development.

The precise definition of the terms of reference implicit in that mandate is open to different interpretations. But what we have tried to do is, first, to show that as far as production was concerned, the pre-colonial Moorish socio-economic system was coherent and relatively functional. Secondly, we have also attempted to lay bare that system's contradictions and shortcomings, taking particular care to bring to light those factors which, judged according to the society's own criteria, within the society's own frame of reference, compromised its ability to perform at peak capacity. We are quite aware that in so doing, we have laid ourselves open to accusations of an antiquarian bias, of having a fixation on the past. But our concern has been to differentiate as meticulously as possible between the undeveloped condition in which Moorish society kept itself in the past when it was, so to speak, on its own, and its current condition of underdevelopment, a condition characterized by a complete dislocation of both its economic and social structures. In our opinion the main responsibility for this

dislocation rests not with the Moors, but with the capitalist market economy. Because ever since the end of the 18th century that system, the capitalist market economy, has taken into its hands the means for controlling the destiny of these pastoralists of the Sahara Desert.

It would have been appropriate to conclude this study by placing Moorish society back within its context in the general Moorish society. But had we attempted this, we would have been drawn into a critical examination of the relevance of ethnic criteria in an exposition of current Mauritanian social realities--and that is quite another problem.

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