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Sociological Profiles:

Black African Mauritania

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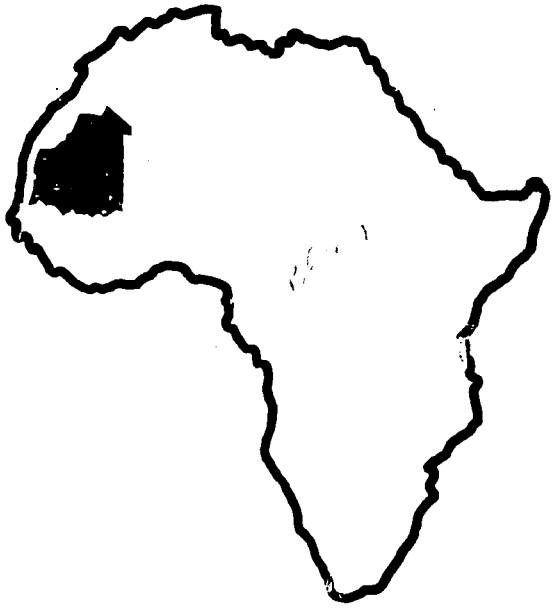

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RURAL ASSESSMENT AND
MANPOWER SURVEY IN MAURITANIA

MARCH 1980

SOCIOLOGICAL PROFILES

BLACK AFRICAN MAURITANIA

1980

Sociological Unit

- RAMS -

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

As prescribed in the terms of reference of the RAMS Project, this phase of reports is composed of the sociological profiles.

The sociological unit had initially decided that the sociological profiles presented in this report would focus on the way of life on the one hand, of the herders (Moors and Peulhs), and, on the other hand, of the cultivators (Toucouleurs, Soninkes, Wolofs). It had seemed more important to highlight the socio-economic similiarities and differences between the groups having similar occupations, than to describe them. Our initial idea could not be carried out due to the kinds of sources available, the limited sociological field experience of the team and, especially, due to lack of time.

The presentation of the sociological reports will be as follows: a detailed analytic synthesis will precede all the studies undertaken by the sociological unit of RAMS; the Sociological Profiles and Studies in Social Change which will include: The Future of Pastoralism, the Social Organization of Agricultural Production, including a study on land tenure, Migration and Population Movement in Mauritania and Modes of Accumulation and Social Evolution.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of the population located on the right as well as the left bank of the Senegal River is basically Toucouleur. (1) In recent centuries however, other population groups of varying sizes (the Peulhs, Woloffs, Soninkes and Bambaras) have come to settle in this area, and it is certain that they, like the Toucouleurs, will be affected by the construction of the multiple irrigation projects designed by the SONADER and the OMVS. In fact, one of the first rice-growing projects implemented in Mauritania as early as 1[illegible] years ago, has had a significant impact on a series of Woloff villages located on the Plain of M'Pourie. (2) It is therefore rather surprising to note that the existing ethno-sociological literature on Mauritania hardly makes mention of these populations, which though a minority, are nevertheless important because of their ever increasing role in the socio-economic evolution of the country.

It should be pointed out that studies focusing on Black African Mauritania are scarce and very often outdated. Marvouet, (3) though a geographer, is one of the few researchers to have compiled a basic study of the Peulhs of present day Mauritania. He is correct in his observation that, Mauritania continues to be considered as a country of the Moors . To

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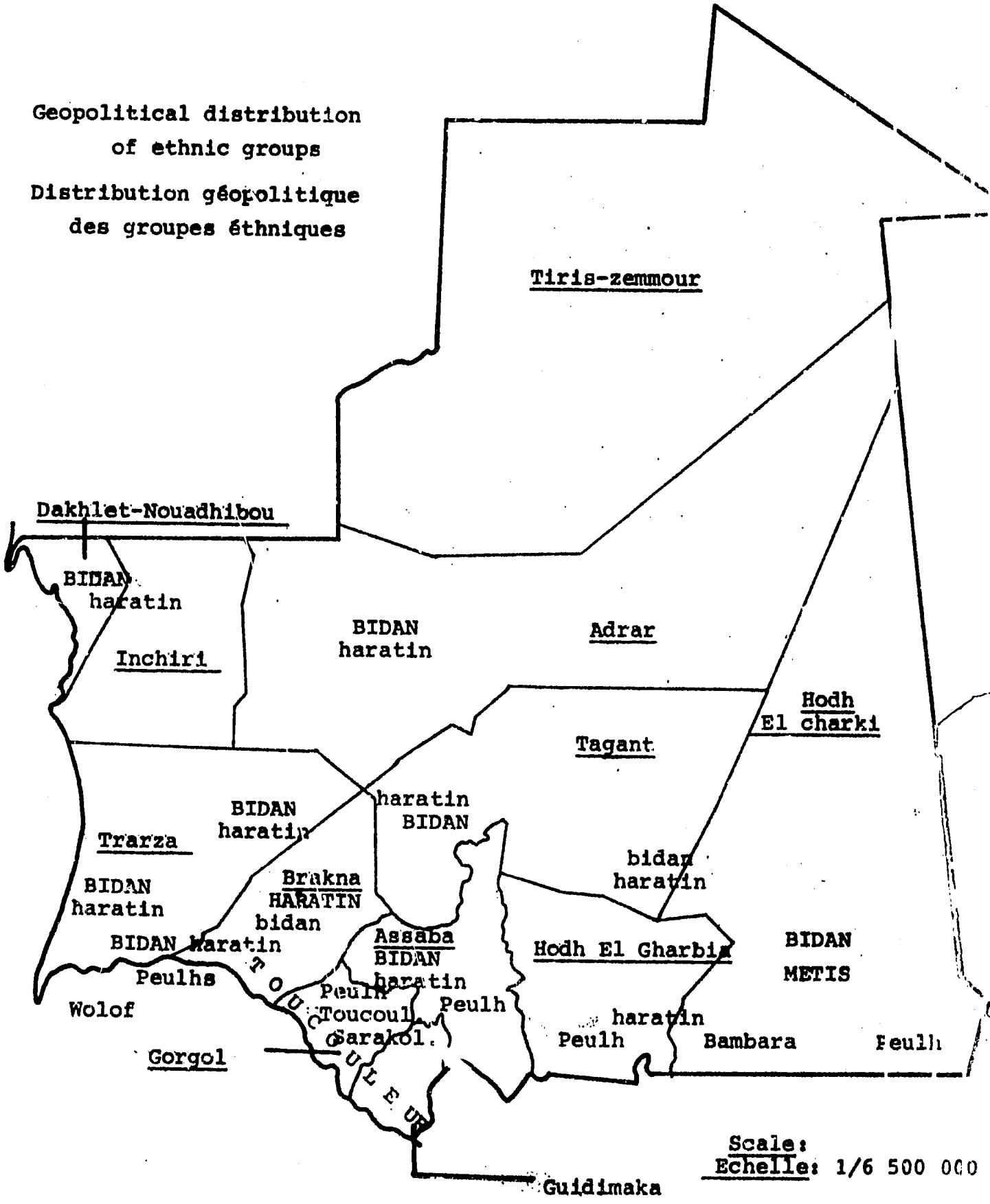
(1) It should be noted that the Toucouleurs, Peulhs, who are cultivators, are a part of a larger ethnic group, the Halpoularen, of which the Peulhs-Foulabé form the branch of transhumant herdsmen.

(2) The Plain of M'Pourie is included in the discussion on "L'Organization Sociale de la Production Agricole" in the report les Changements Sociaux en Mauritanie.

(3) Marvouet, p.44.

Geopolitical distribution of ethnic groups

Distribution géopolitique des groupes éthniques



appreciate the lack of attention which has been accorded the non-Moor ethnic groups, it suffices to simply observe the difference between the bibliography available on the sociological profiles of the Moors and that which is available on the Mauritanians of the south.

Furthermore, one of the rare experts on the Mauritanian society who has attempted to rectify this imbalance in the study of one ethnic group at the expense of another was unable to overcome, if one may venture to say so, his professional bias in the overall evaluation of the society. Francis de Chassey has written several books and articles (4) in which he presents the opposition between the north and the south, but always in terms of Moors versus Toucouleurs. It is therefore not possible to present a detailed analysis of Black Mauritanian society given that this report has had to limit itself to available documentation.

This narrow view of Mauritania is caused by the geo-political structure of the country. De Chassey wrote in 1978:

> Parmi tous les pays au sein desquels se rencontre ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler l'Afrique Blanche et l'Afrique Noire, des côtes atlantiques à la corne orientale, la Mauritanie est le seul où la majorité de la population soit constituée de pasteurs nomades, arabes de souche ou de culture le seul aussi où cette majorité ethnique, profondément rattachée au Maghreb et au monde arabe s'est trouvé en même temps étroitement liée à l'Afrique de l'Ouest et aux ethnies négro-africaines voisines par cette colonisation venue du Sud et déjà en un sens par sa longue histoire

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(4) See the bibliography for a few of his publications.

precoloniale. (5)

The foundations of the complexities unique to Mauritania and which have generated quasi-insurmountable psychological and social difficulties in today's world are rooted in this link. It is no longer quite valid to state that in 1978 nomadic herdsmen compose the majority of the population. Though it is quite evident that they remain profoundly Arab-Berber in culture, their lifestyle has been so drastically changed, especially after the drought - still readily apparent - that according to the last census of 1977, three quarters of them have begun to think of themselves as sedentary.(6)

This draws our immediate attention to the changes that have taken place in the contacts and interactions between the various ethnic groups and the different ways of life. However, if Mauritania has been clearly viewed by others as being more closely attached to the Arab world, or more precisely, to the Maghreb, rather than to Black Africa, the populations themselves are not as tied to both these worlds as the geo-political context would have it appear.

Due to the psychological, social, political and economic gulf which has been and continues to be even more profound, it is practically impossible to find studies which establish a

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(5) Of all the countries from the Atlantic coast to the eastern Horn where the so-called Black African and White Africa meet, Mauritania is the only one in which the majority of the population is composed of nomadic herdsmen, Arabs in origin and culture; it is also the only one in which this ethnic majority, deeply attached to the Maghreb and the Arab world, sirultaneously finds itself closely linked to West Africa and its Black neighbors because it was colonized from the south and also in a way, because of its long precolonial history.

(6) See FAMS report on Demographic Projections.

socio-political history linking the destinies of the two worlds within the different ethnic groups - le Chassey is one of the few exceptions. (7) Consequently, studies by Mauritanians or other sociologists focusing on the relationship between one ethnic group and another are indeed quite difficult to find. Even the traditional links between Arab and Peulh herdsmen and nomads generally receive little attention. As a result, all this leads to the conclusion that there is still a problem of the acceptance of others, even if today more than ever it is theoretically impossible or erroneous to describe the national society as being one of separate and distinct entities. Though there exists a deeply anchored cultural atavism, perpetuated on the one hand by the rigid hierarchial social structure of the various groups, and on the other hand by their specific colonial experience, the acceptance of others is inevitable. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly imperative for the structural reorganization of a country which is undergoing very real economic, political, social and environmental difficulties.

Mauritania is a country of emigrants, of conquerors, of those pursued from elsewhere at varying points in a not very distant past. They came as nomads and cultivators. Although they have developed an enduring attachment to the desert and the land on which they live, they nevertheless have not lost sight of their origins, be they Beidanes, Haratines, Toucouleurs, Peulns, Soninkes, Woloffs or Barbaras. Their historical backgrounds distinguish them from one another, but surprisingly enough, they are linked by striking similarities in their social and political structures - with the only

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(7) De Chassey - mainly 1979.

exception being a group of some thousand Bambaras who have developed a highly egalitarian social system. Whether it is called the Khaima, the Ka, or the Galle, (7) they all center their social unit around the dwelling. Varying degrees of spatial mobility characterizes them. All the classes and castes have profoundly retained their atavistic rigidity. Slavery still has a socio-economic function. Islam has now become a part of their heritage.

They have all been profoundly affected by the drought of the 70's, a disaster which disoriented and diminished, if not outrightly destroyed, their livelihood, and which served to render them destitute under the added weight of the social upheavals generated by the cumulative effects of colonization, independence, migration, uncontrolled urbanization and development projects. A social disequilibrium has set in among all the groups.

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(7) the Khaima - the tent of the Moors

the Ka - the family compound which is the dwelling unit of the extended Soninké household.

the Gallé - the compound of the extended Toucouleur family.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. Up to the XIXth Century

The history of southern Mauritania overlaps with that of the Sahelian zone and the whole of the Sahara-mediterranean area, and in particular, with that of the Senegal River Basin.

It is not the goal of this study to present a detailed historical analysis. However it is necessary to cite significant developments which will prove helpful in understanding how the ethnic pride of each group has been historically reinforced, and how the socio-economic of the region has proceeded.

The populations of Mauritania began defining their respective borders as of the Xth century. The indigenous populations, black cultivators and fishermen, frequently referred to as "the mysterious Bafours", (8) had already been driven centuries ago from the Sahara towards the Mauritanian Sahel by the conquering Berbers and Arabs. Meanwhile, the Empires of Ghana and Awadagost, a result of an intermingling of populations, created political, social and economic systems which were not only rigidly hierarchical, but also extremely competitive and combative in nature. The Peulhs, Toucouleurs, Soninkes, and the Wolofs thus strengthened their respective identities. The constant loss and expansion of territories between the Xth and the XVIIIth centuries, the development and collapse of empires and states,(9) did not deter the interpenetration of the Berbers and Arabs further south, a movement which, as of the XVIth century, became enhanced by the lure of new agricultural possibilities and expanded trade.

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(8) Mauzel, p.8.

(9) A list of a few of these political evolutions can give an idea of the extent of military, political and ethnic activities within the region: The Kingdom of Takrour, the Peulh Empire of the Fouta, the Walo Kingdom, the Emirate of Trarza, etc.....

Furthermore, it was during the XVIth century, as along all the other African coasts, that the slave trade attracted the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and later the French, who succeeded in monopolizing the trade in gum arabic, gold and slaves in the middle of the XVIIth century. This trade generated extensive contact between Moors and Toucouleurs, the deniankobe and torobe, established and reinforced their systems of exchange, alliances and military techniques. In sum, the hierarchical social structures and the exercise of political power were reinforced, but this was perhaps achieved at the expense of a more comprehensive solidarity.(16)

In general, the primary objective of such politico-economic alliances was to reinforce power bases which were always created in view of better controlling tributaries and political subjects. In addition, they helped foster a favorable socio-political climate by maintaining both their contact with the white foreigners and the trade agreements with their rivals.

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(16) De Chassey, 1976, p.37 - A large portion of this section is based on De Chassey and Laurel.

B. COLONIZATION

Up until the XIXth century, the system of barter, and payment of high dues and taxes - the "customs" - were standard practices, and the various Black and Moorish leaders had already begun requesting that the European and Saint-Louis traders make their payments in the form of luxury goods, and items of prestige (French and Dutch linen, wooden combs, Flemish knives, mirrors, etc...). These traders found this practice very convenient because for them these diverse items were only 'shoddy goods which could be cheaply had.'(11) However, the Toucouleurs and Moorish leaders started to become more demanding and the traders gradually became unwilling to make concessions. In the name of "free trade", France's policy took a distinctive turn in 1850. Without the least hesitation, France began its policy of territorial expansion to ensure unilateral trade through the pacification of the populations, or, more precisely, of the Chiefs of the Walo-Walo, Fouta Toro, and the Moors. They had great difficulty in implementing this policy, for Black and Moorish groups, though normally antagonistic, allied themselves against the French. As a result, it took the latter more than forty years to achieve their objective.

The alliances or agreements made hardly had any effect within or between the ethnic groups. The hierarchy of social classes remained as inflexible as it had been during the previous centuries. It was in fact because of this hierarchical structure, common to both the Moors and the Toucouleurs, that the commerce of gum arabic and the slave trade were made possible. It did not upset either the psychology or the established social order, but on the contrary, increased the economic status of all those in control.

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(11) Le Chassey, ibid.

It was only at the end of the XIXth century, in 1891 to be precise, that the Senegal River area became annexed and the traditional authorities were overpowered. The final demarcation of Mauritania's borders and the French penetration up to the desert became the exclusive objective of the one whom the Moors had nicknamed "the Charmer".

Between 1900 and 1905, Coppolani was to Mauritania what Lawrence of Arabia was to the Arabs: through "persuasion and reduction," and his intimate knowledge of the culture, the peoples and their religion, he was able to hide beneath his adopted desert attire all the fierceness and determination of a colonizing Churchill: "divide and rule." Nevertheless, He was able to admirably demonstrate his force, especially with the chiefs of warrior tribes ... in order not to have to use it. He aggravated existing differences so as to dominate both sides and signed solemn treaties with one group while making discreet overtures to their enemies.(12) In 1905, Coppolani was killed while on a mission to penetrate farther north in the "peaceful" conquest of the Tagant and Adrar regions. It was from this date onwards that the French adopted a more military approach and became even more determined to establish French domination on "these acres of sand" which, at independence, would become an important source of supply for the French steel industry - the iron ore of Idjill-Zouerate.(13)

Nevertheless, it takes twenty years, up to 1920, before France can claim Mauritania as a colony, with Saint-Louis as its capital, and not until 1933 that she can declare the "pacification" of Mauritania complete. The division of these "sandy acres," which as of the turn of the country became transformed into a diplomatic quarrel justifying an annexation

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(12) Ibid, p.41.

(13) Ibid, p.42.

an inter-state war, a civil war, and the emergence of social problems which have yet to be resolved. Mauritania, like its neighbouring countries, becomes integrated into the traditional colonial sphere. It had played a significant role in the slave trade and had become a territory of strategic and political importance.

However, it should be pointed out that Mauritania's evolution as a colony differed from that of the other territories, and this has had a lasting effect on its political and national development. In spite of the fact that the majority of the population of this country had emotional, political and cultural ties with North Africa, it was a territory administered from the south, from Black Africa, and had a capital, Saint-Louis, physically located outside its own borders. Though forced to direct its attention towards the south, the Moorish population instinctively oriented itself towards the north. Of even greater importance is the fact that the trauma created by the impact of the divided influence was even more disruptive because of the lengthy duration of the process of "pacification". It took the French eighty years to insure their domination. Mauritania was indeed a "conquered territory", giving it a distinctive feature in colonial autonomy. The trader exerted greater influence than the French administrator residing ... and commanding from Saint Louis. The impact on the population also differed. It was more direct and less conspicuous among the Moors towards whom the French administration had adopted an attitude of 'respect for the social structures'. However the French presence was more visible and more easily implemented among the sedentary groups of the river valley. These populations were easier to locate and therefore more accessible for administrative control than the nomads or semi-nomads wondering in the vast desert.

C. THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COLONIZATION AND INDEPENDENCE

At first glance, the economic impact of colonization on Mauritania was barely evident until 1945, and De Chassey quotes Commander Voisin, who candidly evaluated the burden that France had imposed on the country 'Il y a juxtaposition d'un nouveau système au vieux système qui touche à toutes les activités du pays (élevage, culture, artisanat) mais ne s'y intègre pas, ne transforme pas, ne produit pas, consomme et laisse un peu d'argent. C'est un parasitisme'. (14) Mauritania thus proves to be costly to France, and colonial gains are practically non-existant. Indeed, it was only as of 1925 that the import of goods begin to attain a certain breadth of importance (green tea, sugar, cloth, millet, rice) yet no attempt was made to set up any kind of local industry.

Though the economic impact on the population may have appeared neglible, it was nonetheless felt, for the drawn out "pacification" of the territory caused profound changes in traditional social and economic relationships, particularly in the south. The traditional systems of protection were either eliminated or replaced by colonial taxes. Furthermore, inter-ethnic wars were suppressed - disrupting the established balance of power - only to be replaced by colonial aggression.

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(14) Ibid, p.56 'There has been the juxtaposition of a new system on an old system. However, while encompassing all the activities of the country (livestock, agriculture, crafts), it has not attempted to integrate itself into the old system, neither transforming nor producing but merely creating a system of consumption and distributing minimal amounts of moneys. It is parasitism'.

Details of the impact made on the various ethnic groups in the south will not be discussed here as they have been already thoroughly presented elsewhere (15), and are as relevant to the Moorish society, as they are to all the other ethnic groups.

Four important points need to be underlined for they are particularly pertinent to all traditional classes for they have had an impact on the internal and external social relationships of each of the groups.

1. The political system of the Toucouleurs was significantly uprooted at the end of the XIXth century and the traditional Assemblies of notables (notables elected according to established customs), saw, for the most part, their land being confiscated. Collaboration with the colonizer became so widespread that it inspired the clandestine spreading of numerous poems denouncing 'the heady swirl of foreign values intoxicating the society'.(16) Stripped of its traditional power and of its capital, the land, all social systems begin to degenerate.

2. The slave trade was officially abolished in 1905, though domestic slavery among all ethnic groups continued to be accepted by the colonizer who felt that it did not in any way threaten his survival. Nevertheless, this prohibition led to an insidious weakening of the master-slave relationship, which, in turn, nurtured the idea of migration.

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(15) See the sociological profile on 'The Moors', by A.W. OULD CHEIKH.

(16) See De Chadsey, op. cit. pp. 65-66.

3. The elimination of inter-tribal wars provoked a new form of desertification not only brought about by the increase in livestock but also by more accessible veterinary care, by the increase of the sedentary movement along the river banks and the search for more distant grazing areas.

4. Colonial taxes created a need for money. The monetarization of production urged people to look for salaried jobs not only within other regions but also in other countries, in Mali, Senegal, France, the Congo... etc.

On the eve of its independence in 1960, the economy of Mauritania found its future mortgaged to new forms of economic activities which could not guarantee the re-establishment of its socio-economic balance. It was, in fact, the continuation of an economic, social, cultural and political impoverishment which only lead to an increased dependence on the outside world.

The pre-capitalist Mauritanian society remains just that because its level of production cannot as yet aim at the accumulation of goods to be profitably exchanged. In addition to the historico-political reasons which have already been briefly mentioned, the situation is also the result of a difficult environment which is being increasingly threatened.(17) There has been no surplus, and for the time being, there can

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(16) See De Chassey, op. cit. pp. 65-66.

(17) See report on the Mauritanian environment by P. HAUSNER (IAMS).

be none. Before the period of colonization, there was indeed greater self-sufficiency and a fulfilment of basic needs which the production system was then able to maintain. At present, there are no significant changes in the attitudes and skills which could lead to the creation of a surplus generating a reproductive system. In fact, the leap from a subsistence economy to the required capitalistic output, has led to social and economic instabilities.

Positive changes introduced by the colonizers should however not be overlooked (the suppression of slavery, the elimination of razzias) for they fostered more fruitful contacts between the different groups. Maures et Toucouleurs en viennent-ils à échanger davantage leurs produits complémentaires en voisinant et en se fréquentant pacifiquement. En particulair les nomades prennent l'habitude de consommer le mil de la Vallée ou du Hodh'.(18)

Apart from the civil war waged against the Saharaouis, two sociological developments have already profoundly influenced the present day Mauritanian society: the adoption of new consumer habits, and the effects of the drought of the 70's. The present and future implications, especially regarding the drought, have engendered justifiable anxiety on the part of the population and its traditional and national leaders. (19) It would be worthwhile at this point to list the increasingly disruptive developments which have occurred over the past two decades:

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(18) "Moors and Toucouleurs begin to increase the exchanges of their complementary products through good neighborly and peaceful interactions. The nomads in particular, acquired the habit of consuming millet produced in the valley or in the Hodh'. De Chassey, op.cit., p. 74.

(19) See the AMS studies on social changes which can not overlook these crucial problems.

1. The uprooting of part of the population and the uncontrolled exodus towards the cities which have transformed large segments of rural dwellers into an urban proletariat.

2. For this group, uprooted from its traditions, a new life style is imposed, creating social problems for which solutions are not already found within the context of these profoundly traditional and conservative societies.

3. A new urbanized social strata is developing. It is composed of civil servants and traders who are obliged to support numerous persons to whom they are more or less related, and who often use and abuse the expected customary hospitality. (20)

4. The flight of human resources from the rural areas diminishes the amount of land being cultivated and reduce the nation's chances of achieving food self-sufficiency. Although there are projects for the construction of large hydrological dams in the river valley area, these will inevitably lead to further concerlate not only social but also economic, sanitary, agricultural and pastoral problems.

In spite of the lack of adequate sociological and anthropological data on the Black African societies of Mauritania, it nevertheless remains necessary to grasp the essence of their traditional culture in order to evaluate the extent of the social transformations which they have undergone, and to forestall greater social upheavals. While presenting the general

outlines of the colonial structure of each of these ethnic groups - the Toucouleurs Peulhs, Soninkes, and the Wolofs (the Bambaras excluded) - an attempt will be made to plan the analyses within the context of the socio-political and economic changes mentioned above. These changes have had an irreversible effect on all aspect of the traditional way of life.

II. THE TOUCOULEURS (21)

A. The Similarities and Differences Between the Toucouleurs and the Other Ethnics

A shared language and a shared territory unite both banks of the Senegal River creating a sense of a common identity for the Toucouleurs, the main group in the area (22). Originating from dispersed and heterogeneous tribes, they have, over the centuries, forged an active solidarity, adapting to and adopting socio-political structures which have eventually become their own. Like most Sahelian societies, theirs is as rigidly stratified and hierarchical and despite the various changes which have occurred, they have managed to maintain a deep-rooted attachment to their land, the Fouta Toro. (23)

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(21) The origin of the word Toucouleur comes from the Wolof word Tokoro, which in turn is derived from the Arabic Tekrur, meaning: from the region of Tekrour, a XVth century kingdom established in the Senegal River basic.

(22) For the whole of Mauritania, the Toucouleurs and Peulhs comprise 48% of the Black population. The Peulhs constitute approximately 20% of the entire population. (De Chassey, 1977, p.161).

(23) See Wane, p.16; de Chassey, 1979, p.235.

It is this complexity of mobility and permanence within the social structure of the Toucouleurs which defines the dominant character of this ethnic group which' in part, appears to be the original and intricate synthesis of the numerous cultural contributions brought to the Valley."(24) The ethnic groups of the region share not only the same economic occupations, the same agricultural traditions, the same Islamic influence, and the same concept of social rigidity, but endogamy and the physical closeness of villages also characterize them. The enduring attachment to both land and language is their common identity. (25) However, the feature which appears to distinguish the Toucouleurs from the other ethnic groups is the direct correlation between land ownership and political power.

We will see below that, like the Toucouleurs, the Soninkes also maintain an intimate relationship, though far more complex, between family, social and spatial organization. Similar to both ethnic groups though not as clearly defined with the Toucouleurs, the traditional ideology makes no real distinctions between the family and the social community, nor the private and the public. However, for the Toucouleur, the traditions strongly define the political authority of the Almany, the chief elected by the noble landowning families, and whose power is based on the extent of his territorial possessions which in fact constitutes the very source of power of the ethnic group. It is the very struggle for the appropriation of land, especially the most fertile soils of the Walo, which played a most decisive role in the history of the empires and kingdoms which have succeeded each other along the Senegal River and in Mauritania.

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(24) De Chassey, 1977, p.112.

(25) It could also be said that the Moors are equally as profoundly attached to land and language - the land, for them, being the desert.

Though the importance of political power and social status may have become modified over the centuries, (26) the political and social structure of the Toucouleurs have not evolved at the same pace for the traditional modes of production, and through it the established socio-economic order, have been perpetuated.

It is not feasible, within the scope of this study, to go into all the extremely complicated and structural details of the relationship between the Toucouleurs kinship system - marriage, clan, affiliations - and their socio-economic aspects. However, a clear grasp of the internal functioning of this "mechanism" is necessary in order to better understand the problems resulting from socio-economic change affecting family structure, life style and production. This study will therefore attempt to cover the general outlines of the present social organization of the Toucouleurs.

B. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Among the Moors, the tent, the khaima, is the basic social unit. Here, the independence of the nuclear family predominates. Among the Toucouleurs, it is the compound of the extended family, the galle, which serves as the center of that social unit. This regrouping of several households serves to maintain the network of kinship and authority, and reinforces the individual's identity to his lineage and clan. Being patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal, the Toucouleur society is highly stratified according to a set of kinship and professional criteria.

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(26) It is interesting to note that during the colonial period the village and regional chiefs were still being chosen from among descendants of the Noble families and as Wane notes (p.18), "To date, the majority of the political echelons is drawn from these families" in Senegal, if not in Mauritania as well.

i. Kinship: Family and Political Organization

The family, village and tribe constitute the framework of the political organization which defines the privileges and obligations of the members of a lineage in relation to their community in all matters governing the life of the group.

The gallé means the compound itself, governed by an elder, the dyom gallé, or the head of the compound, the patriarch of the household. The extended family (poove) living in the compound is composed of several households with each household (foyré), (27) the nuclear family maintaining economic independence under the supervision of the head of the family, the father, dyom foyre, or mawdo foyre, who manages his land and his granaries independently from those of the other households. Despite the granting of such autonomy, the gallé is indeed the primary social nucleus and all its members owe complete obedience to the dyom gallé. The gallé has a strong sense of cohesion and solidarity, and the individual is strictly controlled through conformity to the family and social organization relationships are nearly always defined in terms of age and sex. This picture of static traditionality is today being challenged not only because of the changes introduced through colonialism, but also because of large-scale migrations and even perhaps because of the evolution of new land tenure systems. tendency to seek individual land ownership has spread to all levels of society. The outcome of this struggle is already occurring on the Mauritanian banks and has evidently not yet been resolved. The changes which are already emerging from it will certainly induce the reorganization of the traditional social organizations by gradually loosening the bonds of kinship.

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(27) The word Foyré is taken from the French foyer, which aptly indicates the minimal socio-political role assigned to the primary family group in traditional society.

The village is composed of one or more lineages or linyol headed by the chief or maodo euro, who is the undisputed authority. He represents his community in relations with the exterior and when necessary, makes the final decision on all matters concerning the village. Nevertheless, the most powerful authority in the community is very often the village imam who incarnates spiritual power. Given that the chief of the village is not elected for life, there is a procedure for his dismissal, which is increasingly being put to use and thereby bringing about greater social instability. (28)

Seven powerful nobles representing all the communities of the Fouta have centralized their authority in the person of the Almamy (29) who was empowered to govern all the galle and linyol of the tribe. He is a political and military leader elected by a sort of "council of elders" composed in effect of members of these powerful landowning families. As the power of the Almamy is not hereditary, it cannot become despotic. The socio-political institutions have been set up in such a way as to prevent either one or the other from happening (30) but have insured that this power remains within the most influential social group which has the privilege to elect and dismiss the Emir. The latter, based on the size of his land holdings controls, therefore, all forms of production and decides on all possible transformations. Though it is possible to commend the democratic nature of the political system of the Toucouleurs, it is nevertheless undeniable that

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(28) Boutillier, et. el. p.55.

(29) Alamamy comes from the Arabic word, Amir el mu'minine or commander of the faithful.

(30) Le Chassey 1978, p.197.

the potential source of despotism resides in the social organization grouping the 'Council of Elders', the Toroldé, those whose authority predominates on all the castes and social orders. (31)

ii. Occupations: Orders and Castes

This study will not dwell on the ideological quarrel surrounding the definition of social classes as opposed to castes in Mauritania. Instead, it will base its analysis on de Chassey who differentiates, within the social structure of the Toucouleurs, orders and castes according to the economic function of the particular social strata or status involved.

According to de Chassey, (32) the orders reflect the soci groupings which are essentially determined by their rank in the hierarchy of dignity and proximity to the power structure governing the society as a whole. Both the degree of dignity and authority are linked to specific social functions and not to the level of a productive activity which is the primary function of the inferior strata. On the other hand, however, the castes, more exclusive groupings, are defined according to a specialized occupation which places them into a distant social division which itself fits within each order.

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(31) Wane points out (p.27) that there is an 'Association of Traditional Owners and Cultivators of the River Valley'. It is an association established in 1956 by leading landowners for the sole purpose of protecting the rights of ownership of its members. They endorse agricultural improvements only when they stand to be the principal beneficiaries, and thereby insure the perpetuation of the traditional land tenure system.

(32) De Chassey, 1977, pp. 127 and passim.

Referring to the structure outlined by Yaya Wane, (33) the Toucouleur society is divided into three classes: the free-born, Rimbe, the castes, Nyenbe, and the servants, Nyabe. Endogamy is rigorously enforced between the orders, but exogamy is tolerated between castes.

Glance at Table I will provide insight into the complexity and strict division of labor based on defined authority and particular roles. The striking similarity between this social structure and that of the Moors should also be pointed out, even though the latter is less complex and more flexible.

a. The order of Nyenbe, the servile classes, is formed of two castes, the slaves and the freed captives - meaning those who have absolutely no rank, and who consequently, "increased the status of those who own them, regardless of how modest the rank of the latter may be." (34) If slaves possess nothing, not even themselves, the freed captives, on the other hand, is in theory," a freeman. Given that his time to his own, he may work elsewhere, on the condition that he devotes a period of time to his master.

"Insofar as they introduced minimal changes in traditional system of production, neither Islam nor colonization, nor independence.... managed to effectively abolish slavery." (34 a) The resulting consequences of changes in the modes of production, in a more equitable distribution of land and in the economic independence of the individual fostered by migrations and greater mobility will,... on the contrary, eliminate the accepted

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(33) See the table drawn from de Chassey, ibid, p.188.

(34) De Chassey, 1977, p.189.

(34a) Ibid., p. 189

'Horizontal' Social Stratification: A Summary of the Orders and Castes of the Toucouleurs.+

Orders	Sub-Orders	Categories Based on Function or Occupation (Castes)	Functions	Specified Honorary Titles
HIMBE (sing. dimo)	rimbe ardiibe (freeborn)	torobe (s.torobe) lawabobe jangube or sereebe miskinebe	temporal power - Spiritual power freeborn, cultivators	variable title thierno
		sebe (s.cedo) worgankobe kolyabe mbonade awgalnabe helgalagel, etc..	former sovereigns soldier (de koli) local sub-varieties of	farba thieddo diagaraf the kolyabe
	rimbe hunnybe (courtiers)	diawarbe (s. diawando) sutalbe (s. thioubalo)	courtiers & advisors - fishermen	soma dialtabe
NYENBE (sing. nyendo)	fecciram gollo (laborers)	wabube sanycbe baleebe wayilbe sayakobe sakebe alawbe	weavers blacksmiths gold/silversmiths shoemakers	diarno farba baylo fossiri
		lawbe wecebe laade worworbe	leathermakers boat builders - domestic workers	- kalmbaam
	naalankoobe (carriers of news or nyaagotobe (praisers)	burnabe warbabe nabube oudu pate naalube diawarbe lawbe gumbala awlube	potters and ceramists musicians singers griots (reciters of genealogies)	farba gawlo
DYABE (sing. dyaddo)	scotiibe (freed slaves) halfaabe (captives)	nacube (s. nacudo) nacube	descendants of freed captives ++ slaves	jagodon

+ Drawn from V. de Chassey, 1977, p.166.

++ It should be pointed out that both these categories designate people who are essentially tillers of the

b. The nyendo order, those specifically belonging to the castes, represents a long hierarchy of hereditary occupations including "the people of the word" and the "manual workers" (artists and craftsmen). (See table for complete list).

c. The order of the rimbe, the freeborn, is composed of castes of varying rank and power. The only ones actually involved with a productive economic activity are those who rank the lowest in the hierarchy the subalbé, the freeborn fishermen who practically monopolise fishing along the river, thereby engaging in an activity which is nearly as noble and so vital as cultivation. This occupation is thus viewed as a privilege rather than an obligation. The subalbé possess large number of fields and own the major portion of the falo (the most fertile soils) given their location near the river (35). In 1957, it was reported that 1[illegible]% of the population of the valley was composed of fishermen, who as a single group, caught approximately 1[illegible],000 tons or 3/4 of all the fish taken from the river. (36) Now, twenty-three years later, only rarely is fishing the exclusive activity of these fishermen who now have gained access to other sources of revenue, especially those available through migration. (37)

The sabé, the traditionally warrior caste, also included the courtiers and counselors, who the diawarbé, "who were reputed to be clever and diplomatic, capable of handling the most delicate of situations". (38) Today, they offer their talents and services as marabouts and, like the lower castes, have become beggars.

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(35) Le Chassey, 1977, p.1[illegible]2, Wane, p.93.

(36) Boutillier, et al, p.137.

(37) SEDES-FAO, p.29[illegible].

(38) Wane, p.[illegible]4.

The torobé are the only ones to have an indisputable authority and political power. As the higher caste, they represent the religious, political and landowning aristocracy. The Almamy dyabé is elected from this caste. (39) With the exception of the dyabé, this class included the only real peasant group of all the castes with the exception of the dyabe, this class includes the only real peasant group of all the castes which so far have been mentioned. In effect, the torobé are cultivators, but only in theory, for their sharecroppers and paid laborers, the dyabé, are the ones who actually cultivate their fields.

There is an apparent contradiction in the attitude of this class towards the role of cultivators. The torobé have traditionally refused to accept any other occupation except that of cultivator, as it is the role linked to their noble status. At present however, the rural exodus has particularly affected the torobé youth who, though rejecting the role of cultivator, do not wish to lose the privileges enjoyed by the landowning class. This, evidently, is a phenomenon common to all developing countries. Nevertheless, with reference to the torobé, this particular refusal to "dirty one's hands" is based on three factors: the actual tilling of the soil was always linked to the servile castes, the educational system established during colonization and maintained after independence has never instilled respect for agricultural occupations, and finally the flight from the rural areas and migration have increased their purchasing power to a level which adequately ensures immediate, even if only intermittent, consumption.

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(39) "Any torodo peasant may, in theory, become the Almamy. The only criterion is that he be over forty years old, pious, literate and of good character." De Chassey, 1977, p.195.

These attitudes will inevitably introduce a change in the land tenure system in the Valley.(40) This will be brought about not only because of a progressive alienation from the land, but especially because of the greater involvement of all levels of the society in the new regulations governing the acquisition of land, the effects of which are already apparent in the exchanges and sale of land taking place in the valley: transactions which, only a few years ago, would have been totally inconceivable. Though far from widespread, this phenomenon is indicative of new attitudes developing towards the traditional ties of kinship, land and power.

III. THE PEULES

A. Pastoral Life

i. The Origins of the Peulhs

Little is known about the origins of the Peulhs of the Sahel, though there are many hypotheses concerning these ethnic groups. This is equally true of the origins and way of life of the Peulns of Mauritania who differ greatly from one region to another. Vernet states that southeastern Mauritania had been occupied by neolithics with Sudanese traditions who had come from the East after having settled on the banks of the Nile. Though racially heterogeneous negroid traits predominated, they were mixed with europhoide influences.(41) We believe that they may possibly be the ancestors of the

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(40) A study of land tenure in Mauritania, the problems and its process of change will be included in the KAMS report on social changes, ..

(41) Vernet, p.30.

Toubous and Peulhs. However, what is certain is that they were cattle herders who led their herds from one pasture to another. This way of life has not significantly evolved since that period.

ii. Transhumance and Livestock

Bremaud provides classifications drawn from le Houvreur and based on climatic zones and on criteria of habitat, economic activities and mobility (42) for the different life-styles of the people of the Sahara and the Sahel. They are of particular interest because they effectively demonstrate the differences which exist even within the same lifestyles as practiced in both desert zones. This approach highlights the differences between the Moors, the 'real' nomads, the Peulhs, the pastoral transhumants:

	the Sahel	the Sahara
Sedentary	: fixed habitat permanently occupied	idem
	diverse crops;	palm groves & gardens
Semi-Sedentary	: herds sheltered in stockades	small livestock sheltered in stockades.

(42) These classifications are taken from Bremaud, pp. 96-97. It must be emphasized that these categories are presented with the objective of classifying the most typical features of each group. There are indeed numerous gradations between and within each category, as reflected in trade, settlements, exchange, or even in methods of stockraising.

Semi-Sedentary	:	fixed habitat temporarily abandoned during a part of the dry season;	fixed habitat
		diverse crops;	seasonal separation of the family between gardening and transhumance;
Semi-nomads	:	mobile habitat;	mobile habitat;
		millet fields;	palm groves; and no gardens;
		limited mobility around a permanent water point;	very localized zones of pasturage;
Nomads	:	mobile habitat	mobile habitat;
		no crops	neither palm groves nor gardens
		transhumance dependent on rainfall.	large-scale mobility dependent on rainfall.

It is evident that the habit is the only constant element common to similar categories. The mobility or immobility of the group determine the level and intensity of their various economic activities. In all cases - the decision to migrate and the range to be covered is all dependent on nature. It is only within the interior of the chosen space that each group establishes its way of life according to economic and political inter-ethnic relationships. It is through these relationships that "the different possibilities for making use of the various ecological environments

are discovered". (43) Therefore conditions of nature exert minimal influence over the way of life selected, for the choice is rather a cultural response to the geographic environment and is one which takes both ecological and political conditions into consideration. (44)

Transhumance (45) is indeed a complex phenomenon as evidenced by the three different lifestyles of the Peulhs of Mauritania - semi-nomadic, semi-sedentarized, and sedentarized. (46)

Within both the nomadic and sedentary milieu, livestock raising is one of the principal modes of accumulation of wealth. Even though this accumulation takes the guise of the most easily recognizable signs of social prestige, it is in fact at one and the same time the "investment capital" and the "end-products." It should equally be pointed out that regardless of the nature of the rural environment, livestock and agriculture are closely linked. Even herders who have no agricultural activities maintain numerous contacts with cultivators. First and foremost, however, livestock has a role in the course of normal social activities, especially in the constitution of the dowry (in the Soninke society this was the exclusive function of the livestock owned).

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(43) Mervouet, p.89.

(44) Ibid, p.90

(45) Bremaud's definition, p.100, Transhumance: all seasonal movements of a cyclical nature involving all or part of the herd within the spatial limits of customary pasturage.

(46) With reference to definitions, consult the categories lined above for semi-nomadic, semi-sedentary and sedentary groups of the Sahel.

It is therefore quite clear that in communities where livestock rearing is the primary activity, it constitutes the economic and social basis of the group. Different type of livestock however, represent different economies. It is evident that cattle raising is more difficult than the raising of goats and sheep which are more manageable and more easily sold, especially when it involves a forced sale. (47) In addition, because this smaller livestock produces a higher number of offsprings, it offers a better rate of distribution among the families.

Being a symbol of social differentiation, the herds of the wealthier cattle breeders are very often dispersed to various areas to avoid, on the one hand, taxation, and on the other hand, the jealousy (the evil eye) of others.(48) This practice constitutes a fundamental difference between the sedentary and the transhumant groups. For this first group, the concentration of their "capital" is more conspicious and more centralized. Among the sedentary cattle breeders as with the sedentary cultivators, this accumulation of wealth is essentially in the hands of the leading families: nobles, tribal chiefs, rich merchants.... (49)

Traditionally, the only way a herdsman could maintain his standard of living, his "capital," was to have a herd providing milk, for the sale of this produce was more profitable for the Peulhs who controlled 75% of all the large cattle herds

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(47) Ancey gives an example of the heavy losses involved in the sale of cattle by certain Mossi of Upper Volta. They were obliged to sell 1/3 of their herd in order to compensate for a deficit of 450 kilos of millet (p.40).

(48) There is possibly another logical reason which may be medically explained. Dispersing the herds diminishes the risks of contagion during an epidemic - A risk which could lead to the loss of the entire herd. However, this explanation is not necessarily a traditional one!

(49) It is interesting to note that nowadays, and especially since the drought, traders have started taking over the ownership of herds from traditional herdsmen (Diallo, p.15).

in Mauritania. For the Moors, small livestock, far easier to sell, was an important source for their personal daily consumption of milk (it is considered degrading for the Moors to sell milk) and their consumption of meat during major celebrations. (50)

iii. Livestock Raising and Agriculture

The relationships which have traditionally existed between herdsmen and cultivators have at times been one of dominance by the former group. However, 'the decline of great empires established by populations engaged in livestock raising has considerable modified this situation'. (51) The changes were primarily brought about by sedentarization thereby making it necessary for different ethnic groups to adopt the same activities within the same spatial environment. This led to the exchange of techniques as well as the acquisition of land and services. The present social structures and the utilization of land are all the outcome of this process, of the mutations that transform traditions. (52)

Livestock raising has become an important activity which is second only to agriculture in the valley. This is due to the influence of the Peulhs on the Toucouleurs. Though it was now originally one of their main occupations, the Toucouleurs now engage in extensive breeding of livestock. (53) Unlike fishing, an activity essentially linked to a particular class, the subalbe, livestock raising may be practiced by all social

(50) Hervouet, pp.93 and 97. "It should be pointed out, however, that the drought - as stated below - has profoundly changed the attitude of the herdsmen towards their "capital".

(51) SEDES-FAO, p.298.

(52) Ibid.

(53) Boutillier, et. al., p.135.

categories. "Nevertheless, the importance attached to the breeding of livestock in the various economic systems of the Valley significantly varies from one ethnic group to another". (54)

Outlined below - based on the study of SEDES-FAO - are some of the reasons highlighting the current interest and importance of livestock to cultivators: (55)

1. it serves as a medium of exchange for a specific type of goods;
2. it can supply the family's need in meat;
3. it provides draught animals;
4. it serves as a new form of insurance in case of crop failure;
5. it allows for greater independence should the cultivator desire to leave the family circle;
6. it increases or eliminates the cultivator's dependence on the herder: in areas where there are both cultivators and herdsmen, in some cases the former arrange for their children to learn how to become herders. This is far more common in Mali than in Mauritania.

However, the cultivator is still not totally independent of the herder with whom he maintains important contracts for the traditional exchange of his millet and rice crops against manure to fertilize his fields.

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(54) Ibid.

(55) SEDES-FAO, p.299-300.

B. THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE PEULHS

"The Peulhs are largely dispersed from Senegal to the Republic of Central Africa. The Peulh diaspora has given the different groups highly varied historical experience. This is the reason why they developed extremely diverse social systems..."(56) It is therefore, the way of life which is significant and not kinship ties linking distant lineages. For example, while the Wodaabe of Niger are described as being exclusively nomadic herders in the excellent study carried out by Dupire, the Wodaabe of Dar el Barka in Mauritania are large landowners though they also practice extensive livestock raising. (57)

i. Concept of Space Lived in and Exchanged

In noting the disparities within the different groups of Peulhs, Hervouet states that these are not only due to the influence of the groups which lived with them or were neighbors to them, but also the consequence of the range of mobility determined by their chosen agro-pastoral activity. The spatial environment selected reflected, in fact, not only the composition of the herds but also the social, economic and political power of the group. Thus, the movement of the herds can only be possible if waterpoints are located close enough to one another so that they may be watered daily. These waterpoints, however, may be located in areas under the control of other ethnic groups (the Chratti and the Tadjakant, Moorish groups, own the area extending from the Aftout to the Guidimakha) thereby imposing a political constraint on the direction in which the group may attend its area of mobility. The movement is thus restricted by the political environment. Yet

(56) Bonte, p.5.

(57) See O. Ba.

another constraint can also be imposed: technique of water usage allowing differences in the use of space. The Moors need to water their herds only every other day, while the Peulhs need to do so daily. Livestock and water drawing techniques used by the Moors allow them to use areas unexploitable by the Peulhs during the dry season.(59)

The traditional way of life of both the Moors and the Peulhs has been profoundly changed, and though the drought may have dramatically made the changes highly visible, the process had nevertheless begun long before that. The youth have begun rejecting the austerity of pastoral life, preferring a different spatial environment, the easier and less dangerous activities of the cities. This trend appears to be more visible among the Moors than the Peulhs, because through their commerce, the all-pervasive importance of money at all levels of the Morrish society predominates. It is 'as if the password had become, 'get rich!'" (60) Among the Peulhs, their highly restraining social organization has had the effect of keeping their youth more closely attached to the family unit , their herds and their traditional spatial environment.

ii. Social Structures (61)

The three Peulh communities in Mauritania gradually infiltrated into the country and organized their respective societies according to the spatial environment in which they

(59) Moorish well-diggers employ methods unknown to the Peulhs, thus allowing them the use of areas inaccessible to the latter (Hervouet, p.101).

(60) Hervouet, p.108.

(61) There is very little information available on the social structure of the Peulhs of Mauritania. This sector therefore will be limited to simply presenting the most essential features drawn from the rare sources available on this subject.

found themselves. Indeed, the relationship between land and the Peulhs (62) is reflected in the names distinguishing the three groups: Peulh Walo, Peulh Dieri and Foulabé. Two zones mark the advance of the Peulhs. On both sides of the 450 mm isohyete in the Assaba region, there exists the sedentarisation front while from the North of the Gorgol River basin to the Reguiba region predominates the transhumants' front. (63)

The social organisation of these three groups is essentially identical to that of the Toucouleurs discussed above; the basic social unit is the gallé, the extended family led by the patriarch . The Ardo is the head of the clan and represents the power of the regrouped lignages. As with the Toucouleurs, the power of the Ardo has been diminished by that of the Almamy, the spiritual leader of the group. In contrast to the Toucouleurs, however, castes as well as endogamy are not predominant characteristics among the Peulhs. (64)

The Walo Peulhs, the least nomadic of all three groups, are not very different from the Toucouleurs. Their social

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(62) See Agricultural Production studies of the RAMS for further details. Enough to point out here the two out of nine types of soils caracteristic of the Senegal River Valley: the dieri, a sandy zone most fit for the season of "hivernage" or rainy season; and the walo, most adequate for recessional agriculture and, indeed, the most consistently productive zone.

(63) Toupet, p. 300.

(64) O. Ba includes the Peulhs as one of the castes within the 15 castes of the Toucouleurs' social structure. It is difficult to accept such a categorization for it appears more evident to us that the Peulhs are parallel to and independent of the Toucouleurs' internal social structure.

evolution has been influenced by their lengthy contact with populations located along the River. The village community preeminates among the Walo Peulhs and in fact, "the basic social unit is no longer strictly formed along genealogical lines, but added to the original group were numerous allies of diverse origins who became assimilated to the Peulhs during the course of their migrations".(65) The increased importance of the occupied spatial environment, the development of agriculture of the wadi (dry riverbeds) and the walo have all significantly made up the production typical of the Peulhs.

> L'influence Toucouleurs et la pratique de l'agriculture ont donc conféré aux Peulhs Walo une structure d'organization socio-politique supérieur au gallé, perrettant ainsi de disposer d'un pouvoir de décision et d'organisation plus large s'appuyant sur un genre de vie semi-sédentaire où le noyau villageois est relativement important. Les Peulhs Walo ont donc emprunté aux Toucouleurs, non seulement leurs lois foncières, mais aussi, une partie de leurs structures sociales, et il est parfois délicat de les distinguer. (66)

The Dieri Peulhs have retained their language of origin - the Djolof. Three essential elements determine their territorial unity:-

a. a waterpoint near which they may camp during the dry season

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(65) Hervouet, p.79.

(66) The influence of the Toucouleurs and the practice of agriculture have thus given the Walo Fulani a scico-political organizational structure extending beyond the gallé, thus allowing them a broader organizational and decision-making power based on the semi-secentary way of life where the village unit is of relative importance. The Walo Peulhs thus adopted not only the Toucouleurs' land tenure laws, but a part of their social structure as well. It is therefore at times difficult to distinguish one system from the other.

b. grazing areas located in the vicinity;

c. land available for cultivation during the rainy season.

A striking characteristic among the Dieri Peulhs is the manner in which spatial dispersal is reflected in their social dispersal. Within this community, it is the chief of the gallé, the dyom gallé, and not the maodo ouro, the village chief, who is the exclusive decision-making authority. The family unit is very limited and the least misunderstanding within a group could lead to a new social and spatial separation. In a region dominated by Moors, the political force of the Dieri Peulhs has thus been reduced: their choice of a difficult agricultural alternative from the outset, the dieri, and a willful independence, all make for a lack of political force, which sharply distinguishes them from the Walo Peulhs among whom the association of cultivators and herders is a solidly entrenched institution.

The Foulabe are the Peulhs nomads par excellence. In fact, they have been labelled, hatobé, meaning "the obsessed!" in Foular. (67) It was only in 1956 that their conversion to Islam became complete, (68) and though this may not be indicative of their isolation, it is at least indicative of their attachment to their original traditions. They are also called the Foulabe of the Tarakoro, after the region in which they live and in which the concentration of Moors is sparse, even though this region was a passageway for their razzias at the turn of the century.

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(67) C. Ba, p.112.

(68) Hervouet, p.64.

Like the Dieri Peulls, the chief of the galle is the central authority for the group. He is the one to make the decisions pertinent to all sales or barter. Among the Foulabes, women have the right to take only profits gained from the sale of milk. Should she seek a divorce, strict traditional and pre-Islamic regulations deprive her of the animals included in the dowry which she had brought to her husband's home. Moreover, when leaving, she is not allowed to take even her children with her. This serves as a means by which the group maintains its economic and social cohesion and by which it prevents its disintegration through its frequent dispersions.

Independent of the Moors, relying on their lineal and social organization, the Foulabe "have an overall vision of the environment in which each present is integrated in their interpretation of their special environment". (69) This interpretation however, is undergoing profound changes due in part to their adaptation to Islamic norms, especially with regard to women, (70) but also due in part to a forced sedentarization which is as an aftermath of the recent drought.

C. The Peulhs And The Drought

The drought of the 70's was one of the most severe ever experienced by the populations of the Sahel, especially of

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(69) Ibid, p.87.

(70) Islamic laws state that a widow has the right to inherit a part of her deceased husband's herds. Hervouet, p.87, cites the example of a dispute which occurred in Arach Mouderi, Karakoro, in 1972. One of the two spouses of the deceased wanted to respect the Foulabé tradition, while the other preferred the Koranic law.

Mauritania. Moreover, it is continuing into the new decade of the 80's, entailing and aggravating the social, economic, and ecological problems of the most disadvantaged populations.

Hervouet (71) states that previous droughts were different and far less damaging for they occurred in only restricted areas. The famine which developed in their wake was not, therefore, as generalized and as widespread among humans and animals. The recent drought has had a distinctly different effect on the human populations than those of the previous years.

Table II, adapted from a FAO report of 1977, shows, in comparison with other countries, the disastrous state of the bovine herds in Mauritania, thus essentially those of the Moors and the Peulhs.

During this drought, three particular developments have had a significant impact on the populations: (72)

a. an extensive drought,

b. a 60% demographic increase over the last thirty years, without, however, a comparable increase in food production because of the lack of the necessary farming techniques;

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(71) Hervouet, pp. 131-137; see RAMS report on the environment by P. HAUSER (RAMS).

(72) Hervouet, pp. 137-8.

c. an increase in the number of herds during a ten year span, 1959 to 1968, due to mass vaccination of herds, leading to a disequilibrium between pasturage and livestock, between agriculture and cattle breeding. In addition, the recent increase in the cultivated surfaces has resulted in a corresponding decrease of available pasturage.

All of these events have changed not only the range of mobility and inter-ethnic social relationships, but the very attitude of the herdsmen towards the value of their herds.

Diallo (73) uses the term "sedentary" to describe the Peulhs because of the distinctive tendency of the latter to sedentarize. For example, Maurel (74) indicates that since 1971 the density of the herds in F'Diz has sharply increased. Entire camps of herders from Boutilimit, Bouadhibou, Akjoujt and Nouakchott have been arriving there, some of them for the first time in their lives. Not one of them can remember having ever experienced a more difficult year. The increased density of both the human and animal populations has moreover led to numerous, and sometimes violent, disputes between herders and cultivators.

The movement towards sedentarization is continuing and is irreversible. It has fostered an awareness of the need for diversification in both livestock raising and farming. However, there seems to be a contradiction. The accumulation of herds became unprofitable since, as indicated in the table, over half of them were lost. Nevertheless, those who

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(73) Diallo, p.14.

(74) Maurel, p.45 and p.2.

Table No. II*

Consequences of Drought in the Sahelian Zone

(in % and in thousand units)

Countries	Cattle				Sheep - Goats				Camels				Donkeys				Horses			
	BD++	AD++	Difference No.	%+++	BD	AD	Difference No.	%	BD	AD	Difference No.	%	BD	AD	Difference No.	%	BD	AD	Difference No.	%
Mauritania	2 300	1 115	1 185	52	8 000	5 850	2 150	27	700	670	30	4	230	150	80	35	16	10	6	37
Niger	3 905	1 960	1 945	49	8 590	6 570	2 020	24	331	272	59	18	355	253	102	29	178	138	40	20
Mali	3 648	2 347	1 301	36	8 300	6 810	1 490	19	241	179	62	17	330	121	209	63	98	78	20	20
Chad	4 200	2 505	1 695	40	4 200	3 920	280	7	560	545	15	3	347	332	15	4	146	136	10	7
Senegal	1 513	1 036	447	32	1 924	1 633	291	15	5,3	5,7	+0,4	+8	59	54	5	8	41	36	5	12
Upper Volta	560	450	110	19	900	800	100	11	5	5	0	0	80	70	10	13	30	25	5	17
Total	16 126	9 413	6 713	42	31 914	25 583	6 331	20	1 842,3	1676,7	165,6	9 1	401	980	421	30	509	423	86	17
Total UAC	16 126	9 413	6 713		3 191	2 558	633		2 763	2515	248		700,5	490	210,5		509	423	86	

* Table II is drawn from Bremaud, p. 114 (FAO).

++ BD = Before Drought
AD = After Drought

+++ Approximately

still had a part of their herds were able to sell them in order to meet their immediate needs. This possibility increased the economic aspects and the "capital" value of livestock, thus encouraging many of the Peulhs to reconstitute their herds, while nonetheless being forced into diversifying their activities becoming either farm laborers or landowning cultivators.

The cultivators, having likewise suffered from the long years of the droughts, were also attracted by the value of livestock. The acquisition of livestock is spreading, thus creating a new form of economic security for the group.

This nurturing awareness among the herdsmen of the need for economic diversification has given rise to a new and revealing phenomenon with respect to the adaptation of the herders to farming and to new sources of fodder. In regions in which irrigated development projects are being set up, the herders no longer wish to be excluded from the agricultural and fodder production opportunities created by these developments. They have even begun formulating their demands with regard to the redistribution of land being irrigated in the Senegal River Valley. (75)

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(75) SEDES-FAO, p.300 - There is a typical example of this case in M'Pourie as indicated in the case study presented in "The Social Organisation of Agricultural Production" included in the report on Studies in Social Change.

This significant interest in development projects does not however resolve the numerous difficulties confronting herders who cannot - or will not - abandon their way of life. The loss of their herds has been a dramatic psychological blow for them. There are examples of "recurring cases of abandonment of the herds followed at times by that of the family and even by suicides." (76) The loss of herds has profoundly disrupted the basis of the national and communal economies. As a result, we cannot ignore the irreversible impact that this loss has had on both family and social structures. A psychological need is deeply felt today by the herder to revaluate his occupation which is the very foundation on which social stability, if not primarily the stability of the family, can be rebuilt - a process indispensable for all development.

IV. THE SONINKES

The Guidimakha and Its Ethnic Diversity (77)

Traditionally, it is said that the first Soninke to settle in the Assaba was called Makha Male Soumare, from which was derived Guidi (mountain of) Makha. (78) The Guidimakha is undoubtedly the region with the highest concentration of Mauritanian Soninkes, the most important group of this tribe.

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(76) Ibid, p.306, Hervouet points out that the majority of the Foulabé and other ethnic groups lost between 40 and 60% of their sheep and goats and more than 60% of their cattle (1977, p.78). Adoptation to the consequences of the drought has been difficult for the Moors especially because of the loss of their laborers, that is, the haratine, who have migrated. This is the group which has traditionally been their shepherds.

(77) This section is essentially based on the reports of Downs and Peyna; and of Raynault, et. al.

(78) Hervouet, p.86.

According to Saint Père, the Guidimakha was exclusively inhabited by Soninkes up until 1903. Since then, and especially since the recent drought, all the other ethnic groups meet there in ever increasing numbers.

In 1889, the Soninkes founded Selibaby, the capital of the region, and the first foreigners to settle there were the Bambaras in 1903, as slaves of the Soninkes. In 1905, the French began imposing taxes, which led a large number of Soninkes to leave the region in order to avoid payment. Taking advantage of this situation, the Bambara slaves revolted and the French gave them the land and huts which had been abandoned by the Soninkes. This is the event which led to the division of the town of Selibaby into two parts: the original Selibaby and Bambara Doudou.

The Peulhs had begun arriving in the Guidimakha as of 1940 but it was until the advent of independence, in 1960, that they began settling in the interior of Selibaby itself. A little before that, in 1953, the Beidane Moors came as traders, and the Haratin, independently of their masters, created villages where they would live only during the rainy season while settling in Selibaby during the dry season.

Although in appearance, harmonious social relationships exist between these different ethnic groups which appear to interact very well, there still exists an atmosphere of mistrust which is further complicated by the fact that the distinction between nobles, slaves and castes is maintained in the daily social and political life of the groups. Moreover, in the Guidimakha, only the noble class has the right to participate in the leadership of the Soninke community.

It is interesting to note that the Soninkes of Guidimakha compose one of the seven different dialectic groups of the Soninkes living in Mali, Senegal and in other regions of Mauritania. It is said that the differences between the dialects of these groups are such that they have difficulty in understanding one another. For example, the Soninkes located around Nema and the Malian border are the Makhere, those of Mali are the Diafounou, those of Senegal, the Boundou, and in Guidimakha, there are two different groups, the Khaniaga and the Haire. This linguistic isolation of Soninke communities is made even more conspicious by the fact that, in comparison, the Halpoularen, Toucouleurs and Peulhs, have been able to maintain their linguistic and cultural similarities, which has therefore created mutual understanding between the groups despite their different origins and the resulting linguistic differences.

This extreme diversity is certainly the underlying cause for the legendary image of the Soninkes: an extremely authoritarian if not outright dictatorial - system of control within the community which facilitates the making of collective decisions and their implementation. This control extends to all the activities of the individual for whom the interest of the group must take precedence. Raynaut et al give an example of this attitude. In 1975, the chiefs of the Soninke villages in the Guidimakha made the decision to uniformly set the price of millet at a particularly low rate in order to discourage sales. The community would not have been able to meet the food needs otherwise, and anyone disobeying this order was heavily fined.(79) This concept of almost atavistic obedience in the Soninke personality is further reinforced by the age-set system, the authority of the family head, and the superiority of the male and the husband.

(79) Raynaut et. al. p.96.

B. Social Organization

i. The Village

The complexity, but also the strictly hierarchical family and social relationships of the Soninke society demonstrates an internal discipline which contrasts with those of the other ethnic groups in Mauritania. It is also the explanation of why the institution of slavery is still so rigorously maintained among the Soninke, while among the Peulhs and the Moors it has already begun to weaken.

The village, divided into "free" and "non-free" members is the basic political unit of the group. The chief of the village, a descendant of one of the leading, therefore noble, families, is the undisputable authority. He is the one who is responsible for tax collections, who directs the activities of the village, who receives strangers, who organizes the control of bush fires and settles quarrels among the villagers. His counselors, the village elders, are also of the noble class.

The Ka, the household unit, is composed of an extended family varying between 15 to 50 members. Governed by a Kagouma, the head of the family, it represents the most important social unit in the community. It is only upon the death of the family head that the sons may leave the family compound to go and build their own compound.

The "free" men of the village are divided into four categories: the nobles, the marabouts, or people of the Book (the Koran), the counselors and the castes. The members of this last category are all grouped under the same label,

Nyakhamdu, which includes the griots (both musicians and genealogists), leatherworkers, Blacksmiths, fishermen and woodworkers, who are all strictly endogamous.

The "non-free" category is divided into two groups: the diokourounko and the komo.

The dioukourounko, domestic slaves, (the equivalent of the abid among the Moors), enjoy certain privileges in the master's household, for they have supposedly accepted their status. Having arrived at the same time as the founding families on which they are dependent, they are subject to no taxation and are responsible for communal tasks.

The komo the equivalent of the Haratin, are on the other hand slaves bought from other ethnic groups and are under the control of the master. They normally work as farm laborers, cultivating for the family to which they belong. According to the attached table on the division of social categories in four Soninke villages in the Guidimakha surveyed by the team of War on Want in 1979, it is interesting to note that the komo constitute the largest social group in all of these villages.

TABLE III

THE DIVISION OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN SEVERAL VILLAGES IN THE AREA (30)

Villages	Nobles	Marabouts	Counse-lors	Castes	Fisher-men	Diou-lour	Komo
SGUILI	15 %	17.5 %	7 %	3.1 %	2 %	7 %	46.4 %
ILLSSIMOU	31.7 %	5.8 %	6.2 %	-	-	-	54.1 %
GOUNTOUROU	12 %	13.6 %	1 %	8.4 %	1[illegible].9 %	4.3 %	49.[illegible] %
LOU	4.4 %	6.9 %	-	6.7 %	7.4 %	-	72.6 %

Exclusivity, or perhaps ethnocentrism, of this society prevents any foreigner from becoming Soninke. However, any stranger may become a slave according to the Soninke. None may be Soninke, even after having lived among them for generations. Downs and Reyna quote a Soninke proverb which aptly pr presents this attitude: 'Even if a log remains in the water for a hundred years, it will never become a crocodile.' (31) The Bambaras, the traditional slaves of the Soninkes, have however, more than once revolted against their masters. As recently as 1962 and 1975, there were bloody uprisings in Selibaby. (32)

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(30) Table III is taken from War on Want, p.22.

(31) Downs & Reyna, p.25.

(32) Ibid, p.26.

Among the Soninkes, all social categories are subdivided into age-sets similar to those of the Toucouleurs, the fedde. In the villages, the age-set system is highly stratified among both the men and women generally grouping age-sets separated by 3 to 4 years. Although the age-sets may now have only a ritualistic function, they are nevertheless a microcosm of social control and pressure. Traditionally, every age-set had its particular tasks and obligations in the village. In Selibaby however, there are only two distinct age-sets: one for young people up to 35 years of age, and another for the adults above 35.

Like all Black African ethnic groups, the Soninkes are polygamous and divorce is infrequent. Similarly, as in all other Third World countries where this phenomenon is taking on alarming proportions, marriage has become an onerous undertaking, generally exceeding the financial resources of the majority of the population. Migration and the transformation into a consumer society are the principal causes, and, as will become apparent further on, migration among the Soninkes has become one of the most visible characteristics of the society, placed second only to that of social rigidity.

Downs and Reyna provide a list of the mutual obligations of the Soninke husband and wife. This list could in fact be implied to all African societies. There is nonetheless an exceptional condition which the Soninke female is obliged to fulfill (and one which all other ethnic groups concede is unique to the Soninkes): that is, she has the obligation and duty of painting and guarding the hut - tasks normally assigned only to males in other societies.

Another unique characteristic of the Soninkes' social organization, and one which again reflects the social stratification and the division of labor within the group, is the way in which the responsibilities of the members of the family are designated according to the work to be done in the fields. The maximum output of each and everyone is directed towards contributing to the dynamism of the group while developing a personal sense of responsibility to the group, and, in particular, to his family.

ii. Economic Activities

Soninkes are first and foremost farmers. However, since the drought, like the Toucouleurs, they are engaging themselves more actively in livestock raising as a means of ensuring greater economic security.

Everything is foreseen in the life of the Soninke, even to his position in the fields and the type of soil he has the right to cultivate.

The le-khore or collective field, corresponds to the family dwelling the ka, to the extended household. The chief of the ka is responsible for field production. He keeps the yearly cereal supply for the entire extended family in a special granary to which only he has the key. He is also the one who rations out the necessary amount for the family meals each day. (83)

Although land tenure is organized according to the type of soil and field, as with the Toucouleurs, this is perpetuated more rigidly and with a tighter hierarchy among the Soninkes.

There are two categories of cultivable land: clan soils, khaabela-ninye or tribal fields, and so-called free soils, dymankafo-ninye. The clan soils, strictly appropriated and placed under the responsibility of the clan chief, are the most fertile soils, falo and fonde, while the lands which are freely accessible to the entire village community and for

(83) A parallel can be drawn between the traditional Arab and western societies where similar systems exist: it is often the father of the family who metes out the necessary amount of money for family meals, either on a daily or a monthly basis, depending on the family.

which the village chief is responsible, are the arid soils, dieri located far from the river and the village.

Apart from the clan soils, three usages, determined by the landowners, nyinagumme, are permitted: 1) lending land, renewable yearly: 2) land lasting from one to three years, and: 3) land purchase, a recent occurrence affecting only the fonde soils, often used for housing construction. In theory, payments for temporarily acquired land amount to one-tenth of the harvest. Their symbolic purpose is to strengthen the bonds between the owner and the user. In practice, however, these payments differ greatly from one village to the other and from owner to owner. (84)

The free lands are subject to the "law of the ax." Whoever first clears the land has the right to cultivate it, but it must be recalled that the village chief is still responsible for the management of all the plots, and that a payment of one-tenth of the harvest goes to the village.

The three types of village soil, falo, fonde and dieri, reflect the social levels of this society.

The falo, or flood lands, which are the most fertile soils along the bank of the river, are the absolute property of the nobles and cultivated mainly by the komo, slaves. "Ce qui est important à noter, c'est le caractère précaire de la jouissance que la majorité des exploitants peuvent exercer

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(84) War on Want pp. 18-19.

sur les jardins de décrue." (85) The absence of economic participation by the majority of the farmers can only diminish their interest in land development and improvement in their farming methods and in productivity, which are actually their primary responsibility.

We once again refer to the table from the War on Want report to accentuate (see Tables IV and V) the contrast between the social classes of the landowners and the farmers in those villages surveyed.

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(85) "What is important to note is the precarious nature of the control that the majority of the farmers can exercise over the recession plots." Ibid, p.26. Text underlined in the original. There is walo soil in the Guidimakha, which makes the falo soils very precious.

TABLE IV (+)

FALO: DISTRIBUTION OF: LANDOWNERS BY SOCIAL STATUS

ages	Nobles	Mara-bouts	Advisers	Castes	Total	Diou-kour.	Komo	Total	Grand Total
UILI	65.5%	23.0%	8.5%	-	97%	2.8%	-	2.8%	98.5%
ESSIMOU	62.5%	15.5%	-	-	78%	-	-	20.8%	98.8%
GOUN-OU	92.0%	3.0%	5.0%	-	100%	-	-	-	-

TABLE V (+)

FALO: DISTRIBUTION OF CULTIVATORS BY SOCIAL STATUS

ages	Nobles	Mara-bouts	Advisers	Castes	Total	Diou-kour.	Komo	Total	Grand Total
UILI	46.0%	20 %	8.2%	2.8%	77%	-	23%	23%	100%
ESSIMOU	14.5%	36 %	14.5%	-	65%	-	35%	35%	100%
OUN-OU	21.0%	13 %	13.0%	-	47%	-	53%	53%	100%

(+) From War on Want, Tables IV and V, p.24.

The percentage of "free born" landowners of the falo varies from 78% to 100%.

The acquisition of alluvial banks for rainfed crops, the fondé, is also in the hands of the noble and "free" classes, although a recent change has come about with a slight increase in the number of landowners in the "slave" classes, the komo, who purchase plots for construction. (86)

The arid soils, diéri, located several kilometers from the river, are freely accessible for ownership by the "slave" classes. This distance (from the river) is the main criterion determining who will have the privilege of cultivating the soil.

This distribution of owners by soil type and consequently by type of production provides an insight into the spatial relations that are governed by the social relationships of the Soninke. Village space, as well as land space, is organized according to the social status of the group concerned. Nobles are located in the center of the village, and the slaves are at its periphery. In the fields, the proximity of the plots is also determined by the spatial arrangement in the compound. Traditionally, one does not have the freedom of choosing a field, even within a prescribed plot of land. The individual is enclosed within his social and spatial circle.

On top of this stratification, there is a distribution between land owned by men and by women, called the Salumo for the man and the Yakharinte for the woman, the latter specializing in growing rice and groundnuts.

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(86) Ibid, p.27.

Although individuals are free to dispose of the crops produced in their fields either by sale or by barter, the head of the household can always draw from the individual granaries to satisfy the needs of the extended family: he is unable to do this from communal lands.

Livestock raising is growing in economic importance among the Soninkes, especially among the wealthy. This activity is beginning to spread throughout the region. If some persons owned 30-40 cattle before the drought, those same persons might have 200 or more today. (87) This cannot compare with the size of the Moor and Peulh herds (which can number as many as 1,000 head of cattle) but for a society whose activities are fundamentally centered around the land, this interest in economic diversification reflects a profound change in social and economic values.

The attitude of the Soninkes, who are helped by emigrant relatives working in France and elsewhere to purchase cattle, is quite different from that of the Peulhs and the Moors, who make no distinction between the livestock's economic contribution and its value in terms of social prestige and sentimentality.

C. Migration Among the Soninkes

One cannot speak of the Soninkes without speaking of migration. For over a century, their life has been strongly marked by it, and their emigrants have never broken their ties with the village and family community. To do so is inconceivable and would be economically destructive to the group.

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(87) Downs and Reyna, pp. 40-41.

Despite a long tradition of Soninke migrant merchants throughout West Africa, a tradition which should have prompted them to abandon their social constraints, it is precisely this extreme social and familial control which forbids anyone the moral possibility of deviating socially, unless he accepts becoming a social outcast.

Today however, this migration movement has reached dangerous proportions for this society, in which disputes, however minor they may be, have begun to arise, especially among the komo emigrants. (88) The War on Want report presents a table on the everyday activities of the fields surveyed. (89) Astonishingly, the 10-15 year-old group is the largest, comprising 60% of the work force, while there is only one person in the 20-50 age group! It is certainly no exaggeration to state that aside from famine, a more distressing situation cannot exist for a community. The entire responsibility of supervising the fields and the village is left in the hands of persons over 50 years old: "... l'effet de production agricole est à la charge d'enfants et de veillards ... la pénurie première de force de travail constitue le problème majeur pour le travail agricole et les projets de développement au Guidimakha." (90) Hence, the traditional dynamism of the Soninke will inevitably become totally nonexistent. A problem of agricultural production stagnation arises, mirroring a disquieting lethargy and rendering that production marginal in the local economy. A strong tendency to be supported by the emigrants' earnings grows and consequently the need to

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(88) Countless are the incidents among the Soninke in the hostels in which they live in France. The problem of Soninke migration will be delved into more deeply in the study "Migration and Urbanization" under "Social Changes."

(89) War on Want, Table III, p.38.

(90) "... agricultural production is left in the charge of children and old people... this shortage in the labor force constitutes a major problem for farm labor and the development of projects in the Guidimakha". Ibid, p.39.

consume imported products begins to prevail. (91) The sharp rise in purchasing power which has emerged in the past decade since the drought has no connection whatsoever with the potential and productivity of the region or the group.

The highly pronounced absence of active men in the region will noticeably affect the role of the woman within the family and the community. In its evaluation of rural development in the Guidimakha, War on Want has already noted that for the women "les opérations entreprises dans un cadre collectif ont conduit à un réel succes... par... la capacité de se mobiliser et de s'organiser autour de propositions techniques." (92) One of the reasons for their continued participation is undoubtedly because they now have access to the most fertile soils, the falo, which were previously off limits to them.

Women, children and old men make up the agricultural labor force, along with the salaried laborers paid by funds received through emigration.

Traditionally, the Guidimakha is the crossroads of commercial trade between the north and the south. Due to losses incurred by the drought and the drop in craftswork due to migration, trade based on sale or barter has been drastically reduced. Trade is becoming unilateral: with funds from the emigrants, the investment of the communities seems to focus mainly on livestock. It is their bank!

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(91) Ibid, p.39.

(92) "Operations undertaken in a communal setting have been highly successful... by... their capacity to activate and organize themselves around technical recommendations." War on Want, p.10.

Thus, the women's energies cannot suffice to support a society which still considers itself to be rigidly structured. One cannot, therefore, help conclude with this somewhat pessimistic quote on revitalizing the region:

> Quelque soit la persistance d'une coherénce fondamentale, les villages du Guidimakha voyaient d'une manière générale leur système de production agricole évoluer dans le sens d'un repli d'ensemble, marqué par un resserrement de l'éventail de ses potentialités... et un retrécissement de son champ spatial d'intervention... (93)

V. THE WOLOFS AND THE BAMBARAS

It was impossible for us to find written documentation on the Wolofs and the Bambaras of Mauritania, two groups found at both ends of the Senegal River, one to the west and the other to the east. They form small ethnic communities with bonds to their original groups, especially the Wolofs. Nonetheless, the Bambaras and Wolof are groups that maintain a strong social and cultural identity living among the more predominant ethnic groups and having established either trade relations or matrimonial ties with them. Anthropological, sociological and ethnic literature of Mauritania whispers not a word about them. Therefore, it is only with extreme hesitation that we shall introduce the most general and traditional traits of the Wolofs as described in another country, Senegal. We have already observed earlier that nearly the same situation exists for the Peulhs and the Soninkes, and the rare existing

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(93) "However persistent their basic coherence, the villages of the Guidimakha, generally speaking, saw their system of agricultural production evolve toward an overall recession, marked by a narrowing of the range of its potential... and a shrinking of its spatial field of activity." Ibid, p.89.

references to these latter two Mauritanian ethnic groups reveal a situation different from that of the larger ethnic groups from which they originate. (94) Here, therefore, is an interesting topic for researchers. However, it is worth insisting that serious sociological research specifically focused on these groups should be undertaken within the framework of the OMVS projects and projects concerning Mauritania if it is intended to integrate them in the development planned for their regions.

THE WOLOFS (95)

A. Brief Background and Economic Activities

As is the case everywhere in the Sahel, the traditional political and social system of the Wolof is not only complex but very formalistic. Throughout Islamization, colonization and the independence movement, their organization has been severely shaken. Yet, certain customs still hold, especially in regards to social relations.

Originally, the Wolofs occupied a region north of Senegal. But during the XIVth and XVth centuries, the Peulhs pushed them back from their original location, the Fouta Toro, towards a region farther west, and the Moors drove them southward into the region that they now occupy in Senegal, where they established trading relations with Kayor, Baol and Jolof.

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(94) We will not touch upon the Bambara, that small group of some 1,100 persons in southeastern Mauritania, since it appears that the Mauritanian groups, ex-slaves of the Soninkes are, according to Downs and Reyna, fundamentally different from the Bambara of Mali (see Paques) where the caste systems, age groups, and centralization of powers typical of the Sahel predominate. In Mauritania, we are told that the Bambaras are fiercely egalitarian. This contrasts strongly with all the other ethnic groups in the country.

(95) Gamble, p.15.

This constant movement of the Wolofs is reflected in their oral traditions, in which countless tales relate their migrations and conquests. This also explains why the Wolofs are considered to be a mixture of Peulh, Toucouleur, Serer, Mandingo and Bambara... and why, according to Gamble, there is a hesitation to support the claim that the Wolofs constitute an ethnic group. (96) Still, they have merged into a culturally assimilated people and dynamic merchants, cultivators and owners of livestock, which they leave in the care of the Peulhs.

In the rural community, the Wolof's primary activity is agriculture. Moreover, in the northern region of the Senegal River, the Wolofs of Mauritania are identified with the "Walo" region, that part which is flooded by the river and which they cultivate: they are called the Walo-Walo.

Contrary to the other ethnic groups, there is greater co-opration between the sexes although traditionally there existed a division of labor on the land between men and women: the men grew millet and the women grew rice, as with the Soninkes. Today, as elsewhere throughout Mauritania and Senegal, the salaried work force plays a larger part in agricultural labor, especially in the cultivation of groundnuts, the great wealth of the Wolofs. It must be pointed out that this great wealth prevails in Senegal and is only a secondary, though important crop for the Wolofs in Mauritania. (97)

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(96) Gamble, p.15.

(97) The religious movement of the Mourides in Senegal, initially begun in the XIXth century by Amadou Bamba, a Mauritanian Toucouleur, formed socio-economic communities which had an undeniable impact on Senegalese agriculture. However, these highly structured and disciplined communities had no impact on Mauritania.

The system of land tenure varies enormously from one community to the next among the Wolofs, in relation to the population's level of stability and the demographic pressure on the land. In most of their communities, whoever clears the land has the right to cultivate it, and this right is respected until the land is deserted. In a community, the free born and the chief of the village have first choice of the land. The chief has full authority to settle any disputes over land distribution. Next are the other members of the community and finally the strangers who divide the remaining fields among them selves. In contrast, in highly populated communities, the free born control all arable land surrounding the village, while those of slave origin are obliged to go deeper into the bush to clear their fields.

What is the role of the Wolof today as middleman in the monetized trading between Mauritania and Senegal? Have the Wolofs taken up the thread of this new type or is it still in the hands of the more urbanized Wolofs of Senegal? We cannot say - or at least, literature does not permit us to answer our numerous questions.

B. Brief Description: Political and Social Organization

At one time, there existed a noble class among the Wolofs, the gelowar, who dominated the Wolof communities and whose leaders, the bur, were elected, like the Toucouleurs, from among the elders, who had to belong to a specific lineage which changed according to the region. Each caste had an elected representative who served as intermediary between his caste and the leader and who could thereby be more powerful than the village chief, the damal, who did not belong to this noble class. Hence, the power was controlled and strongly

centralized under the command of the bur. The women in each chieftancy also had a representative, usually the mother of the bur, who enjoyed certain privileges (for example: the villagers answerable to the chieftancy cared for her fields) and had the authority to settle problems concerning women, adultery, divorce, quarrels, etc.

The social organization of the Wolofs is characterized by five basic elements: (i) patriarchy and matriarchy exist and vary according to the community (98) (ii) apart from a few exceptions, endogomy dominates in all social classes: (iii) men enjoy great mobility and are free to chose their place of residence; (iv) age groups, unlike the Soninkes, Bambaras and Toucouleurs, are not of the least importance and; (v) the social stratification, so strict in the rural area, does not seem to exist in the urban towns.

Certainly social stratification among the Wolofs has undergone greater changes and more adaptations than among the other ethnic groups in Senegal and Mauritania, but there are still three distinct groups typical to the region: the gor (the free born) the Nenyo (the professional castes) and the jam (slaves and freed slaves).

This short report, which has provided a superficial analysis of the Wolofs and is silent about the Bambaras, reveals the extremely deplorable lack of interest in these ethnic groups, resulting in a total absence of documentation on the subject.

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(98) However, Gamble, p.44, does not explain the reason for this differentiation nor the criteria governing these kinship ties.

V. CONCLUSION

A quick perusal of this report can only accentuate the enormous gaps in information on the various Black African ethnic groups of Mauritania, both from the historical as well as sociological viewpoints. However, this analysis presents the essence of available documentation and again exposes the lack of information. As we have attempted to explain throughout these pages, we have not claimed to have gone to the heart of the subject matter or presented a detailed analysis of the data.

We have pointed out the wide gaps in the role of women, whether in traditional life or in the rapid, perturbing process of socio-economic change. Rare are the references made to inter-ethnic relations although they are very ancient in this country, to the rich and animated history or to the highly mobile populations. The social organization of the ethnic groups, except for the most important, the Moors and the Toucouleurs, has scarcely been touched upon in detail. The attempts made by professional groups, members of castes in all the social systems for integration in national and local economies have not been analyzed. The roles of socialization and traditional and modern education are almost never considered. The countless questions which we have been justly asking ourselves cannot be answered, in light of the present state of Mauritanian sociological research. Hence, we can only insist on the importance of pursuing original sociological analyses based on solid field experience.

Traditional wars, colonialism, independence, droughts, migration and the rural exodus followed by sedentarization of the masses have all mixed the ethnic groups together and left each with a characteristic different from their brothers on the other side of the Senegal River. In fact, whether Toucouleur,

Peulh, Soninke, Wolof or Bambara, each of these groups has diverse origins, and the Senegal River has become the common bond between them on both banks of the river. Nonetheless, one socio-economic peculiarity distinguishes them from the original ethnic groups - the contact between the river-dwelling Moors and Blacks through wars or through their mutual support against a common enemy. For better or for worse, they have found themselves "à la fois associés dans la soumission ou la resistance au même joug, et rivaux dans la même course aux mêmes avantages offerts par la colonisation puis la décolonialisation." (99)

The difficulty of making generalizations about these populations is due to the great differences which exist not only between them but even within the same ethnic group living in the various regions. Nevertheless, there are some similarities in their social structures and their economic and vocational activities. All of the ethnic groups, aside from the Bambaras of Mauritania perhaps, about whom too little is known, have a highly hierarchical social structure deeply rooted in their socio-economic and political habits. The social stratification of nobles, free born, castes and slaves is a leitmotif which runs through these ethnic groups. To varying degrees, all are experiencing social changes which provoke internal changes in domestic and group relationships. Today all have two dominant activities which have been either upset or revaluated

(99) ... to be both partners when under or rebelling against the same yoke and simultaneously rivals in the race for the rewards offered by colonization and then by decolonialization." De Chassey, 1978, p.101.

by the drought of the 70's: agriculture and livestock raising. However, trade is growing in importance, facilitated by a consumer economy.

Like the Arab Bedouins and the Eskimos of Alaska, peasants of all these ethnic groups use various terms to express nuances in their "raw material": the camel for the Arab, snow for the Eskimo, and soil for river dwellers. The variety of terms for arable or uncultivatable soil provides insight into the sociological and economic importance of each of these types to the group. Hence, the Toucouleurs have nine terms to describe their fertile soils, the walo, and five for their arid soils, the dieri. (100) We have seen that the Soninkes determine a person's social position and kinship in relation to his prescribed occupation in a certain type of field.

In all of the ethnic groups mentioned, the habitat and therefore kinship is the basic unit, whether or not it represents the extended or immediate family...

Drought, migration and a market economy have deeply influenced the way of life of the ethnic groups of northern and southern Mauritania, and the outcome of these events has not yet really been grasped. It is thus indispensable that, even before establishing a constructive development approach which would touch the most intimate part of the populations - their traditional, economic, social, political and eating attitudes - an effort should be made to harness this process which leads from tradition to change, the latter capable of being negative and positive at the same time.

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(100) See O. Ba, pp. 9-10.

Thus, in our upcoming studies on Social Changes in Mauritania, we shall introduce three aspects which in our opinion are the determining factors in the near and long-term future of all ethnic groups: (i) the Future of Pastoralism, (ii) the Social Organization of Agricultural Production and (iii) Migration and Urbanization in Mauritania. A study on Land Tenure will be incorporated into the second study.

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