

SENEGAL: A TYPICALLY AFRICAN COUNTRY?

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ABSTRACT. *Senegal: A Typically African Country?* The young nation of West Africa, part of the former French colonial system, has a long history showing a clear integration within the context of the Sahel region. After independence, it followed a particular evolution: though its economic and social development was not free of the contradictions and the failures so characteristic for former colonies, compared to other African states, Senegal showed a considerable political stability, successfully avoiding civil wars, military coups and dictatorships and maintaining a multiparty system. However, recent evolutions show a certain tendency towards constitutional instability, a weakening of the rule of law and certain signs of drift towards authoritarian governing. The present international situation of the Sahel and of West Africa represent a further challenge for Senegal, because it can play a crucial role there showing a positive example, on the condition of preserving its stability and democracy.

Keywords: *colonialism, slavery, négritude, independence, French Community, Françafrique, elite, president, crisis, coup d'État, corruption.*

In March 2023 we had the opportunity to participate at an Erasmus+ mobility in Senegal, at the University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar. The first conversation with our colleagues was an introductory one and among others they asked us whether we visited Africa before. After we told them we both visited Morocco and Madagascar a couple of years ago, they replied that those countries, though geographically belong to Africa, were however not quite the “real Africa”. “You have to come to sub-Saharan Africa to experience that” they told us.

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After all, what can be considered as the “real Africa” or typically African, when we compare countries and peoples? Senegal is certainly situated in the so-called “Afrique Noire” (Black Africa). However, if we compare it to other African countries, it does not always fit in a pattern.

From the geographic point of view, Senegal can be mostly considered as a country of the Sahel region, though the second smallest (after Eritrea): situated between the 12th and 17th parallels, its climate makes a transition between the dry tropical, desert climate of its northern neighbour Mauritania and the subequatorial, grassland climate of its southern neighbours, with a rather short rainy season during summer. The northern half of the country receives between 200-600 mm of rainfall per year and is dominated by shrubland (semidesert), while its southern half is more humid and the typical vegetation is wooded grassland (savanna). The climate of the Sahel region used to be more humid in prehistoric times, which favoured the early apparition of agriculture and a higher population density, compared not only to the neighbouring Sahara, but especially to the more southern regions of West Africa, which used to be mostly covered by evergreen or deciduous tropical forests.

1. The Republic of Senegal: a historical review

The territory of the Senegambia region has been inhabited since prehistoric times, the oldest archaeological findings (bifacial chopped stone axes and other tools from the Cape Verde peninsula and from the area of Rufisque) being dated as palaeolithic tools. Hunter-gatherers and fishermen in the coastal area were probably speaking proto-saharan or proto-berber (Afroasiatic) languages.

In the neolithic era, the stone tools became much more diversified and accompanied by ceramics and other kitchen remains, proving the presence of an important population of fishermen and traders in the Atlantic Coast area. Following the dessication of the Sahara (cca 3500 BCE), the southward migration of Saharan peoples and the expansion of the Niger-Congo language peoples can be associated with the expansion of the Sahel agriculture. The first commonly cultivated crops were millet (with fonio as its local variety) and broomcorn (sorgho), later barley and African rice too, while livestock was mainly represented by goats, sheep and cattle.

An interesting theory about the origins of the Senegalese was launched by the famous historian Cheikh Anta Diop, who was firmly convinced about the strong connection between (if not the direct origins of) the first inhabitants of Senegal and the ancient Egyptians. Oral tradition also claims that some people,

such as the Dia-Ogo, came from the Nile valley. However, the desertification of the Sahara represented a major obstacle for long distance contacts in ancient times (the horse and the camel were much later domesticated), so the influence of Egypt in Africa during the rule of the pharaohs cannot be proved to have been effective outside of the Nile river basin and North Africa (Iliffe, J., 2022), not to mention the completely different linguistic history of West Africa (dominated by the Niger-Congo language family) and the Nile valley (the ancient Egyptian was a branch of the Afroasiatic languages, besides the Semitic and Cushitic branches, and their southern neighbours were speaking Nilotic languages).

The origins of the Niger-Congo family and of the Sudanese Africans is still under debate, but most probably they migrated initially in the fifth millennium BCE from an area situated in today's Eastern Nigeria and Cameroon, in the Benue, Nyong and Sanaga rivers basins. The spread of territory occupied by the Niger-Congo peoples at the beginning of the fourth millennium BCE ran from the Senegal river in the west to Cameroon in the east (Meredith, M., 2014). The western zone was inhabited by the sub-groups known as Volta, Mande and North-West Atlantic or Senegambian languages, of which the Serer-Fulani-Wolof branch became predominant in present day Senegal.

The protohistorical period (first millennium BCE) was represented in Senegal by the presence of metallurgy (at first copper and later iron processing) and some megalithic circles built of mostly volcanic rocks in the frontier region with the Gambia. Iron processing and agriculture were introduced, according to the oral tradition, by the Dia-Ogo people, who came here in the 6th century BCE from present day Mauritania.

Migration always shaped the peopling of Africa, but by the end of the first millennium CE the most important ethnic groups that inhabited Senegambia were already living in the region: the Wolof (or Ouolof/Jolof) presumably came from the north and settled between the Senegal River delta and the town of Diourbel, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ferlo Desert; the Serer, living initially in the Tekhrur Kingdom, were later displaced by the Muslim Fulbe populations; the Peul (also named Fulani/Fulbe/Pular), a pastoral people who later spread into more than a dozen of African countries of the Sahel region, most of them in today's Niger and northern Nigeria; the Tukolor (or Toucouleur), a Fulbe-speaking people who later became sedentary and were among the first to convert to Islam; the Soninke (or Sarakolé), a Mande-speaking ethnic group spread in Mali, southern Mauritania, Guinea, Gambia and eastern Senegal, founders of the Ghana Empire; the Mandingue (or Malinka/Mandinka/Mende), who founded the Mali empire in the 13th century and are spread today in several countries of West Africa; the Diola (or Jola/Joola) from southern Senegal, predominantly in the Casamance River basin.

Climate change had also a great influence on African migration patterns, as it still has today. In West Africa, after a rather wet period before 1000 CE, came a prolonged dry period from c. 1000 to 1500, followed again by a wet period from c. 1500 to 1640 in which geographical boundaries shifted, and with those boundaries went movements of people; after 1640 a new dry period followed, with further migrations (Green, T., 2020).

Arab chronicles such as *Tarikh al-Sudan*, *Tarikh el Fetach* or the works of El Bekri are attesting that during more than 1300 years in this part of Africa, from the 4th until the 16th century CE, permanent dynastic struggles took place, when smaller states were conquered by their stronger neighbours. The first states in the western extremity of Africa appeared in the 4th century CE: the Empire of Ghana which, at its maximal extent, included the eastern part of present day Senegal. Ghana was one of the main providers of gold for the Mediterranean area, having rich gold mines at Galam, on the lower Falémé River (a tributary of the Senegal). The gold from Galam was exported to Morocco starting from the first centuries of CE, and it finally caused the decline and fall of the Ghana Empire, invaded in the 12th century by the Almoravids (Radian, L., 1966).

The first local political entity was the Kingdom of Tekrour, a rival state of Ghana, created by the Tukolor on the southern banks of the Senegal River. South of Tekrour the Dia-Ogo founded the Kingdom of Namandirou, later named Fuuta-Tooro, where Soninke, Serer and Peul (Fulbe) people lived together. The first predominantly Wolof state was founded in the 14th century by Ndiadiane Ndiaye, which reunited by 1360 the smaller kingdoms situated between the Senegal and the Gambia river mouths into a much bigger state, the Jolof Empire. By this time the influence of Islam became preponderant, more and more people of the Sahel region becoming Muslims.

Between the 13th and 17th centuries most of the western extremity of Africa was included into the Mali or Mandingo Empire, the largest empire of West Africa, founded by Sundiata Keita (1214-1255), which replaced the former Ghana empire in the region. At its maximal extension, at the end of Mansa Musa's reign in 1337, it included not only the upper basin of the Niger River, but the whole of Senegambia until the Atlantic Ocean to the west and to the cities of Gao and Tadmekka in the east. Between 1235 and 1265, one of Sundiata's generals, Tiramakang Traoré founded the Mandingo state of Kaabu with its capital located at Kansala in the Gambia. By the 16th century its influence extended over what are now The Gambia, the southern Senegalese region of Casamance and Guinea-Bissau. This was a federation with a fierce warrior aristocracy, who shaped Kaabu's strength and secured its power for centuries to come. To the north of the Gambia River was the most powerful state

in the 15th century, Great Jolof, with five provinces: Jolof, Cayor, Waalo, Bwol and Siin. The size of Jolof cavalry by the 16th century reveals extensive connections to trans-Saharan and also Atlantic trade (Green, T., 2020).

The first Europeans who reached in the 15th century the shores of Senegal were the Portuguese: Dinis Días, the father of Bartolomeo and Diogo Días, was the first navigator to go in 1444 “beyond the land of the Moors” and reach the furthest point west of Africa that he named Cape Green (Cabo Verde), situated today in the city of Dakar, and Île de Gorée, which he named Ilha de Palma. In 1445 Nunho Tristao reached the mouth of the Senegal river and in 1446 probably that of the Gambia too. Alvise Cadamosto, hired by prince Henry the Navigator, explored in 1455 the Canary Islands and Madeira, then the mouths of the Gambia River. One year later he discovered the Cape Verde Islands and reached the Geba River delta (in today’s Guinea-Bissau).

The Portuguese founded in 1536 a settlement on the island of Gorée (known before as Bezeguiche) and they soon used it as a base for slave trade between West Africa, North Africa, the islands of Madeira, Azores, Cape Verde and Sao Tomé, then across the Atlantic Ocean into Brazil and the Caribbean. The 16th and 17th centuries brought to the region competition from other European sea powers too: the Dutch conquered and founded their first comptoir at Île de Gorée in 1588.

The French arrived at the mouths of the Senegal in 1626 and built a fortress on Ndar Island, renamed Saint Louis. In 1633, cardinal Richelieu granted the monopoly of commerce in Senegal and Gambia to the *Compagnie normande*, founded in 1626 by Jean Rozée from Rouen, which became in 1634 the *Compagnie du Cap Vert*. The French occupied James Island in 1651 (in The Gambia) and Saint Louis in 1659. In 1664, these settlements were ceded to the French Company of the West Indies, founded by Colbert. In 1677, during the Franco-Dutch War, a fleet led by admiral d’Estrées destroyed the fortifications of Île de Gorée and took the island. In 1678 captain Jean Du Casse founded the comptoirs of Rufisque, Portudal and Joal, then took and destroyed the Dutch fortress of Arguin Island (in today’s Mauritania). In 1679, the *Compagnie du Sénégal* obtained the right of trade between Cap Blanc (Mauritania) and the mouth of the Gambia river, where it founded the comptoir of Albreda (today Albadarr in The Gambia). In 1685, King Louis XIV signed the so-called “Black Code”, establishing the rules for the treatment of Negroes in the colonies (Radian, L., 1966), while Île de Gorée remained one of the main centers of slave trade in Africa.

Between 1692 and 1783, several wars between France and England caused the colonies of Saint Louis and Île de Gorée to change ownership: the English took both in 1692, then again in 1758. The Paris Treaty of 1763 (ending the Seven Years War) gave back Île de Gorée to the French, but the rest of Senegal

remained under British rule. In 1765 the French bought from the King of Cayor the land between Saint Louis and Dakar. The Cap-Vert peninsula was settled in the 15th century by the Lebu people, who founded the village of Ndakaru, at the bay across Île de Gorée (where is today the port of Dakar), that became the capital of the Lebu Kingdom (Meredith, M. 2014). The other villages of the peninsula like Ouakam, Ngor, Yoff and Hann represent today distinctively Lebu neighbourhoods of the city of Dakar. In 1783, according to the Treaty of Versailles (ending the American War for Independence), the settlements of Senegal came back to France, who recognized in exchange the British possession of the Gambia River valley. Then, between 1800 and 1814, during the Napoleonic Wars, the forts of Saint Louis and Île de Gorée were again occupied by the British, but the Paris Treaty of 1814 brought back Senegal into French possession, just like the majority of French colonies occupied by the British after 1793.

The slave trade was first banned by France during the Great Revolution in 1794, then by the British in 1807. Though emperor Napoleon I reintroduced slavery into the French colonies in 1803, he banned the slave trade in 1815, and in 1848 the second French Republic abolished slavery on all French territories. However, the slave trade within the African continent continued in the 19th century, until it was finally banned.

In the 1830's France started building its second colonial empire. After the conquest of Algiers in 1830, the French created in 1845 three provinces in Algeria, conquered the Moroccan port of Mogador in 1844 and started the conquest of the Ivory Coast in 1842-1843. Admiral Bouët-Willaumez, governor of Senegal from 1843 to 1845, extended French sovereignty by founding in 1843 the new comptoirs of Assinie and Grand-Bassam in Senegal and the town of Libreville in Gabon, the later for the settlement of freed African slaves. The second French Republic also gave a parliamentary representation for Saint Louis in 1848. In parallel they encouraged the missionary activity of the Franciscans and Jesuites, especially within the heathen population of the south.

The extension of the colonies remained also a top priority of the second French Empire. The nomination of general Louis Faidherbe as governor of Senegal in 1854 was a clear sign of an even more aggressive colonial policy. On November 1st 1854 he founded the Colony of Gorée and Dependencies, separate from Senegal. In 1855-1856, under the pretext of the "pacification" of Senegal and securing the free navigation on the Senegal River, the French fought the guerilla of the Trarza Moors led by Mohammed Habib. Between 1855 and 1863, they crushed the resistance of the Toucouleur and Serer peoples, in 1857 occupied Dakar, founded the port of Dakar and organized the corps of *tirailleurs sénégalais* of well-trained African soldiers who were to become soon one of the main forces of the French colonial army. Between 1854 and 1865 Faidherbe

organized the *Quatre communes* of Senegal (Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar and Rufisque), whose statute was recognised by the Third Republic. In 1862-1864 France annexed the territories of Salum, Siné, Baol and Casamance and finally in 1865 the Kingdom of Cayor (Radian, L. 1966). By extending the French influence much beyond the boundaries of Senegal, Faidherbe became the founder of French West Africa.

The conquest of West Africa was realized according to Faidherbe's plan to connect Senegal to the Niger River by constructing a series of fortifications between 1880 and 1883. After this the French were able to take into possession the middle Niger valley by the successful assault on Tombouctou under commander (future Marshall) Joffre in 1894 and the expedition of captain Monteil to Lake Tchad. French Guinea and the Ivory Coast were occupied by 1883 and finally Dahomey in 1886 (Duclert, V., 2022).

At the Conference of Berlin (or "Congo Conference", 1884-1885), the European powers divided the still unconquered parts of Africa between themselves, establishing the future spheres of interest of the European powers. Among others they agreed on new ground rules for European occupation of Africa's coastline. Henceforth, any state wanting to claim African lands on any part of the coastline was required to notify in advance other states signing the Berlin agreement to enable them to make known any claims of their own. Furthermore, to be valid, all future claims had to be supported by "effective occupation" (M. Meredith, 2014, p. 394). Consequently, Congo was recognized as a possession of Leopold II, King of Belgium, Sudan as a British possession, the frontiers of Nigeria, British East Africa (present Kenya and Uganda), German East Africa (Tanganyika, Rwanda, Burundi), Cameroon, Togo, German South-West Africa (present day Namibia), Rhodesia and Nyassaland (Malawi) were delimited.

The third French Republic organized between 1885 and 1895 a series of expeditions of exploration and conquest in the Sahara, the upper Niger basin and Central Africa, followed by the founding of new colonies: Mauritania, French Sudan (Mali), Niger, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Tchad, Oubangui-Chari (present Central African Republic), French Congo and Gabon. In 1886 an agreement was signed with Portugal according to which the town of Ziguinchor with the region of Casamance became a French possession. On the 16th of June 1895 Senegal, Mauritania, French Sudan, French Guinea, Upper Volta, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire and Dahomey (present Benin) were reunited in a super-colony of 4689000 km² (about seven times the size of France), named *Afrique Occidentale Française* (French West Africa), recognized internationally in 1898. Its first capital was at Saint-Louis, then from 1902 at Dakar. With the new colonies of North Africa, Equatorial Africa, Madagascar and Indochina, the worldwide extent of the French colonial empire was increased ten times between 1870 and 1914.

Though relatively short-lived in their great majority (compared to the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and British empires), the African colonies played an important role in the history of the French Republic. Though there is today a rather general consensus about the unjust, exploitative character of the colonial regimes, there is a strong debate about how profitable they really were for the metropolises. In the case of France, the African colonies, though very extended, were rather poor in natural resources and sparsely populated, where effective control (especially in the Sahara desert and in the rainforest areas) was rather a fiction than reality, so their exploitation was not very profitable. According to V. Duclert, the colonisation was technically a disaster, politically a failure and morally a shame for the Republic. The maintenance of the colonies was however a question of geopolitical influence and of international prestige. The majority of the French public opinion and its leaders were firmly convinced about the “*mission civilisatrice*” of France in the world and were willing to accept the huge expenses of the development, management and defence of the colonies. The source of power for the pro-colonial parliamentary group was an extended clientele in the colonies, within the army and among the businessmen. It was also leaning on a nebula of associations, rather militant than scientific, like the *Société de Géographie* from Paris. Founded in 1821, it was spreading an ideal of discovery and conquest, especially in Africa. After 1890, the *Comité de l’Afrique Française*, initiated by Hypollite Percher, financed several expeditions in Africa (Duclert, V., 2022).

For Senegal, two different statuses were introduced after 1901: the inhabitants of the *Quatre communes* were French citizens with full rights, while the newly-colonised territories were submitted to the legal system of *indigénat*, which allowed the discrimination of African natives and their submission by punishment and forced labour. Under the influence of deputy Blaise Diagne, mayor of Dakar between 1920 and 1934, a special status could be chosen by the inhabitants of the *Quatre communes* from 1916.

The turn of the 19th-20th centuries was the period of Mouride revival in Senegambia. The Mouride Brotherhood was a Sufi order with the headquarters in the city of Touba, founded in 1884 by Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba Mbakke, a Muslim mystic and ascetic marabout who, though did not support the French conquest of West Africa, did not wage outright war on them, but preached the *jihad al-akbar*, the fight through hard work, learning and fear of God. The Mourides had an important contribution in the spread of intensive agriculture in Senegal, especially for commercial crops such as peanuts.

The project of general Gallieni (commander of French Sudan between 1886 and 1888), to construct a railway relying Dakar to Tombouctou (the Dakar-Niger railway) was realized between 1900 and 1924. The railway was to play a major role in the transport of peanuts, the main cash crop of Senegal and Mauritania. A much larger project of a railway between Paris and Dakar (through Algeria and Morocco) was never finalized, the last station being built at Colomb-Béchar (today Tafilalet in Morocco). In exchange, the air connection between France and Senegal was realized in the 1920s: Jean Mermoz flew in 1925 from Casablanca to Dakar and the writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry started mail flights in 1926 between Toulouse and Dakar. Between 1929 and 1932, in order to balance the effects of the Great Depression, the French colonial administration quadrupled the amount of investments in the colonies, mainly in the form of government loans. An official report declared in 1932 that “urban Dakar and its rural satellites became vast construction sites”. The extension of the cities, the increase of cash crop production and a mounting public debt introduced the colonies into a new phase of under-development (Ilfie, J., 2022).

The French colonies played also an important role in the world wars, sending thousands of conscripts in both wars who fought on the fronts of Europe, Africa and the Middle East. In 1940, 63000 tirailleurs were enlisted of which 24000 were dead or missing in action by 1945. Between 1940-1943, the colonial authorities of French West Africa remained loyal to the fascist regime of Vichy. In September 1940, the British navy, accompanied by the French Free Forces of general De Gaulle, attempted unsuccessfully to occupy the port of Dakar (operation Menace/Battle of Dakar). Pushed back by the defense of the French government forces lead by governor-general Boisson, the operation was a total fiasco.

After the war, the French government made clear the intention of maintaining the colonies under its control. The massacre of Thiaroye sent a brutal message on this matter: on December 1st 1944, in a military camp near Dakar, dozens of Senegalese tirailleurs were shot and 34 were imprisoned because they demanded their wages for their four years captivity in France (Blanc, G., 2022). On December 26th 1945 France joined the Bretton Woods system and created the official currency of the French colonies, the CFA.

In conducting their “civilizing mission” in Africa, the French had been highly successful in cultivating a small black elite to whom they granted full rights as citizens on condition that they accepted assimilation into French society and rejected their African heritage, family law and customs. In outlook, members of the elite saw themselves, and were seen, as Frenchmen, brought up in a tradition of loyalty to France, willingly accepting its government, its language and culture,

and taking a certain pride in being citizens of a world power. Their political aspirations centered on securing for the African populations the same rights and privileges enjoyed by metropolitan Frenchmen. No one campaigned for independence and political debate tended to reflect metropolitan tastes. One of the main means of creating a loyal elite was the school system. To accomplish this role, in Senegal the William Ponty Normal School (named after colonial administrator William Merlaud-Ponty) was founded in 1903, where many later African celebrities, such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Modibo Keita, Hubert Maga, Mathias Sorgho, Hamani Diori, Mamadou Dia ou Abdoulaye Wade were educated (Iliffe, J., 2022).

The close relationship that France strove to establish with its African elite was best personified by two men: Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal and Felix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire. Both rose to become ministers in the French government and both acted as staunch advocates of the "*Union Française*". However, Senghor soon began to react against assimilation, formulating a philosophy termed "négritude", a black consciousness that served as an intellectual precursor to nationalism (Meredith, M., 2011). Another important representative of Senegalese thought was Blaise Diagne, member of the French parliament between 1914-1934, who was at first a pan-African thinker but later formulated a proper philosophy called "diagnisme". According to Diagne, the future success of African societies should not be based on brutal revolutions, but on "reasonable evolution" and cultural assimilation into more developed civilizations. Because of his loyalist pro-French opinions, Diagne was labelled as anti-African by radicals and pan-African activists.

The *Union Française* was proclaimed in 1946 including metropolitan France and the territories of the French colonial empire. Senegal became a *territoire outre-mer* (overseas territory) of France. As a result of the strengthening anticolonial movement, Senegal and other colonies of French West Africa became in 1956 autonomous territories and introduced the universal suffrage for men and women. In 1958 Charles de Gaulle (as first president of the Fifth French Republic) proposed a new constitutional project for all the French territories in Africa. Submitted to a referendum on September 28th 1958, 97.2% of the Senegalese chose the status of member of the French Community, with a constitution following the French model.

In order to preserve the regional unity, Senegal and the Sudanese republic (former French Sudan) created in 1959 the Mali Federation, but soon tensions appeared between the two members of the federation, so it was dissolved on August 20th 1960. On September 28th 1960 both Senegal and Mali proclaimed their independence and became separately members of the U.N.

2. Characteristics and peculiarities of present-day Senegal

Most of the French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa gained their independence in 1960 and France remained for decades after that date strongly involved in the development and defense of these countries, although the French Community has ceased to function de facto since 1961. It was replaced by the *Union Africaine et Malgache* and from 1965 by the *Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache* (African and Malagasy Union), an intergovernmental organization created to promote cooperation among newly independent states in Francophone Africa. Until its dissolution in 1974, it tried to present itself as an alternative to the Organization of African Unity (Búr, G., 2011).

General De Gaulle counted on Africa during World War II and he was counting on it even more after the war. Facing the hegemony of the two great world powers, he expected that African colonies would restore the power of Europe and especially of France. Even if De Gaulle was out of power between 1946 and 1957, the Fourth Republic followed the trail of Gaullist colonial politics and engaged in three directions: the economic exploitation of the colonies, their military control and the selection of African elites supposed to preserve the interests of France. After the independence, the French Community was meant to reinforce France on the international stage, to help it procure the raw materials that were lacking in the country and find opportunities on the African markets, conditioning the help for development on the subordination to the French economy. As for the new African heads of state, if they acceded to independence in a subordinate manner, they were rewarded with the monopoly of power they were looking for since the end of the war. This is how *Françafrique* worked, put into practice by men like Houphouët-Boigny (who used the term *Françafrique* for the first time) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (Blanc, G., 2022).

Senghor was very successful as a poet and a philosopher, but his presidency received less favourable reviews. The close ties he maintained with France prompted accusations from radicals that he was lending himself to neocolonial interests rather than promoting the kind of African socialism he claimed to support. He relied on French trade and industry, and kept a French praetorian guard to ensure national security. French paratroopers promptly intervened in December 1962, when Prime Minister Mamadou Dia accused him of subordinating the economy to the interests of his acolytes and tempted a coup. Senghor refused to countenance a more rapid rate of Africanisation by allowing unqualified Africans to take over jobs from qualified Frenchmen. In Dakar the French population actually grew after independence. Despite French assistance, Senegal's economy remained largely stagnant, as demographic growth effectively canceled out the increase of the economy. At the same time

Senegal became increasingly encumbered by external debt. Senghor steered through these difficulties with a mixture of compromise, coercion and pork-barrel politics. He kept the support of the Muslim Brotherhoods by providing marabouts with special favours, such as large loans and strategically placed development projects. He bought off political opponents by offering them government posts and material benefits. He reacted to student protests with strong arm tactics - tear gas and arrests. At the age of 74, Senghor announced his decision to resign in favour of his protégé, Abdou Diouf. Senghor thus became the first African leader since independence to give up power voluntarily. The tradition of multi-party politics he established in Senegal survived. In 1981 Diouf passed legislation allowing for the legalization of all political parties. He went on to win several elections until accepting defeat in 2000 (Meredith, M., 2011).

On July 30th 1981, an attempted coup d'état in The Gambia resulted in the intervention of the Senegalese army in order to reinvest President Dawda Jawara into power. Following these events, Gambia agreed to sign a union agreement with Senegal and create the *Senegambia Confederation*, which would exist until 1989, when it was dissolved because of mutual disagreements between the two member countries.

Between 1989 and 1991 a serious conflict broke out between Senegal and its northern neighbour Mauritania on the basis of older ethnic conflicts, this time on the matter of the water of the Senegal river and the project of two dams, the Diama and the Manantali Dam. The conflict resulted in a temporary break of diplomatic relations between the two countries, tens of thousands of victims, thousands of refugees on both sides and serious repercussions on internal political life in Senegal.

Another conflict erupted in the southern province of Casamance, whose population of mainly Diola origins previously already resisted to islamisation, enslavement and French colonial administration. Exploited as the country's main granary and at the same time neglected because of geographic isolation, the province used to be one of the main tourist attractions of Senegal. Sporadic fighting took place between a separatist group, the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) and government forces following which tourism ceased to work, not lastly because of the presence of landmines in the region.

In 1998 a military coup throw the southern neighbour Guinea-Bissau into a civil war, followed by the intervention of the Senegalese army to help president Joao Vieira, finally ousted by the rebels in May 1999.

The presidential elections of March 19th 2000, won in the second round by the longtime leader of the opposition, Abdoulaye Wade, brought the fall of president Abdou Diouf. Wade abolished the Senate and the Economic Council in 2000, then in 2001 succeeded in amending the constitution, reducing the presidential mandate from 7 to 5 years, dissolving the National Assembly and naming Mme Madior Bouaye as first female prime minister of Senegal in March 2001. The tragedy of the Joola, the ferry boat connecting Dakar to Ziguinchor, capsized in September 2002, caused the death of more than 1800 people and resulted in the resignation of Mme Bouaye.

Abdoulaye Wade, after being reelected as president in 2007, reestablished the Senate and a seven-year presidential mandate in 2008. His liberal economic policy brought significant foreign investments into Senegal and spectacular investments in infrastructure, but also resulted in the decay of agriculture, the crash of several industrial sectors (like the chemicals' industry), a high unemployment rate, an increasing number of emigrants seeking refuge especially in the Canary Islands and a dependence on the Senegalese diaspora in covering the needs for foreign currency.

The opposition denounced on several occasions a drift into authoritarianism during the mandates of A. Wade, who presented himself for a third mandate in 2012, but was finally defeated by his former Prime Minister Macky Sall. The new president launched a series of institutional reforms in order to reduce government spending and the corruption, creating a national antifraud and anti-corruption agency in 2012. The massive government investments resulted in a 6.8% economic increase in 2018, while the country became increasingly dependent on Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern capital. At the same time, the drift into authoritarianism did not cease: during his first mandate, the Constitution was amended ten times and the electoral law eighteen times. As a result, Macky Sall was reelected for a second term in 2019, then the Parliament abolished (for the third time) the office of Prime Minister between 2019 and 2022, installing a presidential form of government.

In March 2023, based on the opinion of the Constitutional Council of 2019, Macky Sall declared himself eligible for a third presidential mandate. His main opponent, Ousmane Sonko, mayor of Ziguinchor, was charged in 2021 with rape and murder threatening and condemned in March 2023 to two years of prison. His conviction started a series of violent riots in the capital with several deaths and injuries and resulted in his elimination from the list of eligible presidential candidates. In June 2023, president Macky Sall declared that he would not candidate in 2024 for a third term, supporting Prime Minister Amadou Ba as presidential candidate for the Benno Bokk Yakaar coalition.

3. Conclusions

Most of the authors who write about contemporary Africa (Fage, 2002, Meredith, 2011, Iliffe, 2022) draw a grim picture of the post-colonial sub-Saharan countries: a deep under-development with chronic poverty and famines, endemic corruption, turbulent or faked elections and frequent coups d'État resulting in military dictatorships, unscrupulous elites whose only concern is the conservation of their privileges or nouveau riches looking for making even greater fortunes, ethnic conflicts installing into power military casts of blood suckers who are starting civil wars in order to control the natural resources of the occupied territories.

Compared to other African states, Senegal showed a considerable political stability, successfully avoiding civil wars, military coups and dictatorships and maintaining a multiparty system. However, recent evolutions show a certain tendency towards constitutional instability, a weakening of the rule of law and certain signs of drift towards authoritarian governing.

According to M. Meredith (2011, p. 691-693), fifty years after beginning of the independence era, Africa's perspectives are as bleak as ever. Already the world's poorest region, it is falling further and further behind all other regions of the world. With a population rising to more than one billion, real per capita income is lower than in the 1970s. Between 1981 and 2002, the number of people living on poverty nearly doubled. Although Africa possesses enormous mineral wealth, its entire economic output is less than 2 per cent of the world GDP. Its share of world trade and investment is similarly minimal – less than 2 percent. Though there was a period of optimism due to an increase of commodity prices in the mid-2000s, with real GDP rising about 5 percent a year, the improved economic performance did little to reduce unemployment and poverty levels. The prospects of Africa escaping from precipitous decline depend heavily on international assistance. The magnitude of the crisis is too great for African states to resolve by themselves. Most states are effectively bankrupt, weighed down by debt, barely able to raise sufficient funds on their own account to provide a minimum of public services.

On the other hand, the enormous demographic potential of Africa which presently looks rather like a burden, could represent on the long term one of the main strengths and chances for economic development, on the condition of significant improvements in education. Though access to higher education multiplied in the last decades, due mostly to the apparition of dozens of new universities, the lower levels do not show the same progress. In the Francophone countries for instance, while elementary education is in the national languages (like Wolof or Malagasy) or ethnic maternal languages, there is a dual system

within the high schools, with French Lycées (financed by the French government or by private funds) continuing to educate the children of the privileged elites and high schools in local languages for the rest of the students. As teaching in the universities is almost exclusively in French (like in Madagascar), the children of underprivileged families with no access to the Lycées Français do not really have a chance to follow a higher education institution.

The fabulous mineral riches of Africa always attracted all sorts of traders and investors eager to make a profit and this is still true today, but instead of western countries and companies, usually labelled as “neo-colonialist exploiters”, in the last couple of decades more and more investors from China, India and the Arab monarchies of the Gulf gain contracts of development not only in the mining sector, but in the infrastructural and institutional development too, offering generous loans with more than suspect conditions and always ready to pay off officials who do not care too much about enslaving their countries with indebtedment and further economic dependence.

The East-West rivalry was present in Africa during the Cold War and it is unfortunately present again, not only on the field of economic control, but also in the geopolitical fight for new spheres of influence: the recent coups in the former French colonies of Africa (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger and Gabon) show a general shift from French domination, whose military are gradually ousted from the region and replaced by radical Islamic militias or foreign (especially Russian) mercenaries. In the present international context Africa is sadly becoming again a scene for localized conflicts between the superpowers. In this situation, the current government of Senegal is reacting consequently: reinforcing its military and playing a leading role within the ECOWAS, including sending military in different conflict areas of West Africa in order to counter foreign influence and Islamic extremism, both representing serious threats for the stability of the whole continent.

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