

Village roots and city lights

FOR MANY ETHNIC GROUPS in West Africa, travelling and migration have been part of the pattern of life for centuries. But today many young Senegalese feel they have no other choice, as the government's neglect of the farming sector, and high prices and taxes make it impossible to earn a living in the countryside. A lot of migration is temporary — with many men returning from the towns at the end of the dry season — but a substantial number go for good.

Although they may leave their farms to seek a livelihood in Dakar, Paris, Naples, or New York, there are no Senegalese whose true home does not remain their native village. It is the place to which you can always return — though, to keep this option open, you must contribute financially to the welfare of your family and the community.

In the Casamance, to take one example, the small village of Séléki has an outpost in nearby Ziguinchor, and others in Banjul (Gambia), Dakar, and Paris. The absent villagers are able to pool their savings, to help the Village Association to fulfil needs unmet by the central government, such as the building of a school-house or dispensary.

Along the Senegal River, the money sent home by migrants can often amount to as much as 60 per cent of a family's cash income. For most rural people, anything beyond a meagre subsistence has to come from outside — from their wage-earning migrants or, if they're lucky, from voluntary aid agencies. They don't see much of the \$100 a head that official overseas aid is supposed to provide; the largest share of this goes to widening the gulf between city and village.

The pull of the village ...

The magnetic power of the village — and the ability of the Senegalese to switch back and forth between traditional and modern cultures without obvious signs of schizophrenia — is perhaps most strikingly demonstrated by the great gatherings of the Diola people of the Casamance, which take place once every seven years. They are the ceremonies of initiation to manhood, an occasion of profound importance at which the new generation of young men is introduced to the secret rites and myths of their people. Youths who have never been far beyond their village are brought together in the mysteries of animist tradition with graduate students from Harvard or the Sorbonne, who have often flown back specially for the three-week initiation in the sacred forest.

... and the lure of the town

For others who go abroad, the experience may sometimes end in humiliation. France, which is estimated to have a Senegalese community of up to 150,000 — many of them without the proper papers — has recently been clamping down on illegal migrants. Almost every flight from Paris to Dakar (and other West African cities) now carries a small group of deportees, delivered to the departure gate in handcuffs by a posse of *gendarmes*.

On their return, most disappear into the anonymity of Dakar. There they join more than a million other hopefuls, all competing for jobs and living space. Even girls as young as 8 are sent from their villages to find work as housemaids. It seems certain that within a few years Senegal's population will be 50 per cent

urban — a very high rate for an African economy still largely dependent on agriculture. But there is hardly any formal industrial sector in the towns to absorb the incomers; their only hope is in back-street enterprises, otherwise known as the 'informal sector'.

The clerics come to town

It is not only the poor who are leaving the land. Wealthy families of *marabouts*, prompted by the erosion of their peanut empires, have been moving into urban businesses and taking a more direct role in politics. They have acquired such a big stake in Dakar's commercial sector that conceivably they could one day lose the support of the peasantry who have been their faithful followers.

The first hint that such a split was even thinkable came in 1988 when the Khalifa-General of the Mourides instructed the one million members of the brotherhood to vote for the incumbent President Diouf. A sizeable number rebelled, contending that how they voted was not the Khalifa's business. In 1993 there was no such instruction from the holy city of Touba — a tacit admission that the *marabouts* could

not claim to deliver the Mouride vote for the government. In the meantime, many of the Mouride faithful have found themselves in such hardship that they have been unable or unwilling to pay the customary tributes — including weekly farm labour — to their *marabouts*. It is possible that the rural power of the *marabouts* will wane in the years ahead and — if they have to pay the peasants to farm their land — the economics of peanuts will become even more problematical.

Dakar, the consuming capital

Total collapse of the rural economy is being staved off by the young people of Senegal finding jobs in a cold climate 2,000 miles or more from home. But, as Europe locks its gates more firmly against unwanted workers from the South, that source of income can only shrink. Without any other options to keep it afloat, the government of Senegal may finally be forced to contemplate a policy that favours the countryside, empowering those on whom it must ultimately rely to feed the country. The irony is that this is becoming



JEREMY HARTLEY/OXFAM

Down-town Dakar: the offices of the Central Bank of West African States

less and less politically feasible as the population balance swings to the cities.

With 1.5 million people, the Greater Dakar region now has 20 per cent of the country's population, crammed into less than one per cent of its territory. The capital alone has four-fifths of the nation's businesses, three-quarters of all permanent jobs, and three-quarters of all vehicles. Most of the food eaten by the town-dwellers has to be imported, and the peasants unwittingly help to pay for that, in terms of reduced investment and services.

If Dakar absorbs much more than its share of national resources, one thing that must be said is that it has an effective government. Mayor Mamadou Diop, elected for the first time in 1984, has won popularity with some major investments to improve schools and health services, as well as up-grading the city's markets, public gardens, and playing fields. With Dakar still growing at a dizzy rate, he has a lot to do.

JEREMY HARTLEY/OXFAM



High fashion in hairstyles, displayed in a Dakar market

Putting on the style

Whatever the problems of urban growth, there is no denying the spirit and vitality of Dakar, which stands at the crossroads of African and European cultures, with its fine buildings, the hubbub of busy markets, and its almost perfect climate. Down the wide, tree-lined avenues of the old colonial centre, past cafés and smart shops, stroll wealthy Dakarais, sleek and poised in their traditional dress: the epitome of West African elegance.

Clothes and grooming have always been important to the better-off Senegalese families. Hairstyles, in particular, used to be very elaborate. Each family had its own style, so that it constituted a form of personal identity. Up to adolescence, boys as well as girls had their specific styles, but at that age the boys shaved their heads completely. A girl adopted a different hairstyle when she married, including a braid up to the crown of her head, as a sign of eternal union with her husband.

Sometimes, new styles were created to mark important events: candidates in an election would even have 'campaign hairdos' invented for their supporters to wear. But although a few survive, many of the traditional forms of hairdressing have disappeared since today's grandmothers were young. Some styles took days to complete and were difficult to maintain. Now, people have less time, and simpler styles have become the fashion, in clothes as in coiffure. There is, nevertheless, a strong and perhaps growing interest in forms of cultural expression that assert the national identity — and nothing has diminished the aesthetic sense of the Senegalese and their appreciation of elegance.

Night-time in the shanty-town

ONLY A STONE'S THROW away from the bright lights of central Dakar is a *bidonville*: a ramshackle shanty town consisting of long rows of corrugated tin huts. Here live the forgotten people, the poorest of the urban poor.

In a little open space, a stately silk-cotton tree spreads its massive roots. In the maze of alleyways that surround it there are mounds of car parts and old iron waiting to be recycled, a vegetable garden tended by the women of this tin town, and one or two tiny kiosks selling basic supplies like soap and matches. Groups of men sit round glowing braziers in the darkness, talking, smoking. Others pass by like ghosts, exchanging polite greetings.

The shacks are mostly one-room homes, some papered with pages from magazines, others bare. There is just room for one or two beds and some floor space for sleeping mats. No windows. But people have their pride. The shacks are kept as clean as conditions allow, and the residents are getting on with their lives as best they can. The pregnancy rate is high, but there is relatively little prostitution within the community, and little or no violence. Theft, of course, is something else. Pointing to his van, one man grimaces: 'I have to sleep in it, if I don't want it stripped.'

Despite the overcrowding and the lack of the most basic services, there's no time for despondency for people who want to eat tomorrow. In fact, the *bidonvilles* of Dakar have quite a developed economy of their own. The men are mechanics, petty traders, or experts in repairs and recycling. The women take in washing from the neighbourhood, run little cafés in the alleyways, or work on the vegetable plot. One woman won £500 in a lottery a few years ago and invested in a large refrig-

erator. With it she makes ice to sell, and she rents space to people who want to keep food or drinks cold. She hopes that one of her eight children will get an education in order to support the family later.

For such people, education is the shining hope of economic liberation. A family of 10 all live in one room, with no furniture except the beds; but the five school-age girls persevere with their homework, proud of their exercise books and instruction sheets for a basic literacy course in French. Hardly any of the shanty-town children go to school, but the local voluntary organisation, ENDA, is helping with the literacy training. ENDA is also supporting a young man who gives free evening classes in French, English, and Arabic. He has a blackboard installed at the roadside.

But for those who have nothing, there is still no security. This *bidonville* is owned by a foreign company which now wants to evict the whole community and sell the land for development.



JEREMY HARTLEY/ONFAM

A seamstress at work in a shanty-town on the edge of Dakar

The family first

'Poverty is not being without clothes: the person who is truly poor is the one who has nobody.' — *Wolof proverb*

FAMILY TIES come before anything else in most of Africa, and in Senegal that is certainly the case. The extended family is not just a question of having lots of aunts and uncles and cousins: the bonds of the family are much stronger than that. Among the Wolof, each member of the family has a clearly defined role and responsibilities in relation to everyone else, and their lives are woven together in a complex fabric which can resist many kinds of stress.

The Wolof view of the cosmos relates every person to his or her ancestors, the family line, and the spirit world. It is bound up with a theory of reincarnation,

and a new baby is therefore a manifestation of the spirit of the ancestors, a tangible link between past, present, and future. The child is brought up with a consciousness of its place in this family pantheon. In due course he or she acquires another lifetime bond, this time outside the family: a bond with all those of the same age group in the community. Taken together, these relationships build a world-view in which individuals see themselves first and foremost as part of a spiritual and temporal collective. Some aspects of this world-view may be particular to the Wolof, but it is generally shared by the other ethnic groups of Senegal, for whom the self-centred individualism of Western societies is very far removed.

This, at least in principle, is how it should be. In practice, faced with new economic and social pressures, many

Merina Diop village, near Pekesse: Anta Mbaya, traditional birth attendant (left), advises a mother about the care of her new baby



BERNARD TAYLOR/OXFAM

families in the towns and cities cannot give their children this traditional education within the family circle. When both parents have to work, children in poorer neighbourhoods are often left unsupervised, with no one to explain the world around them. Among the urban bourgeoisie, meanwhile, traditional values are giving way to the more material concerns of the nuclear family, which leaves the business of educating the children to formal schools.

A question of numbers

Polygamy was permitted by the traditional religions of Senegal, so the country's conversion to Islam, rather than Christianity, posed no problems in this regard. In the old days, in an underpopulated country where all families worked on the land, it made economic sense for a man to have 15 to 20 children to join the family workforce, and he probably needed three or four wives to achieve that. At the present time, about one quarter of married men have more than one wife, but the number is declining as lifestyles change. Younger people in the cities are almost unanimous in rejecting polygamy. This may help to slow the nation's birthrate, bearing in mind that wives in polygamous families often compete to have the most children.

Another factor in this trend is women's progress towards emancipation, which is giving many a new sense of independence, and the confidence to develop their own talents. Sonja Fagerberg Diallo, a leading literacy campaigner, says there has been a tremendous social change among women who have learned to read and write, creating a wide gap between the under-40 age group and their mothers. But the impact of this change, she adds, has yet to come. Senegalese society equates wisdom with age, so for the time being the younger women defer, saying, 'It's not our turn yet.'

Most girls marry at 16 or 17 and have their first baby before they are 20. On average they will have about six children, though girls who have been to school

place less value on large families than those without an education.

The mortality rates for children remain higher than in other regions of Africa: 18 children in every 100 die before the age of five (compared with 13 in Southern Africa), the main causes being malaria, diarrhoea, respiratory infections and measles — often made lethal by underlying malnutrition. Nearly one-third of children do not get an adequate diet.

Senegal's population rose from an estimated one million at the turn of the century to about 2.5 million in the 1950s, and to 7.5 million in 1990. Some of this growth has been due to inward migration

Traditionally children learn about the world at their mother's knee



JEREMY HARTLEY/OXFAM



from the Sahara and countries to the south, but primarily to a dramatic decline in the mortality rate. In the past, mortality in the Sahel was roughly equal to the birthrate, and thus an equilibrium was maintained. But since the early years of this century it has dropped by more than half, largely because of extensive vaccination campaigns and other forms of preventative medicine.

The people of Senegal will have to cope somehow with their rapid growth in numbers, but family-planning campaigns, despite having lots of American aid money behind them, have encountered stiff resistance. The age-old attachment to large families is still strong, backed by the pro-natalist attitudes of Islam, Catholicism, and the traditional religions. For the poor, anyhow, limiting births is not an intelligent strategy; the more children you have, the better your chances that one of them will do well and be able to support the family.

What's in a name?

For *Smith, Brown, Jenkins, and McNeil*, read *Ndiaye, Sow, Thiam, Cissokho, and Diedhiou*. With the British names, you can guess whether their owners are from England, Scotland, or Wales; but if a Smith meets a Smith, they are unlikely to assume that they are related to each other. It is different in Senegal. If a Ndiaye (pronounced *N'j-eye*) meets another Ndiaye, they know that they must be cousins. Names here are important and, along with distinctive features, modes of dress, and manners, are a badge of one's ethnic origins. This counts for something in a country with as many as 20 distinct ethnic groups. Four-fifths of the population, however, is made up of five groups: Wolof (40 per cent), Serer (14 per cent), Peulh (12 per cent), Toucouleur (10.5 per cent), and Diola (5.3 per cent).

The Senegalese sense of humour finds particular expression in the many 'teasing relationships' that exist between families and sometimes between ethnic groups. With a grin, a Serer may remind a Toucouleur that he would have been his slave once upon a time. When a Gueye meets a Seck, one of them is almost bound to make a joke about the other's inordinate appetite for rice.

While each ethnic group remains attached to its own traditions, the dominance of the Wolof is reflected in the widespread adoption of their language throughout the country. This process of 'wolofisation' means that 80 per cent of people now speak this tongue, while about a quarter speak the Peulh language, Pulaar. All the same, French remains the official language, even though it is spoken only by a small educated minority.

Schools without books, clinics without medicines

A PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER in Kaolack is trying to explain why only one Senegalese child in seven passes the exams at the end of primary school. 'They have to share books. Quite often there are no notebooks or pens. Sometimes there isn't even a school building, and the parents have to contribute to build one. The situation is disastrous.'

Fewer than two-thirds of children in Senegal go to primary school, and it's not because they're playing truant: there just aren't the places. This rate of enrolment compares with the 95 per cent achieved by other African countries at the same level of development. Forced to make budget cuts in order to meet its targets for economic structural adjustment, the government's approach has been to keep all the teachers on the payroll, but to stop investing in school buildings, and in essential equipment.

More than half of those who fail the primary exam abandon their studies; a third will try again; and 10 per cent will go to private schools. By 1988, because of the breakdown of state education, private schools accounted for almost 20 per cent of secondary pupils.

Only two per cent of the nation's students attend university. But in 1988/89, a quarter of the education budget went to higher education. It just happens that the undergraduates and their professors have important political clout. All the same, the reputation of the University of Dakar has suffered from a doubling of student numbers in five years and a decline in teaching standards, which has led to a high drop-out rate in many faculties. Strikes by teachers and students are common. At the impressive new

'There are no schools in our village. The nearest is 9 km away, with no means of getting there. That's the government for you. School is free, but for a good education you have to pay. It's a 9 km walk to the health centre, too — and you have to pay for everything when you get there.'
— A villager from Sare Souky

University of St Louis, the students went on strike in 1993 over the shortage of teaching staff and the government's failure to release their grants.

0.8 of a dentist

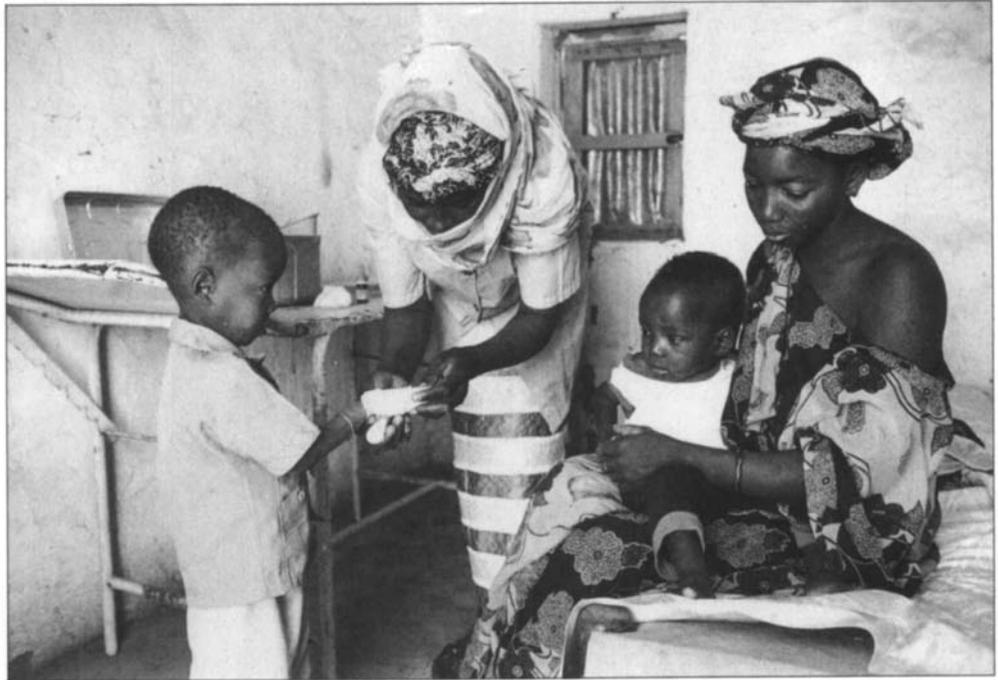
The situation is not much different in the health sector, which has been the hardest hit by government austerity measures. For every 100,000 people, there are six doctors, three pharmacists, and exactly 0.8 of a dentist. Nearly half of all health workers are concentrated in Dakar. Four out of five people in the cities have access to clean water, but in the rural areas, the figure is more like one in four.

Dimar village: a roof but no desks in the primary school



BERNARD TAYLOR/OXFAM

Dimar village:
bandages but no
medicines in the
health clinic



BERNARD TAYLOR/OKFAM

Under the structural adjustment reforms, people now have to pay for a visit to the doctor and for any medicines they need. These charges are based on the principle of cost recovery, which the World Bank says is 'perfectly accepted by the users of public health services'. Perhaps the principle is accepted, but in practice by the late 1980s fewer people were going to a doctor or to hospital than 10 years earlier — and few would claim that was because they were healthier.

By 1990, salaries were devouring three-quarters of the health budget. There was only five per cent left for medicines, and the lion's share of that went to hospitals, leaving little or nothing to fill the empty shelves of village health centres. Although professional salaries may be very high compared with other West African countries, it would be hard to argue that Senegal's health services are over-staffed.

Perhaps it would be more efficient to reduce the numbers of health workers in order to buy more medicines and equipment; but would they serve more, or fewer, patients? These are not Alice-in-

Wonderland questions; on the contrary, they are typical of the harsh choices that confront Senegal's decision makers every day.

Statistics don't tell the whole truth

At the level of statistical analysis, the prospects for an upturn in the provision of schooling and health care are not encouraging. But, as in many areas of Senegalese life, the people's perception of their reality transcends the gloom of statisticians. Schools, for example, are not the only repositories of knowledge for children, and many young Senegalese have learned about the modern world from being actively involved in their own rapidly changing environment. This kind of knowledge is not measured by formal education, but it may nevertheless be a good preparation for life in the world they will inherit.

Rumblings of discontent

THROUGH LONG YEARS of drought and economic decline, the Senegalese have tolerated increasing hardship without any sign of revolt against the system. But they will rebel violently against what they see as blatant injustice. After the 1988 Presidential elections, when the opposition parties claimed they were cheated by vote-rigging, protests went on for several months.

The Casamance in revolt

For the past ten years, a sense of injustice has also fanned the flames of a separatist movement among the Diola people of the Casamance. Almost cut off physically from the rest of Senegal by the intervening territory of the Gambia, the Diola have preserved much of their traditional way of life from outside influences. They have always resented the intrusion of northerners in their affairs, and consider they've had a raw deal from central government. A steady influx of peasants, fishermen, and proselytising Muslims — along with foreign tourists at a Club Méditerranée resort and other beach hotels — is seen as a new colonial invasion. Land has been allocated to influential families from the north and some of the Diolas' sacred groves have been felled to plant peanut fields.

The Diola have never taken kindly to foreign domination. A French Governor-General in 1917 admitted, 'We are not the masters of the Casamance; we are only tolerated there.' One problem for outsiders trying to assert their authority here is that Diola society has no castes or hierarchies, only an assembly of notables in each community and village chiefs, who are often only front-men for the wise elders — the ones who take all important

decisions in the seclusion of the sacred grove. From the bureaucrats' point of view, it has made the region almost ungovernable.

In 1982, the Casamance independence movement hoisted its flag of rebellion over Government House in Ziguinchor. The rebels under arms may number only a few thousand, but it is generally believed that they command support from a substantial cross-section of their people. In May 1991, after years of sporadic rebel attacks, peace talks with the government produced a ceasefire. Some of the leaders of the Casamance Movement of Democratic Forces (MFDC) came out of hiding, and the government's tacit recognition of them lent weight to the independence cause. A 'peace management committee' was set up, but a radical wing of the MFDC, well armed with kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, promptly split off to continue the armed struggle. With the approach of the 1993 elections, the tempo of attacks and government counter-attacks mounted, leaving several hundred dead in little more than six months.

Few observers believe that the Casamance problem can be resolved by eliminating the relatively small guerrilla movement. Indeed, the separatist movement is likely to be strengthened if the exploratory drilling currently taking place off the Casamance coast finds commercially viable quantities of oil. Some fear that the forces of disintegration might then spread to the Peulh communities of the Fouta Toro — the middle valley of the Senegal River. They, too, complain of the neglect of their needs by a central government which shows little concern for the rural areas.

The only solution in sight is a Commission on Regional Decentralisation,

which is not making much progress. Some doubt whether the Wolof who run the country would consider even partial self-government for the Casamance or the Fouta Toro. In the end, however, they may not have much choice.

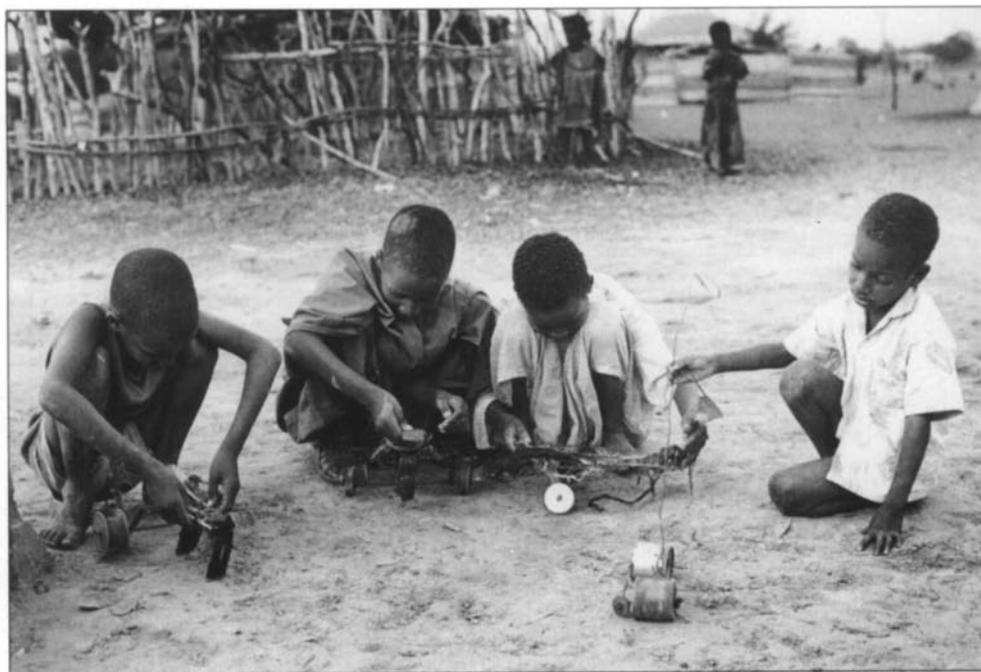
Mauritanian refugees in the middle

At the other end of the country from the Casamance, in camps strung out along the Senegal River, are the victims of a crisis in Mauritania: 50,000 Mauritanian refugees, whose lives were shattered in 1989 when disputes along the Senegal River border between farmers and Mauritanian herders escalated into serious rioting. Senegalese workers living in the Mauritanian capital of Nouakchott were attacked, which prompted angry Senegalese crowds to harass the well-established Mauritanian community in Dakar, who dominated much of the small-scale trading there and in other towns. Most fled from Senegal, abandoning their homes and businesses.

The government of Mauritania — controlled by 'white' Moors of Arab descent — not content with the exodus of Senegalese nationals from its territory, then expelled tens of thousands of its own

black population from their homes, forcing them to seek refuge across the river in Senegal. One camp, at Ndioum, has held nearly 3,000 men, women, and children since they were evicted from their lands in 1989. Even before the crisis, these lands had been coveted by the Moors displaced from their traditional terrain farther north by years of drought. Whole villages were uprooted, and the Ndioum camp is divided into 23 sections, one per village.

The camp coordinator says the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has reduced their monthly food ration from 14 kg each at the beginning to 7.5 kg now. They have organised schooling for their children, but few if any of the adults have been able to find jobs. In response to a UNHCR questionnaire asking whether they want to go home or stay in Senegal, they all replied 'Go home — with conditions'. But their conditions, including restoration of property or compensation, and a total amnesty, are not likely to be acceptable to Mauritania. So the refugees remain in the camps, where many of their children have known no other life.



Children playing with home-made toys in the camp for Mauritanian refugees at Ndioum

BERNARD TAYLOR/OXFAM

The wheels grind slower

IN MANY AREAS of the Senegalese economy, the process of development is shifting into reverse gear. A few years ago Senegal produced shoes, turned out a moderate quantity of galvanised sheet metal, and even had a vehicle-assembly plant. By the end of the 1980s shoe production was down to zero, the car factory had gone, and sheet-metal output was a mere one-sixth of the level ten years earlier.

Is this due to excessively high production costs, prompting firms to move to other countries? Inefficient companies that couldn't cope with outside competition? An inevitable consequence of the economic structural adjustment process? Whatever the analysis, it doesn't alter the fact that industrial output remains the smallest contributor (18 per cent) to the country's income. Figures for 1990 show the primary sector (agriculture, livestock, fisheries)

contributing 20 per cent, and the service sector (trade, transport, communications) a massive 60 per cent.

Production of phosphates — the third-biggest export earner after fish and peanuts — rose fairly steadily during the 1980s, but other industrial output such as salt, cement, and fertiliser showed only a modest improvement.

Senegal has substantial known mineral reserves — high-grade iron ore, copper, chromite, gold, and marble — in its eastern region. But without existing transport facilities from these remote areas, the cost of exploitation at current world prices is judged uneconomic.

One historical cause of Senegal's economic problems was that a wide industrial base was developed during the colonial period, with the aim of serving the whole of French West Africa. Since



The Senegal Sugar Company, an agro-industrial complex on the Senegal River, employs 5,000 workers on its irrigated cane plantations and in its refinery. It produces about 70,000 tons of refined sugar for the domestic market, but its output could be greater.

independence this large market has withered away, as each country has sought to meet its own needs. As a result, many companies found themselves operating far below capacity, with an excessive burden of plant and equipment.

Socialism turned inside-out

The government's New Industrial Policy, launched in 1984 under the structural adjustment regime, aimed to attract new industries to the country, to privatise all activities that could be detached from the public sector, and to lower customs barriers, exposing local producers to the bracing air of foreign competition.

This was a complete about-turn from previous industrial policies, which were based on the protection of local industry and socialist principles of state management. Neither the protection nor the principles had really worked: labour productivity had been declining in most industrial sectors since the mid-1970s; but, as in agriculture, no one was prepared for the sudden change. A further shrinkage in jobs has thus meant a rapid expansion of the informal sector — especially in Dakar and the other main towns — and a rise in urban unemployment.

Educated for unemployment

There were 143,000 people out of work in Dakar alone by 1991 — almost 25 per cent of the active population, according to a recent survey. Nationally, unemployment levels had already reached 20 per cent by 1988. This would be bad enough if the country's workforce was not increasing; in fact, it is estimated that 100,000 young people are entering the job market every year. With recruitment to the public sector virtually frozen and formal jobs in the private sector declining, the chances of finding work are now better for those with less education. Despite the remarkable Senegalese capacity for getting by somehow, this state of affairs poses a serious threat to peace and social stability.

The back-street economy

The 'informal sector' is a dry, academic term to describe the hive of makeshift livelihoods — market traders, artists, hairdressers, transporters, dressmakers, builders and traders of all kinds — which makes life possible for most of the people most of the time. Partly because of this name, the informal sector is usually regarded as subsidiary to the formal economy of 'proper' businesses and jobs. Actually, it's the other way round.

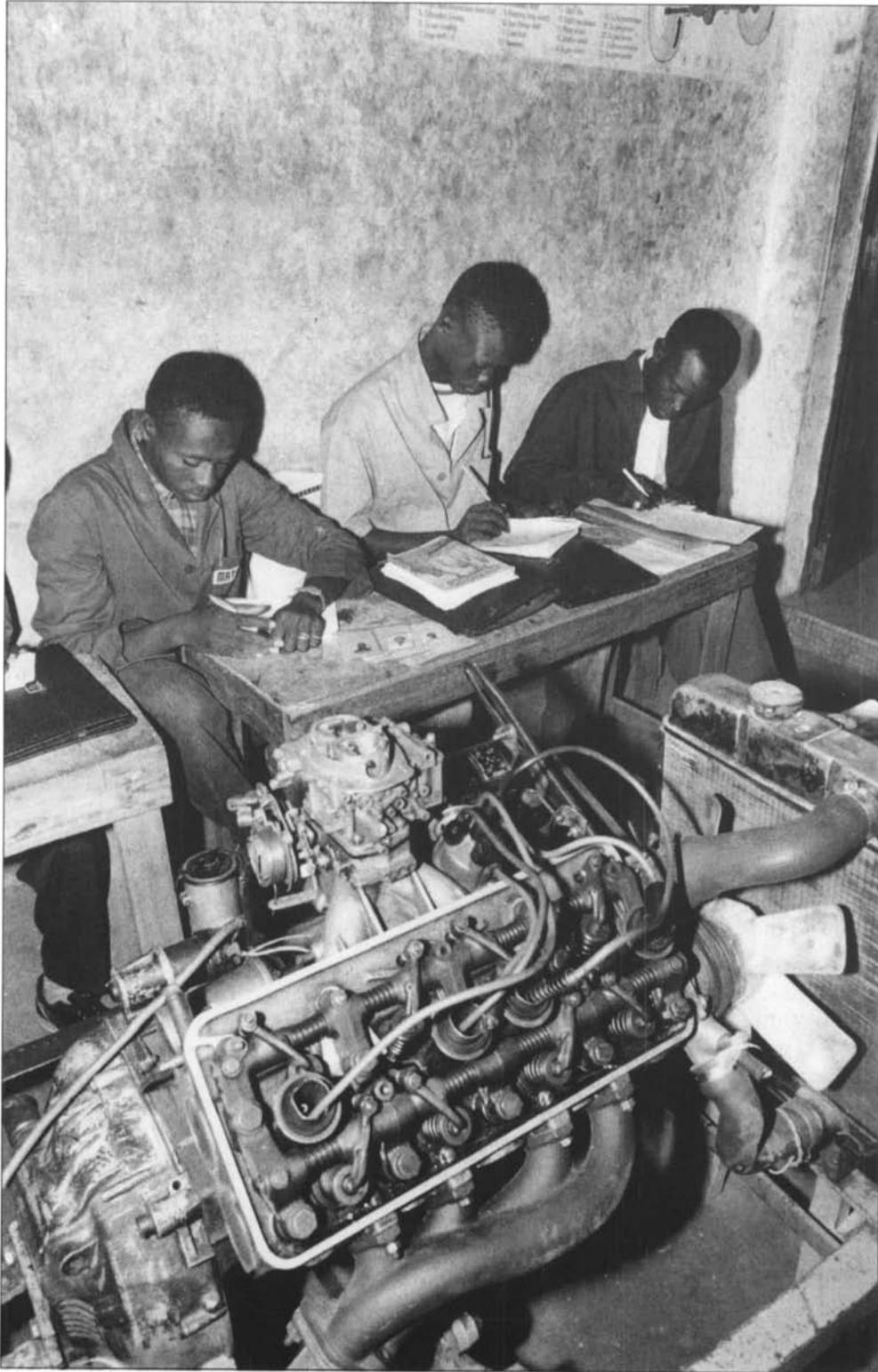
There were about 600,000 people with jobs in the informal sector in the late 1980s, compared with 200,000 in the formal economy. Since then, job losses have pushed the number close to one million.

As businesses and employment have shrunk, so have the government's tax receipts. To make up the deficit, it can choose between taxing the rest more heavily (which could be counter-productive) ... or closing up the system's many loop-holes (which would offend many of the government's supporters) ... or finding new sources of revenue. The World Bank suggests finding ways to tax the informal sector. But this could stifle its vitality, or force it further underground.

Pay-offs for some

The government did recently succeed in persuading the World Bank to pay for a voluntary redundancy programme, to slim down the over-staffed civil service. In the first year, the Bank paid for 2,000 redundancies and the payroll dropped accordingly. In the second year, 1,385 took their golden handshake ... but somehow 1,450 others managed to get recruited — which meant a net increase in staff numbers.

The World Bank insists that it is too early to draw conclusions about the New Industrial Policy which it inspired. But in eight years it has produced no signs of an economic upturn. That's not to say that a restructuring of the economy wasn't necessary: almost everyone agrees that it was. But many doubt whether the policy will fulfil its promise of economic growth.



BERNARD TAYLOR/OXFAM

Apprentice mechanics in Dakar, trained by ASAFIN, a local development group. Senegal needs much more of this type of investment.

Mbalax for relax

THE OLD MAN on the drum is laying down a throbbing beat, accentuated now and again with a blast on the tin whistle between his teeth. His rhythm underpins an intricate, dancing melody from the one-string calabash instruments played with bows by his two fellow musicians, as they stroll between the tables of a local drinking parlour.

In the back streets of Velingara, away from the narrow streets crowded with shops and stalls and pigs snuffling in the dust, an unmarked gate leads into a compound where, under a pergola of woven mats, a group of townspeople are sitting around, chatting and listening. This is the Casamance, where the popular drink is the local palm wine, home-made and cheap. It's the region which gave birth to the *kora*, a 21-stringed lute which is the typical instrument of West Africa.

Everyone's having a good time, in a setting that's a long way from the kind of arena with spotlights and stereophonic sound where sophisticated singers and musicians are playing the traditional music of Senegal in a modern idiom. The Wolof call it *mbalax*: their special blend of rhythm and relax. Youssou Ndour, whose latest album was nominated for a 1993 Grammy Award as best foreign record, is the 'King of Mbalax'.

For a different kind of relaxation, the Senegalese love their spectator sports. First and foremost is traditional wrestling, which was witnessed in 1795 by the Scottish explorer, Mungo Park, who wrote admiringly of the combatants' dexterity and judgement. A championship match today can carry a purse of £8,000 for the title-holder and half as much for the challenger. Big fights attract up to 50,000 spectators. If the national champion is

defeated, it's the talk of Dakar.

Football is also very popular. Children start young, playing on the beach or any patch of open ground, while international matches against other West African teams attract large crowds. The best players have the chance of being signed up to play in European leagues.

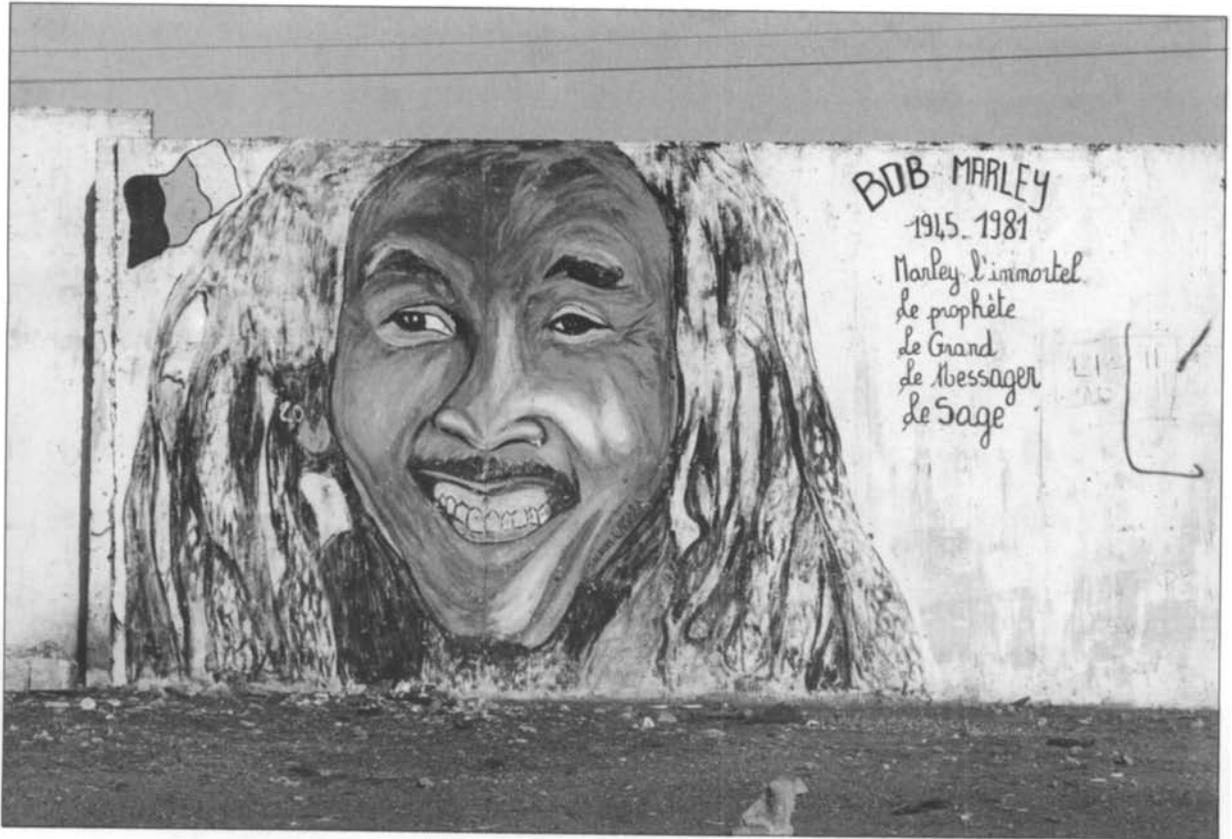
Along the Atlantic coast, canoe races in brightly-painted craft are often the focus of festivities, while every day the beaches around Dakar are crowded with keep-fit classes of young people in shorts and t-shirts, and solitary joggers in smart track suits.

Words and pictures

At this westernmost edge of Africa, poised between desert, forests, and ocean, Sahelian life is a rich fabric of many ethnic strands, each with its own distinctive history and culture. What is special about Senegal is its readiness to absorb and adapt the attributes of many diverse cultures. Léopold Senghor, who liked to think of his country as 'the Greece of Africa', was in some ways the archetype of this cosmopolitan outlook, his poetry and political philosophy bridging African and European traditions.

In a more modern idiom, the renowned Senegalese writer and film-maker Sembene Ousmane was one of the first to give African cinema an international audience. Recently, his *Camp de Thiaroye* and *Guelwaar* have won prizes at the Venice Film Festival, and others, such as Djibril Diop and Paulin Vieyra, have also won esteem for Senegal in the film world.

Figurative painting is not an indigenous art form, but a growing number of artists have found new expression for the African visual



Rastafarian singer Bob Marley, immortalised in a 'Set Setal' street mural in Dakar

imagination through an adaptation of European abstract, surreal, or naif styles. Some achieve an original and authentic fusion, for example in fine vignettes of daily life, painted on glass; others are largely a decorative reworking of models from elsewhere.

Not all the cultural influences which Senegal absorbs are wholesome. Imported films and TV programmes purvey seductive images of glamour and violence, with amoral, consumerist attitudes which are at odds with the traditional values of Senegalese life. Material possessions, these soap operas and game shows seem to say to the shanty-town dwellers who crowd into a neighbour's shack to watch TV, are the only measure of earthly salvation.

One original form of street art, deriving inspiration from many sources, burst on the Dakar scene in 1990 as part of a spontaneous city clean-up movement called '*Set Setal*' — roughly translatable as 'Clean to be clean' or 'Cleanliness is

purity'. This was an impromptu movement of young people, many of them unemployed, to tidy up their neighbourhoods, remove rubbish from the streets, and then beautify the open spaces with trees, flowers, and artworks of their own making. Wood, stones, old car tyres, and paints of every colour were used to make sculpture, brightly-painted monuments, and murals of many kinds. Some were just for fun, but most had a serious message, honouring political and religious leaders and heroes of the struggle against French imperialism, such as Lat-Dyor; others conveyed public-service messages about health, hygiene, and AIDS. Lions and doves of peace were recurrent images in *set setal* — reflections of the young generation's will for power and independence, but without violence.



BERNARD TAYLOR/OXFAM

'Beware of AIDS': a 'Set Setal' mural in Dakar

Sopi! Sopi! Sopi!

EVERYWHERE IN THE TOWNS and the cities of Senegal the rallying cry is change: *Sopi! We want change!* The political opposition has adopted this convenient slogan to declare its rejection of the status quo. But the demand for change is more than a political slogan. It expresses a belief that the whole system of government is deficient and must be reformed.

There are some who believe that a fundamental process of change is already under way in Senegalese society, which President Diouf's recent re-election for a seven-year term can do nothing to check — and which he, to survive, will have to accept. They see the old feudal patterns of power crumbling and a new, hopeful future on the horizon, beginning a moral and spiritual liberation which never came with political independence. For the first 30 years, the government always maintained that political sovereignty was only one step towards the goal of real economic independence. Yet that goal has receded year by year.

There are some new signs of hope on the political and social map of Senegal. It is a fact, for example, that a large proportion of the population was born since independence and is therefore burdened neither by memories of a colonial past nor (perhaps more importantly) by an uncritical acceptance of their own post-independence leadership.

It is also true that, as the authority of central government has been eroded, people have been inventing their own futures and devising their own self-help schemes. The government itself has been obliged to make the institutions of democracy — notably its election procedures — more openly democratic. This, if nothing

else, has given people hope that change is possible and cannot be blocked in all circumstances by those in authority.

A rural revival?

At the village level, too, things are changing. More information and ideas are filtering through, to help rural people innovate and improve traditional practices. And more village associations are grouping themselves into federations in order to share their experience and claim some voice in policy-making. The sort of progress that Senegal can be proud of is the success of a public education campaign against bush fires, which laid waste to six million hectares a year in the early 1970s. By 1988, this figure had been cut to 130,000 hectares.

There are some possibilities, at least in theory, of a rural revival. On a small scale, affordable techniques of organic farming are restoring or protecting endangered soils. Much more could be done at low cost to promote these methods. And one study has suggested that agroforestry — mixing trees and crops — could double the number of people able to live in the peanut basin. In one region, the study points out, millet production was doubled in the 1960s by planting 50 *acacia albida* trees per hectare, their leaves giving the land as much natural fertiliser as 50 tons of manure. That's all very well, farmers say, but *acacia* trees take 15 years or more to get established, and many die in times of drought.

Time to start sharing the power

Meanwhile, as some foreign aid agencies and voluntary groups have realised, the essential key to progress for most

Mme Assiata Sy, a leading figure in the development group Maisons Familiales Rurales, in her office near Ndioum. Through the 'associative movement', ordinary Senegalese people are acquiring more control over their own lives.



BERNARD TAYLOR/OXFAM

Senegalese lies in their acquiring more control over their own lives. At the most basic level this is happening with literacy and health campaigns; at an institutional level it is happening with the new growth of village federations and associations of small businesses, which are finding they can have more influence collectively than separately.

But a new culture of self-reliance within Senegal will not be enough to enable the country to fulfil its potential. The international community must take some of its own structural adjustment medicine and start reforming the systems of foreign aid and trade which perpetuate global poverty. The fragmented mini-economies of Africa, lacking a big enough domestic market to provide them with an engine for growth, find themselves being tossed like flimsy *pirogues* in the turbulent wake of the rich world's economic battleships.

The road to regional recovery

For West African countries like Senegal, domestic and international trends all seem to point to deepening dependency on a global economy which is impervious to

their needs. Yet there is still a way out which could, with the necessary vision and leadership, save the day: the path of regional integration. Many efforts to develop this path have been blocked by those with a vested interest in the status quo, but some leading economists of the region now argue that it is the only way to stop the economic slide.

In a recent book, Moustapha Kassé, the Director of Senegal's Centre for Applied Economic Research, argues that 'a wide and deep process of integration would make it possible to resolve the development crisis'. He advocates a regional division of labour, building on each country's strengths and natural endowments, together with a regional system of finance and credit, to establish the best conditions for exploiting all the resources of the sub-region. As things stand, Kassé points out, no individual country has a real chance of recovery on its own.

In fact, Senegal has been at the forefront of efforts to build closer regional cooperation. President Diouf is committed to the idea of a regional parliament, though the government sees many political hurdles in the way of full

economic integration. The official view is that a start could be made by developing communication and transport links, and coordinating policies on information, health, education, and the environment.

Senegal has direct experience of this from its short-lived union with the Gambia in the Confederation of Senegambia. Created in 1982, the Confederation was fairly limited in scope and, after some friction between the two countries, President Diouf abandoned it in 1989 as 'a waste of time and money'.

A new start for Senegal

In some respects, Senegal is a microcosm of the crises afflicting Africa at the end of the twentieth century. Many of the problems are complex, and the solutions tried so far have had meagre success. At the same time, it's just possible that — given the right push from within and without — this country could become a

beacon to guide others towards an authentically African way of development before the continent's nation states are 100 years old. It would be a huge achievement, considering how little they had to start with and how much has been stacked against them. But for that to be feasible, much more will have to change.

The optimistic view is that after a mere generation of independence, Senegal — and much of Africa besides — is already shaking off some of the shackles it inherited, and others that its leaders had imposed on their people. In historical terms, thirty years is not long for a new nation to find its feet.

Unless one can identify the pebble that starts a landslide, it is never easy to pinpoint the moment when a nation embarks on a process of change and renewal. But for the people of Senegal, it has to happen sooner, rather than later.



'What future for the youth of Senegal?', asks a street mural in Dakar