
**Involving "neo-urbans"
in the political game
The example of Senegal**

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Introduction

A paper brought out last year treating the “Hunger Riots”¹ had made it possible, among other things, to point out the extreme difficulties encountered by the authorities in power when trying to control urban populations. This applies in particular to those in capitals, which are simultaneously the most vocal in their demands and those closest, geographically speaking, to the seat of power and therefore the most dangerous. The political and electoral “control” or containment of the population within capitals is, and will be to an increasing degree, one of the all-important keys to stability for African regimes. Indeed, when analyzing the “hunger riots”, we came to realize that, on the one hand, the main trigger was not necessarily hunger, and later, on the other, that the “riots” always implied a critique of governance. Finally, it emerged that a significant number of the demonstrations, especially in Senegal, had been set in motion by people coming from outlying districts, where a large proportion of the neo-urbans are to be found. In addition, viewed from a specifically urban angle, the results recorded in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years often reveal (Conroy Krutz: 2006) that those in power find it more difficult to secure victory in the towns or at least to win such a high proportion of the vote there, as they do in rural areas.

Current demographic forecasts relating to sub-Saharan Africa all predict an extremely rapid increase in population and at the same time an even more dramatic rise in the size of urban populations. A significant number of people, over and above the natural growth of urban populations which currently in Senegal is the main factor behind demographic growth in Dakar, regularly leaves rural areas in order to settle in the towns and, in particular, in the outlying areas on their edge. As is already the case, these populations and the districts concerned are at the very heart of social transformations (the reduced level of absorption into the community, increasing individualization and new forms of “community-building”) and the political stakes involved (above all because of their numbers and also because of their capacity for making demands and sometimes for rising in revolt). It also appears important to us to understand how these populations of

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¹ Cf. A. Antil and S. Touati: *Food Crisis, “Hunger Riots” and the Agricultural Repercussions in Sub-Saharan Africa*, consultation document for the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (CAP), 2008, 33 pages.

neo-urbans² form social ties, foster social solidarity, mobilize themselves or are mobilized and how these processes become part of the redefinition of the local political situation.

In Senegal the vote of these populations, in conjunction with the vote of the young people born in the city at the time of the 2000 elections, contributed in large measure to Abdou Diouf's defeat and Abdoulaye Wade's victory. Nevertheless, it is clearly necessary to bear in mind that this analysis of the situation in Senegal is by no means a comprehensive one, particularly when it comes to the wide plurality of national situations south of the Sahara.

This is why after painting a brief picture of the demographic future of the continent we shall now turn in more detail to the Senegal example. We shall attempt to single out the dynamic and the "new" forms of mobilization and/or the new solidarity vectors bringing together individuals in their districts, as well as their capacities for turning social mobilization into the political kind. After that we shall briefly outline two counter-examples, which show that developments in Senegal, while they raise questions of general relevance to the continent as a whole, point to answers or a path specific to that country. Finally, we shall note by way of conclusion a certain series of facts which could be valuable for decoding current and future developments in the countries south of the Sahara.

² It should be noted that the category of "neo-urbans" is a subject of debate among specialists in urbanization, who in fact consider this term too vague (how long does one remain a neo-urban?) and underline how the question of relegation and protest in urban society concern the categories of the urban poor rather than "neo-urbans" as such. Nevertheless we shall use the term in this paper, which does not claim to be heuristic or theoretical. Furthermore we are seeking, first and foremost, to underline the phenomenon of the massive rural exodus currently in progress and the political impact of that exodus, so that this term seems adequate in the circumstances even if the concept gives rise to problems within the field of research.

The Rapid Urbanization of a Continent with Sharp Contrasts Between the Nations

Urbanization at a Crossroads When Societies Are Being Transformed

The rapid urbanization of the African continent stems from a range of factors of different kinds – demographic (the population explosion, natural growth of the urban population, the large rural exodus leading to major changes in the rural-urban ratio), economic (better job opportunities in the towns and agrarian systems unable easily to absorb larger rural generations or to feed larger family units, which have led people to leave rural areas to pursue family strategies for diversifying types of activity and income), sociological (attractions of city life and modernity, greater amenities, educational strategies of whole households) and situational (conflicts, droughts, various cataclysmic events).

Urbanization can thus be seen as an issue, where various phenomena of different kinds and wider implications come together. Urbanization has to be understood first and foremost as human mobility in the widest possible sense. The arrival of neo-urbans in the cities, for example, can be a temporary relocation (seasonal migrations or sojourns of several years to put together savings prior to marriage or so as to start up a new rural activity). It can also constitute a stage in the course of migration abroad. Arrivals in the city can, of course, also mean permanent moves.

Urbanization of a country needs to be viewed within the context of the much wider question of the transformation of African economies, in which urban activities are becoming the new pillars of growth (construction, service industries and communication technologies).

It is also appropriate to refer here to another concept – to the demographic and economic scale and degree of mobility involved – in order to appreciate one of the major issues involved in the African

continent. This concept is that of “populating”³. It is normal, if we are considering a country or continent in the long term, for human mobility to adjust to transformations in the economy. Indeed what would have happened to the countries of Europe, if human mobility had not gone hand in hand with industrialization and successive redeployments connected with other technological revolutions? This mobility, in Western countries, was not purely national, but also transnational and inter-continental. The development of Africa will give rise to enormous transformations in its “populating”, namely in the repartition/distribution of people.

The urbanization of a country is something to be considered as part of a whole range of much wider sociological transformations (transformation of loyalties, of the family unit, of the sense of belonging and of the political sphere).

The urbanization of the continent has to a large extent already started because the urban population is 11 times larger than it was in 1950⁴, having increased from 21 to 232 million. Despite this, the rate of urbanization in Africa remains below that of other continents. The global figure, however, masks major differences between the various regions south of the Sahara⁵. If we turn to Table 1 in the Appendix to this article, we note marked contrasts between the countries listed, which straightaway rules out any opportunity for generalization. If we take two neighboring countries as an example, Senegal and Mauritania, their profiles are very different and questions regarding neo-urbans, as we shall see below, cannot be approached in precisely the same way. Senegal, one of the first countries in the continent to become highly urbanized, moved from an urbanization rate of 30% in 1950 to one of 49% in 2005, while Mauritania moved from a rate of 2% to 64% during the same period.

The Influx of the Neo-Urbans

The urban explosion is expected to continue: according to UN-Habitat, the population is due to double between now and 2030. There will be some 759 million urban residents across Africa by 2030, as opposed to 373 millions in 2007. Approximately 40% of the population currently lives in towns and more than 50% will be doing so in 2025. While population growth is forecast as 2.1% per annum between 2000 and 2030, the urban population is forecast to increase by 3.3%. By 2030 there will thus

³ Cf. J.-M. Cour : « Pour une meilleure gestion du peuplement et de l'aménagement du territoire en Afrique subsaharienne », in S. Michailov, *La France et l'Afrique : vade-mecum pour un nouveau voyage*, Karthala, 1993.

⁴ As opposed to a coefficient of 4 for the total population and 3 for the rural population.

⁵ In 2005, the rates of urbanization were 27% for East Africa, 38% for Central Africa, 44% for West Africa and 55% for Southern Africa.

be 400 million more Africans living in towns and a significant share in this increased will be the result of the rural exodus. The influx of these rural populations brings with it the promise of large-scale development, but also raises the question as to whether the cities have the capacity to absorb and receive these new inhabitants. To what extent are the infrastructures, education and health systems, housing and job markets up to the task? This question is all the more important given that certain of the countries south of the Sahara present with a macro-cephalic urban structure⁶, i.e. in which one large city – usually the capital – has a far greater population than the other towns, which receives the bulk of State investments but also most of the rural exodus. The other towns in which there are far less dynamic job markets and highly inadequate ranges of public services, do not manage to provide long-term solutions for internal migrants, who prefer to establish themselves straightaway in the capital.

Frequently, the whole range of these socioeconomic problems is to be found on the outer fringes of the town, in the vast pockets of makeshift dwellings⁷ which are to be found in all the towns of the continent and which absorb almost all the neo-urbans. In most of the sub-Saharan countries slightly over 50% of the urban population lives in makeshift accommodation. In this respect only in the Republic of South Africa and some of its neighbors are the equivalent figures less than 40%. In a large number of the major cities of the continent makeshift accommodation is more or less the norm. In Addis Ababa only 10% of the population resides in accommodation of an acceptable standard.

The new arrivals in the towns consist simultaneously of a continuous flow of people driven out of the rural areas, of those seeking to emigrate, for whom a regional and/or national capital constitutes a first stage of an international migration project⁸, but also of waves of people in the wake of climatic disasters or violent crises. Differences between urban networks, between arrival patterns, between policies for returning people to country areas more or less taken as a given and between the numbers of rural migrants mean that the

⁶ This is true for Mauritania and Senegal but, on the other hand, countries like the Ivory Coast and Nigeria have a far more balanced distribution of the urban population.

⁷ UN-Habitat uses a specific definition for a shantytown. A dwelling place is declared to be a shantytown, if it fails to meet at least one of the following criteria: an enduring construction, i.e. built in an appropriate space and offering proper protection against extreme climatic conditions; an adequate living space, that is to say a maximum of three people sharing the same room; access to drinking water in sufficient quantities and at an affordable price; access to adequate sanitary installations such as private toilets or public ones shared with a reasonable number of people; security of tenure so as to avoid any kind of forced expulsion". Cf. D. Mataillet, "Alerte aux bidonvilles", *Jeune Afrique*, August 13, 2006.

⁸ It should be noted that, as emphasized by Jérôme Lombard, a majority of those seeking to emigrate consists of town-dwellers.

phenomenon of urbanization varies considerably from one African country to another.

The question of the rural exodus and the existence of ever-growing numbers of neo-urbans, even if this convenient term is difficult to define (for how long can someone be regarded as a neo-urban⁹?), is becoming an ever more prominent issue for the governments of the sub-Saharan states. A wide range of research and reports has already considered the social stakes involved (equipment, infra-structure, employment etc.), but the massive influx of neo-urbans, in particular into the capitals, also raises the question as to their integration into local politics. How can this electorate be mobilized, which frequently – as in Senegal – has been on the point of engaging in protest at the time of what has too promptly been referred to as “hunger riots”, an electorate which sometimes suffers from hunger and sometimes from the absence of the State in outlying districts and deeply mistrusts political parties and their promises? Naturally these analyses could be extended to a much large proportion of the urban population, because the neo-urbans are already part of other large groups, forming what might be termed a “dangerous class”, which is urban, young and difficult to contain politically for those in possession of political power.

⁹ Sérigne Mansour Tall, expert in urban affairs at the UN-Habitat office in Dakar emphasized during a meeting in November 2009 that it is difficult to single out neo-urbans from other residents of what UN-Habitat describes as “the suburbs” or unplanned districts. In actual fact, children of former neo-urbans are to be found living in the suburbs – young people who were born in those districts and people who have had to move there from other districts. These populations are therefore mixed and it is difficult to separate out the neo-urbans within them.

Overview of the Senegal Situation

Arrivals in the Cities and the Collapse of Traditional Structures for Absorbing Individual Newcomers¹⁰

As already noted above, Senegal is one of the African countries, in which urbanization began earliest of all and has been the most extensive. Issa Sall¹¹ describes what he sees as different waves of rural newcomers in the towns. Even during the colonial era, numerous families left rural areas so as to escape from the authority of District Officers and also from forced labour. The 1970s saw the arrival of economic refugees driven out by severe drought. In the 1980s the influx of new arrivals into the towns gathered speed, all the more so as a result of the strategies for migrating abroad used by Senegalese from rural areas, which often took them through Dakar. Abdou Diouf has made migration abroad easier by withdrawing exit visas. Issa Sall interprets this as a deliberate strategy by the Senegalese government “to export manpower” so as to respond in part to the major economic problems, which had obliged the country to push through a Structural Adjustment Program during the 1980s and 1990s. The arrival in Dakar of numerous country dwellers to install themselves there or to migrate is, however, only one aspect of human mobility in Senegal. At the same time people from the North of the country are coming to Casamance to install themselves in large numbers there which leads to certain tensions in their relations with the local residents. The collapse of the peanut economy will lead to a mass-scale exodus of farmers from the peanut basin (central Senegal) towards the South, towards Dakar but also, and in particular, in the direction of Touba. Today the capital of the Mourides¹² has become the refuge for the whole of the peanut basin.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Marie, *L'Afrique des individus*, Karthala, 1997, réed. 2008, 442 pages.

¹¹ Director of the journal *Nouvel Horizon*, met by the author in Dakar in November 2009.

¹² One of the main brotherhoods in Senegal which has several million adherents. On the subject of brotherhoods Sérigne Mansour Tall specifies the following: “The brotherhood networks are only second-rank networks. They are based only on a foundation of a family, village or ethnic network stemming from initial encounters [...]. The brotherhood is a form of association which can be deduced from first names, dress, ways of making vows or telling beads. It is a sign of good form to parade the

Some of those with whom we have discussed the situation even assured us that villages within a hundred-kilometer radius of the town were emptying, while Touba would be experiencing at the present time a population increase of 10% per annum. The rate of population increase for Senegal as a whole is in the order of 2.5% and the equivalent figure for Dakar would be 3.9%. When these figures are extrapolated, there will be a likely total of 25 million in Senegal in prospect by 2030 and a capital with a population which will have more than doubled by then¹³.

The social frameworks to be found in rural areas are not always transferable to the towns. There is a double process of redistribution facing the migrants moving in from the country. First of all the geographical move, because in Dakar families or individuals do not, for the most part, install themselves in a district on the basis of regional or community affinities¹⁴. In addition, it is important to stress the breakdown of family structures after contacts with the city, which results in the emergence of nuclear families and gradual abandonment of the rural model of land and home shared by several generations, several households or men with several wives, each living with their respective children¹⁵. Certain people among those interviewed emphasized that families in the outlying districts are often larger, but this is due above all to different demographic patterns – people moving in from the countryside still have large numbers of children. Opportunities for family solidarity are limited – people provide shelter just for their children: cousins have to fend for themselves, even oldest sons sometimes have to find themselves a separate room elsewhere in the district. Most families in the suburbs do not have the resources to provide meals for the whole range of their members. So, in many families, certain members have to “cope” on their own when it comes to breakfast and supper, as only the midday meal is guaranteed: this set-up is often referred to as *bop sa bop*¹⁶ or “each one for himself” (Calvès et Marcoux, 2007).

brotherhood one belongs to which would not entail being labelled a sectarian or someone with an exaggerated regional or ethnic allegiance”. Cf. *Investir dans la ville africaine*, Karthala, 2009.

¹³ The evolution of the population of Dakar: 1875: 1,500 inhabitants; 1904: 18,000; 1931: 32,500; 1945: 80,000; 1980: 300,000; 2000: 2,200,000; 2007: 2,525,000. The Plan for Urbanism in 2025 predicts five million by then: “Dakar Horizon 2025: An Urbanism Plan for 5 million inhabitants”, in *Le Soleil*, Dakar, September 29, 2006.

¹⁴ It should not, of course, be assumed that there are no distinctive features in any of the Dakar districts: the presence of people from the Mouride brotherhood is, for example, particularly noticeable in certain districts. People also refer to “Touba Ouakam” or “Touba Sandaga”, so as to underline the presence of migrants of Mouride origin (Touba being the name of the city deemed sacred by the Mourides; in Yoff members of the Layène brotherhood are present in large numbers and those of the Serer brotherhood are especially concentrated in certain districts”).

¹⁵ On the subject of the changing composition of the family in the cities, see: Mamadou Ndongo Dimé: “Remise en cause, reconfiguration ou recomposition? Des solidarités familiales à l’épreuve de la précarité à Dakar” in “Sociétés africaines en mutation: entre individualisme et communautarisme”, *Sociologie et société*, Montreal, Vol. 39, No. 2, Autumn 2007.

¹⁶ Literally “head for head” in Wolof.

New Sources of Support and New Mobilization Networks

This process goes hand in hand with a trend that has been noted for years, namely that poverty is becoming more and more of an urban phenomenon, as was manifested by the food crises which marked the end of 2007 and the first half of 2008. It has also emerged that young people inside the “unplanned districts” on the outskirts of cities are the main victims of the far from easy urban transition to the towns. These factors apply in particular to young men who have problems finding a place for themselves in the official economy. Suffering from the shortage of jobs, they are consequently unable to marry and set up a home. They are street peddlers and they are only too familiar with the transport problems (high prices involved for traveling to the central districts, traffic jams). These conditions create *de facto* elements of a special kind of solidarity stemming from shared destinies, age and class origins. Numerous communities/ethnic groups in Africa are shaped by associations based on age, gender, etc. These associations usually enable the “youngest in society” to gain a place within a village gerontocratic structure of a rather vertical nature.

The districts on the fringes of Dakar are crisscrossed by associations for young people, which for the most part are based not on community but geographical proximity. Their community is one of people sharing a destiny of “relegation”, a group which creates a social framework, when confronted by the collapse of previous structures which had absorbed the individual. The idea of a mass of young people regrouping in district and age-based associations definitely does not take into account the whole range of social ties and of potential mobilization vectors. Other organizations which figure in this context include religious ones and those based on trades or occupations, while the trade unions also play a role.

Nevertheless, Abdou Salam Fall¹⁷, who has undertaken several pieces of research into social transformations in Dakar, maintains that between the 1990s and today a major development has taken place. In the 1990s “young people experienced crises but their elders found a way through them”¹⁸, but ten years later vertical links had already collapsed with the notable exception of migration projects, for which the family is the key unit, within which money is collected for the migration candidate. Most of the young people from the outlying districts, who are subject to 72% underemployment¹⁹ and 92% of

¹⁷ Sociologist specializing in urban affairs at Dakar’s IFAN (Fundamental Institute for Research into Black Africa) in Dakar whom the author met in Dakar in November 2009.

¹⁸ This expression belongs to Abdou Salam Fall.

¹⁹ The idea of unemployment in an African context is not very meaningful and “under-employment” is a preferable term, since it covers the aspects of an activity’s irregularity, e.g. the number of hours worked and how that falls short of the number

whom are engaged in unofficial work, find themselves in “horizontal” groups centered round new gathering places or charismatic figures such as marabouts, rap or hip-hop groups or singers, leaders of associations (for young people or women in their particular district), but also professional mediators who are specialists in grass-roots development, particularly within the context of NGOs. These young people are thus mobilized around different types of activities like building sites, dancing, wrestling, football etc. Round charismatic figures of this kind and these social networks, the inhabitants of the outlying districts, and in particular the young people, try to build a new kind of citizenship for themselves, which will enable them to integrate and assert their status as rejected outsiders.

Among these new social networks associated specifically with towns, some marabouts become figures of prime importance. These emerging figures, quite often referred to by our local contacts, stand out on account of their striking ability for mobilizing other people. We shall take as examples two marabouts prominent in the Dakar and even national scene – Sheikh Béthio Thioune and Sheikh Madou Kara Mbacké Noreyni. Both of them belong to the Mouride brotherhood, but the cult of personality – for which they are the focus – their fame and their ability to mobilize people cannot be judged by the same criteria as their rank within the internal hierarchy of the Mouride “clergy”.

Sheikh Béthio Thioune is not a descendant²⁰ of the founder of the Mouride brotherhood. Indeed his social origins are extremely modest. A resident of Dakar, he is revered by his *talibés* (or faithful) – the *thiantacounes* – like a father and a true reflection of the divine light (some of his followers even think that anyone who has seen him is bound to go to Paradise), rather than in connection with any religious doctrine (Havard, 2006). They carry out an act of allegiance (*Jebélu*) in order to be accepted into the community. The *thiantacounes* derive their name from the ceremonies (*Thiant*) regularly organized in Dakar, which involve both a banquet, an occasion for contemplation and sacred songs, a setting where marriages are sealed between the faithful, but also a place which is very festive (even licentious – according to Sheikh Béthio’s detractors) with singing and dancing. It is a place where Sheikh Béthio Thioune displays his wealth and extravagance, several bullocks are killed (sometimes over 20) each week in order to feed his flock. He claims to have several million followers, a fact fiercely contested by the other factions in the brotherhood. He probably has several tens of thousands of followers, a large part of whom are recruited from among the urbanized youth and in particular from among young *déclassé* elements of

the individuals concerned would wish for, the necessity of working in an informal situation and with remuneration insufficient for an individual to be able to achieve any real autonomy.

²⁰ The descendants of Sheikh Amadou Bamba Mbacké are known colloquially as Mbacké Mbacké.

the urban population (Havard, 2006) of the first, second or third generation. This new community, which has already become fairly cut off from rural reality and in which both former drug addicts and reformed hoodlums are to be found, is regarded by some analysts as a quasi-sect. Sheikh Béthio Thioune thanks to his large audience in Dakar and throughout the rest of Senegal succeeds in attracting financial backing and boasts of being able to influence election results. He had therefore appealed to his followers to vote for A. Wade at the time of the 2000 elections.

Sheikh Modou Kara MBacké Noreyni is, according to him, a great-nephew of the founder of the brotherhood. He too succeeded in attracting a large number of *talibés* (followers), around 500,000 within the *Mouvement mondial pour l'unicité de Dieu*²¹ (World Movement for the Uniqueness of God) (Audrain, 2004). He also recruits followers among the poorest and most underoccupied young people in the towns. Sheikh Modou Kara stands out thanks to his ability for organizing marches of his *baay-darou* (followers) for various occasions. These marches simultaneously demonstrate his strength and ability to organize. Some of his followers have even been organized in something resembling an armed militia, the "Peace Commandos", who often parade in combat uniform and have links with the security company "Kara sécurité" created by their leader. These "hatchet men" were recently implicated in an attack on the officers of the journal *Walfadjri* last September²². In December 1999, when a large rally of his followers was held in the main stadium of the Senegalese capital (Audrain, 2004), Sheikh Modou Kara called upon his flock to vote for Abdou Diouf in the following year's presidential elections and he was heartily booed for that. The fact that his followers refused his *ndigel*²³ testifies to this religious leader's increasing difficulties, when it comes to exerting political influence. As pointed out to us by most of those we interviewed, the structures for religious control of society no longer have the capacity to influence voting behavior. This phenomenon is naturally far more conspicuous in the towns. Mohamed Guèye²⁴, for example, stresses that at the last electoral meetings in Touba, the Mouride capital, it had been possible to observe an electorate, which was not abiding by the electoral *ndigel* of the brotherhood's leader. In 2004, Sheikh Modou Kara had wanted to transform his religious aura into political capital, by creating his own political organization, the PVD (or *Parti pour la vérité pour le développement* – Party of Truth for Development), which to date has not had a single candidate

²¹ This is the number claimed by the organization.

²² Cf. "Agression contre le groupe de Walfadjri : Modou Kara l'intouchable", *L'observateur*, Dakar, 2009.

²³ Advice-cum-order issued by a marabout to his follower, which can apply to any aspect of life, including voting.

²⁴ Director of the journal *Le Quotidien*, whom the author met in Dakar in November 2009.

elected. As noted by Jérôme Lombard²⁵, the considerable ability of these two marabouts to mobilize people has enabled them to channel the violence of young town-dwellers, who are suspicious of what politicians have to say.

Difficulties for Political Parties Seeking to Involve the Neo-Urbans in Senegalese Politics

The two “worldly marabouts”, whom we have just briefly described above, symbolize the emergence of new forms of solidarity networks²⁶ and techniques for mobilizing neo-urbans, but also an inability to translate this mobilizing activity into power to shape electoral outcomes. On the subject of these “worldly marabouts”, Madior Fall²⁷ explained to us why, according to him, marabouts were no longer such good “vendors” of clients to the political parties. For him now there are simply “too many people in the market”²⁸ for selling electoral clients: they are not the only “operators”. Attempts by the marabouts to create political parties, such as Sheikh Modou Kara’s PVD, Ahmed Khalifa Niass’ FAP²⁹ or Sérigne Mamoune Niass’ RP³⁰ demonstrate incidentally the readiness of the marabouts to attain elective posts rather than confine themselves to the role of intermediaries supplying “electoral livestock”.

For Mohamed Guèye, the political field and electoral competition are distinguished by various characteristics, the intensity of which is particularly conspicuous in outlying districts, where neo-urbans live, especially the collapse of authorities concerned with involving the population in voting activity and the emergence of individual choice with regard to voting. It is in fact not rare to find different cotes within one and the same family unit, which renders ineffective the strategies used by the political parties in their approach to that electorate via “social elders”. There is a real difficulty for the political parties when it comes to integrating into their organizations people from the so-called unplanned districts³¹. This difficulty reflects the parties’ inability to understand those areas, their social dynamics, in

²⁵ Researcher at the IRD (Research Institute for Development) in Paris, whom the author met in Dakar in November 2009.

²⁶ They have definitely been part of a brotherhood, which is not a new element in Senegalese society, but their capacity for mobilizing people, which is not on a par with their aura in the Mouride hierarchy, certain practices regarded as heterodox and their ability to recruit followers in urban areas have led to the emergence of players rather different from traditional marabouts.

²⁷ Director of the journal *Sud Quotidien*, whom the author met in Dakar in November 2009.

²⁸ The expression is Madior Fall’s.

²⁹ Front des alliances patriotiques (Front of Patriotic Alliances).

³⁰ Rassemblement pour le peuple (Union for the People).

³¹ Jérôme Lombard points out that this difficulty is also found in districts inhabited by the *nouveaux riches*.

particular the fashioning of a new sense of citizenship in those districts, which is characterized by the inhabitants taking their destiny into their own hands³², by a strong demand for goods and public services, and also by a deep distrust of political parties. This difficulty also stems from a commercialization of political life³³ obliging political parties to have a large “war chest” available, because of the increasing need to distribute money before each election, which would point to significant “capacities for accumulation”. The President’s party is clearly not lagging behind the others given the major “levies” obtained, particularly in relation to contracts for public works³⁴.

All in all, as we are assured by Sérigne Mansour Tall, the question of the neo-urbans and the outlying districts is one of essential importance for the régime and for the country in general. All major demonstrations start out from the suburbs: street peddlers in particular, we are told, have become professional agitators, highly responsive to changing situations and anti-establishment. These zones have also become major sources of votes and it will become more and more important to win them round in order to achieve electoral success. The State sometimes tries to respond to social demands, as for instance with the recent promises of a job-creation program specifically for young people from the outlying districts or the “Zero Potholes in the Suburbs” campaign³⁵. Political parties find it difficult to establish themselves and to have an impact³⁶, because in contrast to the rural areas, which have more stable structures and in which the *big men*, who are able to mobilize their supporters for voting purposes, are well-known, the outlying districts of towns are a laboratory of social change, in which various players are competing with each other in the market for political supporters.

As we have seen, more questions are raised in these few pages of analysis than questions answered. Populations which are difficult to involve in politics, these neo-urbans, are nevertheless mobilized by a large range of players and organizations of every possible size (from youth groups in the districts concerned to “worldly marabouts”). The neo-urbans, like the rest of the urban population,

³² During the 1990s the *set/setal* movement, which noted young people cleaning their district, but also cleaning it up morally speaking, by trying to combat corruption, was already starting out from this redefinition of citizenship. Cf. M. Djouf: “Fresques murales et écritures de l’histoire : le *set/setal* à Dakar”, *Politique africaine*, No. 46, 1992, p. 41-54. We would like to thank Jérôme Lombard for having brought the existence of this movement to our attention and for this reference.

³³ On this issue, see in particular R. Banégas: “Marchandisation du vote, citoyenneté et consolidation démocratique au Bénin”, *Politique africaine*, No. 69, Karthala, 1998.

³⁴ This fact was corroborated for us by several well-known analysts of the political scene in Senegal.

³⁵ The roads in the outlying districts are often in a mediocre state, particularly in areas subject to flooding.

³⁶ Naturally a more detailed analysis would be necessary in which a certain number of opinion-shapers in those districts would emerge, particularly during local elections: well-respected long-term residents, people from those districts originally but who have succeeded economically etc. National elections are of a different kind, however.

are at the heart of these markets of influence, where political protest and violence can be mobilized. These markets are taking shape with a wide spectrum of players and are in fierce competition with each other. Other national examples enable us to understand better the processes analyzed this far solely in relation to Senegal.

Other Examples

Mauritania, Nigeria

In Nouakchott, a Process of “Re-Tribalizing” Politics Made Easier by Urban Segregation

In Mauritania the urbanization process began later and in addition it was accompanied by a rapid and ubiquitous trend towards sedentary living. The census of the Mauritanian population carried out in 1977 recorded a country with a population which was still for the most part nomadic. Forced to become economic refugees by terrible droughts, neo-urbans turned up in Nouakchott *en masse* during the 1980s, 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium. Nouakchott, created in 1956 and no more than a small town with a few thousand inhabitants at the time of Independence, today has a population which probably exceeds the million mark and would represent over a third of the nation. The Mauritanian capital has absorbed two thirds of the neo-urbans. As in Senegal, the network of Mauritania's towns reveals a marked difference in size between the capital and all the rest. Developments in this sphere were so rapid that the various plans for urbanization aimed at bringing order into the growth of the capital were already obsolete when given official approval. This town – overspill area for environmental refugees – had had a relatively mixed population in the late 1970s and early 1980s, became more and more subject to segregation as it grew in size.

While the town was growing, its districts seemed to develop as cohesive communities to an ever increasing degree. The first districts such as Ksar or “The Capital” were places where the first civil servants clustered as well as traders. The Moors³⁷ and the Negro-Africans³⁸ lived in the same districts. Then, as the town grew, reproducing the country's geographical map as it did so, certain districts took in people on the basis of their place of origin: the 5th and 6th Districts are inhabited by Negro-Africans from the valley of the River

³⁷ Term which embraces the part of the Mauritanian population, which adheres to Arab culture. Locally, the term *Beydan* (persons of mixed Arab-Berber origin) tends to be used more as does *Haratine* (people of African origin but Arab culture, which actually includes erstwhile classes which served the *Beydan*).

³⁸ Term which brackets together the African population, i.e. mainly the *Haapular*, *Soninké* and the much smaller groups of *Bambara* and *Wolof*.

Senegal, Teyarett mainly by people from the North and Toujounine by people from the East. In the 1980s and particularly the 1990s, the enhanced role of communities came more and more to the fore, notably as a result of political developments. The new districts were more and more uniform. Riadh, for example, was populated almost exclusively by the *Haratine*, who had been moved out of the central districts and the former mixed character of the old districts of the town was visibly on the decline. After the ethnic conflicts of 1989 (Choplin, 2009), the Moors moved out of the 5th and 6th Districts, which are now populated almost exclusively by Negro-Africans (*Halpulaar*, *Soninké*, alongside which are to be found numerous people from neighboring countries Senegalese, Malians). A journalist³⁹ explained to us that he had lived in the 6th District before, but that over the years the district had gradually ceased to resemble its former self and that his friends (mainly *Beydan*) had all left and he wanted to get back to a district, where he would be able to find a familiar environment again. When he decided to sell his house, only *Soninké* presented themselves as potential buyers. That part of the 6th District was now lived in, virtually exclusively, by people from that ethnic group.

This emergence of separate communities does not just lead to a situation in which districts become either predominantly Moor or Negro-African, but one in which much finer distinctions are still drawn – districts are dominated by Moors of the East, the *Haratine*, the *Soninké*, the *Haalpular* etc. In certain districts veritable tribal islands emerge. In the district known as *Le Carrefour* (Crossroads), in the Arafat administrative area, it is already possible to single out small tribal islands consisting of no more than a dozen houses⁴⁰. Various factors serve to explain this unfortunate trend. First of all the ever larger waves of economic refugees coming from the interior to rejoin their family, when they have the opportunity, and establish themselves in an environment close to their own people in order to benefit from their support. In addition, the “turn-over” of properties is important: this fluidity of the property and land market holds out an opportunity for new arrivals to get nearer to their own people, although they may not have been able to do that initially. Finally, allocation of plots of land via semi-official routes (Choplin, 2009) has made it possible for politicians, high-ranking civil servants and certain influential businessmen to gain control over whole districts from which they have enabled their own people to derive advantage. The construction of social housing by the SOCOGIM⁴¹ has to a large degree benefited the communities to which successive directors of this organization belonged.

³⁹ Conversation arranged with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumera, director of the weekly, *La Tribune*, in 2001.

⁴⁰ Conversation with Yahya Ould El Bara, anthropologist teaching at the University of Nouakchott in July 2002.

⁴¹ Société de construction et de gestion immobilière de la Mauritanie (Company for the Construction and Management of Real Estate of Mauritania).

This process of spontaneous regrouping followed by the emergence of tribal based communities, in parallel with the growth of the city, is therefore to be explained with reference to several factors and in particular to the existence of a dynamic market in landed property with an extensive turn-over of that property and also to the role played by certain entrepreneurs in the distribution of plots of land. This process, however, is also part of the evolution of Mauritanian society as a whole. The droughts, the chronic economic crisis and the structural adjustment program devised in the 1980s have substantially reduced the stated ability to organize society. The redistribution, based on patronage, of goods or “cash” accumulated illegally has reactivated ethnic and tribal loyalties, which replace the State and engulf it. The introduction of democratic competition at the beginning of the 1990s has also helped to accentuate this re-emergence of tribal loyalties⁴², but also – and primarily – to increase ethnic and racial rhetoric, which manifests itself in the towns in the increasingly rapid community building. Thus, in contrast to the Senegal situation, initial community ties, even if they are transformed and tempered through contact with urban life, are still operating frameworks, which point the way when it comes to voting in elections.

In Mauritania, this phenomenon of community allegiance is found in conjunction with an even closer link between the communities and the region from which the new townspeople originate. Armelle Choplin stresses that certain recommendations on how to vote in Nouakchott are taken directly from voters’ original home region, while in Senegal, on the other hand, these links can exist but are not so clearly defined. Jérôme Lombard notes that numerous inhabitants of Dakar are in actual fact no longer linked into rural reality and points out, as an example, young Dakarians from the Serer community, whom he has studied and who have been “Wolofized”, i.e. who express themselves first of all in Wolof and only afterwards in the language of their own community.

⁴² Cf. A. Antil: “Le chef, la famille et l’État. Mauritanie, quand démocratisation rime avec tribalisation”, in *Politique Africaine*, No. 72, December 1998, p. 185-193.

In Nigeria, a Market Based on Political Patronage in Towns and Regulated by Money and Violence

Nigeria differs from the Senegal example in view of a number of structural features: an economy with which the curse of oil has wrought havoc, accounting as it does for more than 90% of its export earnings and causing unhealthy competition at the heart of the country's politico-economic class as well as neglect of various other of Nigeria's sectors of production. Indeed the industrial sector, far from being extended, has been shrinking since the 1970s. The country has become (leaving oil to one side) an importing economy. Thus, in a country, which is one of the largest exporters of oil south of the Sahara, virtually all the petrol consumed is imported. The focusing of attention by the business-and-political class on oil revenues and the non-governance, which ensues from that have meant that the State has "disappeared" from the life of Nigerians. Despite aid of many different kinds and promises of investment in the sector, electricity production has stagnated during the two terms of Olesegun Obasanjo's presidency. Last but not least, Nigeria is characterized by violence – political and criminal – far more widespread than in the other countries of the sub-region and in particular in comparison with the situation in Senegal. An economy living off oil revenue and thus undermined by the curse of oil, an invisible State and serious levels of violence all make it difficult to compare Nigeria with Senegal, but which, when we view its development from the historical angle, helps us in some respects to understand how neo-urbans are drawn into a political framework and sought out as voters come election time.

We have observed how in Dakar, a market characterized by patronage, political mobilization and the channeling of violence, was being redefined. In Nigeria since the 1970s a system of political patronage has been starting to spread its tentacles throughout the country, which is known as *godfatherism*. The *godfathers*⁴³ can be former politicians, businessmen or actual gangsters. They offer "protection" to a politician to ensure they are elected, that is to say funds for his electoral campaign, but also opportunities for getting to know and for exerting control over the "electoral patch" of the targeted constituency. This territorial control can be exercised in several ways – buying votes, fixing elections, sending out "hatchet men" to dissuade those opposing their protégé from going out to vote and so on. This "local expertise" consisting of a well-informed mixture of previous knowledge of the terrain and the ability to buy supporters and dis-

⁴³ Cf. I. C. Okoye, "Political Godfatherism, Electoral Politics and Governance in Nigeria", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, December 4, 2007.

suade the other side from voting is offered to the *godson*. All this makes for a lucrative investment because, once the *godson* has been elected, he will reimburse his *godfather* generously in the form of an attractive monthly pay-off and/or lucrative public contracts, if the *godfather* is a businessman. In this process skillful control of the terrain implies utilizing all the players, who can influence the electorate locally or to other types of players of an extremely violent kind such as gangs or *cult societies*⁴⁴ to put a stop to any resistance and intimidate local populations or patronage networks which had previously been in place.

It goes without saying that the Nigerian example is not in any way a foretaste of what will happen right across the board in sub-Saharan Africa with regard to vote control, but it is, nevertheless, a path which could be opted for by the societies exhibiting some of the characteristics described at the beginning of this section.

⁴⁴ Initially this term was used to designate student unions. Later these groups lurched into violence, racketeering and crime.

Conclusion

Control of the neo-urbans and their integration into the political scene have become a central issue in relation to the stability of political regimes south of the Sahara. In the first place it is from the outlying districts of the towns where the neo-urbans reside that certain social demands are made or outbreaks of violence begin – as we were able to establish at the time of what came to be referred to as the “hunger riots” (2007-2008). Students or trade unions no longer have a monopoly when it comes to initiating social unrest. In the second place the neo-urbans represent an increasingly large section of the electorate.

The arrival of several hundred million neo-urbans in African towns in the next few decades will make this issue an ever more urgent one. It will no longer be enough for regimes to “play off” the country against the towns in the hope of controlling the situation, because the urban populations will soon be larger than rural ones.

In Senegal the neo-urbans of Dakar are experiencing a collapse of the traditional support structures for the individual (community, family, etc.) for reasons both geographic (scattering of people from one and the same village of origin between different urban districts) and socioeconomic (cost of living in the town which undermines opportunities for family support often centered round the nuclear family). They are also experimenting with and building new social networks or social alliances or even starting to mobilize in new ways. Nevertheless, the players who come to influence these potential new recruits (leaders of associations, “worldly marabouts”, etc.) experience difficulties most of the time, when attempting to translate their capacity for mobilizing followers into control at election time.

Political parties have problems mobilizing support in these districts, because they try to heighten the awareness of this very young population using channels which operate elsewhere (using their “social elders” and marabouts). Nowadays the vote in these districts is a question of the individual's choice, as the young neo-urbans try to construct a new kind of citizenship for themselves, which is often at odds with the political world. The political parties naturally make up for their inadequate “hold on reality” in those districts with an orgy of money hand-outs each time there is an election, which would indicate increasingly large opportunities for amassing funds.

The example providing a marked contrast with Senegal, due to its far more recent process of urbanization is that of Mauritania:

Senegal was already one of the most urbanized countries in the continent in 1950, while Mauritania illustrates evolution of a very different kind. Instead of the communities of a very mixed type to be found in the outlying districts of Dakar (where most of the neo-urbans live), urban segregation has been proceeding at an increasingly rapid pace in Nouakchott since the 1980s, as a result of which the traditional structures providing social networks are much more in evidence and still function to a certain extent when it comes to steering voters.

The Nigerian example reveals an “urban political market” that is more developed and more structured than that of Senegal, in which money has a prominent part to play and also violence via *god-fatherism*.

The cases described here – Senegal and the contrasting situations found in Nigeria and Mauritania – constitute possible scenarios for the political integration of neo-urbans throughout Africa.

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Appendix

Table No. 1: Ranking of Countries according to their Rates of Urbanization in 1960 and 2005

En 2005. 2 ^e chiffre (xx,19)	Taux d'urbanisation			
	En 1950. 1 ^{er} chiffre, exemple Burkina Faso (4,xx)			
	Inférieur ou égal à 10 %		Entre 11 % et moins de 25 %	25 % et plus
Moins de 25 %	<u>Afrique de l'Ouest :</u> Burkina Faso (4,19) Niger (5,23)		<u>Afrique de l'Est :</u> Burundi (2,11) Rwanda (2,22) Ouganda (3,12) Malawi (4,17) Ethiopie (5,16) Erythrée (6,21) <u>Afrique australe :</u> Lesotho (1,18) Swaziland (1,24)	
	10 pays			
Entre 25 % et 40 %	<u>Afrique de l'Ouest :</u> Guinée (5,36) Togo (7,36) Sierra Leone (7,40) Mali (8,34) Gambie (10,26) Guinée-Bissau (10,36)		<u>Afrique de l'Est :</u> Mozambique (3,38) Comores (3,36) Tanzanie (4,38) Madagascar (8,27) Zambie (10,36) Zimbabwe (10,36)	
	<u>Afrique centrale :</u> Tchad (4,26) Angola (8,37)		<u>Afrique australe :</u> Namibie (9,33) Soudan (6,40)	
16 pays				
41 % et plus	<u>Afrique de l'Ouest :</u> Mauritanie (2,64) Bénin (5,46) <u>Afrique centrale :</u> Cameroun (10,53)		<u>Afrique de l'Est :</u> Kenya (6,42) <u>Afrique australe :</u> Botswana (3,53)	
	Mauritanie (2,64) Cameroun (10,53)		Botswana (3,53)	
5 pays				
41 % et plus			<u>Afrique de l'Ouest :</u> Nigeria (11,48) Liberia (13,48) Côte d'Ivoire (13,46) Cap-Vert (14,58) Ghana (15,46) <u>Afrique centrale :</u> Gabon (11,85) Centrafrique (16,44) Guinée équatoriale (16,50) <u>Afrique de l'Est :</u> Réunion (24,92)	
			Cap-Vert (14,58) Gabon (11,85) Guinée équatoriale (16,50) Réunion (24,92)	
5 pays (< 50% en 2005), et 4 pays (≥ 50% en 2005)				
41 % et plus			<u>Afrique de l'Ouest :</u> Sénégal (30,51) <u>Afrique centrale :</u> Congo (31,54) <u>Afrique de l'Est :</u> Maurice (29,44) Djibouti (40,85) <u>Afrique australe :</u> Afrique du Sud (43,58)	
			Sénégal (30,51) Congo (31,54) Djibouti (40,85) Afrique du Sud (43,58)	
5 pays				
Total	31 pays		12 pays	
			5 pays	

Sources: UN, quoted in Benoît Ferry, *L'Afrique face à ses défis démographiques*, Karthala, 2007, p. 44.