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## Crossing Over: Ethnicity and Transboundary Conflict in the Senegal River Valley\*

As the waters of the Senegal River retreat to a shallow ebb at the height of the dry season, the border separating northern Senegal from southern Mauritania narrows to a thin, incandescent band of blue, reflecting the intense sunlight of the arid Sahel. In the middle Senegal Valley border town of Matam, situated on the river's left bank (Map 1), the morning of April 20th, 1989 dawned as another serene and uneventful day, the heat of the tropical sun keeping town residents at bay, sequestered in their mud-thatch dwellings and rectangular tin-roof houses. The calm of the mid-morning air soon gave way, however, to the faint sound of a peculiar drone, much like that of a distant rumbling train.

Gazing from the top of the high clay banks of the river, a large gathering of people could be seen some distance below, amassed as a human fortress wall in the middle of the river. Facing off a short distance away on the right bank, a throng of assailants moved about at a frenzied pace, running up and down the sandy incline, hurling large rocks and bits of wood upon the horde of angry bodies in the channel below. The clash was marked by an occasional duel as attackers wielding large chunks of wood as clubs swung frantically at one another.

From high above on the banks of Matam, women and children in the fishing quarters of the village scurried about between mud huts calling out

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to one another as they gathered rocks and bits of wood. The fresh stocks of ammunition were passed rapidly in a gauntlet down the river slope to the men below. Meanwhile, youth raced along the narrow pathways between the mud dwellings carrying small ruminants belonging to their attackers from the other side. In the early morning hours, these animals had been confiscated after entering garden plots belonging to the fishing community and grazing on the fertile beds of grass and the dry stover of maize, beans, and garden vegetables.

This violent clash of neighboring riverine communities—a bloody confrontation of black Haalpulaar fishers and cultivators, and black *haratin* Maures<sup>1</sup>—continued unabated well into the day. By nightfall, two men, one from each community, had died. Both had been brutally tortured and beaten. This incident of ethnic violence on the northern boundary of Senegal occurred in the wake of a similar border dispute eleven days earlier between Mauritanian herders and Senegalese farmers on the river island of Doundou Khore at Diawara (near Bakel in the upper valley) where two Senegalese died.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of these skirmishes on the remote Sahelian frontier, the grisly truncheoning, mutilation, and indiscriminate execution of hundreds of innocent victims several days later in the towns and cities of Senegal and Mauritania caught the most astute social critics of political relations between the two countries by surprise. The black-on-black conflict that initially erupted at Diawara and then Matam, set off a deadly chain of events from the upper valley to the Atlantic coastal port of Saint-Louis. Residents in town after town along the Senegal border took to the streets, venting their rage and hostility at Mauritians in their country.

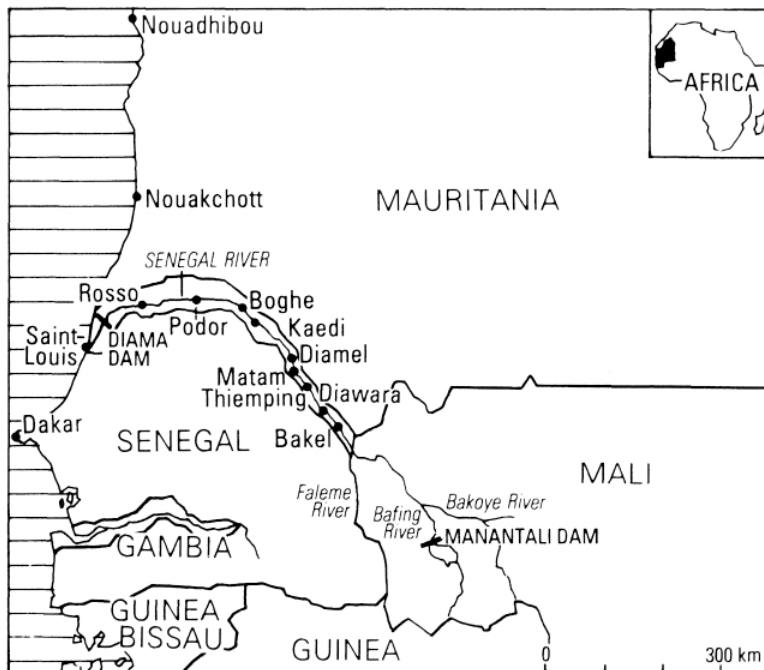
Initially, the assault targeted personal property and items belonging to

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1. The Haalpulaar population (lit. 'speakers of Pulaar') in the northern Senegal Valley is a cultural melange of black Sub-Saharan agropastoralists, who farm, fish, and raise ruminant livestock along the river's edge and on the adjacent lateral floodplains, and who reside primarily in the intermediate catchment zone of the river's broadly extending basin, known as the middle valley. In addition, a semi-nomadic population of Fulbe herders dwelling directly south of the floodplain belt in a sandy upland plateau region (known as the Ferlo) are subsumed within the ethnic category of the Haalpulaar described here. When necessary to make an unambiguous distinction among these communities, however, Fulbe herders will be referred to separately from Haalpulaar farmers and fishers.

The *haratin* are freed slaves or serfs of black Sub-Saharan descent who speak Hassaniya, a Mauritanian Arab dialect. *Haratin* derives from the Arabic term *hartani* and refers historically to a population cultivating the palm grove oases of the Sahara, who 'constitute a kind of caste, formed of men theoretically free but of an inferior status, ranking between the *ahrar* "free men" and the *'abid* "slaves, captives": peasants' (COLIN 1971: 230).

2. For an eyewitness account of the 9 April 1989 Diawara incident, by a Senegalese national taken hostage in Mauritania during the crisis, see 'Honteux massacres fratricides', *Jeune Afrique*, 7 juin 1989, N° 1483: 82-95.



MAP 1. The Senegal River Valley.

'white' Maure shopkeepers, or *bidan*,<sup>3</sup> who are found in many of the towns and villages of Senegal where they dominate petty trade and markets in the retail sector. By the time the unrest spread to the capitals of Nouakchott and Dakar, however, people as well as property fell victims to the violent outburst. In the brief span of a few days in late April, mayhem ruled the streets of the major towns and cities in each country. It is estimated that between 15,000 to 40,000 Mauritanian shops in Senegal (Park, Baro & Ngaido 1990: 2) were pillaged and destroyed.<sup>4</sup> Eyewitness accounts chronicle macabre scenes in Mauritania such as the mutilation of children's genitalia and women's breasts by bands of *haratin* assailants. During 'Black Tuesday' in Nouakchott, at least 200 black Africans died at the hands of black *haratin* death squads trucked in from the countryside to carry out systematic executions under the supervision of white *bidan* patrons (Doyle 1989: 15-16; Coupe 1990: 369-371). A representa-

3. The *bidan* as described by STEWART (1973: 8) refers to the 'white race' and derives from the Arabic term *bayd*, the plural feminine construction of *abyad* meaning 'white'. While primarily of Arabo-Berber origin, *bidan* historically intermarried black Sub-Saharan Africans, leading Stewart to claim that the term is 'essentially a social rather than colour classification' and that *bidan* status 'requires a genealogy claiming Arab descent which is socially acceptable, i.e. which is credible to other [*bidan*]' (*ibid.*).
4. DOYLE (1989: 14), a foreign correspondent assigned to Dakar during the bedlam, estimates between 300,000 and 500,000 Maure shopkeepers in Senegal. In all, they account for about 85 percent of the country's small retail trade (FALL 1989a: 33).

tive rendering of the gruesome acts of violence is found in the following account by a West African news magazine: 'In Dakar, in Nouakchott as in the principal cities of the two countries, the scenes of pillage and of vandalism had been, everywhere, accompanied by acts of incredible savagery: mutilated bodies, heads cut off, women disemboweled, children's throats slit, etc.' (Diallo 1989: 26 [Translation is mine, J. V. M.]).

The bloodbath unfolded as a series of reprisals and counter reprisals between Nouakchott and Dakar as rumors of mutilation and widespread execution filtered back to the capitals inciting hysteria and violence among mobs of youth in Senegal and *haratin* in Mauritania.<sup>5</sup> By the end of April, when the bloodletting finally subsided, over fifty Maures had died in Senegal (Doyle 1989: 16). The number of Senegalese killed in Nouakchott and the countryside is somewhere between 200 and 1,000.<sup>6</sup> Soon after the eruption of violence, the heads of state in each country declared states of emergency, imposing curfews under military supervision. A massive international airlift of approximately 100,000 repatriates from both countries was launched soon after the pogroms ended (Parker 1991: 160). The quelling of unrest in the towns and cities gave way to a new round of tragedy, however, as black Sub-Saharan Africans—primarily of Haalpulaar ethnicity—were systematically rounded up and deported from Mauritania. By May 1989, a huge wave of refugees—many of Mauritanian nationality living on the right bank of the Senegal River—began crossing the border into Senegal.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, large numbers of Mauritanian nationals were expelled from Senegal. By late October 1991, an estimated 70,000 people had sought refuge in Senegal, another 13,000 having fled to Mali.<sup>8</sup> In June 1989, the refugee count of

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5. The precipitating conflict in the northern valley, at Diawara—the chain of violence involving the wholesale destruction of Maure shops, and the seesaw pattern of urban pogroms—is extensively documented by national and foreign correspondents reporting on the events as they transpired. For detailed accounts of the interstate conflict, the sources are numerous. They include the 1989-1990 issues of popular African news magazine (*Jeune Afrique, Africa Report, West Africa*), African and European newspapers (*Le Soleil, Sopi, Sud Hebdo, Le Monde, La Croix, l'Événement du Jeudi, Libération*), bulletin news summaries and political reports covering African affairs (*Africa Confidential, Africa Research Bulletin, Economist Intelligence Unit*). On the other hand, reporting in the American press (*New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, Newsweek, Time*) has been much more sparse.

This essay does not attempt to recount the lengthy chronicle of events as they have been reported. Rather, attention is drawn to the structural linkages of society, history, politics, and the environment as they mediate process and change between the urban core and the rural periphery.

6. DAHMANI 1989: 24; 'Mauritania: War on Black Citizens, *Africa Confidential*, XXX, 1989: 2.

7. Discussion of the plight of the refugee population follows in the latter half of this essay.

8. 'La situation des réfugiés mauritaniens dans la vallée du fleuve Sénégal (Rive gauche). Étude de cas des camps de Ogo, Sinthou Garba et Faboli, dans le

Mauritanians returning to their homeland was approximately 170,000 (Belotteau 1989). In the past three years, the left bank of the Senegal River has become the holding area for thousands of refugees separated from family members and former lives in Mauritania. These dispossessed dream of being reunited with kin and resuming normal lives as cultivators, fishermen, livestock producers, and day laborers in their villages and towns of origin.

## Conceptualizing Conflict

The Senegal-Mauritania conflict is symptomatic of a trend within modern states of heightened competition among various groups for human and natural resources (*i.e.* group entitlements in employment, health, education, land, loan guarantees, etc.). Journalists and social scientists alike have attempted to identify the causes underlying the ethnic fratricide in Senegal and Mauritania. Numerous commentaries have been advanced, the majority of which use a structural materialist approach to explain the ethnic violence. The focus has largely been on the issue of resource access, particularly access to land, which is today a highly prized commodity in the Senegal Valley. Since completion of the Manantali Dam in Mali in 1987, and the antisaline intrusion barrage at Diama, near the river's mouth, in 1986, regional development efforts have concentrated on commodified rice production in irrigated perimeters. In the haste to bolster agricultural production, the conversion of some of the most fertile recession farmlands to irrigation has provoked volatile land disputes among peasant smallholders and urban elites and sparked serious debate among scholars and experts about the future path of development to be taken in the region.<sup>9</sup> Authors offer different interpretations of the weight to be assigned to the environment and physical ecology (Santoir 1990a), political ecology and economy (M.M. Horowitz 1989, 1991), domestic and interstate political relations (Parker 1991), and Arab-African national identity (Badel 1989, Stewart 1989, Santoir 1990b) in spawning widespread violence and unrest across national boundaries.

This essay seeks to demonstrate how structural and material conditions in tandem with the motivating forces of the individual or group actor give rise to conflict. The macroanalytical focus on structure and the micro-level emphasis on individual and group actors merge in the synthesis of two recent exposés on ethnic conflict. The different theoretical

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Département de Matam ' (n.p.: Groupe africain des volontaires pour le développement, unpub. ms.), 1991: 2; SHERBININ 1992: 16.

9. For detailed accounts of the conflict placing the phenomenon of 'land grabbing' at the heart of the debate, see M. M. HOROWITZ 1989, 1991, COUPE 1990, PARK, BARO & NGAIDO 1990, BA 1991, CROUSSE 1991, and SECK 1991.

views on ethnic discord of D. L. Horowitz (1985) and Tambiah (1989) are complementary paradigms when understood in a broader context. What follows is a brief summary of the authors' perspectives.

In his comprehensive work, *Ethnic Groups and Conflict*, D. L. Horowitz (1985: 140) argues that paradigms which cast ethnic rivalries in either a materialist mold as the product of modernization, or in a cultural idiom as the result of invidious plural ethnic tendencies, do not go far enough in explaining 'the important role of ethnic-group anxiety and apprehension [. . .]. None treats the intensity and violent character of ethnic conflict as specially worthy of explanation'.

'Attention needs to be paid to developing theory that links elite and mass concerns and answers the insistent question of why the followers follow. The role of apprehension and group psychology needs specification, as does the importance of symbolic controversies in ethnic conflict. The sheer passion expended in pursuing ethnic conflict calls out for an explanation that does justice to the realm of the feelings. It is necessary to account, not merely for ambition, but for antipathy. A bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory' (*ibid.*).

Horowitz's critique of a materialist approach to ethnic conflict is reflected in a 1989 essay by Tambiah who elaborates on the increasing 'ethnic politicization' taking place within the framework of a capitalist world economy. Contradictory processes of global cultural homogenization and local socioeconomic diversification and differentiation exist concurrently (Roseberry 1982: 202; Tambiah 1989: 341). According to Tambiah, what separates contemporary anthropological discourse from its recent Barthian past in the quest for a more profound understanding of 'ethnicity' is the endeavor to explain the present ground swell of ethnic militancy in the world today. In the 1960s, anthropologists studying ethnic identity were preoccupied with the investigation of permeability and process (Barth 1969). Today, Tambiah (1989: 339, 341) turns our attention to the new challenge that confronts anthropology—to make sense of the heightened 'politicization of ethnicity' in contemporary states:

' . . . Barth's edited volume [. . .] seems now, scarcely two decades later, too benign and tranquil for the study of the ethnic conflicts accompanied by collective violence that rage today [. . .]. The central problems posed by our present phase of ethnic conflicts are startlingly [*sic*] different, arising out of an intensified "politicization of ethnicity" and issuing in conflicts between member groups of a state and polity, which itself is thought to be in crisis ("the crisis of the state"). [. . .] the main problem to be explained is "why ethnicity becomes more easily politicizable in modern society and in those societies on the threshold of modernization, as compared with earlier phases of history" (Tigil 1984: 36). The present context of politicized ethnicity is distinctly a marked phase in the political and economic history of newly independent countries'.

In sum, whereas Tambiah attributes ethnic conflict to the strain of differential resource allocation in a competitive world capitalist order,

D. L. Horowitz (1985: 140, 143, 213) attributes the collective violence of individual elites and their constituent ethnic groups to factors such as 'ethnic-group anxiety and apprehension' and the role of 'relative group worth'. The global or external conceptualization of conflict (materialist structural paradigm of Tambiah) and the local or internal configuration (group psychological actor-oriented model of Horowitz) need not be mutually exclusive. In reinterpreting the conflict between Senegal and Mauritania, this essay suggests that the distinct group psychology of ethnic collectivities as constituted by processes of self-identity (which Horowitz equates with concepts such as 'relative group worth', 'group legitimacy', 'group entitlement', and 'group cleavage and comparison' [*ibid.*: 143, 185]), has, as its structural underpinning, a political economic dynamic of capitalist expansion and economic differentiation.

Enmities among ethnic groups are the product of years of intergroup contestation over territory and resources. The bloodletting on the streets of Dakar and Nouakchott in 1989, as well as sporadic incidents of violence on the northern border in the wake of the urban *mêlée*, must be placed within their proper historical, cultural, and socio-political context. What is presented here is the unique sequencing of events, that over time created sentiments of mutual distrust and hostility. The border incidents at Diawara and Matam awakened these latent antagonism and, in so doing, set off the deadly spark that cost the lives and loss of property for many, brought serious physical injury to hundreds of people, and triggered the forcible expulsion of thousands of foreign and national residents from each country.

The bases of group identity and self-legitimation and the forces of modernization intersect when the issue of group entitlement is situated in diachronic perspective. By briefly tracing three phases of regional history—1) the permeability of precolonial boundaries by agrarian communities on the northern Senegal frontier; 2) French colonial policies of cultural, political, and economic hegemony over black Sub-Saharan Africans and Arabo-Berber Maures; and 3) postcolonial state initiatives of agrarian land reform and agricultural modernization in the Senegal Valley—it will be shown that state policies of resource disbursement have been instrumental in distancing black and Arabo-Berber populations. In effect, the historical process of evolving use rights over land and political participation in multi-ethnic nation building (with important implications for group entitlements to land, legitimation of cultural identities through language preservation, and economic opportunity through political networks of state access) are the basis for understanding how 'group cleavages' and 'group comparisons' are formed (D. L. Horowitz 1985: 143). The transboundary division of ethnic communities in the Senegal Valley by means of interstate policies of inclusion or exclusion to land, linguistic parity, and political autonomy has bred periodic bouts of anxiety, appre-

hension, and, finally, conflict spilling over both banks of the river on a massive scale in recent times.

Tambiah (1989: 346) identifies three critical scenarios in which the subjugation of an ethnic minority to the discriminatory policies of an ethnic majority leads to a deterioration of intercommunity relations and ultimately to an outbreak of hostilities among competing groups. These are: 1) a 'severe erosion of niche-equilibrium' among foreign specialized minorities (commonly referred to in the literature as 'middlemen minorities' [Bonacich 1973]); 2) the slow and progressive physical displacement of 'satellite ethnic/tribal minorities' from their peripheral frontier homelands by 'majorities entrenched at the center'; and 3) 'differential incorporation' whereby the claims by a particular ethnic collectivity to political ascendancy based on demographic superiority and/or historical precedence of occupation lead to a process of 'structural asymmetrical pluralism' that is resented and contested by the ethnic minority. Collectively, these scenarios are central in understanding the interplay of group psychology and global capital in ethnic conflict. In each case, a close parallel may be drawn to the context of violence as it occurred in Senegal and Mauritania.

Attention now turns to the regional history and geographical context in which the three scenarios mentioned above have been played out at the crossroads of the Sahel, where North and South, Arabian Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, adjoin.

## Enmities Old and New

In the early 20th century, the Senegal River was designated by the French colonial government as the boundary separating Senegal from Mauritania. The fertile soils at the river's edge and in the adjacent lateral floodplain supported a mosaic of ethnic communities engaged in riverine fishing, floodplain and dryland farming, and transhumant and nomadic livestock production. For centuries, the river basin functioned as an oasis in a semi-desert region, enabling humans and animals alike to prevail over intermittent drought and climatic variability in this harsh Sahelian landscape.

Directly north of the Senegal River in the western Sahara, the vast barren desert region of Shinqit (present-day Mauritania) became home to a nomadic population of Muslim scholars (*zawiya*), descendants of the Sanhadja Berbers (Almoravids) who migrated into the region between the 8th and 11th centuries (Chassey 1977: 32). Arab warriors (*hassani*) of the Banu Ma'qil tribe (from which Hassaniya, the official Mauritanian language is taken) occupied the same region several centuries later, arriving during the late 14th century (Stewart 1973: 13). Descending from these two principal groups are Mauritians of Arabo-Berber stock, known as *bidan*. Today, they are at the apex of a three-tiered Moor



social hierarchy of nobles, middle laborers (former slaves or *haratin*) and tributaries, and slaves (*abid*), musicians, and artisans.<sup>10</sup>

Until the recent period of protracted Sahelian drought, beginning in the late 1960s, many *bidan* eked out a modest existence in the desert as nomadic herders.<sup>11</sup> The *haratin*, who farmed the fertile floodplains on the right bank of the Senegal River, provided tribute in grains to their *bidan* superiors. The *abid* slaves lived in the remote desert interior cultivating oasis lands and tending the herds of their *bidan* masters under conditions of harsh exploitation and poverty.

Prior to French policy of regional pacification in the late 19th century, the Senegal River Valley served as a corridor for the movement of trade goods and people between the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Sudan. Settled principally on the left bank of the Senegal River before the mid-18th century were three ethnic polities: the Wolof in the kingdom of Waalo in the lower valley, the Haalpulaar of Futa Tooro in the middle valley, and the Soninke of Gajaaga in the upper valley (see Map 2). On the right bank were the Maure emirates of Trarza, Brakna, and Tagant.<sup>12</sup> Frontier relations were often hostile as bands of Mauritanian warriors (*hassani*) would descend from the northern desert, slip unchecked across the river, and raid isolated encampments and small farming enclaves in the floodplain and adjacent upland plateau, capturing young women, men, and children as slaves, and simultaneously pillaging goods, food and animals. Santoir (1990a: 556) notes that this customary form of raiding, or 'razzia', was not carried out exclusively in the middle valley by *hassani* warriors, but rather was a common practice of Fulbe and Haalpulaar warriors as well, constituting an institutionalized 'mode of transfer' of resources within an integrated regional economy.

In addition to being the central location of raiding parties across the river, the northern frontier also attracted Fulbe herders in search of nutrient-rich pasture. During the rains, Senegalese herders would move north across the river, grazing their animals on the seasonal grasslands of southern Mauritania. With the onset of the dry season, Fulbe herders in the Mauritanian interior would move south across the river, pasturing their animals on the crop residues of the floodplain after harvest. During this post-harvest period of open grazing, known as the *ñaangal*, the

10. CHASSEY 1977: 84-90, 1984: 27, 28; COUPE 1990: 60. 'Subordinate to the hassanis were zawiya tribes and several strata of tributaries: the *zenegha* or *lahma* who were bidanis, *haratine* or freed slaves, *abid* or slaves, *mallemin* or smiths, and *iggawen* or musicians and bards' (STEWART 1972: 379).

11. 'For the Bidan, acts of physical labor implied the control of one individual over another's labor: to engage in any form of physical labor was to admit some degree of dependence and some degree of ignobility' (WEBB 1984: 36).

12. While ethnic polities are statistically portrayed here as having fixed geopolitical boundaries dissected by the physiognomy of the Senegal River, in fact, a considerable flux of populations occurred, both seasonal and long-term, moving back and forth across the river.



MAP 2. Pre-Eighteenth Century Ethnic Polities in the Senegal River Valley.

manuring of farmers' fields and the exchange of dairy products for grain and fish would assure the reproductive survival of herding, farming, and fishing communities. Thus, the river frontier during precolonial history presented a high degree of temporal and spatial permeability and flux of populations. Relations among the neighboring Maure and black African populations became characterized by mutual but contradictory associations of complementarity and conflict (*ibid.*: 559).

### The Taming of the Northern Frontier

With the arrival in the 18th century of French merchant capital eager to extend its sphere of commercial control into the heart of Africa, relations among inhabitants on both sides of the river were ineluctably altered. The relevance of French colonial dominion over Sub-Saharan and Arabo-Berber peoples of the Senegal basin in fostering ethnic dissonance has not been adequately explored.

Colonial conquest and the consolidation of disparate and, for the most part, inimical ethnic bodies within a corporate French polity, bound by coercive measures of commercial regulation, codification of law, and mandatory tax policy (Tambiah 1989: 341), left an indelible mark on the collective conscience of the *bidan* Maure community. French interest in the region initially took the form of mercantile trade, which evolved along the

Senegal River at entrepôts or 'escales', such as Podor, Matam, and Bakel. Salt from the Sahara was exchanged for grain and livestock from Senegal, and gum harvested by *haratin* Maures was bartered for imported guinée cloth via the French colonial capital at Saint-Louis (Schmitz 1989: 70). Ongoing warfare and raiding for slaves between the Maure emirates and Senegalese powers south of the river eventually led to French pacification of the region in the late 19th century. By the turn of the century, Wolof and Haalpulaar communities had managed to recover and cultivate lands lost earlier to the Trarza and Brakna emirates on the north bank during slave raids that forced Blacks to flee south into Senegal (Park, Baro & Ngaido 1990: 9).

The early 20th century witnessed the progressive resettlement and recuperation of right bank land by left bank inhabitants and the increased presence of Fulbe herders in southern Mauritania. Santoir (1990a: 560) attributes resettlement of the right bank by the Haalpulaar to three main factors: 1) lower livestock population densities allowing for a larger pastoral reserve during drought years as well as during periods of abundant rainfall after 1950; 2) livestock requisitioning by France during the two world wars as well as livestock epidemics forcing herders to flee north; and 3) evasion of taxation on animals by colonial administrative authorities. The movement of black Africans north across the river coincided with a reverse migration of *bidan* south into Senegal's groundnut basin, where they opened small retail shops in small towns and cities to capitalize on the burgeoning groundnut trade in the region. Strong religious affinities between Mauritania and Senegal were also established at this time through Muslim brotherhoods (*Qadiriyya* and *Tijaniyya*). The marked shift in commerce to the groundnut basin also contributed to the regional decline of the Senegal Valley and extensive outmigration by the latter half of the 20th century (Becker & Lericollais 1989: 151).

In 1903, Mauritania was declared a protectorate of France, and colonial officials based in Saint-Louis administered control of the Mauritanian hinterlands through a policy of indirect rule akin to that of the British, placing regional authority in the hands of *hassani* emirs (Stewart 1972: 385-386). Soon after, however, French authorities began delegating more political tasks to francophone black Africans educated and trained in Senegal, assigning them to important administrative posts in the Mauritanian outback. The northern desert lands were administered as a subsidiary of French commercial interests in Senegal. Imported goods destined for Mauritania were shipped north by land to Saint-Louis, before proceeding further north. Overall, French policy aims and infrastructural development in the region were largely directed toward Senegal, with Mauritania serving more as a satellite to be incorporated within the administrative colonial core at Saint-Louis (Stewart 1989: 162-163).

## Ethnic Cleavage and National Identity in Mauritania

The French strategy of geopolitical consolidation of Maure society under a francophone black African regional polity precipitated debate among Mauritians in the 1950s over the direction the emerging nation's identity should take at independence. Mauritania found itself at the crossroads of a crisis of national cultural identity, forced to forge one of two paths: that of political inclusion (implying a pluralistic culture of Arab/black African identity), or exclusion (based on a monolithic Arab identity).

The debate over national identity found its overt expression prior to independence in the establishment of several regional political parties. The UPM Party (Union progressiste mauritanienne) espoused a pro-French policy of regional integration, favoring the merger of Mauritania with Senegal and Mali in a pluralist society of Arab-black African unity. The EM Party (Entente mauritanienne) sought an exclusive Arab nationalist polity. Finally, the FNLM (Front national de libération mauritanien) advocated the pan-Arab union of Mauritania with Greater Morocco (Badel 1989: 16-17). The early voices of dissent among black Mauritians in the Senegal River Valley opposed to any political platform of national Arab identity united in forming two party blocks, the BDG (Bloc démocratique du Gorgol) in 1956, and the UOVF (Union des Originaires de la Vallée du Fleuve) in 1957 (Stewart 1972: 388-389; Baduel 1989: 18). These two groups were the precursors to a more militant, politicized movement for black African parity known as FLAM (Forces de libération africaines de Mauritanie) that was to emerge out of growing political unrest and dissent among black Mauritians in the 1980s.

The partisan views of the pro-Arab and black African parties on the political orientation to be adopted by the Mauritanian state were vociferously expressed during the National Congress at Aleg in 1958 (*ibid.*: 25-26). Stewart (1972: 392) notes that during this period, the incipient rise of a black non-Maure political conscience served as the primary catalyst in the emergence of a new Maure identity in which past animosities between *hassani* warriors and *zawiya* marabouts were laid to rest.

In sum, the ethno-politicization of black Mauritians at independence and a colonial legacy of French domination gave rise to a concerted policy of arabization by *bidan* Mauritians in the post-independence period.

## Group Entitlement and Arabization at Independence

Several scholars writing on ethnicity have underscored the significance of language in conferring political advantage in a multicultural con-

text. D. L. Horowitz (1985: 219-220) refers to language as 'a symbol of domination [. . .] the quintessential entitlement issue'. Tambiah (1989: 345) reaffirms this position, suggesting that: 'Language is not a mere communicative device, but has implications for educational advantage, occupation and historical legitimation of social precedence'. In Mauritania, shortly after independence, arabization played a key role in conferring political advantage and 'entitlement' to *bidan* Maures who had staunchly resisted attempts at cultural assimilation and participation in the colonial system of French education, and who moved quickly to assume control of the government bureaucracy at the expense of a black non-Arab speaking population in the Senegal Valley. Thus Blacks, who had previously gained favor with the French as a result of their active participation in the colonial school system, now suddenly found themselves disadvantaged vis-à-vis Maures.

Soon after Mauritanian independence, President Ould Daddah proclaimed Arabic as the national language in 1961 (French maintaining the status of 'official language') (Park, Baro & Ngaido 1990: 12). Movement on the part of the *bidan* government to extricate itself from any postcolonial French allegiance gathered momentum in 1965 via departure from the OAM (Organisation africaine et malgache) and the promulgation of laws 65-025 and 65-026 mandating Arabic in all primary and secondary schools (Baduel 1989: 24). The educational decrees had the incendiary effect of fomenting unrest and formal protest among black lycée students and teachers in Nouakchott on 4 January, 1966. The protests were immediately and forcefully put down by bands of armed *haratin* mobilized under the supervision of *bidan* nobles.<sup>13</sup> During the incident, six people died and an estimated seventy more were injured (*ibid.*: 26).

In protest of the violence and systematic under-representation of Blacks in positions of government political authority, a 'Manifesto of 19' was issued in February 1966. Language again resurfaced as the source of controversy in 1979 when another government decree was issued augmenting the role of Arabic in education (Omaar & Fleischman 1991: 36). Protests and violence again erupted leaving two dead (Park, Baro & Ngaido 1990: 5). In addition to educational policies promoting arabization of Maure society, other commentaries have noted a concerted strat-

13. A freed slave, once interviewed about the nature of relations existing between the *bidan* and servile *haratin*, provided the following metaphor: 'The Moors rule by an alliance of the rider and his horse' (COUPE 1990: 334). This alliance of white patron and black client has been interpreted, by one observer of urban violence in Nouakchott, as a modified form of the traditional 'razzia' undertaken by the *hassani* warrior and his faithful *haratin* tributaries (*ibid.*). It is essential to note that despite differences of color, the white *bidan* and black *haratin* are inexorably bound by language and culture. During incidents of ethnic unrest (both past and present) between *bidan* Maures and black Africans, the *haratin* have steadfastly defended the interests of their *bidan* superiors—pitting themselves against other Sub-Saharan Blacks.

egy on the part of the government to project an exclusively Arab image void of any black African presence through the media, in bank notes, stamps, airline advertising, and other forms of public relations (Omaar & Fleischman 1991: 38; FLAM 1991: 18).

Additional measures taken by the government in favor of a pro-Arab/anti-French stance included creation of a national currency and abandonment of the zone franc in 1973, membership in the Arab League in 1973, and nationalization of the mining industry in 1974. Between 1972 and 1974, Mauritania steered a new course in international relations, shifting its political allegiances away from the West in favor of the Arab Middle East (Baduel 1989: 22-24).

### **Capital Transfer from the Core to the Periphery**

Following independence in Senegal and Mauritania in 1960, ethnic tensions between *bidan* Maures and black communities in the Senegal Valley worsened. The deterioration in relations may be attributed to two factors that strongly effected structural change in the domestic economies of both countries during the 1970s and 1980s: 1) massive donor lending and foreign capital investment in the damming of the Senegal River, a strategy intended to modernize the agricultural sector and boost food production after two decades of Sahelian drought, and 2) a foreign debt crisis prompting drastic reductions in domestic spending and the dismantling of public sector finance under the rigorous guidelines of structural adjustment laid down by the World Bank.

As capital flows and development resources under the purview of the 'après-barrages' or post-dam initiative began to be funneled to the northern valley in the mid-1970s for investment in modern pump irrigation agriculture, the issue of group entitlement, most notably concerning land, emerged once again as the Achilles' heel of ethnic discourse.

### **Redefining the Landscape**

The onset of drought conditions in the Sahel in the late 1960s exacerbated longstanding differences among farmers and herders on both sides of the river, and became the pivotal force in reshaping the region's physical and sociopolitical landscape. The devastating losses of livestock to herders in Mauritania profoundly transformed a predominantly pastoral society into a nation of urban squatters huddled at the margins of desert towns, like Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, in poor shanty-like quarters or *bidonvilles*. Estimates cite a drop in the nomadic population of Mauritania from 80-85 percent of the national total between 1965-1970 to 17-23 percent between 1980-1985 (Andriamirado 1989a: 34; Baduel 1989: 38).

The urban population rose precipitously from 2 percent in 1950 to 40 percent in 1990 (*ibid.*), and national herd losses were estimated at 45 percent (cattle 54 percent, camels 10 percent, sheep and goats 17 percent) during the drought years of 1968-1973, 1976, and 1982-1984 (Coupe 1990: 141).

Santoir (1990a: 571) observes that in the drought years after 1972, the near extinction of semi-nomadism as a way of life among the *bidan* Maures was accompanied by the rural exodus of a servile labor reserve of *haratin* and 'abid sharecroppers cultivating the recession floodplains and desert oases of their *bidan* patrons. *Haratin* and 'abid alike sought out the sanctuary of towns and cities staffed with government services and international famine relief for victims of the drought. The abrupt diminution of the *bidan* in the pastoral sector and their increasing presence in the petty retail trade (notably in Senegal) left abandoned grazing lands open to colonization by Fulbe herders by the mid-1970s (*ibid.*). At the same time, *haratin* dromedary nomads were forced by the drought to move south into Haalpulaar farmlands in search of better pasture (*ibid.*: 573).

This reconfiguration of social and spatial boundaries, along with a new campaign on the part of the *bidan* government to administer post-drought taxes on livestock and appropriate land and animals by informal modes of coercion heightened tensions between *bidan* and *haratin* Maures on the one hand, and black farmers and herders (largely Haalpulaar and nomadic Fulbe) on the other.

By the end of the 1970s and a decade of near constant drought, both the Senegalese and Mauritanian economies were in need of vigorous revival through massive infusions of investment capital. The construction of the Manantali and Diama dams on the Senegal River, financed by Arab and European funds, was hailed as the perfect elixir for the economic woes of both countries.<sup>14</sup> The dams are intended to provide a cheap source of hydroelectric power, and shore up food production deficits and mounting trade imbalances in grain imports that have been rising steadily over the past three decades. The optimistic prospect of introducing a double season rice crop is touted by ardent supporters of the

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14. As of 1990, dam costs (all infrastructure including dam supervision, access roads, population resettlement, and forest clearing) had reached \$620 million (\$506 million for Manantali, \$114 million for Diama [\$1 = 316 CFA Francs]) (ZOLTY 1990: 33). Cost sharing to be borne by the tri-member states is as follows: Senegal 42.1 percent, Mali 35.4 percent, Mauritania 22.5 percent. The reimbursement of energy-related costs (hydroturbines, transmission lines, etc.) will be shared primarily by Mali at 52 percent, followed by Senegal at 33 percent and Mauritania at 15 percent (FALL 1989b: 40).

project as the silver bullet solution to the agro-economic ills of the region.<sup>15</sup>

The introduction of irrigated agriculture began in earnest in the mid-1970s, and after nearly two decades, 56,000 hectares (40,000 in Senegal, 16,000 in Mauritania) have come under development. The long range goal for the region is to develop approximately 375,000 hectares (240,000 in Senegal, 125,000 in Mauritania, and 9,000 in Mali), of which 100,000 are to be irrigated by the year 2015, at a net annual increase of just over 2,500 hectares (M. M. Horowitz 1991: 173). Even with the projected expansion, grain production will fall far short of meeting planners' expectations of the highly touted 'breadbasket' region to feed the populations of both nations.<sup>16</sup>

In Mauritania, the devastating effects of drought on the economic well-being of the country were compounded by a second disaster of human rather than natural agency—involvement in the Polisario conflict. Between 1975 and 1982, the war effort in the Spanish Sahara accounted for 30 to 40 percent of the national budget. With the marked drop in world market prices for copper and iron (Badel 1989: 31), the country's total foreign debt mushroomed from \$600 million in 1978 to \$1.8 billion by 1987, or approximately 250 percent of its Gross Domestic Product, making Mauritania one of the world's most indebted countries per capita (*ibid.*: 41). This ruinous foreign policy, dovetailing with the infirmities of drought, brought the nation financially to its knees. Feeling its back to the wall, the *bidan* administration turned its full attention to the Senegal River Valley, where it hoped to rise from the abyss of fiscal disaster. In casting all its eggs in the basket of agrarian land reform and privatized tenure, the Maure government had prepared its nest for the birth of a new modern creature—irrigation agriculture.

### Agrarian Land Reform and Rising Tensions in the Senegal Valley

Eager to transform a long neglected regional economy into an agrarian heartland, the Senegalese and Mauritanian governments embarked on a

15. *Plan directeur de développement intégré pour la rive gauche de la vallée du fleuve Sénégal. Rapport d'étape* (Tarbes: Groupement d'études et de réalisations des sociétés d'aménagement régional—Compagnie d'aménagement des côtes de Gascogne [GERSAR-CACG]), 1989, mimeo; and *Plan directeur de développement intégré pour la rive gauche de la vallée du fleuve Sénégal. Document provisoire* (Tarbes: GERSAR-CACG), 1990, mimeo.

16. By 1991, grain output in Mauritania reached 82,414 metric tons, or only 23 percent of the nation's food needs (SHERBININ 1992: 12) while irrigation agriculture in Senegal is expected to produce 583,000 tons or only 31 percent of the nation's requirements in grain by the year 2000 (FALL 1989b: 40).



program of national land reform aimed at reapportioning resources both to state and private sector interests, foreign as well as national, capable of investing heavily in rice irrigation. Under the criterion of *mise en valeur* (i.e. capital valorization), national land reforms in Mauritania (1960) and Senegal (1964), followed by additional decrees in the 1970s and 1980s, set in motion the institutional jural mechanisms facilitating the progressive erosion and transfer of common property rights from the smallholding peasantry to an elite cadre of government functionaries, private commercial entrepreneurs, and maraboutic clerisy of Islamic sectarian leaders.<sup>17</sup>

While both countries attempted to shift customary ownership and use rights from communal to individualized collectivities for the purposes of rice irrigation, the government policy in Mauritania took on a more capitalized form, allowing for the disposition of land rights through purchase and entitlement.<sup>18</sup> The initial Mauritanian decree (N° 60.139) in 1960, granting the state eminent domain over vacant lands ('terre morte') after ten years, set the stage for a new era of land speculation in the 1980s. Land ordinances in Mauritania in 1983 and 1984 (N°s 83.127/CSMN and 84.009) effectively individualized tenure, thereby opening the door for state access to large tracts of land for irrigation development (Park, Baro & Ngaido 1990: 12, 15; Ba 1991: 260, 264).

This was followed soon after by a series of ministerial directives or 'circulaires' in April of 1984 (N° 0005) and July-August 1985 (N°s 007 and 00020) enabling *bidan* government officials to circumvent certain restrictions on the size of land holdings for appropriation and to 'set up agricultural development schemes without passing through the verification of ownership and compensation procedures of the 1983-84 legislation' (Park, Baro & Ngaido 1990: 15). With this legislation the state took away local control over conflict resolution in land disputes. As Park, Baro and Ngaido note (*ibid.*: 17), the consequences of this state action were often grim:

17. For more exhaustive treatments of land tenure policy and reform in Mauritania, see PARK, BARO & NGAIDO (1990), CROUSSE (1984, 1986, 1991), and BA (1986, 1991). For Senegal, see NIANG (1982), SECK (1985), ENGELHARD & BEN ABDALLAH (1986).

18. The critical distinction to be made between Senegalese and Mauritanian land reform policy is one of structural mediation or its lack thereof, between the state and the peasantry. SECK (1991: 309) comments on the key role of the Rural Community ('Communauté rurale'), a locally elected body of rural village elders responsible for all jural procedures of land disposition and registration, as the mediatory mechanism of the state instituted under the 1972 Senegalese agrarian administrative reform ('Nouvelle politique agricole'). In Mauritania, the stark absence of any modality for arbitration enables the state to directly intervene via local government officials (district governors and department prefects) in the usurpation of peasant lands. It is this blatant disregard by the state of peasant rights to land that has fostered resentment and periodic outbreaks of violence against the *bidan* establishment by black farmers.

'Traditionally, cultivators could always reach an agreement because each community knew the limits of its territory and its holdings. Even if there was conflict on the border of their territories, customary law, seconded by *shari'a*, provided a means of resolution. With the abolition of traditional tenure and the application of the 1983-84 legislation, only the government can settle tenure issues [. . .], this has led to many casualties and even to whole villages being eliminated by the government'.

By 1985-1986, additional government circulars (N<sup>os</sup> 020/MINT and 00013/MINT/SG/DAT) from the Interior Minister to regional administrators accelerated the pace of expropriation of peasant land holdings to private sector interests from Nouakchott and other urban areas (Coupe 1990: 348-349; Crousse 1991: 284). Innumerable instances have been documented of acts of land grabbing by *bidan* entrepreneurs and government elites from Nouakchott and elsewhere. Among the most noteworthy accounts of land expropriation, are the loss of 21,356 hectares of classified forests, traditional grazing routes, and national highway land between Boghe and Rosso in the Trarza region to *bidan* entrepreneurs from Nouakchott; the loss of *haratin* lands at R'Gheywat; and the seizure of Wolof lands at Bren (Ba 1991: 266-267). In Rosso and neighboring departments of the Trarza, Ba (*ibid.*) also exposes the abuses of defective land entitlement procedure, where 8,245 hectares were registered under the names of 56 people (an equivalent of 147 ha/person), many of them fictitious. In addition, land purchases of 20 hectares for 200,000 UM (Mauritanian ouguiya)<sup>19</sup> by regional administrators and businessmen became commonplace on the Mauritanian right bank.

A 1987 report of the Mauritanian parastatal SONADER (Société nationale de développement rural), promoting irrigation agriculture in the region (cited in Coupe 1990: 354), provides a candid commentary on the frontier ethics (Bloom 1990) of land expropriation by well-positioned elites: 'Now a peasant can get up one morning to begin the work of clearing new land belonging to him, and find an urban entrepreneur already working there without his having been informed'.

Accompanying the changes in land valorization for purposes of rice irrigation in Mauritania was the formation of a new social class of rural proletarian field labor composed of black *haratin*, sedentarized Fulbe agropastoralists, and Senegalese and Malian farmers who were paid 3-4,000 UM/month for long, onerous hours on the rice schemes (Ba 1991: 268-269). Senegalese technicians were routinely hired as skilled equipment operators on the perimeters as well (Coupe 1990: 349).

The proliferation of land seizures predates the circulars of 1985-1986 noted above. The Minister of the Interior himself ironically acknowledges the abuses of illegal land concessions by regional authorities and

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19. 1,000 ouguiya = \$13.242.

chides his subordinates in 1984 for their excesses and liberal interpretations of the land code:

'Finally, I turn your attention to the innumerable abuses of power committed by administrative authorities with regards to state land concessions. Several authorities have accorded rural concessions while they have no authorization before the present decree [No 0005/MINT of 14 April, 1984]. This attitude denotes not only an ignorance of the law [...] even negligence of the rights of the State that the territorial authority must faithfully represent. In any event, the breaches of the present circular, and the acts of concession issued in defiance of the reglementation will be severely sanctioned' (Crousse 1991: 294 [Translation is mine, J. V. M.]).

Despite culpability acknowledged on the part of *bidan* government officials themselves, land privatization continued unabated after the decrees of 1985-1986.<sup>20</sup> It finally reached its apogee when a local directive (N° 119/DB) initiated in 1988 by the prefect of Boghe in the middle valley reapportioned nine plots varying in size from 20 to 689 hectares to *bidan* speculators from the north (Park, Baro & Ngaido 1990: 17). This event along with numerous other land seizures prompted black leaders of the *Tijaniyya* Islamic caliphate, in the Senegal Valley, to call for the organization of self-defense militias to resist land seizures by the state and to warn the Mauritanian government, in June, 1988 that: 'If it [the border situation] is not firmly resolved in reasonable time, this problem may bring grave consequences to the peace of the northern frontier and the surrounding sub-region' (Andriamirado 1989a: 34-36). The pernicious seizure of valuable floodplain lands belonging to black Senegalese and Mauritanian farmers, mostly Haalpulaar, and a general state trend toward 'bidanization' of government resources and services (arabization of education, preferential hiring of *bidan* in government posts, etc.) prompted black Haalpulaar leaders and intellectuals, in 1986, to form a militant organization, FLAM (Forces de libération africaines de Mauritanie), in defense of black Mauritanian interests. FLAM members distributed the 'Manifesto of Oppressed Black Mauritanians' at the 1986 OAU (Organization of African Unity) summit in Harare, calling for violent resistance to continued land sales and seizures by Maure merchants (Coupe 1990: 351).

FLAM leaders also protested the preferential disbursement of loans and credit through national banks to *bidan* entrepreneurs for agricultural investment in large-scale irrigation schemes. A Mauritanian government crackdown on FLAM dissidents and intellectuals including the author of the manifesto, Tene Youssef Gueye, resulted in arrests, imprisonment, and torture. This fueled protests in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Boghe,

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20. A recent World Bank report (cited in SHERBININ 1992: 8) indicates that between 1984-1985 and 1987-1988, the total surface area of private rice perimeters in Mauritania increased 17-fold, from 500 to 8,500 hectares.

and Kaedi. Further violence and rioting in Mauritanian cities in 1988 was triggered by the execution of three high-ranking officers, and the pronouncement of eighteen life sentences in Oualata prison following an aborted coup attempt in October 1987 by Haalpulaar military officers. By late 1988, Gueye and two officers of the coup had died while in prison (*ibid.*: 352-360).

Violent confrontation over land had been escalating prior to 1988, as black Senegalese farmers were forcibly expelled from their farm lands on the right bank by *haratin* communities defending the capital interests of their *bidan* superiors.<sup>21</sup> The clashes on the border prompted an August 1988 meeting of Senegalese and Mauritanian officials and the formation of an interstate commission to identify affected areas of land dispute and to institute measures assuring the maintenance of transborder mobility of populations and the equitable access to farmlands by parties on both banks of the river. Disagreements between the two parties following visits to village sites of land contestation led to the failure of border diplomacy and a resumption of interethnic hostilities over farmlands on the right bank.

### Frontier Retribution and the Prelude to Chaos

With tensions mounting along the border prior to the ethnic clashes in 1989, a chain of events spurred by the governments of each country fanned discord among inhabitants on both sides of the river. Annoyed by what was perceived to be an outright assault on the transboundary farmlands of their northern border residents, Senegalese officials retaliated in November 1988, by enforcing an earlier government decree (N° 322 on 11 March 1986) restricting dromedary grazing below a line extending across the Ferlo region from Potou to Dara, Linguere, and Matam. The total number of camels was not to exceed 6,000 heads and only two males and one female were permitted per family (Santoir 1990a: 570). Mauritanian herders lost 20,000 camels (in addition to 30,000 cattle and 100,000 sheep) during the seizures (Dahmani 1989: 24), and responded soon after by setting up a temporary embargo along the border to prevent entry of Senegalese trucks carrying vegetable oil, animal feed, and fresh vegetables. The Senegalese immediately responded in kind, instituting a blockade at the border town of Rosso on all fresh fish, mineral water, and food imports from Mauritania.

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21. Numerous instances have been documented of ongoing contestation between neighboring villages on opposite sides of the river over right bank floodplain bottomlands (*waalo*) and river bank gardens (*falo*) converted for irrigation use. One of the most vehemently disputed, volatile confrontations over such lands, took place between the *haratin* Maure community of Dolol Siwre (on the right bank) and the Haalpular village of Odoberé (on the left) in the middle valley, dating back prior to 1986. For accounts of specific village incidents, see FLAM 1989; FLEISCHMAN 1991: 15, and journalistic coverage by *Sud Hebdo* in 1989.

This low-level trade dispute finally ceased in February 1989. At this time, only two months prior to the eruption of hostilities at Diawara, the Mauritanian government took the long awaited step of joining the Maghreb Union, and in so doing, intensified the inflamed racial sensibilities of black communities settled in the region.

### Frontier Raiders, Forlorn Victims, Forsaken Lands

In the aftermath of the violence of April, 1989, diplomatic relations were severed between the two states.<sup>22</sup> The Mauritanian government pressed its claim of indemnization for large losses of property belonging to Maure shopkeepers, the confiscation of livestock, and assets frozen in Senegal's banks. Senegal advanced irredentist claims to land on the right bank and called for the redrawing of the northern boundary based on a 1933 French colonial charter. Both nations stood teetering at the brink of warfare by December 1989, as minor military clashes along the river went either unnoticed or underreported by the international press. Heavy exchanges of artillery fire on the border occurred on numerous occasions as did Mauritanian training missions near the river where loud explosions were frequent by late 1989 and early 1990. One of the most sustained military engagements occurred on 20 December 1989 at Diamel, a small fishing village on the left bank, 2 kilometers downstream from Matam. This confrontation, and several others, as well as sporadic gunfire by armed *haratin* civil militia at Senegalese fishermen on the river and at left bank farmers, resulted in scores of casualties, including on occasion, innocent women and children. Several sources documented the Iraqi shipment of arms, mortars, SAM-7 missiles, rocket launchers, and Iraqi military advisors in anticipation of ensuing warfare.<sup>23</sup>

During the height of the conflict in 1989, thousands of black Senegalese and Mauritanian nationals were forcibly expelled from Mauritania while many others voluntarily fled their villages to avoid threats of physical attack and loss of property. Many crossed the river on foot or by boat, arriving in Senegal tired, hungry, and with few if any belongings.<sup>24</sup> A large number claiming Mauritanian nationality appear to have

22. With the attenuation of border hostilities in 1991 and 1992, both countries have been engaged in a series of meetings and political negotiations aimed at restoring diplomatic ties in the near future.

23. 'Mauritania: The Politics of a Pogrom', *Africa Confidential* XXXI, 13: 3; and 'Mauritania: Friends of Saddam', *Africa Confidential* XXXII, 3: 6; KING 1990: 18; ANDRIAMIRADO 1989b: 32; SOUDAN 1990: 42.

24. Coverage of the plight and pillage of border refugees is chronicled in the sources cited *supra* in fn. 6. These accounts describe the systematic confiscation of personal items including jewelry, watches, clothing and money, and the destruction of national identification cards by Mauritanian authorities.

The maltreatment of those deported from Mauritania, as well as an extensive

been expelled either as a result of putative Senegalese descent, or because Mauritanian identity cards were obtained after 1966, in some instances fraudulently.<sup>25</sup> Contesting the claims of Mauritanian authorities, one survey of Fulbe refugees in the middle valley (Matam department) reveals that an overwhelming majority (90 percent) were born in Mauritania (Santoir 1990b: 595). Many villages on the right bank are alleged to have been torched and razed or systematically emptied of black Haalpulaar residents. Park, Baro and Ngaido (1990: 2) report the clearing of 140 Mauritanian villages of their entire population, and cite an estimate that 50 percent of the Haalpulaar community downstream from Podor was expelled from the right bank by mid-1989. Many of these villages were then repopulated by *haratin* Maures relocated in the valley to farm new irrigation schemes. In addition to serving as a convenient labor reserve, this population of relocatees functions as the armed guard of the *bidan* government, positioned on the front line of defense against Fulbe herders, and Haalpulaar fishermen and farmers attempting to cross the river (Sherbinin 1992: 7; Omaar & Fleischman 1991: 38).

By 30 June 1989, the Matam department had received more than 26,000 refugees of which an estimated 80 percent were Fulbe herders.<sup>26</sup> Three-quarters of them cultivated floodplain lands in Mauritania (Santoir 1990b: 581). A geographical survey undertaken in 1973 by Lericollais and Diallo (1980) provides the only exhaustive assessment of the magnitude of transboundary farming. Seck's recent analysis of the 1973 data (1991: 305) reveals that 11.7 percent (37,498) of all floodplain farmers in the Senegal Valley cultivated fields on the opposite side of the river. The Senegalese, moreover, represented 79 percent (29,771) of all transborder farmers, while their Mauritanian counterparts accounted for only 21 percent (7,727). Although these figures are now dated, they provide, nonetheless, a rough measure of the proportional losses of highly

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history of human rights violation, such as the imprisonment, torture, and extrajudicial execution of political prisoners has been documented by human rights organizations, such as AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (1990), and AFRICA WATCH (1990). In addition, FLAM (1989, 1991) has reported at length on the deliberate actions of the state to institute a discriminatory policy against Blacks in Mauritania, reminiscent of the policies of apartheid in South Africa.

25. 'An African Exodus with Racial Overtones', *New York Times*, July 22, 1989: 1, 4; PARK, BARO & NGAIDO 1990: 20.
26. In order to qualify for national and international human relief services, such as food aid, the Senegal government has identified three sub-categories of refugees: 1) 'réfugiés', black Africans of Mauritanian nationality; 2) 'rapatriés', Senegalese citizens who resided or worked in Mauritania, and 3) 'déguerpis', displaced or uprooted Senegalese citizens who farmed the right bank of the Senegal river (M. M. HOROWITZ 1989: 6). Among the deported in the Matam department, 17,774 were refugees, 7,122 were rapatriates, and 1,360 were uprooted, as of 30 June 1989 (figures obtained from the Matam Prefecture in June 1989).

valued floodplain lands to both Senegalese and Mauritanian farmers since closure of the northern boundary.

As farmers and herders fled each country, significant numbers of ruminant livestock were confiscated or abandoned. The animals reported by Matam officials as missing, stolen, or confiscated as of 30 June 1989 include, for the Mauritanian livestock, 9,399 bovines, 16,543 ovines and caprines; and for the Senegalese livestock, 3,190 bovines, 4,012 ovines and caprines.

To recuperate personal herds, as well as those of individual clients, Fulbe 'commandos' or *ruggiyankooŋe* deported from Mauritania began launching night time raiding parties, slipping back across the border.<sup>27</sup> By the end of 1989, late night Fulbe raiding excursions into Mauritania had become a lucrative enterprise for many. Santoir (1990b: 590) notes the payment of 500,000 CFA Francs (approximately \$1,800) by one client for recovery of his lost herds. It is interesting that the recent episodes of ethnic conflict in Senegal and Mauritania have witnessed a reactivation of customary raiding patterns in both urban and rural settings—the alliance of *bidan-haratin* ties (patron-clientelism) during the 'razzia' in Mauritanian towns and cities, and the revival of the *ruggo* among Fulbe herders on the border. All too frequently, casualties of Mauritanian civilians and military, and Fulbe herders alike resulted from these furtive missions. The unchecked success of these raids in terms of substantial herd losses in Mauritania was central in pushing border tensions to the brink of full-scale warfare by early 1990.

The sudden, massive influx of deportees, many with extended family ties to members in the receiving villages, overwhelmed the resource capacity of local communities to feed and clothe large numbers of destitute people. In the middle valley, the Matam department experienced a 50 percent population increase almost overnight as refugees spilled across the border in the initial months after April 1989 (*ibid.*). Data presented below from a survey of refugees in one border village provide an example of the degree of wealth in farmland and livestock lost by some farmers and herders.

Located 17 kilometers upstream from Matam on the Senegal River, the village of Thiemping became sanctuary to 392 Haalpulaar farmers, fishers, and Fulbe herders from area villages and hamlets across the river. Between May and July 1989, the village population rose by almost 32 percent. Two-thirds of the incoming refugees were transhumant Fulbe pastoralists, the remaining one-third Haalpulaar agropastoralists and fishers. Among the deported, 47.2 percent claimed status as Senega-

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27. SANTOIR (1990b: 589) denotes the root of the term *ruggiyankooŋe* (lit. 'raiders'), from the Fulbe *ruggo*, which is a ritual practice of institutionalized livestock raiding among neighboring camps of Fulbe youth as a demonstration of virility and courage.

lese nationals (6.6 percent as repatriates, 40.6 percent as displaced or 'uprooted'), while the remaining 52.8 percent (refugees) identified themselves as Mauritanian citizens. Of the Haalpulaar repatriated, almost all were close kin to Thiemping villagers. Fulbe families claimed no affiliation to village members. The gender composition of the deported community was balanced. Fifty percent of refugees were under the age of 15, and the average period of residence in Mauritania for adults above age 30 was 23 years. The high proportion of individuals surveyed claiming Mauritanian citizenship and the lengthy period of residence of adults in that country (most claiming birth there) seriously calls into question the official position of the Mauritanian government that no citizens of their country were deported.

Haalpulaar farmers and Fulbe herders alike suffered heavy losses of livestock. Of 4,732 animals owned (12 head per capita), only 891 (2.3 head per capita) or 18.8 percent were recovered. Per capita livestock holdings were much greater among Fulbe herders (15.8) than among Haalpulaar farmers (4.9). Recovery rates as well were much higher among the former group (3.1 vs. 0.6). Losses were proportionately higher for large ruminants and browsers (cattle, horses/donkeys, camels) than for small ones, but at 22.4 percent, recovery rates were higher for small ruminants (sheep/goats). Overall, the Fulbe recovered 19.9 percent of their animals, while the Haalpulaar recuperated only 12.3 percent. Data on animal losses sustained and rates of recovery are presented in Table I.

TABLE I.—HERD LOSS AND RECOVERY RATES AMONG THIEMPING REFUGEES, 1989.

	<i>Cattle</i>			<i>Horses/Donkeys</i>			<i>Sheep/Goats</i>			<i>Camels</i>			<i>Total</i>		
	O	L	R %	O	L	R %	O	L	R %	O	L	R %	O	L	R %
Herders	1009	916	9.2	80	73	8.8	2992	2281	23.8	2	2	0	4083	3272	19.9
Farmers	174	157	9.8	21	18	14.3	454	394	13.2	0	0	0	649	569	12.3
Total	1183	1073	9.3	101	91	9.9	3446	2675	22.4	2	2	0	4732	3841	18.8

O = Ownership    L = Loss    R = Recovery

A survey of the land cultivated in 1988-89 by the refugee population reveals the importance of transboundary farming in the region and the extent of land lost by riverine farmers and herders (Table II). Nearly four-fifths (79.3 percent) of the land farmed was located in Mauritania, the remaining one-fifth in Senegal. In Mauritania, rainfed uplands (*jeeri*) made up almost one-half (49.6 percent) of all plots farmed, another



one-third (34 percent) were in recession agriculture (*waalo* bottomlands 15.5 percent, *falo* river gardens 12.2 percent, *foonde* high plains 6.3 percent), followed by 16.4 percent in irrigation (PIV or Périmètre irrigué villageois). The refugee population owned most of this land (92.4 percent), the remainder being farmed on a usufruct basis through tenancy, lease, and loan arrangements.

TABLE II.—TRANSBORDER LANDHOLDING STATUS  
AMONG THIEMPING REFUGEES, 1989.

Mauritania Landholding Status

	<i>Waalo</i>		<i>Falo</i>		<i>Foonde</i>		<i>Jeeri</i>		<i>PIV**</i>		<i>Subtotal</i>		<i>Total</i>
	LH	UR*	LH	UR	LH	UR	LH	UR	LH	UR	LH	UR	
Herders	23	4	13	2	5	1	64	6	25	2	130	15	145
Farmers	10	0	12	2	8	1	48	0	12	0	90	3	93
Total	33	4	25	4	13	2	112	6	37	2	220	18	238
%	15.5		12.2		6.3		49.6		16.4		--		100.0

Senegal Landholding Status

	<i>Waalo</i>		<i>Falo</i>		<i>Foonde</i>		<i>Jeeri</i>		<i>PIV</i>		<i>Subtotal</i>		<i>Total</i>
	LH	UR	LH	UR	LH	UR	LH	UR	LH	UR	LH	UR	
Herders	2	22	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	25	28
Farmers	11	5	9	0	8	0	1	0	0	0	29	5	34
Total	13	27	9	3	8	0	1	0	1	0	32	30	62
%	64.5		19.4		12.9		1.6		1.6		--		100.0

Total Transborder Landholding

	<i>Waalo</i>		<i>Falo</i>		<i>Foonde</i>		<i>Jeeri</i>		<i>PIV</i>		<i>Subtotal</i>		<i>Total</i>
	LH %	UR %	LH %	UR %	LH %	UR %	LH %	UR %	LH %	UR %	LH %	UR %	
Mauritania	11.0	1.3	8.3	1.3	4.3	0.7	37.3	2.0	12.3	0.7	73.3	6.0	79.3
Senegal	4.3	9.0	3.0	1.0	2.7	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.0	10.7	10.0	20.7
Total	25.6		13.6		7.7		39.6		13.3		--		100.0

\* LH = Landholdings UR = Use Rights (tenancy, lease, loan)

\*\* PIV = Périmètre irrigué villageois

While the refugees owned and farmed most of their fields in Mauritania, the proportion of fields owned in Senegal remains significantly high (32 of 62 plots, or 51.6 percent). Floodplain lands (*waalo, falo, foonde*) represent the quasi-totality (96.8 percent) of all plots farmed, with *waalo* bottomlands accounting for 64.5 percent.

In examining the portfolio of agricultural lands cultivated by the refugee sample several important facts emerge: four-fifths of all land farmed and lost was located in Mauritania; the bulk of land (84 percent) was owned and farmed by the herder-farmer population itself; and recession lands (*waalo, falo, foonde*) comprised almost one-half (46.9 percent) of all the holdings lost.

These data corroborate the findings of the 1973 transborder land survey cited above (Lericollais & Diallo 1980, Seck 1991). They illustrate the saliency of seasonal mobility for agropastoral communities and show clearly how agrarian livelihoods and landholdings in African river basin ecosystems often transcend international boundaries.

\*

This essay, in focusing on a distant, obscure locale at the margin of the African Sahel, has attempted to shed light on a violent ethnic confrontation that has received scant attention and little critical analysis in both social science circles and the American popular press. The fatal turn of events of 1989 are complex and multidimensional in nature—the fusion of history, ethnic identity, ecology, and political economy.

Tambiah (1989: 346) describes three scenarios leading to ethnic conflict that are effectively illustrated in the Senegal-Mauritania case: the 'severe erosion of niche-equilibrium', the marginalization of 'satellite ethnic/tribal minorities', and the 'differential incorporation' of ethnic collectivities giving rise to a phenomenon of 'structural asymmetrical pluralism'. The erosion and reconfiguration of 'niche-equilibriums', induced by natural and anthropogenic forces, has radically altered the physical and cultural landscape of both countries. Persistent drought in the 1970s provoked a mass exodus of *bidan* herders from the countryside to the towns and cities of Senegal and Mauritania, where they created a new occupational niche for themselves in the petty retail sector. This spatial and socio-occupational void was soon filled by black Fulbe herders who reoccupied the semi-desert niche. Many bond servants (*'abid*) and freed slaves (*haratin*) also fleeing the vagaries of drought, abandoned their previous agropastoral activities for the safety of urban centers. Finally, drought coupled with economic stagnation precipitated the migration north of black Africans into urban areas of Mauritania where manual and semi-skilled jobs were created in the post-drought years.

Since the drought, the occupational and physical landscape has been redefined and restructured by human agency. *Bidan* access to black farmlands on the right bank of the Senegal River for private sector irrigation, aided by the redeployment of servile labor from the oases and river floodplains to the perimeters, has forced Haalpulaar farmers and herders to flee their homes and take up residence as refugees in Senegal. Finally, the abrupt departure of *bidan* shopkeepers from the urban setting in Senegal, and their forced relocation in Mauritania, leaves the issue of future niche-equilibrium in that country as yet undefined.

The 'bidanization' of Haalpulaar lands in Mauritania illustrates Tambiah's second point as well: the retreat of 'satellite ethnic/tribal minorities' at the hands of an encroaching ethnic majority well ensconced in the political and economic nucleus of the state. The arabization of formal schooling and the privatization of prime farmlands in the river basin under a series of land reform decrees in the 1980s consolidated the *bidan* hold on the urban core and paved the way for the transfer and investment of capital to the rural periphery.

A third scenario instigating ethnic conflict is that of 'differential incorporation', whereby the political economic ascendancy of *bidan* elites is buttressed by claims of a demographic majority and historical precedence of occupation.<sup>28</sup> The end result has been a disproportionate overrepresentation of *bidan* authority and influence in both public and private sectors of the economy and a marked underrepresentation of Blacks—symptomatic of Tambiah's reference to 'structural asymmetrical pluralism'.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, this essay asserts that the Senegal-Mauritania conflict is the result not only of the territorial competition over commodified resources, but the product of internecine strife and ethnic antagonism conditioned by historical perceptions of the 'other' as adversary. The recurrence of

28. The *bidan* government claim of demographic superiority has been contested by numerous sources, the most vociferous opposition coming from FLAM (1989, 1991). National census figures from 1977 and 1988 have never been officially released, leading many to question the government claim of a *bidan* demographic majority. Data from the 1960 census reveal 70 percent of the population as speaking Hassaniya, 15 percent Pulaar, 5 percent Soninke, and 10 percent mixed (PARKER 1991: 167). A 1964-65 study from the Mauritanian center of demographic and social studies extrapolating from a representative sample of the population provides very different figures, indicating a clear black majority: white Maures 43 percent, black Africans 16 percent, other servile groups (largely black) 41 percent (COUPE 1990: 59). Any claims of historical precedence of occupation may be mute as well, since the earliest known settlement of the western Sahara is purported to have been a black population of 'Bafour' hunters and gatherers during the Neolithic who were slowly pushed southward by the desiccation of the Sahara and the invasion of the Almoravids from the north (CHASSEY 1977: 23; GERTEINY 1981: 32).

29. For documentation on the disproportional underrepresentation of Blacks in favor of the *bidan* in the high posts of the government, commerce, and military, see FLAM 1989: 16-29.

phenomena such as slave raiding and the 'razzia' by the Maures, *ruggo* raiding parties by the Fulbe, and the contestation over farmlands and pastoral reserves by black Haalpulaar farmers and Maure nomads adds an important and deep-seated social-psychological dimension of group apprehension and anxiety to ethnic conflict. Ethnic animosities borne out of historical struggle, and reinforced by more recent exclusionary practices such as the apportioning of group entitlements in language, land, economic opportunity, and political office to *bidan* rather than black Mauritians, have produced a self-perpetuating cycle of distrust and vilification between the rival groups. Distorted perceptions of the 'enemy', amplified by rumor and innuendo, have never become more evident between black Africans and light-skinned (as well as black) Maures than during the violent clashes of April 1989, when each group brutally lashed out, hacking and pummeling one another in a grotesque fashion.

Recent initiatives to expand the agricultural productivity of the region by means of hydro-technological development of the river basin have had the unforeseen effect of heightening longstanding enmities among ethnic communities on both sides of the river. After a brief rendezvous with mob mayhem and a spontaneous maelstrom of terror and bloodletting on the streets of Dakar and Nouakchott in late April 1989, it is hoped that government authorities, development planners, and social scientists alike will move beyond a position of passivity in '[coping] with the phenomenon of destructive violence' (Tambiah 1989: 348). Concerted action is required to adopt effective policy measures that will mitigate against the likelihood of another tragic outbreak of ethnic violence in the foreseeable future.

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