

Senegal Cultural Field Guide

Senegal is a diverse West African nation approximately the size of South Dakota and home to more than 36 ethnic groups and languages.¹ Senegal's national development has been shaped by its location between the edge of the Sahara and the Atlantic. Trans-Saharan trade brought Islam and Arab influences to Senegal through North Africa. Later, Senegal became one of the first African countries to trade with Europe through the Atlantic seaways. Today, Senegal is seen by the Senegalese as a bridge between Black African, Islamic, and European civilizations.²

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Caption "Senegal"

Ethnic Groups

Wolof

The largest and most influential ethnic group in Senegal is the Wolof. The 5 million Wolof³ comprise 43 percent of the country's total population of 11.5 million. The Wolof are proud of their long history as a powerful and independent people. They view contemporary Senegal as the successor to a line of Wolof-dominated empires. Historically, the center of Wolof culture has been the savannahs of northern Senegal, although they live throughout the country. Today, the Wolof live in both small rural villages and large, thriving urban centers throughout Senegal.⁴ In addition, the Wolof make up the third largest cultural group in The Gambia and are also present in southern Mauritania. Other ethnic groups view the Wolof as a group that values appearance and wealth.⁵

Graphic "sen_wolof_family.jpg"

Caption "Wolof Family"

Wolof culture has become so widespread that it has come to be identified as an overarching Senegalese culture. Most ethnic groups in Senegal embrace elements of Wolof culture as a means to improve communication across ethnic groups. However, certain groups, such as the Jola, view themselves as very different from the Wolof and resist the encroachment of Wolof culture.⁶ Many members of other ethnicities, such as the Fulani, identify themselves as Wolof if they are living in an urban area and speaking the Wolof language.⁷

Ceremonial gift giving (*masla*) is an integral element of Senegalese Wolof culture, especially for Wolof women. It is one of the many pre-Islamic practices still observed by contemporary Muslim Wolof. A Wolof woman's good character depends on her honor, restraint, patience, hospitality, and generosity. All of these characteristics are put on display during the Wolof ceremonies that accompany major life events. The amount given as gifts at each ceremonial occasion is recorded by the recipient, who in turn gives gifts of twice the amount received at later gatherings. Some Wolof men and Muslim institutions criticize these female practices as wasteful squandering. They argue that the

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money exchanged by Wolof women would be better spent as the traditional Muslim *zakat*, or alms collected by Muslim leaders for the poor.⁸

Fulani

The Fulani are the second largest cultural group in Senegal, comprising roughly 24 percent of the population, or 2.7 million people.⁹ The Fulani are also known as the Fulbe, Fula, Peul or Peuhle. Their numbers include a cultural subgroup known as the Toucouleur (or Tukuloor) and a linguistic group known as the Haalpulaar'en.¹⁰ The Fulani are traditionally considered the most pious Muslims and other ethnic groups strongly associate the Fulani with Islam. However, the Fulani believe their greatest quality is their Pulaar language.¹¹ Fulani groups live across the sub-Saharan region of West Africa, and in all of the countries of West Africa, with significant populations in Burkina Faso, The Gambia, northern Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Sierra Leon. The Fulani are also found in Chad, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon. While there is a total population of approximately 10 million Fulani in Africa, Fulani groups are the minority in all the nations in which they reside due to the transnational nature of their distribution.¹² The Fulani in Senegal maintain a cultural connection to Fulani groups across national borders, especially along the Senegal River, where Toucouleur communities were artificially divided by the border formation between Senegal and Mauritania.¹³

Graphic "sen_fulani_children.jpg"
Caption "Fulani Children"

Senegalese Fulani can be divided into two distinct cultural groups based on lifestyle: a large group of semi-nomadic herders known simply as Fulani, and the Toucouleur, who are settled farmers inhabiting the middle valley of the Senegal River Basin. The Fulani and the Toucouleur both speak a dialect of the language Fulfulde known as Pulaar. This dialect, shared between two otherwise dissimilar groups of Fulani, has given rise to a new collective Fulani identity known as Haalpulaar'en, (speakers of Pulaar). Some Fulani identify as Haalpulaar'en in an effort to resist Wolof domination of Senegal.

Graphic "sen_fulani_village.jpg"
Caption "Fulani Village"

The semi-nomadic Fulani's lives are dominated by raising and maintaining herds of cattle. Historically, the constant search for available water resulted in annual migration. Today, the Fulani no longer migrate to dry season camps along the Senegal River; instead, they have developed shorter movement patterns based on shared access to watering holes and the search for usable pasture land.¹⁴ Cattle are a symbol of the Fulani identity, even among Fulani who have given up the nomadic life in favor of a settled life on farms. Cattle herding is considered the only pure Fulani occupation. In herding communities, cattle ownership is directly linked to a male's prosperity.¹⁵

Graphic "sen_fulani_mother_child.jpg"
Caption "Fulani Mother and Child"

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The Fulani follow a code of behavior known as the Pulaar Way. The specific practices of the Pulaar Way vary from region to region; however, it is an expression of Fulani cultural pride in every community. Rather than a uniform code of rules, the Pulaar Way is a group of behavioral traits considered acceptable by the Fulani. Smoking, drinking, and committing adultery, for example, are not part of the Pulaar Way. The Pulaar Way emphasizes the centrality of cattle and glorifies the occupation of cattle herding, as well as the preeminence of the Fulani over all other ethnic groups. When Fulani are brought before the community for having committed a crime, their guilt or innocence is determined by the degree to which their actions violated the Pulaar Way.¹⁶ While the Pulaar Way forbids unprovoked aggression, it compels men to aggressively defend themselves against insults. The Fulani are proud of their reputation as an aggressive people. They believe this characteristic sets them apart from other, weaker peoples.¹⁷

Toucouleur

Senegal's one million Toucouleur make up approximately nine percent of the Senegalese population.¹⁸ Many Fulani and Toucouleur disagree about whether the Toucouleur are true or pure Fulani: many Fulani believe the Toucouleur are actually descended from ethnic groups that moved to the fertile river valley and adopted the Pulaar dialect. The Toucouleur are distinguishable from herding Fulani by their location along the southern bank of the Senegal River, their agricultural lifestyle, and their reputation as Muslim clerics. They are less likely to raise cattle and instead focus on farming the fertile river basin. Their agricultural lifestyle and permanent villages have increased their sustained contact with other ethnic groups, such as the Wolof.¹⁹ This distinction is becoming less significant as increasing numbers of Fulani throughout Senegal take up farming in response to droughts and pressure from the government.

Serer

The third largest ethnic group in Senegal, the Serer, has had a significant impact on Senegal's history because of their legacy of independence and their receptiveness to Catholicism during French colonization. The Serer comprise approximately 15 percent of the population, or about 1.7 million people.²⁰ The Serer believe that they are the oldest ethnic group in Senegal. The Serer claim that they migrated from areas north of Senegal in the year 1,000 A.D., when Berber incursions drove them out of their homeland.²¹ The Serer are a diverse group, and Serer in different villages speak mutually unintelligible dialects. Small numbers of Serer also live in The Gambia.

The Serer define themselves by their attachment to traditional Serer culture, which they believe is very mystical.²² Although some Serer are now Muslim, in the past they were renowned for their resistance to Islam, which they associated with Wolof patriarchy, oppression, and slavery.²³ Many contemporary Serer are highly influenced by the Wolof culture and language and belong to the Wolof-dominated Mouride Sufi brotherhood.²⁴

The power and influence of the Catholic Serer population far exceeds their actual numbers. The famous Senegalese president and poet Leopold Sedar Senghor was the Catholic son of a Serer father and a Fulani Muslim mother.²⁵ The Serer, even those who are nominally Catholic or Muslim, retain much of their traditional mystic beliefs.

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Traditionally Serer believe in sprits, known as *pangols*, who live the sacred forests and to whom they offer libations.²⁶

Jola

The Jola, also known as the Diola or Joola, inhabit the Casamance region of southern Senegal. They are the largest ethnic group in the Lower Casamance²⁷ and make up approximately five percent of the total Senegalese population, or about 600,000 people.²⁸ The Jola also make up the second largest cultural group in The Gambia and are present in small numbers in Guinea-Bissau. The Jola are a diverse people divided by language, geography, and religion. The Jola speak a number of mutually unintelligible dialects. Though most contemporary Jola are Muslim, a significant proportion of the population practices the traditional Jola animist religion of *Awasena*, and others have converted to Christianity. Many Muslim and Christian converts incorporate animist traditions into their religious practices.

Graphic “sen_jola_wedding.jpg”
Caption “Jola Wedding Party”

Contemporary Jola share a strong connection to the land, mainly as rice farmers. Jola live in compounds made up of extended families, and Jola communities are governed by collective decision making.²⁹ Councils of village elders make municipal decisions, and women hold significant roles in religious activities.³⁰ Rice has spiritual significance; it is served during funeral ceremonies and it represents a persons lifetime accomplishments. The more rice a Jola accumulates, the more extravagant their funeral can be.³¹ Many Jola consider their geographical identity as residents of the Casamance region to be stronger than their Jola ethnic identity.³² Some inhabitants of the Casamance feel estranged from Senegal because of their geographic isolation from the rest of the country. The Casamance separatist movement, led by the *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques* (MFDC), began in 1982 and is West Africa’s longest running conflict.³³ The leaders of the MFDC advocate separatism because they feel disconnected from the Dakar government, which they believe has deliberately exploited and underdeveloped the Casamance; thus their grievances are not ethnic or religious, but rather geographic and economic.²⁰ Though the conflict is often misunderstood as driven by Jola separatism, the MFDC is now an elite movement;²⁰ today many inhabitants of the Casamance, particularly the young, are socially integrated into the larger Senegalese society and speak Wolof in addition to their Jola dialect.³⁴

Lebu

The Lebu are the most urban ethnic group in Senegal, and their urban culture is one of the defining characteristics of their identity. The Lebu are concentrated in the urban, coastal Cape Vert Peninsula region of Senegal; however, small numbers of Lebu live along the coasts of Mauritania, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. Although they do not see themselves as ethnically Wolof, the Lebu speak a dialect of Wolof, and many of their family names and customs are similar to both the Wolof and the Serer. The Lebu make up approximately one percent of the population, or about 102,000 people.³⁵ The Lebu believe that they migrated from the north to the Cape Verde Peninsula in 1700, expelling

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the peoples previously living in the area along the way. Once they arrived in Cape Verde, the Lebu became subsistence farmers and famed fishermen. At first, the animist Lebu remained under the political control of the *damel* (king) of the Wolof state of Cayor. However, in 1790, a small group of Muslim Lebu under the leadership of Muslim leader Dial Diop launched a bloody war for independence. The war lasted until 1812, when Cayor admitted defeat and Diop became the leader of the whole Lebu community, both Muslim and animist.³⁶ Today, all of the Lebu identify as Muslim. However, like many Senegalese, they retain many of their pre-Islamic animist practices, such as the belief in spirit possession and the use of charms.³⁷

Graphic “sen_yoff_in_lebu.jpg”

Caption “City of Yoff in Lebu State”

The Lebu state became known as the “Lebu Republic” because of its unique political structure. The state, located in the present day city of Yoff, was governed by a bi-cameral assembly of chiefs and led by a head chief chosen by the assembly. Unlike the hierarchical Wolof, the Lebu has no noble class. Instead, the backbone of the community consists of Lebu freemen. The Lebu’s unique form of quasi-representative government has set them apart from other ethnic groups in the region. This governing history has given them a strong sense of pride in their separate identity and traditions. The Lebu’s strong sense of identity has helped them to resist both French colonization and assimilation into wider Senegalese culture.³⁸ Today, the Lebu living in Yoff retain a measure of autonomy from Senegal.

Mandinka

The Mandinka believe that their ancestors migrated from the Mande regions of central Africa, especially the area that now comprises present day Mali. Many contemporary Senegalese Mandinka live in the Casamance and the southeastern section of Senegal that borders Mali and view the Mande speaking inhabitants of Mali as their distant cousins. In addition, the Mandinka comprise the largest cultural group in neighboring Gambia and can also be found in Mali and Guinea-Bissau. The Mandinka make up about four percent of the Senegalese population, or approximately 480,000 people. The Mandinka are proud of their role in bringing Islam to southern Senegal. They believe that Mandinka Muslim families, known as the *Jakhanke*, were instrumental in converting the Jola and other groups to Islam through trade. In Senegal, the Mandinka identity is fluid and inclusive. Like other Senegalese ethnic groups, they are very accepting of non-Mandinka who adopt a Mandinka identity. Many Senegalese who speak Mandinka and identify as Mandinka also identify with a pre-Mandinka ethnic group that was absorbed into the Mandinka.³⁹

Interaction

Senegal’s diverse mix of ethnic groups have interacted in both peaceful and hostile ways throughout the region’s history. During the 13th century, the Wolof were unified under the leadership of the legendary *bourba* (ruler) N’Diayane N’Diaye. Later, the Djolof Empire also conquered the Serer kingdoms of Sine and Saloum. Under the Djolof Empire, the Wolof resisted the spread of Islam by the Moors of present day Mauritania and the Fulani of the kingdom of Futa Toro in Senegal to retain their traditional animist

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religious practices. Contemporary Wolof Senegalese remember the glory of the Djolof Empire with pride.⁴⁰ The Wolof alternately dominated and were dominated by neighboring Toucouleur and Fulani states. In addition, Wolof states absorbed large numbers of Fulani immigrants with varying degrees of discord throughout their history. The Wolof and Mandinka ethnic groups have also had a longstanding hostile relationship. The Moors of Mauritania attempted to conquer and convert the Wolof to Islam, but met with mixed results. Finally, the Jola people of southern Senegal were seen by the Wolof as a slave source, and many Jola were enslaved and eventually absorbed into Wolof society.⁴¹

Language

Wolof is the most widely used and understood language in Senegal, especially in urban areas. Although French is the only official language of Senegal, Wolof and non-Wolof Senegalese often refer to Wolof as the national language. Urban Wolof has been adopted not only by the Wolof population of Dakar and other major cities, but also by urban Senegalese of various ethnic backgrounds. In 1988, 80 percent of the Senegalese population spoke Wolof, while only approximately 44 percent of the population was identified as ethnically Wolof.⁴² Despite its dominance, many Senegalese, most notably the Fulani, feel that Wolof is not a culturally significant language on its own and serves only as an intermediate language that allows different ethnic groups to communicate with each other.⁴³

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Caption "Language"

Some Fulani and Toucouleur view the increasing dominance of the Wolof language among urban populations in Senegal as a threat to their cultural identity. The Fulani look down on the Wolof language, considering it to be an inferior language that is only dominant because it is easy to learn. The Fulani believe that the Pulaar language is strongly linked to their Fulani identity and that loss of this language means one has lost the Fulani culture.⁴⁴ Younger generations of Fulani, whose parents migrated to cities such as Dakar, often do not learn to speak Pulaar and become fluent only in Wolof. People of Fulani descent often claim they are Wolof because it is the only language they speak. When pressed, however, these urban Fulani often acknowledge their ethnic Fulani heritage and may go on to criticize the Wolof language and culture, expressing anger that it is taking over Senegal.⁴⁵

Resistance to the encroaching Wolof influence has given rise to an increased identification as Haalpulaar'en ("speakers of Pulaar"). Some contemporary Toucouleur advocate using the term Haalpulaar'en as an ethnic classification. They believe calling themselves Haalpulaar'en unifies the Toucouleur with the greater Fulani cultural group, which they believe strengthens their resistance to Wolof cultural encroachments. The Haalpulaar'en movement, however, is led primarily by the cultural elite and has been only marginally successful at combating the Wolof influence and strengthening a shared Toucouleur-Fulani identity.⁴⁶

Wolof is primarily an oral, not a written language. Wolof speakers who are literate in French generally write in French instead of Wolof. Wolof speakers who are not literate in French generally write in Wolof with the Arabic alphabet.⁴⁷ While the use of French remains widespread in Senegal, today it is being replaced by English, which is growing in popularity as an increasing number of the Senegalese elite send their children to American rather than French universities.⁴⁸

Cultural History

Senegalese see Islamic conversion, colonization, and independence as their country's most significant historical milestones.⁴⁹

Islamic Conversion

Senegalese conversion to Islam is relatively recent. In 1912, 66 percent of the population of Senegal was Muslim, but 90 percent of the population identified as Muslim by 1960.⁵⁰ Islam was introduced to North Africa by Arab generals not long after the death of the Prophet Muhammad,⁵¹ and expanded slowly and unevenly throughout Senegal.⁵² The religion first spread south to the Senegalese Fulani area of the Futa Toro from Mauritania, beginning in the 10th century. The Fulani, in particular, are credited throughout Senegal with bringing Islam to West Africa. The Fulani became predominantly Muslim and developed scholarly Islamic traditions known as *toorobe* that were passed down by scholars.⁵³

From the Futa Toro, the Fulani spread Islam by contact with Wolof traders and Islamic brotherhoods and through a series of Fulani campaigns that lasted until the late 19th century.⁵⁴ Islam became increasingly popular with Wolof traders, the peasant class, and among rural populations through peaceful contact with wandering Fulani preachers and merchants. The Wolof lower classes were attracted by Islam's message of social equality and were more likely to adhere to semi-orthodox Islamic practices than the nobility, who saw Islam as a threat to its authority.⁵⁵

Gradually, as Islam spread across the Wolof states, *marabouts*, or Sufi living saints, came to replace the traditional Senegalese authority figures.⁵⁶ A *marabout's* power comes from his *baraka*, or charisma. *Baraka* can be inherited or passed to special deputies, ensuring the continuation of the *marabout's* brotherhood after his death.⁵⁷ The *marabouts* also had legitimacy in the eyes of the people because of their knowledge of the Qur'an and their use of amulets and magic to cure sickness and bad luck. Many *marabouts* were also involved in trade. Most significantly, *marabouts* rose to positions of power by becoming prominent advisors to Muslim and animist kings. They were valued for their magical powers and their ability to read and write Arabic.⁵⁸ In contemporary Senegal, *marabouts* are still authority figures, though only a few command large followings and have strong political influence. Those who do are usually the descendants of *marabouts* who founded Sufi brotherhoods, such as Amadou Bamba.⁵⁹

Colonization

The later years of Senegal's Islamic conversion occurred alongside European regional colonization. The increasing presence of Europeans in Senegal during through the 15th to 20th centuries contributed to the Islamic conversion. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to encounter the people living at the mouth of the Senegal River in 1444. They

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immediately established a trading relationship with the coastal Wolof of the Djolof Empire. The Wolof were known throughout the region for their robust trade economy and welcomed access to a new market. The French established a permanent base at Saint Louis by 1659 and on the island of Goree in 1677. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Wolof traded slaves and gum arabic with the Europeans. Until the mid-19th century, the French only controlled Saint Louis and its hinterlands and Gorée. In 1857, the French annexed the Cape Verde Peninsula and began to steadily extend its control over rural Wolof territories in the interior. Gradually, the Wolof states in the countryside fell to the French.⁶⁰

Slave-trading and other European influences began to weaken and disintegrate the Wolof and Serer states during the 19th century. The increased demand for slaves fueled warfare and instability in the Wolof states as kings and warlords raided neighboring areas and even their own people to supply slaves to the Europeans. Resentment among orthodox Muslims in Senegal grew when they saw their families sold into slavery as the noble classes drank wine and violated Islamic norms. Mixed bands of Wolof and Fulani Muslims led by reformers such as Umar Tall and Ma Ba declared war against the ruling classes and the expanding French colonialists. Although their struggle was framed in religious language, the campaigns were largely in response to the ruling class's failure to protect and provide for its subjects and anger over French imperialism.⁶¹ However, Muslim revolts threatened both the traditional Wolof animist power structure as well as the new French Catholic Administration. Thus, the animist Wolof *ceddo* warrior class joined with the French against the Muslim warriors.⁶²

The most decisive Wolof defeat came in 1886, when Lat Dior, the Wolof leader of the state of Cayor, was defeated by the French during the battle of Dekkilé. His army had resisted the construction of a railway line across his lands, which they perceived as a threat to their autonomy. Today, the Wolof view 1886 as a pivotal year in Senegalese history. Indeed, the French defeat of the Wolof kings marked the destruction of traditional centers of authority and the rise of the Sufi brotherhoods in Wolof politics and society.⁶³

Sufism originated in the Middle East as a mystical movement. Sufis organized into brotherhoods that centered on a particular Sufi philosopher or saint. In Senegal, the first two Sufi Brotherhoods to gain popularity were the Qadiriyya, which originated in Baghdad, and the Tijaniyya, which originated in Morocco. The Tijaniyya brotherhood was most popular among the Fulani and was originally spread by the Fulani warrior Al Hajj Umar Tall. Later, many Wolof left their brotherhoods to join the Mouride brotherhood formed by Wolof hero Amadou Bamba or the Baye Fall brotherhood of Amadou's deputy Ibra Fall. During unstable periods, the brotherhoods were able to offer their followers protection, employment, partial escape from caste boundaries, an outlet for political protest, and a guarantee of paradise after death.⁶⁴ Later, Islam was seen by many Senegalese as an indigenous African way to resist French Catholic imperialism. In the aftermath of Lat Dior's defeat, the French rapidly colonized the communities of Saint-Louis, Goree, Dakar, and Rufisque, calling them the Four Communes.⁶⁵ By the end of the century, the Wolof living in the Four Communes were becoming assimilated into a new, French-influenced urban culture. These towns were governed directly by French law, while the rural areas where the Wolof retained more traditional life styles remained only under nominal control by the French colonial administration. While the Senegalese

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living in the Four Communes rapidly became assimilated into a new, French-influenced urban culture, the Senegalese living in rural areas largely remained loyal to their traditional culture and kingdoms. In the Lower Casamance of southern Senegal, the French first expanded their influence by establishing trading posts and Catholic missions. Although the French did not gain control of the Casamance region of Senegal as quickly as they did in the north, colonization had a significant impact on the people of that region as well.⁶⁶

Over time, an urban and elite group of Africans who were assimilated to French culture developed in the Four Communes. The small numbers of Senegalese that were considered French citizens were usually French educated, long-term residents of the Four Communes, and Muslim. The Wolof, Lebu, and Toucouleur dominated the black African elite in all four of the Communes. Only members of the upper classes became successful political candidates. Although elite Africans were more numerous than the white French or the Creoles (persons of mixed French and Senegalese ancestry), it remained a politically disorganized group until the early 20th century. Galandou Diouf, a Wolof from Saint-Louis, was the first black Senegalese elected by the Lebu of Rufisque as a representative to the French General Council in Paris in 1909. From that point, elite African Senegalese began to assert their power.⁶⁷

Most Senegalese did not receive any political rights from the French until after World War II. Nevertheless, they were still peripherally involved in the political process. After the 1920 reforms were initiated, some traditional chiefs were placed on the Colonial Council in Saint Louis. Although they could not vote, many non-citizen Senegalese attended election rallies across the country. The French colonial administration failed to understand the important role that the Wolof language played in these political rallies. They assumed that because many Senegalese did not understand French, and Wolof was an oral, not a written, language, they did not have the tools to follow political campaigns. However, rallies for various candidates were held in Wolof, and many Senegalese discussed the issues of the day in cafes and on the streets.⁶⁸

The French defeat of the old Wolof kings and the expansion of French colonialism profoundly affected Senegalese society, marking the destruction of traditional centers of authority and the rise of Sufi brotherhoods in Wolof politics and society.⁶⁹ The colonial period saw the strengthening of Sufi brotherhoods, which replaced individual *marabouts*⁷⁰ and took over the old power structure of traditional Senegalese states run by kings, nobles, and the *ceddo* warrior class. The brotherhoods were especially attractive to slaves who saw them as an opportunity to escape some of the constraints of their station in life.⁷¹ The brotherhoods also cooperated with the French and became heavily involved in peanut production. In other ways, however, the new social structure replicated the patterns of the old. For instance, most *marabouts* (religious leaders of the Sufi brotherhoods) came from noble families, while their followers came from low caste families.⁷²

Independence

Senegal achieved a peaceful independence from France on 20 June 1960 led by Leopold Sedar Senghor, who became the first president. The Senegalese consider Senghor to be the father of their nation. Born to Catholic parents in Joal, a small coastal town, Senghor studied in Paris in the late 1920s where he came into contact with others in the

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African diaspora, including African-Americans. These expatriates began to debate issues beyond Senegal's relationship with France, such as the status of Africa as a whole, Europe's global colonization project, and the place of the black man in the international arena. Out of these debates came the concept of *negritude*, this asserted the value of African culture and civilization.⁷³ However, the concept did not gain widespread popularity in Senegal, where most people could not relate to Senghor's struggle as a black man living in Paris.⁷⁴

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Caption "Leopold Sedar Senghor"

After achieving independence, Senegal united with Mali to form the Mali Federation. The Mali Federation was beset by internal conflicts from its inception, and within 2 months Senghor and the Senegalese government decided that it was doomed. The association was dissolved and Senegal became an independent state.

The Senegalese remain very proud of their independence and of their country. With few exceptions, political parties and the political elite that emerged in post-independence Senegal have formed along ideological, rather than ethnic or geographic, divisions. Senghor's party, *Le Bloc Democratique Senegalais*, included members from all Senegalese ethnic groups. Ethnic divisions were more pronounced in local, rather than national, politics. Many Senegalese have grown increasingly conscious of their Muslim identity in recent decades, yet it wasn't until the Diouf administration that Senegal became known internationally as a leading Muslim country.⁷⁵ The Senegalese are also very proud of their reputation as one of the most politically stable countries in West Africa. The election of President Abdoulaye Wade in 2000 is hailed as a rare example of a peaceful transition of power between political rivals in West Africa.⁷⁶ In the days leading to the 2006 elections, there were several minor, politically motivated conflicts in Dakar. However, the nation, as a whole, has remained peaceful.⁷⁷

Religion

Throughout its history, Senegal has been home to a diversity of religions. In Senegal, there is a popular saying that 95 percent of the population is Muslim, 5 percent of the population is Christian, and 100 percent of the population is animist. Most Senegalese practice a hybrid form of Islam that incorporates elements of traditional African religion and North African Sufism (mystical Islam). The Senegalese tend to have little desire to adhere to strict, orthodox interpretations of Islam. They are proud of their unique Islamic practices, which they view as one of the defining characteristics of their identity.

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Caption "Mosque in Kaolack"

In contemporary Senegal, nearly all Muslim Senegalese belong to a Sufi brotherhood and follow a *marabout*,⁷⁸ living saints associated with a specific Sufi brotherhood who are believed to have supernatural powers. They serve as teachers and intermediaries between brotherhood members and god. The Senegalese visit their *marabouts* for guidance and

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advice, particularly before making important decisions, such as choosing whom to marry.⁷⁹ Senegalese women, though they cannot be official members, are usually affiliated with the brotherhoods of their fathers or husbands. Like men, they consult with their *marabouts* and give generously to the brotherhoods and their charities.⁸⁰

The brotherhoods are traditionally associated with certain ethnicities; however, contemporary brotherhoods are integrated in terms of both ethnicity and caste. The Tijaniyya remains the largest brotherhood in Senegal⁸¹ and it is traditionally associated with the Fulani.⁸² The Mouride brotherhood's membership is almost entirely Wolof, and increasing numbers of Wolof are leaving the Tijaniyya to join the Mourides. Most members of the Qadiriyya brotherhood live near the Mauritanian border or among the Moors of Senegal. While the Baye Fall, a subgroup of the Mourides, stand out for their numerous unorthodox practices (such as shunning prayer and fasting in favor of hard work), there are few ideological differences between the Mourides, the Qadiriyya, and the Tijaniyya. The main differences among the three brotherhoods are their unique forms of prayer and ritual observance.⁸³

Mouride *marabout* Sheik Amadou Bamba is by far the most popular and revered figure in Senegal. The Senegalese view Bamba as a saint, poet, and hero of the resistance to French colonialism. He symbolizes Muslim piety, selflessness, and peaceful resistance. His image as a Sufi saint is painted on buildings, automobiles, and necklaces, and has come to represent all of Senegal. The image is based on the only known photograph of Bamba, which shows him standing in front of a wooden wall wearing white robes, a white turban, and a white scarf across the lower half of his face.

Graphic "[sen_amadou_bamba.jpg](#)"
Caption "Amadou Bamba"

Bamba was born in the town of M'backe in 1853. Many Senegalese consider Amadou's mother, Mame Diarra Bousso, to be a saint in her own right. Mame Diarra is said to be the epitome of the Wolof value *surtura*, or patience and self-sacrifice, and she is held up as the ideal Wolof woman. Today, many female associates of the Mourides make pilgrimages to Mame Diarra's tomb in the city of Porokhane. When Bamba was 13, his village was ransacked by the Muslim leader Ma Ba. This event is seen to be the genesis of both Amadou's and the Wolof people's distaste towards religious violence. The Wolof embraced Bamba because they empathized with his weariness of war and responded to his peaceful resistance to the French.

The French saw Bamba's growing influence in Senegal as a threat to their authority and had him exiled. However, Bamba's exile only served to cement his status as a saint among the Wolof and other Senegalese, who interpreted his exile as a parallel to the Prophet Muhammad's exile from Mecca to Medina in 622. While Bamba was in exile, accounts of his saintly and miraculous behavior spread among the Wolof, and these tales are still popular today. Bamba's following soon turned into a movement, and his new Mouride brotherhood became the second most popular brotherhood in Senegal. Though most contemporary Mourides are Wolof, Bamba himself is a national hero to all Senegalese.

The Senegalese are loyal to the leaders, practices, and beliefs of their Sufi brotherhoods. As a result, orthodox Islamic movements have been markedly unsuccessful throughout

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Senegalese history. Though Senegalese reform movements have their roots in the colonial period, most of these movements have had little impact, adapting instead to the will of the brotherhoods. By the 1980s, many prominent Muslim families had educated their children in Arab Muslim countries. These countries began to donate to Senegalese religious institutions to build schools and mosques. This exchange with other Muslim nations raised awareness among some Senegalese Muslims that the type of Islam practiced across Senegal did not conform to orthodox standards. Another Islamic reform movement attempted, but failed to end what it considered to be the Sufi brotherhoods' heretical activities.⁸⁴ The movement ultimately had to admit failure to reform Senegalese Islam and turned its attention, instead, to the perceived corruption and stagnation of the Senegalese state.⁸⁵

Today, Islam is an increasingly significant unifying element of Senegalese identity. The shared experience of Islamic education has decreased the divisions between caste and ethnic groups in Senegal. Arabic use is increasing at all levels of education, and *marabouts* now encourage their followers' children to attend school. Many leading *marabouts* hold a great deal of political influence and have used their power to maintain peace and stability within Senegal. Until the 1980s, *marabouts* instructed their followers to vote for specific candidates. Today the *marabouts* practice neutrality, although low-level *marabouts* sometimes support individual candidates, and politicians continue to seek the support of prominent Muslim leaders. The current leader of the Mouride brotherhood, one of Sheik Amadou Bamba's grandsons, is especially influential throughout Senegal. He continues to uphold his grandfather's tradition of promoting peaceful solutions to political conflicts and has consistently refused to undertake actions that could lead to unrest and civil conflict, such as expropriating land from Fulani herders. However, he and other prominent *marabouts* are elderly, and their successors are unlikely to be regarded with as much respect and reverence by the Senegalese people.⁸⁶ Many indigenous animist beliefs and practices have been incorporated into the Islamic belief system of the Senegalese. For example, some Wolof retain a belief in spirits that guard their villages. Particularly prevalent is a belief in the spirit of the village well. While belief in spirits pre-dates Islam's arrival to the Wolof, the spirits are now identified with the Islamic *jinn*, mystical spirit people who are identified in the Qur'an as being made by god from smokeless fire.⁸⁷ In the Casamance, a number of Jola continue to practice *Awasena*, the traditional animist Jola religion that emphasizes sacred forests, ceremonial masks, and secret initiation ceremonies. Many Jola who had converted to Catholicism returned to animist religious practices after French influence waned in the Casamance during the second half of the 20th century. Thus, among the Jola, it is the Christian population that tends to practice hybrid forms of worship that retain animist religious beliefs and traditions.

The Senegalese are generally tolerant and accepting of religious minorities. Approximately 5 percent of Senegal is Christian, and Senegalese Christians have had a much greater impact on Senegal than their small numbers would suggest. Leopold Senghor, national hero and the first president of Senegal, was Christian. A large proportion of the Jola population is Christian, as are about 10 percent of the Serer. Small numbers of Wolof Christians can be found in urban centers such as Dakar, Saint Louis, and Bathurst. Most Senegalese Christians are Roman Catholics whose families were converted by the French. Senegalese Christians tend to be concentrated in urban centers

because their families were more likely to have come into contact with colonial missionaries there or because they immigrated to the cities during the colonial period to join the Christian communities.⁸⁸ In southern Senegal, most Christian Jola tend to be concentrated south of the Casamance River.

Caste Groups

Caste affiliation is another defining characteristic of identity for some Senegalese. Caste divisions are more prevalent among the Wolof and the Toucouleur than other ethnic groups. Interethnic and interreligious marriage has historically been more acceptable in Senegal than inter-caste marriage.⁸⁹ However, the boundaries between different castes have become increasingly fluid since Senegal gained independence from France in 1960. While the caste system remains important in rural areas, many urban Senegalese increasingly promote equality between the castes. Many Senegalese are placing greater emphasis on their shared Islamic or Senegalese national identity than they do on caste.⁹⁰ The Wolof and the Toucouleur have similar social ranking systems. For these ethnic groups, the highest social order is made up of freemen. A small portion of freemen are political leaders and qur'anic scholars, while the rest are poor farmers. The second social rank consists of artisan guilds, including *griots* (praise singers), smiths, leatherworkers, musicians, wood workers, and weavers. Although these groups are looked down upon socially, many individual members of the lower castes are able to obtain great wealth and prestige. The lowest social rank is made up of the descendants of slaves, that is, peoples captured in conflict or purchased in the slave trade.⁹¹ Although slavery has long since died out, the slave caste continues to exist in contemporary Senegal. It is considered rude to discuss slavery in front of a person belonging to the slave class.

The *griot* caste plays an especially significant role in the Senegalese imagination. Members of the *griot* caste traditionally work as praise singers and musicians. They are also the historians and genealogists of the Wolof, Toucouleur, and Serer. Their praise songs contain long lists detailing their subjects' ancestors. Their role as historians was especially important in pre-colonial Senegal, as Senegalese languages were primarily spoken rather than written. *Griots* are respected by the Senegalese for their specialized knowledge. *Griots* sing songs in praise of individuals and families during important life cycle events, such as circumcisions. The songs reinforce the position of these families in society. In return, *griots* receive food, clothing, livestock, horses, and jewelry from their noble patrons. The relationship between *griot* and noble families can be maintained for generations. Some of these relationships comprise genuine friendship and affection, while others are more contractual in nature.

Urban and Rural Cultures

The distinction between urban and rural culture is one of the most significant divisions in contemporary Senegalese society. Ethnic identity is usually stronger in rural areas. In the cities, especially the capital Dakar, many Senegalese from diverse backgrounds assimilate into an urban-Senegalese identity that is primarily based on the Wolof language. Identity not only shifts between geographic regions, but within individuals as well. For instance, Fulani may speak Fulani and identify as Fulani when they are living in the countryside, but when the same individuals travel to the city, they may speak Wolof and identify themselves as Wolof. For these Senegalese, Wolof has become a non-ethnic

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identity that signifies urban and general Senegalese culture rather than ethnic Wolof culture. Nevertheless, the Senegalese urban identity is highly influenced by Wolof culture, Wolof popular musicians such as Youssou N'Dour, and the predominantly Wolof Mouride brotherhood.⁹²

Graphic "sen_dakar_street.jpg"

Caption "Street in Dakar, Senegal"

Graphic "sen_farmer.jpg"

Caption "Farmer"

Some urban Senegalese see rural Senegalese as unsophisticated simpletons. These urbanites see urban Senegalese culture as hip and cosmopolitan. This attitude is particularly prevalent among the young. Rural Senegalese in turn argue that they are living a more authentic and traditional lifestyle and are less corrupted by Western (especially French) influences. Speakers of non-Wolof Senegalese languages, such as Pulaar and Serer, often echo this criticism and argue that their languages are superior to Wolof because they have no need to borrow from French.⁹³ The Wolof generally reserve the negative term *lakakat* (barbarian, or one who speaks a foreign language) for non-Senegalese people. It is not used for non-Wolof speaking Senegalese from other ethnic groups.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, many Wolof look down on the Fulani because they are perceived as poor. In turn, many Fulani look down on the Wolof because they see them as less pious Muslims.⁹⁵ Some Fulani, particularly those involved in the Haalpurlaar'en language movement, believe that urban Wolof have been unduly influenced by the French language and French culture. However, ethnic divisions in Senegal are generally mild and many Senegalese are conscious to avoid the ethnic conflict that has plagued neighboring states such as the Ivory Coast.⁹⁶

Family Life

Family is another significant aspect of Senegalese culture and identity. Senegalese identity is strongly linked to shared ancestors and familial relations.⁹⁷ Most Senegalese view getting married as essential to becoming a complete, mature adult. Polygamy with up to four wives is still practiced among some Muslim Senegalese, per Sunni *shar'ia* (Islamic law). However, since Sunni *shar'ia* dictates that a man must support all of his wives and children equally, in practice polygamy is rare. Polygamy is practiced more often in rural areas where multiple wives help run farms and manage trade and small businesses than in urban centers. Multiple wives are seen as a status symbol of wealth and power.⁹⁸ Interethnic marriage is acceptable in Senegal; however, some ethnic groups have more reservations than others. Fulani believe it is acceptable to marry a member of any ethnic group, provided they are Muslims.⁹⁹ The Serer believe that a wife will not truly understand her Serer husband if she is not herself a Serer.¹⁰⁰

Graphic "sen_family.jpg"

Caption "Family"

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Children are highly valued and loved in Senegalese society. The Senegalese believe that an entire community is responsible for raising a child, not just the child's immediate family. Child care, discipline, and supervision are usually shared among an entire village or neighborhood. Wolof children are expected to greet their elders politely, obey their elders, help in household chores, and refrain from using bad language. Young girls and boys usually play together and are treated similarly, but as children grow and mature, sharp differences in treatment based on gender begin to emerge.¹⁰¹

Despite gender-based differences in treatment, women fill important and influential roles in society. One influential female Wolof archetype is the *drianke*, an urban woman who is wealthy, generous, dresses well, and runs in popular social circles. The Wolof call the *drianke's* sense of dressing well *sanse*. To many Senegalese, dressing up in an appropriate and stylish manner is a matter of great pride. The *sokna* is held up by Wolof men as the ideal Wolof woman. She is older, high-caste, pious, and virtuous. She does not waste her time or money on the consumer culture of the *drianke*. Instead, she works to uphold her honor and the honor of her family by taking care of her loved ones and modestly doing good deeds. The Wolof believe that Amadou Bamba's mother epitomized *sokna*.¹⁰²

Tolerance and Hospitality

The Senegalese value tolerance and hospitality and pride themselves of their *teranga*. *Teranga* is Senegalese expression referring to the ability to be exceedingly welcoming and hospitable to guests.¹⁰³ Senegalese hosts will offer their guests tea, known as *attaya*, which is a symbol of hospitality. *Attaya* is made from tea leaves, water, and sugar boiled in a teapot. The tea is served three times with each serving sweeter than the previous one, symbolizing the sweetening of friendship over time.¹⁰⁴

Senegalese often bring gifts to a host when visiting. Kola nuts, imported from Sierra Leone, are a common gift and play an important role in both Wolof and Fulani social occasions. The Wolof and Fulani believe that kola nuts are symbols of mutual goodwill between individuals. Many Muslims in Senegal believe that Islam advocates the consumption of kola nuts and say that a person who dies with a kola nut in their mouth is assured happiness in the afterlife.¹⁰⁵

Alcohol should never be given as a gift to a host because many Muslim Senegalese frown on alcohol use and believe that it is banned in the Qur'an. Instead of alcohol, observant Muslims drink imported soda and locally produced mineral water and lemonade. Characteristic of Senegal's tolerant culture, however, some Senegalese people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, enjoy alcoholic beverages.

Senegalese hospitality and tolerance extends to foreigners of diverse backgrounds. Senegalese generally hold favorable views of the United States and American pop culture.¹⁰⁶ Increasing numbers of Senegalese are striving to learn English and send their children to U.S. universities. However, recent U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism are unpopular among many Senegalese, as they are associated with anti-Muslim attitudes and actions.¹⁰⁷ Many Muslim leaders and *marabouts* are critical of the war in Iraq, which they view as a war against Islam. However, their criticism is centered on U.S. policy and is not extended to the U.S. population, which they continue to hold in high regard. Suicide bombings and other violent incidents are routinely criticized in the Senegalese press. In contrast, anti-French feeling is widespread in Senegal. Anti-French attitudes

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generally stem from the resentment that many Senegalese feel toward contemporary French immigration policy, which they view as racist and exclusionary, rather than from the French colonial legacy in Senegal.¹⁰⁸

Senegal is a dynamic nation on a crossroad between different ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures. Diversity is welcomed in Senegal and the Senegalese pride themselves on their tolerance and openness. In recent years, the population has begun to coalesce around a growing sense of shared Muslim identity. The distinctive character of Islam in Senegal, with its emphasis on Sufi brotherhoods and indigenous heroes such as Amadou Bamba, has contributed to this growing sense of a uniquely Senegalese identity. At the same time, the identification of many Senegalese with the Wolof language and culture has grown as well. Young urban Senegalese have embraced a vibrant popular culture that is influenced by Sufi brotherhoods; Wolof culture; urban identity; French, Arab, and American influences; and Senegalese nationalism. The people of Senegal value their rich history and culture and believe that Senegalese culture has made a valuable contribution to the world.

The Senegalese Military

Cultural Style of Warfare

The Forces Armées Sénégalaises (FAS), or the Senegalese Armed Forces, sees its primary role as supporting the civilian government to promote stability in Senegal and abroad. The FAS is loyal to the civilian government and views itself as an extension of the state. Although officially apolitical, members of the FAS are proud of their role in upholding and defending the democratic constitution of Senegal.¹⁰⁹ The FAS's connections to the national government have evolved during a long and rich history since pre-colonial times, through service in the French Colonial armies to its present incarnation as a respected national military force.

Graphic "sen_military.jpg"

Caption "Senegalese Military"

Historical Influences

The FAS view one's service to the community as vital to society. This role draws on a cultural tradition that puts warriors in the center of social and economic development. The pre-colonial warrior class, known as the *ceddo*, held a significant role in the history of pre-colonial Senegal. Serving in the *ceddo* warrior class elevated people of low social rank to positions of political influence.¹¹⁰ Many *ceddo* served as advisors to the ruling kings. *Ceddo* warriors held a key role in the economic development of the region through participation in the slave trade with Arabs from the north.¹¹¹ In many regions, the *ceddo* were known for their ferocity in battle and their resistance to pain.¹¹²

The ancient warrior Lat Dior embodied these values and is a symbol of courage within the contemporary military community.¹¹³ Lat Dior was the last ruler of the indigenous kingdom of Cayor.¹¹⁴ He is honored for his military struggles against the French, as well as the Fulani and Serer, to maintain Cayor's independence.¹¹⁵ Dior's death in 1886 at the hands of the French was the final blow to the indigenous power structure and the solidification of French authority in the region.¹¹⁶ Contemporary Senegalese view Dior as

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a national figure who represents all Senegalese fighters. He personifies physical courage in the face of overwhelming odds. Images and statues of Lat Dior are common on military installations.¹¹⁷

The contemporary role of the FAS is reminiscent of the traditional role of the *ceddo* warriors and Lat Dior. Senegalese military personnel look to the armed forces for employment and advancement, allowing them to better support their families. They proudly play an integral role in the economic development of Senegal through the construction of roads and bridges. The FAS also runs numerous clinics that often serve as the only source of medical care in many rural areas. Members of the FAS believe these types of development roles are part of their warrior culture.¹¹⁸

The warrior culture of Senegal is particularly evident on the battlefield. Senegalese soldiers serving in the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* (Senegalese Rifles), a branch of the French colonial army during World Wars I and II, lived up to the *ceddo*'s reputation for ferocity. The French colonial army recruited the Senegalese soldiers based on a belief that the Senegalese were endowed with primitive warrior instincts enabling them to thrive in harsh military and combat conditions. The French also valued Senegalese soldiers because their presence was thought to intimidate the enemy.¹¹⁹ During both World Wars, the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* impressed their opponents with their performance on the battlefield.¹²⁰

Today, Senegalese service members are proud of their predecessors for serving with valor in both World Wars despite harsh conditions. Like Lat Dior, the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* fought valiantly in the face of overwhelming odds. Life as a *Tirailleur* was difficult; service members often faced racism and humiliation.¹²¹ The *Tirailleurs Senegalais* were given the most difficult duties and were deployed to the most dangerous fronts during wartime. As a result, *Tirailleurs* were two to three times more likely to die than their French counterparts.¹²²

The *Tirailleurs Senegalais* were never officially praised by the French government for their contributions to the war effort. This was especially true during WWII, when General DeGaulle pulled African troops from the front lines toward the end of the war, allowing French troops to receive all the glory for a conflict that had been fought mostly by African troops. Once hostilities ceased, the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* were sent to compounds where they waited for up to 2 years for transport back to West Africa.¹²³ Nevertheless, the Senegalese troops remained loyal to their French commanders, and the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* are still revered within the contemporary FAS. Leopold Senghor and Abdoulaye Wade, the first and the current Senegalese presidents, respectively, were both members of the *Tirailleurs Senegalais*. Their service with the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* likely contributed to their popularity in Senegal.

Graphic “sen_president_wade.jpg”
Caption “President Wade”

Members of the FAS are equally proud of both their traditional and colonial military histories. They see no contradiction in revering indigenous warriors such as Lat Dior along with the colonial forces that defeated Dior.¹²⁴ Despite their seemingly contradictory roles, Lat Dior and the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* both embody the ideals of a military promoting the stability and welfare of their nation. Lat Dior fought to preserve

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his people and culture by attempting to expel the French. The *Tirailleurs Senegalais* fought to preserve the ruling colonial government from external threats. Contemporary FAS members look to this history as an example of their suffering hardship out of dedicated service to the government and the stability of the nation.

Today, the FAS contribute to the stability of Senegal by continuing to support the national government while remaining effectively apolitical. The Senegalese are proud of the apolitical stance of their military and cite the fact that only Senegal, of all the countries in West Africa, has not experienced a military coup since gaining independence as a proof of their success. In order to remain aloof from civilian political activities, members of the Senegalese military were formerly prohibited from voting in national elections. This restriction was recently lifted, allowing military personnel to vote for the first time in the 2007 election. However, military and government leaders remain watchful for any indication that the military is becoming politicized.¹²⁵

Stability in Senegal is further reinforced by the Gendarmerie, the military police who control urban areas such as Dakar. The Gendarmerie, who are charged with maintaining internal security, combat urban crime by maintaining an extensive network of informants and monitor all activity within urban areas.¹²⁶ While the civilian population may complain about the actions of the Gendarmerie, they are willing to tolerate their activities in exchange for stability.¹²⁷

Military Doctrine

The contemporary FAS have been heavily influenced by continued interaction with the French military. Senegalese troop participation in the French colonial forces laid the groundwork for the organization of the FAS. Before Senegal gained its independence, Senegalese soldiers attained their formal military experience through the French Army. When Senegal became independent in 1960, the military was composed entirely of French-trained soldiers.¹²⁸ The FAS remains organized similar to the French military, using the French rank structure. French officers wearing Senegalese uniforms are often stationed with Senegalese units as advisors.¹²⁹

Despite the heavy French influence, the Senegalese military does not have a unified military doctrine. The Senegalese have been exposed to a variety of foreign influences through training programs in France, the United States, Ghana, and most recently, China. The lack of a unified military doctrine impairs their ability to function efficiently when deployed on peacekeeping missions. A peacekeeping battalion may be made up of various units with vastly different training backgrounds. Once deployed, they tend to reorganize on an ad-hoc basis.¹³⁰

International Participation

The lack of an integrated military doctrine notwithstanding, FAS personnel are unified in their belief in the international significance of their forces. The military has an international outlook and is always interested in bolstering its international reputation. The FAS believes it is a superior military force and a key player in the international arena. It is careful to maintain a positive image abroad. Senegalese soldiers see themselves as ambassadors of Senegal. They are happy to deploy abroad and show off the success and professionalism of the FAS.¹³¹

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The FAS's belief in its international importance and desire to be seen as a leader in West Africa has led to a high participation rate in International Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs). Senegal is an international leader in peacekeeping operations. During the past five decades, the FAS has participated in more than 20 PKOs, in the process deploying more than 19,000 troops to 18 different countries, often in part to counteract the growing influence of regional rival Nigeria. The FAS was first deployed to the Congo in 1960.¹³² The FAS has also deployed to Darfur, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and other countries.¹³³ In 1990, both Senegal and Nigeria deployed in Liberia under the banner of ECOMOG. In 1997, Senegal provided the core active element for the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (MISAB) that deployed in the Central African Republic. In April 2005, Senegalese Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye took office as the new force commander of the Mission of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).¹³⁴ Senegal was the only sub-Saharan country to deploy troops during Operations DESERT STORM/SHIELD, and suffered a plane crash that killed 93 Senegalese soldiers.¹³⁵ Peacekeeping missions require a large percentage of the Senegalese military's capacity.¹³⁶

Peacekeeping missions are one of two major sources of active military experience for members of the FAS, the second being the Casamance Conflict. As a result, these operations have had a significant impact on the Senegalese style of warfare.¹³⁷ The high rate of participation in peacekeeping missions has created a "culture of intervention" in the FAS. The Senegalese are proud of their participation and genuinely want to aid countries in need. The Senegalese have developed a "love of the mission" and participate with genuine commitment, sometimes perceived as lacking in other troop-supplying countries.¹³⁸ The FAS are committed to the successful completion of an operation's goals.¹³⁹

The Senegalese military is representative of wider Senegalese culture, in that it places a high value on harmony and consensus. While the Senegalese believe their importance on the international stage encourages participation in peacekeeping missions, the value placed on harmony and consensus has led to a cautious deployment policy. Senegalese military deployment is closely tied to concern for how the country is perceived internationally.¹⁴⁰ The Senegalese have great respect for the concept of sovereignty and are reluctant to deploy their forces into another country's territory if it would undermine that country's sovereign powers. The Senegalese fear that undermining another country's sovereignty would make it acceptable for other countries to deploy to Senegal. Thus, their respect for the sovereignty of other nations is a form of self preservation.

In the interest of maintaining harmonious and respectful relations with its neighbors and other regional states, the government of Senegal will only deploy its military to another country when under a United Nations (UN) or African Union (AU) mandate, or if it feels directly threatened. When deploying troops under a UN or AU mandate, the FAS do not fear that deployment will create a backlash against Senegal.¹⁴¹

The Senegalese military, along with the Senegalese public, generally has no desire to forcibly export its values or ideas to other nations. While the Senegalese are proud of their own institutions, they are content to let other countries follow their own paths.¹⁴²

The FAS has never pressured or enticed an international organization into creating a peacekeeping operation or military force to achieve Senegal's political desires. When deploying under a UN or AU mandate, the Senegalese military is committed to serving

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the spirit of the mission without seeking political gain. The primary professional motivation of the military institution is the continued bolstering of its reputation as a skilled and professional military.¹⁴³

Senegal will, on occasion, utilize the FAS to further the nation's agenda. In such cases, they will act unilaterally and only when a direct threat is perceived. The FAS have taken unilateral action in the Casamance, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. For instance, a 1998 military uprising in Guinea Bissau, located directly to the south of Senegal, was perceived as a direct threat to the stability of Senegal. Citizens of Guinea-Bissau, just across the border from the Casamance, had long been suspected of harboring Casamançais separatists. The Senegalese government and the FAS viewed the uprising in Guinea-Bissau as an opportunity to eradicate the support structure of the Casamance insurgency. Likewise, they feared that an unstable Guinea-Bissau would lead to an increase in insurgent activities. In this instance, Senegal did not hesitate to deploy the military into Guinea-Bissau (with that government's agreement) to put down the coup.¹⁴⁴ Within the borders of Senegal, internal security is considered to be the professional domain of the Gendarmerie. The Senegalese are very reluctant to deploy the army for matters of internal security. Additional branches of the FAS will only deploy within Senegal if the Gendarmerie is noticeably overwhelmed, or if it is facing a direct threat to the state. The Senegalese military has at times deployed Army troops to the Casamance region to deal with low level insurgency. The extent to which the military should deploy Army troops to the Casamance is an unresolved issue in Senegal.¹⁴⁵

Religious and Intellectual Influences

The Senegalese are proud of their international reputation and make a considerable effort to present themselves as a modern and educated military institution. Following in the French tradition, military officers cultivate a reputation as intellectuals and scholars. The role of the scholar was first popularized by Leopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal, who is revered for his service in the *Tirailleurs Senegalais*, as well as his mastery of French literature. Contemporary Senegalese military personnel aspire to following in his footsteps as an intellectual warrior.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, many members of the FAS struggle to reconcile their traditional religious roots with a modern western education and emphasis on scholarly intellectualism.¹⁴⁷

Most of Senegalese are Muslims and members of a Sufi brotherhood.¹⁴⁸ Converts adopted this new faith without abandoning many of their traditional practices. Contemporary Senegalese Islam is infused with traditional animist practices.¹⁴⁹ Animist beliefs, such as the wearing of charms known as *gris-gris* to ward off evil spirits, continue to influence the behavior of Senegalese military personnel.

Likewise, brotherhood affiliation has a significant impact on the FAS. Brotherhoods are religious organizations based on loyalty to *marabouts*, or living Muslim saints, believed to be close to god and thus endowed with power and influence.¹⁵⁰ The most popular Muslim brotherhoods in Senegal are the Tijaniyya and the Mourides. The Mouride Brotherhood is known for its emphasis on hard work and its role in facilitating business connections. In comparison, the Tijaniyya Brotherhood is perceived as more contemplative and pious. Soldiers' affiliations to certain brotherhoods are well known among military personnel, and these affiliations have an impact on soldiers' advancement

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through the ranks. Officers who are members of the same brotherhood as senior officers or other powerful people, such as the president, are more likely to advance.¹⁵¹ Islamic doctrine and Senegalese cultural values also have an impact on the ethical behavior of Senegalese military personnel. Like orthodox Islam, the Senegalese brotherhoods prohibit smoking and drinking. The Senegalese typically do not pray as often as members of more orthodox sects; however, they do pray regularly on Fridays.¹⁵² It is also important for the Senegalese to respect their elders. Socially, a person's age is viewed more prominently than his rank. Officers must still show respect to older officers, even if those elders are of a lower rank.¹⁵³

Cultural Influence on Military Capability

Senegalese military capability is influenced by two major cultural factors: a chronic lack of resources and a conflict between modern education and traditional practices. In addition, as a result of the long historical relationship between the Senegalese and the French, Senegalese military capabilities are highly influenced by French military tradition and organization. Soldiers received military experience and cultural influences from their service in The Casamance conflict in southern Senegal and participation in international peacekeeping operations.

Unlike the U.S. military, the FAS has a very limited resource base, and thus, a much smaller scope of military capability. The FAS receives more than half its budget from foreign countries through the European Union and the United Nations. The greatest share of this funding goes to three elite units: the *Battalion (Bat) Codeau* (light mobile infantry battalion), the *Bat Blindé* (light armor battalion), and the *Bat Para* (airborne battalion). The remainder of the FAS must make do with minimal funding. All units often lack support elements the U.S. military takes for granted, such as adequate fuel supplies to operate transport vehicles.¹⁵⁴

The lack of adequate funding and supplies results in planning and analysis procedures that proceed at a quick pace. While the U.S. military meticulously plans for a variety of contingencies, the FAS does not have the resources for such an array of considerations. Thus, the Senegalese take a pragmatic approach to their planning process by, for example, choosing not to analyze scenarios that would be unrealistic given their resources.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the Senegalese admire U.S. planning procedures. They train extensively with the United States to improve their planning and operations and consistently demonstrate their abilities as good students dutifully going through the detailed planning exercises.¹⁵⁶

The Senegalese are fond of new technology and are eager to incorporate it into their operations. However, they have insufficient resources in this area.¹⁵⁷ Administrative technology is widespread in the FAS. For instance, offices generally have computer and internet connections. On a tactical level, the use of technology is limited to simple devices such as night vision goggles and radios.¹⁵⁸ The Senegalese are eager to receive funding for technology upgrades and will readily incorporate technology at any opportunity.¹⁵⁹ The Senegalese are aware that, compared to the United States, they lack advanced technology. However, the Senegalese are proud that they have comparatively more computers and communication networks than other West African nations.¹⁶⁰

The shortcomings in military planning caused by a chronic lack of resources are reinforced by fatalism and superstition. While officers in the FAS are highly educated,

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traditional beliefs continue to complicate their approach to military planning and operations. The Senegalese believe that earth, water, and other elements of nature are divine and that the future belongs to this divine realm. Ancestors belong to the past, though people may communicate with them through *marabouts* to seek advice. The Senegalese believe that contemporary human beings belong in the present and should firmly remain there, seeking harmony with the ancestors and the divine. Since the future belongs to the divine in this belief system, any attempt by people to plan for the future is considered risky because it may incur divine retaliation. Senegalese officers do not openly admit to being influenced by these cultural beliefs, since they like to project an image of themselves as educated in the Western model.¹⁶¹

This cultural bias toward a fatalistic attitude has a major impact on military operations. Military planning is not a traditional priority for the Senegalese. Planning processes are oriented toward the future and are thus seen as entering into the domain of God, a risky and undesirable endeavor. Nevertheless, Senegalese who have trained with U.S. forces are aware of the value of military planning. They are happy to go through the motions of military planning; however, they are not fully dedicated to ensuring that plans are implemented. They believe that regardless of the amount of planning, the future remains in the hands of God.¹⁶²

The cultural hesitancy toward imposing oneself on the future realm, along with minimal resources, undermines maintenance procedures as well. With the exception of the air force, the military branches do not have regular maintenance programs. In general, equipment issues are not addressed unless something is actually broken; as a result, replacement parts are not ordered until needed. Military personnel will frequently reuse parts of broken machinery to fix other machines.¹⁶³

Practical experience during historical and contemporary conflicts has influenced FAS military capabilities. Due to a long association with French forces in both World Wars, the FAS has adopted the French emphasis on tactics rather than strategy. This preference is reinforced through continual training programs with the French military.¹⁶⁴ Senegalese tactics are highly influenced by their experiences fighting in the low intensity insurgency in the Casamance region of Senegal.¹⁶⁵ The FAS has become quite skilled at dealing with the insurgency in that region.

Civil-Military Relations

The Senegalese Armed Forces have a healthy and respectful relationship with the civilian government. The FAS is staunchly loyal to the civilian government and the national constitution. Military personnel are proud of that loyalty, which they demonstrated during a 1960 coup attempt. Both the civilian government and the military believe that the loyalty of the FAS is one of the main contributing factors to stability in Senegal.¹⁶⁶

[Clip "Army Nation.mpg"](#)

[Caption "Army Nation: LtCol. Scott Womack"](#)

The civilian government is respectful of the military's power. Both are aware of the potential for military and political instability in West Africa. Both parties have a vested interest in conserving the balance between civilian and military power. To this end, the civilian government appreciates the apolitical stance of the Senegalese military. Civilian

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leaders maintain a healthy and respectful relationship between civilian and military power. In the event that the FAS became more politicized, actively supporting candidates in future elections, for example, civilian and military pressure would most likely be used to halt such practices.¹⁶⁷

The FAS has equally good relations with the civilian population of Senegal. The military views itself as the protector and caretaker of the Senegalese nation and its people. Military personnel take great pride in promoting the economic development of the country by constructing roads and bridges and participating in other civic support projects.¹⁶⁸ When they are not deployed, service members interact regularly with local civilians and have good relations with the general population. When deployed on a mission, the Senegalese military makes a concerted effort to engage the local population and create positive relationships with them. The Senegalese military attempts to maintain good relations with the civilian population wherever it is deployed.¹⁶⁹

On the whole, the Senegalese civilian population appreciates the FAS and has good relations with military personnel. The army is based throughout Senegal and regularly engages in relaxed and respectful interaction with the civilian population.¹⁷⁰ The Senegalese people depend on the medical support supplied by the army, particularly in rural areas where low pay rates have created a shortage of medical professionals.¹⁷¹ The Senegalese are grateful that the army does not act like a mafia organization, carving the nation into areas of personal influence.¹⁷² The public further appreciates that the military does not put any pressure on the civilian population by encouraging harassment or imposing taxes.¹⁷³ Military service is considered a respectable career path for the Senegalese.¹⁷⁴

Civilians in the Casamance region have a more contentious relationship with the military than Senegalese in other regions. Civilians in the Casamance have a lower level of trust in the FAS because of the continuing conflict between Casamance separatists and the Senegalese military.¹⁷⁵ In the Casamance region, troop presence is strongly associated with imminent conflict. The arrival of Senegalese troops will cause civilians to flee across the border to Guinea-Bissau.¹⁷⁶ Senegalese from the Casamance region are less likely to enlist in the armed forces. Some civilians in the Casamance may perceive the Senegalese military as their enemy. Recently, efforts have been made to rebuild the relationship between Casamance civilians and the military. For example, the military is increasingly sharing important resources, such as trucks, with Casamance civilians.¹⁷⁷ Civilians in all regions are much more wary of interaction with the gendarmerie and view them in a less favorable light than the army. The gendarmerie has a reputation for aggression and suppression. Civilians tend to go out of their way to avoid interaction with them.

Military Demographics and Ethnicity

Though the government of Senegal has the right to conscript soldiers, far more people volunteer for the military than are needed; as a result, conscription has not been implemented.¹⁷⁸

The demographics and ethnicity of the Senegalese military reflect those of the nation as a whole. The military system favors well-educated, urban members of the population.¹⁷⁹ The officer corps thus tends to come from educated, urban areas and have a relatively high economic status. Senegalese who are not elite urbanites do not progress far through

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the officer ranks. To attend the most prestigious training programs, Senegalese officers must speak English and French. This policy facilitates advancement for Senegalese who are urban, educated, and multilingual.¹⁸⁰

The enlisted ranks are composed of soldiers from rural areas with less formal education. There is little opportunity for advancement from the enlisted ranks into the officer ranks. Enlisted soldiers may progress to the level of non-commissioned officer (NCO); however, this position wields little actual power or influence. Nevertheless, rural Senegalese are eager to enlist because they view the military as an opportunity for a steady job, consistent pay, and a place to live.¹⁸¹ Due to the high number of volunteers, the military has the freedom to select the most educated candidates. As a result, most members of the military, even those in the lower ranks, have some level of high school education. A desire to join the military encourages Senegalese to graduate from high school and helps them to achieve a higher economic status in the future.¹⁸²

Participation in the military cuts across ethnic lines, and there is no overt ethnic tension among the ranks. The Wolof is the dominant ethnic group in the military; however, this status simply reflects their position as the largest ethnic group in Senegal, not any ethnic bias within the military.¹⁸³ There is no tension between the Wolof leadership and other ethnicities in the military.¹⁸⁴ The Senegalese view themselves as soldiers first and members of their ethnic group second. The Senegalese military is unique among Senegal's professional organizations in this respect.¹⁸⁵ The preeminence of the Senegalese national identity is reinforced by both the Senegalese military code of conduct and elements of Senegal's traditional culture. The code of conduct stresses obedience to Senegal's civilian government and to the Senegalese constitution, while the traditional Senegalese emphasis on harmony and tolerance has softened ties to ethnic and religious identities.¹⁸⁶

The Senegalese are proud of the diversity in their military. They believe it is a contributing factor to military stability and healthy military-civilian relations. The military makes an effort to assign people to posts away from their home region to eliminate the possibility of conflicts in loyalty.¹⁸⁷ Senegalese of all ethnicities have family or friends in the military, and the Senegalese view the institution as representing all of Senegal.

Senegalese from the Casamance region are the exception to the representative ethnic make-up of the military. There are fewer soldiers from the Casamance region in the FAS than there are from other regions. This is most likely due to a more negative Casamance attitude toward the military and toward Senegal in general.¹⁸⁸ Though there are only a small number of soldiers from the Casamance in the FAS, ethnic conflict or competition within Senegal does not affect military unity and cooperation.¹⁸⁹

The FAS, like the nation, is predominantly Sunni Muslim.¹⁹⁰ The Senegalese pride themselves on the tolerance of their society, and they embrace people of all religions and discourage religious strife.¹⁹¹ Mixing of religions and religious practices within families and communities is common. Religion within the military reflects this tolerance and tendency to embrace a variety of different faiths. From their history with the French military, the FAS have inherited the practice of celebrating Catholic saint days. Each military unit has a patron saint and the soldiers celebrate the Saint days for their units. There is no tension between the Catholic celebrations and Islamic piety of the troops.¹⁹²

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Followers of the Senegalese brotherhoods serve in the military; however, membership does not cause any tension in the ranks.¹⁹³

French is the official language of Senegal and the official language of the Senegalese military. All military orders and official business are conducted in French. Many senior officers also speak English.¹⁹⁴ In recent years, English classes have been introduced to Senegalese schools. As a result, it is now possible to find lower ranking or enlisted soldiers that also speak English. All military personnel speak Wolof, the most common national language of Senegal.¹⁹⁵

Women play a limited role in the Senegalese military. Currently, women may hold only administrative or medical positions within the military. However, President Wade has recently declared that the FAS will become fully integrated and the FAS are actively recruiting women. Older members of the FAS will likely disapprove of the integration. However, all members of the FAS will respect the decision of the president.¹⁹⁶

Culture and Rank

The Senegalese Armed Forces' rank structure is influenced by the FAS's culture of highly centralized authority. Harmony and consensus across the community is stressed in the military and it is the authoritative leader who makes all final decisions. Members of the community understand the role of the leader and support his authority, even if they personally disagree with his decisions.¹⁹⁷

[Clip "Centralized Authority Structure.mpg"](#)

[Caption "Centralized Authority: LtCol. Womack"](#)

In the FAS, professional interaction is highly formalized and all major decisions are made by high ranking officers.¹⁹⁸ Senegalese soldiers wait for orders from an officer rather than act on their own initiative. Younger, non-commissioned soldiers are not respected as legitimate authority figures; they are not trained to lead and are not viewed by other troops as leaders. In the absence of direct orders from an officer, enlisted soldiers would not know what to do and will not take any action.¹⁹⁹

While tightly organized in theory, rank structure is chaotic in practice. The rate of promotion is high, creating an excess of senior officers with equivalent rank. Higher ranks are coveted for their corresponding pay scale; however, rank is not strictly correlated to power and influence. Social factors, such as kinship or Sufi brotherhood affiliation linking an officer to a general, provide a more accurate indicator of power and influence than rank alone. Likewise, the Senegalese must show respect and deference towards their elders, even if their elders are of a lower military rank. This can create confusion among foreigners who are unable to determine which of the equally ranked officers truly wields authority.²⁰⁰

[Graphic "sen_army_rank.jpg"](#)

[Thumbnail "sen_army_rank_thumb.jpg"](#)

[Caption "Army Rank Insignia"](#)

Authority and influence among the lower ranks are equally chaotic. Senegalese soldiers look to authority figures for guidance and instruction, regardless of whether their

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authority derives from rank, age, or unit. If a soldier is not impressed by the leadership displayed by his own unit's commander, he will look to another unit commander who is popular and widely respected. The chain of command is regularly broken, as going over the head of one's direct commanding officer and speaking to someone higher up is often the best, or only way, to accomplish one's objectives. Orders are effectively transmitted from higher ranks down; however, transmitting information from lower ranks upwards is problematic.²⁰¹

Graphic "sen_air_force_rank.jpg"

Thumbnail "sen_air_force_rank_thumb.jpg"

Caption "Air Force Rank Insignia"

Traditional social factors influence advancement in the FAS. In many cases, Senegalese officers and soldiers are judged based on their accomplishments. However, personal connections and networking remains the most significant means of advancing in rank.²⁰² Completing a training program in the United States or France is considered prestigious; returning from one of these programs will boost an officer's reputation among his Senegalese colleagues and aid his advancement in rank.²⁰³ However, admission to prestigious programs is based on one's social ties to influential officers.²⁰⁴ Officers are selected for rank advancement based on culturally relevant factors, such as kinship and Sufi brotherhood affiliation. As one officer progresses through the ranks, his friends and family members progress with him either directly as aides or as a result of having influence with a ranking officer.²⁰⁵ Thus, social and kinship ties underlie all means of advancement.²⁰⁶

Ethnic affiliation does not play a major role in military advancement. Kinship and Sufi brotherhood affiliation are more important than ethnic identity in determining advancement through the ranks.²⁰⁷

Personal connections, rather than official channels, will enable U.S. service members to better accomplish their objectives when dealing with the FAS. The amount of cooperation received by U.S. service members depends on the opinions held by Senegalese officers toward the United States and the U.S. military. If a U.S. service member is working directly under a Senegalese officer who is not supportive of the U.S. military, seeking help from that officer will prove ineffective. However, going over his head and appealing to a higher ranking officer with authority and influence who is positively inclined toward the U.S. military will garner immediate results.²⁰⁸ Operating in this manner may be difficult for U.S. soldiers who are used to strict adherence to the chain of command.

The highest ranking officers in the FAS are the general officers, of which there is only a small number. General officers are appointed directly by Senegal's president, and only the most politically correct candidates are selected.²⁰⁹ Members of the FAS, in keeping with the traditional sub-Saharan authority structure, believe that it is natural to have a small number of general officers making the military's decisions.²¹⁰

Due to the highly centralized nature of the FAS, Senegalese officers play an influential role in the military. Senegalese officers have a more expansive role than their U.S. counterparts, often taking on tasks that would be given to non-commissioned officers in

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the U.S. military. For example, commissioned officers plan operations on a macro level, as well as supervise them down to minor details such as inspecting gear.²¹¹

The Senegalese military does not have a well developed non-commissioned officer corps. NCOs are primarily technicians who do not hold leadership positions.²¹² Relations between commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers are highly compartmentalized. They work physically separate from each other, and there is very little professional or social interaction. Senegalese who are not members of educated social groups will not progress past the level of NCO.²¹³

Senegalese military personnel are aware of the potential pitfall of such a highly centralized authority structure. Those servicemen who have trained with U.S. forces and been exposed to U.S. practices tend to prefer U.S. methods. They would like to see a more horizontal command structure that encourages non-commissioned soldiers to make decisions and take actions. Unfortunately, the NCO training program in Senegal is not rigorous and does not require any prior training or experience. Thus, the ideal of empowering NCOs has been very difficult for the Senegalese to implement in practice.²¹⁴ Nevertheless, many Senegalese aspire to become NCOs because of the increased pay and job security associated with these positions. Becoming a non-commissioned officer is a lifetime appointment with the guarantee of a steady pay check. Unemployment rates in Senegal are high, and positions in the FAS are viewed as steady jobs that pay well. A typical Senegalese officer uses his military salary to support a large extended family that often has no other source of stable income. Senegalese NCOs are generally not concerned with advancement and are content to remain at the same rank for many years.²¹⁵

The lowest ranking members of the FAS are enlisted soldiers. The enlisted ranks are composed mainly of less-educated Senegalese from rural areas. Faced with poverty and high unemployment rates, soldiers often enlist simply because they are in need of a place to live and food to eat.²¹⁶ A sense of Senegalese nationalism is less prevalent among the enlisted ranks. Enlisted soldiers generally do not speak French; instead they communicate in their ethnic languages or in Wolof.²¹⁷

Unlike enlisted soldiers in the U.S. military, the Senegalese show little initiative to act on their own, preferring to wait for direct orders from officers before taking action. In the absence of direct orders, nothing will be done. This lack of initiative is not viewed as shameful; it is simply accepted by all that enlisted soldiers need the guidance of officers.²¹⁸

Members of the officer corps and the enlisted ranks have relatively positive relations. Economic tension does exist as a result of the higher pay scale of officers. Enlisted personnel are often younger, and thus susceptible to more innovative ideas, whereas many of the older officers generally support the status quo.²¹⁹ Young officers often lack 'real world' training and do not interact with the enlisted soldiers to any great extent. Enlisted soldiers work directly with more senior officers.²²⁰

Military Culture of Service Level Organizations

The Senegalese Armed Forces is composed of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines (Navy Infantry), and Gendarmerie.²²¹ The branches of the Senegalese Armed Forces all have similar organizational structures and are heavily influenced by French organizational structure.²²² For example, the Senegalese military has a Gendarmerie, a service not found in U.S. military organizations.

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Graphic “sen_chain_of_command.jpg”

Thumbnail “sen_chain_of_command_thumb.jpg”

Caption “Chain of Command”

The different services have a unity of purpose and respectful interrelationships. There is a clear division of duty between the branches of the military, and each branch understands that it has a unique role.²²³ The Army, Navy, and Air Force are involved in external conflicts, while the Gendarmerie is responsible for internal security and managing conflicts within the borders of Senegal. The Army will deploy within Senegal only if the Gendarmerie is overwhelmed and in need of support.²²⁴ This division of labor in an African military is unique to Senegal.²²⁵

General officers of the different branches interact in a productive and cooperative manner. This cooperation is due in part to the limited number of available training programs, which necessitates sending officers from the different military branches to the same training programs. As a result, the branch personnel often know each other as classmates before interacting as officers in different branches.²²⁶ The Gendarmerie and the Army may compete over resources on a political level; on an operational level, however, there is a great deal of cooperation.²²⁷

The Senegalese Navy and Air Force are the two smallest branches of the Senegalese military. The Air Force is known for having a more diligent maintenance program than the other military branches.²²⁸ The Navy has fewer than 1,000 service members. Its primary duties are to patrol the waters off the coast of Dakar and transport troops from Dakar to the Casamance. The Navy also guards the bi-weekly civilian transport from Dakar to the Casamance.²²⁹

Graphic “sen_navy_organization.jpg”

Thumbnail “sen_navy_organization_thumb.jpg”

Caption “Navy Organization”

The Army, the largest branch of the Senegalese Armed Forces,²³⁰ engages in two types of deployment: international peacekeeping operations and internal security in the Casamance region. The Army takes great pride in its role as a major troop contributor to peacekeeping operations. When abroad, they consider themselves ambassadors of Senegal and are eager to contribute to Senegal’s positive international reputation.²³¹ The Army also takes great pride in its contributions to the stability and security of the nation through public works such as the construction of roads and bridges and the running of medical clinics.²³²

Graphic “sen_army_organization.jpg”

Thumbnail “sen_army_organization_thumb.jpg”

Caption “Army Organization”

The Gendarmerie is a military police force in charge of internal security.²³³ The Gendarmerie performs crowd control and traffic law enforcement duties.²³⁴ It is also the primary service that fights the insurgency in the Casamance region, though at times it

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does so with the assistance of the Army.²³⁵ The Gendarmerie is also charged with counterterrorism, which is considered an internal security matter. The Gendarmerie is the only nationally recognized law enforcement force in both rural and many urban areas of Senegal, although the capital city of Dakar has a separate police force.²³⁶

Graphic “sen_gendarmerie_organization.jpg”

Thumbnail “sen_gendarmerie_organization_thumb.jpg”

Caption “Gendarmerie Organization”

The Gendarmerie is influential in the internal affairs of Senegal and runs what amounts to a police state in urban areas. The Gendarmerie has extensive networks of informants and is knowledgeable of the day-to-day affairs within each unit’s jurisdiction. Due to the high level of poverty in Senegal’s urban areas, there is an ever present potential for crime and violence. The Gendarmerie, as part of its mandate to provide internal security, is permitted to take whatever measures it deems necessary to quell these civil disturbances.²³⁷

The nature of their assignments places members of the Gendarmerie in day-to-day contact with Senegalese civilians, which sometimes results in high levels of aggression towards the civilian population. Civilians are somewhat afraid of the Gendarmerie and do their best to ignore the presence of the military police,²³⁸ often going out of their way to evade encounters.²³⁹ It is likely that the Gendarmerie is not any more aggressive or authoritarian than the members of the Army. However, the Gendarmerie’s continual contact with Senegalese civilians places the spotlight on their behavior.

The Gendarmerie has recently sent personnel on peacekeeping missions. This deployment has been controversial, since peacekeeping does not fall under the jurisdiction of internal security. The service members themselves were happy to serve on a PKO. However, the move was criticized for draining military resources inside Senegal and leaving the Gendarmerie ill-equipped to deal with any rise in the Casamance conflict.²⁴⁰

The Gendarmerie is the most controversial branch of the FAS.²⁴¹ Political opposition parties regularly criticize the strength and oppressive nature of the Gendarmerie. However, when political power changes hands, as in 2000 with the election of President Wade, the role of the Gendarmerie continues unchanged. The Gendarmerie must be present during all prisoner interrogations, and international organizations have accused the Gendarmerie of torturing prisoners involved in the Casamance conflict.²⁴²

Despite their controversial nature, the Gendarmerie is the most highly sought-after assignment within the Senegalese Armed Forces. Members of the Gendarmerie patrol and perform other security duties on a daily basis. This consistently high level of activity is desirable to the Senegalese, who prefer activity to joining the Army and spending time waiting to be deployed. Due to its popularity, the Gendarmerie receives the most accomplished volunteers.²⁴³

Leadership Style and the Decision Making Process

Senegalese society is group-oriented and values harmony, consensus, and the welfare of the group over the individual. Traditional Senegalese authority structures consist of respected elders who act as the decision makers for a village. These values continue to be

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held in a military context. The FAS has a hierarchical organization in which a small number of high ranking officers hold the decision-making power.²⁴⁴ While the FAS are hierarchical, it is often difficult to determine which officers are truly influential. Officer ranks are inflated, and officers of equivalent rank do not wield the same degree of influence or authority.

Although power is very centralized, officers tend to make decisions slowly and place a great deal of weight on achieving group consensus. The Senegalese believe that maintaining interpersonal harmony is very important. Senegalese military personnel are always gracious and outwardly accommodating. As a result, a Senegalese person may say something with little intention of following through.²⁴⁵ If a foreigner comes across this behavior, it is important to refrain from expressing frustration. Expressions of anger and frustration by foreign officers are seen as undermining Senegalese efforts to achieve harmony and will result in a loss of credibility and respect from Senegalese personnel.²⁴⁶ Traditional Senegalese culture is based on oral transmission of ideas and the seeking of harmony. Long conversations remain an important part of the Senegalese decision-making process. Military meetings are considered an important opportunity for officers to express their opinions at length. However, in many cases the conversation will skirt the most important matter, as it has already been decided by general officers who may or may not be in attendance at the meeting. Senegalese officers will talk at length about a variety of issues and then ultimately agree with the previously determined decision of the general officers.²⁴⁷

Due to the variety of international officer training programs, leadership style among Senegalese officers varies with individuals. Officers attend training programs in a variety of countries, such as the United States, France, and Morocco. Graduation from various training programs results in an inconsistent standard model for leadership style.²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, there are some aspects of leadership that are universally valued among the Senegalese. The Senegalese place a great deal of emphasis on looking and acting the part of a soldier, including dressing in proper military uniform. The ability to give military speeches in eloquent French is also an important characteristic of a prestigious leader. The Senegalese value strong leaders who display physical courage.²⁴⁹ Strength is also measured by a leader's ability to say "no" to the numerous demands placed on them and to stand by their decisions.²⁵⁰

[Clip "Military Values.mpg"](#)

[Caption "Military Values: LtCol. Womack"](#)

The most successful military leaders are those who can effectively balance U.S. and French military influences. Senegal receives aid and training from both the United States and France, and the highest ranking officers are sent to training programs in either of these countries. The most successful Senegalese military leaders tend to be officers who have French credentials, as well as a healthy working relationship with the United States and exposure to some U.S. training.²⁵¹

Cultural Influence on Training

The Senegalese are proud of their military education and eager to promote their reputation as intellectuals. The Senegalese are more educated and intellectual than most

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African forces.²⁵² Leopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal, first popularized the image of the ideal Senegalese as a scholar and poet.²⁵³ Senghor, a scholar in French literature, was a key figure in the *Négritude* movement that promoted African culture as unique and valuable at a time when European states looked down on the African continent. He became the first president of Senegal after independence in 1960 and is hailed as the father of the nation.²⁵⁴ He remains a respected and inspirational figure in contemporary Senegal.

The Senegalese military education structure has been heavily influenced by both their experiences under French colonialism and President Senghor's emphasis on Western military models instead of the Marxist-Leninist models adopted by neighboring Guinea, Ghana, and Mali in the 1960s. A French officer serving as a military advisor to the Senegalese Joint Chief of Staff in Dakar helps design the concept and implementation of the Senegalese military educational model. The FAS runs a military academy in the city of Thies where cadets participate in a 2-year training course that emphasizes leadership principals, military ethics and codes of conduct, authority, discipline, initiative, decision making, planning, conventional maneuver and momentum, urban, counterinsurgency, stability and support operations, mission dedication, esprit de corps, and hard work. Later, young captains return to Thies to participate in the captain command course DAGOS (*le diplôme d'aptitude au grade d'officier supérieur*), which they can only gain admittance to after passing a written exam on culture and military knowledge. Majors and lieutenant colonels are selected through another exam to attend war colleges in the United States, Europe, China, and some African countries.²⁵⁵

U.S. military personnel often criticize the FAS military education for its lack of practical, hands-on training. The shortage of hands-on training is due in large part to a chronic lack of resources. While U.S. education facilities have an abundance of high-quality equipment, the FAS often struggles simply to maintain gasoline supplies for its trucks. Without adequate supply of transportation vehicles and the gasoline to run them, for example, the FAS is unable to conduct more active, hands-on, field exercise programs. Active combat experience is often the best and most practical education available to Senegalese military personnel.²⁵⁶ When the FAS deploy on a peacekeeping mission, foreign donors provide it with equipment and resources. Foreign supplies allow the FAS to bypass its own resource shortfalls. The Senegalese have shown great aptitude for quickly adapting to unfamiliar equipment supplied by a variety of countries. Once they are fully equipped, the FAS are eager to perform well in the field.²⁵⁷

The theoretical and classroom-based education of the FAS undermines the dependability of the Senegalese military in combat situations. While they strive to be professional and dependable, in many cases, Senegalese military personnel lack the practical training needed to succeed in combat situations. This lack of experience, coupled with insufficient resources, limits the types of scenarios in which the Senegalese military can be depended on to perform to the standards of the U.S. military. Senegalese units perform best in real life scenarios when they are working under a very specific mandate.²⁵⁸

Training

The Senegalese armed forces have limited training programs due to a cultural preference for intellectual education and a lack of resources. An emphasis on intellectualism has developed into a military educational curriculum that focuses on classroom work and

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theoretical analysis. The Senegalese focus on the theoretical aspects of warfare, spending a great deal of time thinking about and discussing tactics.²⁵⁹ The Senegalese are traditionally an oral culture with a rich history of storytelling. Like most Senegalese, military personnel value long discussions. This contributes to the theoretical nature of Senegalese military education. Unless they are pushed toward practical applications, the Senegalese prefer to remain in the classroom discussing ideas.²⁶⁰

What little training does occur is sporadic and often unprofessional. There is little training reinforcement, and skills learned during training programs are often quickly forgotten. Viable training programs are particularly lacking in the officer ranks. There are no Senegalese officer training programs for ranks above cadet. As officers progress past the rank of cadet, they begin attending training programs abroad. The United States and France are the two most popular countries for training of Senegalese officers. Officers are also sent to Morocco, Nigeria, Ghana, and recently China.²⁶¹

The FAS embraces opportunities to train with foreign nations, turning a major weakness into an opportunity to expand its relations with other countries. The Senegalese are eager to interact with foreign nations and prove their viability on the global stage.²⁶² They are adept at tapping into the many sources of military training programs and choosing training programs from a variety of nations based on their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, the Senegalese believe the German military has an excellent maintenance policy, so they use German connections to train Senegalese service members in maintenance practices.²⁶³

The Senegalese view training programs with the U.S. military as a valuable asset. Positions in these programs are highly valued. The primary reason for their popularity is the fully integrated nature of U.S. training programs. Unlike many other international training programs, Senegalese soldiers are given the opportunity to train side-by-side with U.S. military personnel, providing the Senegalese with a more well-rounded experience. Admission to U.S. training programs depends on a Senegalese officer's ability to speak English; thus, U.S. training programs receive some of the most highly educated officers.²⁶⁴

Senegalese graduates of U.S. training programs are often frustrated by the incompatibility of their newly earned qualifications with the Senegalese rank system. The Senegalese military structure evolved under the French colonial administration. As a result, there are strong parallels between the organization of the French and Senegalese military and much dissimilarity with the U.S. system. Graduates of U.S. courses often feel they are not given enough credit within the Senegalese military for their achievements. Nevertheless, admission into U.S. training programs continues to be highly valued.²⁶⁵

The Senegalese have strong historical ties to France and French culture. Officers who have trained in French programs earn legitimate credentials, as well as some cultural prestige. Senegalese officers who graduate from French training programs do so with credentials that parallel and are compatible with Senegalese rank and structure. In addition, French remains the language of the military.²⁶⁶

Foreign Relations

The Senegalese emphasis on harmony and maintaining good relationships has allowed them to take advantage of a great deal of resources from a variety of countries. These countries do not always have solid relationships with each other. The Senegalese are able

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to bypass the larger political context in order to take advantage of the resources that countries including France, the United States, Ghana, China, and even Iran have to offer.²⁶⁷

This desire for harmony has helped the FAS balance its relationship with France and with the United States. Often this is accomplished by soldiers' tailoring their attitudes for their audience. For example, the Senegalese are apt to criticize the French when speaking to representatives from the United States. Likewise, when speaking with French military, the Senegalese will downplay the importance of the United States and emphasize the long, historical connections between Senegal and France.²⁶⁸

Training Shortfalls

The major shortcomings of the FAS training programs are the lack of a standardized training regime and inadequate reinforcement of skills learned in training courses. While the FAS is skilled at taking advantage of a variety of training opportunities, a limited resource base inhibits the military's ability to retain skills learned in training. Training opportunities depend on funding from foreign governments. Likewise, combat experience is primarily dependent on participation in international missions supplied by international donors. Military units returning from combat missions in the Casamance or abroad are very accomplished; they are skilled in convoy protection, checkpoints, and other counterinsurgency tactics and procedures. Unfortunately, once Senegalese military personnel return from foreign training programs or PKOs, they do not maintain an active training regime and many skills are lost.²⁶⁹

Social and kinship relations play an important part in an individual's opportunity to attend training programs abroad. Attendance in international training programs is vital for the success of an officer's career. However, one must have the proper social connections in order to gain admittance to prestigious programs. High-ranking officers make enrollment decisions of more junior officers based on their kinship and Sufi brotherhood affiliations. While it may appear that successful officers are judged based on their merits alone, officers will not be in a position to demonstrate those merits unless they have the proper connection to higher-ranking personnel.²⁷⁰

Morale and Motivation

Pride in their professionalism and in the accomplishments of the nation is a major motivating factor for the Senegalese Armed Forces. Within the FAS, there is a great deal of national pride and a sense of superiority over other African nations and militaries. The FAS believe that Senegal is a vital player in West Africa and the world.²⁷¹ The FAS considers itself a well-organized and proficient military institution; it believes others see it this way as well, and it is very proud of this reputation.²⁷² Though the FAS may not appear professional to U.S. military personnel, the Senegalese conduct operations in a professional manner when compared to many African militaries. It does not take criticism of its professionalism well.²⁷³

Members of the Senegalese military believe they are a force for good and view themselves as moral leaders.²⁷⁴ The military perceives itself as a respectful democratic institution because it is not involved in national politics.²⁷⁵ The Senegalese view other militaries as overly political or mercenary in nature. Members of the Senegalese military enjoy informing others of their reputation. This self promotion may be interpreted as

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arrogance by countries that lack Senegal's boastful nature. While other African militaries may be displeased, most of Senegal's boasting is backed up by successful performance.²⁷⁶

[Clip "Selfless Service.mpg"](#)

[Caption "Selfless Service: LtCol Womack"](#)

The Senegalese military is equally proud of its role as the caretaker of the nation and is dedicated to the ideal of selfless service to their country. FAS personnel are motivated by a strong ideological unity with the nation of Senegal. The FAS believes that the Army is the nation and the nation is the Army. The FAS will eagerly undertake a task if it believes it will contribute to this ideal of bettering the nation. To this end, they participate in numerous civic improvement projects and run medical clinics. While the Senegalese are highly motivated by a desire to serve their nation, there is often a conflict between the desire to serve and the desire for personal gain. Many Senegalese who are serving abroad do so to take advantage of these opportunities, such as higher wages or bringing foreign goods back to Senegal for sale.²⁷⁷

Promoting the image of an elite military is also a source of motivation for members of the FAS. The Senegalese, most notably members of the Wolof ethnic group, are very interested in fashion and displaying their wealth and prestige through expensive fabrics and jewelry.²⁷⁸ This value is transferred to the military as well. Military personnel take great pride in wearing and being seen in their uniforms. They are dedicated to looking like elite soldiers.²⁷⁹

National Values

[Clip "Honorable Behavior.mpg"](#)

[Caption "Honorable Behavior: LtCol Womack"](#)

The Senegalese are highly motivated to maintain their national cultural values within the institution of the military.²⁸⁰ National identity is very strong in the military, and members of the FAS identify themselves as Senegalese. Ethnic identities remain present, but are considered less important than Senegalese nationality. The symbols, myths, and values of the Senegalese military are representative of its national identity. The Senegalese value honesty and integrity.²⁸¹ They are more conservative in their personal behavior than members of other African militaries. The Senegalese are also respectful of traditions and of women.²⁸²

[Clip "Hospitable Attitude.mpg"](#)

[Caption "Hospitable Attitude: LtCol Womack"](#)

The most significant national cultural value mirrored in the military is the emphasis that the Senegalese place on interpersonal relations and hospitality. Senegal is known as the "land of *Teranga*" (the land of hospitality), a title in which the Senegalese take great pride.²⁸³ In Senegal, respect is shown by giving one's time. It is a point of honor to spend time discussing the health and welfare of one's families before doing business.²⁸⁴ When working with the Senegalese, it is vital to begin every meeting by engaging in small talk

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and drinking tea or Fanta (a carbonated beverage). If these pleasantries are skipped or rushed, relations with Senegalese military personnel will sour and mission performance will suffer.²⁸⁵

Sacrificing one's life for the sake of the mission is not a motivating factor for the Senegalese military. Members of U.S. forces may perceive this hesitancy to sacrifice lives as a passive combat mentality. In actuality, the FAS fight with ferocity and passion and are not afraid to take casualties in most combat situations. However, Senegalese families and friends will not praise their loved ones for sacrificing their lives in a hopeless combat situation. It is more honorable to a Senegalese soldier to surrender, remain alive, and continue to financially support his family.²⁸⁶

Morale in the FAS

Morale among Senegalese troops is highest when they are deployed on peacekeeping operations or other international missions. The Senegalese believe they are the ambassadors of their nation, and service abroad provides them with the ideal opportunity to show off the prowess of the FAS. When serving abroad, military personnel earn more money and are pleased with this higher rate of compensation. They are also away from their families and thus released from the stress of supporting large numbers of people with their meager pay.²⁸⁷

When soldiers are stationed at their barracks in Senegal, morale is often very low. When in Senegal, military personnel struggle to support themselves and their families. Soldiers often use their wages to support large extended families, and when they are not making the higher rates of pay from UN and AU missions, they often are not able to meet financial needs. When asked how they are doing, the Senegalese often reply saying they are "in a Senegalese way," meaning they are depressed and struggling to manage their affairs.²⁸⁸

Conclusion

The Forces Armées Sénégalaises are proud to be part of a force they believe is helping to stabilize both Senegal and West Africa as a whole. The FAS sees its primary role as providing support to the civilian government of Senegal and is proud that Senegal is the only West African country that has not experienced a military coup since gaining independence. Inside Senegal, the FAS consider themselves to be professional and unified. Members of the FAS place their duty to the military above ethnic and sectarian differences.

Internationally, the FAS attempts to maintain a positive reputation. To that end, the FAS has made many significant contributions to African Union and United Nations peacekeeping operations around the globe. Senegalese troops are proud to contribute to these efforts and see themselves as ambassadors for Senegal abroad. Peacekeeping operations are also a significant source of training for many Senegalese troops.

The FAS has been heavily influenced by the French military. However, despite French influence, the Senegalese military does not have a unified military doctrine. The Senegalese have also been exposed to a variety of foreign influences through training programs in a number of countries, including France, the United States, Ghana, and China. The lack of a unified military doctrine prevents the Senegalese military from functioning efficiently when deployed on peacekeeping and other missions.

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261 Joachim.
262 Bore.
263 Womack.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
267 Bore.
268 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
270 Ibid.
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