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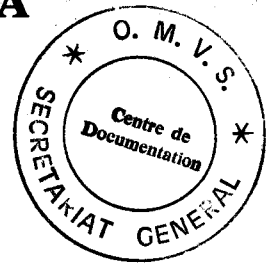
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STUDIES IN SOCIAL CHANGE

THE EVOLUTION OF MODES OF ACCUMULATION
AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN MAURITANIA

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THE EVOLUTION OF MODES OF ACCUMULATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

IN MAURITANIA

In order to complete the analysis of social change in Mauritania, it seemed imperative to us that we examine the recent evolution of modes of accumulation. Such a study would be complementary to those on changes in the pastoralist sector and the development of the migratory phenomenon on its multiple fronts: sedentarization, urbanization, international migrations, etc.

To start with, let us make clear our definition of this technical term, so seldom encountered in everyday discourse. In every society, work and its products take specific social forms. In the market economy which in modern times has been ramified throughout the world, this specific social form is the market commodity. The social form labor takes is wage labor. And the social form taken by the products of labor is capital. It was therefore important to examine the social forms of labor and the accumulation of products in Mauritania before the colonial period, when market forms became generalized. We have in part accomplished the analysis of labor and its evolution in our two sociological reports on animal husbandry and farming. We now proceed to round off this analysis with a systematic examination of modes of accumulation. Let us add that there was a whole series of reasons why we decided to devote special attention to the evolution of modes of accumulation.

First, there was a historical reason: in this part of Africa, criss-crossed by the great caravan trails in the past, and coming under the influence of European merchant capitalism as early as the 16th century, market modes of accumulation have a long history.

Secondly, there was an economic reason: on account of certain factors to be spelled out below, during the colonial period market forms of accumulation on the local scene developed outside the system of production. And this encouraged the growth of a market sector relatively independent of the productive process. The most

obvious evidence of the existence of this market sector is provided by the fact that Moors have come to specialize in trade, and have spread diaspora fashion over all Africa.

Thirdly, there was a socio-political reason: the traders, and more generally the social group which organizes and monopolizes this market form of accumulation plays a major part in the processes of social change.

Our study will comprise two distinct sections:

In the first section we shall go over the conditions under which this market sector was constituted, as well as the development of market mechanisms. This phenomenon per se is an economic phenomenon, but our analysis of it will stress the sociological aspect. In other words, our primary aim will be to lay bare the social mechanisms involved, such as the relationships between producers and traders, between the local system and the colonial system, etc. At any rate a strictly economic analysis capable of establishing laws governing the market place would be rather difficult to accomplish if only because available quantified data are so scarce and available statistical information is so vague.

In the second section we shall gauge the extent to which new forms of economic and social differentiation became established on the basis of these market relationships. In particular, we shall examine the ways in which these new social relationships dominate, transcend, or suppress previous modes of accumulation and social differentiation. (In this connection it may be worthwhile to point out that all of Mauritania's societies have traditionally featured marked social stratification and lopsided modes of accumulation, chiefly as a consequence of slavery). Our examination will lead into a study of the role these new merchant groups play in Mauritanian society today.

1. - CONSTITUTION AND EVOLUTION OF MARKET MECHANISMS : A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

In this area, a brief historical outline is more necessary than in any other. Because commercial networks have a long history in Mauritania, people are sometimes inclined to assume the existence of a certain continuity between the old networks and the present specialization of Moors in trading activities. The actual reality is far more complex: no doubt the long history of market relationships did play an initial part in this specialization. But what we are dealing with is in fact a set of quite different operations, often directed by distinctly different groups.

1.1 - The Establishment of Market Relationships and Commercial Networks in the 19th Century

Well before the colonial period, the old trans-Saharan trade routes which criss-crossed Mauritania and had ensured the prosperity of the old caravan cities like Ouadane and Chinguetti, went into a definite decline. The main cause of this decline was the establishment of European mercantile capitalism in this part of Africa. This establishment was not new; it had in fact given European capitalism time to direct a portion of the trans-Saharan trade to its own account, and to create new trade networks. The European presence was very limited, with the main trading posts being those at Arguin, Portendile and most notably Saint-Louis at the mouth of the Senegal River from the 18th century on. In addition, there were conflicts between various European imperialist powers. But in spite of all this, the penetration of European mercantile interests very quickly impacted upon the internal development of various population groups in Mauritania. Thus, the Senegalese historian B. BARRY ^{1/} has demonstrated that the Sharr Bebbu War,

1/ Boubacar BARRY : Le royaume du Walo, F. Maspero, Paris, 1972.

which gave the Hassani Arab tribes their mandate to dominate the Berber tribes, and which was followed by the setting up of the Emirates at the end of the 17th century, was also a conflict between the heirs of the Al Murabetin, with their vested interests in the trans-Saharan transport business, and others inclined to favor the development of the European-dominated Atlantic trade. It was by no accident that Trarza, situated close to the mouth of the Senegal River and near the European companies, became the venue of these political movements.

Be that as it may, this penetration of European mercantile capitalism assumed new dimensions in the 19th century as a result of the steady expansion of international trade and the Industrial Revolution. And in Mauritania this penetration occurred primarily by way of the artery of the Senegal River, secondarily by way of Morocco.

A stable market system grew up around Saint-Louis and the "posts" along the river. It was a trading system that made little use of cash. In Mauritania it involved the export of gum arabic, a commodity that became a very hot trade item in the 19th century: it was used in the textile industry for finishing and dyeing fabric. As a matter of fact, so strong was the demand for gum that the Moors, who themselves ate it, assumed it was the basic staple of European diet. Imported commodities included manufactured goods, textiles, armaments, baubles and trinkets, etc.. In addition, the merchants of Saint-Louis were not above profiting from the Slave Trade. When it was abolished on the international level, they traded slaves on the domestic market. "Freedom of trade" was assured by the payment of "customary fees" to Moorish Emirs and chiefs. These payments in kind helped spread European-made products in Moorish society. In the 19th century the development of trade was marked by the establishment of new trading firms beside the old merchants of Saint-Louis. Many of these firms were launched by the Bordeaux traders as an alternative to play an important role during the colonial period. The black African population of the Senegal Valley were also directly involved in this trading economy. This was especially true of the Soninke, who also had a long history as a trading people. Starting from the 12th century, Soninke merchants had been trading actively with the Compagnie du Sénégal, in gold, ivory, and above all, slaves.

In the 19th century Bakel and Kayes were the principal commercial ports on the Senegal River. But trade with the Soninke was hard put to it to recover from the abolition of the Slave Trade. 2/

The fierce opposition the merchants of Saint-Louis put up to the conquest of Mauritania was eloquent testimony to the stability of the trade networks which brought them large profits. For years on end they were able to frustrate the implementation of Coppolani's plan of conquest. And Coppolani's correspondence with the French authorities, in which he denounces the trading habits of these merchants, says a great deal about the nature of this commerce: it was typified by alliances with the Moorish chiefs, interference in local politics, the sales of munitions and slaves, an indulgence in profiteering schemes practically tantamount to pillage, etc...

The encroachment of merchants from the North involved "Moroccan" tribes who settled in Mauritania in the 19th century setting up commercial networks in such places as Tekna and Oulad Busba. In a very short while they had branches in Saint-Louis and some of the river "ports". This latter economic stream was smaller than the former. Nevertheless, it did have a certain influence on the evolution of Moorish society because it established itself from within.

By distributing new products it helped create new needs. The classic illustration of this development is the introduction of tea, a product brought into Mauritania by the Oulad Busba merchants in the last half of the 19th century. Its subsequent success is well known. Other commodities included carpets, gold and silver jewelry, perfume, and other products either of Moroccan origin or reexported from Morocco. To this list we should add armaments, imported in bulk from the North at the end of the 19th century. This arms traffic was helped by imperialist rivalries pitting the French, the Germans and the Spanish against each other both in Morocco and in the

2/ A. ADAMS, Le Long Voyage des Gens du Fleuve, Maspero, Paris, 1977

Western Sahara. At the turn of the 19th century, for instance, the Oulad Busba possessed rapidfire rifles which were to give them a transitory dominance of the coastal strip between Southern Morocco and Senegal. These weapons helped put up a stiff resistance to colonial penetration.

This development of market relationships fit in with Moorish social organization. A notable fact is the Oulad Busba brought from the other Moorish tribes not only slaves but tributary rights (hurma). These developments provide evidence of the monetarization of social relationships and the penetration of market relationships. The research we ourselves conducted in the Adrar region indicates that this was a time of active sales of palm groves, and even sales of uncultivated land.

It was in this context that inter-regional and inter-ethnic exchange channels which had admittedly existed before, but which now took on the characteristics of market exchanges, were to get perpetuated. Thus, again in Adrar, the settlement of the Ghudf brotherhood, founded by the Southern Ideybussat, in the Aoujeft area went together with the establishment of an exchange system based on salt, millet and manufactured products imported from Europe. In this connection it would be informative to look into relationships between the spread of the Tijaniyya movement and these new trade systems. As a matter of fact the Tijaniyya movement was introduced by the Idawali, a tribe whose specialization in commerce became more definite in the colonial period. The Ghudf brotherhood mentioned above is also connected with the Tijaniyya sect.

Gum was the principal commodity exported to the European market ; on the domestic market, the principal commodity was salt. In Northern Adrar, the Idjil salt works suffered the vicissitudes attendant on the political and military upheavals there during and after colonial conquest. (The North was not pacified until 1934). By contrast, the Trarza salt works supplied several thousand tonnes of salt for sale along the Senegal River all the way to the Kayes area.

Another commodity which entered the distribution system at this time was millet. It figured in significant exchanges between nomadic herdsmen and people of the river valley, as well as the Soninke in both Mali and Mauritania. The accounts of the caravan traffic passing through Tijikja and the Tagant gates in 1907, the year after Tijikja was occupied, show more than 1,000 camels in transit in just a few months. That figure indicates several hundred tons of freight destined for Adrar and Northern Tagant. And from Southern Morocco and the Oued Draa came barley and sometimes wheat.

Several other products were also traded: tent poles, cotton fabric from Mali (flij), strips of cloth from Soninke areas, etc... as well as slaves, who were traded actively down up till the end of the 19th century and even till the onset of colonization. To what extent did these exchanges take market and cash forms at the end of 19th century? Barter or exchanges based on limited equivalency systems involving salt, millet and cloth for instance, were certainly still very widespread; but we should not underestimate the role played by cash or equivalents with an analogous function, such as strips of cloth.

1.2 - The Creation of a Domestic Market in the Colonial Period

Most historians treating the colonial system agree that the establishment of the colonial system as a system of political domination had as both its aim and its consequence the development of monetary and market relationships (through the direct levying of taxes, for one), the creation of a domestic market, the boosting of production for the market, and the "liberation" of the labor force. This general thesis applies to colonization in Mauritania, on the condition that it be refined by a few specific nuances.

The difficulties encountered in the conquest of Mauritania, and the existence of a large area of dissidence in the North right down to 1934 made the colonizers decide not to rush the pace of the society's evolution, but instead to preserve non-mercantile relationships in a bid to win the

support of those social strata which had ruled the society before it was colonized. The instructions handed down by Patey, who succeeded Gouraud after the conquest of Adrar in 1910, were extremely clear on this point : in order to maintain order in the interior, and to keep the Northern raiders at bay, it was necessary to rely on the Hassani warrior group ; to win this group's support, it was imperative to maintain the existing social structure. In the event, traditional hurma and ghafat payments were maintained right down to the 1950's. As for slavery, the colonial administration went so far to accomodate it that in some cases it actually hunted down runaway slaves. For example, just after 1930 a child was kidnapped in Senegal and sold in Mauritania. A few years later this child escaped, using camels in his attempt to travel back home. The colonial administrator at Trarza jailed the fugitive child on charges of "camel theft" brought against him by his masters.

For these same reasons colonial policy in Mauritania was more restrained in its use of coercive measures in general use in other colonies. Forced labor, for example, was not as widespread there as in other colonized societies. In fact, among the Moors it was practically unheard of ; instead, they were subjected to large scale livestock requisitions. This did not necessarily mean that the colonizer had no economic interest in Mauritania. The country's conquest cannot be reduced to simple geopolitical imperialist aims involving the need to assure a link between the Maghreb and Black Africa. From the colonialist point of view, the zone of economic development was Senegal's peanut zone. Within this optic colonial policy gradually defined two main economic functions in the exploitation of Mauritania ; first, Mauritania was to supply cheap food, principally livestock, to Senegal's peanut producers and her urban wage earners. Secondly, Mauritania was to supply labor to both the urban and rural sectors engaged in peanut production.^{3/} We have examined the second phenomenon, the labor force, in the RAMS study on Migration. We shall now examine the first function. In effect, the production

^{3/} The latter phenomenon, the labor force, is examined in the RAMS report on Migration in the Social Change studies.

of livestock, and secondarily, farm production, were carried on under market conditions. This was an essential aspect in the creation of a domestic market and the evolution of modes of accumulation in Mauritania.

1.2.1. - Creation and Evolution of the Livestock Market

The creation of the livestock market came almost exactly at the same time as colonization. In effect, the majority of Mauritania's people, Moors and Peulhs, make their living from livestock. And these herdsmen have only one way of meeting the need for money : the sale of some of their surplus livestock. The exchange of livestock for other products such as millet, cloth, etc... predated colonialism. Quite naturally, the extension of cash demands resulted in the extension of these exchanges. Moreover, with the growth of Senegal's urban areas, the demand expanded. In the 1920's, the Louga market, sited just over 100 kilometers South of the Senegal River, assumed the position of the principal livestock trading center. (The colonial authorities tried to set up a Mauritanian livestock market at Rosso to compete with the Louga market, but they failed. Livestock fairs were held there several years in a row, but after 1930 the enterprise died). Livestock was sent down on foot, crossing the river at Rosso, Podor, Kaedi and Bakel. From Louga it was sent on to consumption centers in Senegal's peanut zones and urban areas.

Economic stimuli played a key role in motivating herdsmen to sell their livestock. But we should not overlook pressures exercised by the colonial administration. These pressures could take such direct forms as requisitions of animals for meat or transportation at official rates of pay. In 1926, in the Adrar region, such requisitions hit 1,500 camels out of 9,000. The Administrator himself conceded that this burden was too heavy, and was partly responsible for the famine then raging in the region. Each clan was obliged to take turns supplying transport animals. The standard stipulation was 20 % of livestock, with at least 55 camels monthly supplied to the government's transport corps. The herdsmen had to keep these animals near the government posts even if there was no pasture nearby. In addition, they had to provide transport animals for the annual resupply of the Adrar

post from Rosso and Podor. One government administrator noted : "When the yearly transport operations involve no more than 500 camels, they are much appreciated (sic) since they make it easy to pay taxes". ^{4/} With the development of motor transport and the free market, requisitions dropped off. But during the Second World War they were renewed to ensure transportation within Mauritania and the delivery of supplies to Senegal. In that period Mauritania supplied 8,000 camels for domestic transport and 11,000 camels to Senegal every year.

Coming on top of the requisitions, the Zekkat tax, a religious tithe on livestock, put a very heavy burden on herdsmen. In the beginning this tithe was fixed inclusively for each clan or tribe. In 1936 it was put on an individual footing, on the basis of questionable census figures subject to manipulation by the chiefs. Without a doubt there was a lot of trickery, and in good years taxes could be paid with ease. But when droughts or epidemics decimated livestock herds, the taxes became hard to bear. Then herdsmen were forced to sell their livestock en masse to make the necessary money.

The combination of economic stimuli and coercive measures brought about a rapid development of livestock sales. Estimates of sales magnitudes in Senegal are extremely approximative. When we come to sales within Mauritania, such estimates reach the realm of pure fantasy. So, we shall restrict ourselves to the farmer type of estimate and even those we shall handle most gingerly. In 1940, before the market was shaken up by the war, official figures for livestock exports to Senegal were as follows :

- 9,723 camels (5,543 reserved for the transport corps)
- 9,853 cattle
- 126,765 sheep and goats ^{5/}

^{4/} National Archives of Mauritania, Nouakchott

^{5/} National Archives, Series Q

In 1968, export figures more than doubled, except in the case of camels, where sales on the Senegalese market dipped, on account of the fact that camels were no longer used for transport :

- 18,000 (unofficial estimates : 52,000)
- 270,000 sheep and goats (unofficial estimates : 330,000) 6/

The continued development of exports down to the onset of the drought in 1968, and the expansion of the market, were both connected with rising cash demands. The cash sector of the domestic economy of herdsmen expanded ceaselessly because prices of essential commodities climbed steadily. (We shall revert to this point later on). By contrast, livestock prices dropped just as remorselessly. To evaluate this phenomenon, we assembled price data from Mauritania's National Archives in Nouakchott. It goes without saying that these market price statistics should be handled with circumspection. But they do provide useful indications as to market trends.

- At the start of the 1920's, prices were as follows :

Cattle cost between 100 and 150 F in Guidimakha ; in the Senegal River Valley they cost between 100 and 200 F. In each case we have noted the price for export cattle. Sheep and goats cost between 25 and 30 F in Guidimakha ; in Boghe they cost between 15 and 25 F. Prices had remained stable from the time before the 1914-1918 War.

- In 1929, livestock prices experienced a slow but steady rise :

Cattle : 250 to 450 F in the Senegal Valley

Camels : 1,300 to 1,500 F in Tagant

Sheep : 30 F average in Mauritania (Kiffa)
40 F in the Senegal River region.

6/ Statistical Bulletins of the Direction of Statistics, Nouakchott, 1968

- The 1930 crisis saw a sudden collapse in the price structure.

1931 and 1934 prices were as follows :

| | <u>1931</u> | <u>1934</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Camels (Tagant) | 200 | 250 |
| Cattle (Senegal Valley) | 150 | 125 |
| Sheep (Kiffa) | 10 | 15 |

In other words, these early 1930's prices were lower than pre-World War I prices.

- Down till the Second World War the resumed upward climb of prices was slow especially if we take into account the steep devaluation of the Franc in 1937 :

| | <u>1938</u> | <u>1941</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Camels (Tagant) | 500/850 | 1,500/1,700 |
| Cattle (Senegal Valley) | 250/450 | 600/750 |
| Sheep (Kiffa) | 20/30 | 60 |

It seems that these fluctuations were closely connected with prices on the Louga market :

| | <u>Camels</u> | <u>Cattle</u> | <u>Sheep</u> |
|------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1926 | 2,500/3,500 | 400/900 | 50/120 |
| 1931 | 400/600 | 125/300 | 25/35 |
| 1939 | 600/1,150 | 400/780 | 50/80 |

Thus, between the eve of the First World War and the outset of the Second World War, that is, for a period of nearly 30 years, livestock prices remained stagnant. In the case of camels they even experienced a net drop. In the 1930-1931 crisis, these prices even fell by as much as 67 %. Under these conditions herdsmen were obliged to sell more and more of their livestock to maintain their purchasing power. We shall later have occasion to look at these livestock prices in comparison with those of other products on the market, both products of local origin and imported products.

- After the Second World War prices climbed very steeply. But because the Franc had become so extremely bloated through inflation, there was in real terms a further drop in purchasing power. In 1948, these prices were :

- 8,000 to 12,000 F. CFA for meat camel (Tagant)
- 1,500 to 6,500 F. CFA for one bull (Senegal Valley)
- 400 to 1,150 F. CFA for one sheep (Senegal Valley).

- In the ensuing period, right down till Independence, there was a slow but sustained price rise. In 1958, the average price per head of cattle in the Senegal Valley was 9,000 F. CFA, while that of sheep was 1,020 F. CFA (MISOES Study). This trend lasted till the drought : in 1969, in this same region, the prices were 13,600 F. CFA (2,720 UM) for cattle and 1,500 F. CFA (300 UM) for sheep.

This relative depreciation, which in fact was tantamount to an absolute drop in market prices for livestock, was the key factor in the growth of livestock sales. It reflected the producer's victim status in the market place. In 1930, when the world crisis involving peanut production caused a dizzying drop in prices on the Louga market, producers reacted by withholding their products from the market. The result was that money in circulation dried up in the society. This situation did not recur after the second World War. By then market relationships and the cash nexus had penetrated so deeply into the animal husbandry economy that the herdsmen had no alternative but to sell large numbers of their animals in order to survive.

The organization of the livestock market reflected these price fluctuations, the speculative character of the profits involved (in the final analysis these profits were made in Senegal, where livestock was resold at higher prices), and the limited scale of business transactions. Here there was no such large scale organization of the livestock trade as could be seen under the control of the big traders in Mali and especially in Northern Nigeria.

The traders were numerous, and often they operated on a small scale. There was a large number of middlemen, traders and brokers. The colonial trading companies did not participate in this trade. Here and there one could come across a few big traders, but they did not control a large enough chunk of the trade to be able to dictate buying and selling prices. Many of these traders were herdsmen or caravan transport organizers who made regular trips to Senegal. They would start a small herd, usually on credit. After selling this herd, they would buy goods for resale in Mauritania.

The other feature typifying the organization of this kind of trade was the generalization of credit. Livestock was itself often bought on credit in Mauritania, only to be sold, again on credit, to brokers and butchers. In this way a complex web of interests was spun, often on a basis of tribal connections.

The capital involved was small, and a lot of it was tied up in credit; yet the livestock trade did function as one of the foundations of market accumulation particularly in Moorish society, because the market was large and had local bases. These same factors kept the colonial trading houses out of the livestock trade. They were not attracted by these mercurial profits, especially since considerable capital would also have to be tied up at sales points as well as in the organization of transport.

1.2.2 - The Establishment of a Foodstuff Market : Reality or Myth ?

Let us start with a query : did a cereal market exist in Mauritania before the modern practice of importing cereals ? (clearly such a market did not take the same forms as the livestock market).

At any rate we are sure, from a scrutiny of historical data, that there was indeed a large cereal surplus produced in the Senegal River Valley, especially in the interval between the two World Wars, as a result of the cultivation of new land. We also know that this surplus was sold or, at least exchanged.

One of the primary characteristics of the cereal market in the Senegal River Valley was the perpetuation of non-mercantile forms of exchange, or of forms typical of regional "mini-markets" with no systematic connections among themselves. In particular, such mini-markets had no reference prices comparable to the reference prices provided by livestock prices on the Senegalese market. The caravan trade with the Northern regions remained important for a long time. It was mostly monetarized, but it kept its localized character and was partly based on traditional systems of exchange featuring salt, gum, livestock, etc... On the local level trade remained at the barter stage for a long time. During the MISOES study, from 1957 to 1958 ^{7/} it was estimated that about 20 kilos of cereal per head (millet and especially sorghum) were bartered every year for other products. This quantity was quite comparable to the quantities sold in the same period.

The reason for these cereal sales were the same as those behind livestock sales : the need for cash had grown. But the concentration of cereal production in the regions of Brakna, Gorgol and Guidimakha while other regions like Trarza, Tagant and Adrar produced enough cereal only in exceptional years, coupled with very marked annual variations, gave rise to significant inter-regional movements. In 1930, Guidimakha suffered a serious famine after a poor harvest aggravated by locust invasions.

When discussing monetary demands, we have to give the colonial tax its own special place. This holds a fortiori for the tax called achur, which was levied originally in kind, then in cash. It was not abolished until rather late. It was a burdensome tax, because it did not take large annual fluctuations of production into account. In years of scarcity tax relief measures were only grudgingly applied, and farmers had to go into debt to pay the achur tax. Official Government reports even pointed out

^{7/} Boutillier et al., La Moyenne Vallée du Sénégal, P.U.F., Paris, 1962.

that among the Moors, who carried on a particularly chancy kind of farming on rain-irrigated land or in flood basins, this tax was pushing people into giving up farming.

For quite some time, that is, until about 1930, the economic and coercive stimuli applied had only a limited effect. Producers resisted the traders' efforts to bring prices down. The Senegal Valley's cereal surpluses became the object of important business deals in which the colonial trading houses got increasingly involved : they resold millet in Senegal's urban markets or moved it into the peanut zone by rail.

All this while the principles of a trade economy remained in force. Millet was exchanged for other products, and was in turn traded for gum. (In 1924, 2 kilograms of millet were equivalent to 1 kilogram of gum in the gum-producing zones). The traders opened a large number of outlets, with some even in little River villages, where traders' agents could trade merchandise for cereals. (In 1925 the Compagnie Coloniale was established at Maghama, while Buhan and Tessière opened at Tidiane. Other trading posts were founded at Ouali, Palel, Sagné, etc...). The 1923 Economic Report for Trarza states : "Shops have been opened in the principal production centers, where traders have bought up millet at 20 Francs per quart. Taking into account the fact that payments to the farmers are made in trade goods, as well as the fact that a wide assortment of measuring standards is in use, one could estimate that what the traders paid the natives for their millet was 0.3 Franc per quart". The principal colonial trading houses thus siphoned off part of the cereal production. A number of "Moroccan" traders actually from the Oulad Busba tribe, as well as Saint-Louis merchants, were also well established on the market. The methods used were everywhere the same : the harvest was bought cheaply on account of the fact that the farmers were in debt, and partly paid for in merchandises. In our second chapter, we shall consider the effects of this system on the producers.

The producers resisted the domination of cereal production by the merchant sector in two ways :

Throughout this period millet prices climbed steadily. Here the statistical data are rather tricky to handle, because of large annual, seasonal and regional variations ; but overall trends are nevertheless clear :

TABLE 1
CEREAL PRICES, 1906 - 1930

| | |
|------|--|
| 1906 | 0.02 F. per kilo in Kaedi |
| 1920 | 0.60 F. in October, 1.50 in July in Gorgol |
| 1925 | 0.80 F. to 0.90 in the Senegal Valley |
| 1929 | 0.30 F. in January in Gorgol, but 0.90 a few months later 1.10 F. in Rosso in April |
| 1930 | 1.00 F. to 1.25 F. in Boghe |

Source: National Archives, Series Q.

Under these conditions, profits were patently speculative and usurious millet was bought in exchange for goods sold before the harvest at usurious prices : regional differences were taken advantage of, and in the long run millet was resold on the local market after shortages had pushed prices up. Thus, in 1929, traders bought millet for 0.30 F. a kilo in January and resold it at the same market in Boghe from June-July. Another report from the Boghe region in 1925 states that traders bought millet from the Northern farms at 0.60 to 0.70 F. per kilo and resold it directly to farmers in the Chemama, who were still awaiting their harvest, for 2.50 F.

A second way in which farmers resisted domination by the traders was to try somehow to diversify their salable production. In the 1920's peanut production in Guidimakha experienced a marked boom, especially in 1920-1921 when high peanut prices in Senegal quite seduced Soninke farmers. The trading companies refused to pay the price obtaining in Senegal: 60F per 100 kilos. Instead, they offered 40F. When the peasants refused to sell at that price, the trading companies boycotted them, and prices plummeted. By such stratagems the traders succeeded in imposing specialized production--essential in an economy which operates by keeping the producers dependent on the market--on the farmers.

A second period in the evolution of the cereal market began in 1930, following the economic crisis which brought about a collapse in livestock and peanut prices, working in tandem with new coercive measures promulgated by the administration.

In 1930, Native Providence Companies or Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance (S.I.P.) were established in Mauritania, as in the remainder of French West Africa. Their mandate was to control production, to provide against shortages, and to manage reserve stocks of seed and food-stuffs. These companies were set up to combat increasingly frequent shortages. Government officials got into the habit of blaming the shortages on the "short-sightedness" of farmers. Paradoxically, though, these same officials noted in their annual reports that the traders, by ripping off the farmers come harvest time, and by pushing the peasants into debt, caused a lot of shortages. Worse still, the traders used to hoard grain after bad harvests to drive millet resale prices higher. People were

hostile to the idea of "grain reservoirs", seeing in the scheme just another tax imposition. But the system was imposed anyway, and grew in the course of the war. In 1941, they were converted into collective granaries, which was tantamount to putting the chiefs in control of them. And in 1944, after two successive years of poor harvests, it was stipulated that each individual was to contribute a minimum of 15 kilos to the grain reservoirs.

The Second World War witnessed a crisis which we shall study in greater detail later. During that war, the pegging of millet prices at an official rate aggravated difficulties confronting farmers. There was a widening gap between the official price and the black market price, and this gap encouraged speculation, with the result that the traders, especially the trading companies which bought their stocks at the officially fixed prices, made a killing. By contrast, the producers found themselves forced to let their crop go for a song. To add insult to injury, they even had to buy millet back on the black market in case of need.

These were the halcyon days (1930-1948) of the cereal trade. Cereal surpluses remained large right until the war because new lands were put under cultivation, and the resulting increased production helped balance the growth in population.

As far as prices were concerned, this period comprised two phases. The first phase featured a step price drop from a ceiling which may be situated in 1931.

Table 2: The Drop in Cereal Price: 1931 - 1940

1931: 1F per kilo in Guidimakha, 0.80 in Kaedi
1934: 0.40F in Guidimakha, 0.35 in Kaedi
1940: 0.40F in Guidimakha

Source: National Archives, Series Q.

The price drop played into the traders' hands, and the period was marked by a spurt of intensive trading. When the War started, millet prices shot up spectacularly; but the price rise has to be situated within a general inflationary context:

Table 3: Millet Prices, 1942 - 1948

1942: 1.75 to 2.10 F in Gorgol (resold for 8F at Matam in Senegal)
1943: 6 F (official price), over 20 F (black market price)
1945: 2 to 3.75 F
1948: 5.50 F (official price), 9 to 10 F (black market price).

Source: National Archives, Series Q.

In the first place, these steep price variations resulted from a famine consequent on the drought-cum-locust-invasion of 1942 and 1943.

At that time, Mauritania had to import several thousand tonnes from Senegal and the then Sudan. The high prices were also due to the development of a black market, a circumstance facilitated by the fixing of an official base price. Under these conditions, even though the colonial trading companies kept selling large quantities of cereals (in 1943 they sold 1,700 tonnes in the Trarza area alone, where production

was not particularly high) the way they were organized rendered them quite incapable of bringing the market under systematic control. After shortages in 1941/1942 and 1942/1943, the year 1943/1944 saw a good crop, and after millet grown on Walo land was harvested prices dropped to 2.50 F and even 2 F per kilo. The 1944/1945 harvest turned out to be just as good, and prices held steady (at 2.50 F in Boghé in February, 2 F in April and 3 F in November 1945)--to the chagrin of the trading companies. Such being the circumstances, millet hoarded in lean times could not be marketed at the price sought by the traders: 3.80 F. It became necessary to resort to an administrative decree forcing consumers to buy millet as a precondition for getting sugar which was then rationed, in order to bring down surplus stocks.

Such problems encountered in dealing with a rather haphazardly organized and scattered market accounted for the trading companies' lack of interest in the cereal trade in the period following 1948. To this must be added the fact that the surplus was constantly shrinking because of population growth; moreover, the cultivation of new lands came to a halt. Possibly, too, a further reason may have been the development of a labor migratory movement. The trading companies were replaced in the first instance by Lebanese or Moorish traders who in 1957 controlled 80% of the cereal market. Afterwards, shortfalls in production became a regular feature, save in rare bumper years. In the course of the 1957/1958 MISOES study covering the middle Senegal River Valley, the surplus produced throughout the whole valley was estimated at 5,000 tonnes; a decade earlier, the comparable figure was between 10,000 and 20,000 tonnes.

The drought which ravaged the country ten years later merely spelled out in bold relief the fact that there was a structural deficit in production. In this situation market prices were increasingly determined by international cereal prices and government price policies. Moreover, since there is so little selling of domestic production, the notion of a producer price has become increasingly meaningless. Prices appeared quite stable until the drought and the 1973 food crisis; then they exploded.

Table 4: Cereal Prices, 1949 - 1975

1949: 11.30 F official purchase price

13.80 F selling price

This was the year when government base prices were abolished;

prices therefore generally fell in line with those on the free

market.

1958/1959: 17 F per kilo in the Valley

20 to 25 F on the market

1967: 10 to 40 F CFA

1973: about 100 F CFA (19.50 UM)

1975: 55 to 100 F CFA (11 to 20 UM)

Sources: National Archives, Series Q
Statistical Bulletins.

Eventually, the slow growth of a cereal market in the colonial period was rudely interrupted by the drying up of the cereal surpluses on which that market depended. This market had always presented certain peculiar features such as fluctuating prices, the continued practice of barter, speculation, and usury. These features flowed from the fact that the market was not generalized, that producers themselves ate up a great part of their products, and also that non-monetary forms of exchange remained

operative. What in the end really brought about the general spread of market and cash relationships, was the production shortfall. But so important were these subsistence foodstuffs that very rapidly the State had to take measures to organize and control the situation.

1.2.3. The Evolution of Market Mechanisms from the Colonial Period to the Food Crisis

The small selection of price statistics we have presented ought to be handled with care. They are abstracted from official market prices as recorded in government administrative reports. And they sometimes did not take into account such factors as seasonal variations, which in the case of millet were really considerable; nor did they always distinguish between purchase prices and selling prices, etc. In spite of these shortcomings, though, they do make it possible to get an idea of overall trends. So there is a case for using them circumspectly pending a systematic scrutiny of archival materials. Such materials would include not only government archives, but also the books of the trading companies, the military supply depot, etc.

Obviously, the relevant variations are those simultaneous variations between different market prices. We have tried to assemble in a single tabulation prices for a selection of the most important products. These prices have been expressed as a factor of 100, the base figure corresponding to prices for 1940 - 1942, a pivotal period in the country's economic development.

Table 5: PRICE TRENDS, 1906 - 1973

| YEAR | CAMELS | CATTLE | SHEEP | MILLET (kilo) | GUM (kilo) | SUGAR (bread) | GUINEA FABRIC (meter) | IMPORTED RICE (kilo) |
|------|--------|--------|-------|------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1906 | - | - | - | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| 1920 | - | 19 | 333 | 133 | - | - | - | - |
| 1921 | - | - | - | - | 117 | - | - | - |
| 1925 | - | - | - | - | - | 125 | 158 | - |
| 1929 | 33 | 52 | 560 | 222 | - | - | - | - |
| 1930 | - | - | - | 222 | 133 | 125 | - | - |
| 1931 | 13 | 22 | 171 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1932 | - | - | - | - | 17 | - | 50 | - |
| 1934 | - | - | - | 89 | - | - | - | - |
| 1935 | - | - | - | - | - | 69 | 74 | - |
| 1938 | 42 | 52 | 50 | - | - | - | - | 100 |
| 1939 | - | - | - | - | - | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| 1940 | - | - | - | 100 | - | - | - | - |
| 1941 | 10c | 100 | 100 | - | 100 | - | - | - |
| 1942 | - | - | - | 433a 1333b | - | 1500b | - | 2533b |
| 1946 | - | - | - | - | - | 625 | 737 | 706 |
| 1948 | 125 | 593 | 1292 | - | 500 | - | - | - |
| 1949 | - | - | - | 2556c 3067d | - | - | - | - |
| 1956 | - | - | - | - | 667 | 1375 | 1747 | 2824 |
| 1958 | - | 1333 | 1700 | 1778 | - | - | - | - |
| 1967 | - | - | - | 5556 | - | - | - | - |
| 1970 | - | 2015 | 2500 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1973 | - | - | - | 22222 | - | - | - | - |

a. official prices
 b. black market prices
 Source: National Archives

c. purchase prices
 d. selling prices

The first factor to note is the divergent evolution of farming and livestock prices. Until 1940, millet prices rose more slowly except in emergency periods such as 1930-1931, when the gap widened considerably. It widened again during the second crisis that hit Mauritania's economy, that of 1942-1946. Cereal prices rose twice or three times as fast as livestock prices. Then, the balance shifted more in favor of livestock products. We get an even clearer picture if we calculate how many kilos of millet were equivalent to the average price of sheep and cattle in the Senegal River Valley.

Table 6: Equivalent Livestock and Cereal Prices
(Prices for 1 sheep and 1 head of cattle reduced to their equivalent value in kilos of millet)

| | Sheep | Cattle |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 1920 | 42 kilos | 208 kilos |
| 1930-1931 | 14 | 182 |
| 1938 | 36 | 500 |
| 1942 | 21 | 79 |
| 1949 | 43 | 290 |
| 1958 | 45 | 400 |
| 1969 | 60 | 545 |

Source: National Archives, Series Q.

For herdsmen, the toughest times were the crisis periods (1931, 1942), when they had to sell their livestock for a pittance merely to survive. In the years before the 1942-1946 crisis and, especially right after the crisis, livestock prices rose more sharply. As a result of this situation, the herdsmen's favorite traditional practice of using livestock as a form of accumulation became extremely hazardous. In crisis periods, while cash needs rose, livestock prices fall steeply.

The relationship between prices of imported commodities like tea, sugar, textiles, etc. and prices of local products such as cereal, livestock and gum was very complex. In the case of gum, there was a very clear deterioration in terms of trade. In 1926, 1.5 kilos of gum could buy a 2-kilo sugarloaf or 5 kilos of millet; in 1930, just 1 kilo of gum was equivalent to the same 2-kilo sugarloaf or 8 kilos of millet. But in 1932, it took 5 kilos of gum to purchase the same 2-kilo sugarloaf, while 1 kilo of gum only bought 2 kilos of millet. In 1942, the equivalency was down to 10 kilos of gum for a 2-kilo sugarloaf and 1 kilo of gum for 1 kilo of millet. Prices remained very low after the war: it took 3 kilos of gum to buy a 2-kilo sugarloaf and 1 kilo of gum to buy 2 kilos of millet in 1958.

Three phases may be distinguished in the relationship between millet and livestock prices on one hand and prices of imported commodities on the other: in the first phase, lasting until 1930, imported commodities were relatively rare, and their prices were high. After the 1930-1931 crisis, prices fell, comparatively speaking; this phase saw the expansion of market and cash relationships in Mauritanian society. It was suddenly interrupted by rationing and the black market. After the War, prices of imported commodities dipped again. As before, we have expressed this relationship in terms of the number of 2-kilo sugarloaves that selected local products could purchase.

Table 7: Price equivalents of cattle and millet as related to sugarloaf prices

| Year | 100 kilos of millet | sheep | cattle |
|------|---------------------|-------|--------|
| 1925 | 8.5 | 2.5 | 20 |
| 1932 | 7 | 1.7 | 33 |
| 1938 | 8.8 | 3.1 | 44 |
| 1942 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 6.3 |
| 1948 | 12 | 7.5 | 50 |
| 1958 | 11.3 | 6.8 | 60 |

Source: National Archives, Series Q

The deterioration of terms of trade is thus a relative phenomenon which occurs mainly in the course of local economic crises which upset market conditions and spark significant social changes. Very often, these economic crises are linked with periods of drought. This does not mean that droughts are the root causes of these crises: they simply aggravate contradictions in the production system and exacerbate tensions on the market. The first general crisis to hit all Mauritania, that of 1930-1931, was nevertheless just a ramification of the world depression of 1929. In the period before the crisis, Mauritania experienced a first phase of the development of market relationships under conditions comparatively favorable to producers. However, import prices of products from abroad remained high, and the amount of cash in circulation was low. The depression halted business and brought about a drastic drop in prices: "A camel which was worth 800-1,500 F seven or eight years ago is now worth only 200 to 300 F; a cow used to fetch 400 to 800 F, but

today it's worth only 125 to 150 F ^{7/}. Business transactions quickly ground to a stop: producers were no longer selling, and cash was scarce. For its part, the colonial government exerted considerable pressure to get the tax reinstated. "Almost all money earned from transport and the supply of transport animals to the GN, as well as from the provision of palm wood to the administrative post is swalled up by taxation. The chiefs are quite upset by this state of affairs". ^{8/} Moreover, up in the North, this situation sparked a final wave of resistance marked by the departure and death of the Emir Sidi Ahmed. Down South, locust invasions did not make matters any easier. In 1931, for instance, there was famine in Guidimakha. In fact, this crisis, during which trade stopped and cash disappeared was proof that the market was still not well developed. When trade resumed, with the relative drop in prices of imported commodities, the government's coercive measures spurred a strong development in sales in the ensuing years.

The 1942-1946 crisis also produced a different set of effects. It was set in motion by wartime restrictions, namely rationing and the distribution of goods according to a quota system, together with the severe drought of 1941 and 1942. Government policy, in the form of large scale requisitions and the authoritarian pegging of prices at a low level, worsened the situation and encouraged the growth of a black market compounded by wild speculation. And this time, the relatively steep drop

^{7/} Report of the Beyries Mission, 1935, National Archives, Mauritania.

^{8/} Report from Atar, April-May, 1932. GN = Grands Nomades, meaning long-distance nomads.

in prices of local products; far from causing a halt in trade, only forced producers, especially herdsmen, into selling at a loss. Thanks to speculation and the black market, the trading companies and local merchants built up large profits, while the mass of producers sank into poverty.

Here again, the 1942 report on the economic situation in Mauritania produced by the Economic Affairs Head Office, makes apt reading:

"In those regions where animal husbandry and gum-collection are the principal means of livelihood--in other words, almost everywhere in nomadic territory, there was an increasing imbalance between prices of imported commodities and foodstuffs from the South on the one hand, and prices of livestock and gum on the other.

"The guinea coin was worth 65 to 70 F in 1938; now its official value is 125 F, but on the black market, it goes for between 1,500 and 2,000 F.

The price of unprocessed cotton has risen from 3 F to 25 F a kilo, and that of millet from 0.60 F to 2.50 F.

"By contrast, sheep, which used to be worth 30 to 35 F was now worth 50 to 70 F while gum had crawled up from 3 to 4.5 F per kilo to between 5 and 7 F per kilo.

In 1938, a Moor could sell two sheep yearly and clothe his wife on the proceeds; now, to achieve comparable results, the same Moor would have to sell some thirty sheep."

In our second chapter, we shall come back to the social changes resulting from the crisis. These changes prevented a return to the status quo ante bellum even if from 1948 on producers were in a more favorable position on the market because prices had risen to some extent.

The last general crisis to hit Mauritania began with the drought of the late 1960's and grew into the food crisis of 1972-1973. This crisis had to do with important changes in market mechanisms: it was both a result of these changes, and a spur to them.

1.2.4. The 1973 Food Crisis and the Transformation of Market Mechanisms

We are not going to recapitulate a complete analysis of the effects of the drought of the late 1960's, with its special accompaniment, the food crisis whose nadir came in 1973. In any case this has already been done elsewhere. Obviously, the two phenomena were linked, but the food crisis was also the result of a worsening shortfall in cereal production. The drought merely pushed the seriousness of this shortfall into the clear light of day. In normal years, total cereal production hovered around 100 million tonnes, an amount barely sufficient to meet demand. Now throughout the 1970's, this total never rose above 50% of the normal figure; sometimes, it even fell below 33% of it, as in 1972-1973, 1976-1977, and 1977-1978. Such being the circumstances, the cereal market became essentially an import market. In the early 1960's, rice imports had averaged 6,300 tonnes per year. Now, they suddenly soared.

Table 8: Mauritania's Rice Imports

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Quantity in 1,000's of tonnes</u> |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1968 | 12.1 |
| 1969 | 19.9 |
| 1971 | 10.6 |
| 1971 | 27.4 |
| 1972 | 30.1 |

(continued next page)

Table 8 (Continued)

| Year | Quantity in 1,000's of tonnes |
|------|-------------------------------|
| 1973 | 22 |
| 1974 | 31.3 |
| 1975 | 27 |

Source: Commercialisation, politique des prix et stockage de céréales au Sahel, CILSS, 1977 and Statistical Bulletins.

On the average, then, 33% of cereal needs during this period were met from rice imports; to this must be added imports of considerable quantities of other cereals.

However, the effects of the food crisis, including famine and a shortage of cash income, caused the market in cereal staples to develop in a very peculiar fashion. From the establishment of SONIMEX, the Mauritanian State export-import corporation, that corporation had exercised a monopoly over the main import commodities, including rice, tea and sugar. The corporation has a network of branches which in the principal centers sell directly to the consumer. But in the main, they function as suppliers to wholesale traders. So though, in theory, there are price control mechanisms fixing profit margins, in practice the market is for the most part a free market. As for the millet and sorghum market, that is totally uncontrolled.

The situation was further modified by the seriousness of the crisis and the arrival of cereal supplied by international aid agencies. The promulgation of the Law of January 1973, coupled with the implementation of emergency measures to meet an immediate need--the feeding of destitute populations streaming into the urban centers--were tantamount

to a state program of massive food subventions. And this turned market conditions upside down. The CILSS report on Mauritania's cereal market ^{9/} notes that this policy, coming on top of the SONIMEX and the chronic shortages in staples like tea and sugar, produced several results: wholesale traders boycotted the cereal trade and reverted to a barter system. This facilitated profiteering by the traders in times of shortages. The same report spotlights this paradox: the State's cereal policy had turned off producers from bringing cereals to the market because of low prices paid producers, and subventions making imported products comparatively cheaper.

The formation of the Mauritanian Cereal Office in August 1975 was designed inter alia to improve the cereal staple supply situation by building up reserves, and also to stabilize prices. In practice, however, imbalances between the rice market on the one hand and the millet and sorghum market on the other persisted. These imbalances peaked in 1977, when the selling price of millet and sorghum rose to 250% the price of rice sold by SONIMEX. So the rise in millet and sorghum prices paid the producer decided by the Mauritanian Cereal Office did not immediately work to the producer's benefit. Instead, it speeded up a consumer switch to imported rice and boosted profiteering, with border smugglers doing a particularly brisk business.

9/ CILSS, Club du Sahel, Commercialisation, politique des prix et stockage des céréales au Sahel; Etude diagnostique, Tome II, Etudes par pays,

Center for Research on Economic Development, University of Michigan, 1977

The way the livestock market developed was very different. The drought caused heavy cattle losses. But the cereal deficit was even more disastrous. There was a likelihood of herdsmen strapped for cash selling large quantities of livestock to raise money for their other subsistence needs. To protect Mauritania's livestock from this possibility livestock exports were first forbidden altogether, then later allowed but only under rigorous control. (Speaking of rigorous controls, we have to remember that in this country where herdsmen regularly cross frontiers on annual transhumance treks, the idea of rigorous controls of this kind has necessarily to be understood in a relative, not an absolute sense). Two major consequences resulted from this situation.

- On the one hand, livestock prices rose very sharply, increasing 400% on the average in just a few years. Cattle losses in the drought had been particularly heavy, and the rise in cattle prices was correspondingly steep.
- On the other hand, livestock movements were redirected toward Mauritania's own interior. Whoever had money to spare bought up livestock on a large scale, with traders leading the pack. As a result, wage relationships developed in the animal husbandry industry. Herdsmen, if they did not go the whole hog and migrate to the urban areas, tended increasingly to get reduced to the status of mere shepherds, not owners of the stocks they looked after.

In accordance with the analytical principle we have used above, we have put together comparative price evolution data since 1970 in Table 9.

The figures show clearly that price evolution mechanisms operative in the previous crises had not worked out identically. For this, there were three reasons:

- First, there were the changes in the cereal market, already discussed.

In sum, this cereal market changed from a market handling a local production surplus to an import cereal market.

- Secondly, there was Mauritanian state intervention in sales and pricing of essential commodities such as rice, tea, sugar and guinea fabric.

This intervention began with the establishment of SONIMEX in 1966. Other corporations were founded at various times, but they turned out to have

less staying power: the National Transport Office, was set up at the same time as SONIMEX; the Mauritanian Cereal Office was founded in 1975.

But the centerpiece of the policy of state intervention has always been SONIMEX. SONIMEX reached a new stage in its growth during the drought

and the food crisis. The main reason was this: even though its causes were at bottom the same as the causes of previous crises, i.e., the

expansion of market relationships and the extension of the cash nexus in a situation where producers are doubly dependent on the market, the

effects produced by the recent crisis were quite different. Market mechanisms operated to bring about a large scale expropriation of producers,

involving livestock losses and a decline in farming. They also brought about migrations en masse and speeded up the rural exodus. The self-

perpetuation of rural society was at stake, and state intervention in the market was necessary if a major social and political crisis was to be

avoided. Henceforth, beyond the self perpetuation of social structures,

it was human survival itself which was on the line. To ensure this survival, it was imperative to hold prices down to an affordable level. That was what happened in the case of cereal: it meant a partial substitution of rice for traditional cereals. Moreover, a series of problems added to the difficulties involved in cereal production on the local level, apart from the fact that local cereals were more expensive than imported cereals. The market for other essential imports was more mercurial. There was an initial upward spurt, but after that rates were kept within acceptable limits by the policy of state intervention. A warning is in order here: the prices here stated are wholesale SONIMEX prices. We shall see that between SONIMEX and the eventual consumer, there is scope for speculation, evidenced by sizeable variations which are however hard to measure.

- Thirdly, livestock price increases resulted from other effects of the crisis: changes in social relationships at the production level. In effect, such price increases came with the social transfer of livestock and the development of wage labor in that sector of the animal husbandry industry previously most thoroughly penetrated by market and cash relationships. Interestingly enough, at the same time that the value of pastoralist labor and its products was being reasserted, the benefits were no longer going primarily to the producers, but precisely to the traders. We shall come back to this point later.

1.3. The Evolution of Commercial and Financial Circuits

The creation and development of the Mauritanian market and the general spread of market and cash relationships went along with the steady transformation of commercial and financial circuits. We now present an outline sketch of this process.

1.3.1. The Colonial Period

Two features of commercial organization in the colonial period are particularly noteworthy; first, European and other foreign companies played an important role in Mauritania's trade, though this role was limited as compared to their role in other French West African colonies; secondly, national traders took an increasingly important place in this commerce. Apart from a few ill-fated attempts to open trading posts in the hinterland, the colonial trading companies stayed in the Senegal Valley, where they carried on business from headquarters in Saint Louis and Kayes. The only development was some modification of the old river ports. For example, Kaedi and Bakel declined somewhat, while Podor and especially Rosso grew in importance. More and more, Rosso became the great entrepot for imported commodities.

There were two exceptions in this general picture: in Nouadhibou and Atar, the trading companies had been established from a long way back, and they were there to stay. In Nouadhibou, the SIGP and ENTRA fisheries and the Chauvel company did a great deal of business. Merchandise was shipped across the Baie du Levrier in boats, unloaded on the coast, and sent by caravan to Atar. Because Atar was linked with both Nouadhibou and Rosso, which itself was served in the early 1930's by a regular

Lacombe Company transport system plying the so-called Imperial Highway, it grew in importance as a trading center. And the presence of increasing numbers of Europeans expanded the market even further.

Another characteristic of the colonial trading companies was that among them, archaic trading practices died hard. The penchant for obsolete tricks was accentuated by the fact that these colonial companies existed side by side with Moorish, Senegalese and Saint-Louisian traders, who also kept such old methods alive. This was especially true of the gum trade. In this trade, the gum was collected when hot desert winds caused gum trees (Acacia Verek) to exude their sap. The gattering season might last a number of weeks, after which caravans would converge on the trading posts. What happened at that stage is best described in the picturesque 1922 Economic Report for Trarza:

" The methods used by these trading companies are well known,

The Moor arrives at the river port. Before he leaves the

River, he is fastened on by a fast-talking hustler, usually

from the Oulad Beniouk tribe, but sometimes also from the

Zenbotti or Oulad Khalifa tribes. The silver-tongued hustler

promises the Moor a higher price for his gum than the going

market price. He then guides him to a port trading post where

the gum gets weighed more or less honestly, while the Moor

takes goods equivalent to the value he thinks he is going to get.

But once the gum is weighed and stashed away, the Bedouin is

informed that the only price he can get for his gum is in fact

going price on the market. So he leaves the shop owing money, and is therefore obliged to deliver his next year's gum collection to the same trader".

In other instances, the trader or his agent goes directly to the Moorish encampments to barter millet and other goods for gum. (In 1924 2 kilos of millet were worth 1 kilo of gum).

These methods based on barter and indebtedness, and sometimes bordering on rip-offs with false weights and measures being used, profiteering, hoarding and refusal to sell, had a long life. So in using these same methods, Mauritania's merchants were not starting anything new: such were the tap roots of Mauritanian trade.

From the 1930's onward Moorish trade evolved in remarkable ways. At the turn of the century, the bulk of domestick trade was in the hands of the Tekna and the Oulad Busba tribes. These "Moroccan" traders controlled the important trade circuits originating in Morocco, and they had quickly set up branches in Saint Louis, in the Senegal Valley, and even in Senegal itself. These traders controlled part of the distribution network, even though in the Senegal Valley trading posts, where caravans went every year to get supplies of millet, there were also direct exchanges. However, this distribution system remained mainly an entrepot business. Commodities brought in by the caravans were stored and customers, mostly nomadic herdsmen, came from time to time to get their supplies. Credit and barter were very common.

The 1929-1931 depression had severe repercussions on this type of trade, with stocks being devalued and trade coming to a halt. In the wake of the 1942-1946 crisis, many of the traders still involved went bankrupt. The trade was unable to adjust to the speculative conditions of the black market and the new trade demands. Many producers were ruined, and lost credits contracted for. This was when a new type of trade developed: the shopkeeper's trade, to use Dubié's apt expression ^{10/}. This new trade responded to urban growth, especially to new cash demands. It involved the purchase of goods as soon as cash came in, instant credit in sum, the increasing hold of the cash nexus on consumption patterns.

The system began modestly, but grew so remarkably fast that as from the 1942-1946 crisis, it absorbed trade transactions so totally as to push out the colonial trading companies. After Independence, these colonial companies found their scope extremely reduced, except in a few specialized product lines such as the motor and hardware businesses. What lay behind this success of the national traders?

To start with, let us note that this commercial organization developed on a basis of considerable mercantile and monetary accumulation. Mainly, this accumulation occurred in two sectors: first, it occurred in the livestock trade, a sector offering considerable scope to individual initiatives. It was relatively easy to collect a small herd, buying the animals on credit, to take them to Senegal, sell them there

^{10/} Dubié, La vie matérielle des Maures, IFAN Thesis, Dakar, 1939.

and use the proceeds to buy trade goods. In short order, these livestock traders got organized so they could make several trips yearly with the help of hired herdsmen; they thus expanded their business volume and established stable trade circuits between Senegal and Mauritania. At first, the nucleus of these circuits was the Louga market; later, Dakar itself became the nucleus (see the Migration report). Secondly, this accumulation developed in the transportation business. Here too, the area of most intensive accumulation was in the haulage of peanuts in Senegal before the growth of mechanized transport a short while after World War II. The monopoly over the camel-raising business enabled the Moors to make huge profits, sometimes as high as 33% of the peanut harvest. In the heyday of the business thousands, perhaps even dozens of thousands of camels, coming mostly from Trarza, were involved in transport in Senegal. When camel traffic became obsolete, the Moors naturally switched to other kinds of transport, soon entering the automobile transport business where they very quickly locked horns with the Lacombe Company monopoly.

The Second World War added a third sector of accumulation: profiteering on the quota distribution system imposed on imported commodities, coupled with the black market. This was the time when some of the great fortunes destined to grow in the post-war period got their start.

A further feature of this commercial organization is the fact that for the most part, it grows on a tribal basis. Kinship and tribal relationships are used to guarantee credit and ensure funding.

And they make it possible to organize a very close-knit network of retail distribution points; a successful trader lends a relative the goods to make up a modest starting inventory. The latter repays the former as the goods get sold. The old bonds also create a very effective network of interests: in just a few decades a small number of tribes have achieved a monopoly of the distribution system: the Idawali of Tijikja, the Smassid of Adrar, the Zawaya tribes of South Trarza, etc.

The fact that market and cash accumulation takes place within this tribal context masks another fact: that the trading system is highly centralized and tightly hierarchized. This is a constant factor in the development of market relationships in Mauritania: traditional social bonds, tribal adherence and factionalism create a veil over the reality of economic and social differentiation. The price paid for this mystification is the resuscitation of the old bonds by means of an extensive redistribution of property and cash. Within tribes specializing in trade, a few big traders quickly gain total control of the wholesale trade and the commodity transport business. Using tribal bonds, they organize distribution networks which they keep under tight control either through supplying the initial capital or because they cut shopkeepers in on the profits while the operating capital remains exclusively theirs. Against this background, tribalism appears to be as much a tool of individual success as the objective of such success.

Another Mauritanian ethnic group which specialized very early in trade was the Soninke group. In the colonial period, Soninke trading practices kept alive the commercial enterprises of the 19th century. While Moorish traders created a close-knit web of collective interests which served to support individual initiative, Soninke commerce seemed largely to belong in the realm of individualist adventure. Usually, a person got together a bit of capital either by selling livestock or by doing wage labor, first on a seasonal basis, then as a long-range migrant. This capital was then invested in salt, guinea fabric or locally manufactured cloth which the Soninke merchant then took to faraway markets to sell. Aiming at speculative profits, he quite naturally took advantage of such weaknesses of the colonial trade system as the customs barriers to do his profiteering business. This kind of business took Soninke merchants as far afield as Congo-Kinshasa, where they traded in diamonds (see the report on Migrations). Individual successes led to larger population shifts such as those that produced the Soninke colonies in Congo-Kinshasa, the Ivory Coast, etc. But Soninke commerce never resulted in large scale migrations comparable to those produced by the Moorish commercial system.

1.3.2. The Transition Toward a National Trade System

The essential feature of commercial organization, in the colonial era was the duality between colonial trading companies and the national sector. Colonial trading companies fell increasingly under the control of French finance capital, with more than 50% of their capital controlled

by commercial banks after World War II; and it was these companies which dominated the market during a whole epoch. They monopolized both the trade in imported merchandize and that in export produce. In short, they occupied the commanding heights of the trading economy.

In spite of this, right from the beginning sizeable sectors of the trading business proved to be completely outside their grasp. This was of course the situation in the livestock trade and the caravan transport business, the principal bases of accumulation in the national mercantile sector. It was also partly the situation in the cereal trade, of which the trading companies controlled only a small portions, and over which they found it hard to exert their influence.

Soon enough, Mauritanian traders tried to break the economic hegemony of the colonial trading companies--and they succeeded easily. Colonial domination was simultaneously economic and political. The political whole the merchants played thus needs to be understood as a function of their specific economic interests. We shall come back to this point in Part II. The point at issue now is constant factor in Mauritania's political development from the time when it first took on modern forms until the events leading to Mauritania's withdrawal from the Franc Zone and the nationalization of MIFERMA in 1973. (The Representative Horma Ul Babana, elected to office in 1946, was a member of the Idawali tribe which was to be actively involved in subsequent events).

On the economic level, the declining role of the colonial trading companies results from two factors.

First, the trade sector under their control itself declined drastically. The gum trade, for instance, was only of marginal interest after the war. And the progressive disappearance of cereal surpluses spurred the colonial trading companies' withdrawal from that sector (see Section 1.2.2.).

In the import commodity trade there was competition from Moorish traders who had gained a firm foothold in Senegal. Their closely knit network of small shops provided a much more efficient distribution system than the company stores. In fact, the commercial function of these colonial company stores was more akin to the entrepôt business formerly engaged in by the Moors. The major Moorish merchants could go directly to Senegal's import companies and get their manufactured import commodity supplies from there. When, with Independence, MIFERMA was founded leading to the development of the port of Nouadhibou and the growth of a consumer market in the North, Moorish traders already had sufficient capacity to take control of a large part of the new market. It must be added that the colonial trading companies were not overly anxious to take control over such a thoroughly fragmentary market, which would necessitate their tying up large numbers of personnel and huge outlays of capital in transport and distribution costs, since the fact that they were controlled by commercial banks meant they were looking for ways of raising profits. So they abandoned the Mauritanian market because it

was considered difficult to operate profitably there using modern methods.

The trading system set up by Moorish traders had proved much more efficient.

The colonial trading houses progressively abandoned certain trade sectors, especially the subsistence commodities sector.

Because Mauritania already had its own local cash and market accumulation system, Syrian and Lebanese merchants, who spread throughout

Africa after World War II, moved in to take up the slack left by the colonial companies only to a limited extent. They did not really

establish a foothold anywhere outside the urban areas. Moreover, they specialized mostly in products consumed by the wealthiest people, namely Europeans, bureaucrats and such.

In the final analysis, when Independence came Mauritania's national traders controlled a large part of the commercial sector. In the years to come, this part would increase. But a huge obstacle still blocked the development of "national" business: this obstacle was the financial and banking system. Because Mauritania was integrated into the Franc zone, and because the French banking system enjoyed a zonal monopoly (specifically working through the International Bank for West Africa, BIAO), Moorish businessmen were practically excluded from modern financial and banking circuits, except for a handful of bug merchants operating both in Senegal and Mauritania. Now access to modern financial and banking facilities was indispensable if these businessmen were to enlarge the scale of their operations. (The reasons behind this exclusion would justify a separate study: was it a question of old business

"habits" working to French advantage? Was it mainly a matter of a desire to yoke Mauritania economically to Senegal and ultimately to the Franc Zone? Or was it just a lack of interest in the Mauritanian market?).

The situation brought about the appearance of certain transitional economic structures, cherika, as a result of the development of commercial capitalism in the specific circumstances of the post-Independence era. We had occasion to examine this mode of commercial organization just before the year that proved to be a turning point, 1973. Our study was conducted in Nouadhibou and Zouerate, in 1969-1970, in a personal capacity.

Because Nouadhibou is endowed with a port and thus enjoys possibilities of direct imports, the organization of the cherika phenomena tended to differ somewhat from that in Zouerate. Nouadhibou's principal businessmen, less than a dozen in all, were direct import merchants who financed whole boatloads of commodities, sometimes several of them. In Zouerate, we counted 18 wholesale merchants, with widely varying business turnovers. They specialized in acquiring supplies abroad, then reselling them to independent shops. The business was strongly hierarchized, and the number of petty traders was extremely high. Many had a business amounting to no more than 1,000 F CFA per day. In 1969, 80% of Nouadhibou's traders were in this petty category. We counted 305 traders in Zouerate, a town containing just about 15,000 people. Nouadhibou, population below 20,000 had 466 traders. In other

words, there was one shopkeeper for every 50 people, or every dozen families. In such a situation, trade was not the sole occupation of those involved. It was also a form of income redistribution: major traders entrusted fellow-tribespeople and relatives with funds; the latter then used these funds partly for trade and also for other purposes. (About 20% of the traders counted were MIFERMA wage-earners.

From the perspective of the organization of trade circuits, our principal concern in this section, attention should be focused on the big traders. Either they control the petty retail trade through credit arrangements and the setting up of branches, or it is the simple outcome of the social redistribution of wealth. The organization of wholesale commerce presents many interesting features.

- Most of the traders involved did not make their fortunes in Zouerate or Nouadhibou. They came from Atar, Rosso or Senegal with their capital, drawn by the large consumer market represented by the MIFERMA workers. Thus in Zouerate, a large portion of this trade was in the hands of the Smassid tribe from Atar: out of 305 merchants, 76 are of this group. They maintained their interests in their old business areas, sometimes seeing their business in Zouerate and Nouadhibou as merely extensions of their previous businesses.

- They got the bulk of their supplies from the Canary Islands and the Spanish Sahara. That was one more reason why they settled in Northern Mauritania: in effect, goods from these countries were exempt from customs duties at the port of entry. Ever since the early 1960's Indian, Pakistani, Spanish and other trading companies had considerably expanded

their business there. Credit facilities were made available to meet the needs of traders like the Moors who enjoyed little banking support and had only limited liquid assets. Some Spanish banks lent money for placing orders, warehoused the merchandise and eventually delivered it as and where the customer desired. There even were companies in the Canary Islands which delivered goods to Bir Moghreïn in the Saharan interior, from where they were smuggled into Mauritania. In this way, Moorish traders circumvented the obstacles attendant on their being part of the Franc Zone, especially the strict control exercised by French African banks, credit limitations, and the necessity of having goods transit through Senegal. The severance of customs links between Mauritania and Senegal in 1970 merely confirmed this shift of commercial channels and the hostility of Moorish traders to the previous system of strict dependence on France.

- Lastly, the wholesale traders tried to solve problems springing from the smallness of their financial capacity and the weakness of the nation's private as well as public commercial infrastructure by banding together in companies called cherika. A delineation of the situation in Zouerate in 1970 should make it possible to arrive at a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Cherika A was made up of three Smassid brothers whose father was already in business in Atar. They started the cherika in 1955 at Bir Moghreïn, where they were involved in import trading. The eldest brother manages the company as Director. One brother looks after credit

arrangements and banking details. But there is no rigid specialization. The eldest brother lives in Bir Moghreïn. The second lives in Zouerate where he sees to the resale aspect of the business. The little brother lives in Atar but travels between the various Mauritanian towns where the cherika has branches: Nouadhibou, Rosso, Nouakchott, Atar, Zouerate and Bir Moghreïn.

Cherika O consists of two Smassid brothers. Started in 1960, it does business in Atar, Rosso and Bir Moghreïn. Relatives joined the group, and they extended their business to Zouerate. The brother stationed in Zouerate makes supply arrangements, as well as taking care of credit and banking. Another supervises sales. The youngest brother minds the Rosso shop.

Cherika L was set up by one Oulad Busba tribesman and an individual from Brakna in 1959. There was a third member, but he quit the group after a fire gutted its shop in 1967. Both members contribute capital, but one of them has the lion's share. He lives in Nouakchott, managing the supply flow and controlling several shops. The other member keeps the shop in Zouerate in return for half the profits therefrom.

Cherika A and E comprises a Smassid and an Oulad Qaylan, in association with two Chorfa brothers. The group was set up in 1962 as a straightforward group with each associate contributing capital. Stock is taken every six months, and profits shared.

Cherika S and B is a partnership between a high government official who formerly worked in the region, and a shopkeeper. The bureaucrat contributes capital, while the shopkeeper manages the business side.

Cherika B is another kinship-based partnership, this time between an uncle and his nephew. They split profits.

These Cherika partnership controlled a large proportion of Zouerate's import commodity trade. They formed the nuclei of modern trading companies established on the basis of capital shares and an internal division of labor. They also facilitated the search for external credit, the setting up of branch shops, and the diversification of external supply sources. But they were still closely tied to kinship-based and tribal trading organization patterns, and within them social bonds were stronger than contractual stipulations. As a matter of fact, the use of such strong social bonds was necessary since business was done without the support of the local banking system, which alone could have underwritten contractual commitments. In this light, the cherika can be seen as a transitional structure on the way to real modern capitalist trading companies.

By the end of the 1960's, Mauritanian nationals had practically taken control of the trading system. The colonial trading companies had almost disappeared; those left were restricted to highly specialized sectors. For example, Peyrissac specialized in hardware. Others turned to a new line of business; for instance, the SIGP in Nouakchott turned exclusively to the fishing business. The "Lebanese" traders only took over a tiny fraction of the market left by these colonial trading companies. They operated

mainly in the Senegal Valley and in Nouakchott. By contrast, the development of a modern sector encouraged the opening of branches by foreign companies mainly in Nouakchott, and most notably in the automobile trade. Private Mauritanian capital was very rapidly attracted to such enterprises.

1.3.3. The Recent Development of Commercial Capitalism and State Intervention

In the 1960s, the growth possibilities of a national commercial system were blocked by the fact that only a small minority of Moorish traders had access to existing banking facilities; and even those had for the most part to do business from Senegal. A prime factor in the development of commercial capitalism in Mauritania was the evolution of the banking and credit system.

With Independence and the almost complete takeover of the commercial sector by nationals, with their limited financial capabilities and their business habits inherited from the colonial era (speculative profiteering, the extensive use of credit and a chronic penchant for indebtedness), conditions favored an increasing amount of state intervention. We have already looked at the ways and means as well as the consequences of this intervention at the level of market mechanisms

1.2.4.) The desire to withdraw from the Franc Zone, the creation of a national currency in 1973, and governmental policy changes in ensuring years had important consequences as far as trade circuits and the investment of commercial capital were concerned.

In the last decade, the country's commercial and financial circuits have been thoroughly transformed, mainly as a result of a series of political decisions. It is not our aim in this report to give a technical run-down of these measures and their effects. In the first place, such a study would be beyond our competence; in the second place, such studies are available in other RAMS reports. However, a discussion of the subject is imperative here, and we intend to undertake it in a concise manner, placing our accent on the sociological aspects of the issues at stake.

1. The Transformation of the Monetary and Banking System

Mauritania's membership of the Franc Zone in the past implied that its monetary policies were controlled by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) and by the monopoly exercised by private French banks, in the form of the BIAO down till 1967, and in the twin form of the BIAO and the SMB thereafter. This second bank had been set up with the aim of stimulating competition and meeting new needs for funds arising from the creation of SONIMEX. At this time, banking policy was characterized essentially, by the low level of credits made available to Mauritania's private national investors unless their loans were guaranteed by the State. SONIMEX was also founded in response to problems encountered in financing commercial investments without working through Dakar's banks or even banks in the Canary Islands (see Section 1.3.3.). National private deposits were substantial, but they were sent to France. The size of private deposits was proof of a certain dynamism of private "capital", and of the fact that accumulation had expanded, all in spite of the cons-

traints discussed. Moreover, a great deal of accumulated money was simply hoarded by traders who often kept large sums at home.

The BMDC (Mauritanian Bank of Development and Commerce), by according credits to individuals, only partially compensated for these shortcomings.

The credits remained restricted to certain very specific sectors: small-scale equipment accounted for 92% of loans amounting to 12% of total loaned in 1973; real estate, including hire-purchase, accounted for 7% of the loans and 38% of the total; in addition, there were a few small industrial projects, mainly in the fisheries sector, accounting for 16% of the total. (See Table 10 below).

When Mauritania withdrew from the Franc Zone, these data got reversed.

On the heels of that withdrawal came the establishment of numerous private banks, mostly of Arabic origin, such as the BALM and the BAAM. In addition large inflows of capital came into the country, making it possible for national investors to develop their investment capacities appreciably.

We have examined financial statistics from different sources in an attempt to gauge the importance of these changes which resulted in an increase of credits to individuals and enterprises as well as the size of private and company deposits in the banks. (Rather unfortunately, the fact that these enterprises could also be public enterprises endowed with bank credits introduces an element of error into the resulting figures).

The increase of credits accorded private investors took place in two phases: the first phase came in 1967 with the State takeover of part of the import trade to make up for the shortcomings of the "national" banking

TABLE 10 - LOANS ACCORDED BY THE BMD FROM ITS ORIGIN TO 31 DECEMBER, 1973
(in millions of UM)

| Categories | Long Term | | Medium Term | | Short Term | | Current Account | | Total | | % | |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| | Number | Amount | Number | Amount | Number | Amount | Number | Amount | Number | Amount | | |
| Rural Amenities | 1 | 2.9 | | | | | | | 1 | 2.9 | 0.016 | 0.60 |
| Agriculture | | | 5 | 3.7 | 19 | 2.4 | | | 24 | 6.1 | 0.39 | 1.27 |
| Crafts | | | 6 | 5.4 | 2 | 0.14 | | | 8 | 5.54 | 0.13 | 0.14 |
| Commerce | 1 | 2.74 | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 20 | 3 | 40 | 6 | 62.94 | 0.94 | 13.11 |
| Real Estate | 83 | 21.6 | 242 | 141.87 | 3 | 3.4 | | | 329 | 166.8 | 5.39 | 34.74 |
| Hire-Purchase | 52 | £.82 | 43 | 7 | | | | | 95 | 15.82 | 1.56 | 3.29 |
| Small Scale Equipment | | | | | | | | | 5611 | 57.2 | 92.19 | 11.91 |
| Industry | 3 | 43 | 6 | 32.6 | | | | | 9 | 75.6 | 0.15 | 15.74 |
| Public Equipment | 4 | 87.2 | | | | | | | 4 | 87.2 | 0.06 | 18.21 |
| TOTAL | 144 | 166.26 | 303 | 190.77 | 5,636 | 83.14 | 3 | 40 | 6,086 | 480.1 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Statistical Bulletins.

TABLE 11 - CONSOLIDATED BANK STATEMENTS: CREDITS AND DEPOSITS OF INDIVIDUALS AND ENTERPRISES
(figures in millions of UM)

| | 1962 | 1964 | 1966 | 1968 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1980(March) |
|---------------------|--------|------|------|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|
| CREDITS | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Short Term | 217 | 173 | 205 | 693 | 1,648.8 | 2,293.5 | 2,604.3 | 3,317.7 | 4,179.3 | 4,467.2 | |
| Medium Term | 43 | 28 | 21 | 69 | 60.8 | 187.6 | 117.9 | 425.8 | 167.3 | 399.4 | |
| Long Term | | 51 | 52 | 38 | 71.5 | 74.9 | 70.5 | 65.4 | 60.7 | 53.6 | |
| Total Private Debts | 260 | 252 | 278 | 800 | 2,717.2 | 2,953.8 | 4,670.7 | 5,758.1 | 7,112.2 | 7,717.8 | 8013 |
| DEPOSITS | | | | | | | | | | | |
| On Current Account | A 128a | 138a | 301a | 443a | 597.7 | 938.1 | 1,200.6 | 1,243.5 | 1,455.4 | 1,342.9 | 2677a |
| Fixed Term | 14a | 10a | 40a | 79 | 49.6 | 39.2 | 158 | 178 | 115.6 | 252.8 | 1025a |

Sources: BCM Monetary Statistics; Westebbe, The Economy of Mauritania, Praeger, New York 1971, p. 105

a: No distinction made between deposits made by public organizations and those made by private individuals and enterprises.

1978

system. The second phase came after 1974 with the establishment of new banks which made sizeable credit facilities available to private individuals. The growth of short-term credits specifically intended for private investment was spectacular, shooting up 2,000% between 1962 and 1977. The development of medium-term credit was less strong and more recent, starting in 1976 and 1977. It was partly the result of private investments outside the commercial sector, that is, in industry, services, etc. There was also a marked growth in deposits, but the gap between deposits and loans got steadily wider. Before 1968, deposits and loans were almost balanced. But after 1975, the gap became a cause for worry, and the monetary and financial system had to resort to external capital, from the Arab countries and elsewhere, as well as public funds in order to achieve some balance. This was partly why credit was tightened after the 1978 change in regimes.

At any rate, the essential conclusion we have to draw from these grim figures is that private investment capacity grew considerably after 1973.

2. As for the growth of public intervention in the commercial sector, its centerpiece was the establishment of SONIMEX in 1966 with 51% public shares, the balance coming from private sources. This move did not seem initially designed to limit private commerce. On the contrary, it enabled private commerce to solve its fiscal problems. Besides, SONIMEX sold part of its imports to wholesale traders; thus, the corporation complemented the private sector instead of competing with it. Lastly, its scope for intervention was limited to basic commodities such as rice, tea, sugar, and guinea fabric.

But SONIMEX, principally because of the food crisis of 1973, was called upon to take charge of the malfunctioning private trading system, and it seemed to intervene rather effectively in the price system. In fact, by force of circumstance, SONIMEX became an organ for State intervention in those sectors where profits were necessarily limited because of economic or political reasons. Helped out by other institutions such as the OMC or the emergency food distribution scheme, SONIMEX was a clear demonstration of the desire of traders and investors to focus on sectors offering maximum profitability. (In Nouadhibou, in 1980, traders refused to distribute basic commodities, on the grounds that profit margins were too low.

Thus, the evolution of investment capacity, did nothing to change an old fact of commercial life in Mauritania: traders keep hunting for speculative profits. Such profits may indeed be had even in the basic commodities sector, for instance by monopolizing food distribution (See the Report on Migrations) or by organizing artificial shortages and scarcity to push prices up. On this basis, there is room for a multitude of profitable operations, but that scope only exists on the margins of the distribution system. Or to be more precise, it exists when State subventions make it possible to lower prices sufficiently to avoid unduly exacerbated social tensions.

The search for new sectors in which to invest capital accruing from mercantile accumulation or obtained from the new banking facilities was also characterized by this desire to make large profits. We have already looked at the orientation of investments realized with credits advanced

by the BMD before 1973. We shall now look at the general orientation of investments realized with bank credits between 1964 and 1978 (Table 12).

Admittedly, these statistics make no differentiation between public and private investments. Still, they make it clear that "national" capital has continued to flow essentially into the commercial sector. The increase in the financial capacities of traders is again very obvious. By contrast, investments in the fisheries and cold storage sector did not increase appreciably. The mining sector is wholly outside the range of national capital. The same is true of urban infrastructure and Public Transport. The only sector to benefit from sustained business is the real estate sector, also financed by the BMD. This is also the sector offering the greatest opportunities for speculative profits, as rents in Nouakchott indicate only too well. The expansion of the "Miscellaneous" sector seems to us to reflect the considerable increase in business in the service industries, another sector highly attractive to private national capital.

On balance, then, the picture is negative. The expansion of the financial investment capacities of Mauritanian "businessmen" has not meant any real expansion of investment areas. People are still running after speculative profits. And such profits are to be had in those sectors where economic and political happenstance augur well: for example, in housing and land speculation, areas favored by the rapidity of urban growth. They are sought where investments of constant capital are low, such as in the service companies. And they do not create real

TABLE 12 - BANKING CREDIT CATEGORIES, 1964 - 1978 (in millions of UM)

| | 1964 | | 1966 | | 1969 | | 1973 | | 1974 | | 1975 | | 1976 | | 1977 | | 1978 | |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|
| | ST | M< | ST | M< | ST | M< | ST | M< | ST | M< | ST | M< | ST | M< | ST | M< | ST | M< |
| Commerce / Transport | 65 | 94 | 375 | 585.9 | 8.6 | 1020.9 | 0.9 | 1553.2 | 5.3 | 1832.6 | 24.3 | 2629.8 | 13 | 2759.2 | 27.8 | 29.2 | | |
| SONIMEX (started 1966) | | | | 424.5 | | 291.7 | | 22.2 | | 241.7 | | 14.5 | | 66.9 | | 6.4 | | 310.8 |
| Fisheries & Cold Storage | 26 | 78 | 140 | 124 | | 265.1 | | 218.7 | | 20 | | 93.9 | | 20.7 | | 122.3 | | 15 |
| Mines | 14 | | 23 | 333.4 | | 1034.4 | | 96.8 | | 840.9 | | 905.1 | | 753.3 | | 254.1 | | 657.8 |
| Water Work Electricity | 15 | 10 | 85 | 274.5 | | 36.3 | | 305.7 | | 95 | | 443 | | 125.4 | | 595.5 | | 11.2 |
| Construction & Public Transport | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Real Estate | | | | 1.3 | | 118.1 | | 98.8 | | 96.9 | | 1.7 | | 168.7 | | 2.6 | | 181.1 |
| Miscellaneous | 33 | 13 | 216 | 166.2 | | 37.6 | | 302.4 | | 158.2 | | 360.1 | | 372.7 | | 572.6 | | 404.2 |
| TOTAL | 173 | 205 | 825 | 1909.8 | | 1235.0 | | 2282.6 | | 1291.3 | | 3711.8 | | 1389.1 | | 4417.3 | | 1355.1 |

Sources: Westebbe, op. cit., p. 149
 BCM Fiscal Statistics
 Key: ST: Short term; MT: Medium Term; LT: Long Term

bases for an expanded national accumulation of private capital in the years

to come. Apart from a few attempts in the fisheries, investments are made totally outside the productive sector.

Clearly, this situation has sociological as well as economic explanations. We shall be in a better position to understand it after we have examined the way the country's merchant groups started, as well as the way they have grown down till the present. This examination we shall conduct in the second part of this report.

2. The Evolution of Modes of Accumulation and Forms of Economic and Social

Differentiation

To a certain extent, the creation and the evolution of a national market derive from a factor external to Mauritania's realities: The integration of Mauritania into the world-wide system of market and monetary relationships-- capitalism. The symbolic and concrete manifestation of this exocentrism was colonialism, understood both as a phenomenon of political domination and as an economic phenomenon. In the first part of this report we showed how colonial administrative intervention and the penetration of colonial trading companies played a decisive part in the development of market and monetary relationships. We also traced the evolution of market mechanisms and commercial circuits down to the present.

This economic evolution, however, did not completely wipe out the status quo. In Mauritania, we have to deal with societies that were highly differentiated even before colonialism. Moreover, these societies were familiar with market mechanisms of production and distribution. We also saw that from the end of the colonial period, a national commercial sector came into being. We shall now proceed to examine the extent to which the development of market and monetary relationships was destined to create new modes of accumulation or to change pre-existing modes. In addition, we shall identify the social groups which stood to gain from this mercantile accumulation, and find out what new types of relationships were to be established between them and the primary producers. Finally, we shall determine their status in the society.

We think the issue of modes of accumulation is pivotal in the discussion of this evolution: it arises at the meeting point of economic and sociological phenomena, at the confluence of the social accomplishment of work and its products with the social representations given this work and its products--representations which help shape the form taken by work and by its products.

2.1. Mercantile and Non-mercantile Accumulation in Precolonial Mauritania Society

This is a highly complex theme, which cannot be properly treated in the present state of historical and anthropological data. Still, we cannot avoid taking it into consideration, since ideological and behavioral frames of reference are still in part determined by these social representations of work and wealth.

2.1.1. Work, Modes of Accumulation and Their Representations in Moorish Society

Work does not appear under exclusively economic guises unless in social terms it is seen to be determined by exclusively economic criteria, i.e. when work itself takes the form of a marketable commodity capable of being sold, in other words, when it takes the social form of wage labor. In societies that are not dominated by market relationships, work appears in forms determined by other social criteria; it does not take the direct form of an economic activity.^{11/} That is not by any means to

11. D. Becquemont and P. Bonte, Travail, valeur, besoins et conscience aliénée, La Pensée, N° 173, 1979.

imply that work under such circumstances is ineffective as a nature-transforming activity. It simply means that the effectiveness of work is here understood according to criteria other than market criteria; and subjected to determinations different from those pertaining to the exclusively economic sphere of the market place. In precolonial Mauritanian societies, market production was restricted to certain limited sectors. And social representations of work were essentially governed by criteria foreign to market categories.

Much has been made of the low value placed on manual labor in Moorish society. But this is a bit of conventional wisdom which in fact glosses over various extremely complex realities.

People have often connected the low esteem in which manual labor is held with the development of slavery and other servile relationships. The connection is valid, but crude; it has to be refined. In Moorish society neither the slaves (Abid) nor even such vassalised groups as the Zenaga constitute a majority of the population. In any case there are not enough of them to enable the society's other members to shirk work altogether. In fact only a tiny fraction of the society, those who possessed enough slaves or received sufficient horma tribute, were actually "liberated" from work. Nor were the two cases identical, since the slave himself was a piece of merchandise. His work was bought, admittedly not in the form of wage labor, but in the sense that the worker himself had been bought. On account of this fact, within Moorish society slavery seems to be related to market production. As for the dependent form of work involving the Zenaga, it seems to have been:

determined by the political system. It was represented as a consequence of protection provided by the Hassani aristocracy; in fact, as a recompense for this protection. It reflected a political system of ranks or orders, and an ideology based on an unequal division of honor, and the system itself was based on each person's capacity to ensure his own protection as well as that of his dependents. So in this sense the low esteem in which manual labor was held was merely an aspect of the political and ideological determinants of social differentiation. Work was the province of the Zenaga. Political life, especially that heightened form of politics that was war, belonged to the aristocracy.

As a matter of fact, only a part of the Hassani aristocracy was actually "liberated" from work. Slavery, linked with mercantile groups, gave rise to a new distinction between workers and non-workers within the household, though not everyone had slaves. But if we leave slavery aside, we have to invoke a third distinction between representations of work in Moorish society: the distinction between pastoralist work and farming. This distinction works clearly as a justification of the subjugation of the Haratin, the word Haratin itself having its etymological root in farm labor. The Haratin was a liberated slave, free in theory. But his status implied that he was dependent, and liable to hard and painful labor. (It would be easy to find in present Moorish society instances of the persistence of such representations). In fact, as in many societies making such a distinction between farming and pastoralism, pastoral work is not really seen as a form of labor understood as a transformation of the natural and supernatural order. (In this connection

we would be well advised to consider the whole sanctified role played by livestock in sacrifices designed to relate the human world to the divine). Pastoral work is seen more as a way of life, a way which reproduces a relationship between humans and animals. Moreover, animal husbandry and pastoral work were linked to the political hierarchy. The Hassani came from a line of camel herdsman, the Magil. Domesticated animals, especially the camel and the horse, were the instruments of military superiority and political domination.

All these ideas remain very superficial. What emerges from them, rather a contemptuous attitude toward manual labor, is a hierarchization of forms of labor within a dualistic scale of values: dependent work versus free work; farm work versus pastoral work. And this valuation is expressed in the political system. The dominant Hassani groups, authentic herdsmen, are the guarantors and protectors of all forms of work. They themselves are "liberated" from work, and receive milch animals and meat-producing livestock as tribute, as well as whatever farm products they need.

On account of all this, modes of accumulation appear doubly determined. Livestock is the material form taken by wealth, but it is not the socially dominant form. The real source of wealth is political control over human beings. Hence the Moorish proverb: "Wealth is like liquid entering a funnel; block the end, and it overflows and gets lost." This control over people is linked with economic redistribution--a phenomenon which can take markedly showy forms. In extreme cases, the acquisition of material wealth might even result in a loss of political status. In the Adrar

region, Hassani families in positions of political power, if they grew rich in livestock or palm trees, were doomed eventually to accomplish the towba, a sort of penitential religious ordeal involving loss of warrior status and attachment to a Zawaya tribe.

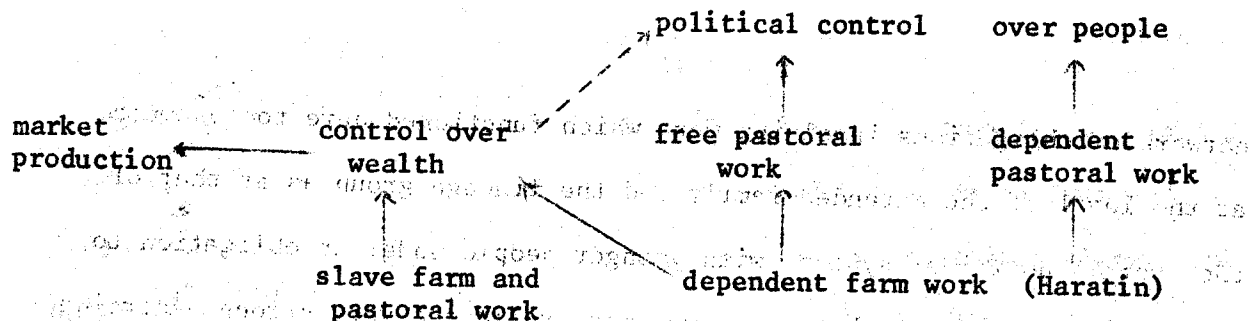
It is fashionable to describe Moorish society as dominated by a double hierarchy "of the Koran and the stirrup". This description has some relevance to our study, and reflects different categories governing work and accumulation. We have already seen that direct production for the market (salt, gum, trade) as well as indirect production (the caravan transport business) involved mainly the Zawaya tribes. It was also among these tribes that slavery was most rampant. In the Adrar region, for example, the exploitation of palm groves by the Smassid or the Chinguetti Zawaya had resulted in a pronounced development of slave labor in the 19th century. (At the same time, there were far fewer slaves among the Zenaga, the Ideishelli and other groups who also had palm groves, or among the Hassani.) This fact has to be linked with the fact that land sales are a matter of long standing, and involve sizeable tracts. In these same tribes such sales of land, involving title deeds we were able to examine, have been practised since the 19th century--another indication of the development of market relationships. The religious brotherhood movements which play such an important role in Mauritania always have an economic aspect. This is true of the Kounta clan who are in a way the initiators of the Qadiriyya sect and serve as models of brotherhood organization in the Western Sahara. They established their control over commercial routes (salt from the mines of Idjil) and over the pasture areas they exploit.

C.C. Stewart's work on the Ahel Sheykh Sidiya and the Oulad Ebieri presents a very detailed analysis of these economic aspects of a religious brotherhood, involving the gum trade, farm development in the Chemama area, the digging of wells and the improvement of pastures in the Boutilimit region, etc.¹²

It comes as no surprise that modes of accumulation of wealth in an essentially material form should be found together, with slaves, livestock and palm trees making up its main forms. P. Dubié, observing the camps of the Emir of Trarza and that of Abdallahi Ul Sheikh Sidiya in the 1930's, noted that there was a great disproportion between the livestock herds and other riches of the one and those of the other.

Admittedly, the distinction we have just made looks less definite in reality, but we are addressing ourselves as much to the level of ideological categories and representations as to that of praxis, and at that level at least the distinction operates clearly. Political control over people is also very important to the main religious heads, and manifests itself in forms of dependent labor done by the disciples. Such labor is rather similar to Zenaga labor, with the difference here that the protection offered the worker and which justifies his political domination, is of a spiritual, not a material nature. In the opposite case, some Hassani take an interest in productive work and trade, sometimes owning numerous slaves. But it remains true that the distinction has general validity. It may be schematized as follow:

12. C.C. Stewart, Islam and Social Order in Mauritania, Oxford University Press, 1973.



2.1.2. Work, Modes of Accumulation and their Representations in Black African Societies

Here our discussion will be much briefer, because it seems to us the data are simpler, not to mention the fact that we are less intimately familiar with them.

Whether we are dealing with the Soninke or the Toucouleur, this much seems clear: social hierarchy is governed by land control, and this control, whatever the level at which it gets asserted, is in the final analysis political. At the level of lineages or extended families, the power exercised by lineage heads or elders was linked to their control of land distribution. At the level of the village the power of dominant clans and "castes", is linked with their preeminent rights over the land. At the level of the overall political system the power of the aristocrats was linked to their control of land tenure; in the case of the Toucouleurs it was even in the last analysis linked to the appropriation of great landed estates, in turn tied with their political roles.

Even if this land tenure control and its connected political function enabled those wielding it to avoid direct work thanks to a complicated

network of obligations involving work which functioned here too as much at the level of the extended family and the lineage group as at that of the overall political system, with younger people under an obligation to work for their elders, the result was nevertheless a very strong assertion of the value of farm labor. This assertion of the value of work functioned within a context of a hierarchization of representations of forms of labor operative in the status system sometimes described as a "caste" system. It is particularly strong among the Toucouleurs, and it is linked with unequally distributed land rights. (The system sets apart a special place for the Subalbe qua "owners" of the Senegal River.

However, just as with the Moors, a second distinction operates within the system of representations of labor forms: the distinction between free labor and slave labor. But this second distinction here seems totally subordinated to the first distinction: the slave, whatever his occupation--and slaves are often farmers--is a person excluded from access to land. At best, in the colonial period, slaves could till dieri land, which was subject to relatively loose tenure laws, and then claim ownership. In rarer cases they could claim fonde lands not under regular cultivation. By contrast, the small farmer with recognized land tenure rights seemed always likely to seek political power. That is part of the explanation of the torodo movement among the Toucouleur small peasantry who work as free farmers; the movement serves as a focus for their claims against the Dyananke system of political control.

Still, slave labor did not develop independently of market relationships. It has thus been demonstrated that the increasing use of slave labor on Soninke farms seems to be a variation on a trading economic pattern in which slaves used to serve as one of the key commodities. After the abolition and decline of the Slave Trade, "domestic slavery was expanded and intensified to ensure agricultural production aimed at the export market, involving mainly peanuts and cotton, which was also woven by slaves."¹³ At the end of the 19th century the resistance against French penetration organized around the Marabout Mamadu Lamine was also an expression of the political claims of the free Soninke peasantry and the political and economic changes already introduced by colonialism.¹⁴

But it is precisely at this level that differences between Mauritania's black African groups and Moors become clearest. Among the Moors market relationships developed outside the political system based on human control, but in black African societies these market relationships seem to have been totally determined by the political system, which was itself based on control of land, a control which of course facilitated human control. We have noted that in precolonial Moorish society it was possible to find instances of land and palm trees getting sold, and even the cash commutation of some political relationships, such as the purchase of horma tributary rights by the Oulad Busba. But in black

13. A. Adams, op. cit., p. 40

14. A. Bathily, La conquête française du Haut Fleuve Sénégal, Bulletin IFAN XXXIV, Série B 1, 1972.

African societies land is strictly kept away from all mercantile circuits. This is true even among the Soninke, who in other respects have such a long tradition of market production. This is not the place to expatiate causes and the import of this divergent evolution. Suffice it to note that this divergence remained operative throughout the colonial period and right down to the present.

In the MISOES studies of 1958-1959, for example, we find the observation that

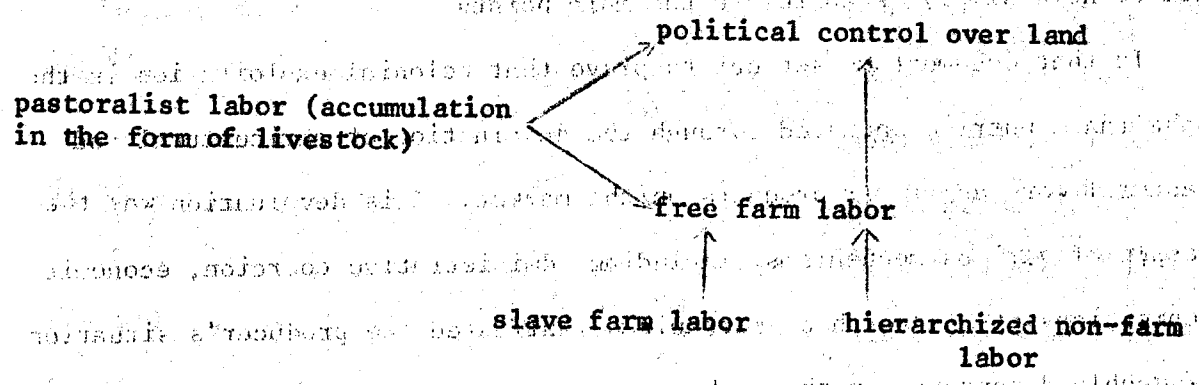
"While the Toucouleurs regard land as practically inalienable in as much as it constitutes the joint property of a collective family, the Moors do cede land in return for money, though land sales are still not too common. Perhaps a reason for such sales is that there is a lot of land, relatively speaking."¹⁵

The question is: What happens to modes of accumulation under these conditions? They can take the form of an accumulation of land rights linked to political power. But the land is inalienable, and to exploit it effectively one has to have enough farm laborers. Hence the increasing use of slaves by the Soninke in the 19th century. Otherwise the land merely lies fallow, as in fact is the case at present, since many landowners in the Valley are faced with a shortage of labor. Because of this, livestock was also generally regarded as a mode of accumulation in precolonial black African societies, especially among the Toucouleur,

15. La Moyenne Vallée du Sénégal, p. 132.

whose ancient bonds with the Peulhs made it easier for them to develop the practice of animal husbandry.

Let us now summarize the principal data in a recapitulative schema:



2.2. The Evolution of Modes of Accumulation in the Colonial Period

To understand the economic and social evolution of Mauritanian society as well as some of its current problems, we have to understand how market relationships and mercantile modes of accumulation developed in the colonial period. We have looked at the ways in which the market was created, and studied its functioning. But market production in Mauritania was all the less an aim in itself to the extent that it only functioned to a limited degree in precolonial Mauritania, and had in part to be forced on the society by colonial administrative fiat. We therefore have to take a preliminary look at the nature and the goals of the colonial system. That done, we shall be in a better position to understand the development of mercantile modes of accumulation in Mauritanian society.

2.2.1. Nature and Goals of the Colonial System of Exploitation

In the Migration report, we have already provided a summary of our hypotheses on the nature of the colonial situation in the Sahel-- hypotheses developed at greater length in our study entitled "La sécheresse des années soixante-dix au Sahel: Transformation des systèmes pastoraux et agricoles sahéliens," in Man and Drought, Geneva (publication pending). Let us here simply recapitulate the main points.

In that document we set out to prove that colonial exploitation in the Sahelian countries operated through the devaluation of agricultural and pastoral work and their products on the market. This devaluation was the result of various mechanisms, including administrative coercion, economic depressions etc. And these mechanisms manifested the producer's situation of double dependence on the market.

Caught in a situation of dependence on the colonial metropolises, these producers furnished export commodities at low prices.

And the producers were also in a situation of dependence on a social group of merchants on the local scene (whom for convenience we shall label "traders") who themselves made a profit on the sale of local commodities.

These two phases of dependence were tightly linked. It was because local traders exercised pressure at the level of the distribution of products that these products, at any rate those destined for export, could be exported at rockbottom prices. It was in fact extremely hard for the colonial trading houses to control the local market directly: the bottom was likely to fall out of the market, and there was resistance from the

producers.

In the case of Mauritania, are these hypotheses in fact relevant?

One objection could immediately arise: Mauritania supplied practically no products that were exportable to the colonial metropolises, except gum.

Quite the contrary: peanut cultivation, which went through a remarkable boom in the Guidimakha area at the turn of the century and at the onset of the colonial period, and the growth of cotton--a tradition in the

Senegal River Valley--actually declined rapidly because the colonial trading companies were not interested in their development. So at first sight the hypotheses may seem irrelevant.

But deeper analysis reveals a clearer perspective: the Mauritania situation can be correctly understood only when inserted into the regional context in which it properly belongs. For the fact is that from the colonizer's point of view Mauritania appeared to be an economic appendage of Senegal. And Senegal experienced a fantastic development in the production of peanuts for export. Colonial exploitation of Mauritania was destined to help maintain Senegal's peanuts production at cheap levels through the following mechanisms:

- **The supply of livestock to the Senegalese market: We have already noted the importance of the Senegalese market to the livestock export trade, as well as the impact of prices first at Louga then in Dakar itself, on Mauritanian livestock prices. We have to add that to the best of its ability the colonial administration tried to organize this export conduit. Thus, in all of Mauritania's livestock centers between the two World Wars prices on the Louga market were telegraphed in such a way that**

they had an impact on the export channels. That is just one specific detail. When there were recessions in Senegal, or when the price structure there collapsed, requisitions made it possible to supply the market on a regular basis. (During the Second World War cattle in the tens of thousands were exported to Senegal.)

- The supply of cereal: In the first decades of the 20th century the evidence indicates that the Senegal Valley exported appreciable quantities of cereal. The 1925 Gorgol Administrative report, noting the large quantities of cereal sold in Podor and Ambidedi, remarks:

"(Millet) serves as a means of exchange. It is delivered to peanut traders along the Dakar-St. Louis and the Thies-Kayes railroads to supply the food needs of the needy regions adjacent to the lines. Millet prices also tend regularly to be related to peanut prices, and the two commodities are in fact bartered against each other."¹⁶

We have already had occasion to describe at some length the evolution of this cereal market. After the Second World War, it declined with the disappearance of cereal surpluses from the Senegal Valley.

- The supply of labor: Labor migrations have a long history in this area. They really became a large scale phenomenon in the Senegal River Valley after the Second World War.

Initially, Mauritania supplied a certain number of seasonal migrant workers who found jobs directly in the peanut zone. In the past few

16. Administrative Report, Gorgol; 1925.

decades, that is, since about 1950, these migratory movements have primarily been oriented toward Senegal's urban centers, where they feed the labor market. Some migrants go all the way to France (see the Report on Migrations).

Aside from geopolitical designs (an empire stretching from the Maghreb to French West Africa), the aim of Mauritania's colonization was essentially to enhance the development and specialization of Senegal's peanut production zone.

As far as the devaluation of pastoral or rural labor and its fruits are concerned, we have seen its mechanisms in practical operation in the fixing of market prices. (By devaluation we mean that selling prices of commodities on the market are lower than break-even prices if all component elements, especially the labor incorporated, are factored in at their real market value). Leaving aside directly coercive measures dictated by the colonial administration, such as requisitions and the fixing of low official prices, etc.), the principal factor working to cause this devaluation of labor is to be found in the series of periodical crises endemic to the society. These crises were sometimes catalyzed by periods of drought, but it must be made clear that droughts merely act as catalysts, not causes. Moreover, some crises occurred at times when there was no incidence of drought at all. Such was the case with the 1930 depression.

In crisis times prices take a dizzying dive; producers are therefore under steady pressure to sell. Thus market relationships and the cash nexus experience a boom. When the crises end, local product prices generally climb slowly back up and the situation becomes more balanced.

But in the mean time the society goes through profound social and economic changes: masses of people are reduced to poverty, economic differentiation is accentuated, the labor force is "liberated", and monetary needs expand, etc.

In addition, there is a relative fall in livestock prices as compared to cereal prices. Since accumulation traditionally often takes the form of the maintenance of livestock herds, this price drop causes a crisis in traditional modes of accumulation. This phenomenon helped to increase livestock sales at a steady rate, so that throughout the colonial period, and in fact right down till iron exports began, livestock was Mauritania's chief marketable commodity.

The devaluation of pastoral and rural work, as partly reflected in price fluctuations, is a complex process, and does not develop in a straight forward linear pattern. The main reason for this is the resistance put up by producers. We have already discussed various circumstances in which such resistance came into play: sometimes producers refused to sell their product at prevailing market prices; sometimes the livestock trade came to a halt; sometimes producers tried diversifying their products; at other times there was large scale deception when it came to paying taxes, or administrative measures were sabotaged, as happened especially in the case of the official "grain reservés," etc. We must add that the period in which this kind of resistance proved effective was from the inception of the colonial era down till the 1930-1931 depression. That period witnessed a considerable slow down in business, and money almost disappeared from the scene. But once the

colonial system was firmly established, in its specific form of "double dependence", producers found themselves more and more disadvantaged on the market.

In any case, this resistance put up by the producers reflects a major historical datum which we must keep in mind if we are to understand the way Mauritanian society has evolved: knowledge of and practical familiarity with mercantile criteria and market mechanisms are of ancient vintage in Mauritania.

The decisive factor explaining the dependence of producers vis-a-vis the market lies in the very mechanisms by which market relationships and the cash nexus got established in the colonial period. Economic crises highlighted and accelerated the changes brought about; administrative measures oriented and reinforced them, but they were not their main cause. It was on the local level that these mechanisms operated at peak efficiency. Traders, often local petty traders, who themselves formed part of a hierarchical trading organization, playing upon the fact that the producers had very little cash income, met their needs for regular supplies by advancing them goods on credit--on the proviso that they would be repaid at harvest time, or, in the case of livestock, that they would take their repayment in livestock at an opportune moment when the livestock could be driven to market and resold at a substantial profit. This was the muda'af credit system, which circumvented the Islamic injunction against usury by taking repayment in kind--a stratagem much discussed in theological circles. It is an old trick. As far back as 1925, the Gorgol Administration, denouncing the "machinations" of the

Dioulas, who were actually stigmatized as "these parasites", noted that the farmers had already sold the greater portion of their cereals, including even future seed, and were therefore constrained to borrow in the harvest season. For every 5 Francs loaned in cereal or other merchandise, the repayment come the next harvest would be 16 kilos of millet, which would then (just after the harvest) cost 0.80 Francs on the market. The Administrator could have pointed out that the reason why the harvest could be bought thus cheaply was that it had already been mortgaged beforehand. The livestock situation was the same: the practice was to deliver a length of fabric or some such commodity right off, to be paid for in the long run with livestock--at double the real value of the original merchandise. Nor was the gum trade different. The constant and increasing indebtedness of the producer was the best way to force him to sell more and more all the time. Hoarding and profiteering were normal tricks of the trade. Products were withheld from the market to drive prices up. On the other hand, after the traders had piled up stocks of cereal and livestock they eased off buying during periods when producers most needed cash, for example when it was time for farmers to pay the colonial achur tax, that is, just after the harvest. The traders thus bought prices down. The economic archives are replete with instances of this type.

The colonial trading companies were as involved in such trading dodges as were the national traders. But such methods made it necessary to exert constant pressure on producers, to keep reducing selling and buying outlets, and to find vantage positions within the daily system of social

relationships governing production and consumption. And national traders were much better placed to do all this than were the colonial trading companies. As we have seen, the colonial trading companies did indeed try to set up more branch shops between the two World Wars, and to get established in the rural areas. But after the 1930-1931 depression, they folded. A number of them started a backlash movement which simply got stronger with time. In some areas such as the livestock trade, they did not even bother to try regulating sales at the level of the nomadic herdsmen.

The rampant profiteering and black marketing which grew during the 1942-1946 crisis were merely the application of these same tricks in a context particularly favorable to their efflorescence.

It was this constant economic pressure exerted on the market which established and perpetuated the producers' dependency status. It was becomes easier to understand the need for this dependency on the local market, as well as the function of the local traders. And on top of this dependency, there was the overall dependency of the colonized society vis-a-vis the metropole. What is unusual about the Mauritanian situation is that at the end of the colonial period the national trading group gained control of practically all of the nation's commercial sector. This, it might be judicious to add, was not all entirely due to the dynamism of the merchant stratum within Mauritanian society: the fact that Mauritania was not involved in the export trade except indirectly (through its connection with Senegal's peanut zone) contributed to the withdrawal of the colonial trading companies from the country.

2.2.2. The Nature of Market Modes of Accumulation and the Effects of Their Development

Whether the topic at issue concerns the colonial trading companies or the national trading group, what comes out of the preceding analysis is the fact that accumulation--which in the final analysis means mercantile profit--grows out of the strict control of the distribution of commodities, and from the maintenance of prices at very low levels. By the same token, increases in the size of this profit are not derived from any concern to innovate improvements in the productivity of labor--improvements which would both permit the worker to raise the value of his work and permit the businessman to raise his relative profit margin, even when this means accepting lower unit rates of profit. The contrary is in fact the case: the craving for higher profits necessitates profiteering operations and involve the beating down of local product prices. This state of affairs creates consequences which we shall study in this section at the level of the producers. It also determines the nature of mercantile modes of accumulation.

As far as Mauritania's producers are concerned, the development of market production and monetarized consumption patterns have proceeded under very unusual circumstances:

1. Market and cash consumption and production patterns may appear increasingly indispensable in Mauritania, but in any absolute sense market and cash consumption and production are at an extremely low level. Studies conducted in the Senegal River Valley by MISOES on the eve of Independence (1957-1958) make it possible to gauge the relative

quantitative importance of this phenomenon (see Table 13).

Here we are dealing with average budgets, a debatable concept, no doubt. The picture that emerges is one of extremely low cash incomes. As far as expenditure goes, between 67% and 75% of income goes into such inelastic items as food, tea, sugar and clothing. This lack of maneouvering room is an additional aspect of the producers' dependency situation.

2. Producers have two ways of increasing their income: they may boost production, or they may look for other ways of making money. The second choice offers rather limited possibilities. In the last several decades only labor migrations have generated enough extra income to often compensate for the loss of former saleable production in such areas as gum and cereal production.

In a certain sense, the colonial period was actually characterized by expanded production, an increase in livestock herds and the extension of arable land. The opening up of new land and the development of fallow land seem to have been at the root of continuous surplus cereal production in the Senegal Valley. But we need to take into careful account the manner in which this expansion occurred. Livestock herds increased steadily simply by overgrazing pastures. Under these conditions, droughts and epidemics periodically decimated them. So if we factor in population growth, for the entire colonial period there apparently was little or no real increase. Similarly, there were limits to the expansion of arable land, and in the cultivation of new lands a point of diminishing returns was in fact reached. The same problem occurred with regard to gum

Table 13: Cash Income

| | M O O R S | | TOUCOULEURS | |
|------------------|----------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Haratin & Abid | % age | Bidane | % age |
| Farming | 290 | 11. | - | 415 |
| Animal Husbandry | 1,070 | 42.5 | 3,260 | 540 |
| Fishing | 70 | 3 | - | 570 |
| Crafts | 240 | 9.5 | - | 535 |
| Gum Gathering | 240 | 9.5 | 165 | - |
| Land rents | - | - | - | 25 |
| Trade | 145 | 6 | 570 | 545 |
| Wages & Pensions | 230 | 9.5 | - | 530 |
| Migrant Earnings | 80 | 3 | - | 865 |
| Miscellaneous | 140 | 5.5 | 135 | 370 |
| TOTAL | 2,505 | 100 | 4,130 | 4,395 |

Table 14 : Cash Expenditure

| | M O O R S | | TOUCOULEURS | |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------|-------------|-------|
| | Haratin | Bidane | | |
| | | % age | | % age |
| Local Food Products | 4.5 | - | 790 | 1,000 |
| Imported | 595 | 46 | 1,030 | 930 |
| Clothing | 560 | 25 | 935 | 1,200 |
| Consumer Goods | 30 | 5 | 35 | 40 |
| Durable Goods | 80 | 5 | 100 | 190 |
| Housing and Development | 200 | 9 | 715 | 350 |
| Ceremonies & Gifts | 125 | 5.5 | 325 | 100 |
| Taxes | 165 | 7.5 | 290 | 275 |
| Miscellaneous | 45 | 2 | - | 230 |
| TOTAL | 2,260 | 100 | 4,220 | 4,210 |

... of ... and ... of ...

production: production was increased by multiple indiscriminate tapping, which eventually derastated the plantations.

We have to add that since methods and techniques remained unchanged, increases in livestock herds or arable areas meant the employment of more labor. But population growth quickly annihilated any immediate gains.

These difficulties merely mirrored a more general problem: rationally, these ought to be another way to raise production: by raising the productivity of pastoral and rural labor. This in turn implies the making of investments that happen to be outside the producers' own reach, given then low incomes. Quite apart from the consideration that the prevailing devaluation of labor makes all such investments unprofitable.

A major result of the producers' dependence on the market is that the society's productive forces have stagnated, not to say deteriorated. This stagnation reflects three factors: first, the fact that it is impossible to raise labor productivity through productive investments; secondly, the fact that there is a tradition of expanding production in a merely quantitative sense; and thirdly, the fact that production factors deteriorate as a result of all this. In Mauritania today the problem has reached gigantic proportions in the form of "desertification", but its roots go far back into the past. The catastrophic deterioration of the Senegal Valley economy, an economy which in times past produced ample surpluses, perhaps provides even more brutally clear evidence of this.

3. The final aspect of the producers' dependence on the market is that a large portion of productive activity is still carried on within a

context of social relationships antedating the colonial era. As C. Meillassoux¹⁷ has aptly demonstrated, the maintenance of a non-market production sector is the condition ensuring that the sector that is marketed will be sold at rock-bottom prices. If all production factors-- land, labor etc.--were expressed in market terms, it would be difficult to perpetuate devalued market production without resorting to a permanent system of coercive mechanisms. So production continues within a context of non-mercantile relationships involving domestic service, slavery, tributary ties etc. In other words, production has continued outside the context of wage labor, except in recent times. In addition, part of the consumption and distribution of goods produced takes place within the context of these social relationships.

However, there is an increasing contradiction between the maintenance of these non-market relationships and the process of labor "liberation" we have specifically analyzed in the Migrations Report. This process flows from the expansion of mercantile relationships. This contradiction, which is one of the motive forces transforming the society, has particularly devastating effects of the organization of work and production, as can be seen, for instance, in the impact of migrations on Soninke society.

What we are here confronted with are the general consequences of producers, dependence on the market; but we still have to refine our analysis according to types of economy and society.

17. C. Meillassoux, Femmes, greniers et capitaux, Maspéro, Paris, 1976.

Moorish society is made up mostly of herdsmen. Within it, however, there have long been the fundamentals of market production and accumulation. The main product being livestock, it is easy enough to siphon off surpluses for export. So the development of market production would seem a relatively simple matter. But a principal block existed in the form of non-market forms of labor, especially dependent labor linked to the political structure and the political control to which the Zenaga producers were subject. The block remained for some time during the colonial era because the colonial administration kept the political structure alive. This desire of the colonialists to maintain the social structure for their own purposes is clearly expressed in the "Instructions" handed down by Gourand and his successor Patey (1910). These "Instructions" made up a veritable political program radically different from the program followed by Coppolani, who was more interested in wiping out these political relationships and in breaking the hegemony of the warrior group in order to enhance producer autonomy and boost production. Unfortunately, within the confines of this report, we cannot analyze the contradictions in which the colonial administration got enmeshed between the two World Wars in its attempts simultaneously to boost market production and to maintain the horma and other tributary perquisites of the warrior group. Examples are legion: one being the refusal to grant concessionary rights to several colonial companies desirous of exploiting the Trarza saltworks--a refusal designed to protect the prerogatives of the Emir of Trarza.

In black African societies the situation was very different. There land, the basis of political organization, remained insulated from market relationships. This situation resulted in the appearance of a fresh obstacle, this time at the level of the land tenure system. New forms of exploitation of this control, first political and then economic, appeared or developed in the guise of sharecropping, tithing and renting arrangements. In Soninke society these also helped delay the development of mercantile relationships; alternatively, they helped orient such relationships into migratory movements.

To round up this rapid analysis of the effects of the devaluation of labor and its products at the level of the producers. We shall resume consideration of the growing contradiction between the maintenance of non-market relationships in production and consumption patterns and the steady expansion of the market. The maintenance of these non-market relationships being necessary to hold products down to low prices. The contradiction has grown explosive of late because people in the productive sector are obliged to buy an increasing portion of their subsistence needs on the market. This was an aspect of the 1973 food crisis which also highlighted the fact that the different bottlenecks in Mauritanian society were endangering the society's functioning and its very self-perpetuation.

When we come to the level of the actual conditions of market accumulation, we find the consequences just as operative; in fact they determine its nature.

In the commercial sector proper, accumulation is limited by the size of the market and the very low incomes of rural producers. Only the creation of a modern wage sector (mines and the bureaucracy) and urban development were liable to help expand the market. Still, the main obstacle was the speculative basis of accumulation, in other words, the investor's itch to seek exorbitant profits. Such high profits are in principle incompatible with investments capable of improving labor productivity. But it is just such productivity improvements which would create conditions conducive to the upward revaluation of work and to a rise in prices. And they would achieve this result precisely by tying up capital, thus lowering the rate of profit.

It is this orientation toward speculation which determines the main sources of accumulation. We have already dealt with these points above, so all we need do here is to recapitulate them:

- First, there is speculation in the livestock business, with traders taking advantage of seasonal and annual fluctuations as well as regional variations, and transporting livestock to the export markets; this is coupled with speculation in the cereal business, where traders monopolize and hoard supplies to create artificial shortages, regional variations and seasonal as well as annual fluctuations.

- Secondly, there is the practice of speculative selling and usury involving those import commodities which fall within the range of inelastic consumption patterns (food, clothing).

Obviously this picture we have sketched is a very bleak one, and is most valid in times of crisis. But here crisis periods can stretch out

over exceedingly long tracts of time; for example, one crisis lasted from 1942 till 1946 or even until 1948. And even in normal times of picture is valid as an index of actual trends, as numerous economic reports in the archives testify. Finally, it seems to us to apply broadly to the present situation, provided we take into account the rise of new opportunity areas for speculative profits such as transportation, housing and the service industries, etc. We shall come back to this point in Section 2.4. Apart from that, some features of the market have of late been modified: the cereal market used to produce surpluses; now it is bedevilled by production shortfalls, and has increasingly to import to make up the deficit. Since Independence, state intervention has changed the way the import trade operates. And finally, the food crisis made necessary a number of measures which have changed market mechanisms.

In the productive sector, market and cash accumulation have failed to get reoriented, for several reasons:

It is the very conditions governing market production in the rural and pastoral sector that have militated against productive investment in that sector until recent years. Wage labor was practically unknown there; above all, the devaluation of labor in that sector made it impossible to turn such investments into paying propositions, whether they were made by the producers or by private capital. To start with, wage labor in the modern productive sector was for a long time found mainly in the mining industry. This high-technology industry involved capital investments way out of reach of the amounts of capital raised from national market accumulation. The exception to this rule was the

fishing industry, a topic we shall come back to.

Market accumulation was thus very circumscribed as to its sources and methods, favoring trade, especially of the speculative kind. It was equally limited in its social representations, practices and functions. The maintenance of non-mercantile relationships, and the need to exert strict control over the market at a local level shaped the social relationships under which accumulation maintained itself and expands. The manipulation of kinship and tribal structures and the formation of economic and political patron-client networks characterize social relationships among those Moors who control the market sector. Accumulation also goes hand in hand with a distribution of wealth. This redistribution seems at first sight to have nothing to do with accumulation, but in fact it ensures its perpetuation. The growth of market accumulation does not result in the emergence of such personality types as the savings oriented bourgeois, or the Western-type entrepreneur driven by the individualist success urge. Here the trader--let us stick to this term even in cases where accumulation transcends trade, strictly speaking--perpetuates, if only superficially, some of Moorish society's most traditional values: kinship and tribal bonds, showy redistribution of wealth aimed at security political control over people, membership of a religious brotherhood or at least of the community of believers. The issue is complicated by the fact that these traditional values are manipulated to perpetuate and enlarge the bases of accumulation, as well as to mist over the accentuated social differentiation resulting from it. The question is: to what extent is the ploy successful? We shall come

back to this question in Section 2.4. But as a preliminary step, we have to discuss briefly the way this social stratum of traders has evolved.

2.3. Creation and Evolution of a Social Category of Traders

We have already dealt with numerous points above, so we can afford to be succinct here.

2.3.1. Consequences of the 1942-1946 Crisis

In several respects the 1942-1946 crisis was a watershed in Mauritania's economic and social history. In particular, this was the time when the old entreport trade died out; the cononial trading companies faded, and there was a boom in the small-shopkeeping sector. The crisis also marked the first time national mercantile accumulation was developing on a large scale.

A virulent speculative spiral followed the drought, the blockage of trade with France, and the imposition of a strict quota system on imported commodities: in 1942, for instance, the quota for cloth in Tamchakett was 15cm. per head per year; in Chinguetti the corresponding figure in 1946 was 1 meter. Quotas were just as strict for sugar, tea, candles etc. Prices were officially pegged at a low level, but this only created conditions for a general black market in practically all lines of goods. Smugglers did a vast business across the country's borders with the Spanish Sahara, the Gambia, plus other French colonies whose frontiers were officially sealed.

Skyrocketing prices on the black market played into the traders' hands. In the hinterland, a single guinea coin could buy a riding camel or

20 sheep. Traders bought rationed goods from indebted producers. The 1948 Economic Report for Trarza pointed out:

"The sugar ration coupon has become the de facto currency; it makes it possible to make money without lifting a finger. It is not used to purchase sugar; instead, it is sold to a trader. The trader in turn lays his hands on the goods thus rationed, only to sell them on the black market. This scandalous racket is enriching the traders and the wealthy people. It is time it was stopped."¹⁸

In the cereal trade, speculation was particularly intense. We saw the way the colonial trading companies indulged in it in 1944 and 1945. In Chinguetti in 1948, traders hoarded millet before July when it cost 14 Francs. Then all they had to do was wait till prices rose. And rise they did--to 27 Francs in October just after the date harvest, then to 37 Francs in December, when there was less milk available.

The very large profits accumulated on this basis went along with a whole range of social changes which in turn helped expand the market and boost accumulation capacity.

As we have noted, dependency relationships linked with the political system created an obstacle in the way of the development of market relationships. The Hassani were particularly hard hit by the crisis, and many of them were forced to sell their herds. Tensions increased between them and their former dependents who still had to pay them heavy tributary fees all on top of their tax obligations. The Hassani tried

18. Economic Report, Trarza, 1948.

to use these fees to offset their cash income losses, but the dependents found the double imposition less and less tolerable. A protest movement against the Horma tribute got started in the Trarza area with the accession of a new Emir in 1944.¹⁹ It culminated in the cash commutation of the fees in 1946, despite the hostility of some warrior tribes, especially the Eulab. It spread throughout Mauritania, and the process of cash commutations was completed in Adrar, where the warrior group exerted particularly strong pressure, in 1952. On that occasion the administrator Messmer remarked that the horma fees seemed to be "an unreasonable imposition" which could not have been maintained without administrative support. The only obstacle to the completion of cash commutation operations was the opposition of the warriors who profited from the horma. It was imperative to end "this 40-year-old institution". There were more practical underlying motives, however: it was necessary to get the cash commutation operations going "before the 1951 electoral conv. in." This was an indication that the new political rules established after 1945, involving the election of a deputy, also implied economic and social changes (see Section 2.3.2.).

This was also the time when the movement to enfranchise (if not to liberate) the slaves picked up steam. When slaves graduated to Haratin status, they entered into new relationships with their former masters. And many slaves fled the miserable lives they led in the encampments,

19. Dubié, Le rachat des horma au Trarza, CHEAM Thesis, 1951.

to seek refuge in the Ksour villages. But there their fate was hardly better, and they ended up swelling the ranks of the destitute masses. Here too the ruined warriors were the hardest hit. From pre-War times the administrator at Trarza had observed that "the serrants" were deserting their masters in large numbers. When the masters asked to have their slaves sent back, the qadi admitted that "most of the servants only left the poor warriors because they denied them food and clothing."²⁰

The disappearance of these dependency relationships created an increasingly numerous stratum of small producers who were in a position to put all their excess production and even their capital "freely" on the market. Of course in this way they often at the same time swelled the mass of destitute producers obliged to sell their livestock.

Another aspect of the 1942-1946 crisis was the growing contrast in wealth between those accumulating riches at one end of the society and, at the other end, those reduced to poverty.

The most obvious manifestation of this impoverishment was the state of undernourishment and famine that so murderously ravaged the Adrar region. The report filed by the Medical Commandant Ganzy, sent on a "mission to study the food situation in the Adrar area", notes that in the few months between October 1942 and February 1943, several hundred deaths attributed to undernourishment were registered in the town of Atar alone. At the same time almost 1,000 people were reported to be in a state of advanced emaciation: "they come from the lowest classes

20. Report.

of Moorish society--beggars, servants abandoned by their masters, etc." The same state of affairs was reported in the 1948 report from Chinguetti: "The indigenous population live practically on credit, selling their labor in advance to the farmers who feed them. They have no milk, millet nor meat." Indications of the high mortality rate may be glimpsed in the demographic statistics previously presented, in very clear terms: from 1940 to 1949, there was a drop in population. This pauperization was not especially due to happenstance. It resulted from a veritable transfer of income, particularly into the hands of traders. And it came together with increasing economic and social differentiation. The same 1948 Chinguetti report just cited notes that "while the proportion of wealth held in livestock has risen, the number of middle-level owners has fallen. They have been precipitated into the ranks of the small herdsmen, while the large herds grew larger.

Side by side with the "liberation" of labor and its products on account of the increasing differentiation based on wealth, the crisis lastly caused a speed up in migrations and the beginning of urbanization in Mauritania. Between 1938 and 1944 Mauritania's urban population rose 500%, and several tens of thousands of migrants settled in Senegal. (See the Migrations report).

We are personally inclined to date the creation of a social category of traders from this period, since before then that category played a different role. Its creation was made possible by the prevailing critical economic circumstances and the changes taking place in Mauritanian society.

2.3.2. Origins of the New Social Category

The economic and social changes we have just spoken of, especially the development of economic differentiation, went along with the rise of new social categories in a position to profit from the colonial situation.

The first group to benefit were of course those appointed chiefs by the colonial administration.

In the Senegal River Valley the traditional political system was partly swept away by colonial conquest. This was particularly true in Toucouleur country, and the French colonial administrative system was set in motion, with its typical hierarchy of district chiefs and village chiefs. This is not the place to go into the history of the colonial class of chiefs. Let us simply note that exceptions aside, this class of chiefs benefited a great deal from their function as middlemen between the Valley's peasant mass and the colonial administration. This profit came partly from official sources, since almost all the chiefs were entitled to keep a cut of the taxes it was their responsibility to collect. In addition, some of them were paid, and sometimes they got political handouts. Thus they had cash incomes far higher than did most producers. To all this must be added all the illegal profits, the direct extortion of more or less "voluntary" gifts, fees for the opening up of new farmland, etc. All these factors created conditions for the accumulation of substantial cash wealth, which was often invested in trading ventures. This type of investment was considerably facilitated by the fact that during the 1942-1946 crisis the colonial administration partly

integrated the chiefs into the management of the quota and rationing arrangements then in force.

But not all traders got their start this way. Far from it. Dioulas-- that is the name traders are known by in the Senegal River Valley--come from very different origins. But in general, as the 1925 Economic Report for Gorgol had already pointed out, those in a position to stake out the initial capital for trading ventures were people with the most direct access to cash incomes, or, to put it somewhat crudely, "the rich". In this category belonged the wealthiest farmers, those especially able to obtain advance loans against the promise of future cereal harvests--under what profitable conditions we have already seen. Now these wealthy farmers were the landowners. According to the same report we have cited, "In order to grow rich in Gorgol and to live idly but comfortably, one needs only fulfil three conditions: first, one must own land; secondly, one must rent it; and thirdly, one must lend the tenant money. All this done, it becomes easy enough to live well of the profits generated by someone else's sweat." Thus, in the Valley, the new trading groups in the society would appear to have emerged partly from the traditionally dominant social strata.

In Moorish society the situation was somewhat different. Moreover, there market accumulation was more highly developed. As we have seen, for a number of circumstantial reasons the colonial administration stabilized the power of the Hassani stratum. In fact some regions such as Adrar even had protectorate status right down to 1920--an anomalous situation within the otherwise uniform French colonial system with its

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tradition of "direct rule". There admittedly were tribal and clan chiefs who played identical middleman roles with regard to tax collection. But in the main the higher levels of the chieftaincy structure reflected Hassani power. The fact was, though, that this social category appeared to be rather aloof from market accumulation. So the development of market relationships implied the rapid economic decline of this warrior group. Under certain circumstances this loss of economic status sparked desperate reactions, an example being the departure into exile of the dissident Emir of Adrar, Sidi Ahmed, in 1932. Most often the deterioration of the warrior group's position appeared slow-paced but inexorable. With the commutation of horma tributary fees into cash payments just after the second World War one of the last economic privileges springing from their warrior status disappeared. Many only managed to survive by taking on odd jobs, chiefly in the colonial army. Nevertheless, soon enough some of them made common cause with the traders, supporting them with their political clout in return for some measure of participation in the wealth the traders had accumulated.

In Moorish society the overwhelming majority of traders come from the Zawaya tribes. This situation is hardly surprising since in precolonial society these tribes were already involved in market production and were already familiar with the mechanisms of the market place. The kind of production involved was of course on a small scale, without the generalized use of cash, and dependent mostly on limited exchange systems, barter, and regional and international transport networks. But that did not mean that

accumulation realized on that basis was negligible. Ode Puyguedeau, in his picturesque book on Adrar, written in 1933, observes:

"The luxurious wealth of the Smassid is stashed away in low-roofed rooms filled with grain, dried dates, packets of sugar, bales of fabric and crates of tea. Their capital is invested in the area's plam groves around the Betba, and is also profitably at work in the quayside stalls. A study plam tree costs up to 250 F and is capable of yielding 120 kilos of dates. In Adrar in 1933, 1934, 355 productive trees were counted, with a total yield of 4,000 tonnes of dates. That in cash terms means 4 Millions Francs for the owners, plus 107,484 in tax revenues."²¹

These tribes therefore were in a better position to build up capital for trading investments. When they modified their old trading methods, they quickly conquered positions on the market. It must be added that traditionally they were engaged in livestock raising and transport which, as we have pointed out, were the main bases of local market accumulation. Finally, other factors contributed to this specialization in trade: for example, there was the important role played by tribal assemblies experienced in the discussion of economic issues, and the use of tribal relationships to build up transport and trade networks: a tribe such as the Idawali, living simultaneously in Adrar, the Tagant area, the Rosso region, and around Lake R'Kiz, was thus in a privileged position to take

21. O. de Puyguedeau, La grande foire aux dattes, Paris, 1937.

charge of regional trade and to control the market.

These few remarks do not constitute an exhaustive analysis. But they do enable us to factor in the weight of historical data in order the better to evaluate current developments.

2.3.3. The Growth of the Traders' Economic, Social and Political

Functions

We have on a number of different occasions already discussed conditions governing the development of accumulation during the post-war and post-independence periods. In this section, we shall merely recapitulate the key stages:

- The colonial trading companies were steadily pushed out and national capital took over this sector: in 1968 companies like Peyrissac had only two outlets in Nouadhibou, concentrating mainly on hardware, books, magazines etc. Buhan & Tesseire kept one shop in Nouakchott, specializing in stationery and office supplies. As for the Lacombe company, it gravitated to the status of a mere garage.²²
- These traders gained progressive access to modern commercial circuits both within the Franc Zone (in Senegal) as well as externally, on an increasing basis (specifically in the Canary Islands and on the Arab countries).
- A sector of state intervention controlling imports of the main subsistence staples was progressively defined, as well as a private sector.

22. SEDES, Les échanges commerciaux en Mauritanie, 1968.

- After Mauritania left the Franc Zone (1973) and created its own national currency and a diversified banking sector, the national traders gained access to modern banking circuits on both the local and international levels.

The expansion of the market sector and national market accumulation went hand in hand with the development of private investments which increasingly transcended the limited boundaries of the trading sector. In the concluding section of this chapter we shall look at the main problems confronting private investors at the present time.

We cannot, of course, understand the development of this market accumulation if we restrict our study to the economic aspect alone. We have in addition to take into account the increasing political role played by traders in Mauritanian society. This role became discernible quite early. In fact it became clear just as soon as modern politics began in Mauritania, that is to say, with the first election of a Mauritanian representative to sit in the French Legislative Assembly, in 1946. (The franchise was limited to just a few tens of thousands of voters.) The winning candidate, who beat the colonial administration's official candidate, a Frenchman, was a bureaucrat of the Idwali tribe who benefited from the active support of a large number of traders. The anti-colonialist, nationalist positions they advocated then were in fact consonant with their economic interests.

When Mauritania achieved Independence, the traders found a new arena of political activity open to them. There would be no point in denying

that they wielded more or less direct influence in colonial political life. Bonds were established between them and certain bureaucrats or politicians; the State intervened in the trading sector, and State markets developed--all indications of a measure of interpenetration between the State and the national commercial sector. Mauritania's customs agreement with Senegal worked very lopsidedly to Mauritania's disadvantage, specifically because it entrenched her dependence on Senegal for supplies. The breakup of this agreement, and Mauritania's withdrawal from the Franc Zone are both events indicative of the traders' influence on the nation's political life. Naturally, they do not always operate as a united front, and their interest may diverge, but it is impossible to take political stock of the time stretching from Independence to 1973 without taking their intervention in the political arena into account.

This political intervention was in turn facilitated by the role traders play in Mauritanian society. The phenomena of redistribution and patron-client relationships which we have already described are the precondition for their effective participation in political life. The concentration of the population in the towns and the pronounced dependence of producers on the market work in favor of the traders' hegemony over the society. We shall not repeat points already discussed in this report and the report on migrations, except to raise a question. Beyond the distribution relationships and economic and traditional social bonds to which they are directly relevant, we have to take into account the political and social functions of the phenomenon of patron-client

relationships. These relationships are in effect manipulated to enhance the traders' intervention in politics. They also facilitate speculation; specifically in the area of urban land grabbing, one of the main areas of speculation since the sudden acceleration of urban migrations in 1973, and in the hoarding of food products, the traders' operations have depended on the use of these patron-client networks for success.

2.4. Conclusion: Present Trends

It is always unwise to make extrapolations on the basis of economic analyses which we have tried hard to reintegrate into the complex background of their historical development. The task is rendered even more difficult since we have constantly highlighted the importance of the political and social context of these economic processes. We can understand the development of Mauritania's internal market only if we integrate into our frame of reference the phenomena of colonial domination and the social transformation they helped bring about. The changes in market mechanisms attendant on the 1973 food crisis need to be studied within the context of Mauritanian politics. And beyond these changes, there are glimpses of new social relationships; those also have to be taken into consideration.

Instead, then, of projecting present trends into the coming decade, what we have chosen to do at the end of this report is to try and examine a number of urgent questions confronting planners. In thus proceeding we are informed by an awareness that in part the answers to these questions depend precisely on the choices made by planners, and beyond those choices, on options selected at the national political level.

2.4.1. Private Investment Capacity in the Modern Sector

The first question is: How adequate is private investment capacity in the modern sector? Judging by current data, the answer seems to be; not at all. In the short run, private national investments continue to create speculation profits; they therefore get oriented toward specific sectors, and these specific sectors are generally not productive in any direct sense. There may be an exception to this rule in the fisheries and associated cold storage industries, but investments there have not always yielded convincing results. Trade-internal and external, remains the preferred domain of private investment. Furthermore, this private investment tends to abandon trade in the less profitable commodities, i.e. subsistence products. Or it only trades in them in a speculative context, playing on the fringes of a sector where the state intervention has become increasingly necessary to forestall social and political tensions. Currently, interurban road transport and housing constitute the second preferred sector for private national investment. It is clear that in the housing sector in particular, investments are irrelevant to the nation's developmental needs. Rather, they are connected with luxury demands, mostly involving an expatriate clientele. The growth of the financial capacities of Mauritania's "traders" has nevertheless enhanced investment in another sector: the service or tertiary sector. In that sector, Mauritanian businessmen, often operating in partnership with foreign capital, display all their marketing skills and their ability to locate profitable areas of investment. It does not seem,

however, that the Mauritanian state has opted to turn the country into a pole of attraction for the development of this kind of business, which would require special facilities such as a duty-free zone, flags of convenience, etc.

The root cause of this orientation of investments lies in sociological and historical factors. In the commercial area as, unfortunately, in many other areas, the shortage of personnel and technicians is of course an important obstacle. But despite such difficulties the traders have been able to demonstrate their capabilities and to make use of market mechanisms. And in certain circumstances they do not hesitate to call on foreign technicians to help develop their business.

If there is in fact a major obstacle in the way of a transformation of values among national investors, that obstacle is the poverty of the internal market. The purchasing power of Mauritania's producers, limited as it already was, was further enfeebled by the fact that the 1973 food crisis drove thousands of producers to migrate to the urban areas, where they have no resources whatsoever. Here we have located precisely one of the major obstacle blocking the development of a national capitalism. Historically, national capital has been accumulated on the basis of a devaluation of farm and pastoral work and its products. This circumstance has aggravated the non-development of part of the country. The result of this historical process, i.e., the impoverishment of local producers and the stagnation of local production, now limits present growth capacity. After all, one of the possible expressions of this contradiction is, that given a narrowly mercantile frame

of reference, it is more immediately profitable to feed Mauritania's population on imported food than to develop local production.

Under such conditions an active public sector and voluntarist policies of state intervention in the pricing system seem destined to remain necessary for a long time to come. It is quite patent that the reorientation of national private investments toward productive sectors--if indeed this is the desired objective--can only be ensured by sustained state intervention.

2.4.2. National Private Investment Capacity in the Rural Sector

The second question concerns the adequacy of national private investment capacity in the rural sector. Of late, private investments in the rural sector have been made in a more or less revealing fashion. These investments have been made rather haphazardly in the agricultural sector, with private development of some irrigated farmland devoted to orchard farming and truck farming, or even to cereal farming. Such investments are more widespread, but also harder to analyze in the pastoral sector. In that sector, since the drought and the food crisis there has been an important shift in livestock ownership to the advantage of traders and wealthy bureaucrats on the one hand and that of the development of wage relationships on the other.

As a matter of fact the situation in the pastoral sector looks more promising--if we may be permitted the use of such an optimistic word in such bleak circumstances--than in the farming sector. In the pastoral sector, market production was more highly developed, and it presented

less of an obstacle, certainly nothing as obstructive as the land tenure problem in the farming sector. Moreover, in this pastoral sector, Mauritanian production supplies a more reliable surplus than that available in the farming sector, seeing that the surplus can be increased by technological improvements in such areas as pasturing, the use of fodder supplements, etc.

Within this perspective we have to take account of the revaluation of prices that took place after the 1973 crisis and has lasted till the present. Speculative interest in this productive sector is also indicated by the problems that hit the meat market in 1980. In Atar, Tijikja and even in Nouakchott, the new livestock owners demonstrated their clout on the market by creating artificial shortages and boosting prices. Quite clearly, in this area also, the domestic market is too small to make lasting improvements possible. But parallel price rises in the export zone may make it possible to perpetuate, at least to some extent, changes in social and economic relationships in the animal husbandry sector.

Still, two questions remain unanswered:

- How will these changes affect those herdsmen who have become paid herdsmen? We cannot assume that they will end up enjoying higher living standards.

- What impact will the present orientation of private investments toward pastoral production have on productivity in the animal husbandry sector? The answer to the first question in fact depends on the answer to the second. There are two possible solutions: the first is to squeeze

... a profit out of these investments by quantitatively increasing production, while aggravating the exploitation of direct producers and speculating on the market. The second would be to try and improve productivity in the animal husbandry sector by introducing technical improvements. Now

bearing in mind the way private investments are currently made, there is every reason to fear that the first solution is going to be the one adopted.

In the farming sector the problems are just as grave, but they are of a different type. Two major obstacles have to be surmounted: the first obstacle is the present land tenure situation; the second is the parlous state the cereal market is in. The second problem may be solved, if need be, by resorting to other types of production, for instance truck farming or orchard development. But the second is a much tougher nut to crack. Nevertheless, one experiment of this type in the Senegal Valley was crozed with success, at least provisionally: A trader sold

off his capital and converted all his wealth into cash. He then returned to settle in his home village. Having gotten a portion of the villagers in debt to himself, he was able to buy up several hectares of land.

Admittedly, this did not happen in the Toucouleur heartland where land tenure rules are more precise in reflecting social relationships, but in a more recently occupied zone where shifts in land ownership may be more rapid.

2.4.3. To what extent does the development of market accumulation and relationships generate social tensions and conflicts?

The present level of investment capacity attained by the merchant stratum in Mauritanian society is at the moment such as to justify reference to a "national bourgeoisie". It is also sufficient to generate social and political tensions inseparable from this level of economic and social differentiation.

However, the fashion in which profits are realized does not open up access to this social category to salaried employees. These profits are essentially speculative, and they are partially drawn from non-productive economic sectors. It is also true that this speculation happens at the expense of consumers. We have no intention of rehashing the methods of hoarding and credit manipulation which still largely underpin trading operations. All we need point out is that these methods continue to produce the same effects as before: the producers get impoverished and lose their resources; there is large scale rural depopulation; and on the outskirts of the urban centers there is chronic overcrowding, etc.

The basic conditions for the growth of social tensions and conflicts do in fact exist, then, and it serves no purpose to pretend that Mauritanian society today is innocent of them. But other factors come into play to blunt the rougher edges of these social conflicts, or at least to disguise them.

Part of the wealth accumulated is reinvested in redistribution patterns with obviously social goals. This helps process raw economic power into social prestige and political power, namely through the building up of powerful patron-client networks. It also helps ensure that the wealthy enjoy an imposing presence and image on the social scene.

We must add, too, that with the exception of a few instances of increasingly gaudy spending in such areas as housing and car ownership, consumer patterns are not yet completely stratified, even if the terrible poverty of part of the urban and rural population tends to highlight differences.

Moreover, there still exist relatively ample possibilities for social mobility, especially through the use of political influence. Many of today's fortunes were only recently made, relatively speaking. And then there are all the social and cultural values held in common, such as Islamic precepts in fact continue to play a soldering role, enhancing social unity.

Thus, even if social tensions and conflicts keep getting exacerbated it would be incorrect to speak of a totally antagonistic situation.

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