

# SENEGAL: THE RETURN OF PERSONALISM

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The turnover of power that took place as a result of Senegal's March 2000 presidential election was hailed by democrats throughout the world and especially in Africa. The second-round victory by longtime opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade of the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) not only toppled incumbent president Abdou Diouf after twenty years in power, but marked the end of forty years of Socialist Party (PS) rule. Yet from a democratic perspective, the era of President Wade has been a severe disappointment, dashing hopes that the great turnover of 2000 would pave the way for democratic consolidation.

President Wade was reelected to a fresh (now five-year) term on 25 February 2007 with nearly 56 percent of the vote in the first and only round,<sup>1</sup> but the problems gripping the country have done nothing but intensify since his reelection. The signs of trouble include a twelve-party boycott of the 3 June 2007 elections for the 150-seat National Assembly, the lack of dialogue among contending political factions, and the demand by Siggil Senegal (the leading opposition coalition, whose name in Wolof means "give Senegal back its pride") for a national conference. Despite the promise of democracy in 2000, Senegal today has declined to the point of mere electoral authoritarianism.

Why should this be so? What makes Senegal's quest for democracy so difficult? Is the problem one of a weak democratic culture? A rigid society saddled with inert political and social forces? A fragmented civil society and ineffectual women's, youth, and labor organizations? An outmoded leadership class still hanging on to the highest state offices? The politically motivated use of public resources to bolster the influence of traditional groups such as religious brotherhoods, confessional orga-

nizations, and customary associations? Or a greedy oligarchy that has kept a tight grip on resources even as the average Senegalese citizen's standard of living has fallen, and a business community that cares little about the fair distribution of the country's scarce assets?<sup>2</sup> All these factors are probably at work, compounded by a succession crisis that appears to be in the offing as the octogenarian president's son Karim Wade maneuvers to become the next chief executive.

Almost since the day after the 2000 election, the enthusiasm and high hopes roused by Abdoulaye Wade's victory have been ebbing away, first among Senegalese intellectuals and then among foreign analysts. The opposition, civil society, the press, and various observers have regularly decried the Wade administration's turn toward autocracy and patrimonialism, which has given rise to a crisis of legitimacy and a loss of citizens' trust in their own government.<sup>3</sup> The roots of such ills, however, reach back before Wade's time in power and help to explain why there was such a large appetite for change in 2000, when people spoke of how "the glass was cracking."

Before going on, it will be helpful to recall briefly some relevant events in Senegal's recent history. The first that bears mention was the tragic sinking of the government-owned ferry MV *Joola* in a storm off the Gambian coast on the night of 26–27 September 2002. The death toll was more than 1,800, making it one of the worst maritime disasters on record anywhere. High-level official negligence was a factor. There were some firings, but otherwise no one has yet been punished for contributing to this catastrophe. Other notable circumstances include the ongoing crisis of the energy and chemical sectors of the economy, the continuing attempts at illegal immigration by young people (thousands of whom have been lost at sea in desperate efforts to reach the Spanish-owned Canary Islands), the unregulated urbanization exacerbated by building projects that Wade used to help his bid for reelection, as well as a crisis over land ownership. Senegal's situation, in short, has been difficult.

### Reigning, Not Governing

Senegal elected its first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001), in 1960, the year of independence. Under Senghor and the Socialist Party (PS), Senegal developed into a virtual single-party state. Still, elections were held regularly, and a limited number of opposition parties were eventually permitted, thus making Senegal more liberal and pluralistic than most African countries at the time. In 1981, Senghor decided to step down, handing the reins to his chosen successor, Abdou Diouf. Diouf and the PS ruled for another twenty years—during which election regulations became ever more restrictive while presidential term limits were abolished—until the landmark 2000 elections that brought Wade

to power and the legislative elections the following year which saw the continued triumph of the PDS.

Abdoulaye Wade belongs to the generation that was in its prime a half-century ago, around the time of independence. He bears the stamp of his politically formative years, the 1950s, when nationalism, dirigisme, and the will of the strong leader were exalted (D&F, 13). Convinced of his legitimacy and believing that he carries with him all the hopes of the people, Wade's use of power smacks of authoritarianism, even though he battled for twenty-five years in the name of democracy. Ironically, the opposition now calls him a "divine-right" president who conceives of the state as a "monarchy without limits." Wade does not govern; he reigns. The constitution that was approved by referendum in January 2001 has in fact brought with it a hyperpersonalization of power that is especially evident in the political prominence and influence enjoyed by the president's wife, son, and daughter.

In Senegal, as in France, when the president's party has tight control of the National Assembly, the prime minister serves at the will of the president. Wade has had five prime ministers in the last seven years. Rather than building on the political openings and democratic institutional progress of the late 1990s, the president has reversed course, draining institutions of their substance and stripping the other branches of government of their powers in order to subordinate them to the executive and render them impotent. This has been the case with the Autonomous National Electoral Commission. Most of its members have, since the outset of their terms, faced challenges from the president or the National Council for Audiovisual Regulation, which has come to control the media (meaning mostly private radio stations). Moreover, the opposition has complained of Wade's many changes to the electoral timetable. For example, just two months before the February 2007 presidential election, its exact date remained uncertain.

An observer of the Senegalese state cannot fail to notice its administrative haplessness. There is no shortage of examples. A case in point is the anticorruption commission, a gimmicky body that has struggled under the weight of numerous scandals and the general climate of impunity that besmirched Wade's first term. The revenue and customs services, meanwhile, are virtually helpless against the basic greed of the regime's power players. The Constitutional Council, despite its formal mandate to rule on political questions, often declares itself incompetent to deal with the opposition's many complaints, as in the runup to the June 2007 legislative elections.

This situation encourages the tendency to backslide toward authoritarianism and the dynastic urges that go with it. Rather than an executive who serves as an arbiter, Senegal has a partisan president who wants to rebuild the party-state—with himself, of course, at the head of the ruling party. Along with the drive toward authoritarianism goes a liqui-

dation of autonomous political forces, speeded by party-switching and the distortion of democracy through the creation of parties generated and financed by the ruling powers. These groups—such as the Waar-wi Coalition of Modou Diagne Fada, former environmental minister and

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Wade loyalist—sprang into being on the eve of the last elections and won a handful of legislators. What came out of the legislative races had more to do with various deputies' whims than with the voters' will. Of the 150 seats in the National Assembly, 131 were won by the president's coalition. The remainder of the seats were won by parties and coalitions funded by

Wade. Most of these smaller parties wound up with three seats each, in races boycotted by as many as three-quarters of registered voters.

The broader coalition that had brought Wade to power in 2000 swiftly fell apart (D&F, 17). Its demise began after the January 2001 referendum on the new constitution, which for Wade was a means of outmaneuvering and defeating his onetime allies. The legislative elections of 2001 and local elections of 2002 sealed matters. The Alliance of Forces for Progress (AFP)—the party of Moustapha Niasse, onetime Wade ally and prime minister from 2000 to 2001—was too obviously a competitor for the coalition to survive the 2001 legislative races, and the disintegration then reached the leftist parties that had played a crucial role in bringing about the change in power in 2000 (D&F, 17). One by one, these parties split off, and today these old allies of Wade are his fiercest opponents.

The problems began immediately after the referendum, as Wade started to exhibit his desire to monopolize power. Other than shortening the presidential term to five years (to take effect only after the end of Wade's first, seven-year term), the new constitution did nothing to soften the regime's highly presidentialist character. The National Assembly remains notoriously weak and dependent. The anticorruption fight, such as it is, remains a tool for waging political conflicts rather than a means of improving governance. Wade is becoming a veritable caricature of Senghorism. He has pressed members of the former socialist regime to join him, dangling over them the Damoclean sword of public audits that would review their stints as directors of the national railway or the lottery or daily newspaper. This has made a mockery of the public-audits process, but has had the effect of convincing many of the targets that the only safe course is to go over to the presidential camp (D&F, 14).

Since coming to power, Wade has sought by all available means to control every political force. He has tried to control labor unions even at the cost of destabilizing them, and has interfered in the election of traditional chiefs such as the Grand Serigne of Dakar's historic Léboue

community. Even the women's movement has not escaped Wade's maneuverings: The law on gender parity for electoral lists, proposed by Wade and passed just months before the 2007 legislative elections, was intended to destabilize any coalition that might threaten his parliamentary majority. Due to a pending appeal, however, the law was not in force for the June 2007 elections.

One of Wade's goals is to reproduce the model of Senghor. Beginning in 1962, Senghor built a single-party regime that swallowed up all existing formations and drove the leftist parties underground. This lasted until 1974, when four alternative currents were allowed to emerge—one of which was Wade's own PDS. How could someone with Wade's background have become so politically regressive, boasting that while Senghor and his party may have enjoyed a forty-year run in power, Wade and his group will make it to fifty?

Among the ruling party's weaknesses is the persistent factionalism that flows from the personalization of power. In order to keep their positions, the president's lieutenants must lie low and appear to be mediocre and unthreatening. Wade has fallen out not only with his first prime minister, Moustapha Niasse, but also and more surprisingly with Idrissa Seck, longtime chief of the presidential staff before becoming premier and heir apparent to the presidential sash in 2002 (D&F, 16–17).

Yet the most serious obstacles to a democratic future remain the triumph of the single will of the president and the absence of political cooperation or even dialogue on questions of national interest or the electoral process. What is urgently needed is political discussion not only about laws to guarantee the transparency of the electoral process, but also about the dynamics that are holding Senegal back and preventing it from achieving its democratic potential.

### The Key Role of Religious Forces

If Wade has succeeded in essentially controlling all government institutions and putting Senegal's democratic achievements in jeopardy, it is because he knows how to pressure the traditional chiefs and notables, turning the game of alliances in his own favor and further entrenching the system of clientelism. Sociocultural inertia reinforces the terrible confusion of identities that besets so many Senegalese, who are at once Muslim religious disciples (*talibés*) or leaders (*marabouts*) and (to a lesser degree) citizens, in a society where there are no clear boundaries between the religious and civic spheres. Communal logic exacerbates matters, for besides religion there are cleavages based on ethnicity and geography. The ties that bind the nation together are becoming ever looser.

Wade's manipulation of religious affairs is his oldest strategem. He is a keen student of the Senegalese mental universe and knows how to use

religious concerns in order to manipulate it. We no longer know whether Senegal's Muslim brotherhoods are religious or sociopolitical entities. Senegalese democracy has always been supported by an Islam that acts as, among other things, a locus of debate and pluralist clientelism. In kneeling before the caliph of Touba (a city sacred to the Sufi Murid brotherhood) on national television just after his election in 2000, Wade showed that alliances were shifting massively. He snubbed the Tidjan brotherhood, which had been so influential under Abdou Diouf, in favor of the better organized, though fewer in number, Murids. Later, Wade would split the Tidjans—the largest of the brotherhoods—by favoring one regional segment of the confraternity over another, traditionally more politically influential one.<sup>4</sup>

The president found the Murids to be a handy instrument for reshaping the coalition that brought him to power, and then for sending a signal to the international community and Senegal's traditional allies about his own steadfastness. He uses the Murids of Touba in several ways. During the runup to the 2002 local elections, the name of the Murid caliph, Serigne Saliou Mbacké, appeared on the PDS candidate list. It was withdrawn after widespread protests, but the point had been made. Then, just before the 2007 presidential election, the caliph of Touba appeared on national television to assert that Wade, if reelected, would complete the modernization of the city's infrastructure. This endorsement sounded like an order to vote for Wade, which was surprising since in 1993 most Murids strongly disapproved of the call issued by the caliph of the time to vote for President Abdou Diouf.

The display that Wade has made of "belonging" to the Murid brotherhood and the real or supposed favors that he has done for Touba have left other Muslim brotherhoods as well as Senegal's Christian minority (the country is 95 percent Muslim) feeling frustrated and resentful. Anxious to calm the resulting turbulence, the state busies itself with soothing the grievances of various religious authorities rather than seeing to the needs of the poor. Cultivating the Murids allows the administration to keep a sure and steady clientele in its camp, but to the detriment of national cohesion. Such is the patrimonialist version of democracy.

Economic factors are also at play in the relationship between the Wade administration and religious groups. The true motor of Senegal's economy is remittances, which continue to increase dramatically. Migration abroad, which was rooted historically along the Senegal River and later adopted in the old peanut-growing region that is the Murid heartland, now affects the whole country (D&F, 8). For the moment, migration serves as a safety valve that tends to stabilize the economy and give an exit option to many young Senegalese (the country's demographic profile features a large youth bulge) whose opportunities at home are blocked by growing unemployment and a continued degradation of social conditions (D&F, 10). Both this migration and the remit-

tances it produces are organized by religious networks.

These economic trends, together with the breakdown of the quasi-monopoly of the state, confirmed the political pluralization that began to set in around the end of the 1970s as the single-party regime looked for ways to “decompress” what had become a potentially explosive situation. With the dismantling of the state’s economic-control structures and the privatization of public enterprises, the state-run spheres of production could no longer be an arena for political accommodation. This weakening of the state’s capacity for clientelism played a role in the process of change (D&F, 9–10).

The advent of political alternation was the achievement of citizens who, through a mobilization that brought together civil society groups, the media, and the Senegalese diaspora, became aware of their own strength. But with the presidential election of 2007, this dynamic seems to have been broken. The state has learned to cultivate more sustained ties with the marabouts, granting its clients diplomatic passports, which in principle should be available only to public officials, and similarly making use of the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca or the question of land ownership by migrants. Privatization and clientelism now affect all of Senegal and partly explain the erosion of the “social contract” under which the state supported the marabouts as a kind of caste (D&F, 10). This erosion in turn has sparked rivalries and jockeyings among the minor religious authorities, who now commonly throw their support to politicians and try to stay close to power.

The manipulation of religion saps the foundations of Senegalese secularism, thereby putting stability and tolerance in jeopardy. In a multiconfessionnal country with numerous religious brotherhoods, secularism or state neutrality in religious matters is indispensable to the building of democracy. Yet despite a constitutional ban, we now see the rise of parties that are essentially religious in nature. Among these is the Party for Truth of Serigne Modou Kara Mbacké, nephew of the caliph and husband of presidentially appointed senator Sokhna Dieng Mbacké. Worse still, some religious groups, such as the one headed by the Murid marabout Sheik Béthio Thioune, are perpetrators of violence. His followers—mostly jobless young men—attacked a rally of Idrissa Seck’s Rewmi party on the last day of the 2007 presidential campaign. Such retrograde forces hold back the deepening of democracy by denying the idea of autonomous citizenship. The disciple who acts in the name of faith places religious identity above the title of citizen.

### The Retreat of Individual Liberties

If individual liberties are not secure, democracy is in peril. In its most recent annual report, Amnesty International (AI) rightly cites the continued threat to free expression in Senegal under Wade, noting that jour-



nalists and intellectuals have been harassed, intimidated, interrogated, and jailed, and certain books have been banned.<sup>5</sup> The police Criminal Investigation Division (DIC) has become a political force, and relations between the government and the press have become riddled with conflict, in part because the administration has created its own attack-dog press to go after anyone seen as critical of the current powerholders. The new regime's firmness no doubt owes much to the PDS leaders' strong sense of legitimacy born of their struggle, their sacrifices, and the historic nature of their victory—even if it was in fact secured by a much broader coalition than Wade typically admits (D&F, 13).

Examples abound of police and judicial actions against opposition leaders, civil society figures, and journalists. Security forces severely cracked down on the opposition's 27 January 2007 march to demand respect for the electoral calendar. Under a general ban on marches—decreed despite the constitution's guarantee of the right to peaceable assembly—opposition leaders were manhandled and even beaten. This was not the first time that demonstrators had felt the mailed fist of repression. Upon becoming president, Wade cited his own victimization by the Diouf regime and boasted that tear gas would not be used under his rule. But the Wade administration's reaction to the student movement that sprang up in early 2001 amid the post-turnover excitement was a textbook case of police repression followed by a mix of strategic concessions and clientelist cooptations.

Alongside police crackdowns on marchers and DIC roundups of civil society leaders goes a still more pernicious form of repression: the censoring of works addressing political matters, particularly pieces that criticize those in power. Two of Dakar's biggest bookstores refused to carry a pair of books by journalist and professor Abdou Latif Coulibaly because of their political content. Although Coulibaly has run afoul of the regime with his two satirical novels—in one of which an African president declares himself king and reproduces Versailles within his country—he remains protected by vigilant foreign and domestic groups that follow his case closely.

Coulibaly is far from being the only media figure who has suffered persecution. Madiambal Diagne, editor of the newspaper *Le Quotidien*, was jailed on 9 July 2004 for "releasing secret reports and correspondence" and "spreading news for the purpose of causing serious political turmoil." He owes his freedom to a massive international campaign by journalists, lawyers, and civil society groups that aimed not only to free him but also to overturn Article 80 of the penal code, which deals with national security but is often used against the press, as in the case of Diagne.

Another illustration of the troubled relations between the press and the government is the takeover by security forces of the Sud FM radio station. This station, founded in 1994, is Senegal's leading private radio



outlet. Interior Minister Ousmane Ngom took it off the air for a day on 17 October 2005 and pulled *Sud quotidien*, the newspaper associated with it, from newsstands after having thirty journalists arrested. His pretext was an interview that a Sud correspondent had conducted with a rebel chieftain. These actions roused a wave of indignation throughout all of Senegal and abroad as well.

Politicians have also become targets for repressive tactics. Jean Paul Dias, a former PDS member and now leader of the Gaiende Centrist Bloc, was dragged out of bed and arrested on 9 August 2006. The police beat his wife and damaged his home in the process. His son, Socialist Party activist Bathélemy Dias, was hauled in three days later for speaking up on behalf of his father and raising questions about President Wade's advanced age. The younger Dias was sent to a prison in the east of Senegal—200 kilometers from Dakar to stiffen the punishment—though protests later resulted in his release.

Relations between the president and his former prime minister and protégé, Idrissa Seck, remain the deepest mystery in Senegalese politics. Wade named Seck premier in November 2002 and sacked him in April 2004. There followed a heated debate about Seck's possible misappropriation of public funds. In July 2005, Seck was arrested for threatening the security of the state, but was never tried. In September 2006, he announced the formation of his Rewmi party and said that he would run for president (he did, and received slightly less than 15 percent of the vote). Seck's perennial rival, Interior Minister Ngom, has publicly called Seck a thief. Wade has veered between accusing and exonerating Seck. It is rumored that much of the tension between the two men stems from Wade's suspicion that the former prime minister served as a source for Latif Coulibaly, perhaps with the intention of setting Wade up to be overthrown by a coup.

In retaliation for denouncing government dysfunction, virtually all administration critics have had to brave some combination of insults, anonymous defamatory letters, death threats, harassing phone calls, police interrogations, and stints in jail. The justice minister plays a central role in keeping dissidence under tight control, and the justice system itself remains the least independent of all the institutions that affect individual liberties.

## A Democracy in Crisis

Senegal's crisis reveals itself in multiple ways. On the economic level, for instance, the current rulers generally favor cooptation and corruption, which are widespread in all sectors of society. The new regime has methodically appropriated the state and its parastatal fringes. The current powerholders have infiltrated enterprise management and put themselves in charge of a proliferating series of special "agencies," with plainly

negative economic effects (D&F, 15). The most prominent exemplar of the problem is Karim Wade, the president's son, who runs the National Agency for the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Agency for Investments. These two bodies are unaccountable sinkholes that have consumed millions of dollars in lucrative contracts.

Other symptoms of the crisis are the lack of dialogue within Senegal's political class and the abuse of money in politics. There have been various studies of how to clean up the corruption, but their conclusions are never acted upon. The ruling party has a giant campaign chest into which it can dip to buy support not only from the poor but also from midlevel chieftains, minor marabouts, traditional notables, and local officials. Thus is the spirit of democracy utterly perverted. Moreover, as some have ironically noted, the results of the 2007 presidential race correlated with the various candidates' relative wealth. One may well wonder how a system in which Wade could win with almost no money in 2000 has become, just seven years later, a system in which cash appears to have been the decisive factor.

The reversal of alliances and the dislocation of coalitions is impelling those in power to starve genuine opposition parties of funds. This is not hard in a country such as Senegal, where the state is the sole channel by which to access resources. The president, moreover, has a great deal of power over how public money is spent, and usually steers it to the most docile. His dealings with the media, for instance, are thoroughly clientelist. One of Senegalese democracy's greatest weaknesses is the degree to which those in power have in effect confiscated the media and turned them into tools of propaganda. Civil society and the opposition complain, of course, but their cries fall on deaf ears. Those press organs still in private hands have preserved a degree of pluralism, but the regime's use of clientelism, controlled factionalism, and strong personalism naturally create political frustrations that contribute to the strained relations between Wade and the press.

Senegalese democracy's true Achilles' heel, however, is undeniably the justice system. By presiding over the Superior Council of Magistrates, the president essentially controls the careers of judges. Moreover, when questions about money dealings loomed over former prime minister Idrissa Seck, in an attempt to protect himself he threatened to publish a list of all those senior magistrates who were taking political-party money or who had received their posts through favoritism.

The Council of State is typical of nearly all the institutions of the Senegalese Republic in being subject to the influence—indeed manipulation and control—of the executive branch. When President Wade and his cohorts decided that they wanted to hold the presidential and legislative elections on separate days, the Council of State decreed this wish into policy in January 2007, trapping an unprepared, divided, and leaderless opposition into an uneven contest against a very well-prepared PDS. The

press, civil society, and the opposition are reduced to fruitless complaining, so what can be done to address the increasingly obvious marginalization of the country's intellectual, economic, and political elites?

The ruling party has no capacity for debating ideas. The president is surrounded by PDS members whose disputes revolve around matters of precedence and the dividing up of privileges and sinecures. Guiding notions of what the nation should strive to become—or of why (beyond the most purely selfish motives) one should want to gain power in the first place—are lacking. Forums for discussion are nowhere to be found. Worse still, Senegal's intellectuals have surrendered to this sad situation. In Wade's orbit, the only path to success is flunkysism.

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The rising figure in the regime appears to be Karim Wade, who has gathered into his hands enormous resources connected with major public projects. Under the pretext of preparing to host the next summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in March 2008, the president's son has created a network of influence that adds up to a parallel government operating outside public or legal control. He likes to appear in public handing out tickets for pilgrimages to Mecca or giving gifts to mosques. For a young man who spent his formative years in Europe and who speaks none of Senegal's indigenous national languages, these interactions with the pious are a brilliant way of improving his image and raising his national profile. Like his father, he calculates that religion is a tool which he can use to attain his goals.

What is his father's design? No prime minister has been given enough time in office to become a true fixture. When the relationship between the president and Prime Minister Seck soured in 2004, Seck was sacked, charged with embezzlement, ousted from the PDS, and replaced by Macky Sall. Sall rose quickly through the PDS ranks and began to believe in his own destiny, only to have Wade take the premiership away from him without explanation after the June 2007 legislative elections.

Although Senegal's opposition has come in for much fair criticism, it is not lacking in spirit. It is true that the parties which form the opposition Siggil Senegal Front have made some strategic errors, especially by letting themselves appear complicit in the maneuvering over the electoral calendar. Yet the high level of voter abstention from the legislative elections has cast doubt on the February presidential results and discredit on a parliament that has been put in place by a mere 35 percent (if that) of the electorate. The newly reconstituted Senate, meanwhile, is

nothing more than a tool in the hands of the president, who names 65 of its 100 members. Moreover, as a result of the boycott, only one senator comes from outside of Wade's coalition. The Senate is now a more powerful body than the National Assembly, and its president would become interim president of Senegal if Wade became unable to serve.

Thinking about how to protect and enhance Senegal's democracy should start with the way that political parties work and should include the renewal of the political class and the ending or at least reduction of the country's excessive political fragmentation (there are more than eighty parties). Parties never turn over their own leaderships, and that needs to change. Most of those who currently run Senegal's parties are incapable of practicing democracy. Broadly speaking, the case of Senegal teaches a lesson about the limits of electoral democracy. Politicians tend to adopt a minimalist perspective centered on respect for procedures, meaning above all free and transparent elections. As we know, without parties there cannot be free elections. But however indispensable to democracy they may be, the parties are beginning to arouse the people's mistrust. Their biggest problem is that they are dominated by a minority of professional politicians to the detriment of the majority of the people.

In Senegal as in many other countries, political parties proliferate and disappear at will in dizzying bouts of fusion and floor-crossing that on the whole make it hard to take the country's party scene seriously. And yet parties must be taken into account by anyone who wishes to see the gains of democracy's "third wave" consolidated and extended. E.R. McMahon<sup>6</sup> thus examines some of the failings for which African parties are often blamed, namely, their tendency to fuel conflicts within fragile nation-states as well as their tendencies to be elitist, corrupt, too heavily urban, and—with no middle class to hold them in check—too ready to give in to antidemocratic temptations.

Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther, for their part, are interested precisely in the functions of political parties as well as the links between the state of parties and the future of the democratization process.<sup>7</sup> Senegal is a classic case. What can be the future of political parties when, for example, religious groups and the crowds who follow them interfere (above all at the behest of those in power) in strictly political decisions? Today, one wonders whether these central institutions of democracy can continue to serve as intermediaries for the recruitment of leaders, the structuring of electoral choices, and the formation of governments. The mobilization of religious groups as well as the persistence of mechanisms for vote-buying, clientelism, and pauperization demand reflection about the future.

In addition, one can only deplore the absence of programmatic debate and the dessication of political thought. The case of the ruling party is illustrative in more than one regard. With the PDS's victories in the

presidential, legislative, and local elections in 2000, 2001, and 2002, respectively, the threat of factional strife became so real that, in order to avoid inflaming it, there have been no internal changes in the PDS since 1996 (D&F, 16). Party switchers and new activists have been incorporated on an ad hoc basis, often by means of purpose-built parallel structures or support movements. Despite talk of renewal, there has been no change in this situation.

Facing a multifaceted crisis and a regime that seems to be aiming at a Togo-style succession in which the longtime president's son takes his father's place, the Senegalese opposition has begun a series of meetings with civil society and the so-called *forces vives* of the nation in order to pave the way for the holding of a national conference. Perhaps the much-desired breakthrough will come from that quarter.

In March 2000, Senegal witnessed an orderly transfer of power from Diouf to Wade. Almost eight years later, the country finds itself caught up in the difficulties created by the new ruling group's method of governing, but also by the important question of presidential succession. The time has come to reassess decades of political practice. The social, political, and economic ambitions of Senegal's elites have progressively lost their vigor. Perhaps we can agree with Momar Coumba Diop's conclusion about the mode of governance that effectively characterized the country from Senghor to Diouf: a president who enjoyed dominance thanks to political and administrative centralization, the cooptation of political figures with an eye to reinforcing presidential leadership, and a permanent concern with raising the president's profile on the international scene (this last motivated in no small part by the regime's dependence on foreign aid, which adds up to nearly half a billion dollars per year or a quarter of the national budget).

The coalition that Wade rode to power has collapsed. Since 2004, the PDS has been in shards and Wade has been openly at odds with his premiers. The 2007 elections ended up revealing the regime's incapacity to maintain, much less improve, the country's democratic achievements. The turnover of 2000 has led to great disappointment. The functioning of institutions that do not obey clear rules and the ambiguous answers given to the Senegalese people as they try to deal with the problems of their crisis-ridden democracy have sown doubt among even the country's most convinced democrats.

After a long political struggle, Wade realized "his historic mission: to uproot the baobab tree of socialism."<sup>8</sup> Yet the president is now uprooting the fragile flower of democracy that was planted in the historic 2000 election. Wade the longtime oppositionist was and is little accustomed to the task of managing public institutions. And a society that has remained inert in the face of powerful forces of retrogression has left many Senegalese wondering about the future path of their country's still-fragile experiment in democratic self-rule. Is it too much to hope

that a national conference can help us to find the strength, the means, and above all the institutions that we need to breathe new life into our gasping democracy?

## NOTES

1. See Momar Coumba Diop, "Le Sénégal à la croisée des chemins," *Politique africaine* 104 (December 2006): 103–26.

2. Never has a sitting African president inspired so many authors. Several critical works have appeared in recent years. In addition to the writings of Abdou Latif Coulibaly, the following are notable: Mamadou Seck, *Les scandales politiques sous la présidence d'Abdoulaye Wade* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2006); Mody Niang, *Qui est cet homme qui dirige le Sénégal?* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2006); Babacar Sall, *Le stagiaire: Journal d'un Président de la République* (Dakar: Les Sentinelles, 2007); each has been barred from distribution in Senegal.

3. Tarik Dahou and Vincent Foucher, "Le Sénégal, entre changement politique et révolution passive. 'Sopi' or not 'Sopi'?" *Politique africaine* 96 (December 2004): 6. Passages in the remainder of the text that either directly quote or closely parallel this article are followed by a parenthetical notation indicating the source (D&F) and page number.

4. According to the General Census of 1988, nearly 90 percent of Senegalese belong to a Muslim brotherhood: Tidjans, 47.4 percent; Murids, 30.1 percent; Qadrya, 10.9 percent; Layènes, 0.6 percent.

5. Amnesty International Report 2007, 225, available at <http://thereport.amnesty.org/document/15>.

6. E.R. McMahon, "Catching the 'Third Wave' of Democratization? Debating Political Party Effectiveness in Africa Since 1980," *African and Asian Studies* 3:3–4 (2004): 295–320, cited in Mamadou Gazibo, "Pour une réhabilitation de l'analyse des partis en Afrique," *Politique africaine* 104 (December 2006): 11.

7. Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), cited by Gazibo, in "Pour une réhabilitation de l'analyse des partis en Afrique"; see also Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

8. M.C. Diop, M. Diouf, and A. Diaw, "Le Baobab a été déraciné: L'alternance au Sénégal," *Politique africaine* 78 (June 2000): 157–79.