

The social reproduction of community-based development: syncretism and sustainability in a Senegalese farmers' association

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the rise and decline of a grassroots community organisation in rural Senegal. It has three aims. First, it problematises the sometimes idealistic nature of the rhetoric and literature on community-based development. Second, it suggests three factors that contribute to the effectiveness of rural self-help organisations: educated and technocratically skilled leadership, unintentionally benevolent state neglect, and a willingness to syncretically recycle elements of 'traditional' social order and culture in the service of contemporary development tasks. Finally, the demise of the community-based organisation examined here suggests a need to shift focus away from the institutionalisation of community-based or civil society organisations *per se*, and to consider instead the routinisation of the participatory, empowering, and deliberative socio-political conditions that make possible the regular emergence of new grassroots organisations across time within a given community. Recent events (since 2005) in the village in question support this shift, as a new generation of community leaders has begun to craft a new community organisation, explicitly built from the detritus of the older organisation described in this article.

INTRODUCTION

In the rural Siin region of Senegal, a group of young men decided that urban unemployment, minimal education at a barely functioning university, and the squalor of living on the margins of capitalist incorporation

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were not for them. They went back to their home village, a dusty, poor place near the edge of the advancing Sashara. They founded a community organisation, a 'peasants' association' they called it, to try to create meaningful work for the young, stem the rural exodus, address poverty and do something to restore soil fertility and limit deforestation. During a cholera epidemic, they launched a community health education campaign ('Five drops of bleach in the water jug saves your children!') that prevented many fatalities. They succeeded in attracting foreign aid funding for a garden farming project, and later, an animal husbandry scheme. They set up micro-credit and took over small shop keeping when Mauritanian merchants were expelled from Senegal. After many years, their project ended in what might be called failure, from a certain point of view.

The rise and decline of this community-based organisation – the *Association des Paysans de Tukar* (APT) – provides an empirical foundation for three wider points. First, this rural Senegalese example problematises the sometimes utopian nature of current thinking on community development. The turn toward community, local empowerment, and sustainable livelihoods (Helmore & Singh 2001; Macleod 1997; Uphoff *et al.* 1998) as the latest and greatest development panacea *du jour* sometimes idealises community-based organisations as extensions of an unproblematised, liberal-democratic 'civil society'. Non-governmental and community-based organisations, unlike prior integrated rural development projects, basic human needs agendas or liberalisation efforts, are supposedly poised to solve problems of accumulation, distribution and sustainability, by virtue of being close to the 'people' and 'community' (see Bhattacharyya 1995, for a statement of this critique).

Second, this case study suggests three factors that contribute to the effectiveness of rural self-help organisations. It confirms some existing emphases in the community-based development literature, highlighting especially the central role played by an effective, educated leadership (Tendler 1997; Uphoff *et al.* 1998). It underscores the importance of a particular configuration of state–society linkage: in a general political economy of patron-clientelism and prebendalism, the case of the APT reveals the ironically salutary benefits of state neglect.¹ The success of the APT also depended in part on leadership with a neotraditional sensibility, who used what they considered to be local culture as viable tools for social mobilisation (rather than shameful vestiges of a pre-modern past). This made it possible for APT leaders to engage in what I describe elsewhere (Galvan 2004) as 'institutional syncretism', the creative recombination of institutional elements (organisational structures, rules, habits and values)

derived from more than one socio-cultural origin (e.g. from local 'tradition' and globalised 'modern' models).

Finally, the APT's relative demise in recent years suggests not the weakness of community organisation in this part of Africa, but the weakness of an analytic framework in which community organisations are treated as institutional structures which, once founded, must endure and take on a 'life of their own'. The search for the *institutionalisation* of community-based organisations may itself be a critical flaw in our understanding of how this particular facet of 'civil society' can contribute to sustainable development. I suggest that, rather than reifying the community organisation as an institutionalised structure distinct in organisation, resource base, and historical trajectory from community itself, it makes more sense to envision these grassroots organisations as entities which emerge and disappear, wax and wane, in conjunction with generational and other community life cycles. From the point of view of contributions to sustainable development, the question is not the institutionalisation of this or that organisation, but the routinisation of the participatory, empowering and deliberative socio-political conditions that make possible the emergence of new grassroots organisations across time within a given community. With an eye toward this routinisation of the conditions for 'growing' new community-based organisations, the case of the APT tells a story more complex than the mere rise and fall of a single association. Indeed, events in the village of Tukur since mid-2005 confirm this interpretation, as new funding possibilities, the emergence of a new generation of community leaders, and new technologies have resulted in the creation of a new community organisation, explicitly built from the detritus of the APT.

SETTING

The Peasants' Association of Tukur (*Association des Paysans de Tukur* or APT), was founded in 1986 in Tukur, a large village of some 3,000 inhabitants in what had been the pre-colonial kingdom of Siin, a part of Senegal where the Serer ethnic group is predominant.² Tukur, like many communities in the Siin, appears to have been founded some eight centuries ago by migrants who entered the area from the north, displaced a prior Mandé-related group (the Socé), and established a system of intensive farming and pastoralism over several generations (Becker 1984; Gastellu 1981). This region is just south of the Sahara, has relatively poor, sandy soils and limited rainfall (now about 30 cm per year), although some evidence suggests that the last century of intensive clearing for peanut

production and rapid increases in child survival rates have altered the physical environment considerably (Lericollais 1972).

The chief chronicler of pre-colonial agrarian societies in Senegambia, Paul Pelissier (1966), insists that the Serer achieved robust agricultural productivity and high population densities because, over the centuries, they combined a particular form of animism with an ingenious land and resource management scheme. While not the only important background theme in understanding the setting for the APT, it is the case that, following Meillassoux (1978), cosmology/spirituality, production and domination intertwine in complex and important ways in the Siin. Oral histories and local lore suggest that founding lineages of villages like Tukar established positive relations with ancestral spirits that inhabit the land and ensure its fertility. In the hierarchical social structure of the Serer of Siin, leaders of founding lineages held positions of authority as custodians of land in both the spiritual (maintaining essential relations with the spirits) and the material sense. Known locally as ‘masters of fire’ (from the use of fire as a brush clearing instrument by village founders), these descendants of founding lineages came to manage a three-year crop rotation (early sprouting millet, late sprouting millet, fallow), orchestrated the placement of cattle and other livestock on fallow fields (manure from the animals replenished the soil), and controlled access to critical trees like the nitrogen-fixing *Acacia albida*. Up to the mid-twentieth century, these spiritual leaders/resource managers played an important role in ensuring the agricultural success of people of the Siin region.

Although the extension of colonial rule, the spread of the head tax and the need to grow peanuts (to earn cash to pay the head tax) put pressure on Serer communities like Tukar, they were able to adapt, sometimes in ingenious ways, to respond to these changes. They worked peanuts into their three-year crop rotation scheme by eliminating one of the varieties of millet, thus adding to their famine risk, although the hope was that sale of a cash crop would provide liquid capital to enable them to buy food when needed. Critically, Serer farmers found ways to put more land into productive use without abandoning the long-established system of holistic land custodianship by the heads of founding lineages, or masters of fire. An exchange institution that translates roughly as ‘land pawning’³ was central to this adaptive tenure system, permitting farmers to exchange land-use rights for one-time, interest-free cash payments without undermining the local ontology of ownership as custodianship of land by masters of fire. As a result of this adaptive flexibility in the historic tenure system, Serer farmers had made room for cash cropping in the form of peanut production, while continuing to make use of local

institutions of authority over resource management and allocation of fields.

Things changed somewhat more dramatically at independence. Improved health interventions, and a relative decline in infant mortality in the 1960s, put significant demographic pressure on this delicately balanced production and resource management scheme (ORSTOM 1992). Perhaps more critically, a well-intentioned post-independence land reform (first promulgated in 1964), designed to put the land 'in the hands of those who farm it', spelled the end of the system of crop rotation, fallow, pasturing, manure input and maintenance of nitrogen-fixing trees orchestrated by the masters of fire. Land reform replaced this ecologically and culturally adaptive institutional structure with a simple, clear but ill-advised redistributive norm, which, when applied in the Siin region, meant that after two years of use a farmer could claim title to that land.

This had several unintended adverse results which exacerbated ongoing soil depletion, severely undermining agricultural sustainability in the area around Tukur. First, it created a confusing system of two competing tenure regimes: some farmers stayed within the old tenure system managed by masters of fire. Others used the new land reform law to claim (or in local parlance 'nationalise') fields they had farmed for two years or more. 'Nationalisation' came at the price of rupturing social relations with those who had overlapping and competing claims to the same land,⁴ and with those who still adhered to the old master of fire system. Second, the land reform undermined the authority of the masters of fire themselves, under the false assumption that in the Siin such elites represented aristocratic land accumulators whose holdings should be redistributed in the name of equity and opportunity.⁵ Masters of fire were not capital accumulators in this setting, owing in large part to the rather low value of land.⁶ With their authority undermined by the land reform, masters of fire were less able to manage and maintain fallow practices, safeguard the nitrogen fixing *Acacia albida*, and enforce crop rotation, leading to the gradual decline of fallow, rotation and protection of nitrogen-fixing trees.

Finally, the land reform made the most innovative and important local land tenure practice, pawning, illegal as a long-term strategy. Pawning had made possible stable, long-term use-rights transfers. Those who received pawned land could count on using it for a decade or more, and thus make improvements to the land, letting it lie fallow or pasturing animals there, whose manure provided essential nutrients. But these long-term exchanges were incompatible with the land reform, which placed a premium on making clear claims to land by using it as much as possible, and discouraged farmers from giving land in pawn (since it might be

‘nationalised’ by the borrower after two years). As a result, more people farmed more land more intensively, putting more pressure on already declining fallow and pasturing practices.

Not surprisingly, tenure confusion, the destabilisation of local resource management authorities, and the end of stable pawn contracts coincided with declines in soil fertility and agricultural productivity by the 1970s.⁷ A locally adapted common pool resource management system (of the type Ostrom 1990 celebrates) was replaced by an unregulated free market in what you planted, where you planted, what you did with live-stock, whether you fallowed, and whether you cut any tree you needed for fuel. By the early 1980s, farmers in the Siin region, who had once been able to provide for their own subsistence and earn cash selling peanuts, were losing the ability to make any kind of agriculture productive. Young people, seeing little hope for a productive life in villages like Tukur, left in droves for the capital, Dakar, and for the growing urban centres of the interior (such as Fatick, Kaolack, Mbour, Diourbel and Tambacounda).

*THE ASSOCIATION DES PAYSANS DE TUKAR*⁸

The young men and women who would found the Peasants’ Association of Tukur, the APT, were part of this rural exodus. Like many in their generation, they left for school, the lucky ones for university, others to join the military, or to look for whatever odd work they could find outside the economically dying Siin region. Unfortunately, they chose a poor time to seek wealth and adventure in urban west Africa. Drought, economic crisis, lack of investment, moribund international prices for local commodities, and the structural adjustment-induced dismantling of the state’s presence in the economy, made the 1980s and 1990s a particularly tough time for migrants to the cities, be they manual labourers or university graduates (Adepoju 1993).

Each of the seven individuals responsible for founding the APT in the mid-1980s had been in Dakar or another urban centre for some part of the previous five to seven years. Interviews with each of them reveal similar narrative elements: the characteristic rural exodus search for new opportunity, some level of frustration in pursuit of educational or economic opportunity, a desire to eventually return to Tukur and to avoid marrying a non-Serer person in urban Senegal.⁹ ‘This is not what we want to do, or what our fathers and mothers did. It’s something we do because we must’, as one of the founding group put it (APT founder 3 1995 int.).

By the spring of 1986, these seven leading figures in what would become the APT, all of them in their late 20s or early 30s, had made their way back to Tukur, partly driven by frustration with the 'modern' economy, partly pulled by the desire to maintain links with their place of origin, especially as they got to marrying age. Some were motivated by a feeling that they wanted to 'make something happen' (APT member 1 1988 int.) in Tukur that would enable young people to stay in the community, and not go through their own experience of struggle and disappointment of urban migration.

Then, in the spring of 1986, a cholera epidemic provided the immediate catalyst for founding the APT. The disease was spreading through the Siin region, towards Tukur, taking the lives of the very young and the very old in particular. Although none of the eventual founders of the APT had specialised training in public health matters, they understood the link between the disease and contaminated water supplies. They organised public health awareness training, orchestrated hand washing campaigns at the Wednesday open air market, visited schools and homes to teach sanitary measures, along the way convincing many women in the community to use a few drops of chlorine bleach to purify their family's drinking water. As the epidemic raged across neighbouring villages, Tukur suffered fewer and fewer casualties, thanks in large part to the efforts of the group who later founded the APT (APT founder 1 1993 int.; APT founder 2 1995 int.; APT founder 5 1993 int.; APT founder 6 1993 int.; APT member 3 1993 int.).

Emboldened by this experience, by 'the chance to actually use something we had learned in Dakar' (APT founder 3 1992 int.), the core group of seven started to discuss the possibility of building on this experience 'to make something happen in Tukur'. They were led by a young man who had left the university in Dakar, whose father had been a colonial gendarme, and who had travelled extensively in west Africa as a young boy. His cousin, who had been a marine posted to Gambia during the experiment at confederation, later joined the group. Another leading figure was a prominent son in the family of the master of fire, the lineage that had long been responsible for holistic resource management. This young man had also spent time at the university in Dakar. The eldest son of a key public official also became a prominent member of the group, as did the son of a local tailor, and two women of about the same age who had completed primary school and were considered of 'good farmer stock'. Together this group of seven led the campaign against cholera, and in the ensuing months, began to think of this experience as a model for future activities.

If they had succeeded in teaching their neighbours about the use of chlorine bleach, and in so doing had saved so many lives, perhaps they could take other steps to give people the chance to make a living in Tukar. After considerable discussion, they reached another dozen or so people of about their age in the community, making sure to include more women and at least a few representatives of the low-status occupational castes (storytellers, blacksmiths, leatherworkers, potters, weavers). They prepared a document outlining the goals of a proposed 'peasants' association', establishing officers: the visionary and administrative leader, son of the gendarme, as secretary-general; the son of the local political official as president (he was also the oldest of the group); the member of the master of fire's lineage (as vice president); the tailor's son as treasurer; one of the women in the original core group as head of the 'women's section'.

The organisation was officially registered with local government officials, a formality having more to do with paying a few thousand CFA francs for the necessary *timbres fiscales* than with coordination, linkage, support or direction from public agencies, which never made contact of any kind with the APT. An older brother of the secretary general had a university classmate who worked for a Franco-Senegalese non-profit development and training organisation in Dakar, *Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde* (ENDA). The APT was just the sort of local, grassroots organisation ENDA liked to support. As a secondary and not especially instrumental mechanism of support, the collaboration between ENDA and APT eventually brought a series of US university students as interns to Tukar, mostly to observe and learn (as fortune would arrange things, I was in the first batch of such interns, in 1988). Eventually, ENDA helped the APT general secretary to formalise their top priority (a basin for storing rainwater, to be used for an irrigated vegetable garden in the dry season, which would give young people something to do during those nine months of the year, other than migrate to the cities). The proposal was funded in 1990, resulting in the digging of an enormous basin next to a plot of land that the APT had secured as an experimental garden plot.

This project, however, suffered from poor soil analysis: the basin never held rain water for very long; and the water it did hold proved too brackish for gardening, contaminated by minerals in the soil that formed the basin itself. APT members consider this the fault of ENDA advisors, who, in their view, undertook insufficient soil and hydrological analysis. (APT founder 1, 1996 int.; APT founder 2, 1995 int.; APT founder 3, 1993 int.; APT founder 7, 1993 int.; APT member 2, 1995 int.). The key player

from ENDA, friend of the older brother of the secretary general, disputes this claim, insisting that the earthen basins were never intended to hold water for more than two months, at most, and that there was no way to foresee the leeching of salts into the stored water (ENDA official, 2005 int.). As a result, the dream of remunerative gardening from November until at least March or April, the bulk of the dry season, seemed beyond reach. Given the mutual disillusionment and recrimination, ENDA moved on to other communities and other projects, and had very little to do with Tukar after the failure of the water catchment scheme (ENDA official, 2005 int.). Eventually, the APT moved on to other activities – they received other grants to establish a revolving credit fund to help community members buy, raise and sell cattle. This dovetailed nicely with the existing entrepreneurial interests of local farmers, and continued for a number of years, with a slice of each farmer's proceeds used to replenish the revolving credit fund.

In the mid-1990s, most of the APT's available resources were reinvested in buying and running a local 'boutique', or general goods store. The APT took on this task, for which it was not particularly well suited, in response to a community crisis: ethnic unrest on the Senegal–Mauritania border had resulted in the forced expulsion of most Mauritians in 1989 (Parker 1991). Mauritanian immigrants, much resented both for the treatment of Senegalese in Mauritania (where slavery was officially outlawed in 1980), and for their business practices within Senegal, had had a lock on the retail general goods sector (the 'boutiques') in Tukar and many similar sized rural communities. With the much resented Mauritians gone, there were no shopkeepers, and therefore no easy way for people in the community to buy tea, sugar, cooking oil, notebooks, cigarettes, plastic tubs, rope and all manner of everyday goods.¹⁰

In spite of considerable debate and dissent within the organisation ('Serer people don't run shops!' 'That's something only foreigners do!' 'What do we know about how to keep a shop anyway?'; APT founder 6, 1995 int.; APT member 1, 1993 int.; APT member 5, 1993 int.), members of the community were complaining about the absence of the nearly 24/7 'boutique' retail outlets. The APT shifted most of its resources into re-opening and running one of these shops. It was a constant headache keeping the store stocked, finding APT members to staff it at all times, and perhaps most critically, getting a handle on the free flow of credit to customers. The shop was forced to shut down on a number of occasions because, having given most of its inventory away to relatives and friends on credit, the shelves were bare and there was no reserve left to restock. When a few Serer entrepreneurs took over some of the other closed shops,

and eventually, by the late 1990s, Mauritians returned and reopened their old places of business, many APT members were relieved. They had in part rediscovered/recreated the original rationale whereby shop-keeping and retail sales had been relegated to marginalised ethnic outsiders with few or no kin-reciprocity ties to the community. As in much of the pre-capitalist non-Western world, social networks and what Hyden (1983) calls 'economy of affection' linkages trump individual 'interests' in personal savings: when a cousin, real or imagined, comes in need, it would be 'uncivilised' to turn her away while stuffing one's own piggy bank.¹¹ In the light of an economic culture that valued kinship claims and redistribution over personal savings and accumulation of capital, it was adaptive and rational to put tasks like shopkeeping in the hands of recent migrants and ethnic outsiders who had few kin-reciprocity claims in the settings where they did business (Cohen 1969: 14–20).

Interestingly, one could read this inability on the part of the APT to separate itself from existing economy of affection relationships with kin and other local allies as an example of too much 'institutional embedding', and thus, in a way, an 'excess of syncretism'. But institutional syncretism, as discussed in this work, is neither the wholesale adoption of externally derived, 'modern' rules and norms, nor the unreflexive reproduction of existing local or 'traditional' regularised habits and practices. In this sense, the APT's failure to find a way to 'insulate' itself from economy of affection demands for credit in the running of the boutique is better understood as an absence, rather than an excess of syncretism. A more syncretic solution would have involved the use of some locally meaningful way to refuse economy of affection redistributive demands in the name of preserving the merchandise stock, and thus the capital and economic viability, of the boutique as a small business. This might entail some alteration, redeployment and reinstitutionalisation of the existing and elaborate systems of excuse making, reliance on fate, or the will of Allah to explain unwanted outcomes. Syncretism would have entailed making these 'traditional' excuses into new rules-in-the-making, available to resist kin demands for merchandise on credit. The fact that such a syncretic solution never emerged reveals the pitfalls of both unreflective modernisation and traditionalist cultural embedding.

In the years after the shop keeping experiment, the APT tried to return to its cattle-raising revolving credit scheme, but lacked the capital needed to run the project on the scale of previous years. For reasons to be explored below, the organisation became moribund save for one initiative. A malaria-prophylaxis purchasing arrangement, run on a shoestring by

several women from the APT, continues to the present day (APT founder 6, 2005 int.; APT founder 7, 2005 int.). In their neighbourhoods within Tugar, these women collect funds from relatives and neighbours to purchase the readily available quinine products used as malaria prophylaxis (chloroquine, mefloquine; more recently concocted, non-quinine-based drugs have been beyond their financial reach), stocking up on the medicine to give out to as many children as possible during the rainy season. Although comparative infection rate data are not available, members of the community consider it a successful undertaking. In the present day, this relatively small-scale project remains the APT's most successful initiative.

EXPLAINING THE APT'S PERIOD OF SUCCESS

At least three factors help account for the period of relative success of the APT from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s: a distinctive configuration of state–society relations resulting in unintentionally benevolent state neglect; educated leadership; and institutional syncretism. As an exercise in theory building, rather than theory testing, each of these factors extends or deepens the rich existing literature on grassroots organisations and development (see Bhattacharyya 1995; Patterson 1998; Uphoff *et al.* 1998; Veltmeyer & O'Malley 2001). Empirical work well beyond this case, controlling for type of community-based organisation, factors and settings, would be needed to explore the degree to which these factors typically contribute more universally to the success of such local development organisations.

First, at the political-structural level, it is important to highlight the fact that the APT came to exist at all, despite unlikely circumstances and limited external support, and that it thrived and indeed accumulated resources in a relatively autonomous fashion for most of its life-span. The story here is what did *not* happen to the seven ambitious young returnees to the village of Tugar. In some other parts of Senegal, and indeed in many other post-colonial settings, the patronage politics of the ruling party machine/state officialdom (then the *Parti Socialiste*, now the *Parti Démocratique Sénégalaise* – the dynamic is essentially the same) might have loomed larger on the scene. Even in rather legal-rational, stable and civically oriented Senegal, Crawford Young's (1994) *Bula Matari*,¹² the hypertrophic state inherited from colonialism whose administrative, extractive and coercive resources dwarf those of the private sector economy and society, has the potential to co-opt, transform and sometimes distort grassroots organisations like the APT.

Patterson (1998: 432–5) offers just such a story in a part of Senegal not far to the north of Siin, in the village of Ndoulo, where the founder of a grassroots women's empowerment organisation was elected president of a state-sponsored regional association of women's organisations. Once elevated to this post, the erstwhile grassroots leader enjoyed new opportunities to interact with public officials, and gained access to resources well beyond those available to her in her former role. Women from Ndoulo reported that the leader came to ignore the needs of the organisation she had founded, paying more attention to her new travels and contacts, resulting in acrimony and stalemate within the women's group. In Patterson's case, registration with the state was itself a crucial part of the story. As a means to promote gender empowerment at the grassroots level, the Senegalese government had enacted legislation to provide special incentives and resources to village-level women's organisations, as well as to create regional structures to network them and ensure that they benefited from the organisational economies of scale that result from integration. While these were all entirely benevolent state interventions, in the post-*Bula Matari* political economy of much of the ex-colonial world, state intervention at the community level can disarticulate the organisational scale and resource base of local organisations from the much vaster organisational scale, resource base and opportunities for accumulation and career advancement of the official public sector. Once Ndoulo's grassroots women's organisation became integrated in the institutional structure of a centralised, Dakar-based framework for promoting gender rights, it also became integrated into an institutional apparatus rich in opportunities for personal gain through patron-clientelism. Integration cost the group autonomy (as Ribot 1999 would predict) and, perhaps more importantly, drained it of the life blood of grassroots community organisations, local legitimacy.

This did not happen to the APT, in part because of the unexpected yet salutary benefits of being a historic backwater, in part because of the particular configuration of state/society linkages in place when the APT was founded. Tukar and its environs in the Siin have a long history of antagonism toward central authority, dating at least to the colonial period.¹³ This particular corner of Senegal is the stereotyped homeland of the supposedly recalcitrant Serer peasant, whom the French found unwilling to cooperate with peanut production in the early days, and who staged open rebellions against taxation and regulation as early as an 1891 uprising in Diohine, a village 2 kilometres south of Tukar (ANS 1892). Colonial administrators were both enamoured of the agrarian skill of the Serer of this region, and deeply frustrated with their unwillingness to accept

induced relocation. When the French colonial state sought to move 'productive' Serer peasants to eastern Senegal, to counter what officials saw as the agriculturally rapacious practices of the Mouride Islamic brotherhoods, few went, and those who did returned to the Siin after earning some cash, undermining the entire relocation scheme (Pelissier 1966: 309–11).

After independence, founding President Senghor, simply because he was a Serer (but not from Siin), could reliably guarantee Serer votes for his ruling *Parti Socialiste*: there was little need to extend the patronage system of the party to this 'safe' area. As an unintended side effect, rural electrification, phone lines, gravel roads, investments in education and health care by-passed Tukar and the Siin in general for decades.¹⁴ The region remains a backwater for simple reasons of economic development and political patronage. Unlike the Senegal River Valley or Casamance, it has limited agricultural potential. It is not near or much integrated with Touba and Tivaouane, holy cities of the major Islamic brotherhoods and recipients of massive state infrastructural investment. In contrast to once remote Joal, Louga and Kebemer, it is not the homeland of one of the country's three presidents to date, all of whose home communities have enjoyed their moment of state largesse. Although linked to urban spaces by migration and the remittance economy, Tukar is in a fairly minor, mostly forgotten corner of Senegal that plays no significant role in the patronage politics that constitute the main linkage between rural places and the centre of political, economic and cultural life in Dakar. So it is not surprising that the emergence in the mid-1980s of a small community organisation in such a location should have almost no meaning in terms of the political logic of patronage in Senegal.

This logic of patronage must be situated in the particular context of Senegalese state–society relations. Educated urbanites in Dakar, Saint Louis and, to a lesser extent, provincial capitals, experience a fairly active politics of opposition, independent media and vibrant associational structures. This is where Senegal earns its reputation as one of the most democratic societies on the continent. Dakar and other urban centres still bear some imprint of the colonial project of assimilation, in which they were given special rights and privileges, and became sites for class formation distinct from the experience of the rest of the country, the 'interior'.¹⁵

But for rural people from a place like Tukar, the urban space of the independent TV and radio, of the various, fractal, sometimes confusing opposition politics, is remote. It is often most easily understood as a locus of personal aggrandisement, rather than civil debate or democratic

deliberation. From this rural vantage point, to be connected to the state has meant having a relative in government, being associated with an Islamic brotherhood that the state needs and favours, or forging some other personalistic, economy of affection link to the centre. Until very recently (more on that below), Tukar has had almost none of these linkages, which, from the point of view of raw infrastructural investment, has been a clear deficit. But from the point of view of grassroots community organisation in the 1980s and 1990s, this turned out to be a net plus.

With almost no patronage network linking Tukar to the state, the founders of the APT were not co-opted by a local party baron, and thus could not tap state or party patronage resources to pursue their goals. They did not have to attune themselves to the patronage calculus of working with the regime, and instead had to remain sensitive to the dynamics of building local, community level support for their efforts. The fact that Dakar had paid almost no attention to Tukar and its environs meant that it was more immune to the centripetal pull of what Schaffer (1998) identifies with the Wolof term *politik*, relations tainted with the deployment of power for the sake of personal aggrandisement.

This is not to say that the state has *no* presence in a place like Tukar. The Land Reform of 1964 and subsequent Rural Council reform of 1972, followed more recently by the decentralisation wave of the mid-1990s, have meant that the legal codes, systems of resource management and adjudication devised and directed in Dakar do impact on the lives of ordinary people in neglected places like the Siin. But government representatives most associated with state power and the centre – the *prefet* or *sous-prefet* (centrally appointed representatives of the state), the agricultural extension agent from the *Centre d'Expansion Rurale*, or the technical assistant from the *Services des Eaux et Forêts* – tend to intervene in local affairs only in cases of emergency. Local farmers and local associations like the APT largely ignore these entities, which tend to ‘keep to themselves ... or just give speeches’ (APT member 4, 2002 int.).

More proximate vectors of state authority – the Rural Councils who are supposed to enforce the land law, for example – do the bidding of the central administration when required to, but more commonly follow the logic of institutional syncretism. As explored elsewhere (Galvan 2004, 2007) and discussed with regard to the APT below, this involves actors creatively taking apart and recombining rules, norms, practices and organisational structures of more than one socio-cultural origin. Rural councillors sometimes do the bidding of the state, but more commonly they reinterpret the land law, or procedures for decision-making and

adjudication, in ways that blend rules that emanate from Dakar with rules and norms that local people find historically meaningful.

The point is not that all successful community-based development depends on some idealised autonomy from the state. Although they consider very different subtypes of civil society organisation (political watchdog groups as opposed to grassroots community development organisations), Ndegwa (1994) and Gyimah-Boadi (2004) underscore the potentially constitutive nature (cf. Migdal 2001) of civil society–state interactions in Africa. The APT case fits within this framework, but draws our attention to the particular configuration of state–society linkages as an important element in the development of community-based development organisations. Clearly the state in Tukar provides the minimal coherence, legal order and predictability to facilitate the autonomous emergence of new organisations like the APT. But it has also done little in the way of investing in the development of the region, and this neglect, while materially costly, unintentionally insulated Tukar from the centrist, centripetal, patron-clientelistic tendencies of the Senegalese state. The limited degree of *Bula Matari* that one finds in Dakar or the Senegal River Valley did not manifest itself in the Siim, allowing the APT to remain more beholden to the community than to external political patrons.

A second major factor in explaining the relative success of the APT has to do with effective leadership on the part of the ‘group of seven’ who founded the organisation. Most critical was the enlightened leadership of the son of the gendarme who became secretary-general, articulated the original vision for the organisation, served as its key agent of mobilisation, and effectively ran the operation from its founding through its years of success. In this particular case, building on the existing literature on rural development success, I would break the effectiveness of leadership into several components, which may or may not apply in the case of other CBOs: education and administrative skill; legitimation based on extra-community experience and expertise; mobilisational skill that approximates Weberian charisma; and, most critically, neotraditionalism and an associated tendency to see institutions in syncretic terms.

The leadership of the APT had all these qualities: their time abroad had given them educational and administrative skills that helped them conceive of a new form of collective action as a means to address poverty and rural exodus with concrete new initiatives, not to mention giving them the know-how to draft the formal organisational charter and to give it credibility with state officials, external partners, and funders. This echoes a number of the themes developed by Uphoff *et al.* (1998), among others. Interviews with community members suggest that people trusted the

secretary general and other leaders of the organisation, because, despite their youth, they had ‘spent time outside Tukar’ (farmer 1, 1993 int.), and their educational and other experiences meant that ‘they have knowledge of how the world works that can help us here’. In effect, we see a form of techno-scientific, expert legitimisation bolstering the credibility of the APT as an organisation. As Weber (1978) himself speculated, technical training, skill and expertise in the use of new and seemingly beneficial ‘technologies’ (in this case, the ‘technology’ of public administration, grant-writing, dealing with funding agencies and other, extra-local development organisations), represents a particular, emergent form of legitimacy, characteristic of Jameson’s (1984) ‘high modernity’.

These elements of leadership alone are of course not enough; technically trained experts, drawn from within and from outside communities, are the very foot soldiers of the development enterprise, yet community-based organisations as effective as the APT in its heyday are rather unusual. The leaders of the APT, especially the secretary general, were especially skilled at motivating and inspiring their fellow community members to see a new vision of how to organise economic and social life in the community. The secretary general was himself a kind of attraction, a celebrity in the community, whom people trusted because he articulated a vision of collaboration and cooperation that addressed their current very real crisis, and suggested a way to reorganise work, farming, livestock raising, financial cooperation that would break with old habits and provide a path to a plausibly better future.

But the secretary general was a Weberian charismatic only in a very limited sense; his programme was not revolutionary, in the sense of upending the old order and building a new society on the rubble of old institutions and ways. Indeed, a key ingredient of leadership success in this case was in fact neotraditionalism; the leaders of the APT clearly incorporated in their rhetoric an emphasis on Serer custom, history, culture and way of life as an important usable resource in development. They were legitimate and effective, in part, respondents indicate, because they *came home* to live in Tukar out of a desire to marry Serer spouses, retain Serer cultural identity, and pay respects to Serer ancestral spirits and way of life. Conversations with the leaders of the APT suggest that this was not a conscious instrumental tactic (although it worked well in that way). Rather, a rejection of modernist materialism – in religious terms in particular – was a key element in their personal value systems. Having tried their hand at university and urban employment, in the words of one APT founder, ‘there was nothing for us in Dakar, and we did not want to become Dakarois or Wolof’ (APT founder 4, 1993 int.). Here, evocation of

Senegal's dominant and most commodified ethnic community (the Wolof) stands for a neo-traditionalist assertion of Serer distinctiveness in the face of the changes associated with the new economy, the city, and modernity in general, summarised by this imagery of what it means to 'become Wolof'.¹⁶

The neo-traditionalism of the APT leadership goes hand in glove with the final contributor to the organisation's success, the fact that it was institutionally syncretic; it combined institutional elements (organisational structure, formal rules, informal rules, habits or values) of more than one socio-cultural origin.¹⁷ This peasants' association, in one guise an egalitarian, Weberian formal organisation as versed in *Robert's Rules of Order* (2000) as any parent-teacher association in US suburbia, was also in fact a remobilised circumcision age-cohort. The five young men in the core founding group had undergone the ritual of male circumcision at about the same time, linking them to each other in a durable, historically embedded and locally meaningful set of institutional practices. The two founding women were of the same generation and thus shared a set of similar, though less formal ties to the male age-cohort group. Circumcision cohorts in this and similar societies represent important life-cycle institutions, whose members grow up together, support one another as quasi-kin in finding brides, dealing with in-laws and raising children, as well as in farming and other economic activities, and in times of personal crisis and celebration (Bernardi 1985).

This syncretic refashioning of a 'traditional' age-circumcision cohort as the raw material for building a new, more 'modern' institution parallels a more famous innovation among Ngoni peoples of southern Africa, who in the 1830s used similar cohorts as the basis for a new military unit, the *impi* age regiment. The age-circumcision cohort bond became the basis for enhanced solidarity and willingness to sacrifice in battle, rendering the *impi* age regiment such an effective fighting force that it helped trigger waves of conquest and expansion first by the Mthethwa, and later by the Zulu and other peoples who used this institutionally syncretic innovation to transform the geopolitics of the entire region in a period that became known as the *mfecane* or time of troubles (Peires 1993). There was, for Tukar, a certain innovativeness in using a similar historic institution as the kernel for a farmers' self-help organisation.

Along the same lines, it was also no accident that APT's leadership group gave important positions to both a member of the lineage of the village founder/resource manager, and the son of the highest-ranking local political official.¹⁸ When the time came for the head of the founder's lineage to lead community-wide celebrations surrounding fertility rites

and the agricultural cycle, the APT leadership enjoyed places of prominence in these celebrations.

Indeed, the APT gained access to the plot of land used for the irrigated farming experiment thanks to a donation from the head of the founder's lineage. When the organisation began looking for a plot of land for their irrigated garden project in 1986–87, the secretary-general of the organisation (the most quintessentially Weberian of its leaders) petitioned the representatives of the state, the Rural Council, for access to unused and marginal lands controlled by the council. His requests were delayed or ignored over many months. It appeared that elders in the community, who controlled the Rural Council, were still suspicious of this upstart group of 'youth', even though the Rural Council president's son was an official of the organisation.

Frustrated and dispirited at trying to achieve their goals through official channels, the leaders of the APT eventually realised they had other resources at their disposal, in the form of a personalistic linkage to the spiritually powerful village founding lineage, which had historically been at the centre of land tenure relations. Leaders of the APT had at first not wanted to use 'traditional ties' to achieve their goals, but had wanted, in the words of the secretary general, to 'get started and do our work in a correct, modern way'. But when this failed, it opened the door for pragmatic creativity, for imagining another means to get access to land; the APT leader closely related to the village founding lineage put time and effort into explaining the situation to the titular head of that lineage, the former spiritual and material custodian of most of the farmland in and around the village, who still held considerable influence on land use decisions with many people. This took time; the lineage head was sceptical at first, and the APT leader from that family had many long conversations with him over more than a year before he would agree to give his support to the APT's use of a field he controlled. He gave the APT access to the plot, he said, because he 'came to think of these boys as people who understood and respected *cosaan*, and were just trying to help the village' (lineage head, 1993 int.). This, he made clear, would not have been possible if the young man from his lineage had not been a key figure in the leadership of the group.

The act of pragmatic creativity that made it possible to gain access to the most crucial form of capital in this society (land) should not slip past our attention. It is deceptively simple, and yet uncommon in African development. APT leaders, who wanted to 'do our work in a correct, modern way', could have found themselves at an impasse when this proved impossible. They could have considered working through a 'traditional'

authority figure, via personalistic blood ties to him, as a pre-modern form of social organisation, unworthy of a group than fancied itself educated, sophisticated, bringing development and 'progress' to the village. They owed their success in large part to their willingness to define local, pre-existing patterns of interaction and rule structures, not as vestiges of backwardness to be left in the past, nor as shameful instruments of nepotism to be used but hidden from view, but rather as practical tools to be evoked in the service of crafting a new, syncretic institutional order.

Some years after securing the land in question, after ENDA had dug a huge water catchment basin which failed to hold water free from salination, the APT had to make sense of the failure of the project to themselves and the community. Elders in Tukar tended to accept the argument that the project had failed because the heavy machinery used to dig the water storage basin had offended the ancestral spirits living in that land, who 'knew no such noisy things' (farmer 2, 1995 int.). The APT leadership struck an interesting position on this critique, never openly rejecting or seeking to refute it, even as they, in their own accounts, placed the blame more squarely on the hydrological and soil analysis provided by the Dakar-based NGO, ENDA, and its implementation by the contractors. APT leaders continued, even in failure, to practise institutional syncretism, organising their own rituals of repentance held at the site of the failed project, patterned on the annual fertility rituals conducted by the leader of the founding lineage.

Members of the Tukar community felt they could trust the APT and follow its lead because it was 'a group of youths who respect the values of our people' (farmer 3, 2003 int.). Careful attention to syncretism, to the need to render external education, techno-scientific legitimation, and partnering with external funders locally non-threatening and somehow familiar, by integrating into the organisation itself elements of local culture and social structure, was essential to the partial success of the organisation.

CONCLUSION: DECLINE AND THE CONDITIONS FOR REPRODUCING COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

By the late 1990s, the APT had begun to fragment, losing both its leadership position in community development efforts and its ability to mobilise various sectors of Tukar society. The circumstances and apparent causes of this demise were prosaic. The organisation's visionary and *de facto* leader, the secretary general, received a long-sought scholarship to study

in the United States. He left in 1993 for what was to be a mere six-month stay, but given unexpected educational and career opportunities, has yet to return to Senegal.

The departure of the key leader of the APT was itself an important blow. But others in the organisation's leadership 'moved on' in ways structurally analogous to, if less dramatic than, the secretary-general's departure for the US. Key figures in the organisation, who had been young, mobile and unmarried in the days of the fight against cholera and the animal husbandry scheme, grew older, married and settled down. Acquiring new responsibilities, they were less able to find the time and resources to organise new community activities. By early 2002, the vice president could speak for the organisation as a whole when he declared, 'the APT is now pretty much dead' (APT founder 2, 2002 int.).

So, another promising community-based organisation would seem to have failed. In spite of its apparent success at raising consciousness, building legitimacy and recycling tradition, this organisation could not survive the simple aging of its key members. Indeed, its very syncretic quality – as a redeployed age-cohort – may have doomed it to irrelevance when the age-cohort became less a tool to secure status and resources for an up and coming generation, and more an economy of affection network of social support among an already established elite.

Yet we should not read the rise and fall of the APT as another indicator of the intractability of underdevelopment in rural Africa. This study does not, at the end of the day, give us reason to summarily dismiss local empowerment and community organisations. Rather, it reminds us that it may be a mistake to focus too much on the institutionalisation of particular community organisations like the APT. This concern for building strong and durable institutional structures – be they of the state in a previous era, or of civil society (Wilson 1997) or participatory and community-based organisations (Agrawal & Gibson 1999) in the present – has long been a central theme in development theory.

Yet the very focus on *institutionalisation* may itself misunderstand the actual relationship between communities as social organisms and community organisations as institutional structures. Too much concern for institutionalisation artificially reifies the CBO, separating it in an unrealistic way from the dynamics of change in the community of which it is both part and reflection. The demise of an organisation like the APT, rather than being a sign of the ephemeral nature of the experiment, may be a natural, expected and even useful part of the overall dynamic of community-based development. Generational change and life cycle

dynamics may make the rise and fall of any given CBO over a period of years not an indicator of dysfunctionality, but the norm.

If this is the case, then the crucial question becomes not under what circumstances can any given community organisation, like the APT, become durably institutionalised – we should expect that no such organisation will ever really be durably institutionalised. Instead, we should look to the pre-conditions, the good soil which can nourish the ongoing social reproduction of new community organisations, generation after generation.

In the case of Tukar, the particular combination of unintentionally benevolent state neglect, institutional syncretism and educated, technocratically legitimate, charismatic and neo-traditional leadership, has in recent years recoalesced to form two new activities of note. First, since 2003, in the months after rains when well water is high and clean, some of the young sons of APT members and their cohort walk the 5 kilometres to the old APT irrigation project site. The boys use this water for their own micro-garden project. In 2003, they grew onions, tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and a few other ‘condiments’, hiked back to the weekly market in Tukar and sold these items ‘to make a little money to help our mothers’. These budding agrarian entrepreneurs know enough to couch their business practices in the local imagery of family cohesion and the loyalty of sons towards their mothers. Institutional syncretists in the making, to be sure.

More significantly, in 2005 a representative of a UK foundation found his way by a circuitous path of economy of affection linkages to Tukar, offering to provide funding to restart cattle raising revolving credit and other development activities, if the community could organise itself to form an association to receive and manage the funds. At first, many saw this as a means to revive the APT. But a number of people in Tukar, including some of the old APT leadership, and many younger people who had only known APT as a story, felt it would be a mistake to do so, especially given recriminations and allegations of financial impropriety surrounding the demise of the APT-run boutique. In late 2005, two groups began to coalesce to receive the new funding: the neo-APT group attracted mostly ex-APT members and was headed by a former APT official, the son of the former Rural Council president. The second group, led by another ex-APT leader, the individual from the village founder’s lineage, drew a few APT members associated with the village founder’s lineage, as well as a large number of younger people. The conflict thus was in part generational, in part inter-elite, pitting the village-founding lineage against the politically important son of the Rural Council president.

The latter group drafted the charter and selected officials for a new organisation, to be called by a Serer name, *Bug Saax Of*, or 'Those Who Love Their Village'. By December, it appeared that the funder, seeing the division his offer had generated, would withdraw from Tukar.

The former secretary general of the APT, still in the US, spent many hours and more dollars on the phone to the two newly established *cabines telephoniques* (phone centres) and the smattering of cell phones that sometimes work in the village. He talked to everyone, including the now divided leadership group of the APT, the leading figures among the younger generation (now about the age of the APT founders in the mid-1980s). He eventually made contact with an older generation, the uncles, and older cousins of the APT leadership group, and convinced them to intervene in the conflict, talk to the two factions, and call a public meeting to which the entire village would be invited, to try to hash out an agreement. He 'had to shame them to do this, to tell both sides they were going to hurt Tukar if they kept on like this' (APT founder 1, 2005 int.).

The meeting took place in late December 2005 and featured public and formal apologies from the leaders of each faction for what they had said about the other side. Much was made of the need to think about the collective wellbeing of the village, about how the village would be made to look to outsiders (such as the former secretary general, living in the US, and the UK donor), and about the need to do something for young people in the community. The meeting produced a compromise, institutionally syncretic solution, in which the old organisation, the APT, would be abandoned. The community agreed to unite around the new organisation with its more overtly neo-traditional name, *Bug Saax Of*, but modified to include a Council of Elders, which would include leading figures of the former APT. This Council of Elders would be consulted by *Bug Saax Of* officials on key decisions, such as the determination of development priorities and use of funds. The leader of the faction seeking to revive the APT, son of the former Rural Council president, would be appointed president of the Council of Elders. *Bug Saax Of* would also be structured to have a wide-ranging 'youth section', to draw in and mobilise young people.

The rise and fall of the APT, and the recent emergence of a new community-based organisation in Tukar, together suggest that state neglect, effective leadership and institutional syncretism served not to institutionalise a one-time community-based development success story, but to establish the means for the social reproduction of community-based organisations over time. The creation of *Bug Saax Of* suggests that the conditions for the ongoing *emergence* of community-based development

organisations persist in Tukur; whether these and other factors will align to produce developmental *success* is more uncertain.

Indeed, the factors of interest here seem to have shifted somewhat. Tukur still ‘enjoys’ relative state neglect and the ‘fruits’ of being mostly cut off from the dynamics of the centralised state/party patronage machinery. But with the arrival in recent years of rural electrification, international telephone access, and with talk of paving the old, sometimes-gravel road, this is changing. Moreover, Tukur finally has a personalistic link to the ruling party – a Tukur partisan of the longtime opposition *Parti Democratique Senegalaise* has been elevated to a junior post in the Ministry of Education since that party’s victory in the 2000 presidential election. A middle school was recently built in Tukur. As the new organisation *Bug Saax Of* emerges, Tukur is more ‘on the map’ than it was, which may mean state patronage dynamics will play out to the detriment of the new organisation.

Tukur is still a place that young people want to come back to, in part because economic opportunity is so limited in urban Senegal, in part because local people still identify with Serer animist culture and the need to be in Serer agrarian communities to maintain some sense of Serer cultural identity and heritage. But it is sufficiently and unavoidably integrated into ‘modern’, commodified economic and social relations for this desire to return to be not merely reactionary or defensive neo-traditionalism. As the crafting of *Bug Saax Of* as a compromise organisational entity reveals (even its name is a hallmark of neo-traditionalism), the tendency toward creative, syncretic problem-solving remains vibrant in Tukur.

Sons and daughters of Tukur may want to come back to this place, but it remains unclear whether these returnees bring with them the expertise to found organisations, identify problems, develop solutions and profitably and sustainably interact with funders. *Bug Saax Of* interestingly relies on a mix of APT-generation know-how, long-distance phone calls to the visionary leader in the US, and the energy and untested skills of a new generation. It remains to be seen if this configuration of leadership and human capital will result in a successful new effort at community development. The creation of *Bug Saax Of* also highlights the role played by external donors (cf. Gyimah Boadi 2004), in this case as the crucial catalyst, and the ways in which the everyday banalities of new technology made it possible for the Tukur overseas ‘diaspora’ to play a vital, guiding and shaming role in intra-village conflict.

There are of course costs associated with the decline and revival, perhaps once a generation, of community-based development organisations.

Lack of institutional memory, start-up costs associated with crafting a new organisation, transaction costs associated with garnering community support, and the relative inability of such short-term organisational entities to pursue long-term development goals, are just a few examples. However, the benefits associated with renewal of leadership and membership, consequent social legitimation, and capacity to express and manifest the immediate interest of community members may outweigh the costs, provided that we limit our discussion to community-based development organisations, and do not try to generalise for civil society organisations as a whole.¹⁹

Moreover, the case of the demise of the APT and emergence of *Bug Saax Of* suggests that we are not looking at the wholesale erasure of the previous organisation, its officials, skill, knowledge and experience. As the old organisation fades and a new one emerges, in part to address life cycle changes within the community, members of the old organisation are likely to find their way into a new structure, and thus contribute expertise and guidance. *The Bug Saax Of* Council of Elders invented to achieve a compromise community agreement is precisely a means to institutionalise expertise and historical memory, without institutionalising particular community-based organisations themselves.

Taken as a study in the possibilities for the ongoing creation of new community-based development successes, the rise and demise of the *Association des Paysans de Tukur*, and the recent emergence of a new organisation built from its detritus, suggests factors which may help account for a sustainable development predicated on the ongoing reproduction of new, autonomous community organisations, each of which may last a generation or less. If this case is any guide, unintentionally benevolent state neglect, a tendency toward institutional syncretism, and technically savvy local leadership more or less fluent in developmentese may be among the factors that contribute to the social reproduction of community-based organisations and, by extension, development. The jury on this is out for Tukur itself, and, as a way of calling for analytic induction to extend this line of theorising, for similar communities in the ex-colonial world as well.

NOTES

1. Like Migdal (2001), I argue that the particular pattern by which the state constitutes itself in relation to and through society must draw our attention. But in this case, the importance of state-in-society has more to do with the way social forces fill the lacunae made available by an absent, benevolently negligent state, than with the state's presence as a socially constitutive force.

2. The Serer are actually a colonially codified ethnic umbrella category lumping together the people of the former kingdom of Siin, known sometimes as Siin-Siin or Sinig, along with six other

groups, some closely related to the group in the Siin, others not so closely linked. To conform to contemporary local self-designation and for simplicity's sake, I refer to the ethnic group predominant in Tukar and the environs as 'Serer'. For more complete reflection on the distinctions among Serer sub-groups, see Aujas (1931) and Galvan (2004: ch. 2).

3. Itself an excellent illustration of institutional syncretism. See Galvan 1997 and 2004: ch. 4.

4. See Berry 2002 for a discussion of the ubiquity of such overlapping, competing and negotiable claims to land in Africa.

5. While this was the case in some parts of the Senegal River Valley (Park 1993: 14–24), the same dynamic did not obtain in the Siin.

6. Fusing Meillassoux (1978) and Bourdieu (1998), it would make sense to think of these elites not as the accumulators of material capital in the form of land, but as holders of symbolic, social and cultural capital.

7. In and around Tukar, respondents to a socio-economic survey I conducted in 1993 (with the help of research assistants from the French government research agency, then known as ORSTOM, now IRD) reported mean peanut sales of 36.5 kilos per household (standard deviation 48.54 kilos, $n = 693$). Of 727 respondents, only 44 respondents, 6% of the total, practised fallow. Although longitudinal data for peanut production in this area are not systematic, extensive qualitative interviews put the 1960s mean yield at close to double the 1993 amount, and suggest that under the master of fire system, close to one-fifth of available land was set aside for fallow and pasture. These localised data on declining yields for the key cash crop are consistent with FAO statistics for all of Senegal, which show average peanut production of 944,798 tonnes for the period 1960–69 declining steadily to a 1990–99 average of 688,632 tonnes, a reduction of 27% (FAO 2006).

8. This section is based on extensive open-ended interviews with the seven core founders of the APT, semi-structured interviews with other members of the organisation, as well as observation of APT meetings. The bulk of the interviews took place during field research in 1992–93, as well as during a follow-up visit in 2001. Participant observation of meetings of the organisation took place in 1988, 1992–93, 1995 and 2001.

9. Interviews with APT founders and APT members are cited in the text and listed separately in the references. To protect the anonymity of respondents, they are listed as 'APT founder' to designate one of the seven individuals who helped establish the organisation, or as 'APT member'.

10. Tukar still had a weekly market day, where all these and other commodities could be found. Communities a long walk or short horse-cart ride away had market days on other days of the week. But the loss of the Mauritanian-run boutiques meant having to wait up to a week to get a hold of these goods. It also reduced available supply on market days, because the Mauritanians played a critical role in importing and distribution, as well as retail sales.

11. For his classic formulation of the economy of affection concept, see Hyden 1983, and for more recent reflections, Hyden 2001.

12. *Bula Matari*, or 'crusher of rocks' is the name Henry Stanley convinced locals to use for the Belgian colonial state, a power so formidable and out of proportion to society that it became and remained, in ex-Zaire and in other post-colonial societies, the primary locus for the accumulation of wealth, power and status (Young 1994).

13. Indeed, most accounts of relations between Serer peasants and the pre-colonial regime of the Mandé Gelwaar, who migrated to the area in about the fourteenth century, conquered the locals, and became the ruling dynasty of the kingdom of Siin, suggest ongoing antagonism between local peasants and the central state, then based in the village of Diakhao some 30 km to the east of Tukar (see Sarr 1986–87).

14. Despite its proximity to the capital Dakar (2.5 hours drive), telephone lines did not reach Tukar until 2002. Electricity is now (2006) only available in the central marketplace and a few compounds. The last 18 km of road to Tukar are still broken laterite and sand pathways, challenging to navigate in the rainy season.

15. See Crowder (1967) for the definitive study of the distinctive project of assimilation in Senegal.

16. This observation is consistent with recent literature on Wolofisation, which highlights both the degree to which Wolof language and culture are replacing those of related groups like the Serer, especially in cities (Cruise O'Brien 1998; McLaughlin 2001; Swigart 2001), and the emergence of an ethnicist 'backlash' against Wolofisation, in which the Serer are situated alongside Diola as important non- or anti-Wolof groups (Sambou 2005; Smith 2004).

17. For an overview of the origins of this term in religious anthropology, see Stewart & Shaw 1994 and Stewart 1999. For a more extended discussion of syncretism as applied to institutional and social change, see Berk & Galvan 2006 and Galvan & Sil 2007.

18. This official had no effective or strong ties to the ruling party or the state, although he worked tirelessly and largely without success to change this.

19. Indeed, it would be useful in recent work on civil society organisations in Africa to establish a clearer differentiation between political watchdog organisations (of the sort central to the analyses of Ndegwa 1994 and Gyimah-Boadi 2004) and community based development organisations (more the focus of Patterson 1998 or Ribot 1999). The latter so differ from the former in goals, scale, organisation, budgets and relations to the state that classifying them together as ‘civil society organisations’ probably adds more analytic confusion than insight.

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