

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DH - 14
Rural Animation in Senegal

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Institute of Current World Affairs
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New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Rural animation is based on the theory that technological progress in agriculture must be preceded by profound changes in peasant attitudes. Animation aims at inducing the peasant to accept the idea of progress through his own efforts, to take his fate in his own hands. In Africa, where peasant majorities now let themselves be exploited by urban minorities, rural animation obviously implies political revolution.

The techniques of rural animation were worked out by the French IRAM in Morocco (see DH-12) and are receiving their first full-scale test in Senegal. Though the idea is borrowed - we will return to the methods later on - animation is being carried out entirely by Senegalese. Its moving spirit here is Ben Mady Cisse, the austere and thoughtful director of animation in the Commissariat General au Plan. To Cisse, animation is closely linked with "decolonization": with the acceptance by Africans, and first of all by the elites, of the responsibilities of independence. (The opposite of "decolonization", as Cisse defines it, is the state of mind of those new African rulers that waste their countries' meager resources while counting on foreign aid to finance their development: they behave as if the Europeans were still ultimately responsible.) In recent months Cisse and his staff have been preaching animation and decolonization to the lower-level technicians and administrators, those closest to the peasants, on whom the success of animation in large measure depends. At these sessions, which last several days, the talk is remarkably free and frank, and one hears simple truths that are seldom heard in Dakar. Here, for example, is Ibrahima Sow, Cisse's assistant, speaking to a group in the village of Koutal in southern Senegal:

"We who call ourselves an elite may have professional qualifications but we do not have the spirit and drive that our country needs... We must rid ourselves of the city intellectual's mentality that looks at the peasant with contempt... Our first battle is with ourselves... If we do not change ourselves, we shall fail, and we shall have to lower our eyes when our children insult us... But once we have a group ethic we cannot be defeated..."

What Cisse and his men are trying to do, in essence, is to give the technicians an esprit de corps, a cause for which to work under difficult and unrewarding circumstances. The technicians - often very young, with little training or experience - spend months alone in the bush struggling with problems that have baffled experts. They are aware that their colleagues in Dakar get higher pay, do less work, and have much more plea-

sant living conditions than they. The "system" does not reward their efforts, and their morale naturally suffers. (One morning in Koutal the young men were laboriously making up lists of questions for an inventory of the resources of a village they were going to visit that day. As they wrote on scraps of paper, Radio Senegal was blaring the "news". The news was that the President was off again on a state visit, a thirty-two-member delegation was off to a cultural event in England, Senegalese delegates were off to international conferences on handball and the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and Dakar was playing host to a convention of the International Association of French-Speaking Journalists, an organization whose purpose I have been unable to discover. The contrast between the "news" and the activities in Koutal was striking.) The three days of living together in Koutal at least gave the young technicians a chance to hash over their problems with people they could trust. Their preoccupations came out in the question periods that followed each speech, and in the evening discussions around a kerosene lamp. Here are samples drawn from Koutal and two other animation seminars:

- Q. Why are there no high officials at this meeting?
- A. A good question that should be asked of the governors. They were invited, but they said they had a lot of work now... (Laughter)
- Q. Don't administrators' houses that cost one million francs (\$4,000) set a bad example of overspending for the peasants?
- A. Yes, but remember that the bush administrator's colleague in Dakar is living in a chateau with airconditioning, a refrigerator and a car.
- Q. What should we do when a village asks for a school or a cooperative, and they don't really need it or we don't have the means to give it to them?
- A. The point is to start a real dialogue between the state and the community. If this exists, then an honest explanation will satisfy them.
- Q. Human investment projects are not carried out the way the speaker says they should be... The deputies never have ideas for projects, and they and the national leaders never show up to share in the work...
- A. Do your own job well...
- Q. But then the deputy will be jealous, he'll think you want to take his place, and he'll try to have you fired or transferred.
- A. We all have to accept the risks of the battle... The deputy will talk only to the feudal leaders (i.e., chiefs, marabouts, traders)... They are becoming outdated... Tomorrow you will win...
- Q. I reported a case in which the peasants were being cheated on the scales of the cooperative, but nothing was done about it...
- A. Keep going higher until you get results. Lots of people, including all of you, know about these things, but nobody speaks up...
- Q. What can we do if we get conflicting orders from the technical services and the local administrators, if the local administrator tells us to distribute seed to his friends instead of to those who need it? Some of us are getting complexes about this...

- A. The local administrator is in charge, but if you have complaints take them to a higher level. (Derisive laughter. The officials at this seminar were equivocal on this issue.)
- Q. Isn't it unfair for the government to make those of us who earn low salaries pay the development tax? (A new tax of 5% on income over 30,000 francs - \$120 - a month.)
- A. Our country needs savings for development, but not one of you in this room has saved a single franc (laughter), so the government has to force us to save... Considering how poor our economy is, and the standard of living of the peasants, you - all of us who work for the government - are overdeveloped, not underdeveloped.

Like these seminars, animation itself is primarily a process of dialogue, of palaver. Animation begins with the choice of a small area which has the potential for rapid if modest economic growth and whose tribal patterns are fairly well known. The local director of animation sounds out a group of villages. He asks them to nominate some peasants for a period of training, in the dry season, when there is no work. (Usually the men should be between 25 and 40: old enough to be listened to when they return and young enough to absorb new ideas.) The director goes away, leaving the village to make its choice without outsiders present, then comes back to pick up the chosen men. The group then lives with the director at the local center of animation - a building that is deliberately rudimentary so the peasants will not feel out of place - for about three weeks. This is supposed to be long enough to influence the peasant, but not so long a time that he becomes detached from his back-



PEASANT WITH PEANUTS

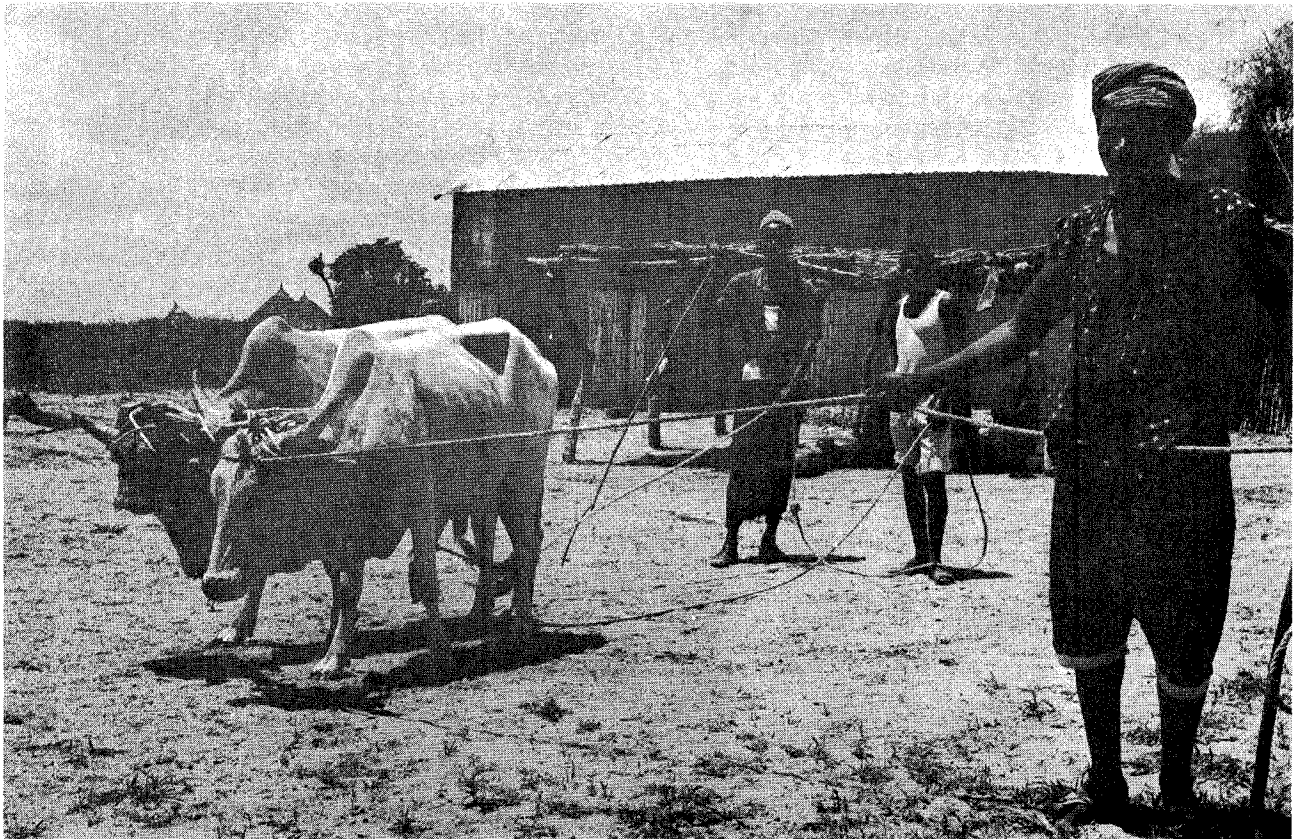
ground and does not want to go back. Officials and technicians speak to the peasants, and are required to stay and answer questions. The first phase consists of simple explanations of the history and government of Senegal and of the duties of those government services with which the peasant will come in contact. The second phase covers the economic needs and resources of the area in which he lives. The third phase includes discussions of the means, both technical and social, of improving his area. Each evening, at that time of relaxation when the peasant in his village would be palavering under the tree, the director and the peasants talk over the events of the day. Shortly before the end of their stay, the peasants are taken to a nearby village (not one of their own) and are asked to study its resources and answer the question: "What would you do if you lived here?" On the gala evening that ends the three-week stay, the peasants stage a play in which, in dance, song or drama, they express what they have learned in whatever art form is most natural to them. The director, looking on, learns what the peasant students have gotten out of their stay.

The peasant then returns to his village. His return is the occasion for a great palaver at which he tells the villagers what he has seen and learned. From then on, the "animator" is to be the liaison between his community and the government technicians. Whatever projects are to be undertaken are determined by a dialogue between the two. (In the past the government tried to impose projects which the peasants silently sabotaged - nobody bothered to ask their opinion.) A few months later, after a project has been decided on, the animator will be brought back to the center for two to ten days of instruction in the chosen field: organizing a cooperative or a human investment project, training draft animals, introducing new crops.

The technique of animation is designed to influence the peasant without alienating him from his environment. He receives no salary and is discouraged from seeking any official status. If he is alienated, he can no longer reenter his community and influence it, and he probably will want to leave it. (The main effect of rural schools is to drive the young men, those who should be animators, out of the village and to the city.) For animation aims at uncovering peasant leaders who will remain responsible to their community, not to the government in Dakar. This is of course difficult. According to Cisse, many peasants accept the fatalistic idea that the white man is rich in this world, while the black man will be rich in the next. And, in the words of Assane Diop Masson, another of Cisse's assistants, "we must remember that nothing foreign, and particularly nothing foreign that comes from the administration, will be easily accepted by the peasants." (Foreign to the village, in this context, not foreign to the country.) Cisse's approach to the peasants - and the very core of his personal philosophy of animation - is this: "We must make it clear that change is true fidelity to our ancestors. Their way of life was in tune with their environment, but today the environment is different. To be faithful to our ancestors means to adjust to our envir-

onment as they did to theirs, not simply to cling to old ways for no reason."

But what kind of change? In economic terms, animation is designed to mobilize Senegal's main form of capital: underemployed men and animals. And to do it inexpensively, out of local resources, without foreign aid. The 1962 budget for animation is \$400,000, none of it in foreign exchange; the extra income produced by animated peasants should provide more than enough foreign exchange to pay for whatever imports - seed, machinery, etc. - are needed. But obviously animation implies social and political change as well. Cisse does not attempt to impose an ideology on the peasant animators. On the contrary, Cisse simply wants to give a voice to the peasants and then "let them define our African socialism". In practice, Cisse believes that many of the new forms of organization will be cooperative rather than individualistic; but the village community is urged to adopt those methods that suit its needs and its habits. The aim is a contract between state and community, freely entered into and with a purpose desired by both (economic progress), in which the community provides work and the state provides technology; it is a continuing contract in which each partner must force the other to do his part. This is of course an ideal - the contribution of animation is that it seeks,



SENEGAL'S CAPITAL IS UNDEREMPLOYED MEN AND ANIMALS

through the peasant animators, to make the ideal practical. It is also original, in current African politics, in its profound mistrust of the educated urban elites that are now in power.

Animation is just getting under way on a large scale. The first two centers, opened in late 1959, were experimental: the regions chosen were considered to be the most difficult in Senegal, on the theory that if animation worked there it would work elsewhere. The results were promising - in one area, animation started the dissolution of a rigid caste system, and aristocrats now work with ex-slaves - and it was decided to expand as fast as possible. More than 3,000 animators have now been trained, and it is hoped the number will reach 8-10,000 by 1964 (over-fulfilling the goal of 7,000).

Since the great majority of the animators are very recent graduates, it is too early to evaluate their work. And, by the nature of what animation tries to accomplish - many tiny situations of change, none of them dramatic - its results are hard to see and to put into statistics. But what evidence one can find is encouraging. In one remote area the animators built first-aid posts which the government promised to supply with drugs; but the government failed to supply them; now the peasants set aside part of their annual earnings to buy drugs for a village pharmacy which they operate themselves. In another, animators have greatly reduced the local resistance to vaccinating cattle, and elsewhere animators led the members of a cooperative in voting out of office as president the local marabout, who was exploiting them in the old style. It is largely due to animation that the use of draft animals for plowing is spreading rapidly, that the growing of rice is increasing on the Senegal and Casamance rivers (at a tiny fraction of the capital cost of earlier mechanized projects), that vegetables are being grown more widely in the Casamance area. Around Kafrine, the peasants are diversifying their crops, and this rainy season they did not suffer the usual period of hunger.

Directors of animation report that peasant interest is increasing as animation begins to produce economic results. Two years ago a group of villages, fearing that animation was some form of forced labor, sent ex-slaves to the center; the next year they sent free men who would be listened to on their return. Cisse believes that animation as a rule is successful in inverse proportion to the degree of European influence. The village of Koutal, where there is a center, lives by farming, but no villager will go to the center - they are only three miles from the town of Kaolack, so they consider themselves too "evolved" for animation.

But if successful animation reduces peasant resistance, it is bound in time to increase resistance from those who benefit from the present system. Cisse and his staff are aware of this prospect; they hope to postpone any showdown struggle until animation is too strong to be crushed. Only recently, and after considerable hesitation, did they invade the territory of the Murid marabouts. They skilfully drew their first animators from the households of Murid leaders; the young Murids

then defended them against those who told the marabouts that animation was aimed at destroying Muridism. So far, animation in Murid country is only attempting increased production. The Murids approve of this goal; Falilou Mbake, their Grand Caliph, said in a recent interview that animation and Muridism are in "perfect symbiosis". Obviously Muridism as it is today is incompatible with the social goals of animation. Cisse and Ibrahima Sow, both devout Moslems, hope the marabouts will return to their religious role, for both believe that a reformed Islam should play an important role in Senegal's future.

"But they are not the most wicked ones," Ibrahima Sow remarked mildly during a conversation about the marabouts. The "most wicked ones", in the opinion of the animation leaders, are what is known here as "la bourgeoisie de la fonction publique" (the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, but the term is unfair to the original bourgeoisie). This is the privileged Dakar elite of those who profited from the end of French rule. Their references are a diploma and political connections. It is their privileges - the Mercedes-plus-chauffeur of the minister, the graft of the local administrator, the lavish scholarship of the university student - that in the long run are threatened by animation. To them, as to the marabouts, the message that animation hopes to convey is: reconvert or perish.

(I am aware that the views expressed here on the elite may seem harsh or intolerant. I doubt if the gap between rulers and ruled is as great in any industrialized nation, West or East, as it is in the new African states; nor can the privileges of the elites in Africa be justified by productivity. The Dakar stenographer earns the same salary as the Paris stenographer - and produces one-quarter the copy. The African student at the University of Dakar receives a scholarship of 15,200 CFA francs a month from France, plus 3,000 to 5,000 from his own government - twelve months a year. After he pays his fees, room and board, he has left more cash than the monthly salary on which a Senegalese laborer supports his family - and considers himself lucky. "An infantile disorder," says Leopold Senghor. But do disorders, even infantile, heal themselves automatically?)

In the clashes between animation and the elite, Prime Minister Mamadou Dia has sided, according to Cisse, with animation. But probably only one in a hundred such clashes reaches Dia's desk. The rest are obscure little struggles, carried on in remote villages; the outsider seldom hears what is going on, much less who won. An animator notices that the scales at the cooperative are fixed to cheat the members. He complains; the local powers may help him, or, if they are involved in the racket, they may squash him. The technician who seems too independent is bribed with a refrigerator, or, on a higher level, a junket abroad for "training". If he accepts, he may get in the habit of demanding "gifts" in return for his advice, and he in turn will suppress the animator who complains. The outcome of these many hidden struggles is likely to determine the future of animation, for the greatest danger to the animators is probably discouragement. The animator, once beaten, is unlikely

to be reanimated; the technician's initial enthusiasm fades quickly if he is not backed up, and he starts maneuvering to get himself sent to an airconditioned office in Dakar (a transfer in which ability is not likely to play a part). My friend Victor, the cooperative agent mentioned in DH-11, is one of these: he hopes to land a job as a clerk for Air France in Dakar.

In this obscure conflict, Dakar is a largely negative influence. It is perhaps symbolic that the first news I heard, on returning to Dakar from a swing through the bush to visit animation seminars, was the scandal of Ousmane N'Gom. N'Gom is leader of the government party in the National Assembly, Senghor's chosen successor as Mayor of Thies, and was at one time considered the number four man in the government. The news was that N'Gom had been accused by members of the Thies municipal council of swindling the town of \$150,000 on construction contracts. The story was kept out of the press. As this is written, no disposition has been made of the case, but I found no one in Dakar who thought that N'Gom would go to jail or even that he would be publicly exposed. By now the news has traveled far out in the bush. It is of course a dreary lesson, one of too many, to the men on whom animation depends.

Today the Senegalese political system is one in which one hundred flowers bloom. Ben Mady Cisse sows the seeds of true revolution; Ousmane N'Gom reaps the fruits of the coup d'etat by which the elite succeeded the French. So many changes are underway in Senegal, with unforeseeable effects, that it is sillier than usual to try to devine the future. I have simply tried to determine the arena in which that future will be decided.

Sincerely,

David Hapgood

(Photos courtesy of Senegal-Info)