



Large Water Projects and Conflicted Territorial Identities in Sub-Saharan Africa: Social Imaginary Significations linked to the Development of the Senegal River

American Association of Geography Annual Meeting, 7-11 April 2021

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Field work:

Lower Senegal River Basin



Main research questions & methodologies

The Senegal River – representations & territorial identities (at different scales)

- History of local communities along the River
- Social trajectories & “professional” identities (farmers, herders, fishermen)
- Geo-political aspects – border & national identities

The development projects – management & inclusiveness

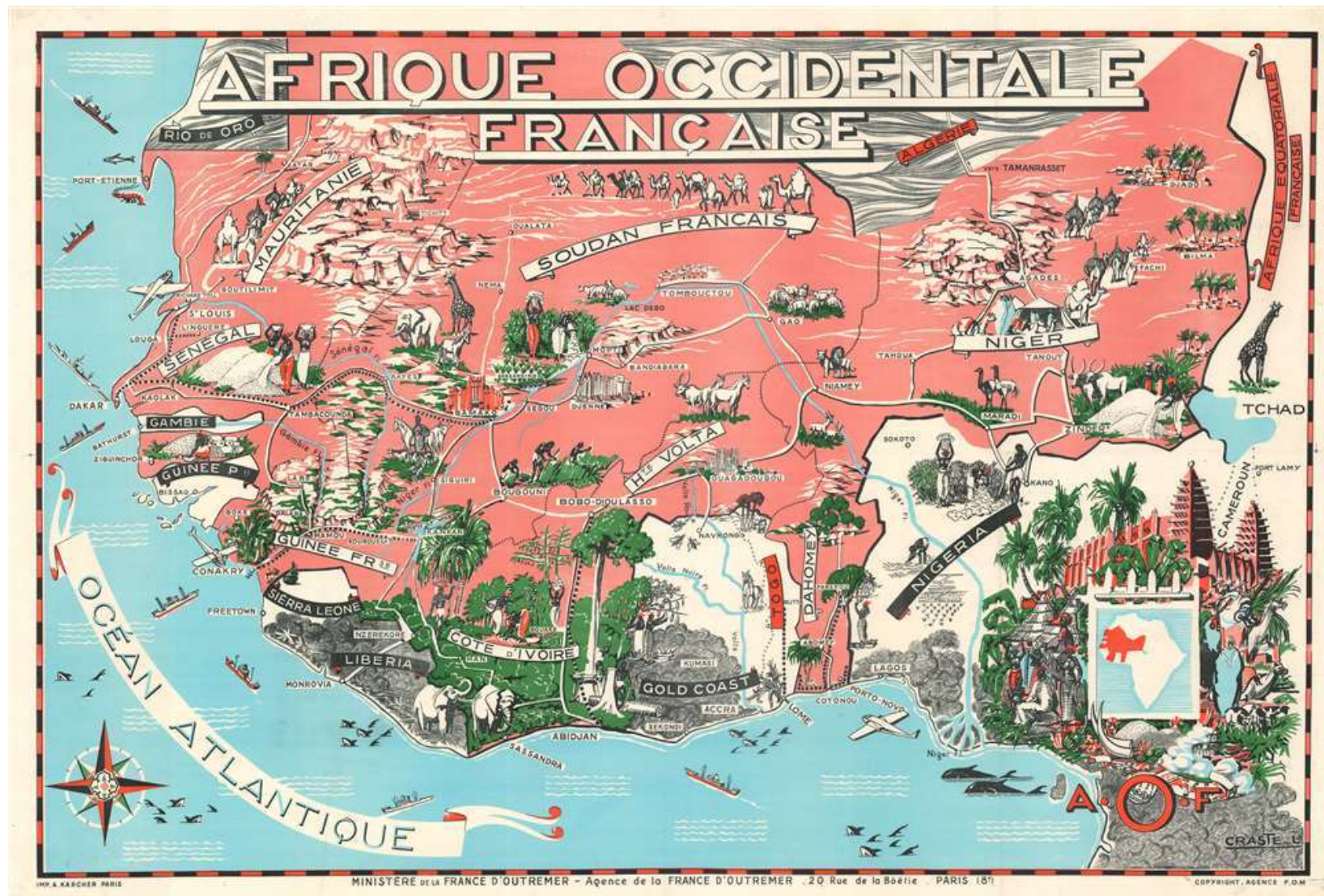
- Who decides what?
- How communities along the river are taking part in development projects

Methodology

- 200 semi/non-directive interviews
- Archives (reports, minutes of meetings)
- Participation to meetings

River Senegal – River of Gold
Medici-Laurentian atlas, 1351





Source: Agence de la France d'Outre-Mer, 1951

French West Africa (1895- till independences)

Brief history of the Senegal River Valley

Important potential agroecological zone in Senegal – River Senegal perceived as an “**oasis in the desert**”

- End of colonial period: different attempts to regulate the river and promote irrigation but with limited success
- Post-independence in 1960: idea again of cash crop for export and food crops for local substitution: sugar, rice, on top of other traditional cereals (sorgho, mil, maize) + tomatoes, onions, beans,...

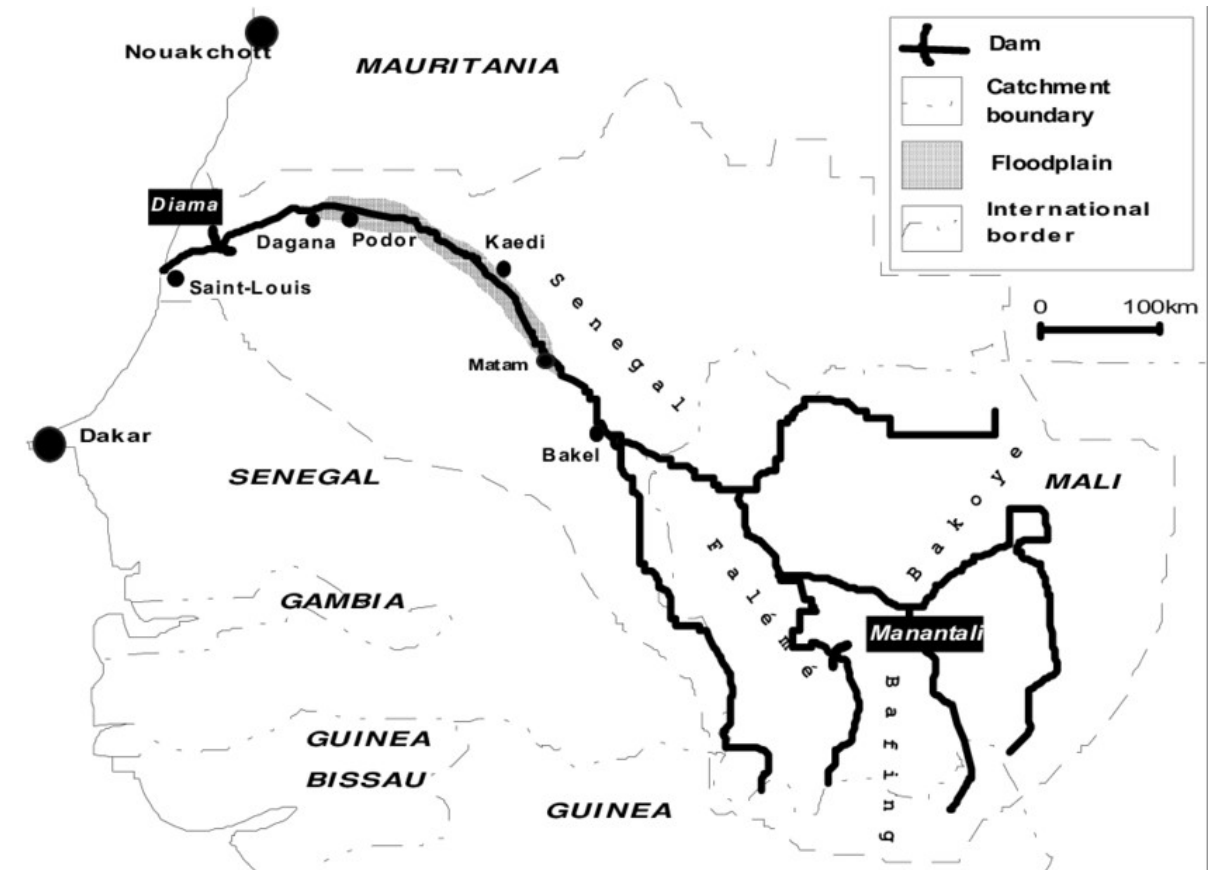
Desertification of the Sahel?

- End of 1960s & beginning 1980s– severe droughts
- Creation of the Senegal River Basin Development Authority (Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du fleuve Senegal – OMVS)
 - In 1972 between Senegal / Mauritania / Mali (+ Guinea in 2006)
- Concretisation of the idea of a series of large irrigation projects with the construction of dams in the 1980s

Senegal River – “**River of Gold**” ... as a channel for goods – trade economy

- River reaches gold mining areas of Ghana Empire
- Today concretisation of the idea of the Senegal River as a means of communication for landlocked Mali

The localization of the main dams



Source: Fraval & al, 2002



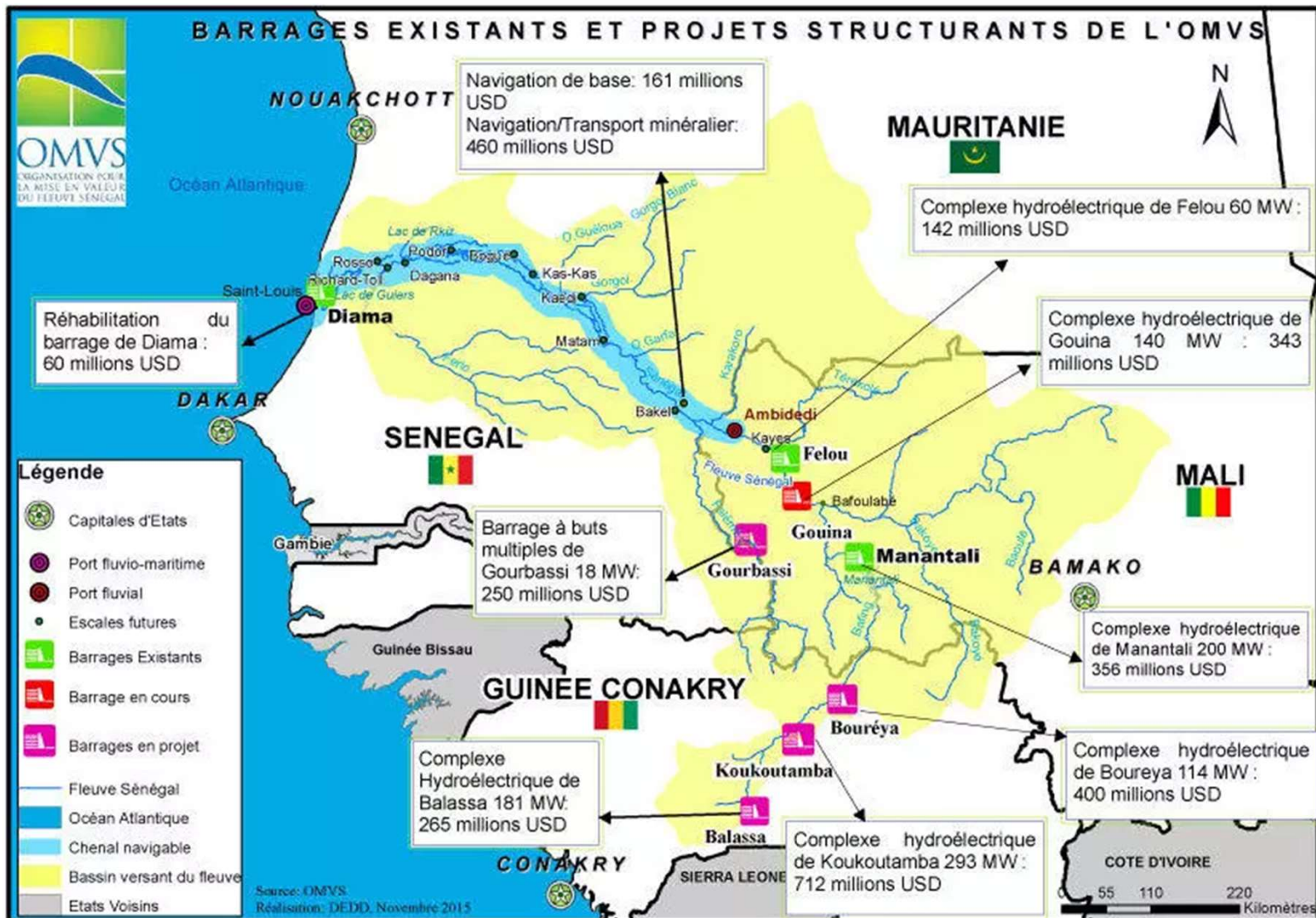
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Source: PDIDAS

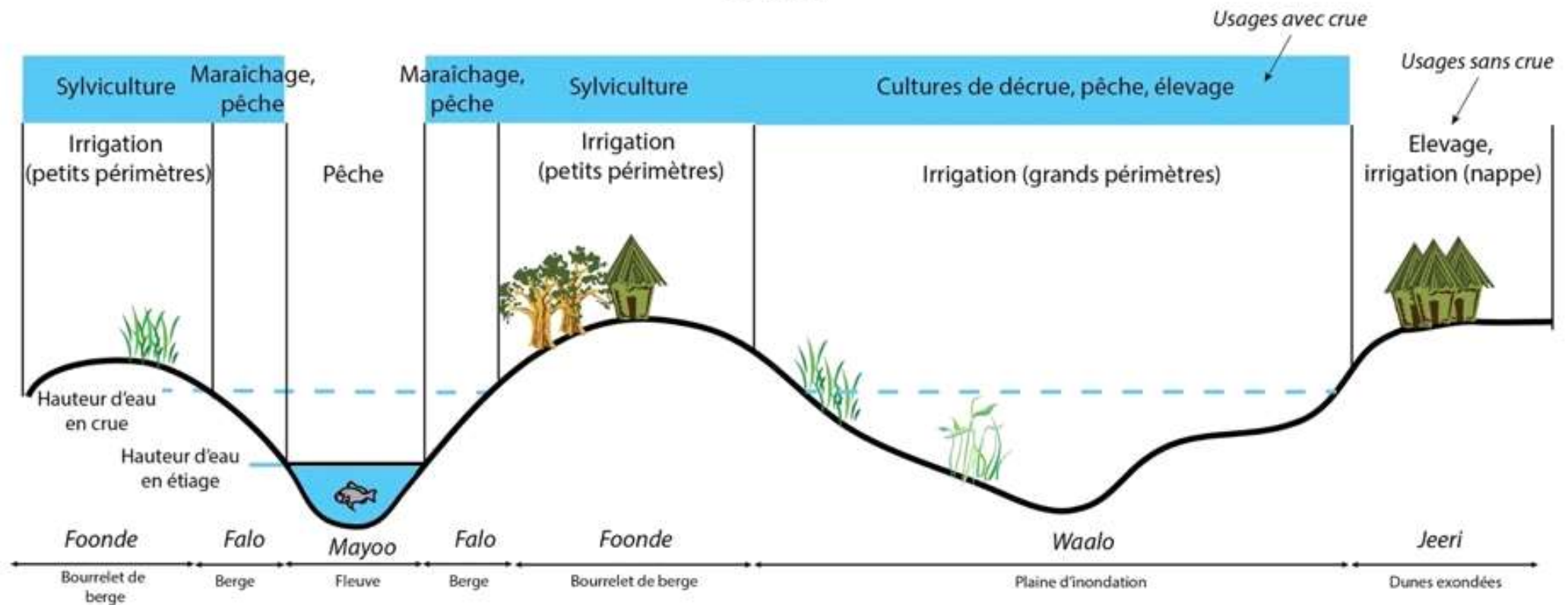


Dama

Source. Lemaire, 2020



USAGES



Source: Bruckmann, 2017

Old “traditional” farming system

IRRIGATION VS FLOOD
RECESSION CULTURE?



Source: Lemaire, 2020

Ideology of development

Dams

- Associated to “development”
- Affirmation of the States vs local communities
- Territorial control via irrigation projects on both sides of the river

Losers and winners

- Farmers >> herders marginalised >> fishermen without resources

Multiple detrimental environmental and health impact

- Invasive plant typha
- Schistosomiasis (bilharzia)

Territorial mutations

Border with Mauritania – tensions & conflict (notably the “events” of 1989)

- Mauritania : strong affirmation of the Maure identity – racism against Black communities
- 1989 conflict around land appropriation (partly linked to the development of the River Senegal)
 - Estimate 300 deaths and 10,000s of people evicted on both side
- River = now an international border but also matter of cooperation between countries at a state level

Climate crisis

- Acute local perception of climate change
- Irrigation – matter of survival vs labour migration in the 70s

Thank you for your attention!

Contact: E-mail x.lemaire@ucl.ac.uk

“This research/project is supported/funded by the British Academy’s Sustainable Development Programme,
supported under the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund”