

# The Soninke Civilization: The Social Mutations of the Contemporary *Soninkara*

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## Abstract

In this paper, the author aims to study the causes of the social mutations of the Soninke society from the colonial epoch to the present day. In fact, we have noticed that the western colonization which symbolizes a huge cultural aggression against the African societies in general, has brought about big transformations in Africa in general and in *Soninkara* particularly. Since this historical event, the society of the Soninke people has been undergoing a huge cultural influence of the whites through the capitalist system, the French school and the modernism. The traditions and the way of life of the Soninke people keep changing under a bad contamination of the modern Western civilization characterized especially by liberty (freedom of speech and opinion) and a so-called equality between the individuals. And things have started falling apart in *Soninkara* hence the social conflicts and the loss of good values.

## Keywords

Social, Mutations, Soninke, Society, Western, Colonization, Cultural Aggression, African, Transformations, *Soninkara*, Historical, Event, Influence, Whites, Capital, System, French, School, Modernism, Traditions, Way, Life, Contamination, Modern, Civilization, Liberty, Equality, Individuals, Conflict, Loss, Value

## 1. Introduction

The Soninke are black people who live in West Africa. They are mainly concentrated in the upper valley of the Senegal River divided into three countries namely Senegal, Mali and Mauritania (Pollet & Winter, 1971). They have played a prominent role in the history of this sub region with the Ghana Empire called *Wagadu* in the Soninke language. They founded also many kingdoms after the

decay of the Ghana Empire in Senegal, Mali and Mauritania (*Gajaaga, Gidimaxa, Jafunu, Kiringa...*) before the French colonization. The latter is considered as the mother cause of the mutations of the Soninke society. Thence, we are going to base on this historical event which has caused a great cultural hemorrhage in Africa in general and in *Soninkara* particularly to explain the deterioration of the Soninke way of life from the colonial time to the present day. We will focus on the cultural transformations, brought about by the French colonization in Africa, on the socio-traditional and moral aspect and also on the economic aspect in the Soninke society. In addition to that, other causes like migration and modernism will also be studied in this work in order to better demonstrate how the western cultural influence has deteriorated the socio-traditional and moral values of the Soninke people.

Our approach is different from those who usually tackle this issue based only the conflict of identity between the *horo* and the other social classes (*nyaxamalo* and *komo*). This study is going to deal with the social mutations on the whole system of life of the Soninke people.

## **2. The Impact of the French Authority on *Soninkara***

To implement successfully their machine of exploitation, the French colonial authority thought fit to destroy or neutralize all the powers of the traditional leaders, to impose a new administration and to settle a new education system in its colonies. At that epoch of colonialism, during the XX century, the French colonialists had no consideration of the way of life of their subjects that they looked upon as people without civilization. They argued that black African people needed to be civilized. For that purpose, they thought they had to format the traditional system of life of the Soninke people rooted in some values which can really make a society developed. Therefore, the imposition of a civilized system based on Judeo-Christian capitalism on the Soninke land, to meet the industrial needs of France, was view by the French colonialists as a great necessity.

### **2.1. The Destruction of the Traditional Leaders' Power**

The French colonial system had ousted (Richmond & Gestrin, 1998) the traditional rulers by putting an end to the royalty of the *tunka nlemmo*<sup>1</sup> in *Soninkara*. The main objective of this domination was the exploitation of the resources of the Soninke land in order to develop France. As the western countries were in competition of industrial development, that enterprise was necessary. Thence, all the local powers of the Soninke society of that epoch were neutralized. The *horo*<sup>2</sup> who had the monopoly of the chieftaincy (the ruling class) were turn into in-

<sup>1</sup>The *tunka nlemmo* represented the royal family.

<sup>2</sup>*Horo* is the plural form of *hoore* which means free-person. The *horo* are the upper class of the Soninke society. They are the traditional rulers, the religious leaders and the principal warriors. They have a privilege and prominent over the other social classes namely the *nyaxamalo* (middle class) and the *komo* (lower class).

termediaries between the French colonial authority and their people. They worked for the French colonialists. The one who were reluctant or tried to revolt were eliminated. Besides, the local army was weakened. A great number of the Soninke warriors<sup>3</sup> were killed for that purpose. The French colonial authority was empowering itself by acting so. That facilitated the realization of its project of developing France with the natural resources of Africa.

As a result, the Soninke local traditional leaders had lost their power in favor of the French colonialists. Thus, they served the French colonial administration. They fulfilled their tasks under the control of the French colonial authorities who became their masters. Therefore, the heads of the Soninke people of the colonial epoch turned into valets of the French colonialists who controlled their land. As they lost all the prestige of royalty, they were forced to work for the interests of France. Since the French colonialists had strong military power with sophisticated weapons, they succeeded in extinguishing the Soninke ruling and military powers.

Then, all the leaders of *Soninkara* were listed and controlled by the French colonial administration. Those who were the allies of the French colonial authority were rewarded, and those who were reluctant were intimidated (Tandjigora, 2012). The traditional chief or king whose duty was to protect his people from the enemies and safeguard their welfare, “no longer ruled in his own right, but as an agent of the colonial authority” (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1960). That was the starting point of the substitution of the African political system by the Europeans.

Pollet & Winter write: “*L’implantation française à Yélimané prit d’abord la forme d’un camp militaire. Elle était à l’image de l’effort politique du colonisateur qui voulait substituer sa domination au pouvoir traditionnel. [...] Le changement de régime eut pour conséquence politique principale que la puissance des Dukuré<sup>4</sup> fut décapitée, leur déchéance s’opéra au moyen de l’interdiction de la guerre, justification de leur pouvoir et source de leur prestige, et par l’abolition de l’esclavage, moyen d’enrichissement de tous les nobles en général. Les chefs durent obéir plus forts qu’eux et ne furent plus que des intermédiaires entre les administrateurs et la population.*” (Pollet & Winter, 1971).

Translation: “*The French settlement in Yelimane started by a military camp. It meant the political effort of the colonizer who wanted to substitute the traditional power. The change of regime had as main political result the destruction of the Dukuré’s power, their collapse was achieved by the prohibition of war, justification of their power and source of their prestige, and by the abolition of slavery, mean of enriching of all the nobles in general. The chiefs had to obey those who were more powerful (than them) and were mere intermediaries between (the colonial) administrators and the population.*”

<sup>3</sup>Warrior is called *yugu sire* in Soninke, warriors = *yugu siru*. According to the Soninke oral tradition, the *yugu siru* were eliminated by the *tubabu ni* (white men).

<sup>4</sup>The *Dukures* were the *tunkalemme* (royal family) of *Dyahunu* (or *Jafunu*), an ancient Soninke kingdom. It is geographically located in Mali after the balkanization of the African continent.

Moreover, to better ensure their power in the Soninke land, the French colonialists had created troubles between the traditional leaders who were essentially *hooro* (free-men) and the *komo*<sup>5</sup> (slaves) through the abolition of slavery and the creation of “villages de liberté”. This is the strategy to divide in order to better reign. The French colonial authority instigated the clan of the slaves to emancipate by claiming their liberty. That was a way of creating a social imbalance to weaken the traditional ruling leaders of the Soninke society so as to put an end to the *tunkaaxu*<sup>6</sup> and the *mangaxu*<sup>7</sup>. In fact, all the ways and means were good to extend the French colonial authority power and influence over Soninke land in order to meet the industrial needs of France which was in competition with its neighboring countries. And the social troubles could, really, weaken the authority of the traditional chiefs or kings. It was in this context that, the lower class, the *komo* have started to claim freedom in *Soninkara*. Thus, some families of this clan moved to remote lands to set up their own villages to free themselves. For example, we have the villages of *Turime* and *Bema* in Bakel<sup>8</sup>. That was a strategy to ensure their power and influence in the framework of their project of expansionism and their agricultural and industrial exploitation in Africa in general.

Furthermore, the sons of the chiefs were called to be trained in the French school in the region of Saint-Louis (north of Senegal) so as to assimilate them the colonial way of thinking and doing or the western cultural values, hence “Assimilation policy”. That was a forced integration of the traditional rulers’ heirs through western school.

## 2.2. The Assimilation Policy of the French Colonial Authority

The French colonial authority thought that it was vital to indoctrinate the sons of the chiefs the western cultural values in order to better succeed in their enterprise of agricultural and industrial exploitation on the lands of their subjects. This is a cultural colonization which is the worst domination. Thus, the traditional rulers of *Soninkara* would lose their heirs. That phenomenon could also make the sons of the chiefs hostile to the some traditions of their fathers. In other words, it could jeopardize the continuations of many traditions.

In actual fact, the French colonial authority used school as a cultural to stop the traditional training which was a channel of transmission of the Soninke cultural values in the royal court. One can understand that through the great importance that Faidherbe gave to the French school in Senegambia.

Bouche writes: “...*Faidherbe décida-t-il d’ouvrir une école spéciale pour eux où ils ‘apprenraient’ notre langue pour la commodité de nos relations avec leur pays et où ils seraient élevés comme des individus destinés à retourner au milieu de populations à demi sauvages [...]. Faidherbe voulait que vingt ans plus*

<sup>5</sup>*Komo* is the plural form of *kome* which means slave.

<sup>6</sup>*Tunkaaxa* can approximatively signify royalty.

<sup>7</sup>*Mangaaxu* can approximatively mean warriorhood.

<sup>8</sup>This piece of information was given by one of our informers, I. Soukhouna. He is from Manael.

*tard, qu'il n'y eut un seul chef, en Sénégambie, qui ne sortit de cette école.*" (Bouche, 1974).

Translation: "...Faidherbe decided then to open a special school for them where they would learn our language for the suitability of our relationships with their country where they would be brought up as some individuals meant for an environment of semi savage people [...]. Faidherbe wanted, twenty later, every chief in Senegambia to be a product of that school."

Faidherbe used the French school as a weapon of conquest. He wanted the sons of the chiefs to be transformed into allies of the French colonial authority in order to support the exploitation of the natural resources, in Africa, for the economic development of France. That is why, for this French former colonial governor, they must understand the French language and adopt the European mentality so as to be able to collaborate with the colonial administration for the interests of France.

In fact, as far as the sons of the chiefs assimilated the European values and ideologies, that would facilitate the colonial penetration in their society which were being exploited by the French colonialists on the behalf of France. They could provide them much information as the French colonialists did not understand the languages of their subjects. The sons of the chiefs would play both the roles of representatives and interpreters for the French colonial administration. Thus, the colonialist could easily know the gist of their subjects' affairs. They could also distinguish their enemies from their allies. Therefore, the opening of the French school, during the colonial epoch, on the African soil was a way to better control and dominate the local authorities and their people. In other words, it was a device of control.

And culturally speaking, when we learn a foreign language, we are strengthening the people to which that language belongs. In consequence, we become culturally dependent. That can even generate a kind of complex which symbolizes a psychological weakness and influence negatively our cultural identity. In actual fact, the promotion of a language can hugely contribute to the cultural and economic development of a society or country. Language is vital when regarding culture and economic development.

This issue is among the major difficulties of the black continent's development. The leaders, who should be references as far as African culture is concerned, are transformed into white blacks (*tubabu nbinu* in Soninke). They behave as western people to the detriment of their culture. They have western mentality and tastes. They educate their cultures in western culture.

As a matter of fact, it is the continuation of the phenomenon of the traditional leaders' sons' indoctrination which is reflected through the contemporary African rulers. The heirs of the traditional authorities were trained to act in the economic interest of France. The current African leaders act in the framework of "France-Afrique" cooperation for the benefit of France. Nothing has changed since the colonial epoch except the external aspect of things. Till nowadays, the

African leaders are forced to incorporate western values such as republic, democracy and many others to serve the western countries. All their policies are inspired of West. They have nothing of their own. They are still following the orders of their masters. They are under their control. That is why, they act as the representatives of the western leaders in Africa.

This is the effect of the assimilationist policy initiated by the colonial authority in Africa for the benefit of Europe. The western school is an industry which produces western products. It makes some Africa people alienated and many others hybrid. It is a silent killer of the African traditions and values.

In addition to the policy assimilation through the French school, the colonial authority set up a new court in *Soninkara* to compel the traditional leaders and their people to judge according the western laws.

### **2.3. The Imposition of the French Colonial Justice to the Soninke People**

Before the arrival of the French colonialists, the Soninke people had their own laws. They were written, but they were inspired of good morality and kept by heart. The disputes between people were mainly settled by reconciliation. In addition to that, there were some *cadis* who judge basing on the Islamic *sharia*. But when the French colonialists arrived on their soil, things had changed. The French colonial authority did not recognize the traditional laws of its subjects. It brought an apparatus of justice which was erotic to the Soninke society. Some laws that the Soninke people did not know and did not apprehend. Since then the local justice was replaced by the European one.

As justice is fundamental in a society, the French colonial authority broke the Soninke local justice in order to better ensure their domination over the Soninke land. Thence, the customary law and the *sharia* (managed by the *cadî*) were not considered by the French colonial administration. Any traditional leader or *cadî* could not do justice without the knowledge of the French colonial authority if not they risked punishment from their master who controlled everything. There was a reorganization of justice in the colonies in order to maintain the French order.

Eric Gasparini writes: “...*tout jugement rendu en matière indigène portant condamnation des dommages intérêts ou une amende, ne sera exécutoire auprès qu’après avoir été approuvé par le commandant de l’arrondissement. [...] l’administration une politique indigène en matière judiciaire, mais elle est également pourvu de moyens de contrôle importants sur le droit local.*” (Gasparini, 2010).

Translation: “...*any judgment done for the indigenous affairs regarding the condemnation to damages or fine, will only be executed after being approved by the district commandant. [...] the administration has not only an indigenous policy in terms of justice, but it was provided with important means of control on the local law.*”

The French colonial authority overviewed the local justice due to the direct administration of France on its colonies.

Pollet and Winter write: “*Il fut institué un tribunal coutumier, présidé par le chef de subdivision conseillé par deux conseillers. Ce tribunal rendait ses jugements, tant au civil qu’au pénal, en accord avec la ‘coutume saracolaïse coranique’ dans la mesure où elle n’est pas contraire à la morale et à l’ordre publique français. [...] La Cour de Nioro<sup>9</sup> tranchait en seconde instance et était seule compétente pour les affaires criminelles.*” (Pollet & Winter, 1971).

Translation: A customary court was settled, led by the subdivision chief, assisted by two counsellors. That court gave its sentences, as well civil as penal, in accordance with the saracolle koranic custom as far as it is not contrary to the French moral and public order. [...] The Court of Nioro.

The whole judicial power was between the hands of the French administration. Everything was done according to its convenience. Then, the local leaders and their people were subjects, and their land was ruled by the French colonial justice.

In the beginning, people were reluctant to the French laws, but gradually, they realized that they had no choice but to admit and comply with them in order to avoid troubles with the French colonialists. As time elapses, many Soninke people went to the court and civil registry established by the French colonialists either to settle some of their familial disputes or for having papers. Since the declaration of the children’s birth, marriage and death was a great necessity, the Soninke people were obliged to go to these places to have papers for their identification across their balkanized countries and the world. This also was the reason why, many parents were obliged to send their children to French school. They needed to understand the new world in which they were.

And nowadays, civil papers are in the core of the Soninke people’s life on account of school and migration. This is an effect of the substitution of the customary law by the French law. This phenomenon marked the start of the modern *Soninkara*.

Furthermore, to transform the African societies in general and *Soninkara*, the French colonialist imposed the capitalist system to their subjects. The latter would upset the traditional system of the Soninke people.

## 2.4. The Capitalist System in *Soninkara*

The principal activity to survive of the Soninke people, before the coming of the French colonialists and during the colonial time, was agriculture. They also practiced breeding cattle<sup>10</sup>, fishing and hunting. They exchanged their agricultural products by barter, which was basically the mean of transaction, to have *sappe* (salt) and *kambare* (rub)<sup>9</sup> (Pollet & Winter, 1971) (from the Moors) and cattle of ship, goats or oxen (from the Pulars). As a matter of fact, the Soninke

<sup>9</sup>*Nioro was a kingdom in Soninkara before the colonization of Africa.*

<sup>10</sup>Agriculture (*soxoye*) and breeding cattle (*naaburu maraye*) are still practiced in *Soninkara*. They are two principal traditional activities for survival.



have been practicing commerce since the Ghana Empire's epoch with the trans-saharan trade which experienced a great success in West Africa. And salt had been a precious good since then. Thus, that business had continued as far as the colonial period. The Moors needed cereals (*yille*) so much, and the Soninke needed salt likewise.

That is why the Soninke people had some experience in commerce hence the *dioula*<sup>11</sup> (*Jula*). The latter were realized not to practice commerce permanently by Dr. Tautain (Pollet & Winter, 1971). They did it for a specific objective. Once the latter was reached, they resumed growing crops.

Pollet and Winter write: "...le métier de dioula (*marchand ambulant*) n'est généralement pas une profession que l'on exerce toute sa vie, on fait un certain nombre de voyages pour s'acheter un ou plusieurs esclaves, de gagner le douaire (*la dot*) d'une femme, etc., puis on reste à ses cultures." (Pollet & Winter, 1971).

Translation: "...the dioula's trade was not usually a job that people did in their whole life. They travelled to purchase one or many slaves, to gain the dowry for a woman, etc., then they focused on their crops."

The Soninke people's experience in commerce and their crops would interest the French colonial authority during the colonial period. As a matter of fact, the Soninke had dealt with the French in the precolonial time precisely during the slavery in Africa. They were considered as the most civilized people in the sub-Saharan region by the Europeans at that epoch. The latter were impressed by their skills in commerce.

Pollet & Winter (1971) write: "Les Soninke ont été le sujet d'écrits épars qui se rejoignent cependant sur l'importance qu'ils accordent généralement aux activités mercantiles..., il s'agirait essentiellement d'un peuple de commerçants."

Translation: "The Soninke people have been the topic of various writings which however recognize the interest that they usually grant to the mercantile activities..., it would be essentially about a group of traders."

It was at that period that the *yille*, a basic commodity in Senegambia, became vital in the transactions.

Bathily (1989) writes: "Les transactions sur le mil, denrée vivrière de base en Sénégal, furent un facteur d'une grande importance dans l'histoire économique de la région au XVIIIe siècle."

*Le rythme de la traite des esclaves au Galam*<sup>12</sup> était largement conditionné par les disponibilités en mil dans les magasins des forts."

Translation: "The transactions with the millet, basic commodity in Senegambia, were a very important factor in the history of that region in the XVIII century."

*The rhythm of the slave trade in Galam depended mainly on the availabilities of the millet in the stores of the forts"*.

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<sup>11</sup>Dioula or Jula means trader in Soninke.

<sup>12</sup>Gajaaga is a former Soninke kingdom which stretched between the territories of Senegal and Mali (in the upper Senegal River valley and beyond the Falémé). It was called Galam by the Pular of Fouta (North-east Senegal).



Even after the abolition of slavery in XVIII century, the French colonizers kept on dealing with those whom they considered the biggest traders in the sub-Saharan zone in slaves (Pollet & Winter, 1971).

When the French arrived again in *Soninkara*, in the framework of the colonization of Africa, (the homeland of the Soninke people) to meet the industrial needs of France that things began changing. The French authority urged their subjects to seek profit by developing business in agriculture. That traditional basic crop (*yille*) interested again the French colonial authority so much that it imposed the Soninke people to pay the contribution by this agricultural product. Millet which was a basic survival product among the Soninke people was vital in the transactions. Then, a service, created by the colonizer, named “institutions de prévoyance” was set up in some Soninke areas like *Dyahunu* and *Tiringa* so as to control the *yille*. The French colonial authority had even prohibited, in those areas, the selling of this crop to the strangers (Pollet & Winter). The colonial administration had obviously interest in controlling the millet seeds (*yille*). In fact, each family used the *yille* for paying tax to the colonizer (Pollet & Winter, 1971). The contribution (*sagalle* in Soninke) became both a sacerdos and a great worry to the subjects especially when it must be paid by money in the XX century<sup>13</sup>. That duty, really, put the Soninke people under the yoke of the French authority.

Furthermore, the introduction of some services in the agricultural affairs like the “institutions de prévoyance” supervised the subdivision chief (Pollet & Winter, 1971) was something new to the Soninke people of that epoch. That phenomenon has penetrated progressively the agricultural field of *Soninkara* until the present day. Then, many services have been set up in some Soninke areas in the framework of modernizing agriculture.

As in business the sources of incomes are the services and the goods, so the increase of the agricultural exploitation and the creation of various services were advantageous to the colonizer to gain lots of benefits. This is the reason why, the Soninke people were told to enlarge their fields for more crops to ensure the consumption and the payment of the contribution to the French administration. An important amount of seeds must be kept for seeds of the following rainy season in some attics called “greniers de reserve” (Pollet & Winter) managed by the colonizer. That service named “institutions de prévoyance” initiated by the French administration was not free. The Soninke cultivators paid that service with their *yille*. That was a way of exploiting their subjects of the French colonizer.

The noticeable phenomenon which upset the socio-economic life of *Soninkara* was the substitution of the *yille*, which used to be a capital mean of transaction (Bathily, 1989), by money. The penetration of money has changed lots of things in the Soninke society.

In fact, the agricultural exploitation undertook by the French authority to meet the industrial needs of France and the development of commerce, during

<sup>13</sup>In 1945, the “Franc des colonies francaises” was imposed to the French colonies in order to allow France to benefit from the natural resources of Africa. <https://www.nofi.media/>

the colonial time, in the area of AOF<sup>14</sup> made people great seekers of profits. In addition to that, the ecological crisis with the droughts and the payment of tax (with money) imposed to the subjects in the French colonies made socio-economic life difficult in *Soninkara*. Thus, people were obliged to sell a portion of their crops or to move to the agricultural exploitation areas or big cities like Dakar, Bamako for gaining money. That was the beginning of the peasants<sup>15</sup>, transformation into money seekers.

People became money seekers for paying tax because the colonizer imposed to the subjects the payment of the contribution by money (Pollet & Winter, 1971). They also sought money for meeting their needs such as buying manufactured products from Europe, paying fares<sup>16</sup> and other services. The capitalist system began penetrating the life of the Soninke people. Thus, people moved as far as the “basin arachidier” of *Sine Saloum* in Senegal, in the framework of the “navétanes” (Pollet & Winter, 1971) to make a living.

As capitalism is characterized by the unceasing seeking of profit, Africa became another market where the colonialists could collect lots of benefits. In actual fact, developing the agricultural exploitation and the commerce of the finished products made by France was a strategy to extend the French market in Africa. As there was a strong competition between the European powers, there were tremendous stakes in developing the capitalist system in the black continent for the French and their rivals (English, Portuguese, Spaniard, and Italian).

Thus, a new trend of survival started in *Soninkara*. Some Soninke people started to lead mercantile activities for making a living. And progressively, commerce began to gain lots of actors among the Soninke. Then, the importation of the manufactured products favored the opening of modern shops in the Soninke homeland. What would change the social consideration of richness among the Soninke of the XIX century. It was no longer based on the amount of crops (yille) stocked in the *mara*<sup>17</sup> but that of money. That marked the beginning of materialism which has grown gradually.

The phenomenon of money acquisition would jeopardize the common life<sup>18</sup> (*koffo nbireye* in Soninke) that used to symbolize social cohesion in *Soninkara*, for the seeking of capitals enhances individualism<sup>19</sup> and selfishness. This system of life would threaten the social cohesion and the harmony in the social relationships of the *Soninkara*. The possession of private properties can make the

<sup>14</sup>Afrique-Occidentale Française (1895-1958) was the western side of Africa colonized by the French. It encompassed several countries such as Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin, Guinea Conakry and Ivory Coast. Its capital was Dakar. <http://www.larousse.fr>, Afrique-Occidentale française (AOF).

<sup>15</sup>In *soninkara*, people usually consume the crops they grow. That is to say the crops are meant for consumption.

<sup>16</sup>Modern means of transports such trains and cars have been brought to Africa since the colonial time. In *Soninkara* people used trains to travel to cities like Dakar or Bamako.

<sup>17</sup>Mara is an attic where people used to store the annual provision.

<sup>18</sup>The Soninke people believe that the common life is better. They say “*Bereke ana koffo nya*”. That is to say we have benediction in collective; it is more advantageous to live together for individuals.

<sup>19</sup>For the Soninke, only God is one, but human beings are social creatures, they need one another in order to survive on earth.

individual independent or even self-sufficient. Some troubles in the social relationships, therefrom, could put in danger some moral rules such as the respect towards the elders<sup>20</sup> (*hirsu* in Soninke) and the sense of sharing concerning one's properties (which symbolizes both solidarity and altruism). These fundamental moral values would be threatened by the materialism that capitalism embodies. And unfortunately, that money system enhanced by the industrialization of Europe has killed many social values which symbolized the common life. It has transformed the Soninke people into "big money seekers", hence migration which is nothing but the imposition of the capitalist system's result in *Soninkara*.

### 3. The Migration of the Soninke People and Its Effects in *Soninkara*

The migration of the Soninke people towards the big cities of, central Africa and France is another phenomenon which is a direct consequence of the French colonization. It has brought about many social mutations in *Soninkara*. The Soninke people love migration so much that their neighbors (in Senegal, Mauritania and Mali) recognize them by that feature. For example in Senegal, the Wolof people say that the Soninke<sup>21</sup> love migrating to Europe (precisely France) so much.

To study the effects of migration in *Soninkara*, we are going to divide the Soninke community into three groups: the *kaara nko* (the Soninke villagers in the rural areas), the Soninke people in the capital cities (Dakar, Bamako and Abidjan) and those who migrate to France.

#### 3.1. The *kaara*<sup>22</sup> *nko* (The Soninke Villagers in the Rural Areas)

The migration to some capital cities of West African countries, to France and to Central Africa has brought about many changes in *Soninkara*. Certainly, the houses for dwelling have been well modernized and the living conditions as well, but many customs and traditions have disappeared. And some other have been neglected. People are more engrossed in materials than in social values. That phenomenon has destabilized the social cohesion and the harmony in the relationships in the *ka*<sup>23</sup> and the *debe*<sup>24</sup>.

Formerly, the *hirsaxu*<sup>25</sup> was taken into account in *Soninkara*. Migration, however, has jeopardized this custom. As the *fakke*<sup>26</sup> and the possession of materials in the *kaani*<sup>27</sup> have rendered many people disrespectful, the orders and the recommendations of the *hirse*<sup>28</sup> are less or no longer considered. The *hirse* who

<sup>20</sup> *Soninkara* is an oligarchical society. The Soninke people consider much the respect and obedience of the *hirsu* (elders) even if this fundamental is declining so much in the modern *Soninkara*.

<sup>21</sup> The Soninke represent 70% of the African migrants in France. They consider France as El Dorado. The migration to France is mainly the dream of the Soninke youth.

<sup>22</sup> *Kaara* means homeland in Soninke. The Soninke people living in the homeland are called *kaara nko*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ka* means house in Soninke.

<sup>24</sup> *Debe* means village or city in Soninke.

<sup>25</sup> *Hirsaxu* is approximatively Elderliness.

<sup>26</sup> *Fakke* is total satisfaction in food.

<sup>27</sup> *Kaani* is the plural form of *ka*.

<sup>28</sup> *Hirse*, here, means leader of the group.

used to symbolize unity in the *koffo*<sup>29</sup> is not any more respected as *ganr*<sup>30</sup>. He was the vector of cohesion and harmony in the group. He called the family members to the oneness of the *koffo* for maintaining strong and harmonious relationships. He looked after the moral education for the welfare of everybody. And he included every member in that task. Moral was in the core of people's life. It was a mean of urging the members to respect religiously the collective life, for the strong attachment to the social life is beneficial for the unity of people. In fact, the main preoccupation of the *hirse* (leader) was the oneness of the group (family) for the social cohesion and the harmony in the relationships in the *ka*. The abundance of money and materials, however, has undermined the *hirsaaxu*. If the colonizer had destroyed the power of the traditional for reducing him to a mere servant, the migration, as far as it is concerned, has deteriorated the symbol of unity of the *ka*: *hirse*.

This phenomenon of disrespectfulness towards the *ka nhirse*<sup>31</sup> is similar to the death of the general whose troop will undergo defeat because of their broken spirit. Thus, in the *kaani*, nowadays, we cannot talk any more about unity or oneness because the abundance of money and materials has favored individualism, selfishness, self-sufficiency and indiscipline. Most of the family are not characterized by discipline and modesty, but they are rather arrogant and disrespectful. In consequence, the whole body of moral norms (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1960) which held people to live together in peace and harmony are, nowadays, affected by these vices.

Some values like reverence and obeying the elders have become obsolete. As a result, all the members have become *hirse*. No one, nearly, admits the authority of the leader. The juniors, the women, the children have a poor consideration towards the *hirse*. They follow more their passion and desires than the recommendation and the orders of the *hirse*. This situation is similar to a boat without captain. The one who used to be religiously respected and around him people gathered to have a good social organization sees, nowadays, his authority denied by his members. Each member, almost, is the chief of himself or herself. Therefore, in a social group where everybody is an authority, the social cohesion will inevitably decay. The relationships are strained and the misunderstanding and the internal conflicts will spoil the social balance and the peace between the members. Thus, the stringent responsibilities (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard) of the chief such as education (*maraye*) and unifying the group that serve to promote oneness in the *ka*, have been deserted. People are preoccupied with their own businesses.

As a matter of fact, migration has enriched the *kaara nko*, but it has destroyed the social cohesion and the harmony in the relationship. Though they have a lot of comfort, beautiful houses and plenty of commodities stocked in their *maro*<sup>32</sup>,

<sup>29</sup>Any association (of human beings) is called *koffo*.

<sup>30</sup>*Gani* means past or in the past.

<sup>31</sup>*Ka nhirse* means the leader of the house of chief of the family.

<sup>32</sup>Migration has made the Soninke people the richest social group in their countries.

most of the Soninke people live “alone together”. That is to say they are in the same house, but they are not unified. The *hirse* is no longer the symbol of unity in the *ka*, for the disrespectfulness and the arrogance of the family members.

The abundance of money, in *Soninkara*, has also changed the consideration in the social relationships. Even the parents show more respect to their sons who are *faranci nko*<sup>33</sup>. They follow their desires, but those who are in *kaara* are less considered. This phenomenon is general among the *kaara nko*.

As far as the *debe* is concerned, the traditional structure dwells intact, but the social cohesion and the harmony in the relationships between the *xaabilo*<sup>34</sup> are deteriorated.

What was more essential in the social relationships between the families no longer exists. Money has given independence to lots of *xaabilo* especially the lower class. And that has created a kind of emancipation of the *komo* ((the former) slaves). In many Soninke villages, the people of the lower class do not admit any more to be considered as slaves (*komo*) hence the social tensions. Since they possess wealth and being also influenced by the western democracy<sup>35</sup>, they claim equality and better consideration.

We have noticed that many people of the lower class are richer than their former masters due to the migration. That phenomenon has been the main cause of the social tensions between the *hooro* (upper class or free men) and the *komo*. The latter are fighting in order to build up their identity. Then, they claim respect and an equality of rights between the *xaabilo*. Though their claims are reasonable, they bump into the refuse of the *hooro* who do not want to lose their preeminence and their social privileges (Diagne, 1967). That situation has upset the political solidarity (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1960) and has entailed social conflicts in some Soninke villages.

In actual fact, the relationship of domination that used to exist between these two social classes is, nowadays, the principal reason of their conflict. The *komo* no longer admit obedience and servitude towards their former masters. They do not have any more that will of submission to them, for their fortune. They require, instead, the *hooro* to recognize their dignity as their fellow creatures. In other words an equal treatment in the social relationships is required. The *komo* show a will of change and the *hooro* want a perpetuation of the relationship of domination. The latter try to redefine the social relationships in a way that does not convince the former. That has generated some dynamics which are destabilizing the social cohesion in *Soninkara*. In some Soninke villages, the social polarization is obvious. For instance, we can quote Tuabou, Baalou, and Laani<sup>36</sup>.

This social crisis is almost everywhere in the Soninke villages nowadays. This issue has decayed the basic relations that make up the social order (Fortes &

<sup>33</sup>The Soninke migrants in France are called so in Soninkara.

<sup>34</sup>*Xaabila* (singular) is approximatively family.

<sup>35</sup>As democracy advocate liberty and equality for all the individuals, the lower class people defy the upper class people so as to be well considered and well integrated in the affairs of the society. They no longer want the noble men to look upon as slaves.

<sup>36</sup>Tuabou and Baalou are in the county of Bakel (north-east Senegal) and Laani is in Mali.

Evans-Pritchard, 1960) in the whole Soninke society. As the axiomatic premises of the social order are affected by a social crisis, the social unity, in the villages, is fragmented. So, the common life is no longer meaningful because people are losing sight of the common interests. They are rather preoccupied with sectorial and private interests.

### 3.2. The Soninke People Living Capital Cities

The rural exodus which is result of the capitalist system, has made lots of Soninke people move to some of the West African countries' capital cities like Dakar, Bamako and Nouakchott. There is a great number of the Soninke living in these big cities. This phenomenon has injured *Soninkara* socially speaking.

Those who have decided in the capital cities cope with a problem of educating their children in *Soninkaaxu*<sup>37</sup>. The latter is fundamental in *Soninkara*. For the Soninke people, the one who does not know his or her culture, language, history and genealogy is not a real *Soninka nlemme*<sup>38</sup>. Fortunately, most of the Soninke children born in the capital cities do not really the cultural patrimony of *Soninkara*. The worst thing is, they do not even know how their homeland (kaara) is and they cannot speak Soninke. They are influenced by the city life trend so much that they are culturally lost. Even though, the Soninke families living in cities try to keep their social relationship through ceremonies and some organizations, they have failed to educate their children in *Soninkaaxu*. The *kaara nko* see it as a shame.

Furthermore, the matrimonial alliance with other ethnic groups has impacted negatively on the Soninke living in cities. For instance in Dakar, we notice that those who have married Wolof women have lost their offspring culturally speaking. Many Soninke children cannot speak Soninke because of their Wolof mothers. The latter refuse to integrate in the Soninke way of life. This matter has, fundamentally, destroyed many Soninke family units in the cities. The *kaara nko* are shocked and disappointed by this issue. They cannot digest the fact that a *Soninka nlemme* who are not able to express themselves in the language of their homeland. They feel it as a cultural loss.

Many *Soninka nlemme*, in Dakar, are not recognized. In fact, the culture features of a Soninke do not appear on them. They ignore *Soninkaaxu*. This is the reason, some *kaara nko* do not consider them as Soninke.

### 3.3. The *faranci nko* (Soninke People Living in France)

The migration to France is seen by the Soninke people as a key of success in their life. Formerly, they only focused on agriculture to survive, but since the end of the XX century, things have started changing. Now it is the migration, the greatest source of incomes, which ensure the survival in *Soninkara*<sup>39</sup>. People depend

<sup>37</sup>*Soninkaaxu* means both the Soninke cultural identity and the whole cultural patrimony of the Soninke.

<sup>38</sup>*Soninka nlemme* means a child of Soninke.

<sup>39</sup>Author's observations on the Soninke community living in the upper valley of Senegal River.

entirely on the migration to France. They say: “Faranci nyi jikke nya” (France is a hope). The essential revenues of the Soninke people come from France. Then, *Soninkara* has become strongly dependent on France.

Certainly, migration has been advantageous economically and financially speaking, but it has deeply changed the behavioral aspect of the Soninke people and has negatively affected some social norms.

The peasants who have turned into wagers is a phenomenon which has brought about many social mutations in *Soninkara*. Thus, the value of *yille* is replaced by that of money. The latter is possessed by the *faranci nko* who are always considered as the rich in *Soninkara*. This change of consideration has generated another mindset that is undermining the Soninke moral and social norms. That is why, we notice that the *faranci nko* are more considered than the *kaara nko*. They hold the stringent responsibility, in the modern Soninke society, which is ensuring the *biraadi*<sup>40</sup> in *kaara* (homeland). Since the crops are not regular because of the ecological crisis (droughts and rarity of rains), all the expenditures of the *ka* are ensured by the *faranci nko*. They are the actors who keep afford the homes. It is the main objective of migration among the Soninke. As they like eating much and comfort, they religiously respect the *faranci nko*. Even the chief of the family who is traditionally obliged to stay in *kaara* for managing the *ka* for the common interest, is behind them. The latter usually call them for the commodities, the bills (water and electricity), and many other expenditures. This has ranked the *faranci nko* over the *kaara nko*.

However, the Soninke migrants in France are undergoing a great influence of the French society. This is the cause of their mutation. To integrate into the French society, they are obliged to abandon or even alienate a part of their cultural identity. The Soninke in France have lost many values especially those who have settled there with their families. They cope with a real problem of education concerning the children. The latter being brought up in a cosmos where there is a lot of liberty, lose sight of their culture. They adopt some values that are utterly contrary to those of their fathers and grandfathers. We observe a break (Timera, 1996) with the *Soninkaaxu* amid the Soninke of France. They are crying over this crucial social issue.

Furthermore, the basic social relations (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1960) between the *xaabilo*<sup>41</sup> in France are strained hence *gambanaxu*<sup>42</sup>. There is, nowadays, a great social conflict between the Soninke of France. The *komo* do not accept any more the traditional social configuration which gives all the privileges

<sup>40</sup> *Biraadi* can approximately mean commodities (rice, millet, sugar, milk, cooking oil briefly all the basic needs for survival).

<sup>41</sup> The Soninke people are strongly conservative. They have brought in France the same traditional organization they have in *Kaara*. However, they are coping with a great social conflict between the *xaabilo* especially the *hooro* (free-men) and the *komo* (slaves). The latter claims equal rights and treatment. The former refuses so as to keep their social privileges and preeminence.

<sup>42</sup> *Gambanaxu* is a social issue in *Soninkara* which has appeared in the XXI century. However, if we study meticulously, we will find that it is originated in the French colonization of Africa. Many revolts of the *komo* have been repressed by the *hooro* since the colonial time. But the *komo* are still fighting for equal rights and treatment in the villages.



and domination over them. Then, the *gambanaxu* symbolizes the revolt of the lower class. They argue that all the human beings are equal and must be treated equally. Being in a society which supposedly defends the human rights, the *komo* have engaged themselves in a combat to fight against the social inequalities of the Soninke societal organization. As a matter of fact, it is them who motivate the *komo* of *kaara* to struggle for their liberty and equal treatment of the *xaabilo* in the Soninke villages. This has been the source of social conflicts in many Soninke villages. The social stability and order are strongly disturbed by the fight led by the lower class for equality for all in *Soninkara*. This crucial issue has even caused some deaths. We can quote *Laani*<sup>43</sup> in 2020 as an illustration.

## 4. Modernism

Modernism is a movement from the West which is against whatever is traditional and religious. It is like a tradition-killer because it modernizes people and makes them dislike traditional life. And people tend to be more and more modern by loving materials to the detriment of the traditions. The worst thing of modernism is its toxic and pervasive influence on the youth, the hope of the future.

Thus, the Soninke people are not spared by this phenomenon. We can say that nowadays, the situation is almost chaotic as far as morals and traditions are concerned.

The windows through which modernism has had access to fragment the traditional and moral values are: school and technology.

### 4.1. Western School

The western school is not only a temple of knowledge, but also it is a channel through which some ideologies and doctrines are conveyed. We have noticed that since the youth has started learning in the western school, they have adopted another way of thinking which is totally different from their parents' and grandparents'. That has involved a conflict of generations between the youth and the old people in *Soninkara*.

The western has distorted the mentality of many young Soninke people. The majority of the young people do not like the traditions. They see them something that pertaining to the past (*ganni* in Soninke). To their point of view, they have a growth mindset, they need to behave in different way as intellectuals. For them, the world has changed, therefore the society has to get rid of the traditions as some white people have done to follow the modern trend. As they have been taught the freedom of thinking and speaking at the western school, they have become hybrid and hostile to the traditions. They, frequently, challenge the traditional way of life of *Soninkara*. They always utter "these traditions are nonsense".<sup>44</sup>

Sibiri says (Badian, 1963) "*Je ne sais ce qu'on vous met dans la tête à l'école.*

<sup>43</sup>*Laani* is a Soninke village Mali.

<sup>44</sup>We usually hear this kind of speech from the Soninke learned young people.

*Vous nous revenez gâtés, insolents et irrespectueux. [...] vous vous croyez supérieurs à tous les autres.”*

Translation: “*I do not know what they put into your head in school. You return to us spoiled, insolent and disrespectful. You believe you are superior to the rest of people.*”

And the old people see their children as white blacks with a narrow mind and some behavioral issues. They state that school is “bad” because it destroys, culturally and spiritually, the younger generation<sup>45</sup>. Usually, they say that the children have learnt, but they know nothing hence the blaming game. For them the French school’s content is in conflict with their background (beliefs and traditions). They also say western school only instructs, but it does not educate.

Actually, the French school’s program is not liked but many African people, because it produces French black people (Richmond & Gestrin, 1998). The content of the syllabus is rather assimilationist. It does not teach any African culture or history. Everything is centered on the West.

Furthermore, the concepts such as liberty, right, and democracy are misleading the younger generation. In fact, they have failed to adapt them wisely to their social realities. For them, these concepts involve libertinism which is noticed through their immoral, irresponsible and lawless behavior. Actually, their perception of things involved by these concepts has given them another mindset. That is why, they are in permanent conflict with their background. They lack discipline and wisdom. And these values must go with knowledge in order to make it beneficial to the whole society. Even if they are academically strong, they are morally and spiritually weak. Now, the old people love morals and religion. They are disappointed to see their heirs behaving without “yaagu”<sup>46</sup>.

## 4.2. Technology Devices

Since the information communication technology (ICT) devices have penetrated the Soninke society, great mutations have been noticeable on the behavioral aspect above of all among the youths.

The technology devices such as televisions and mobile phones have driven the nail. They have poisoned the behavior and the faith of the Soninke young people. Nowadays, the youth is morally and spiritually weak due to the misuse of information communication technology devices.

Technology has put the young Soninke into contact with the virtual world which renders them stereotype. They take many things as reality from that world which are ruinous for them morally and spiritually speaking. The latter has given them some vague and uncontrollable tastes which make them unaccountable and lazy. Thus, they fail to make efforts to save their cultural heritage. They do not strive to develop their culture. They are followers of their passions: films, football briefly leisure. And, the appearance of social media in XXI century has

<sup>45</sup>Till now, there are many Soninke people who prefer Arab Islamic school than French school.

<sup>46</sup>The term *yaagu* is Soninke. It means shame.

worsen things morally speaking. The young boys and girls have no shame and modesty hence perversity and indiscipline. Their way of speaking and behaving is catastrophic.

This phenomenon has made the old people so much worried. They see their heirs some values which are not at all adequate with their culture and their faith. Their hope is broken when they see, in the villages, the youths behave in an irresponsible way hanging so much to leisure. Since the Soninke culture hates laziness and unaccountability, they feel deeply disappointed. They say “nowadays, the children are nothing for all”<sup>47</sup>.

However, the parents are also to be blamed. They buy ICT devices for their children without any control. Most of them have the same tastes as their offspring even if there is a bit nuance. They spoil them by giving much liberty in following the virtual world which affects badly the youth.

As a matter of fact, the advance of technology, above of all in the XXI century, has deteriorated the whole body of social and moral norms of *Soninkara*. Things have moved from bad to worse because of too much freedom. It has enhanced ill-speaking, calumny and debauchery. As a result, people have serious moral issues. The mutual respect and the sense of responsibility have nearly disappeared. Everyone is the chief of themselves following their passions. It is licentiousness and anarchy which have replaced order and stability. The contemporary *Soninkara* is characterized by the deterioration of the good values.

The values which give people a good personality, guarantee of social peace and stability, are declining nowadays. Most of people above of all amid the youths are disrespectful, arrogant, rude and selfish. These discipline issues are jeopardizing the harmonious and cohesive life in modern *Soninkra*.

## 5. Conclusion

Since the French colonization in Africa, *Soninkara* has been experiencing many social mutations which are deteriorating the values that underpin a cohesive and harmonious societal group. The arrival of the French colonialists caused the disappearance of the Soninke kingdoms and entailed a great social disorder. It is the mother cause of the social mutations. In addition to that, we have migration and modernism which have badly affected the Soninke way of life. They have jeopardized the common life which used to symbolize unity and oneness in *Soninkara*. Nowadays, most of the Soninke people have discipline issues that have endangered the order and stability of the society. They have also brought about social conflicts between the classes and the generations. There is no understanding between people of the modern Soninke society because of the fragmentation of the social and moral norms that used to guarantee order and stability.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

<sup>47</sup>The old people, nowadays, are shocked with the irresponsible behavior of the youths and their lack of good morality.

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