

MAURITANIA – THE OTHER APARTHEID?

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Abbreviations

CMSNS	Comité Militaire du Salut National (Military Committee for National Salvation)
FLAM	Forces de Libération Africaine de de Mauritanie (African Liberation Forces of Mauritania)
FURAM	Le Front Uni pour la Résistance Armée en Mauritanie (The United Front for Armed Resistance in Mauritania)
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OCAM	L'Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache (Organisation of the Afro-Malagasy Community)
OMVS	L'Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur de Fleuve Sénégal (Organisation of Senegal River Valley)
POLISARIO	Frente Popular para Liberacion de Saguia el Hamra y de Oro (The Liberation Front for Self-determination of the Western Sahara)
PRDS	Parti Républicain Démocratique et Social (Republican, Democratic and Social Party)
SEM	Structure de l'Education des Masses (The Structure for the Education of the Masses)
UM	Ouguia Mauritanie (Mauritanian currency unit)

Mauritania

Location: Northwest Africa, latitude 25⁰ & 15⁰, longitude 17⁰ & 7⁰. Bordered by Senegal to the south, Mali to the east, eastern Algeria to the north, West Sahara to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west.

Main geographic features: The country occupies an area of 1,037,000 sq. km, of which 80 per cent is arid and 20 per cent semi-arid. It consists of a plateau, of which the highest point is 915m, and the Adrar Mountains in the north. Mauritania has 700km of Atlantic Coastline and 800 km of shoreline along the Senegal River.

Population: Estimated to be 2 million in 1988.

Ethnic division: Black Africans and Arab-Berbers.

National languages: Hassaniya (Arabic dialect). Pulaar (Fulani), Soninke, Wolof, Bambara and Imraguen.

Official language: Arabic, and as administrative language French.

Religion: 100 per cent Muslim of the Malekite Rite.

Date of Independence: November 28, 1960 from France.

Capital: Nouakchott.

Currency: Ouguia Mauritanie (UM)

Political System: One-party rule 1961-1978, Military rule 1978-1991, contested multi-party system inaugurated in 1992.

Economy: Agriculture, livestock, fishing and iron-ore.

Literacy rate: 17 per cent.

GNP: US\$ 800 million, US\$400 per capita (1991).

Foreign debt: US\$2.1 billion, US\$ 120 per capita (1991).

Main problems: Racial division, slavery, political instability, serious environmental degradation caused by drought and desertification.

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Garba Diallo

The Present Crisis

Since its artificial creation by colonial France in 1960, Mauritania has been a playground for violent ethnic strife, the shameful practices of classical slavery, civilian/military authoritarian rule compounded by serious ecological degradation resulting from prolonged droughts and catastrophic desertification processes. These four elements seem to have been mutually reinforcing to make Mauritania one of the least politically stable, most underdeveloped and heavily indebted countries among the least developed nations of the Third World. The arbitrary creation of Mauritania by the forcing together of two ethnically distinct and historically antagonistic communities makes any attempt to build a sense of nationhood and national identity a daunting task. This has been exacerbated by an obsessive determination on the part of the Arabs not to share political power with their black co-citizens. It was in the name of national “unity” that Mauritania’s first president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah abandoned free political pluralism in favour of one-party rule in 1961 (Gerteiny, 1967). This centralization of power caused widespread discontent at the periphery, and corruption and nepotism in the centre. Political power was removed from the south to the Arab north, thus confirming black fears of Arab domination. Racial tensions between the ruling Arab north and disfranchised south mounted and exploded into periodic violence in 1966, 1968, 1979. The Sahelian droughts of the 1970-80’s and Mauritania’s involvement in the West Sahara War in 1976-79 turned Arab nomads into ecological/war refugees and created an extensive slum belt around the main towns and along the Senegal Valley (Diallo, 1992).

Mauritania’s one-party civilian regime was deposed in a coup d’etat by the Army Chief of Staff, Lt. Colonel Moustapha Ould Baleck, in July 1978. The new junta called itself “Comité Militaire du Salut National” (Military Committee for National Salvation), CMSN. It promised to pull the country out of the war, restore national unity and repair the damaged economy.

The first promise was fulfilled in 1979 when Mauritania gave up its part of the Sahara territory and signed a peace accord with Polisario, the liberation front in Western Sahara. However, neither national unity was restored nor the economy repaired. On the contrary, further strain was added when thousands of black slaves as well as free black African soldiers who had been recruited in the army to fight in the desert war were purged from the army following the peace treaty with Polisario. These internal factors combined with external ones, namely the growing influence from extremist Arab regimes like Iraq, Syria and Libya, pushing the military regime to resort to draconian measures for “solving” the problems.

In 1980, classical slavery was “abolished” in order to rob initiative away from the newly-created Free Slave Movement, El Hor; Islamic Shari’a laws were imposed to calm slaveholders’ fears for a real emancipation of their slaves; educational reforms, allowing for the introduction of African languages into the school system, were decreed to meet the most important demand by the black community; and a political organ, the “Structure for the Education of the Masses” (Structure d’Education des Masses), SEM, was created as an ideological base and political façade for the military regime and to act as a communication line between it and the people. Most important of all, however, was the adaptation of new land laws in 1986-84: African customary land ownership was abrogated to allow the state to allocate fertile African land along the Senegal River to Arab nomads and businessmen from the north (Santoir, 1990a and 1990b – or any of these; Parker, Diallo, 1992). Both Arab nomads and businessmen rushed en masse to colonize the south (Diallo, G., 1989). The mounting racial tensions led to the creation of the African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (Forces de Liberation Africaines de Mauritanie), FLAM, in November 1983. FLAM published a manifesto in April 1986 in which it denounced the establishment of an “apartheid” state in Mauritania (ibid). It called on the government and enlightened Arab sociopolitical bodies to initiate a national dialogue to solve Mauritania’s national question and identity crisis. It also called on the black community to unite and fight for its political, economic and cultural rights by all means necessary including armed struggle (FLAM, 1986).

Taya’s regime, which seized power on December 12, 1984, responded to legitimate black demands with more violence and discrimination, (Africa International, *Africa Confidential*, 1989a). Hundreds of black intellectuals, suspected of being FLAM members, were arrested and sentenced to long terms in September 1986. In 1987 several thousand black servicemen in the armed forces were purged while many others were jailed, banned and confined to remote villages. Three black officers were executed on December 6 of the same year. The situation worsened and escalated when the regime enforced the 1983-84 land reforms on black-owned lands in the south. The prefect of Boghe, Ould Jiddou, issued circular no. 19/DB in May 1988 confiscating all black-owned farmland in the Boghe area (*Jeune Afrique*, 1989). As some of these farms were owned by farmers living on the Senegalese side of the river, defence committees (known as Comités de Suvi du 18 juin, 1988) were set up by these people who accused the Nouakchott regime of trespassing into their traditional rights (Espoir, 1992), rights which they had prior to the arrival of Arabs in the area and the creation of Arab-ruled Mauritania itself (Diallo, G., 1989).

The 1989 clamp-down

While the racial tensions developed into daily clashes between Arab settlers and black farmers, relations with Senegal were deteriorating. When the farming season began in 1988 farmers from the left bank of the river were prevented by the Arabs from cultivating their farms on the Mauritania side. Senegal retaliated by banning Mauritanian camels from grazing on the Senegalese side. This developed into a trade embargo, media war and daily confrontation between blacks and Arabs along the border (Sy, Tall, 1989). At the same time the racial and political situations reached boiling point following the death of four prominent black political prisoners at Walata and the discovery of the Iraqi inspired Ba'ath coup attempt.

This was the prelude to the April 1989 crisis when Mauritanian border guards crossed into the Senegalese village of Diawara on April 9, to fight alongside Mauritanian herders against Senegalese farmers. The guards killed two Senegalese and took 13 other hostages into Selibaby in Mauritania (Park et al., 1991). Anti-arab Mauritanian demonstrations were organized throughout Senegal and Arab shops were sacked by angry youth (Diallo, S., 1989). In Mauritania, an anti-black massacre as systematically carried out by Arab extremists. SEM militants were reported to have met on the eve of the massacre to transport slaves from the east by bus to carry out the killing of more than 1,000 Senegalese, black Mauritians, Guineans, Ghanaians and Ivoirians on April 24-25, 1989 (*Africa Confidential*, 1989a, Parker, 1991). It was rumored that the killing¹ was planned by Colonel Gabriel Cymper, the political minister and the state secretary for the SEM, Ould Rachid (Diallo, 1989b).

This gave the Mauritanian regime a golden opportunity to internationalize its own internal problems. Black Africans who were seen as an obstacle to the total Arabisation of the country were accused of being Senegalese and hunted down and killed, rounded up into detention camps or deported to Senegal and Mali. An estimated 500,000 Arab Mauritians who had previously controlled up to 80 per cent of the retail trade in Senegal were either repatriated or moved to other West African countries and the estimated 30,000 – 40,000 Senegalese immigrant labourers in Mauritania were repatriated. The operation was executed with air transport help from France, Morocco, Algeria and Spain. In the context of the war situation, Mauritania started an unprecedented campaign of deportation of its own black citizens to Senegal and Mali. Between 70,000 (UNHCR, 1989) and 150,000 (Diallo,S.,1989) black citizens including high-ranking civil servants, army personnel, farmers and

¹ "Killings of black Mauritians continue", Amnesty Newsletter, September 1990.
"Mauritania persecutes its black citizens", The New York Times, June 17, 1991.

Fulani herdsmen were stripped of everything including their clothes and nationality papers, and then forced to cross the river. As a result of the anti-black pogroms, Taya became a hero both in the eyes of the pan-Arab elements within his own community, and among nationalist Arab regimes such as Iraq, Libya and Syria (Diallo, 1991a; Parker, 1991).

Arab nationalists who were serving prison sentences were released and a new and bloody crackdown on blacks was carried out when between 3,000 and 5,000 thousand blacks were suddenly rounded up in late 1990. When the prisoners were released in March 1991 it dawned on the black community that more than 500 of the detainees had been murdered in custody (African Concord, 1991; US Congress, 1991; FLAM, 1991; Diallo, 1991a). The Nouakchott regimes was forced to introduce some sort of political reforms, partly by the democratic changes sweeping throughout the continent and a desire to repair its image following its support for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War.

Elections in 1992

A new constitution was adopted in July 1991, and multi-party presidential and legislative elections held in early 1992. Eleven Arab-dominated political parties against one black led were authorized. The democratization process was entirely controlled by CMSN, which became a political party, "Parti Republicain, Democratique et Social" (PRDS), and secured 69 of 79 seats in parliament. In contrast to known procedures, presidential elections were held on January 24, 1992 before legislative ones in March.

Eleven of the 79 Members of Parliament are blacks, and of the 20 ministers three are blacks. Opposition parties tried to participate in the first round of elections, but gave up because of massive rigging by Taya's PRDS.

The German observers, invited for the January 24, 1992 presidential elections in Mauritania sent their report to President Ould Taya. The observers reacted to the official media's incomplete transmission of the essential points of their observations. These essential points are the following:

- Incomplete election lists, arbitrary and full of mistakes
- Prefectures "overrun by the events"
- Insufficient quality of the ink that was used
- Arbitrary distribution of election cards
- Between 7 and 30 per cent of the eligible voters were sent back from the vote voting offices/polling stations and were not permitted to vote
- Extremely slow voting process, unusual even in African conditions, 6 hours or more for each individual to be able to cast her/his vote
- Open bias for Taya's party by those responsible in the voting offices/stations

- Very low participation
- Open ballot boxes, sometimes lacking tickets
- Different indications between the lists and those given by the responsible officials in the voting offices/polling stations

The German observers concluded in their report to the president that

The high number and the seriousness of the noted irregularities were of such a scale that they influenced the results of the elections considerably. It would therefore, under a normal situation, be necessary to organize a new round of elections. (*Al-Bayane*, No.10, February 19-26 1992, independent Mauritanian newspaper.)

Colonel Taya remains the president, his former interior minister, Colonel Ould Baba has become Speaker of the Parliament, an Arab prime minister, Ould Boubacar, was named in May. Both Ould Baba and Ould Boubacar are from Ould Taya's tribal home town Atar (*Jeune Afrique*, Diallo, 1992). After the democratization process ended, Senegal submitted² to donors' pressure to restore diplomatic ties with Nouakchott (on April 22, 1992). The donors appear to be anxious that the exploitation of the valley be resumed (Diallo, 1992). As Fransoi Soudan put it "it is still the same people and the same policies" (ibid). FLAM is still banned, Mauritanian refugees are still living in the 220 camps on the Senegalese side of the river, and 4,000 – 6,000 others are still in Mali, the regime still refuses to set up an independent commission to investigate the massacres of black detainees in 1990 and the national crisis in Mauritania has not been addressed. Martial law and dawn to dusk curfew were restored for two weeks throughout the country following the latest devaluation of the national currency on October 2, 1992.

² Senegal – Mauritanie: La Paix, á quel prix (peace at what price)?, Sud-Jebdo, March 27, 1991, Senegal. Mauritania and Senegal: Reconcilliation without foundation, on the backs of the blacks, Mauritania Today No. 7, 1992, Oslo.

The History of Mauritania

The geographical position of Mauritania makes the country a meeting point between the Arab and African cultures. The interaction between these two cultures has bred tension within Mauritanian society and thereby generated a political tradition of intolerance and repression in the country. Historically, Mauritania was inhabited by black Africans (Diallo, G., 1989). Here was the setting for the most advanced West African civilizations: Ghana and Tekrur (Fulani) from around the 5th to 12th century A.D. Whereas the former evolved into the great empires of Mali and Songhay which survived up to the 17th century, the latter developed into the theocratic Kingdom of Fouta Toro under the leadership of Oumar Tall who led Fulani struggle against French colonial encroachment during the last decade of the 19th century. The massive influx of Arabs from the north during the 13th – 15th centuries drove settled black communities south toward the Senegal River, whilst the French colonial encroachment, beginning in the 1850s from the south, had the opposite effect (Gerteiny, 1981). The indigenous population was consequently hemmed in between the two invading forces from the south and north. Apart from the Atlantic in the west, the only escape road left was toward the east. Oumar Tall led at least 25 per cent of the valley population in his eastbound emigration (Park et al., 1991).

Arab arrival

Though Arab influx into North Africa has almost exclusively been attributed to Islamic conquest drive, the ecological degradation in Arabia has played a decisive role in the timing and number of people who abandoned Arabia to seek greener areas elsewhere. The climatic similarity between Arabia and North Africa has made the latter a prime settlement alternative for the migrating populations of the former. Thus, following the tragic collapse of the Marib Dam, near San'a in Yemen in 570 A.D., several hundred Arab tribes were forced to abandon their home country and head toward North and East Africa.

This migration took place 40 years before Islam was revealed to Prophet Muhammad in 610 A.D. The importance of the ecological aspect on migration, highlighted around the 11th century the massive displacement of Arabs from their original homeland following another severe drought. Prominent among the immigrations were the Beni Hilal tribes from Yemen, who had invaded North Africa three centuries before.

From there, they reached northern Mauritania in the 14th century (Gerteiny, 1981). For more than 200 years, they plundered the region and warred with the Berbers who were roaming throughout the northernmost fringes of the Mali and Tekrur Empires. Following the defeat of the Berbers by the Arabs in 1644, four Emirates (town-states) were established in north western Mauritania (Diallo, 1991b). The process of Arab-Berber integration was set in motion with the latter being rapidly Islamised and Arabised (Gerteiny, 1981).

Ibn Khaldun reported that in the course of their incursion into North Africa, "... the Bani Hilal went westward, allegedly destroying, slaying and raping. Like locusts, the Hilalians and their herds (camels) devoured and devastated all forms of vegetal life, reducing the whole area to desert land and creating the severe shortage of timber that later plagued their seafaring descendants" (Gerteiny, 1981:6).

Whereas the war between the Arabs and the Berbers ended with the defeat of the latter, the war between their combined forces on the one side and black Africans on the other both continued and intensified right up to the arrival of the French at the end of the 19th century. Protracted and bloody Arab/Berber raids were mounted against settled African communities (Diallo, 1992). During this hit-and-run period of Afro-Arab wars, tens of thousands of African men, women and children were stolen into slavery by the Arabs (Diallo, G. 1989). This accounts for the fact that about 30 per cent (Bourgi, Weiss, 1989) of the population of Mauritania is former and current slaves, called Haratin and Abids, respectively.

Population

In its 1991 country profile of Mauritania, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) reported that the mass movement of people resulting from the disturbances between Moors and black Mauritians in 1989 have yet to be reflected in the population estimates, which should be read with caution. The ongoing resettlement of Tuareg and Berber refugees from Mali and West Sahara in expelled black Mauritians' villages (FLAM, 1992b) will undoubtedly complicate the demographic situation further. Furthermore, no official census results from either the 1976-77 or the 1988 censuses have been published. President Taya told *Jeune Afrique Magazine* that "the results will be made public when the processing, which is underway, is finished ... It should be recalled that the UN has largely taken part in the execution and supervision of the census" (*Jeune Afrique*, 1990:37).

The population in 1989 was estimated at just under 2 million and it comprises approximately 60 per cent black African; the actual balance of numbers is disputed and is a matter of some political importance, given the dominant position in society occupied by the Moors (EIU, 1991:63). Taken together, free black Africans and Haratins (black slaves) outnumber the white Arabs by a considerable majority (US Department of State 1990: 237). Yet, successive regimes claim that black Mauritians constitute only 15-18 per cent of the total population (Abeidrahamane, 1989).

Table 1. Results of the 1988 population census, smuggled out of the ministry of interior's statistic safe code MAU/85/PO2

Region	Sedentary population	Nomadic population	Total population
Nouakchott	387,853	0	387,853
Hodh Chargui	141,308	67,078	208,386
Hodh Ghurbi	111,178	41,151	152,329
Assaba	136,141	24,666	160,807
Gorgol	165,397	14,321	179,718
Brakna	162,026	23,857	185,883
Trarza	176,907	23,685	200,592
Adrar	55,764	4,869	60,633
Inchiri	11,887	1,748	13,635
Nouadhibou	59,166	837	60,003
Tagant	57,639	7,616	65,255
Guidimaka	108,981	7,695	116,676
Tiris Zemmour	30,603	3,137	33,740
Total	1,604,850	220,660	1,825,510

The census format was divided into three population categories based on the 1962 Mauritanian citizenship code:

- A) Arabs: Arabs, Berbers and Haratins plus any other Arabs, Berbers and Tuaregs residing in the country, though some might be from Mali, Niger or West Sahara. It is worth noting that when Mauritania renounced its portion of the West Sahara in 1979 the Saharawis, who had earlier been granted Mauritanian citizenship when the country divided the Sahara with Morocco in 1976, did not lose their Mauritanian citizenship!
- B) Africans: Fulanis, Soninke and Wolof who could prove their Mauritanian origin.
- C) Others: Any black African foreign nationals + black Mauritians without nationality papers, a very common situation prior to the early 1980s need to acquire papers in order to receive food aid arose. When the Mauritanian citizenship code had been adopted in 1962 a good number of Berber and Tuareg refugees from West Sahara, Mali and Niger became Mauritanian while authentic black Mauritians were made "foreigners".

While both Berbers and black Haratin slaves were counted as authentic Mauritians, Bambaras and Fulani nomads were excluded. The author's informant is a man who took part in the census who recounted that the Arab governor of Gorgol directed that Arab/Berbers without identity papers should be counted as Arab Mauritians, whereas blacks in similar cases should be recorded as "others/foreigners". *Jeune Afrique Economie* reported in its March 1992 issue that "... the results of the census were used to identify 'les elements sénégalais' during the 1989 events" (*Jeune Afrique Economie*, 1992).

Minority nightmare

The deportations, the invitation of any lighter skinned Berbers to take Mauritanian papers, the castration of black prisoners (Africa Watch, 1991; Amnesty International, 1992; FLAM, 1991) and the systematic falsification and hiding of population data all suggest that there is a real panic within the ranks of the ruling Arab elite. As Roland-Pierre Paringaux put it: "Even though the authorities keep the results of the last census hidden, they are an open secret. The verdict of demographic growth – if not history – is clear: in Mauritania, unlike the slaves and freed slaves, the [Arab] owners [of slaves] are becoming more of a minority every day" (Paringaux, 1990;44).

The ethnic division

The free black Africans comprise four ethnic groups. These groups are closely related to each other and also to other black Africans of West Africa as well.

Fulani is the largest group within the black African community in Mauritania. They are called by different names such as Fulbe, Fulata, Fulah, Fulani, Haal-pulaar (Fulfulde) and normally refer to themselves as Fulbe, singular Pullo. They are primarily agro-pastoralists, who inhabit the savanna belt stretching from the Sudan to Mauritania. Their greatest civilization centers are found in the four Foutas: Fouta Tooro on both sides of the Senegal River, Fouta Bunndou in the Senegal-Mali border region, Fouta Macina in the inland delta of the Niger River in Mali and Fouta Djallon on the high land of Guinea. Great concentrations of Fulanis are also found in northern Nigeria and Cameroon.

Soninke are the indigenous people of Mauritania, who were the founders of the Kingdom of Ghana in south eastern Mauritania in the early 5th century A.D. They are now mainly concentrated in the Guidimakha, Assaba and Hodh regions in the south east of the country. They are also found in western Mali, north eastern Senegal and in the Gambia. The Soninkes belong to the Mande ethnic group. Their main economic activities are agriculture and trade.

Wolof is the third largest group. They are mainly concentrated in the Rosso (Trarza) region on the south western border with Senegal, where they live as fishermen, farmers and traders. Their greatest concentration is in the urban centers of Senegal and Gambia.

Bambara is the smallest free black ethnic group in the country. They number perhaps no more than 10,000 individuals. They live mainly in the east at Nema, Aioeun and Kankosa. The main concentration of Bambara is in Mali and eastern Senegal. Like the Soninke and Wolof they are part of the great Mande people.

The Arab/Berbers. The term Arab is applied here in respect of the fact that these people refer to themselves as Arab, not Berber or African. The Arab government of Mauritania does not even admit the existence of Berbers in the country. As such the newly-introduced constitution of the country stipulates: "The people of Mauritania are Muslim, Arab and African" (Project de Constitution, 1991:2). They are nevertheless a mixture of Berber, Arab and African stock which has become united by language and religion. Locally, they are known as *Beydanes* (meaning white in Arabic). They speak an Arabic/Berber dialect called Hassaniya.

Haratin. Haratin is derived from the Arabic word of freedom, yet they are believed to be the wretched of the Mauritanian desert. In Mauritania the term has been applied to former slaves whereas the current slaves are called *abid*, singular *abd*. Both categories are still economically and culturally attached to their present or former Arab masters (Mercer, 1982; *Africa Watch*, 1990). They have lost almost every aspect of their African origin except their black colour.

Imraguen. This is the smallest black ethnic group still held in Arabic bondage in the country, which numbers no more than a couple of hundred persons. They are Negro Africans but speak an unfamiliar language. According to Alfred Gerteiny, "they are vassals to the Hassan (Arab) tribes, particularly of the Awlad Bou Sbä. They live in dismal huts and live off fishing in the region stretching from Cape Timiris to Nouadhibou" (Gerteiny, 1967:56).

Racism in Economic Life

The Mauritanian economy is based on agriculture, livestock, fishing and minerals plus massive capital inflows (US\$120.8 pr capita). Agriculture is concentrated along the valley of the Senegal River and in the Guidimaka region in the southeast. There are four types of farming systems: Flood recession (when the flood withdraws – recesses, the farms do not need to be irrigated), and irrigation in the valley and its two tributaries (Gorgol Baleyol and Gorgol Daneyol); rain-fed agriculture in the south and southeast and a number of oases in the centre. Main crops are millet, sorghum, groundnuts, rice, dates, vegetables, sweet potatoes, melon etc. Livestock comprises cattle, goats, sheep, camels. Fisheries on the 700 km Atlantic coast are said to be among the richest and most diverse in Africa. Mauritania has also an 800 km coast along the Senegal River. Minerals consist mainly of iron ore and copper in the north. The fishing and cultivation are practiced by black Africans. Cattle herding is mostly the occupation of Fulani herdsmen while camel, goat and sheep herding is dominated by the Arabs who use their slaves (Daxxel, 1989b)³. Whereas the livestock suffered heavily from the Sahelian drought, the mining sector declined as a result of the fluctuations and price slump in the iron market in the 1980s (Hodgkinson, 1989).

After shooting his way to power in 1984, Colonel Ould Taya promised to put the economy back on the right track, end economic corruption and clean up the public sector. He accepted an IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programme in 1985 and has been adjusting further and further without any sign of economic recovery. The national currency, the ouguiya, has officially lost 63 per cent of its value since Taya took over and ordered its devaluation by 35 per cent in 1985 and 28 per cent in October 1992 (Diallo, 1992).

With an estimated population of 2 million occupying over 1 million square kilometers which show great potentials, Mauritians should not suffer from lack of basic necessities or be classified (as by the World Bank in 1986) as a least developed nation. Although Mauritania is the third largest aid recipient (US\$120.8 per capita) in the world, after Israel and Jordan (Tomasevski, 1989), its foreign debts amount to US\$2.1 billion. The bulk of cash flows to the country come from oil-rich Arab countries, France, Germany and Spain. Of the total foreign investment in Mauritania between 1985 and 1988, 45 per cent came from Kuwait, 16 per cent from Saudi Arabia and 9 per cent from France (*Marchés Tropicaux*, 1990).

³ See also Paringaux, 1990; and “Esclaves oubliés” by the same author in *Le Monde*, October 23, 1990.

Concentration on the north

During colonial times, nearly all development projects and economic activities were concentrated in southern Mauritania. After independence however northern regimes not only attempted to shift development and economic activities from the south to the north, but they also deliberately underdeveloped the south (Daxxel, 1989b). In order to make the south poor and thus dependent on the north, Arab regimes in Mauritania imposed Land Reforms Act No. 83.127 in June 1983 and 119/DB in 1988, as a legal cover to confiscate black people's farmlands along the Senegal River. The reforms apply only on black-owned lands in the south.

Part of this was to concentrate all development projects in the north, while canceling nearly all infra structural schemes which were underway in or planned for the south, such as a surfaced road linking Rosso with Selibaby via Boghé, Kaedi and Mbout. Instead the regime built a multi-million dollar highway linking Nouakchott in the west to Néma in the east in such a way that it would pass only through Arab areas. This project was so important that the current Minister of Home Affairs, Hasni Ould didi, was appointed Minister of the Nouakchott – Nema Road in 1974. After accomplishing this nationalist task in 1985 Ould Didi was promoted to become Minister of Education, then Foreign Affairs until April this year. Ould Didi is an architect of the Arabisation policy par excellence (FLAM, 1991).

The Land Ownership Issue

Before the drought of the 1970s and 1980s, there were no serious problems of land ownership. Different communities stayed in and around their traditional areas. The Arabs led their nomadic way of life in the north while the blacks continued their mainly settled way of life along the Senegal River valley. However, the drought, which severely reduced the productive capacity of the rest of the country, and the declines in revenue from the mining and fishing sectors have drastically decreased Mauritania's export earnings and increased its import needs. On the ethnic level, Arabs have been deprived of their traditional livelihood as a result of the drought of 1968-1985 which decimated their camel, goat and sheep herds. Their situation became increasingly precarious by the recent conflict with Senegal which deprived them also of their hard currency income through their previous monopoly of about 80 per cent of small retail trade in Senegal (Daxxel, 1989a).

The Organization of Senegal River Valley (OMVS)

The Senegal River (1,800 km) is the second longest in West Africa (after the Niger, 5,611 km). "L'organisation pour la mise en valeur du Fleuve Senegal" (OMVS) was established on March 11, 1972 by Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. OMVS is a development project whose principal purpose is to coordinate research and the work required to develop the resources of the basin of the Senegal River in the territories of the member states. The objectives of the OMVS are to improve, balance and guarantee the economic and social situation of those living in the basin. The first phase of the development programme for the basin called for the construction of a hydro-electric power dam at Manantali in Mali, for a salt barrier at Diama in the delta on the border between Mauritania and Senegal, for cleaning of the river's navigation channel, and for providing ports and places of call (Godana, 1985).

The project is intended to provide electricity and ensure the irrigation of 400,000 hectares of land in the river valley. International treaties had, since the time of independence, specified that the international border does not give any country a right to interfere with the indigenous patterns of ownership and cultivation in the valley (see Parker et al., 1991). The people of the valley have therefore viewed Arab-led Mauritanian regimes as deliberately breaking international laws and dispossessing them of the lands entrusted to them by their ancestors in favour Arab development schemes.

Donors' aid to and insistence on privatization and the setting up of large projects in the area has made the Senegal river valley highly attractive for Arab agribusiness investments. The availability of slave labour also plays an important role for elite investments. This has focused Mauritanian government policy on the remaining potentially arable land: the Senegal River Basin where the lands, inconveniently, have long been owned by the blacks (Park et al., 1991).

Understanding the Mauritanian Crisis

In order to give a clear indication as to whether Mauritania is an apartheid state or not, I would like to focus on the more familiar conflict situations in the Sudan and South Africa. The racial and cultural conflicts in all three countries have been a permanent source of tension and destabilisation both within and across borders.

Mauritania compared to the Sudan

Mauritania is comparable with The Sudan in that there have been bloody ethno-racial wars between the indigenous black Africans on the one hand and the immigrating Arabs on the other. The Arabs began to arrive into both countries from the north following the emergence and triumph of Islam in the Middle East from the early 7th century onward. The immigrants have been pressuring the original populations towards the south since that time. This has resulted in chronic north-south ethnic conflicts for political power and economic control within both nations. The Arabs have false assumptions of the superiority of their culture over the local ones. This has been manifested by the forced Islamisation and Arabisation campaigns orchestrated by successive Arab regimes. The history of Afro-Arab relations in the Sudan and Mauritania have mainly been characterized by brutal wars, slavery, forced Islamisation and Arabisation, the systematic destruction of indigenous cultures, values and civilizations coupled with insatiable territorial expansion on the part of the immigrants. As in the cases of South Africa and Zimbabwe, the colonial powers left power firmly in the hands of the settlers in both Mauritania and The Sudan (Markakis, 1985, Diallo, 1991a). It is common to hear black militants say that Mauritania's independence in 1960 was hijacked by the Arabs as the white settlers did with that of Zimbabwe in 1965 (Diallo, 1991a).

As the Arabs proceeded with the application of their visions of society, the natives set out to mobilize and resist the new imperialist yokes. This was the point of departure for the current civil strife, which broke out between the Arab north and African south in the Sudan on the eve of independence in 1956. The first Afro-Arab confrontation in Mauritania took place in 1961, a few months after Mauritania's independence was proclaimed. Since then, there have been constant tensions between the north and south, with the former being repeatedly accused of racial discrimination – or even genocide – as well as political, economic and cultural hegemony over the latter.

Both nations are located in Africa and surrounded by black nations. Yet their leadership behave as if they were not in the dark continent or had large black communities within their societies. These communities were neither consulted nor gave their consent when the Sudan and Mauritania joined the Arab League in 1956 and 1974, respectively. Successive Arab regimes in both countries have been accused of misusing Islam for imperialist ends. This claim was made valid when military regimes introduced Islamic Shari'a laws in Mauritania and the Sudan, in 1980 and 1983 respectively.

Unlike the Sudan however, religion has not played any significant role in the ethnic war in Mauritania. Thus, if used rationally, Islam could play a positive role in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Mauritania and South Africa – a comparison

Mauritania and South Africa are similar in that:

- The colour divide between the whites and black is clear in both countries. The Arabs in Mauritania call themselves *Beydane* (Arabic for white) as the Boers refer to themselves as *Blanke*.
- As the Boers claim historical anteriority in South Africa, so the Arabs claim that they were the first inhabitants and the only true citizens of Mauritania.
- In both countries the settlers have used ruthless methods to gain territorial control through the forced displacement of the natives. Native territories are welcome as integral parts of the nations but the inhabitants of these territories are labeled foreigners.
- The Bantu Education Act of 1953 in South Africa and Arabisation Acts Nos. 65-025 & 65-026 of 1966 were introduced in order to secure cultural hegemony through the education of docile black servants.
- Land Act No. 27 of 1953 in South Africa and Land Act No. 83.127 of 1983 in Mauritania were adopted to give settlers access to and control over the most productive parts of the native lands.
- Banning and confining blacks to remote villages is a method used by both regimes, and
- Divide and rule policies are central in the maintenance of settler hegemony. South Africa has formed and armed black vigilante militia whereas Mauritania constituted a Haratin (slave) militia group in 1990 (*Africa Confidential*, 1989; Amnesty International, 1990, numbering 6,000-8,000; Diallo, 1991b).

Better than South Africa?

In contrast with South Africa, there are no straight forward racially discriminatory laws in Mauritania. For example there are no daily colour lines separating blacks from white, there are no officially separate schools or housing for blacks and whites, or “independent homelands” whose citizens are

foreigners in Mauritania. Blacks do not have to carry pass books in order to be allowed to move around the country, interracial marriage is not illegal; in principle, every mature citizen can vote and stand for election; there have always been 2 or 3 blacks in each government.

Black militants attribute this lack of strict colour lines to the fact that Mauritania has been ruled by weak and violent dictatorship regimes which not only oppress the blacks but also their own race. They do not bother to create laws and regulations.

Worse than South Africa?

Mauritanian regimes have surpassed South Africa in the following ways:

- Classical slavery against blacks is still common, despite its official abolition in 1980.
- Mauritania has deported tens of thousands of its citizens to neighbouring countries solely on account of their ethnic origin. Their number was at least 130,000 in mid-1989, and was increasing all the time, reports *Jeune Afrique* (July 5, 1989). South Africa has not deported black citizens to Zambia or Angola.
- Mauritania avoids even having diplomatic ties with black Africa.
- Mauritania has both introduced and applied religious laws in a discriminatory manner for political purposes.
- Mauritania has systematically refused to release population figures to support the claim that the country is overwhelmingly Arab despite evidence to the opposite.
- There has never been any real democracy even for the Arabs.

Apartheid practice in Mauritania?

According to Mauritanian laws it is illegal to discriminate against persons or groups because of their race or colour. While the country has ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (adopted on June 26, 1981), it has not ratified the main international treaties adopted by the UN General Assembly to protect human rights throughout the world, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted in 1966) and the Covenant against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (adopted in 1984).

By ratifying the African Charter, Mauritania has undertaken to respect the right to enjoy human and civil rights and freedoms without discrimination based on race, colour, language, sex, religion, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status. Nevertheless there is ample evidence that blacks in the country have been the victims of racial discrimination at the hands of successive Arab regimes, who have denied them not only the most

basic cultural, social, political and economic rights, but the right to life and citizenship.

1. Amnesty International has issued reports in 1989 and 1990. Amnesty International in 1990 writes: “Since the publication of the Report, the human rights situation in Mauritania has considerably deteriorated. Extrajudicial executions, torture and the cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of villagers have reached a very alarming level in the south of the country. The targets of government forces and Haratin [slave] militia are black African villagers who are singled out because they belong to a particular ethnic group, Haal-pulaar (Fulanis). Hundreds of black Mauritians have been arrested, persecuted and often assassinated on very wide pretexts ... A curfew whose timing varies in different regions and villages is in force” and Amnesty International in 1991 writes about the reported killing of 339 political prisoners between November 1990 and March 1991: “Details of the killings have only recently come to light, when those who remained alive in detention were released in March and April 1991. In November and December 1990 several thousand black Mauritians were arrested... Most of those arrested were members of the armed forces and civil servants, the majority belonging to a single black ethnic group from the south of the country, known as the Haal-pullar (Fulani)”
2. *Africa Watch* reports: “Persecution of black Mauritians – Summary executions, deprivation of citizenship, illegal expulsions and arbitrary arrests” News from AW, September 7, 1989; “Mauritania: Slavery – Alive and Well, 10 Years After it was Last Abolished” June 29, 1990; and “Mauritania: More Than 200 Black Political Detainees Tortured to Death” May 31, 1991.
3. In its Country Reports On Human Practices For 1990, the US State Department charged that “the human rights situation in Mauritania continued to deteriorate in 1990.”
4. After boasting in an interview with the Paris-based weekly, *Jeune Afrique Magazine* that “Mauritania is not going to be Liberia”, President Ould Taya confessed the killings of more than 300 black political detainees without any form of trial *Jeune Afrique* No. 1605: Oct. 2, 1991.

In its adoption of an unprecedented resolution on what it termed “the extraordinary record of human rights violations in Mauritania”, the US Congress points out that “the government of Colonel Taya has instituted an aggressive policy of Arabisation which as been used to persecute and marginalize black Mauritians...” The Congress strongly condemns, “the unexplained killing of over 500 black political prisoners, who were arrested in late 1990, the burning down of entire villages and confiscation of livestock, land and belongings of black Mauritians as well as the expulsion of tens of thousands of blacks to Senegal and Mali”. It adds that “execution, torture and forcible expulsion are only the visible signs of government abuses”. Non-Arabs are discriminated against in all walks of life, including unequal access to education, employment, and health care” said the resolution. “Even the heinous practice of slavery, although formally

abolished in 1980, continues in some parts of the country” (*Congressional Record*, 1991).

Features of Apartheid?

Mauritanian regimes have gone as far as to deny the existence of black people in the country. In an interview with *Jeune Afrique* on January 1, 1990, Ould Taya declared that “Mauritania cannot be in the process of arabisation as it is an Arab country” (*Jeune Afrique*, 199:37).

The implementation of Arabisation policies, and the imposition of Shari’a laws by Arab regimes on black Africans suggest that deliberate efforts are being made by these regimes to forcibly assimilate non-Arabs. The routine maltreatment of blacks in the country reminds one of black people’s situation in South Africa. The Mauritanian regime has been accused of ordering the massacres of at least 1,000 and more than 500 black citizens, in April 1989 and November 1990 respectively (*Africa Confidential*, 1989). Blacks have been singled out for deportation to refugee camps whereas Arabs from neighbouring countries have been welcomed to settle in Mauritania (US Department of State, 1990; FLAM, 1992a). Tuaregs from Mali and Berbers from the West Sahara have been invited to colonize expelled blacks’ villages in southern Mauritania. Slavery is practiced exclusively on blacks by Arabs in the country. Islamic shari’a Law has been exploited by Arab judges in the country to claim “blacks’ heads and limbs” (*Afrique International*, 1989:16).

The Amsterdam based “*City Sun*” wrote in its October 4, 1990 edition: “The massacre of black Mauritians continues in Mauritania. Blacks are dying and disappearing at the hands of the government forces on a scale never seen before in that country, says Amnesty International. A year ago we said the persecution of Mauritians’ black community had reached a peak ... that appalling situation has now gone from bad to worse ... If the government wants to escape the charge of racial discrimination, it must take steps to calm the fears of the people of south and put an end to the conditions that have led to the disappearance and killing of prisoners, Amnesty International demanded” (*City Sun*, 1990). During a debate in the French National Assembly, representative Jean-Pierre Bouquet drew the attention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roland Dumas, to the situation in Mauritania. He told the minister that: “For some years violent confrontations have taken place between the main Mauritanian communities... the black community has been the object of discriminatory measures which do no longer guarantee, for example, equal access to public employment... During the last few months numerous Mauritanian nationals have been expelled to Senegal under conditions which are difficult to accept.” Based on this he asked the foreign minister to explain France’s position on the issue (*Assemblée Nationale*, 1990: issue No. 27690-30/4-90).

In a reply letter concerning the situation in Mauritania to the MP, Bernard Stasi, another representative, Roland Dumas writes: “In response to your

question on the grave violation of human rights, in Mauritania, whose victims are the black citizens... in the context of last April's intercommunal confrontations, some 60,000 black Mauritians were arbitrarily expelled to Senegal while others have been subjected to vicious and discriminatory measures. The French government has intervened with the Mauritanian authorities in the most firm manner... we have a frank and permanent dialogue in order to put an end to these unacceptable practices. As you have indicated, France shall not continue its cooperation efforts in the Senegal Valley should the forced displacement of the population continue..."
(R.Dumas, Paris, march 14, 1990, 000235CM)

The Origin of Racism in Mauritania

Racism has its origin in the first contacts between Arab Mauritians and black Africans and the relations which were thereafter established between the two. The Arabs came as drought refugees, invaders, traders or missionaries. Black people have been enslaved on such a scale that the term black has become synonymous with slave in Arabic. Systematic destruction of black culture and civilization became the order of the day wherever and whenever the Arabs gained a foothold in the country. They distorted and falsified black history and achievements while glorifying their own. Blacks were pushed to the bottom of the social, economic and political ladder. Moreover, the Arabs exploited a provision in Islam to use women captured during religious wars as concubines.

Millions of coloured populations have spearheaded wars on black Africa from The Sudan to Mauritania (Williams, 1987). That Mauritania is the only country, among the 20 member states of the Arab League, which calls itself an Islamic Republic or (with the exception of The Sudan) imposes shari'a law testifies to this relentless search for cultural refuge. It was this that led Mauritania into signing a union treaty with Libya in April 1981. The fact that they did not even have a common border was not important. By contrast, Mauritania has never attempted to unite with any black African country.

Mauritania as a buffer state

In 1967, Alfred Gerteiny wrote: "The political history of the Mauritanian territory is intimately connected with that of French West Africa, particularly Senegal. It acquired a degree of individuality only after World War II, though administratively and economically it remained dependent upon Senegal until independence. With Senegal, Mauritania formed one electoral unit, represented by one single senator (President of Senegal 1960-80, Leopold Senghor) in the French senate. For all practical purposes, Mauritania was an appendage of Senegal" (Gerteiny, 1967:116). The term Mauritania applied then only to the Arab-inhabited northern part of the country which the French termed "la vide" or emptiness. The administration was called "L'administration de la vide". The southern areas were parts of the Senegal Valley region which comprised both banks of the river.

The decision by France to establish Mauritania as a buffer state between Arab North Africa and black West Africa led to strong reactions among the inhabitants and in Morocco and Mali and their respective supporters.

The black south wanted to join the proposed West African Federation of Mali whereas the Arab north wanted to join Morocco. At the same time Morocco was mobilizing the Arab world to help it annex northern Mauritania (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 1960). Morocco formed an irregular army called “Armée de libération”. The leader of Isitqlal party, Allal El Fassi called for the reconstruction of Greater Morocco in 1956: “We shall be really independent only when we have reconquered the land of our glorious fathers ... (which) stretches from Tangier ... to the shores of the Senegal River ...” (Gerteiny, 1967:128). The black community formed two political parties, Bloc du Gorgol and Parti des Originaires de la Vallée. They demanded that Mauritania should either remain associated with Senegal or become a federal state.

The Ould Daddah regime

France was able to father enough support for the creation of Mauritania. The formation of the first Mauritanian government was entrusted to Mokhtar Ould Daddah who came from a traditionally pro Fench el Brii tribe. He was against a union with either West Africa or Morocco. His slogan was “Faisons la Patrie Mauritanienne”. For his survival, Daddah relied heavily on the diplomatic backing of black Africa on the one hand, and military, financial and technical support from France, on the other. The new administration was run by skilled black Africans and French ex-colonial officials.

With the exception of Tunisia, all the Arab countries supported Morocco’s claim over Mauritania. The dispute with Mali was soon solved via negotiation. At the time there were no obvious signs of racial discrimination within the state machinery. Mauritania was active in supporting black African liberation throughout the continent. It participated in the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache (OCAM) and was part of the Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine, and West African regional airline (Air Afrique) of which Mauritania was a co-founder. In practical terms, there was no border between Mauritania and Senegal. Mauritania depended on the port of Dakar for exports and imports. Southern Mauritania was the centre of political, cultural and economic activities (Diallo, 1991a). This close link with black Africa promoted the defection of several pan-Arab ministers and political figures to Morocco.

After consolidating his power and the recognition of Mauritania by Arab countries, Ould Daddah began to turn his back on black Africa and towards the Arab World (Daxxel, 1989b). Arabisation and the withdrawal from African regional organizations such as the OCAM, and CFA became the order of the day (Parker, 1991). After recognition by Morocco in 1969, Mauritania lobbied feverishly to join the Arab League in 1973. By 1989 Mauritania had reduced its diplomatic ties with black Africa to three embassies (Nigeria, Gabon and Zaire) and with Asia to one (China). While there were 17 embassies out of the 20 Arab nations.

Black representation in the government was reduced to 30 per cent during the 1970s and to 20 per cent in the 1980s (Parker, 1991). Furthermore, the blacks are excluded from the offices of Presidency, Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament, Foreign Affairs, Information and Rural Development and high commanding office in all branches of the army (Diallo, 1991a). As *Africa Watch* put it, political power has been controlled by the Arabs, who have subjected the country's black population to gross human rights abuses and denied equality of opportunity in every aspect of public life (*Africa Watch*, 1990). "What is taking place in southern Mauritania is, in effect, an undeclared war, in which one community (Arab) is using the resources and power of the state against another" (Amnesty International, 1990).

Table 2. *Ethnic representation in Ould Daddah's cabinet in February 1966*

Ethnic	Blacks	Arabs	Total
Ministers	2	9	11
Junior Ministers	1	11	12

Source: Manifeste de Negro Africaine Opprimée, April 1986.

Table 3. *Ethnic representation in Ould Taya's cabinet in February 1986*

Ethnic	Blacks	Arabs	Total
Ministers	3	10	13
Junior Ministers	2	13	15

Source: Manifeste de Negro Africain Opprimée, April 1986.

Table 4. *Ethnic representation in Ould Taya's cabinet in May 1992*

Ethnic	Blacks	Arab	Total
Ministers	3	20	23
Junior Ministers	1	15	16

Source: Author's observations.

The principle in Mauritania has been not to have more than three black ministers in any government. The portfolios of sports, transport and public works are reserved for black Mauritians. Local and regional governments in all black regions and departments have always been put under Arab prefects and governors. On the foreign affairs front, successive regimes have put extra effort into portraying the nation as exclusively Arab as possible. This can explain that while all Arab countries in Africa are represented at ambassadorial level in Nouakchott, the 47 black African nations are represented by only three. There are only two black ambassadors in the Mauritanian missions abroad.

The Armed Forces

On the eve of independence in 1960, there was not a single Arab army officer. The new national army was composed of black Africans who had been forcibly recruited to the colonial army. The Arabs were exempt (Africa International, 1989). Thus, the highest ranking officer was a black Commandant, Diallo. In order not to have to appoint him to the post of Commander in Chief of the new army, Ould Daddah dispatched Arab teachers to France where they received military training for a couple of months and returned to take the leading positions in the army. The first group of teachers to be sent to France included Mbarek Ould Bouna Moctar, Cheikh Ould Bouda, Ould Hussein and Moustapha Ould Salek. On their return, Ould Bouna Moctar was appointed Commander in Chief. Salek also rose on the career ladder to lead the 1978 coup (FLAM), 1991).

During the 1960s and early 1970s, officers were trained in France and Senegal. This changed in 1974 after Mauritania nationalized the mining company MIFERMA, created a national currency and withdrew from the FCFA Zone, and joined the Arab League. Iraq and Algeria became the favourite countries, for the formation and the training of military men. In addition to the military training, the dispatch of aspiring officers to these two countries served the double purpose of Pan-Arab ideological indoctrination and linguistic skills acquisition. Taya's special army brigade was trained in Iraq and hence called after Saddam Hussein's Republican Guards.

No black officer has, since independence, assumed the post of Chief of Staff of the armed forces, with the exception for a period of a few months during which Colonel Yall acted in this capacity. In order to join the army schools, one has to be either bilingual or Arab speaking. This means that all Arabs are eligible by birth and by learning French. Language has become more important than physical fitness and military aptitude. Like all the other public sectors, the army has not escaped the systematic Arabisation. In 1984, of the 18 officers recruited to the paramilitary gendarmerie only one was black. In the National Guard, there was one black among twelve recruited officers. In the July 1985 entry examination, there were only 5 blacks among 59 officers. The army establishment has reserved half of the places for Arab-speaking persons, and the other half is for bilingual candidates and "open" competition for both Arabs and Africans.

Soon after seizing power, Colonel Taya proceeded to change the structure of the armed forces. Free black Africans were purged by thousand; when there were no Arabs, Haratins filled the vacuum. Former Minister of the Interior and the second man in the regime from 1986 to 1990, Colonel Gabriel Cymper, was the one who supervised the recruitment of slaves

and former slaves into the army (*Africa Confidential*, 1989). In addition to the prolonged systematic purge of blacks from the armed forces, there is hardly any free black African recruited into the armed forces (FLAM, 1991; Smith, 1991).

Table 5. *The ethnic distribution of military grades*

Grades	Blacks	Arabs	Blacks (%)
Colonel	1	5	16.66%
Lt. Colonel	3	5	37.5%
Commandant	3	12	20%
Captains	16	34	32%
Total	23	56	29.11%

Source: Manifeste de Negro Africain Opprimée, April 1986.

Cultural Discrimination in Mauritania

Like Somalia, Mauritania is a nation of oral tradition. There are hardly any books or libraries. Mauritania is among the least well-known countries in the world. Arab regimes seem to be happy about this. They capitalize on the situation to violate the most basic rights of their citizens solely on account of their racial origin. The black Africans have the same cultural traditions as elsewhere in West Africa. What makes them slightly different is their thorough Islamisation, which means that they sometimes confuse religion with Arab nationalism. They suffer from a serious identity crisis similar to that of the Arabised Berbers of the country.

The bulk of the blacks have lost important parts of their culture as a result of confusion between nationalism and religion. This confusion makes them use Arab names when baptizing their children, instead of African names. It is ironical that while complaining about cultural chauvinism, blacks still glorify Arab symbols: names, language, etc. They do not seem to understand that these so-called Islamic names were authentic Arab names which were in use long before the revelation of Islam. Prophet Muhammad neither changed his name nor those of his followers following their conversion (Diallo, 1991b). Blacks in Mauritania have not fully realized that Islam is not the issue, it is just another means to an end (Daxxel, 1989b). Successive regimes have capitalized on the black confusion to promote Arabisation, join the Arab League, condone the practice of slavery etc, ostensibly in the name of Islam.

There is only one museum in the capital. Most of the historical sites are buried underneath the invading sand dunes. Koumbi Salih, site of the ancient West African Kingdom of Ghana, has disappeared under the sand, which suits the policy of obliterating the black history of Mauritania (Daxxel, 1989b).

Mauritania has one state-run radio station, one TV station and one daily newspaper. Programmes in African languages or about African culture are barred from the national radio from 20.00 hours to 06.00 hours. This is the time when radio transmissions travel the longest distance.

African languages are given 2 hours per week on national TV against 25 for Arabic and 4.50 for French (FLAM, 1991).

If you happen to see Mauritanian cultural/ “national” symbols such as the flag, stamps, postcards, tourist literature, visit the only “national” museum in Nouakchott or travel by Air Mauritanie you may feel that you are not in the dark continent at all as everything emphasizes the Arabness of the nation. This applies to the name of the country (derived from moor), its 13 regions (only Gorgol and Guidimakha in the extreme south have African names), districts and streets. Further knowledge about the destruction of black culture in the course of the 1989-90 deportation of blacks has yet to be known.

Distorted education

The Arabisation campaign has not only marginalized non-Arab Mauritians, but has also distorted the quality of education offered to Arab children. A common opinion among teachers says that the result of Arabisation was that children neither master French nor Arabic. Officially the literacy rate in French and Arabic stands at 17 per cent. Though the teaching of African languages has been officially recognized since 1979, mastering an African languages does not yet entitle one to join the ranks of the “literate”. It was the French who conspired with the Arabs to impose Arabic for the first time in Mauritania in 1959 (FLAM, 1991). Ould Daddah reinforced this cultural imperialism by his (Bantu) Arabisation Act of 1966 which imposed Arabic on all school children from the first school year. Thus, from the age of seven years the African child has to battle with learning two alien languages (French and Arabic), both laden with long imperialist traditions. In 1979, Ould Daddah’s regime published a circular declaring “Arabisation of Mauritania is a long term objective that will lead to the full rehabilitation of our Arabic language and our culture” (ibid).

Slavery

Like in nearly all other human societies, slavery was common in the African society of Mauritania during ancient times. Slavery was then an integral part of armed conflict between warring ethnic, tribal or political groups. When one of them defeated the other, victors as a rule took the vanquished as slaves. These slaves were normally traded off and exchanged with earlier captured ones and thus regained their freedom.

Slavery had no colour at that time. With the massive influx of Arabs into Mauritania, often under Islamic disguise from the 8th century onwards, slavery assumed its present black character. From then on no white-skinned person was ever taken into slavery by the Arabs. This is why one cannot find a single white person among the nearly half a million black slaves who remain in Arab captivity in Mauritania to this day (Diallo, 1991b).

Abolition of slavery

Slavery was first abolished by colonial France on January 10, 1905. The second abolition was implied in the new constitution of Mauritania at independence and the third when the country joined the UN in October 1961. The latest abolition was proclaimed by the ruling Military Committee of National Salvation when it adopted ordinance no. 81.234 of November 9, 1981, which reads: After the Military Committee of National Salvation's deliberation and adaptation, the President of the Committee promulgates the ordinance:

First article: Slavery in all its forms is definitively abolished throughout the territory of the Islamic republic of Mauritania.

Second article: In keeping with the Shari'a law, this abolition will imply a payment of compensation to those entitled to such.

Third article: A national commission, composed of ulama (religious leaders), economists, and administrators will be instituted by decree to study the modalities of the compensation. These modalities will be fixed by decree once the study is finished.

Fourth article: This ordinance will be published without delay and implemented as law. Nouakchott, 9 November 1981

The President: Lt. Col. Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla.

(Park et al., 1991).

As can be clearly noticed, apart from the first article, nothing was said about the would-be free slaves. The three remaining articles dealt with the compensation of money to the slaveholders, who under normal circumstances, would have paid both moral and material compensations to the people they have exploited for centuries. It is not surprising therefore that slavery is still rampant⁴ in Mauritania.

⁴ The Forgotten Slaves: In Mauritania, whites still have a lock on ethnic blacks, Omaar Rakiya, The Christian Science Monitor, August 14, 1990.

Slavery continues

After a fact finding mission to Mauritania in 1982, the London based Anti-Slavery Society estimated that there were at least 100,000 full time slaves and more than 300,000 semi-slaves still held in bondage by Arab Mauritians (Mercer, 1982). Four years after the latest abolition, a UN mission confirmed the total absence of any concrete measures by the authorities in favour of the slaves (Africa Watch, 1990). As Roland-Pierre Paringaux wrote in his paper entitled “The Desert of the Slaves”:

... ten years after the ‘final’ proclamation of abolition, slavery is far from being a thing of the past in the Islamic republic of Mauritania ... The decree of abolition was made primarily as a direct response to the pressure of events. At the time, two dangers threatened. Externally, the international community was exasperated by the continuation of a practice universally condemned, and Mauritania, among the poorest of the poor nations has always relied on foreign aid. Internally, the El Hor (Liberty) movement, founded by some ex-slaves to promote real emancipation, was gaining ground. The 1980 public sale of a slave in the market had given rise to demonstrations. The abolition decree allowed the authorities to lower the pressure on the two fronts. (Paringaux, 1990).

In his introductory remarks to the Anti-Slavery Society Report of 1982, John Mercer writes:

The head of state from 1960 to 1978, Muktar Ould Daddah, kept slaves behind the presidential palace. The successive military committees which have controlled Mauritania since the coup d’etat in July 1978 have fluctuated between ‘a return to tradition’ – implying amongst other aspects that there would be no relaxation of slavery – and the decree of 5 July 1980, yet again ‘abolishing’ slavery. (Mercer, 1982).

Ten years after the latest abolition, *Africa Watch* published a report entitled, *Mauritania slavery Alive and Well, 10 Years after it was last abolished*. The human right’s organization declared that:

Abolishing slavery which is deeply-rooted in Mauritania, is a difficult and long-term problem. Our criticism is not that the Mauritanian government has tried to eradicate slavery and failed, but that it has not tried at all. We are not aware of any significant practical steps taken by successive governments to fulfill the important responsibilities Mauritania undertook when it passed laws and ratified international agreements prohibiting slavery. Its persistence is largely explained by the fact that legislative enactments have not been accompanied by initiatives in the economic and social fields. Government literature refers only to ‘Haratins’, or freed slaves, creating the myth that slavery is a problem of the past. What there has been is largely a revolution in semantics. In the cities, the term ‘abd’ (Arabic for slave), has been abandoned in favour of ‘the blue ones’ or the ‘Sudanese’. Other terms include ‘pupil’ or ‘domestic’, domestics who are not paid, have no rights and are entirely at the mercy of their ‘employer’ – in other words, slaves. A representative of Africa Watch spent a month in Senegal ... interviewed a wide range of black Mauritanian about racial discrimination in Mauritania, including the question of slavery. Among those who spoke with Africa Watch were a number of slaves who escaped from Mauritania, or slaves who came to Senegal with their masters years ago and chose to remain in

Senegal for fear that if they returned to Mauritania, they would be forced to live as slaves. Consequently, there are substantial slave and Haratin populations living in St. Louis, Rosso, Richard Toll and many of the towns and villages along the valley” 4e (*Africa Watch*, 1990:3).

In an article in *Emerge*, Roberto Santiago has this to say about what he terms “modern African slavery: Mauritanian’s version of Apartheid”:

“When apartheid is slowly being dismantled in South Africa, a similarly harsh institutionalized racism and defacto slavery continue to flourish in the Arab-ruled north-west African nation of Mauritania, with little public outcry from the international community. Mauritania, with a population of two million, was the last nation on earth to abolish slavery, by July 5, 1980 decree, but that decree had made little difference to the hundreds of thousands of black Mauritanians who were slaves; they continue to be economically and culturally dependent on the white ruling class (beydanes). Blacks make up 70 per cent of the Mauritanian population” (*Emerge*, 1991:14).

Slave militia

What makes slavery even more alarming is the revival of an old Arab practice of forming large armies from slave communities. In Mauritania, thousands of slaves have been forcibly recruited, armed and put under an Arab commandership to patrol African villages in the south. Several hundreds of innocent villages have been massacred at the hands of this militia (Amnesty International, 1990). Amnesty reported on the use of slave militia in October 1990: the Haratins who had been settled on the lands of expelled blacks had been armed by the authorities and asked to organize their own defence.

“Amnesty International has been informed that some authorities are profiting from the subordination ties between masters and Haratines to enroll the latter in this militia. In general this militia does not simply defend itself when attacked, but undertakes punitive expeditions against unarmed civilians living in the villages. In some cases, Haratines who object to this gratuitous violence are threatened with reprisals by the security forces who escort them on these expeditions” (Amnesty International, 1990; Diallo, 1992). Haratins are used to perform a triple function: to fight the Arab war on blacks, to generate division and hatred between the free Africans and the slaves, and to till the stolen lands for the Arabs (Brekke, 1989). This reduces the chance of an African united front against the common enemy.

Mauritanian Refugees in Senegal and Mali

The total number of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal is hard to tell. The most cited number varies from 70,000 registered by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to between 100,000 and 150,000 estimated by the Association of Mauritanian Refugees and FLAM. In addition to these, there are between 40,000 and 60,000 in Mali and several thousands scattered throughout Africa, the Middle East and Europe, since the vast majority of black Mauritanians who were abroad when the present conflict erupted in April 1989 automatically lost their citizenship. The latter include students, ordinary immigrant workers and diplomats.

However, the difficulty in determining the number of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal and Mali can be attributed to (among other the following reasons):

1) In both countries many were sheltered by relatives; 2) others did not present themselves to local authorities for fear of repatriation back to persecution in Mauritania; 3) the government in Mali refused to grant them refugee status until after Moussa Traore was overthrown in March 1991; 4) some of the Fulani nomads were able to take their cattle with them. As a result of this and their lack of previous experience of any form of registration or acute need of emergency help, they continued their nomadic way of life in northeastern Senegal. Reports suggest that 50 per cent of the Fulanis around Lexeiba/Podor had already been expelled by mid-1989. As has been pointed out above, accounts suggest numerous cases of state criminality and assert that 140-371 villages have been expelled in their entirety.⁵

Some of the Mauritanian refugees in Senegal have been sheltered in 220 camps just across the river inside Senegal. They have been provided with some of their basic needs thanks to the generosity of Senegalese people, the government and UNHCR. As a result of lack of international media focus, the UNHCR is reported to be winding down its support facilities. Rations provided by UNHCR to the refugees have already been reduced from 15 kg sorghum per person per month to 9 kg. This is in spite of the fact that the refugees have nothing and are totally dependent on the help they have been receiving. Those who were deported or fled to Mali were not even granted refugee status until the new government replaced Mousa Traore's defunct regime in March last year. Nonetheless their conditions are far worse than that of those in Senegal because of the ongoing military conflict between the central authorities and Tuareg rebels. They are moreover within the firing range of Mauritanian rockets supplied by France, Iraq and other Arab countries. In addition, killer diseases like cholera, malaria and yellow fever have spread due to inadequate food and sanitation facilities.

This material deprivation has combined with psychosocial breakdown and emotional depression to take a heavy toll among the refugees. Taking into

⁵ See Association des Mauritaniens Réfugiés et Exilés au Senegal, August 1992, *Sénégal*, and Phillipe Marchesin, *Tribus, ethnies et pouvoir en Mauritanie*, Editions Karthala, Paris, 1992.

account the profound link between the black farmers and their ancestral lands and that of the Fulani pastoralists and their cattle, it is impossible to assess the depth of the psychological shock which has befallen these peasants following their sudden banishment from everything they valued (Daxxel, 1989b). The UNHCR's magazine "Refugees" reporting on the psychological plight of the deportee in Senegal states that, "every day, the refugees in the village of Garli in Senegal peer across the river to the Mauritanian side for a glimpse of their home village, which bears the same name. It is strange to be close to home, and unable to go back. For as long as they remember, these sheep and goat breeders, fishermen and peasants lived peaceful life, threatened only by the vagaries of the seasons and climate" (UNHCR), 1989). It was not only their home village they were peering at, but also Arab settlers occupying their houses, farms, milking and slaughtering their cattle and cutting down revered trees in and around the villages, and well as demolishing the graveyards of their ancestors (Daxxel, 1989b).

Democracy à la Apartheid?

Mauritania's one-party rule was brought to an end by the 1978 military coup. Political parties were prohibited until the 1991 halfway reforms. The CMSN ruled the desert nation for 13 years by decree, without any form of constitution governing its acts. Opposition groups operate clandestinely.

In addition to FLAM, the opposition include the United Front for Armed Resistance in Mauritania (le Front Uni pour la Résistance Armée en Mauritanie) FURAM, formed in 1990. Others than these are more or less pro-government factions, such as the Iraq funded Ba'ath party (*Africa Report*, 1992) Nasser and Muslim Brothers parties.

Until 1991, the regime had used a Libyan inspired political organization, the Structure for Education of the Masses (SEM), to relay policy initiatives and to serve as a channel of communication between the regime and the people. SEM which was found at all government levels down to village/neighbourhood was established in 1981 by ex-president Haidalla. SEM initially mobilized people to carry out local improvement projects, to eliminate illiteracy and to discuss their grievances, and needs, which were then passed over to the authorities.

The SEM was soon destroyed however since the regime started to use it to make people spy on each other to the extent that it created mistrust within family and community as well as between different tribes and ethnic groups. Worse still was the use of the SEM to plan and execute the 1989-90 anti-black pogroms. As for democracy, in a speech to mark the end of Ramadan on April 15, 1991, Taya announced that free elections would be held on a new constitution, and opposition parties legalized before the elections at the end of 1991. In an interview with *Le Monde* on May 8, 91, Taya explained: "the new constitution would be prepared by the CMSN aided by jurists and that there was no question of involving opposition groups in the process, because these are merely brawlers, exiled and jobless, who publish and distribute leaflets. He added that democracy was not introduced earlier because the people were not sufficiently politically mature. "You can't just throw someone who cannot swim into the water" (*Le Monde*, 1991, author's translation). On June 11 Taya presented a draft constitution to be adopted in a referendum on July 12. The proposed constitution stipulates that Mauritania is an Islamic, Arab and African Republic whose national languages are Arabic, Fulani, Soninke and Wolof whereby Arabic is the official language. It envisages a powerful presidential system. The president is elected for renewable 6 year terms. He appoints and dismisses the prime minister. Legislative functions shall reside with a senate and parliament (Project de Constitution, 1991, author's translation).

The African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (FLAM)

The escalation of racial repression led to the formation of the African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (FLAM) in November 1983. FLAM is open to all Mauritians who aspire to a peaceful ethnic co-existence within the framework of national unity in cultural diversity and who are willing to fight for that end. Its stated objectives are: To bring an end to the official discrimination against and persecution of black Mauritians by successive Arab regimes as well as put an end to the practice of slavery and the slave trade. It opposes the monopoly of power by any ethnic group, political faction or military band. FLAM advocates the establishment of a federal system of government in Mauritania as the most realistic and democratic way to keep the country together. The movement believes that democracy in Mauritania can only be hoped for after the racial problems have been justly solved and Mauritians agree on the fundamental questions in their society.

FLAM initially called on the government to take part in a national dialogue in order to find a peaceful solution through democratic negotiation. When this was dismissed as a narrow black outburst, the front published its manifesto (*Manifeste de Negro Mauritanien Opprimé*) in April 1986 to document with facts, figures and statistical data that black Mauritians have been subject to crude discrimination at all levels in their own country. The government response was the arrest of black intellectuals in September 1986, the crackdown on the army in October 1978, the murder of black prisoners at Walata in August-September 1988, the massacre of both black Mauritians and other West African nationals in April 1989, the deportation of tens of thousands of peaceful black citizens in 1989-90 and the massacre of over 500 black detainees in late 1990.

It was in the context of the 1989 crisis that FLAM decided to resort to armed struggle which has been combined with a diplomatic campaign to let the world community know what is taking place in Mauritania (FLAM, 1991). FLAM's headquarter is based in Dakar. It operates militarily from both Senegal and Mali as well as from within Mauritania. Following Taya's declaration pending political liberties last year FLAM suspended its armed struggle to give the democratic initiative a chance. The armed struggle was resumed as time revealed that what Taya meant amounted to democracy "à l'apartheid" identical to the one that has been practiced in apartheid South Africa since 1910. FLAM's main problem is a lack of resources. It is not easy to convince foreign groups or governments to provide assistance to the struggle, simply because people hardly know about Mauritania, let alone what is taking place down there. The Arab factor also frightens many black and western countries from taking the Mauritanian issue up for fear of endangering their economic and financial interest in the Arab world. This is why the OAU has insisted on referring to the conflict within Mauritania as a Senegal-Mauritanian conflict.⁶

⁶ See *Report on efforts of Sub-Committee of the OAU Commission to Solve Dispute Between Senegal and Mauritania 14th – 17th September 1990*, and *Report of the Fifth Ordinary Session of the OAU InterAfrican Ministerial Commission on the Senegal/Mauritanian conflict*, Resolution CM/Res.1217 (L) of July 6, 1990.

The Implications of the Situation in Mauritania

Among the drought-stricken Sahelian nations, Mauritania is the worst affected by both drought and desertification (Diallo, 1992). The country has been sending both people and animals to its black neighbours to the south and south east, more than any other country in the region. Prior to the April 1989 conflict, there were, for example, some 500,000 Arab Mauritanian traders in Senegal alone, whereas Senegalese in Mauritania were estimated to be about 30,000–40,000 (*Africa Report*, 1989). Before the events of April 1989, Mauritanian herders used to travel with their livestock as far as the Gambia via Senegal, and Burkina Faso and Niger via Mali (Timberlake, 1985). More than half of Mauritania's population is closely related to the people of West Africa. Mauritania has become as dependent on the Senegal River as Egypt and The Sudan on the Nile. Inconveniently enough from their point of view, the river originates and runs through black African countries whose security is threatened by the racial tensions in Mauritania. Obviously Mauritania has a lot to lose when hostilities threaten a peaceful region. It cannot expect to benefit from this vital life line without peaceful relations and cooperation with those countries. Environmental protection and combating desertification also requires joint hands by all the affected countries of the region. Such peaceful relations and fruitful cooperation are however out of question as long as the racial war on the blacks persists. If totalitarian ruled Africa has shied away from condemning the persecution of blacks by the pan-Arabists in Nouakchott, a future democratic Africa will not tolerate such persecution. However, those in power in Nouakchott do not seem to realize these objective realities.

On February 12, 1990 *Newsweek* reports that: "An undeclared war is simmering at the western end of the line dividing Arab North Africa from the African sub-Saharan". The US Africa Assistant Secretary of State, Herman Cohen was quoted in the same article: "In the conflict there is an Arab against African element which is very dangerous for the rest of Africa". This situation in the country poses a serious threat to the whole concept of Afro-Arab relations and future cooperation, and an obstacle for a much-needed regional economic integration of the area. In addition to being at loggerheads with Senegal since 1989, Mauritania's relations with Mali are at their lowest level ever. Apart from dumping black refugees into Senegal and Mali, Mauritania has both supplied arms and acted as a transit route for other Arab countries to supply arms to Tuareg separatist rebels in Mali and Niger as well as to the Cassamance separatist rebels in southern Senegal (*Africa Confidential*, 1989b).

MAURITANIA CHRONOLOGY

- Apr. 4, 1957, the French Assembly approves “Loi Cadre” to relinquish France’s direct control over its colonies around the globe.
- May 21, 1957, Ould Daddah forms his first government with French backing.
- Sept. 28, 1958, Mauritania votes to remain within the French Community based on the framework of “Loi Cadre”.
- March 22, 1959, the first Mauritanian Constitution is adopted by the newly elected Constitutional Assembly.
- May 17, 1959, elections of first National Assembly.
- Oct. 19, 1960, Agreements signed in Paris, transferring power to the new Islamic Republic of Mauritania.
- Nov. 28, 1960, declaring of Independence from France.
- Oct. 1961, Admission to the UN as the 103 third member. This was after the USSR lifted its veto against Mauritanian membership, in a trade off with the USA which lifted its veto against Mongolian membership.
- Apr. 6, 1961, Ould Daddah amends the constitution in order to give himself special powers, thus Mauritania becomes one party/one man state.
- May 25, 1963, Mauritania takes part in the foundation of the OAU.
- Jan. 30, 1966, Ould Daddah’s regime imposes Arabisation Act No. 65-025 and 65-026.
- July 1965, Mauritania withdraws from the Organisation of African and Malgache Community.
- Feb. 1966, publication of “Le Manifeste de 19”, which denounces the arbitrary imposition of Arabic (Bantu Education) on African children and calls on the black community to stand up and defend their cultural rights in the face of the chauvinist Arabisation drive.
- Jan. 5-10, 1971, crackdown on striking Trade Unionists and the jailing of their leaders.
- 1972, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal establish the Senegal River Valley Development Organisation (L’OMVS) amid protest from Arab nationalists in Mauritania.
- June 30, 1973, creation of national currency (Ouguiya) and withdrawal from the French Zone.
- Oct. 1973, Mauritania joins the Arab League amid protests and condemnation from the black population.
- No. v 24, 1974, the mining company, Miferma, is nationalized and becomes Societe Nationale d’Industries de Mines, SNIM.
- Feb. 26, 1976, Spain terminates its occupation of the Western Sahara.
- Feb. 27, 1976, proclamation of the Saharawi Arab Republic.
- Apr. 14, 1976, agreement between Mauritania and Morocco to divide the Western Sahara amid strong opposition by Polisario and its backer Algeria.
- 1976, Polisario mounts raid on Noukchott during which its Secretary General loses his life.
- April. 30-31, 1977, Polisario mounts raid on and occupies the mining centre Zouerate for several hours.
- July 10, 1978, military coup deposes Ould Daddah’s one party regime. Lt. Col. Ould Saleck takes over.
- Apr. 1979, President Saleck appoints an advisory council made up of 60 Arab and 10 African personalities! The inauguration of the council is boycotted by the black community (including the 10 members) because blacks are shamelessly under-represented. This results in the loss of real power by Saleck in favour of Col. Bouceif, who becomes the new prime minister.
- May 27, 1979, Ahmed Ould Bouceif perishes in a plane crash in Dakar after being in office for just 3 weeks. He is replaced by Col. Haidallah.

- August 5, 1980, peace agreement signed with Polisario in Algiers, after Mauritania renounced its claim on the Sahara.
- July 5, 1980, independent Mauritania abolishes slavery (for the third time).
- June 1983, Apartheid-like Land Reform to expropriate black people's farming land along the Senegal River are imposed.
- Dec. 12, 1984, Col. Taya stages a successful coup against Ould Haidallah.
- Apr. 6, 1986, FLAM publishes its Manifesto of the Oppressed Black People of Mauritania, which exposes and denounces the discrimination suffered by blacks under pan-Arabist rule.
- Sept. 25, 1986, the regime begins war on the black community. Hundreds are arrested and jailed after being charged for taking part in the publication of the Manifesto and being members of FLAM.
- Dec. 6, 1987, three young black officers are executed without trial. They are accused of plotting a "black" coup to overthrow the minority regime. The execution is followed with widespread protests, demonstrations and attacks directed against racist installations throughout the country.
- Oct.-Dec. 1988, four black political prisoners die of hunger and thirst at the Walata desert detention/torture camp.
- Apr. 9, 1989, Mauritanian border guards cross over into the Senegalese village, Diawara, where they shoot to kill three Senegalese peasants and kidnap 15 others to Mauritania.
- Apr. 15, 1989, Mauritanian Berber shops attacked in Senegal.
- Apr. 24-25, 1989, the regime organized the indiscriminate massacre of at least 1,000 black Africans in Nouakchott and other towns in Mauritania.
- Apr. 28, 1989, 61 Berber Mauritians are killed by Senegalese mobs in response to what happened in Mauritania.
- May 1, 1989, Mauritania and Senegal agree to repatriate their citizens. Arab/Berber Mauritians living in Senegal as small scale traders are estimated to be 500,000 and Senegalese technical workers in Mauritania are 30-40,000.
- May 5, 1989, Mauritania begins deporting its black citizens to Senegal. This continues until the end of 1990. 150,000 are either deported or flee to Senegal while 60,000 escape to Mali.
- June 1989, FLAM resorts to armed struggle combined with political and diplomatic campaign to make the world know and treat the regime as a pariah state like South Africa.
- Oct.-Nov., 1990, 5,000-6,000 black civilians and army personnel are rounded up to detention camps.
- Dec. 6, 1990, the government announces that some people have been arrested for planning a coup and that they will be brought to a fair and public trial.
- March, 1991, the regime announces an amnesty for all political prisoners, all are blacks. The released ones tell of the murder of their inmates in custody as well as the horror through which they themselves went. All the released carry torture scars all over their bodies. Some are paralysed and others have been castrated "in order to reduce black people's fertility".
- Apr. 15, 1991, Taya announces that a new constitution will be introduced before the end of the year. This will be followed by free elections and legalisation of press and political parties.
- Apr. 1991, a wide range of eyewitness stories confirm the murder in custody of 537 black prisoners in the course of the latest waves of anti-black operations.
- May 8, 1991, President Taya denies, in an interview with Le Monde, the killing of any prisoners. He reiterates his refusal to set up an independent commission to determine as to why the people are arrested at all, tortured or killed without even being charged and to determine those responsible for the crimes. Concerning the new constitution and democratization, he says that no opposition individuals or group will be allowed to take part in the process. The whole thing will be prepared and controlled by the army, for these so-called oppositions are nothing but jobless, brawlers and exiled groups.

- May 1991, mothers, sisters, daughters and wives of the 537 murdered form a committee to coordinate their campaign to bring Taya's regime to justice. Since then, they have been staging daily sit-ins in front of the presidential palace and have engaged 30 lawyers to bring their case to the International Court of Justice at the Hague.
- June 12, 1991, Taya publishes his constitution amid a new crack down on the opposition leaders. The constitution reads "Mauritania is an Islamic, Arab and African country, which shall strive for the unification of the grand Maghreb, the Arab nation and Africa. The national languages are Arabic, Pulaar, Soninke and Wolofe and that Arabic is the official language".
- July 12, 1991, Taya puts his constitution to referendum. He claims that over 86% of the vote eligibles have taken part in the voting and 97% of them voted yes. FLAM calls on the people to boycott Taya's game. Both FLAM and foreign observers estimate the participation in the referendum to be about 22-33%, while noting the fact that it is impossible to know how many have voted as long as the results of population censuses taken both in 1977 and 1988 are still being hidden by the government which fears that they will reveal that the Arabs are in fact a minority of no more than 25-30% of the population.
- Dec. 1991, 12 political parties have been authorized. 10 of are more or less owned by Taya. The opposition consist of two parties: the Union des Forces Démocratiques which is made up of black figures, newly emancipated slaves (Haratin) and a few Arab liberals, and Mamadou Alassane Ba's party for Equality and Justice.
- Oct. 8, 1991, Taya confesses in an interview with Jeune Afrique No 1605-of 8.10.91 that more than 300 black Africans from the Army have been killed in his regime's custody.
- No. 11, 1991, Taya announces that presidential elections will be held in two rounds on Jan. 24 and Feb. 27, 1992 while parliamentary elections on March 4, 1992.
- Jan 24, 1992, first multiparty presidential elections in 18 years are held. The official results proclaims Ould Taya won 63% of the votes in the first round of elections. This sparks off widespread protests led by Ahamed Ould Daddah's supporters from the main opposition party, Union des Forces Democratiques (UFD). UFD accuses Ould Taya of massive riggings, preventing its supporters from voting while allowing Tuareng refugees from Mali to vote. Ould Taya responds by deploying the army to disperse the protesters killing five blacks and injuring dozens among UFD militants. Curfew and martial rule are imposed for two weeks.
- March 4, 1992, parliament elections are held amid total boycott by all opposition parties. Taya's PRDS wins 85 seats of the 96 mandates in the parliament while the remaining eleven are won by independent candidates.
- Col. Ould Taya appoints the 37 year old Sidi Mohamed Ould Boubacar as prime minister. After forming his civilian government Ould Boubacar declares that his main task is to cure the economic crisis by cleaning the administration, fighting, corruption and repairing the country's relations with donors.
- April 22, 1992, Mauritania and Senegal restore diplomatic relations.
- May 9, 1992, the border between Mauritania and Senegal is partly opened, yet Mauritania deportees are not allowed to return home.
- Oct. 2, 1992, as part of a package agreement with the IMF and the World Bank, Mauritania devalues its currency by 28% and 42% respectively against US\$ and French Franc. The price of basic goods shoot up more than 100% without any wage increase or other measures to help people cope with the new economic crisis. Widespread anti-regime protest which forces the government to impose curfew and martial law once again.
- Nov. 1992, Mauritania and Senegal open their border completely without deciding the fate of Mauritania deportees in Senegal.

Racial persecution in Mauritania condemned by US Congressmen

Hon. Ted Weiss of New York, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Mr. Yahron, the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Africa, Mr. Burton, Mr. Wolpe, Senator Edward Kennedy and Mr. Felgham in the US Congress sponsored a resolution on the racial violation of black Africans' human rights in Mauritania, introduced in the Congress on July 9th, 1991, to draw attention to what the sponsors of the resolution termed as "the extraordinary record of human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania". It was added that "the government of Col. Taya has instituted an aggressive policy of Arabisation which has been used to persecute and marginalize black Mauritians ...". The full text of the resolution is reproduced below, as it was published in the Congressional Record, Extension of Remarks, July 9, 1991, E2465:

Expressing the sense of the Congress regarding human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Whereas the Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, under the leadership of Colonel Manouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. Whereas the Department of State, in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1990, stated that the human rights situation in Mauritania continued to deteriorate. In 1990, with the government engaging in extrajudicial killings and torture. Whereas political power in Mauritania remains firmly in the hands of the ruling "Beydanes" (Moors of Arab/Berber descent) and has been used to persecute and marginalize black Mauritians from the Halpulsar, Wolof, Soninke, and Bambara ethnic groups. Whereas members of these ethnic groups have been subjected to gross abuses of human rights by the Government of Mauritania, including the following: (1) the forcible expulsion in 1989 and 1990 of up to 60,000 black Mauritians into Senegal and 10,000 into Mali, where most continue to reside in refugee camps, (2) the burning and destruction of entire villagers and the confiscation of livestock, land and belongings of black Mauritians by the security forces in 1989 and 1990 in an effort to encourage their flights out of the country,

(3) the death in detention as a result of torture, neglect or summary execution of at least 500 political detainees, following the arrest of between 1,000 and 3,000 Mauritians in late 1990 and early 1991; (4) discrimination against non-Hassaniya speaking black Mauritians in all walks of life. Including unequal access to education, employment and health care; (5) an aggressive policy of "Arabisation" designed to eradicate the history and culture of black ethnic groups; and (6) the use of state authority to expropriate land from black communities along the Senegal River Valley through violent tactics: Whereas, despite the formal abolition of slavery in 1980, the practice continues in regions of Mauritania: Whereas on June 5, 1991, seven opposition political leaders were arrested in Mauritania after they announced the formation of a coalition of opposition political groups; and Whereas these gross abuses of human rights violate Mauritania's obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention to End All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the African Charter on People's and Human Rights, and provisions of the Mauritanian Constitution: Now, therefore be it
Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), that the Congress – (1) deplores and condemns the Government of Mauritania's persecution of non-Hassaniya speaking black Mauritians

and the continued practice of slavery in Mauritania; (2) calls upon the Government of Mauritania to abide by its international obligations and the provisions of the Mauritanian Constitution to protect the rights of all Mauritians; (3) calls upon the government of Mauritania to permit an impartial investigation by independent Mauritanian organizations into the death in detention of hundreds of black Mauritians and to bring to justice those responsible. (4) calls upon the Government of Mauritania to permit international human rights and humanitarian organizations (including the International Committee of the Red Cross, Africa Watch, Amnesty International and international medical organizations) to conduct fact-finding missions to Mauritania; (5) calls upon the Government of Mauritania to take immediate steps to enforce Mauritania law and end the practice of slavery; (6) welcomes recent actions by the Government of Mauritania including the amnesty and release in April 1991 of hundreds of political prisoners held without charge or trial; (7) further welcomes President Taya's announcement on April 15, 1991, promising legislative elections and allowing political parties to be formed; (8) regrets that, despite such promises, Mauritanian authorities nonetheless arrested in early June 1991 a number of trade unionists and government critics who had called for greater democratization;

(9) welcomes the diminution of tensions between Senegal and Mauritania, and encourages both governments to take actions to prevent a recurrence of the events of April 1999, by taking special measures to

protect each other's nationals within their borders;

(10) commends the Department of State for its thorough reporting on human rights abuses in Mauritania in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1990; and

(11) calls upon the President to take the following actions to convey the concern of the United States about gross violations of human rights in Mauritania;

(A) Publicly condemn abuses of human rights such as killings and imprisonment of black Mauritians and the continued practice of slavery.

(B) Encourage the appointment of a special rapporteur on Mauritania at the United Nations Human Rights Commission,

(C) Oppose loans to Mauritania in the World Bank and the African Development Fund in accordance with section 701 of the International Financial Institutions Act.

(D) Encourage the Government of France, the Government of Spain, the Government of Germany to limit assistance to Mauritania to humanitarian assistance provided through private voluntary organizations and oppose loans to Mauritania in the World Bank and the African Development Fund.