

INSTITUT FONDAMENTAL D'AFRIQUE NOIRE (IFAN): (FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR TROPICAL AFRICA)*

IFAN, whose initials formerly stood for the French Institute for sub-Saharan Africa, was founded during the colonial period. After independence, it was renamed Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) and became a public institution attached to Dakar University.

To define its structure we must outline its historical background and explain its new orientations in the context of the harmonious development of the nation. For this reason we have planned this article as follows:

- I. Historical evolution.
- II. The research structures.
- III. The administrative and technical structures.
- IV. Achievements and new orientations.

I. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

We do not propose in this brief article to trace the whole historical evolution of IFAN, but we may recall some characteristic features. There were two main stages in the transformation of IFAN's structures:

- (a) a colonial period (1931 to 1960),
- (b) a period of decolonization (1960 to the present day).

(a) IFAN during the colonial period

Established in 1931, IFAN was geared to the purposes of colonial policy in the field of research. Its role was outlined in a 'pre-project' by a history 'agrégé'[†], Albert Charton, in these words: 'The constitution of an African Science is a requirement of our colonial policy'.

Thus, on the lines of what was done in the Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), the primary task of IFAN was to coordinate research work in the continent. For this purpose, informal journals (bulletins) were established; first the journal of the Committee for Historical and Scientific Studies of French West Africa, created on 10 December 1915 by Governor Clanzel, then this same journal changed its name to 'Bulletin' of the Committee for Historical and Scientific Studies of French West Africa, and has now become the Bulletin of IFAN. Centres were set up at Saint Louis, Abidjan, Conakry, Bamako, Niamey, Porto-Novo, Wagadougou, Douala, Lome and in Mauritania. During this period, some personalities of outstanding scientific talent helped the Institute to flourish; in particular, Theodore Monod, Doctor of Science, who was one of the first pioneers, Jean Richard Molard who founded the Geography Section in 1945, Georges Balandier, Rene Guitat, Hampathe Ba and many others who all devoted their knowledge and skill to the cause of research.

After this first phase of laying foundations, IFAN became part of a federal University of Dakar established by decree No. 57240 of 24 February 1957, and another decree of 21 March 1959, supplemented by Order 3118 of 31 March 1959, which turned the Federal IFAN into an institute of the University of Dakar.

*Translated from the French.

[†]Translator's note: the 'agrégation' is a competitive state examination for admission to posts on the staff of lycées and universities (post MA level).

(b) The period of decolonization

The year 1960 was a historic one for the states of sub-Saharan Africa which attained their sovereignty. The federation broke up and the states, jealous of their sovereignty, redefined their scientific structures with orientations in line with their ideologies. However, in the field of education and research, it must be stressed that the process of inter-African cooperation managed to save the institutes and establishments formerly serving the needs of education. Hence the inter-African vocation of IFAN was not undermined; on the contrary, it was strengthened by a vertical collaboration with the former colonial power which maintained its financial and moral aid. Nevertheless, reforms were tried out and the Institute was marked by two stages which gave it a new lease of life. The years 1968 and 1973 were characteristic of this post-colonial period.

And 1968 was an important stage in the history of the university. In France the protest movement of May 1968 had completely changed the university structures; the faculties were split up and stress was put on inter- and pluri-disciplinary education combined with research. In Dakar, the partially French university experienced the same upheavals. The integration of IFAN into the university was carried out under the direction of two Frenchmen, Vincent Monteil and Pierre Fougeyrollas, the former being an Islamologist and the latter a sociologist. Thus there was added to the former research role of IFAN that of teaching, assumed by research scholars who lectured in their respective faculties.

Another decree of 1973 (73390, 30 April 1973 to 5 May 1973) laid down the new conditions of the organization and functioning of the Institute. This decree set out IFAN's research role in the general provisions of Article 1 of the decree in these terms: 'The Institute is responsible for initiating and promoting scientific studies concerning sub-Saharan Africa in general and West Africa in particular'. The decree redefined the organs of IFAN, i.e. the governing body, the scientific committee, the Director, the departments and services.

That is, briefly, the historical background, which clearly shows that the authorities wished to provide IFAN with an autonomous scientific staff whose main activity would be research. By examining the research structures, we can show how the organization of departments and the establishment of research programmes correspond to this continuing vocation of research which IFAN had assumed ever since its creation.

II. THE RESEARCH STRUCTURES

(a) The Department of Social Science

This department comprises five researchers and is headed by Abdoulaye Diop Bara, Lecturer (maître assistant) in the 'Faculté des Lettres' who is completing a doctoral thesis on the Wolof people. This department has planned its research work in several directions:

(i) rural sociology; the study of the social structures of the peoples of Senegal (Wolof, Serer, Toucouleur, Diola). This section is analysing family and kinship and the various social stratifications.

(ii) socio-economic problems; the study of the land tenure structures, land reform, the changes in traditional society under the impact of modernism (a study being conducted since 1973 by Mamadou Niang, head of the economic and legal section, Doctor of Legal Sociology, with a diploma in Comparative Law),

(iii) urban sociology; the study of the problems of housing and levels of living,

(iv) religious sociology, a study conducted by Yaya Wane, Doctor of Sociology and senior researcher (maître de recherché) at the National Centre for Scientific Research,

(v) the social psychology section.

Mrs. Fatou Sow, Doctor of Sociology, and junior researcher at the CNRS, has already completed

several studies on the status of women in relation to development, and on the problems of level of living and housing.

Mrs. Solange Camara who is completing a doctoral thesis, is working on problems of nutrition among the Senegalese black Africans.

Apart from its research work, this department includes a technical assistant in the person of Oumar Gueye, who has 15 years' experience and has taken part in all the major surveys of IFAN. Oumar Gueye is at the same time a repository of oral traditions through his numerous contacts with informants.

(b) The History Department

Abdoulaye Ly, the first Senegalese to be a 'Docteur ès Lettres', former Minister of Health and head of this Department, has written a famous book on the peasant masses. He is doing research on the European expansion and the formation of underdevelopment in West Africa since the sixteenth century (the case of Senegal). His focus of interest also covers Senegal and West Africa between the Brazzaville Conference (1944) and the 'loi-cadre' ('outline-law' which led to the institution of the French Community) of 1956.

Others who have contributed to the work of this department are Sekene Mody Cissoko, lecturer at the Faculté des Lettres, who is working on the Mandingo civilizations; and another historian, Moussa Oumar Sy, who is concentrating on oral traditions. Camara Laye, author of *L'enfant noir*, who is working on the Mandingo civilizations, is collaborating in this history 'laboratory'.

(c) The Department of Geography

The Head of the Department is C. Barbey, lecturer in the Faculté des Lettres.

The department includes human geography and physical geography. Research is under way on the formation of dunes and deserts in general. The department is also contributing to the preparation of the third volume of the *International Atlas of West Africa*. Also working in this same department is Mme Diouf Ndeye Bineta Sene, who has a 'maîtrise' (master's degree) in geography.

(d) The Department of Prehistory and Protohistory

The Head of Department is Syr Descamps, lecturer at the Faculté des Lettres, Dakar University. There are also two researchers each holding a doctorate, Annie Ravise and Abdoulaye Sekhna Diop.

The aim of the Department is to advance the knowledge of West African civilizations in general and Senegalese ones in particular, for which there are no written or oral records. Several technicians and specialists are working there on the reconstitution and restoration of ancient ceramics. Cartology work for cataloguing sites is being done in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and the Government tourism office. In 1974, the department held an exhibition dealing with prehistory which was visited by 45,000 people.

(e) The C 14 Laboratory

This department, planned by Cheikh Anta Diop, 'Docteur d'Etat ès Lettres', historian, linguist and physicist, is analysing samples of geological, geomorphological, prehistorical and archeological interest. The department is collaborating with several foreign institutes (the French Archaeological Mission in Ethiopia, the Paris Institute of Human Palaeontology, the University of Dahomey).

(f) The Department of Anthropology

The research scholar in charge, Guy Thilmans, is doing research on protohistory, studying human bone remains.

(g) Indo-African Languages and Civilizations

Dr. Upadyaya, Professor of Indian Studies, is conducting a comparative study of the Dravidian languages and the Negro-African languages. He intends to broaden this to an in-depth study of all the linguistic, socio-cultural and religious aspects. He is now working on a project for preparing a comparative etymological dictionary.

(h) The Department of Linguistics

In charge is Mme Arame Diop, 'Docteur 3e cycle'. With her is a researcher, Mlle Jeanne Lopis, who holds a 'maîtrise' in linguistics.

The Department's project concerns the use of the national languages in the educational system. The department is collaborating with the CLAD (Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar) in the preparation of a Wolof-French dictionary of 6,000 words.

(i) The Department of Islamology

There are four researchers trained in Arab universities. The department's current programme concerns the collecting of documents of all kinds written either in Arabic or in national languages using Arabic characters. These manuscripts cover several fields: history, pharmacopoeia, linguistics and geography. The department is also helping to prepare a history syllabus which will be taught in secondary schools.

(j) The Department of African Languages and Civilizations

The head is Lilyan Kesteloot, Professor of African Literature, author of an anthology of negro-African literature. The department is helping to prepare a card-index of documents concerning history in the oral literature.

(k) The Department of Botany

The head is researcher Antoine Nongonierma, assistant at the 'Faculté des Lettres' and the 'Faculté de Médecine Vétérinaire'.

The programme concerns the following fields: research related to the knowledge of all the flora and vegetation of West Africa; in-depth studies of particular taxonomic groups (family, genus, etc., in West Africa).

The department is collaborating with the Faculty of Science in connection with the supervision of master's degree courses in natural science.

(l) The Department of Vertebrate Zoology

The researcher in charge is Cisse Mamadou, Assistant at the Faculty of Science. Its activities include a study of the lizards of Senegal and study of all the vertebrates of the country and of West Africa. The department is in fact the reference point for all information concerning the vertebrate fauna of West Africa. The department has interdisciplinary relations with the Faculty of Science (the Department of Invertebrate Zoology, ORSTOM, and the Faculty of Biochemical Medicine).

(m) The Department of Terrestrial Invertebrate Zoology

The researcher in charge is Roger Roy, agrégé of the University.

The activities of the Department include the collection of terrestrial and marine invertebrates located in Goree; the identification of insects and their stomach contents and the identification of insects that are harmful to the crops of BUD-Senegal and the horticultural station of Camberene.

The department is collaborating on the West African level with Ivory Coast, Ghana, Cameroun, Upper Volta, and the Central African Republic.

(n) The Technical Departments

The publication services. There is one researcher in charge, Dominique Zidouemba, who is the holder of a master's degree in history. Two newsletters are published every quarter (A series for natural sciences, and B series for social sciences).

Other publications are *les notes africaines* (quarterly) and other irregular publications such as *memoires* (dissertations) of IFAN, introductions and African studies, catalogues and documents.

It should also be pointed out that on 24 October 1973, the department signed an agreement for publication and dissemination with the Nouvelles Editions Africaines (N.E.A.).

The library services. Oumar Diop, certificated lecturer in modern literature is in charge.

The documentation centre has a number of books and periodicals that are available to researchers. There is a reading room where foreign students and researchers can have access to the documentation. As regards exchanges, IFAN receives several collections and periodicals. Apart from the periodicals and files, the library has nearly 60,000 books.

As well as its research departments and technical services, IFAN hosts in its premises other research services or structures with which it collaborates. This applies to the Dakar Centre for Applied Linguistics (CLAD) and Rul 12 (Dakar-Holland) the inter-university project for research on urbanization and planning of urban extensions in the Cap Vert area.

We should also mention the IFAN museum department, which includes the Museum of African Art in the Place Tacher, the History Museum and the Museum of the Sea which are in Goree.

III. THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND TECHNICAL STRUCTURES

After this brief glimpse of the history of the Institute and its research departments, we should mention the administrative and technical structures, without which IFAN would find it difficult to fulfil its mission.

IFAN functions with the help of the technical services, headed by qualified staff. For the last four years, Mahady Diallo, the chief administrator, assisted by his colleagues, has been looking after the sound financial management of this establishment, for which he recently received the congratulations of the State Inspectorate. IFAN's administrative structures comprise the accounts section, the personnel section and the technical services such as the car park and the carpentry services. We should also mention the secretaries/shorthand-typists who, being recruited by competition, can provide guarantees of competence and assiduity in their work which involves helping to prepare the documents written by the researchers.

IV. ACHIEVEMENTS AND NEW ORIENTATIONS

Although it is too early to sum up the results of an old institution like IFAN which is increasingly dynamic, we can at least outline the recent prospects or new orientations that are emerging.

Since the last reform mentioned (decree 73 of 30 April to 5 May 1973), IFAN has been determined to assume its own responsibilities for research. The decree stipulates that there should be appointed, to head it for three years, a 'Docteur d'Etat maître de conférence' or 'Professeur agrégé', with the approval of the governing body and the university convocation. The present Director is Professor Amar Samb,

agrégé in Arabic and 'Docteur d'Etat ès Lettres'. He is an established Islamology scholar with a well-known book on the contribution of the Islam of Senegal to Arabic literature.

In 1975/76, IFAN has 26 researchers, mostly of various African nationalities but including a few Frenchmen from the technical cooperation service. With its pluri-disciplinary structure and its researchers of many nationalities, IFAN intends to assume its research responsibilities in order to serve the development of the African continent and is even contributing to the enrichment of a universal civilization on the basis of a widely disseminated culture. The form of its participatory collaboration and the richness of the programmes of its departments constitute firm support for an overall development in the service of Africa.

As regards education, IFAN is already helping, at primary level, to compile textbooks in history and geography. At a higher education level, the researchers do part-time lecturing in their respective disciplines and faculties.

We may also note that the various national government departments can use reports or documents on various disciplines that have been prepared by the researchers (tourism, rural development, educational television, pharmacopoeia, etc).

CONCLUSION

We are glad to note that one of the oldest research institutions in Africa has kept its inter-African vocation and is contributing to the development of the cultures of the negro-African world. To achieve its goals, IFAN could not do other than set itself an ambitious task, so that one wonders whether the institution still has the resources for carrying out its policy. It is not pleasant to end this study on a bitter note, but it would be difficult to ignore some obstacles which sometimes hamper the implementation of goals already defined by IFAN.

For the moment, IFAN is the only institution which has scholars mainly devoted to research, as shown by their regular visits to the field and the quality of their publications. It is therefore to be hoped that it will continue to fulfil its role of giving 'impetus and co-ordination' to African research, in order to serve development.