

Online Article

A Library is Gone: Tribute to Professor MOMAR COUMBA DIOP, (1951–2024)

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) is saddened to learn of the passing of Prof. Momar Coumba Diop in Paris on 9 July 2024 following a long illness. Prof. Diop was 73 years old at the time of his death.

There is no better summary of the life and impact of Prof. Diop than that shared by *Le Soleil* journalist, Seydou Ka, who concluded that ‘If the man is not a prophet in his own house, because he did not receive the recognition he deserved during his lifetime, he did enjoy immense respect within the research community’. This sentiment captures what M-C Diop meant to friends, students, journalists and colleagues within and outside Senegal, many of whom gave glowing tributes to the impact he made on them personally and acknowledged his loss not just to them but to the world of academia whose networks he graced, animated and uplifted.

Trained as a sociologist, M-C Diop’s intellectual contributions give meaning to a scholarship that is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. He taught sociology at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLSH) at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar from 1981 to 1987. Later, he joined the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique

Godwin R. Murunga

Executive Secretary
CODESRIA

Noire (IFAN). It was during these years that he engaged with CODESRIA, working with the network of researchers who gave weight to the pan-African reach of his scholarship.

His contributions to knowledge range from studies on migration, to state-formation and state-building processes, religion and identity, structural adjustment programmes and sustainable development.

Together with several Senegalese scholars, including Ibrahima Thioub and Mamadou Diouf, M-C Diop deepened our understanding of the formation of Senegal through, for instance, the study of statecraft. He anchored his work around questions of migration, identity and social change and problematised the notion of legitimacy as Senegal moved from socialism to ‘liberalism’. His insights, contained in the edited study originally published in French under the title *Sénégal: Trajectoires d’un État* (1960-1990), and translated into English in 1994 as *Senegal: Essays in Statecraft*, mobilised some of the key debates in Senegal that led

to a majestic understanding of how prominent Senegalese intellectuals understood and responded to the challenges that faced the country at the time.

One cannot understand M-C Diop’s knowledge through an isolated reading of one of his studies. He always built one intervention onto another, and the archive of his work reveals a horizontal expansion as he covered key interconnected thematic issues and a vertical growth as he deepened his analysis of each of those themes. In 1990, for instance, CODESRIA published his jointly authored Working Paper No. 1, on *Statutory Political Successions: Mechanisms of Power Transfer in Africa*. He later expanded his analyses into a series of studies on Senegal that won him wide acclaim and cemented his place in the social science community.

M-C Diop will therefore be remembered for his contributions in *Le Sénégal sous Abdoulaye Wade : le sopi à l’épreuve du pouvoir*; *Le Sénégal contemporain*; *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf, État et Société*; *La société senegalaise entre le local et le global*; *Sénégal: Trajectoires d’un État* (1960–1990); and *La construction de l’État au Sénégal*, a study jointly authored with Donal Cruise O’Brien and Mamadou Diouf.

Many have commented on his scholarship but many more have noted his humility, curiosity, discipline, loyalty and mentorship of different generations of Senegalese colleagues. Penda Mbow reminds us that it was Momar Coumba Diop who introduced them to CODESRIA, encouraging them to attend the Gender Institute and introducing them to the works of East and southern African authors, including Archie Mafeje, Mahmood Mamdani and Sam Moyo. Mamadou Diouf states that Momar's legacies were anchored in the family traditions of Jolof, the Islamic brotherhood

and political commitments, as well as the turpitudes of the HLM district and the Blaise Diagne high school where he studied. In him we had a librarian, a publisher, consummate researcher with a methodical approach to his craft, indeed the perfect embodiment of 'a true aristocrat of knowledge', to once again borrow Penda Mbow's words. Even in sickness, Mamadou Diouf reminds us, he was stoic, at some point seeming to have triumphed over the illness.

It is not only now that we celebrate him. In 2023, his peers—including Ibou Diallo, Ibrahima Thioub,

Alfred Inis Ndiaye and Ndiouga Benga—presented him with a 720-page book entitled *Comprendre le Sénégal et l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui: Mélanges offerts à Momar Coumba Diop*. As Momar Coumba Diop is put to rest on 13 July 2024 in Yoff, there is no doubt that we have lost the compass of Senegalese humanities and human sciences. We at CODESRIA grieve with his family and friends and pray they have the grace to remember him while letting go. We know this is a difficult prayer since, as Mamadou Diouf points out, it is difficult to think of Momar Coumba Diop in the past tense.

