



Senegal

COUNTRY

Formal Name: Republic of Senegal

Short Form: Senegal

Term for Citizens: Senegalese

Capital: Dakar

Independence: April 4, 1960 (from France); August 20, 1960, federation with Mali dissolved

GEOGRAPHY

Size: 75,951 square miles (196,190 km²)

Boundaries: Bordered to the north by Mauritania, east by Mali, south by Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, and west by the Atlantic Ocean

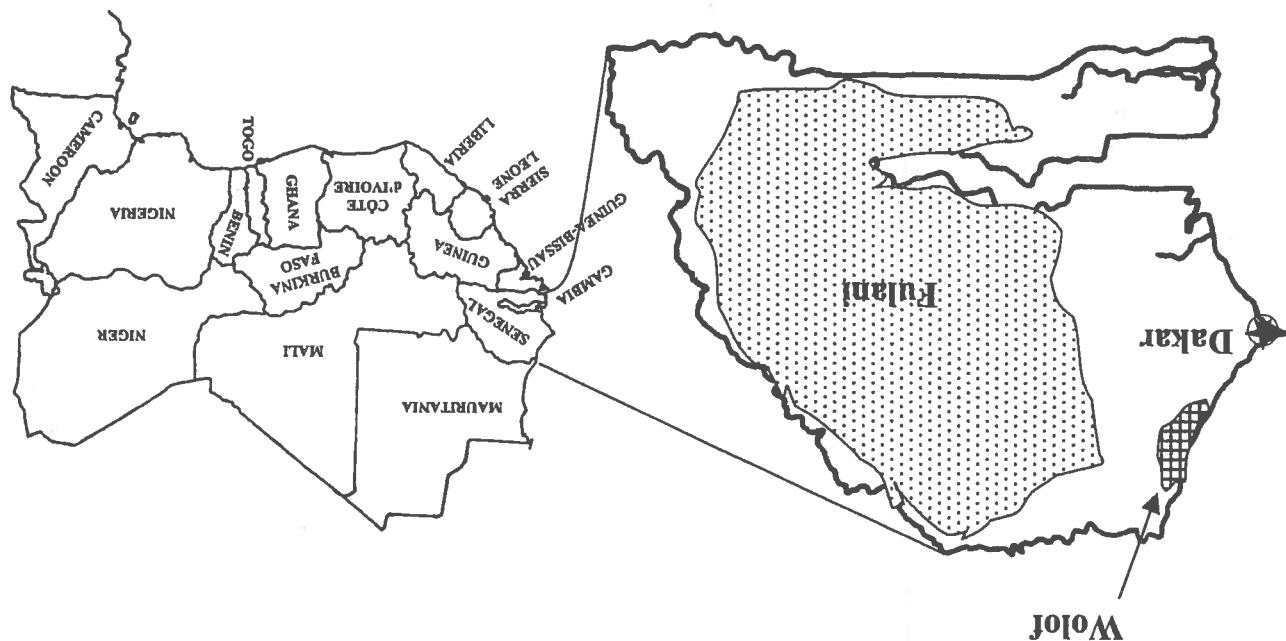
SOCIETY

Population: 10.1 million

Ethnic Groups: Wolof (43%), Pular (24%), Serer (14%), Diola, Mandingo, among others

Languages: The major languages are Wolof, Senegalo-Guinean, Mande, Pular, and Mandingo. French is the official language.

Religion: 92% Islam; 6% local religions; 2% Christianity



THE MAJESTIC FISH

The saying that one never quite knows the value of what one has until one loses it is illustrated vividly in this story. The Fularis tell of a small pond and a Big Fish who became tired of the dull life of that pond and decided to take up residency in—of course—a bigger pond.

There lived a school of little fishes in a small pond very far away from the river. Because the river was far from the pond, the little fishes never had to worry about the bigger fishes coming into the pond to bother them. The only times the fishes felt bothered was when the local village boys cast their hooks into the pond hoping to snag one of them. But, the fishes knew this, so they seldom thought it was a bother. Indeed, they took a liking to the boys because they brought them worms to feed on. The boys' hooks were too big for the fishes to swallow, so they just nibbled on the worms, ate around the hooks and left them bare. To get more worms, they tugged on the lines and swam back to watch the boys pull them in with all their might. Finding no fish, the boys baited the hooks again and sank them back into the pond.

The fishes lived happily together in their own little world until one rainy season. It had rained so very heavily on one of the days that an upstream river had overflowed, flooding neighboring farmlands—and the little pond. When the water receded, the mud settled, and the water cleared, the little fishes found themselves sharing their pond with a much bigger fish.

The little fishes tried to make friends with this Big Fish, but he would not respond to their overtures. The Big Fish just kept to himself.

"Would you tiny ninny wits stop disturbing the water," he snapped at the small fishes one day. "I am trying to enjoy the sun and grab a nap." Then he turned away and faced the bank of the pond. Since he was so big, his movement swished the water so hard that the little fishes rammed into each other and against the bank of the pond.

The Big Fish's relationship with the little fishes never got any better. The little fishes tried to ignore him, but the pond was so

small and the Big Fish so big that they couldn't help running into him. So, one day one of the little fishes said to the Big Fish, "You know, don't you think that you might be better off going down to the big river. As big and majestic as you are, probably mixing with other fish of your stature would do you some good. It is obvious that you don't like it here, and I don't blame you."

The Big Fish's ego was stroked. He puffed himself to be even bigger and more majestic.

"Oh! Yeah?" he asked, sizing up himself and watching his every move in his shadow.

"Sure," the little fish continued, "Isn't it obvious? It is easy to see you are of royal descent and we ninny wits are not even fit to groom your fins much less share a pond with you. Your whiskers and the grace with which you move your tail have royalty written all over them."

For several days, the Big Fish was the subject of discussion in the pond as the little fishes praised him and puffed his ego. The Big Fish decided that the advice was the best thing he had ever heard from those little fishes. So he decided to take it.

"You know," he said to the little fishes, "I think you are right for once. I believe that good can come out of those puny heads of yours after all. I have really had it with you little fishes and your childish jokes. So, the next time the upper river overflows and the floodwater arrives, I'll be out of here. I need to be down in the big river with fish of my own size and majesty."

The little fishes couldn't contain their joy, even though some of them thought that the Big Fish might be making a big mistake. While some urged him to rethink, others puffed him up for having come up with such a brilliant idea.

Several market weeks later the rains came again, followed by the floods. The pond and all the surrounding land was covered with water for as far as the eyes could see. Some of the fishes somersaulted above the water level to check out the extent of the flood. As they fell back into the pond, they anchored their fins to the bank to keep themselves from being swept downstream by the flood, but not the Big Fish. This was his opportunity! He slowly swam to the surface of the pond, bid the small fishes goodbye, and allowed himself to be

swept down to the sea by the flood.

As he went with the flood, he began to notice that everything was larger than in the pond. The shrubs stood as tall as the trees at the ponds, and the rocks were towering over him like mountains. Even the water was different. It tasted funny, he thought.

"Wow!" he exclaimed, filled with excitement for the new life he was going to lead. "Why didn't I think of this sooner? I can't wait to see all these other majestic fishes!"

As he was thinking about his new life, he found himself between two giant rocks. Since he was now tired, he decided to catch his breath for a minute. But as he rested, he noticed that the water current had increased to a swirl. As he turned to anchor himself, he found himself staring into the eyes of a fish much, much bigger than he. He was still trying to recover himself when other, even bigger fishes swam by.

"What is a little fish like you doing here?" the much bigger fish asked him. "Get out of the way before we run you over."

"Can we eat him?" asked the first fish.

"He is too small, even for you," said the biggest one, who must have been their mother. Then one of the fishes chased after him. The Big Fish swam as fast as he could and hid between the rocks.

As soon as he noticed that they were gone, he cautiously came out from between the rocks. No sooner had he come out than another big fish dove for him. As he swam faster and faster, he wondered why he ever left the serenity and quietness of the pond for this war zone. How would he survive? He couldn't even settle down long enough to find something to eat. All day, he was busy running so that he wouldn't be some other fish's lunch.

"I must find a way to get back to that pond," he said to himself. "And I'd better do it now before the water recedes or I end up in another fish's stomach."

When the water calmed somewhat, he quietly swam upstream in the direction of the pond. "I hope that I can find that pond," he said to himself. "And if I do, I will cherish and appreciate it. I must make friends with those fish and live in harmony with them."

The swim upstream was more difficult than his ride downstream on the current had been. He laboriously swam below the current,

digging his fins into the mud as he did. But eventually he came to familiar surroundings. Finally, he was in the pond, and he collapsed on its bed, exhausted and panting.

"Look who is back," said one of the little fishes. "I can see that the big river wasn't big enough for you either."

But the Big Fish just lay there out of breath. He thought to himself, "You win. You can talk all you want. If I had known what life in the big river was like, I wouldn't have left in the first place."

From that day on, the little fishes played to their heart's content. The Big Fish never bothered them; nor did he feel any more majestic than they. He played with the little fishes and they all lived happily ever after.