

Jean Ouattara

Summary:

Jean Outtarra discusses the history of Khor and the Protestant and Bambara communities in the area, with considerable attention paid to the processes of conversion and inter-communal relationships between different religious groups that emerged over the course of the community's development. His testimonies shed light on patterns of migration to the Saint Louis area; practices of conversion and relationships between Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims in Senegal; the relationship between colonization and various types of assimilation; histories of conscription; and communal origins and losses.

- Jean Outtarra was born on April 15, 1943 in Khor. He studied in a Muslim-majority school in Ndjolofène for primary school, through which he became intimately familiar with Muslim religious teachings and practices. Between these personal experiences and mixed religious heritage, Jean became deeply interested in Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue efforts, to which he has devoted himself for decades. Jean studied nursing and spent 25 years as a pharmaceutical sales representative while also opening schools and becoming the director of the Higher Institute for Health, first in Ziguinchor, then in Saint-Louis. He has been an elder in the Senegalese Protestant church community since 2004, and was indeed chair of the Dakar Protestant Church from 1992-96.
- Jean's mother, Kouta Maréga, is from a Soninke marabout family, "one of the largest Muslim families in Senegal." His maternal grandmother, Kourouma, had a brother, Moussa Samuel Vauvert, who had converted to Christianity and had married and settled in Saint-Louis. Kourouma, while visiting her childless brother in the early 1900s, gave custody of Kouta to him, and he raised her as a Christian in Saint-Louis. Vauvert opened a French school in Khor, which also encouraged growth of the Khor community.
- Jean traces his father Andres (Adioma) Outtarra's family origins to people who lived between Mali, the Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. Jean's grandfather, Zandiougou, died when Andres was five years old, after which Jean's grandmother raised him alone. Andres was sent to work under prominent Saint-Louis figure Charles Le Gros in the print shop of Saint-Louis while still young, which established his career as a typographer. Andres also was a prolific farmer, teaching Jean much about cultivating fruits and vegetables, and longtime director of the local Protestant church. Andres was additionally conscripted in both World Wars.
- Much of Jean's narrative describes the origins of the Protestant community in Saint-Louis, which he traces to the appointment of the Protestant Jauregui Berry as governor in the 1860s. Berry, according to Outtarra, secured three missionaries from France (Louis Jacques, Andros, Jules Luga) and deployed them to Sédhiou to evangelize so as to counter Catholic missionary efforts based in Carabane and Sédhiou. These early missionaries bought land and established a school and a clinic, but the Sédhiou mission quickly failed due to disease and Berry redirected conversion efforts to Saint-Louis, specifically to the village of Khor (then Bethesda). There the Protestants founded the Bethesda Protestant School. Governor Berry also

borrowed the refuge practice that had historically been based in the village of Raw (which is Wolof for “escape”) to lands under the governor’s domain centered around Khor/Bethesda, explicitly linking Khor and Raw and making the early village of Khor into a safe haven for people fleeing internal conflict between “the different Lebu chiefs, Serer chiefs, the Bambara who came from there.” The creation and linking of these refuge spaces, according to Outtarra, helped both Muslim and Protestant conversion efforts. Moreover, it led to waves of immigration to the Khor area by people fleeing internal conflict. Governor Berry worked with a local Senegalese convert called Taylor to translate the Bible into Wolof and thus redoubled Protestant conversion efforts, first with Wolof communities and then with the Bambaras who settled in the area. Mass conscription in WWII led to the diminution of the Christian community in the village, as Muslim proselytization expanded during the war; the transition from Bambara services to French also contributed to further decline for a time, before a revival with the opening of Université Gaston Berger, which brought Christians from a wider geographical area.

- Jean speaks also about the settlement of Bambara communities in the Saint-Louis area, which he said began in the north of the region before limited housing encouraged people to start buying lands closer to Khor. He states that the first neighborhood of Saint-Louis was Mbambara, which he says was settled when Bambara soldiers during WWI married and settled there. Jean is careful to relate much of the developmental history of Saint-Louis to contributions of the Bambara community.

Main Themes:

- Religion: Jean describes lots of inter-religious acculturation, such as his study of the Quran and experiences with Islamic schools and various marabouts’ Protestant schooling. He also notes that he comes from a religiously mixed family, with a Christian father and Muslim mother. (He notes repeatedly that Saint-Louis is a “melting pot.”) Much of Jean’s narrative is further devoted to Christian conversion stories, both into Protestantism (the focal point here) and Catholicism, with detailed stories of various missionaries. Jean’s story of the creation of the Protestant community in Senegal also involves narratives of historical forcible conversion to Islam.
- Migration: Jean speaks at length about the migration story of the Ouattara family.
- Assimilation: In addition to recalling how many Bambaras took on Wolof family names, Jean speaks about the assimilation of names by adopting French personal names, though his community largely maintained Bambara/Senegalese names as well. He also describes how church sermons used to be in Bambara sometimes, but are now exclusively in French.
- Origins and losses: Jean devotes considerable time to describing the origins of the Protestant community in Senegal, as he states his “father was part, certainly, of the first ones who converted to Christianity in Senegal, as a Protestant.” Also describes how most of the inhabitants of Khor had converted to Islam during WWII. Further, he explains the origins of the name Khor, which means “shell” in Wolof: the area,

originally called Bethesda, was renamed after a river bridge built from shells (Pont de Khor).

- Conscription: Speaks mainly about the first world war (“the 14-18 war”) and his father’s experience of conscription there, and how he and one other man from the same village were the only Black survivors they could find at Verdun. Also describes WWII (“the 39-40 war”) in less detail, linking it to a story of conversion to Islam.
- Colonization: Among other things, Jean describes the seizure of valuable archives related to the history of Protestantism and Christianity generally in the area by the French authorities. He is aware of their existence in the French central archives in Nantes. He also describes his father’s ways of working around the colonial court system, using his warm relations with the colonists (as both a civil servant and vegetable seller) to get his relatives out of a legal dispute.

Tags:

- Location (Khor/Xor)
- Cultural groups (Bambara)
- Religion (Islam, Christianity [Catholicism, Protestantism])
- Internal conflicts
- Migration
- Assimilation
- Conscription
- Colonization
- Trades (agriculture)
- Origins and losses
- Characters (Ngolo Bougou)