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# Municipal Orders of Saint-Louis of Senegal in the 18th Century: Administrative and Scientific Uses - The Example of the Blanchot Register

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**Abstract:** This reflection is part of a research workshop on the cross-use of archives as an object of study by the historian. The communication that was to necessarily ensue produced this text. This article starts from the administrative and scientific professions to examine an archive that we have decided to call: municipal ordinance. This document in the singular constitutes a collection of orders or instructions given by the commander of Senegal to the mayor of the city in the management of the colonial establishment. The first instruction manual retraces the procedure and the context of the production of the document for administrative use. The second user's guide reports on the contribution of the document that has become an archive to historiographical research. This archive, often cited in historiography, is questioned here. It depicts the relationship between a local administration made up of French people and a municipality made up of Senegalese (free blacks and mestizos) in the management of the city. One would be tempted to speak of an inclusive administration, that is to say advocating the direct participation of local inhabitants in the political affairs of the French establishment with the primordial role played by the mayor of the city. In fact, this would risk masking the reality insofar as this situation is obtained not because of the good bouoir of the French but rather after a long struggle of the Inhabitants of Saint-Louis of Senegal. This sociological and political reality structures the context of the archive that will be examined here.

**Keywords:** Ordinances, Mayor, Municipality, Saint-Louis du Senegal, Administration, Archives

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## 1. Introduction

The expression, municipal ordinances, is by globalizing connotation containing the meaning of the so-called registers of the orders of the administrators Blanchot and Schmaltz of Senegal. These are decisions not taken by the municipality but instructions given to the mayor of the city by the French administrator of Senegal. Municipal ordinances are distinguished from those received by each ordinator of Senegal, appointed by the French Minister of Marine and Colonies [10]. Ministerial ordinances followed the rhythm of appointment of each authorizing officer in the colony, while municipal ones were almost daily. Some inform about the vision of the central administration, embodied by the minister, of the management of the finances of the colony of Senegal. The others describe, among other things, its implementation at the local level.

The distinction between the texts governing the policies applicable and to be applied also provides information on a difference in the place of production of the documents. Despite the common function of the municipal ordinance, taken as a whole, in the management of the colony of Senegal, each document (order or ordinance) has a history, born from the confluence of a necessity and a situation. This is the examination of the state of a situation to be created, corrected, or improved to make the colonial service effective at a given time.

The reflection leading to this work is part of a large thematic corpus relating to the "cross-use of the archive", a methodological workshop between young researchers from different backgrounds, around an essential instrument of the toolbox historians. The purpose of this study is to describe the genesis or the making of the archive, which is very important in the construction of historical knowledge on the

colonial establishment of Senegal in the 18th century. This prerequisite for a work of counting allows the establishment of plural grids of readings of the archive already made in the historiography and those to be made. To do this, the analysis focuses on the administrative and scientific uses of the municipal ordinance.

## 2. Administrative Use - Production of the Document

Administrative use is the first mode of use of the archive. It serves at the time of its development as a document necessary for administrative management. It continues to be important in preserving the principle of administrative continuity and as a documentary reference for its actions [3, 7, 8]. Its Greek etymological attachment, meaning "to govern", "to command", provides information on the political function of the archive. In this perspective, they, in the plural, become an institution or at least integrate the administrative architecture intended to provide a specific service to the administration. On this, any analysis of the archive that does not relate the perspective of its production will be doomed to failure [3]. It is a question here of retracing the procedure of production of the archive document called by default, municipal ordinance.

Blanchot's register or his orders, listed 3B1 at the National Archives of Senegal (ANS), is the container of what is called municipal ordinance, that is to say the list of orders given by the commander of Senegal to the mayor of the city of Saint-Louis, during the revolution and the French empire [4, 12]. Its descriptive presentation in the first sheet is made by Blanchot who says that: "the present register containing 92 sheets, by first and last sheets, was listed and initialed by me, commander-in-chief and administrator of Senegal and dependencies, to serve for the registration of the orders emanating from the Commander-in-Chief of the colony, from 24 fructidor of the 8th year of the one and indivisible French Republic", [3]. On September 10, 1800, while the commander was presenting the register, 86 orders had already been registered. It is not wrong, however, to attribute the paternity of the register to him. In fact, it results from its own initiative. Most of the management measures, taken on the spot, are the expression of the application of the directives of the Minister of the Navy and the Colonies, recorded in texts called "general instructions" for the newly appointed governors, [10]. There was also a quasi-permanent correspondence between the Minister and his agent in the establishment. However, before the production of this document for administrative use, none of the instructions and correspondence with the minister mentioned it. This means that it resulted less from an authorization from above than one of the many local initiatives taken by Blanchot.

Registers were sent to Senegal but only to be used for the statements of movements of the French troops in Senegal, relating to the displacements by leave, infirmity, desertion, death, etc., of the soldiers. It seems that it was a first since

both the founding of Saint-Louis of Senegal and the era of French governors appointed by the King of France to serve in West Africa in general. This is understandable if we know that the official development of the municipal institution in the French administration of Saint-Louis dates from after 1779. This practice became an administrative culture a posteriori, illustrated by the registers of Governor Schmaltz of 1815 and of the Privy Council of Senegal from 1817, [1]. Blanchot's register makes it possible to follow the trace of the correspondence between the commander and the city councilor of the colonial establishment. The peculiarity of the document is its unilaterality, where only the letters, or rather the orders given to the mayor of the city, appear. This does not mean that the mayor did not have correspondence with the latter, but no reference is there. The register contains the decisions of the governor whose execution falls within the prerogatives of the municipality or the mayor. It is the material witness of the municipal history of Saint-Louis insofar as without the register it is difficult to make this history. The municipal ordinance makes it possible to measure the anchoring of the municipality in the French administration.

Before examining the contents of the register of municipal ordinances, let us say a word about its initiator. Blanchot landed in Senegal in 1785 as major of the battalion of Africa in the rank of special commander in 2nd under the governorate of Boufflers. He took over the interim of the latter in June 1786 with d'Aigremont as director. He took leave, returning to France on 20 Nov. 1787 while Boucher was acting for him. Blanchot resumed the post of interim governor upon his return in December 1787. On January 25, 1789 he became the first commandant and administrator of the colony of Senegal and its dependencies, following the abolition of the post of governor. In 1790, he left for France leaving the interim to Boucher whom he found after in 1792. On March 13, 1799, he received his formal instructions before being retired by the 1st Consul and replaced by Lasserre. The dismissal of the latter by the inhabitants of Senegal in revolt, pushed France to rename Blanchot commander on August 17, 1802, which he occupied until his death on September 12, 1807. The particularity of Blanchot's career at the head of local administration is its length while the average duration of the governors of Saint-Louis and Gorée, from 1758 to 1817 is less than 2 years. This long career in Senegambia allowed him to put into practice certain ideas that other governors could not hope for because of their recall. On the military level, he was the author of several initiatives such as the formation of a local troop called the Corps of Senegalese Volunteers.

Blanchot begins to quote the register at the end of his first mission (1789-1801), [10]. The fact that he waited all this time shows that it was at the beginning a kind of collection, for personal purposes, of the orders given to the mayor of the city. He realized, no doubt, over time, its usefulness in documenting and dating the decisions taken in the management of the colonial territory. This idea is reinforced by the fact that during Boucher's interim (1790, 91 and 92),

no order was entered in the register. It is after his numbering that the registrations of other interim administrators are recorded, such as Charbonnier with his 3 orders of February 22 and March 5, 1801. The first studies of the contents of the register were carried out by Monteilhet and Alquier respectively in 1917 and 1922. The first reported that the register "(.) is a folio of 172 pages which includes 452 decisions all emanating from Blanchot, with the exception of those of his temporary worker of 1801, Colonel Lasserre and, in 1808, of his successor Captain Levasseur", [12]. Alquier specifies the irregularity of the inscription of the orders: "the first is from December 28, 1789, but the second is only from March 2, 1793; these orders follow one another after this last date, few in number until the year XI, to then decrease after 1807", [2]. He adds that no order was recorded during the period 1790-92 and in the year 1809, [2]. In fact, the first period constitutes Boucher's interim. Blanchot left Senegal in 1790 and found it again in 1792. The following scenarios are possible. Either, the temporary worker was not aware of the register, that he did nothing in the management of the colony involving the mayor and/or he did not consider it necessary to register them in the register. It is also possible, as indicated, that Blanchot took it to France. Either way, it demonstrates that even though he was the addressee of the orders, the mayor was not the holder of the register. As for the year 1809, Saint-Louis definitively turned the page on Blanchot, who had died two years earlier. This date also marks the loss of Senegal and Gorée by France to the English. However, during the XIII and XII years of the French Republic and in 1806, the greatest number of orders recorded per year was respectively recorded [2]. This is explained by a long economic crisis in relation to the English blockade of the coast but and above all by the two-year war between Fuuta and Saint-Louis.

Blanchot is not the author of all the ordinances intended for the municipality and contained in the register. Indeed, "the orders from number 1 to 90 (25 brumaire year IX, November 15, 1800) are signed Blanchot; from no. 91 to 93, Charbonnier; from no. 94 to 102, Lasserre; from no. 103 to 104, Charbonnier; from no. 105 to 422, Blanchot; from no. 423 to the end, Levasseur" [2]. Charbonnier, captain of the Battalion of Africa was to act twice for Blanchot while Levasseur succeeded him after his death. Lasserre replaced him after his retirement. The register was also used during the English management of Senegal, as illustrated by the last unlisted entries of July 12, 1811 and April 16, 1812.

Content analysis reveals that the majority of the texts are orders. The order does not have the classic format of administrative texts like formal letters with convoluted turns. They have no header or subject. They are usually an injunctive text of a few lines, signed and dated by the commander who orders something to the mayor of the city. This type of text is not a correspondence even if the reference of an epistolary exchange between commander and mayor is often made. The message of the order was not intended for the knowledge of the public but only of the police arm of the colonial administration, the mayor, who undertook to apply it.

However, the register presents other types of text. There are 16 proclamations. The definition of a proclamation by the Littré as a writing containing what one wants to publish or proclaim applies here. The text-proclamation was not only intended for the exclusive knowledge of the mayor but also for all the inhabitants of the city. It was published by poster and/or read by the town crier in the streets of Saint-Louis. These were generally prohibitions or authorizations. The proclamations related to the following restrictions: to welcome foreigners, construction in straw, to open cabarets; on obligations: to the military commitment of the Inhabitants, to the rights to enter and leave the river, to requisitions and mobilizations for the war effort, to the encouragement of civil marriage to the detriment of that "in the fashion of the country ". The public awareness of the states of war against both the English and the Fuuta was also part of it.

The register also includes a listed decree (no. 138), an agreement (no. 199), an extract from the act of the Senegalese registry (no. 235), two letters from the commander to the Senegalese authorities (no. 234, 237), two regulations (no. 424, 435), two notices to the public (no. 200, 307) and a letter from a prince of the province of Fuuta: Dimar (no. 323). At least 25 coins in the ledger are not orders. It is inappropriate for counting to say 452 orders as those who are the first to strip the register do. The register can be qualified by the substantive "orders" as infused by Blanchot's introductory note. Moreover, only 25 of the 452 inscriptions do not fall within the typology of orders.

### 3. For Scientific Use

Scientific use is the mode of employment dear, among others, to archivists and historians, consisting for them of retrace the history of a fact through its imprints left in documents for administrative use, crystallized over time in archives. The work of counting is a prerequisite insofar as a primary source like a raw material calls on the know-how of the historian to transform the amorphous ore into a derivative product [14]. It is important for the user to know the context in which the document was produced and its storage and communication conditions. Thus, the para-archive and the peri-archive often become necessary tools for examining the information contained in the archive [3]. In fact, the archives were not intended to be used for the construction of historical knowledge. The testimonies they provide are only involuntary.

The aim here is to analyze the scientific interest of the municipal ordinance in the production of historical knowledge. To my knowledge, two texts in particular proceeded to the analysis of Blanchot's register, even if his references in Senegambian historiography in general are numerous. These are usually studies of colonial settlements in general during the French revolution and empire. The references are more numerous if the study relates to Saint-Louis in Senegal at the chronological scale indicated. This question is related to the issue of local sources during the period prior to the colonial conquest, begun by Faidherbe.

Most of the archival documentation from this period is currently kept in the Archives in France. The Senegalese postcolonial state only manages to preserve the archives of the so-called colonial period, but not the restitution of those of the previous period. Monteilhet reports that: “the period prior to 1816 is represented in the Local Archives only by two registers of ministerial dispatches, which go with considerable gaps from 1780 to 1808 and by a register of the orders and decisions of the Commandant of Senegal (.)” [12]. The registers alluded to by the author are listed in ANS, 1B1, 1780-1791, (304 leaves) and 1B2, Year 4-1808, (139 leaves) [12]. These sub-series bear in common the title of correspondence between the minister and the administrator of Senegal and dependencies.

This evaluation of the local archival documentation of the studies during the period under review is reductive. It is accepted that the archives of this time sequence are kept in the Navy Funds (1670-1870), the Old Colonies Fund, the Colonial Fortifications Deposit (in Aix and partly online), in the French Archives. But they were available at ANS in the form of microfilm at the time the author was writing his article. It is only from 2014 that this analog document storage medium is no longer available. In addition, the ANS contain sub-series allowing the partial documentation of studies prior to 1816, even if their state of disrepair in relation to their manuscript format makes it difficult to exploit them. These are 10D1, treaties and conventions between colonial establishments and Senegambian states; 13G and 22G: states general of customs.

Alquier's approach is more cautious, inscribed in a defined time frame and space [13]. Assessing the archival documents at the local level, Alquier, archivist to the governor general of the AOF, reports that: "among those which relate to the period of the revolution and the Empire, one of the most curious, rated 3B1 and moreover, the only one of its kind, is the register in which the commander and administrator of Senegal had the orders he addressed to the mayor of the town of Saint-Louis transcribed" [2]. It demonstrates the particularity of the register compared to other documents by placing it in its temporal context. This means that Blanchot's register is essential in the documentation of studies on Saint-Louis of Senegal during the French revolution and empire alone. His work and that of Monteilhet are dependent on municipal ordinances as evidenced by their numerous references. On this, Alquier admits that the register of orders “served as a starting point and as a basis for the present study” [2]. It can be said that the proliferation of studies on European establishments in Africa at the time of the revolution and the empire can be explained by the existence of the register of municipal orders. These periods have become convenient in Senegambian historiography as time markers [6, 5, 9, 11].

Despite its use in the analysis of the management of the colonial establishment, the register offers several reading grids. It is remarkable that studies relating to the municipality and the urbanization of the city of Saint-Louis often refer to it. The register also allows the documentation of political,

economic and social issues within the island district and in the Senegambian space. The conflictual relations between Saint-Louis and its state neighbours, the military arrangements with the enlistment of local inhabitants and their training, the military expeditions against the Senegambian states, the system of hostages of the neighboring kings of Saint-Louis, the organization of island defence, military intelligence and espionage, popular control, etc., are recurring topics in the register. The same goes for questions relating to the production and dissemination of information within the precincts of the capital and its annexed territories, to the communication system, to economic difficulties, communication breakdowns and their impact on the supply of Senegal. This demonstrates the plural and multidimensional contribution to the research work that the exploitation of the register allows.

Personally, this archive has been an immeasurable contribution to my doctoral research. It allowed me to solve the equation of the municipality in its intrinsic relationship with the colonial administration established on the island. It is accepted that the municipality is an initiative of the inhabitants, facilitated by the English occupation (1758-1779), by expelling the French from Senegal [14]. It was a community institution but also a colonial one, participating in the management and defense of the interests of the colonial establishment. The shift of the institution from its community function to that of administration has taken place. The mayor of Saint-Louis became an official of the French colonial administration with monthly salaries in the same way as the authorizing officer or the clerks. The multidimensional character of the orders given to the city councilor provides information on his prerogatives. It can be said that the practical management of local affairs and relations with African states was the responsibility of the mayor. The function of the commandant, head of the colonial administration, was limited to issuing orders. The role of the mayor is comparatively more important than that of number 2 in the administrative hierarchy, authorizing officer, who was limited to finances. The testimony of Poncet de la Rivière on Charles Thévenot (mayor), whom he qualifies as “true master of Senegal”, says a lot about the municipal power of the colony [15]. The mayor managed a relational network in the Senegambian space with an influence on almost all the sovereigns. This gave it *de facto* and *de jure* power in settling disputes between Saint-Louis and its neighbours. He was at the beginning and end of negotiations on behalf of the establishment with the Senegambian states. He was the privileged witness of almost all the treaties and conventions binding these two entities.

Without the municipal orders it would be difficult to grasp the prerogatives of the municipality insofar as the other sources have only incomplete traces. If we take, for example, the instructions given to governors in particular or the correspondence between the Minister of the Navy and the Colonies and his local representative, in general, only the question of the police falls under the responsibility of the mayor. As it turns out, aspects of the mayor's role fit into this

perspective, but others do not and were even the responsibility of the governor. We can cite for example the military field, which was not a competence transferred to the municipality. It would be in vain possible to take other examples to account for the contribution of the municipal ordinance in my research.

However, the limits of its exploitation are partially linked to the orientations of Senegalese historiography, with the flowering of works on the urban and the municipality. It is also possible to make the history of Saint-Louis of Senegal under the administration of Blanchot by exploiting in particular the register which bears his name. The same goes for the daily life of Saint-Louis during the Revolution and the French Empire. It would be interesting to also reflect on the theme of the triptych: States, powers and society. It would be a question of establishing the relationship between central and local administrations on the one hand and analyzing on the other hand the relationship between the political and social powers within the city-state.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is clear that the concepts of municipal ordinance and register of orders inform of a connotative contrast in the content of the document analyzed. The typological analysis reveals that the orders represent the overwhelming majority of the texts but are not unanimous. Other types of text that can be found outside the register are noted after the work of counting, resulting in a certain formative dissonance of the register. This is the case of conventions and decrees found in other archival files. For the sake of consistency according to the majority, it is possible to call it the register of municipal orders or ordinances and better still that of Blanchot even if the latter is not the author of all the texts. The scientific use of the document has revealed the many reading grids it offers for the work already done in historiography but and above all and to be done.

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