



CHAPTER I

Friends and Family

APRIL 4 IS COMING SOON, AND MARIAMA IS VERY excited. April 4 is Independence Day, the day that Senegal gained independence from France. While Mariama is proud of her country and happy to celebrate the holiday, she is even happier to spend time with her parents' families. Schools close for two weeks in Senegal to celebrate Independence Day, and Mariama's parents always travel to visit friends and family.

For the first week of their vacation, they will visit her mother's family in Saint-Louis, about 125 miles (200 kilometers) north of their home in Thiès. On their way back, they will stop for a visit with her father's family in a small village not far from home.

Thiès is a pretty city not far from the capital city of Dakar. Mariama's father works in the mayor's office. Many people in

Opposite: Senegal is a young country. More than four out of every ten Senegalese are less than fifteen years old.



their family work in the government, as do many other members of Senegal's largest ethnic group, the Wolof. The Wolof people are Muslims, as are most Senegalese. In some ethnic groups, like the Wolof, women and girls over thirteen can own land. Unlike in some Muslim countries, Muslim communities in Senegal do not require women to cover themselves with a traditional robe or veil. Instead, women wear colorful headscarves and wraps and Western-style skirts and dresses. Both men and women wear *boubous*, long cotton robes.

Mariama's family will take a *sept-place* (meaning "seven seats" in French) taxi to Saint-Louis. Her family does not own a car. The streets in Thiès are crowded. There are many buses and taxis, trucks, cars, and bicycles, and in some neighborhoods, horse and donkey carts. Mariama's house is not far from schools or the marketplace, so it is easy to walk where they want to go. Her father rides a motorcycle to work. Thiès is a bustling hub of activity. It is a major marketplace for farmers

In Senegal, buses are often brightly colored. People sometimes stand on the bumper of the crowded buses when there are no seats available.



Fast Facts

- Official name of the country:** Republic of Senegal
Capital: Dakar
Official language: French
Official religion: None
Year of independence: 1960
National anthem: "Pincez Tous vos Koras, Frappez les Balafons"
("Pluck Your Koras, Strike the Balafons")
Type of government: Presidential republic
Head of state: President
Head of government: Prime minister



Cap Vert peninsula



Left to right: National flag,
presidential guard



- Area:** 75,955 square miles (196,723 sq km)
Latitude & longitude of country: 14°0' N, 14°0' W
Bordering countries: Mauritania to the north, Mali to the east, Guinea to southeast, Guinea-Bissau to the southwest, The Gambia is completely surrounded by Senegal in the south.
Length of coastline: 330 miles (531 km)
Highest elevation: Near Népen Diakha, 1,906 feet (581 m) above sea level
Lowest elevation: Sea level along the Atlantic Ocean
Longest river: Senegal River, about 2,500 miles (4,000 km)
Average high temperature: In Dakar, 77°F (25°C) in February, 87°F (31°C) in August
Average low temperature: In Dakar, 64°F (18°C) in February, 78°F (26°C) in August
Average ocean temperature: 83°F (28°C) in August; 69°F (21°C) in February
Average annual precipitation: 13 inches (33 cm) in the north; 61 inches (155 cm) in the southwest