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The Limits of the Literary: Senegalese Writers Between French, Wolof and World
Literature

By

Tobias Dodge Warner

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Karl Britto, Chair

Professor Judith Butler

Professor Samba Diop

Professor Susan Maslan

Professor Gautam Premnath

Spring 2012

Abstract

The Limits of the Literary: Senegalese Writers Between French, Wolof and World Literature

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Tobias Dodge Warner

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This dissertation argues that the category of the literary emerged in colonial Senegal through the exclusion of some indigenous textual cultures and the translation of others. In readings of Mariama Bâ, Ousmane Sembène, Cheikh Aliou Ndao, Maam Yunus Dieng and others, I examine how postcolonial Senegalese authors working in French and Wolof have responded to this legacy. Through analyses of a variety of 19th-20th century texts, this dissertation explores how the Senegalese literary field has been crosscut by a series of struggles over how to define proper reading and authorship, and what the shape of a future literary public might be. I argue that Senegalese writers working at the interstices of French and Wolof have engaged with a variety of crises of authorship and audience by addressing their work to a public that is yet to come.

The dissertation begins in the 19th century with a reading of works by an influential 19th-century *métis* intellectual, the Abbé David Boilat, in whose scholarly activities one can perceive the discursive preconditions of a future francophone literary field. From there, the dissertation turns to the early 20th century, when literary studies were introduced into the French colonial curriculum as a discipline for cultivating new and putatively modern modes of authorship and reading. The focus then shifts to the 1960s-70s, where I explore the postcolonial politics of language and the emergence of modern Wolof literature and film in Cheikh Aliou Ndao's *Buur Tilleen* (1967) and Ousmane Sembène's *Mandabi* (1968). I then investigate how the circulation of Senegalese literature as World literature echoes the ideals of colonial literary study. Here, I reconsider the reception history of Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1980), contrasting the terms in which that novel became internationally acclaimed with how it has been reworked by a Wolof writer, Maam Yunus Dieng. Finally, in a Coda, I query how the 'work' of Wolof literature has been transformed in the age of structural adjustment – through readings of Boubacar Boris Diop's *Doomi Golo* (2003) and Cheikh Aliou Ndao's *Mbaam Aakimoo* (1997).

To Lauren, for all of it

And to my parents, Bob Warner and Isabel Downs

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Introduction

The Text Collector: David Boilat's 1843 Notes du Fouta Toro

In 1843, a curious notebook arrived in Paris at the Société de Géographie, a French association that promoted the collection of knowledge about the non-European world.¹ Between the notebook's marbled covers and leather spine, the *savants* of the Society discovered what would have seemed a very exotic array of texts. As they turned its pages, they encountered writing in a variety of hands, scripts, and hues of ink. Some of the texts within were mere scraps of paper, no larger than a postage stamp; other, larger documents had to be carefully unfolded like maps. Many of the documents were written linearly in neat Latin or Arabic characters, but in others the writing was encased in geometric designs or wound counterclockwise across the page in spirals. The assembled texts were affixed with red wax to notebook's pages, giving it the appearance of a collection of pinned insects or pressed flowers.

This unusual collection of textual artifacts had been sent to the Society from what is today Senegal. The assembler of the notebook was the Abbé David Boilat, who was then vicar of St Louis, the tiny island outpost in the mouth of the Senegal river which was the center of French power in pre-conquest Senegal. The panoply of texts was the result of years of collecting specimens. In this Boilat had help from two marabouts² whose painted portraits he included at the beginning of the notebook.³ The notebook, today conserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale, contains a great variety of texts. For instance, it includes a multilingual petition to the colonial governor authored by various prominent St Louisians, which is written in French on one side and Wolofal⁴ and Arabic on the other.⁵ There are also many personal letters in Arabic that were exchanged by the people of St Louis (and likely provided to Boilat by Golojo).⁶ The notebook also contains transcriptions of various Wolof speech genres – fables (*léeb*) and a single song (*woy*) (without music). These are all transcribed in a Latin script, and appear to have been collected in Gorée and the Gambia. The final document in the notebook is a remarkable manuscript in Arabic complete with calligraphy and geometric illustrations. But for the orientalist of the Society perhaps most exciting inclusion would have been the textual components of many *gris gris*, which the Europeans had for centuries been calling 'fetishes.' Often these consisted of verses from the Quran or more occult messages and designs written by a marabout on pieces of paper, which were then bound in leather and worn as amulets, or sometimes soaked in water and then imbibed.⁷ Boilat's collection of *gris gris* were confiscated, he tells us, from various St Louisiennes, presumably by virtue of his authority as Vicar. In the margins around his collections, Boilat notes the different purposes for which the *gris gris* were originally intended – protection, wealth, and so on. One, he notes, was worth the price of a slave. Many of them would likely originally have been bound in leather amulets, so Boilat would have had to open these up and extract the papers inside in order make them part of his collection. It seems to me highly likely that the textual components of *gris gris* were not intended to be read or even seen, so I have not reproduced them visually on the following page.⁸

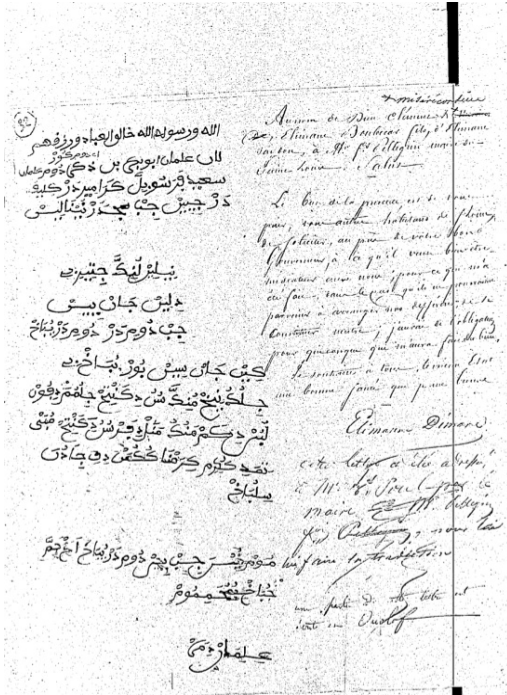


Figure 1: A petition in Wolofal, Arabic and French.

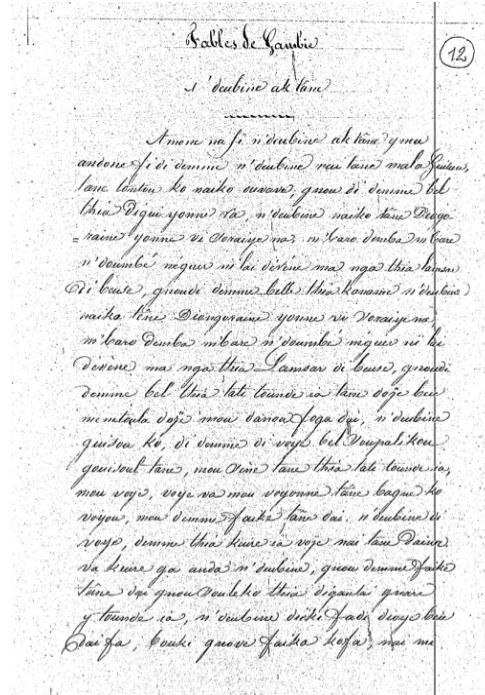


Figure 2: Wolof léeb (fables).

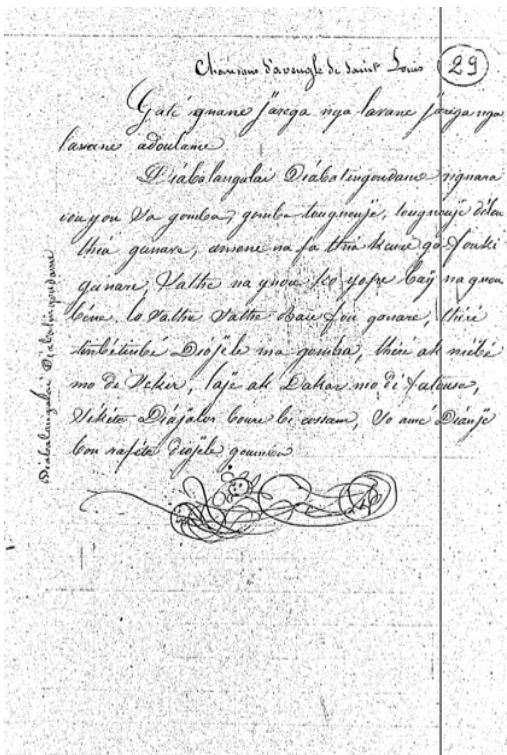


Figure 3: A Wolof woy (song).

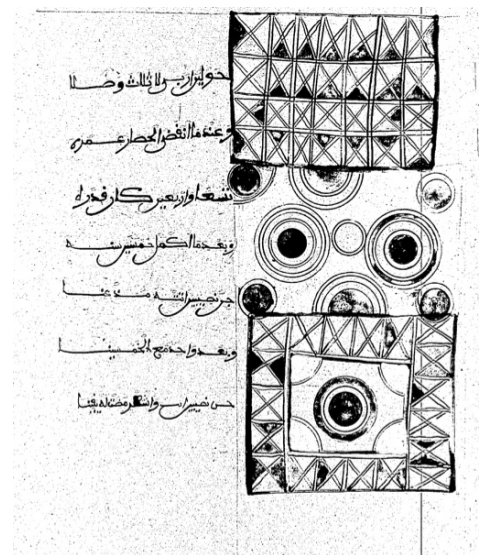


Figure 4: A page from the final manuscript.

(All images reproduced from Boilat 1843)

David Boilat was in a unique position to supply this collection to the Society.⁹ Beyond his ecclesiastical authority, he had a special place in the St Louisian community. Boilat had actually been born in St Louis in 1814, the child of European father and a *signare*¹⁰ mother. (Bouquillon and Cornevin 1981, 15) Along with a small number of other children, he had been a member of the very first group of African students whom the Mother Superior Anne-Marie Jouvey selected to be sent France. These students were to be the very first targets of the ideology of *assimilation*. Boilat traveled with his cohort to France in 1832, and was one of only three boys of this group to survive into adulthood. He was trained as a priest in Carcassone, returning to St Louis in 1842-3 with the Abbés Moussa and Fridoil, the other two survivors. Boilat would have come into contact with the Society through the Baron Roger, the former governor of Senegal who served as Boilat's mentor and patron and who was deeply involved in the Society.

The arrival of Boilat's collections caused some excitement at the Society. Writing in its *Bulletin*, Baron Roger celebrated Boilat's scholarly work and suggested that one of his portraits of the marabouts adorn the cover of the periodical that month, a proposal which was adopted. Noting that for many years the Society's "orientalists have desired to have at their disposal tidy and authentic texts" from the region, Roger was particularly pleased that this Senegalese priest had "undertaken proper studies with the aim of making [his] country better known, and collecting documents [...] for our Society." (Quoted in D. Boilat 2000, 248–253) Roger concluded with a recommendation that "these curious documents" be examined by "one of our knowledgeable orientalists." (*ibid*) The notebook, he wrote, was not merely "proof of devotion" on the part of his protégé, but also revealed "a lot of intelligence, discernment and an enlightened taste for the study of languages and for ethnography." (*ibid*) Roger predicted that the arrival of the notebook foretold a future which would see the emergence of what he called "acclimated travelers," assimilated Africans "speaking local languages, possessing kinship relations there, and all the natural resources that courageous Europeans have lacked." (*ibid*) In a letter of commendation from the Society itself, Boilat was thanked for his "services already rendered [...] to civilization and humanity" and invited to "increase [the Society's] knowledge of the regions of Africa which are in [his] reach." (Quoted in D. Boilat 2000, 252–253)¹¹

While Boilat's collections seem to have been discussed within the Society in the 19th century, they have since fallen out of view of academic scholarship. Some of the images from the collection (the *gris gris*, especially) are reproduced in a glossy book, produced by the Bibliothèque Nationale, about the notebooks of the Society's explorers. But as far as I have been able to discern so far, scholars or historians of Senegal do not appear to be aware of the existence of this archive of mid-19th-century documents.¹² So despite the early interest, Boilat's scholarly practice appears to have been without a contemporary scholarly response.¹³ For this reason, his collection seems fixed in a halfway state – these are text-specimens, but not yet objects of study; potentially readable, though not yet read. I want to pause, though, and question a bit further the readability that this collection of texts seems to promise. Is this readability an inherent, even ontological, feature of all these texts? Or is the readability, at least in some measure, a consequence of the form in which they are collected? What I want to suggest is that Boilat's initial gesture of fixing his collections into this notebook appears to have had a leveling effect on the artifacts themselves. The sense one has that all of these artifacts

possess a commensurable readability is a consequence of the form in which they are displayed. Being pinned into the notebook with wax has stripped them of most of their original context and re-entextualized¹⁴ them as text-specimens. The differences that likely would have existed in how these varied textual objects were created and used has been largely effaced, and the form of the collection reconfigures the distance between these objects and their audiences. Various genres of speech, writing, performance and other non-representational practices of textuality – songs, stories, private letters, petitions, talismans, and so on – are reframed as ‘texts’ that exist for a ‘reader,’ even a very distant, future one.¹⁵

‘The First Senegalese Writer’

While David Boilat’s forgotten textual collections may have faded from scholarly memory, he is actually still a fairly well known name in Senegalese studies, principally for two books he published after his return to France and for his role as an educator in the French schools in St Louis. Boilat’s first book is his *Esquisses Sénégalaises* [*Senegalese Sketches*] (1853), a memoir of his experiences in Senegambia and one of the earliest works to attempt a comprehensive study of the region’s climate, races, and customs.¹⁶ The book is written in a narrative voice that is both proto-ethnographic and literary. Boilat’s second well-known work is his *Grammaire de la langue woloffe* (Grammar of the Wolof language, 1858), an influential linguistic work which won him the Volney Prize of the Institut de France.¹⁷ While Boilat’s grammar was not the first to be written on Wolof, it was the first by a native speaker. In addition to his scholarly pursuits, Boilat is also remembered for his work as an educator, specifically as a pioneer of francophone education. In addition to being the Vicar of St Louis, Boilat had in 1843 been appointed the director of its schools. Along with the Abbés Moussa and Fridoil – the two other African priests who had been to France and back – Boilat founded the Collège in St Louis, the first institution of francophone secondary education in the colony.¹⁸

The back cover of Editions Karthala’s re-published version of *Esquisses* proclaims that Boilat “is very certainly the first Senegalese writer.” This claim is echoed and taken much further by Boilat’s biographers, Yves Boquillon and Robert Cornevin, who write on the back cover of their biography, *David Boilat (1814-1901): Le Précurseur*, that their subject ought to be recognized as the “First true writer from Senegal [...] the first linguist, first historian, first *missiologue* and also the first modern African artist [...] he is also the precursor of the first form of research in the human sciences in Black Africa.”¹⁹

Positioning Boilat in this way is, of course, very problematic, and it is not at all certain that he would have recognized himself in any of these epithets. I am not interested in affirming Boilat as an originator. However, I do think that this accumulation of “firsts” around his work is deeply revealing of a certain epistemic tension at work in the period in which we wrote, and from which the work of this dissertation in part proceeds. In this introduction, I will provisionally take up the claim that Boilat is “the first Senegalese writer” only to trouble it. I am interested in what being “the first Senegalese writer” involved in the 1840s-50s, what it made possible and what it had to foreclose. Specifically, in this introduction I read all these “firsts” that his biographers celebrate – his two published books and his work as a pioneer of the French colonial school – back

through the prism of the text-artifact collections he was quietly assembling. On the level of praxis, the collections have certain commonalities with Boilat's other activities. *Esquisses*, for example, presents itself as a series of literary-scientific portraits of the 'types' that compose pre-colonial Senegal, divided into the proto-ethnographic categories of races, geography, customs, etc. The *Grammaire* is, for its part, also a collection, but in this case of Wolof utterances that Boilat analyzes linguistically. In the sections that follow, I will be arguing that Boilat's two well-known literary/scientific treatises and his work as a Francophone educator are inextricably bound up with his work as a collector of texts.

The Skeleton of Language

Of his *Grammar*, Boilat writes, "It is necessary and urgent to make a methodical book, clear and precise, with which one can learn the Wolof language by oneself and in a short time" since such a book would be of great interest "not only to philology [but also...] for the French colonies of West Africa." (Boilat 1858, iv) Wolof was particularly crucial in this last regard, Boilat tells us, because "all the peoples of Senegal are obliged to make use of it in their commerce with our colonies." (Boilat 1858, vi) The initial colonies of French West Africa were established in zones occupied by or adjacent to Wolof-speaking populations and Wolof was already at that moment ascendant as a language of commerce. Like the studies of Wolof by the Baron Roger and Jean Dard before him, Boilat's *Grammar* is conceived of as a book that will promote the colonization of West Africa (a project more closely bound up with missionary activity in that period than it would be by the century's end). Boilat acknowledged that learning Wolof would present many difficulties to someone unfamiliar with the language, but reassured his reader that he had done his best to mitigate these by "giving many examples of the application of each rule." (Boilat 1858, 372)

But how did Boilat come to select the examples of Wolof speech that would serve as examples in his *Grammar*? By what precedent would he have learned to collect the proper forms of speech for such a scientific study? One way to approach these questions is to situate his works within the parameters of scientific discourse of their era, with which they are in dialogue. Notable in this regard are the guides that the Society itself produced, guides that were intended to train scientific amateurs such as Boilat for gathering useful information, including linguistic research.²⁰

For instance, one guide published by the Society, *Instructions générales aux voyageurs*, advises the amateur linguist to "treat a language like a naturalist treats an animal or a plant" and to search for a language's "distinctive characteristics" before classifying it. (Delagrave 1875) The version of linguistic training that this guide advocates was part of a larger reconfiguration of linguistic study in the 19th century, a turn toward comparative grammar. As Judith Irvine notes, this reconfiguration of the disciplines of linguistic study had some important effects on how many African languages were collected and transcribed.²¹ Discussing the work of missionary linguists such as Boilat, Irvine notes that in the early 19th century, the search for grammar was a search for the best usage – "a guide to linguistic practice rather than merely a description of it." (Irvine 2001, 65) In Europe, linguists in search of authorities on proper use had turned to literature and assembled collections of quotations from famous authors. But in

various sites across Africa, linguists (many of them missionaries like Boilat) were confronted with communities whose speech genres did not, to them, conform to the category of literature.²² Faced with this difficulty, authors of missionary and colonial grammars settled on proverbs and folktales as the best alternative. (*ibid*, 66) The African speech genres they recognized as falling into these categories seemed to the authors of early grammars to be more easily extractable from their context. They could more easily be collected and set apart as texts from everyday speech. (*ibid*, 79–80) During the period in which Boilat was working, then, collecting folktales and proverbs began to replace European travelers' longstanding practice of collecting word lists in African languages. (*ibid*, 80) Crucially, folklore and proverbs were thought to be both author-less and yet highly illustrative of the African speech communities from whom they were collected. For the missionaries who collected them, Irvine suggests, "Proverbs and folktales represented a homogenized, timeless folk mentality, perhaps childlike and certainly essentializable." (*ibid*, 80) They were poetic, and yet not poetry that could be identified with a particular author – ideally suited for making sweeping, racist claims about African cultures, without disturbing the venerable European trope of Africans as being 'without writing.'²³ As the British colonial administrators who collected Yoruba proverbs put it, they were "an embryo literature" of "a nation yet in its infancy."²⁴ (Quoted in Irvine 2001, 80)

To collect folktales and proverbs, however, a certain process of purification had to occur. Aspects of speech that could be determined to be extraneous to grammatical study²⁵ had to be peeled back to prepare the linguistic specimen (the proverb or folktale) for scientific research. Invoking a scene of dissection, or at the very least forensics, the aforementioned *Instructions* describes the work of isolating a language's grammar as being akin to how "paleontology reconstructs an animal with a fragment of its skeleton." (Delagrave 1875) Following the metaphor, the guide reminds the reader that, "a piece of [the organism's] flesh or skin would only be of minor interest." "Grammar," the guide concluded, "is the skeleton [*ossature*] of language." (*ibid.*) Thus the larger scientific discourse to which Boilat's work responds imagined itself as a search for the discrete linguistic unit that could yield a view of the whole structure.

And yet there was a paradox inherent in this method that would separate out the linguistic skeleton. Where, in spoken language, did the bones begin and the flesh end? What kinds of "talk" were suitable for this procedure of isolating the skeleton of language? The guide advised: "One must begin by having a simple phrase pronounced before oneself, that is to say one that contains a subject, a verb and direct object. One should transcribe this phrase with a word by word translation; above all no literature and no philosophy!" (*ibid.*) While the advice here seems clear, the reader would have also encountered elsewhere in the same guide this seemingly contradictory piece of advice: "But what would be even more useful would be a transcription of a legend, a song, even a conversation in the studied language, with a good word by word translation."²⁶ (*ibid.*) On the one hand, then, such a guide would have advised an amateur to push aside all the "flesh" and "skin" of discourse to isolate the representative specimen that could give a view on the underlying structure. In practice, though, flesh and skin could were often to be found clinging to the bones of language that the scientifically inclined traveler was supposed to have already picked clean.

While the *Instructions* pre-dates Boilat's work, this same paradox is clearly evident in Boilat's own Wolof *Grammar*. At the end of his grammatical study, Boilat includes a section he titles "Versions," which contains a collection of transcribed texts of Wolof speech, from proverbs (*léebu*) and fables (*léeb*) to songs (*woy*).²⁷ Boilat introduces the section by noting that there is no better way "to familiarize oneself with the language [...] than studying its maxims, proverbs, adages, etc. One finds in them the application of all the principles." (Boilat 1858, 372) And, indeed, this is largely how Boilat analyzes his "Versions" – as examples of usage with which he can demonstrate the grammatical principles he has laid out. But in some cases, these texts exceed this frame. For instance, some of the *woy* are in fact praise songs in honor of colonial administrators. One such song is dedicated to the honor of Governor Bouët on the occasion of a French military victory at Kaska. The last two lines of the *woy* read: "*Todhie daekae-bae, rey gôre-gnae / Teré-n'ae Kaskaé nélaw*" [*Toj dëkk ba, rey góor ñi / Tere na Kaska nelaw*] [He destroyed the city, killed the men / Prohibited sleep in Kaska] (Boilat 1858, 407) Boilat's analysis of this *woy* is striking for its dry, grammatical discussion of word choice and the little attention it pays to the bloody scene being evoked. Boilat does refer to the violence of this *woy*, but he does so to gloss the use of "*tere*" (to forbid, to prevent) in the last line. The line literally reads "sleep was prohibited in Kaska" but the sense of the line is clearly, "[after the massacre] Kaska was kept from sleeping." Boilat notes this, writing that the line means, "Depuis ce jour, plus de sommeil; c'est-à-dire que le désespoir s'était emparé des habitants de cette cité, pour avoir été battus malgré leurs *grisgris* ou talismans." (*ibid.*) But his commentary on the violence stops there, since the grammatical occasion for noticing it has been exhausted.

These grammatical illustrations, then, contain traces of their original performance contexts. By reading Boilat's *Grammar* back through the process of textual collection and selection that made its linguistic 'data' possible, we can start to attend to these 'versions' not as grammatical specimens but as points at which the larger social world starts to seep into Boilat's supposedly hermetic scientific study. In a sense, there seem to be bits and pieces of skin and flesh still stuck to the bones he has collected, shreds of historicity that remain inextricable from the grammatical skeleton they are meant to display. Though they are included merely to illustrate "the application of grammatical principles," Boilat's specimens point to larger histories of violence, conquest and social transformation underway in Senegambia.

'Readable for Everyone Who Has Eyes'

In his *Grammar*, Boilat describes his desire to capture "a developed and exact *tableau* of a language." (Boilat 1858, iv) In addition to a scientific study, then, perhaps we can think of his process as a painterly one, as an attempt to paint the true and accurate portrait of the Wolof language. And indeed, Boilat seems to have thought of himself as a portrait-painter more generally. In *Esquisses*, for example, he describes his method for writing about Senegambian peoples, customs and geography through a vocabulary of painting. Assuring the reader that he has "not tried to make appear any science or eloquence, but to speak with the greatest simplicity and with the most exact truth," he goes on to say that he has "depicted [dépeint] the customs, the uses, the religious beliefs, the superstitions and the governments of each people." (Boilat 2000, xiv) These are, after all, *sketches*. But

the painterly quality of his scholarly pursuits is not merely figurative. As a supplement to his book, Boilat included a series of portraits he himself had painted of various “types” from Senegambia, ranging from “*Signare*” and “*Thiedo*” to “*Homme Peule*” and “*Femme Bambara*.”²⁸ I have reproduced these on the following page.

Of his decision to include these portraits, Boilat writes that he thought they might be necessary “to give my readers more precise ideas of the peoples I speak of.” The reason for this, he notes, is that the “certain something that characterizes the physiognomy of a race is reserved for the art of painting [...] It belongs to painting to seize nature on the spot and to report it, in all parts of the world, *in characters that everyone who has eyes can read and understand.*” (D. Boilat 2000, xv; my emphasis) This last phrase, perhaps better than any other, outlines the underpinnings of Boilat’s many scholarly practices. They are a search for a method of framing the representative specimen, of painting the portrait of races, places, and languages, such that the truth of the type would be self-evident to the viewer. It is a desire to isolate and make the representative specimen readable for “everyone who has eyes.” The totalizing tendencies of this method come closest to being realized in the two finished works, the *Esquisses* and the *Grammar*. In Boilat’s collections, by contrast, the method seems to have generated its own unassimilable remainder. In his collections, the work of extraction has taken its course, but the transformation of the textual specimens into the finished *tableau* through study and commentary has not been achieved.

Because the collection of texts is the least *authorial* and *authoritative* of Boilat’s works, the author’s scholarly practice is, as it were, left unvarnished. The notebook does not have a declared object of study. It is simply titled “Notes from Fouta Toro.” (Boilat 1843) Instead of presenting itself as already an object of study and commentary, it appears more as a method, a frame – a collection of objects addressed to some future scholarly analysis that it seeks to prepare, but which has not – yet – occurred. And since the work of the notebook has not been totalized into a proper book with a structure, method, or narrative, it serves to reveal more clearly the method at work. To put the point crudely, one is used to the way that a grammar, a memoir or an ethnography would quote and re-entextualize various voices of the social world. But in the notebook, one is confronted more directly by the raw gesture of recontextualization – something which the finished, published books efface. The collection reveals the way in which Boilat’s method had to create space for itself in a crowded textual and discursive universe.

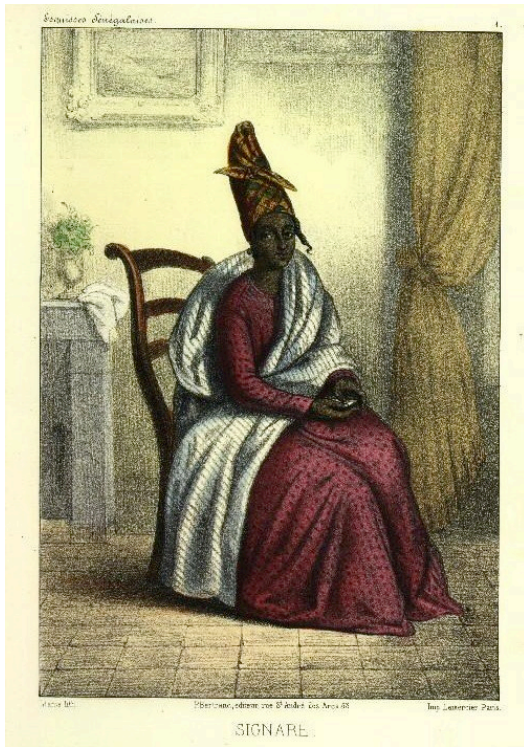


Figure 5: "Signare"

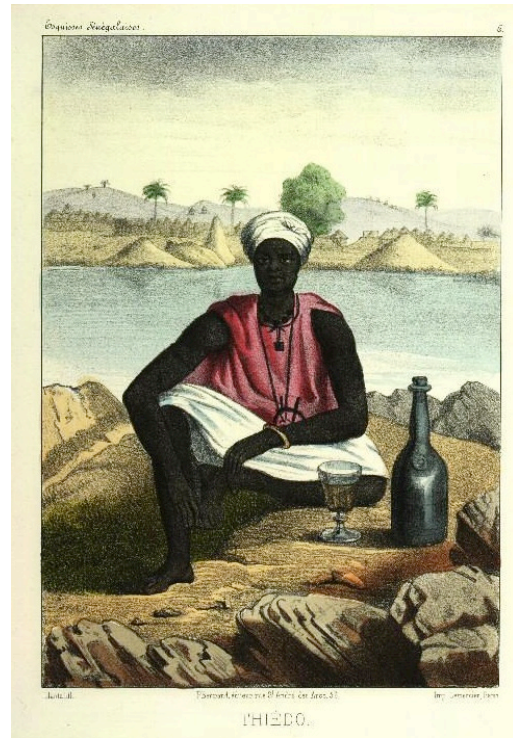


Figure 6: "Thiedo"



Figure 7: "Homme Peul"

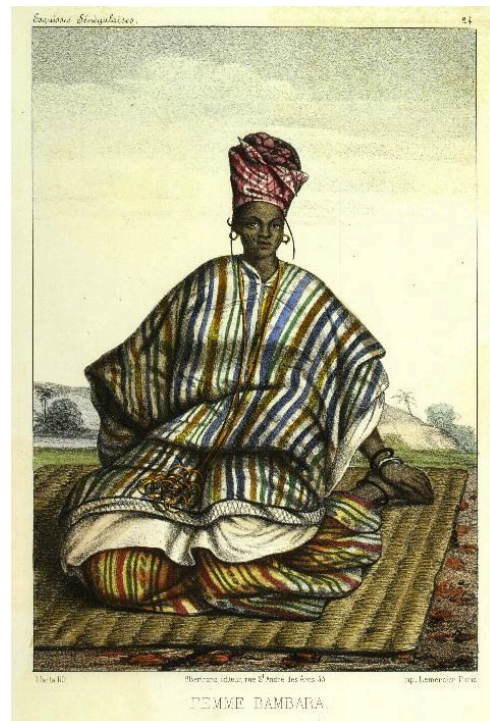


Figure 8: "Femme Bambara"

All images reproduced from Boilat 2000.

Perhaps the best illustration of Boilat's gesture of recontextualization can be seen in another of the portraits that accompanies *Sketches*. The painting, entitled "Homme et Femme Toucoulaures," depicts a marabout creating a *gris gris* for a woman.

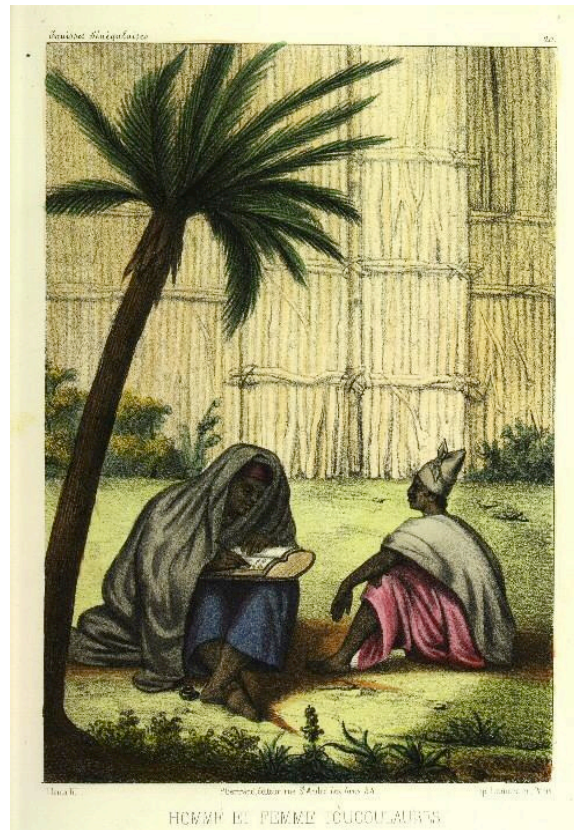


Figure 9: "Homme et Femme Toucoulaures" (Boilat 2000)

As in all of Boilat's illustrations, the viewer is positioned in such a way as to notice the distinctive details of the scene at hand. In this case, the point of view of the spectator can take in the garments and physical features Boilat wishes us to notice as belonging to these 'types.' But the viewer's perspective also includes a glimpse of what is being written in the *gris-gris*. What is crucial to observe about this composition is not what it depicts, but rather the frame it brings to bear, the privileged position onto this scene of writing that it offers the viewer. This is a frame in which one can see and study other practices of textuality.²⁹ Boilat's portrait promises the readability of other textualities, even though the textual practice it depicts may not have initially been intended to be representational at all.

So if this is a scene of 'fetish'-making, I want to suggest that perhaps what is being fetishized is not the artifact being created before our viewing eyes, but rather our own viewing position. The fetish is not the object that is being manufactured; rather, the fetish is the power to denounce this practice, as "superstitious," as Boilat does. The fetish here is the authority to unmask improper understandings of the materiality and agency of texts, to denounce the confusion of subjects with objects. The fetish is not the textual artifact itself but the privileged perspective on it that the painting offers, from which

claims about the proper and improper uses of ‘text’ can be made. The privilege of this point of view, it must be noted, effaces itself in its own claim to naturalness – of course the *gris gris* is a text, Boilat’s work suggests, what else would it be? This is why Boilat not only confiscates but *opens up* the *gris gris* he sends to Paris – this gesture ‘restores’ to them their proper form as mere objects of ink and paper, rather than anything more complex or mystical.³⁰

‘The Force of Words’

But although Boilat the scholar was deeply invested in categorizing, studying and collecting specimens of the languages and cultures of Senegambia, he was, in his capacity as the director of schools, a staunch advocate of francophone education. In his *Esquisses*, Boilat outlines the policies he advocated in his time in St Louis by reprinting a speech he gave to the *Ecole des filles* on the state of morality among the St Louis population. One principal cause of vice in the colony, he surmises, is the “habit of speaking Wolof.” Boilat sees this as a very pernicious influence, particularly among young women. In order to see an “educated youth, virtuous girls and civilized persons” in St Louis, Boilat urges parents to speak only French to their children and to insist that no other languages be spoken in their homes. He cautions that a sufficiently advanced knowledge of French is necessary, because without it young people (young women, especially), “will never be able to reason in terms they do not understand.” Rather than learning history and morality at school, young people without enough French “will only fill up their memories with an infinity of useless words.” (Boilat 2000, 11–18)

This anxiety about filling up memories with useless words was to have a venerable career in colonial educational discourse in French West Africa,³¹ but in Boilat’s historical moment, the problem of French comprehension was deeply bound up with conversion. Without enough French to grasp the ‘proper’ meaning of the texts used in religious instruction, souls could not be saved. In this respect, Boilat was particularly distressed at how difficult it was proving to teach the catechism.

[T]hose who understand French grasp it, but *the others learn only words*. We can only clumsily explain it to them in Wolof. This language lacks all the theological words, how then can we teach them perfectly the catholic dogma, the duties of a Christian, without the French language? [...] We put in their hands the most touching prayers, the heroic acts of saints of their age and condition, the most touching spiritual readings; they read them with the most icy indifference! (*ibid.*, 14, my emphasis)

How chilling must have been this “icy” indifference to scripture to one raised by the Church. The problem, as Boilat puts it, is that these young people “do not understand *the force of the words*.” (*ibid.*, my emphasis) Literacy in French, then, is not a skill pursued for its own sake; rather, reading French properly is closely linked to salvation and propriety.³² Boilat therefore calls on his listeners, particularly the young mothers in the crowd, to stop speaking Wolof in the home, especially to their children.³³ If Wolof could be eliminated at school and at home, Boilat concludes, “All society will profit. We would at the very least have more persons with whom one could engage in reasonable and regular conversation. Illegal alliances would disappear day by day. Then, and only then, civilization would have made more progress than in the several centuries since the colony was founded.” (*ibid.*, 17) Boilat’s crusade against this pernicious “habit” St Louisians had of speaking to their children in Wolof is somewhat curious, because, of course, Boilat

himself was a child of the colony (and, presumably, himself the product of a *mariage à la mode du pays*³⁴). Indeed, Boilat may have learned Wolof from, among other people, his own mother – and in his *Grammar*, he even refers to it as his “mother tongue” [*langue maternelle*].³⁵

Boilat’s campaign to establish proper, francophone literacy in St Louis seems to have been closely accompanied by his collection and re-categorization of other ‘improper’ textual cultures and modes of life. What can we make of this seeming contradiction, which we can perceive in the work of this “first Senegalese writer?” In Boilat’s projects, practices and commitments, I think we can trace the discursive prehistory of later debates over the nature and shape of the literary in the Senegalese cultural field, struggles which are in large measure the focus of this project. What we can perceive in Boilat’s work is the emergence of a frame in which a variety of practices and speech genres all become *texts* – stretches of discourse that can be quoted, transported and read in new ways. It is not my contention that Boilat’s work singlehandedly accomplishes this, that he invents these frames, or that the transformations he participates in have ever been completely realized. Rather, what I want to argue is that we can identify in his work – perhaps more clearly than anywhere else – a crucial move that is part of a larger transformation under way in what will become Senegal, a reconfiguration of the distance between the textual artifact, its author, and its reader.

The second important feature of Boilat’s work is that it crystallizes a tendency on the part of those individuals and institutions in Senegambia who wished to purify practices of francophone reading and authorship to be simultaneously invested in managing or even eliminating ‘improper’ or ‘hybrid’ textualities. Boilat’s commitment to establishing a proper Francophone space³⁶ in St Louis while all the while analyzing, classifying and exporting Senegalese texts was a generative contradiction that has been echoed over and over again in the many years since he first sent his notebook to Paris. As I hope to make clear in the chapters that follow, the management of desirable forms of reading, writing and speaking in the Senegalese cultural field seems to have necessarily involved the production and re-circulation of improper textualities.³⁷

Textual Friction and the Making of the Literary

In this dissertation, I trace these paradoxes as they are refracted in 19th-and-20th-century Senegalese discourse – particularly how struggles over what counts as proper reading come to be important in the interventions that have punctuated modern Senegalese literature. Beginning with the introduction of literary studies into the French colonial curriculum in the early 20th century, my dissertation charts the emergence of the category of the literary in Senegal. In a study of debates over how literature was to be taught in colonial classrooms, I show how literary study became a discipline for cultivating new and putatively modern ways of writing and reading, whose authority depended on the exclusion of some indigenous textual cultures and the reform and translation of others.

Another critical focus of this dissertation is how Senegalese authors and filmmakers working in both French and Wolof have reflected and contested this history. In readings of literature written around independence, I examine how francophone writers struggled with the ways in which literary study in the colonial period had been a world-making project. From there, my focus shifts to the emergence of a modern Wolof

literature in the 1950s-70s, which I read as an intervention directed against the rigidity of the francophone cultural field in the early postcolonial period, under Senegal's first president, the poet Léopold Sédar Senghor. I argue that one need not consider the 'turn' to Wolof as an attempt to assert a rival, nativist cultural nationalism; but rather an attempt to expose the historical entanglement of literature itself with the making and remaking of Senegalese textual cultures. By experimenting with modes of address and response that had historically not been 'literary' and attempting to address publics that have historically been excluded from the category of literacy, Wolof writers trace limits of the medium in which they work.

But in order for the category of the 'literary' (and its Others) to emerge, a certain commensurability between various textual cultures and semiotic practices had to be secured. It is this gesture that I have been arguing we can perceive in Boilat's work. This dissertation, then, aims to study how the articulation of authoritative forms of address and response in the literary field has been intertwined with the production of inadmissible utterances and abject textualities. In this sense, my dissertation seeks to attend to the friction between the Senegalese literary field and other constructions of the textual object. In so doing, I try begin with the ways in which colonial and postcolonial francophone literatures are crosscut by multiple histories of textuality. If we begin from the critical presumption that francophone literary texts are always-already extractable and comparable with other 'equivalent' literary texts, then I worry that we may miss the ways in which Senegalese literature has been implicated in a larger struggle over the refashioning of textual cultures.

This dissertation seeks to study how literary texts have been and continue to be active in the interstices between different histories of textuality, engaged in reconfiguring understandings of the materiality, agency and interpretability of texts. Its three chapters all concern moments in which various actors and institutions are engaged in struggles over what counts as reading, seeing, and speaking. In short, this is a study of Senegalese literature – in French and Wolof – as it has been and continues to be implicated in a larger ecology of textuality and textual practice, simultaneously local and global.

Chapter One follows the spread of literary study in French West Africa, as the secular colonial school system expanded in the early twentieth century. Through an investigation of pedagogical archives, I show how literary interpretation and authorship were cultivated in French West Africa in order to reform the textual cultures Boilat helped make into objects of study years earlier. As a starting point for examining this tendency, the chapter explores a school-age composition written by the early Senegalese novelist Abdoulaye Sadj. Sadj's 1938 essay is an approving meditation on a citation by Montaigne, "to know by heart is not to know at all." I argue that colonial education aimed to redefine local modes of socialization – from oral traditions to Quranic education – as merely "knowing by heart," and in their place instill a certain version of a literary education. In readings of works by such authors as Ousmane Sembène, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and Laye Camara, I show how early francophone literature is haunted by questions concerning the limits and stakes of authorship, and what it would mean to speak in one's own words.

Chapter Two follows how these questions are refracted in the postcolonial politics of language. The chapter opens with a confrontation that occurred at one of the very first conferences on francophone literature, held in Dakar in 1963. There, the novelist and

filmmaker Ousmane Sembène launched into a vehement attack on the institutionalization of francophone literature under President Léopold Senghor, only to be challenged by another Senegalese writer to repeat his critique in Wolof. I study the emergence of modern Wolof literature and film as an oblique response to this challenge: *but could you say it in Wolof?* Specifically, I examine how the first film and the first novel produced in Wolof – Ousmane Sembène’s *Mandabi* (1968) and Cheikh Aliou Ndao’s *Buur Tilleen* (1967), respectively – came to be remade in French, for legal and commercial reasons. I show that these artworks actually highlight their own enforced translation, thereby turning what was an imposition into an object of poetics.

In Chapter Three, I explore how the ideals of colonial literary study seem to live on in the international critical reception of the most celebrated Senegalese novel, Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* (1980). I contrast the terms in which *Letter* became acclaimed abroad with an examination of how it has been translated and reworked by a Wolof writer, Maam Yunus Dieng. By approaching *So Long a Letter* through Dieng’s responses to it, I am able to explore aspects of Bâ’s work that have not been previously attended to by critics. *So Long a Letter* has often been read as a book ‘about’ the institution of polygamy in Senegal, but I argue that the critical preoccupation with denouncing polygamy as an ancient, oppressive practice has obscured the novel’s complex dialogue with contemporaneous debates over efforts to reform Senegalese family law. Rather than reducing Bâ’s work to a statement for or against polygamy, as has so often been the case, I find in her work a critique of the terms of legibility that are made available by literary and legal forms.

In a Coda, I study the ‘work’ of literature in the age of structural adjustment, focusing on two recent Wolof novels, Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Doomi Golo* (2003) [The Children of the Monkey] and Cheikh Aliou Ndao’s *Mbaam Akimoo* (1997) [Donkey Dictator]. Since the 1980s, the Senegalese state has withdrawn substantially from the cultural field, largely abandoning its earlier, Senghorian ambitions toward hegemony in this domain. I explore how both Diop and Ndao engage with a number of questions: what does it “do” to write Wolof literature *after* the ebb of state-centered cultural nationalism? What becomes of linguistic politics when they are no longer addressed to the state, and when the Senegalese public sphere is rapidly Wolofizing from below? In particular, I analyze how Diop and Ndao make poetic use of the ambiguity of the term *liggéey* (work) in Wolof. *Liggéey* can mean labor in the conventional sense, but it also refers to gendered, domestic labor, witchcraft, techniques of spiritual devotion, and other forms of activity, depending on the context. The coda advances a preliminary reading of the ways in which these two novels marshal this indistinction to figure the uncertainties of labor in neoliberal Senegal and query ‘work’ of Wolof fiction in a global literary marketplace.

Chapter One

“To Know By Heart is Not to Know At All”: Literary Study in Colonial Senegal and the Making of Francophone Literature

How and why did literature come to be taught in colonial classrooms in French West Africa? And can we still trace colonial pedagogical debates about what constitutes proper authorship and reading in independence-era francophone African literature, when many authors would have passed through French colonial classrooms as teachers and students? To attempt to answer such questions, I will begin by considering a specific classroom exercise. In a format that will likely be familiar to many teachers and students of literature, a passage, excerpted from a longer novel, is presented to students for an analysis of its style. Figure 1, below, reproduces the passage used in the exercise in question. It is taken from Emile Zola’s 1873 novel *Le Ventre de Paris* [*The Belly of Paris*]. The plot of *The Belly of Paris* unfolds in and around Les Halles, the enormous covered market built in the 19th century in central Paris. The novel is known for its exhaustive descriptions of the colors and forms of the market. The painterly style here seems to attempt to evoke every imaginable form and color, resulting in what one critic called a “chromatic riot.”¹ In fact, *The Belly of Paris* seems not to have attained the same stature of some of Zola’s other novels in part because it favors these encyclopedic panoramas over its own plot, (Prendergast 1992, 66–68) which one can clearly see in the passage selected for the lesson.

This lesson was circulated for use in French West Africa in 1950, roughly ten years before Senegal and many other francophone countries achieved independence. It was distributed in *Education Africaine*, a pedagogical journal that was required reading for teachers seeking advancement within the system.² This passage circulated with a four-page guide for the teacher that detailed a cumulative series of lessons from dictation to analysis of style to composition. The lesson ought to begin, the guide suggests, with a close, guided study of textual details, that the students might begin to see how Zola’s use of form, color, and “precise verbs” make for an “expressive style and exact images” (*images justes*). In this “étude de détail,” the teacher was supposed to point out the importance of “*monté sur un banc*,” which sets up the point of view of the entire passage. The guide also suggested noting the finer points of Zola’s style here, from his musical vocabulary (“*gamme du vert*”) and playful stretching of visual scale (“*montagnes*”) to his use of personification (“*élargissaient leurs ventres*”). Having completed this lesson on Zola’s descriptive powers, the guide suggested that the teacher next identify all the phrases that express color and have the class search for them in their everyday environment, in order that they might create new phrases such as “the blood red of a *chéchia*” or the “the somber violet of velvet.” Finally – but most importantly – the teachers should have the students use the text as a model for a composition of their own, “to paint the fabrics of a local market,” for example, in a similar style. (“Exploitation d’un texte...,” 1950) While such an exercise may not have gone by the name “close reading,” its overall structure is legible to us as a form of literary study even today.

Figure 1:
An excerpt from Emile Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris* used in French colonial classrooms in 1950.³

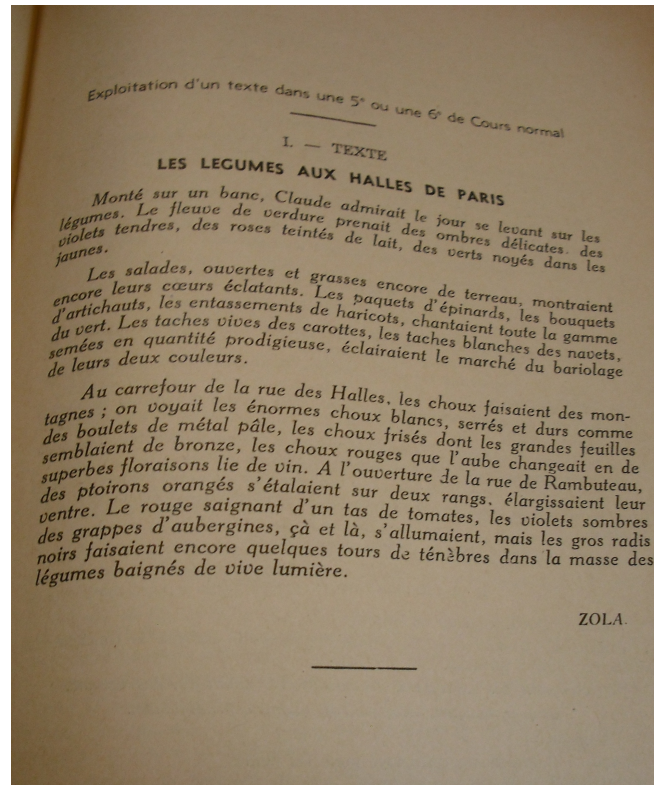
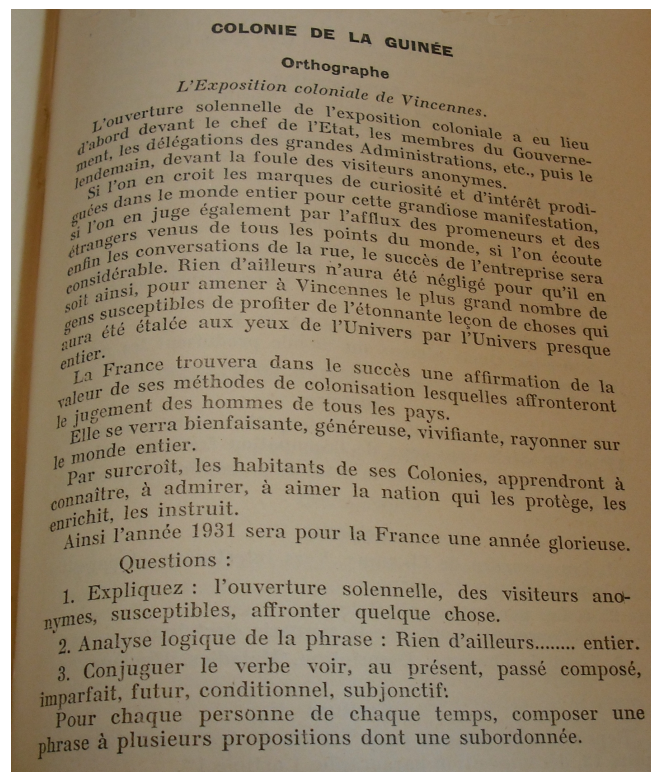


Figure 2:
A writing lesson on the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, used in French colonial classrooms the same year.⁴



But why would the French colonial education system have been interested in having students describe a market in this way? What was at stake in eliciting texts that resembled this one? To sketch an answer to these questions, I will need to trace the history of how and why literature came to be taught in colonial schools in French West Africa. To understand how the Zola lesson made its way into the classroom, one must understand something about what kind of instruction existed before it. A striking example of this is captured in Figure 2, which was also taught in colonial schools in French West Africa, just under 20 years earlier, in 1931.

The passage in Figure 2 describes the colonial exhibition of the same year, which has held in Paris to teach the French public about its colonies and gain support for the colonial endeavor. The exhibition infamously included several recreated native villages, and the colonial administration imported colonial subjects to play themselves in human zoos. (See Blanchard 2008) This is not mentioned, and instead the passage describes the exhibition as an “amazing object lesson [...] in which France can find an affirmation of the value of its methods of colonization [...] and through which] the inhabitants of its colonies will learn to know, admire and love [France].” (“Examens et Concours,” 1931) So, very far away from Vincennes, colonial students would have been copying out this text in praise of the exhibition that was taking place in the metropole, an exercise in which they were supposed to, in a sense, be describing themselves learning “know and love” the nation that was “educating” them. As is immediately apparent, this text is more transparently ideological than the Zola passage. The way it was used was also different. Whereas the teaching guide attached to the Zola text in 1950 included extensive lessons for analyzing and replicating the passage’s style, this 1931 lesson would have been used to test students’ orthography, reading comprehension and ability to take dictation. So clearly something has changed in the 20 years between these two exercises. But why the gradual shift away from copying out colonial propaganda and toward literary study?

In the course of my research in archives in Senegal and France, I have studied the debates about this question among educators in French West Africa. This chapter outlines a history of literary studies in colonial French West Africa, covering a period from the reorganization of the school system in 1903 to the late 1950s. I have found that literary study was introduced into the colonial curriculum precisely to address some of the problems that arose when teachers exclusively used texts like the one from 1931. While colonial educators may have wanted to see their students dutifully copying out official propaganda, they also seem to have had a competing desire to actually find their students’ performances believable. Literary study was introduced as a way of teaching students to know and mean what they were saying in French, rather than simply repeating what they had memorized or had dictated to them.⁵

In this chapter, I examine how debates about proper reading and authorship that took place in and around colonial classrooms came to be refracted in francophone African literature, especially in the period before independence when many authors passed through colonial schools as teachers or students. My argument about colonial literary education is based on extensive archival research in Dakar, Aix-en-Provence and Paris over a number of visits in 2006, 2008, and 2010.⁶ In addition to exploring the curiously central but unavowable place of literary study in the French colonial classroom, I examine how the tensions of this discipline find echoes in three francophone novels published in the 1950s-60s, *L’Enfant Noir* by Laye Camara, *L’Aventure Ambiguë* by

Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and *Le Docker Noir* by Ousmane Sembène. Lastly, I ask how the history of colonial literary might cause us to reflect on our critical practice as scholars of literature.

'That Which We Rightly Know...'

Distinguishing between the work of mere memorization or dictation and proper modes of reading and authorship was crucial but also very difficult in the French colonial classroom. A composition written by a Senegalese student exemplifies this tension. The essay, written in 1938 for a forgotten school assignment, is conserved in the National Archives in Dakar. The essay is a meditation on pedagogy that takes its cue from a citation from Montaigne, *savoir par coeur n'est pas savoir* ("to know by heart is not to know at all"). The author of this composition is none other than Abdoulaye Sadju, who would go on to become one of the earliest Senegalese novelists. He was in 1938 a star pupil in the educational system and, later, a schoolteacher himself. Also, after independence, he co-authored the primary school textbook that eventually replaced colonial-era textbooks.⁷

Sadju's essay approves of Montaigne's maxim, arguing that a child who memorizes only "absorbs knowledge and discoveries from elsewhere which he merely makes his own. In reality, he is nothing but repeating machine." (Sadju 1938) Sadju writes that educators ought not to cultivate bookish memorization, but encourage their students to be more attached to the idea than to the expression itself. Montaigne's maxim condenses in a single phrase, Sadju argues, "the great principle of pedagogy" that helps "guard against the abuse of memory and routine" and contributes instead "to the formation of the scientific spirit, so indispensable to progress." (Sadju 1938)

And yet while Sadju condemns knowing by heart, his composition points to a tension that exists in the original Montaigne as well – the citation is from the essay on educating children and the full quotation reads: "*Sçavoir par coeur n'est pas sçavoir; c'est tenir ce qu'on a donné en garde à sa memoire. Ce qu'on sçait droittement, on en dispose, sans regarder au patron, sans tourner les yeux vers son livre.*" (Montaigne 2007, 157)⁸ But while Montaigne may counsel against overly bookish instruction, his own eyes are, of course, constantly and knowingly wandering back to his own library, where he lingers with Plato, Plutarch, and Seneca. Similarly, while Sadju advocates a pedagogy that would focus only on the idea itself, he must also acknowledge a certain indebtedness to past models. The very fact that Sadju's essay is conserved at all in the education system's archives indicates that it was held in high esteem, perhaps as a crystallization of something essential about that system's self-understanding. But this cuts both ways, because while Sadju's essay certainly distills the ambitions of the system to promote ways of knowing based on reason rather than recitation and memory, it also stages the central anxiety of its entire pedagogy: how could one tell proper reading and writing from what was merely knowing by heart?

'We Have No Ambition To Transform Them All Into Novelists'

From its very beginnings, the secular French colonial school system in West Africa had understood itself as an institution engaged in a war against memory. Before the military

invasion of the interior in the mid-to-late 19th century, the French colonial school had consisted mainly a few small institutions run by priests that aimed to produce an assimilated elite. In the decades after Boilat, the colonial schools had been largely unconcerned with cultivating “authorship” in its pupils. A collection of mid-19th-century compositions “written” by students at the *Ecole des otages et fils des chefs*⁹ in St Louis, provides rather chilling testimony of this. Here is a note, conserved in the Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer in Aix, allegedly written by a pupil to his family.

Je vous annonce que je suis en bonne santé et très content d’être à Saint-Louis. Le Gouverneur m’aime beaucoup et s’occupe beaucoup de nous. (Gayon 1856)

I wish to tell you that I am in good health and very happy to be here in St Louis. The governor loves me dearly and takes great care of us (my translation)

Tellingly, several notes “by” other students use identical language. These compositions essentially consist of students writing their own ransom notes or copying out line after line of racist contrasts between “les pays sauvages” and “les pays civilisés.” They document a pedagogy concerned with the student’s ability to copy French prose texts in proper orthography and spelling.¹⁰ But in the first half of the 20th century, a much larger, secular system was founded, with schools in many countries and elite training colleges in Senegal. The educational project shifted from creating assimilated individuals and saving souls to transforming entire populations. In the course of this shift, new debates arose in colonial pedagogical discourse and the ideals of readership and authorship changed dramatically.

In the new system, teaching literacy was intended to provide skilled African workers with basic French so that they could aid in colonial wealth extraction, and to confer a rudimentary understanding of agricultural science on rural populations in order to increase their productivity.¹¹ The system also placed a heavy emphasis on teacher-training, since very early on it was clear that to be both affordable and effective it had to train a corps of African teachers as quickly as possible. The opportunity to become a teacher in the new school system, like Sadjji for instance, offered Africans limited social mobility. (Conklin 1997, 85) Thus, the debates about reading and writing analysed in this chapter included both Africans and Europeans very early on, albeit in radically unequal positions of power.

Teaching reading and writing were also intended as a form of moral instruction, with the aim of reforming the local textual cultures and bodies of knowledge of West Africa. In the case of Senegal, these included many living oral traditions, the centuries-old system of Quran schools (*daara*)¹², and the literate communities that employed Arabic scripts (*ajami*)¹³ to write African languages. In colonial education discourse, “proper” reading and writing came to be defined over and against these textual cultures, which were described as being overly reliant on memory – particularly orality and religious education.

The colonial schools were also focal points of the new policy of *association*, whose ostensible goal was to preserve local populations in their authenticity and yet transform them into more productive and civilized societies. The ideology of association depended on the cultivation of new ways of seeing and speaking about the world, and

distinguishing these from other categories of perception and utterance such as the superstitious, the traditional, and the religious.¹⁴

The pedagogical theory that underwrote the colonial school system at its founding in 1903 was based on the French Republican primary school, which was taken as the model for most levels in the colonies. (Conklin 1997, 79)¹⁵ Approaches to teaching reading, writing and basic science that would have been considered suited for children in France were adapted for use at many levels in West Africa.¹⁶ In this sense, the colonial school system was infantilizing by design. But colonial educators also believed themselves to be creating a school system where supposedly none had existed, and thus the colonial classroom was seen as a blank canvas on which educators could experiment with new and “progressive” ways of teaching. An example of this was the pedagogical theory of the *leçon de choses*, or object lesson, which was at the heart of both colonial schools in West Africa and the republican primary school in France. In the object lesson, the child would be shown an object, learn its name, and then intuit its function through guided, direct observation. (Conklin 1997, 83) In the West African context, students were to be shown objects from their environment in order that they might intuitively learn to see and speak about them in putatively new and modern ways. As Camille Guy, the Lieutenant governor of Senegal, wrote in 1903: “we are most concerned with placing within the grasp of the natives as quickly as possible the *leçon de choses*, which they must know in order to be of real use to the European in the rational exploitation of the resources of the country.” (Quoted in Conklin 1997, 83) Topics included food, housing, clothing, the body, the village, and the school itself. (Conklin 1997, 134) The *leçon de choses* had become particularly prominent in the 1880s in France under the Third Republic as a progressive pedagogy that would secularize instruction by making it based on scientific intuition rather than bookish training (*dressage*). But in both the hexagon and the colonies, something seems to have gone awry in the application of the object lesson. In his history of education in France, Prost notes that although the object lesson was at the heart of republican theories of education for children, the practice more often than not contradicted the theory. (Prost 1968, 278–280) Teachers seem regularly to have fallen back on the old ways of teaching, which relied heavily on reading and memorizing texts rather than intuiting objects directly. A similar dynamic seems to have unfolded in the French colonial classroom. While the object lesson was supposed to be an exercise in which the colonized student learned to apprehend the world through intuition alone, in practice it seems to have often devolved into a particular kind of textual exercise devoted to cultivating certain styles of reading and writing and instilling in the students proper disciplines of authorship and reading. To put this another way, instead of turning the students’ eyes away from the book, the object of the object lesson became a text.

From the system’s founding through the 1920s, the texts that were actually used tended to be travel writing by Europeans and ideological passages like the one on the colonial exhibition.¹⁷ Over time, this form of teaching was found to produce unsatisfactory results. Colonial teachers started to complain that students were merely repeating what they had read, and not putting it in their own words correctly. This tension reached a head in 1921, during the exit exams for the Ecole Normale William Ponty – the elite teacher training college, located at the time on Goree island, that trained instructors for the entire federation. In 1921, 71 out of 71 candidates passed their exit exams and had to be given diplomas, since they had all acquitted themselves satisfactorily. The jury

suspected that a large number of candidates had simply committed their lessons to memory and reproduced them during the exams. The supervisor of schools at the time, Aristide Prat, complained bitterly at having to pass so many mediocre candidates. In a special memo, he blamed the “meddling of memory, which gives, wrongly, the illusion of progress.” (Prat 1921) He called on the teachers at Ponty and at all levels of instruction to address themselves primarily to their student’s reason. He especially enjoined them “to search for new methods of examination such that they could “continually assure that the student has really understood, that the child knows what he is [...] to effectively verify his intellectual acquisitions.” (*ibid*)

Literary study was introduced to address this anxiety, to cultivate certain standards of written expression and readerly response. The only way to ensure that colonized students actually meant what they said, the thinking went, was to teach them to write in a literary way, to understand not just what a text said but how what it said was convincing. In the preface to a widely used colonial school reader, *Mamadou et Bineta sont devenus grands*, Davesne and Gouin put the problem succinctly: “How does an author create a particular impression for the reader? This is what we must try to have them discover [...] If we neglect to study the technique of writing, we are failing in the principle goal of our instruction. What would we say of a teacher of painting who scrupulously taught the composition of colors that an artist used but who was silent on the characteristics of his art?” (Davesne and Gouin 1939, 4)¹⁸

But while literary study was understood by some as a technique with which teachers might discipline their students’ literacy, it was also deeply controversial. Some of the most influential voices cautioned against taking things too far, since, they argued, it could lead to dangerously imprecise forms of expression and morally harmful reading habits. Georges Hardy, the early architect and first director of the system, wrote in 1911 that the colonial classroom ought to teach “only useful, everyday French [...] to avoid verbosity and the moral failings it leads to.” He suggested that teachers “eliminate with care from [their] lessons [any] abstract terms or figurative language” so “that [students] always know exactly what they are saying and that their capacity of expression does not go further than their capacity of thought.” (Hardy 1917, 189)¹⁹

Hardy’s statements testify to the precarious place literary study held in a system that by definition considered its students as less than entirely rational beings while at the same time purporting to be committed to educating them. Despite Hardy’s warnings about the dangers of figurative language, literary study made its way into the curriculum anyway, in an ad hoc fashion, and the debates about it continued throughout the colonial era. As late as 1952, one teacher commented that “we have no ambition to transform them all into writers” but nor do we not want to produce “instead of a thinking being... a scolarised machine.” (Étève 1952)²⁰ So while no formal and consistent program for teaching literature seems ever to have existed, literary study came to assume a curiously central if unavowable place in colonial classroom. It never was a uni-directional or official policy. Rather, literary study came into use as a problem space in which the educational apparatus debated and tried to contain some of the fundamental tensions and contradictions of its aspirations and practice.

'How Must One Read?'

Teaching proper reading and writing and combating memory in the colonial system also came to be seen as moral imperatives. “The task of the native school,” Georges Hardy writes, “is not to furnish memories, it is to open spirits and form personalities, it is to manage with skill the transition between a past of ignorance and servitude and a future of light and liberty.” (Hardy 1918) In this regard, proper modes of authorship and reading were often articulated as part of a larger project for becoming a modern subject, something to which both native teachers and students were supposed to aspire and strive toward. Hardy laid out the importance of reading in this project in great detail in *The Two Roads*, a sort of handbook for living that he wrote for African teachers who had finished their training and were now somewhere else in the federation teaching classes of their own. The impetus for the handbook seems to have been the fear that the new African teachers would stop reading – and, indeed, living – in the ways they had been taught, and would instead stray back to old habits. To stave off any backsliding, Hardy’s text lays out a detailed plan for native teachers, giving them advice on how to manage the smallest of aspects their lives – how they eat, dress, live, manage expenses, etc.

This is done in part with negative examples of teachers who have not taken the proper “path.” He speaks of one teacher, for example, who “has given up on cultivating his spirit, he does not read anymore, he does not try to understand, he has returned to the prejudices and routines of the old men of his village. He has let his lamp go out, and those that love the light now avoid him.” This individual, we are told, has “become a child again, because he has not taken care of the man that [we] have given birth to in him [*faire naître en lui*] [...] Far from being able to compose a simple note in correct French, he is no longer able to copy without making mistakes. He is a rusty machine.” (*ibid.*, 23)

To stave of such degeneration, Hardy argued that a native teacher ought to instill in himself a habit of reading as a process of continual self-improvement. “One must read to perfect oneself in one’s work,” as he put it. Hardy’s mania for outlining precise directions is particularly apparent here. He offers the native teacher advice on not just what to read, but when – and even how. His advice is worth quoting at length.

“When should one read? [...] Every day, even for a few minutes [...] What should one read? Works relating to the geography, ethnography and history of French West Africa. Magazines (*Annales politiques et littéraires*; *Je sais tout*, *Lectures pour tous*), journals of popular science (*La Nature*, *La Science* and *La Vie*); as for books, stories of voyage and exploration, good, gay authors (the comedies of Molière, Labiche, Courteline); well-chosen novels that are easily understandable by everyone (for example, Alphonse Daudet, Dickens, Alexandre Dumas père, George Eliot, Théophile Gautier, Victor Hugo, Mérimé, George Sand, René Bazin, Jules Claretie, Pierre Loti, Hector Malot, Theuriet, etc). [...] Assemble for yourself a small library of works that will give you pleasure not only to read, but to reread; above all, avoid base literature, novels with glossy covers that will falsify your imagination and your judgment and will make your life into a nightmare; avoid also everything that exceeds your intelligence, everything that you do not understand perfectly, works of philosophy and sociology of which you will retain only the words or hollow formulas, and do not take emphasis or obscurity for eloquence. Linger over books that are clear, simple and clean, that are easily digested and nourishing. How must one read? Slowly, savoring the good passages. Do not devour books but try to understand what you have read, keep a dictionary close at hand, turn over and over the words and phrases whose meaning does not manifest itself right away. To be truly profitable, reading must not tire you and must not cease to interest you. (*ibid.*, 26–27)

For Hardy, then, proper reading and writing are not mere technologies, but are serious, moral disciplines that a teacher ought to impose on himself as much as on his students. The private reading habit, as he imagines it, is oriented toward the production and maintenance of a teaching corps of modern-enough colonial subjects who will, in turn, train future generations. For Hardy, literacy is understood as one component of a discipline in which native teachers fashion themselves into more effective workers in the bureaucratic machinery of the colonial state – in order that they might “*produire d’avantage et mieux*” [produce more, and better]. (*ibid.*, 24) But in a deeply revealing way, his text seems petrified at the potential for private reading to go awry, that native teachers might encounter books with “glossy covers” or “works of philosophy and sociology” which are not “clear, simple and clean” nor “easily understandable,” and which they might “devour” to no discernible profit.

As with his advice about virtually every other aspect of the teacher’s life, Hardy’s discussions of reading are suffused with vocabulary of clean/unclean. Improper reading is not merely a waste of time; it introduces the possibility of a moral injury – even a contamination – of some kind. But what is the moral harm of improper reading for Hardy? While his text does specifically say, other passages on what Hardy calls “moral cultivation” are rather suggestive.

Do not stop cultivating yourself. *A man must treat his soul like he treats his body*, with the concern to maintain it in good health. He often finds himself forbidding to himself the consumption of certain foods or drinks *or even certain dangerous physical practices that can lead to exhaustion*: why? Because he says to himself: I do not want to be sick. So, he ends up just as easily forbidding himself certain mistakes, by saying to himself: ‘I do not want to be dishonored. Dishonor is the worst malady that can afflict the soul.’ (*ibid.*, 31; my emphasis)

Hardy does not specify what these “exhausting... practices” are that might make one “sick” or “dishonored.” It is nonetheless clear that such practices are being schematized along a series of binaries that include honor/dishonor, clean/unclean and vitality/exhaustion. Within this imaginary, reading has a strange status. In a section titled “Moral Health,” he advises the native teacher to frequently “undertake good moral readings which will lead [one] to a taste for the good.” (Hardy 1918, 33) But reading is also a space of potential seduction, where one’s imagination and judgment can be “falsified.” While it is not clear precisely what moral harm lurks behind the “glossy covers” of the books Hardy warns against, the space of possible moral failings he imagines is all the more capacious for not being precisely delimited to any particular “vice.” Thus while reading is, in Hardy’s handbook, a mode of cultivating oneself, it also appears as a risky behavior for the native teacher. While the student’s departure from school is the first step on what Hardy imagines is a path to “liberty and light,” it is also potentially the first moment of possible deviance. The handbook, then, imagines reading as a crucial practice in the struggle against moral entropy, one of an arsenal of small habits with which the newly modernized subject ensures his continued “cultivation.” For Hardy, it is daily practices such as reading that are truly crucial. “Moral life,” he writes, “is not made of principle and maxims, it is made of habits (*habitudes*). Rather than burdening oneself with grand principles, one must [...] yoke oneself to the good through the repetition and progressive augmentation of the same efforts.” (*ibid.*, 31) According to

Hardy, “moral life” involves learning to see the part of yourself that you wish to master as if it were another person whom you must bend to your will. In an extraordinary passage in *The Two Roads*, he advises native teachers that in order to “impose on [themselves] a firm discipline” they need to “learn to distinguish in [themselves] two men.” These include:

the master [maître], the moral being who commands, and the other, the captive unhappily resigned to his fate, the inferior being constantly tempted to do wrong, who must obey. If you do not arrive at this result, it’s that you are not the master of yourself, it is that *you are not worthy of the name of man*; on the contrary, if you know from the beginning *how to make yourself obey*, habits (*habitude*) will quickly take root, *the captive will walk on his own*, and there will be almost no more need to command him, and you will live in calm and security. [...] To find the strength to command this inferior being who resides in you as in every man, remember always the educational mission that is entrusted to you and your duties towards the natives who are less cultivated than you are: represent for yourself the importance that even your smallest actions can have; if you command wrongly, you risk being imitated wrongly. (*ibid.*, 33; my emphasis)

Hardy’s moral project for becoming (and maintaining oneself as) a certain kind of “man” seems to involve the production and containment of a part of oneself as an abject other, a “captive” who constantly has to be made to obey. Moral self-mastery, or being worthy of the name of “man,” in Hardy’s formulation, involves the constant struggle to instill habits in oneself. Even the smallest, most seemingly thoughtless activity is apparently a site of struggle with this “captive” inside oneself. Of course, as the phenomenological overtones of this fiction suggest, it will be only through the work of the captive that the desired self-mastery can take place. The self-mastery Hardy proposes is not the obliteration of the abject captive; rather, it is a process of making him “walk on his own.” What seems clear from Hardy’s handbook is that proper reading and writing are such “daily practices” which can instill the *habitudes* that make it possible to direct one’s own “inferior being” such that “there will be almost no more need to command him.” (*ibid.*, 33)

And yet the personification here also seems to have another register – these figures Hardy evokes are not merely master and captive, but also *maître* (schoolmaster) and pupil. Thus what Hardy proposes is also a process of coming to see one’s own daily life as enacting the scene of the colonial classroom – that the native teacher, who has recently left the Ecole Ponty, ought to continue to distinguish in himself both the master and the pupil. This sense of the moral fable Hardy tells is borne out by other advice he gave. Elsewhere in *The Two Roads* he suggests that native teachers, long after they have left school, should seek to obtain “good textbooks” and periodically give themselves exams and compositions “as a schoolmaster does to his student.” (Hardy 1918)

While Hardy’s handbook is almost without equal or answer in the field of these educational tracts in terms of its ambition to supervise every aspect of the teacher’s life, it seems that some African teachers also described their efforts to cultivate proper reading and writing practices as a form of self-surveillance. For instance, Alioune Diop (the future founder of the publishing house Présence Africaine, then a colonial schoolteacher) speaks of his training as a struggle with himself to acquire ideas and habits based more on “reason” than on “prejudice.” He notes that most of his life he had spoken mainly in Wolof but once he became a teacher, he had to closely monitor what he said and how he said it. “The authority that I was trying to have over my students,” he writes, “obliged me to watch over myself [*me surveiller*] very closely.” (A. Diop 1931) This sense of self-

scrutiny was likely compounded by the follow-up exams that African teachers had to submit to on occasion to maintain their credentials, exams which were designed to ensure that their reading and writing habits had not degenerated. I want to be careful, though, not to assimilate what Diop describes with the program proposed by Hardy's handbook. First, the writings of Diop and other African teachers in publications like *Education Africaine* need to be understood in the context of their use. While it is certainly possible that they were entirely voluntary essays, it seems more likely that contributing to the discourse around pedagogy, particularly providing the "native's point of view" in an officially-sanctioned format, offered avenues of professional advancement. To contribute to this conversation, then, one had to demonstrate that one could describe one's education in terms that were legible for the self-understanding of the system's mission. It is as an effect of this dynamic, it seems to me, that we find these mutual echoes between Hardy and Diop. The discourse on proper reading and writing practices was far more diffuse and internally contested than the single program Hardy imagined, dictated from on high, to be adopted by rank-and-file teachers.

'To See With Method'

One also sees this managing of proper and improper textualities unfold in the texts, activities and exams employed in schools in French West Africa. This is especially apparent in a certain progression that occurs in the questions that appear on the exams that colonial students had to take to earn diplomas and access to elite schools. An exam question for future teachers in the 1910s might read, "Describe how you will make France loved among the children of your village."²¹ But from the late 20s and early 30s on, exams begin to include a greater variety of composition topics. Nevertheless, the questions they ask do seem to interpolate the student into a particular positionality. Quoting a few of these topics will help illustrate what I mean. "Describe the kind of home your parents live in. What feelings does it inspire in you?" "It is Sunday in your native village. What does one do, see, and hear?" "You must have learned many fables. Tell one, in simple language."²² While the shift was not clear cut or linear, there is nevertheless a discernible shift in how the exams approach the problem space of what could count as a student's own words. Overall, the move is toward testing a capacity to perform a certain kind of reflection or translation. For access to elite educational institutions, students increasingly had to demonstrate that they could reflect on their past in a certain way.

The classroom activities colonial educators report using also reflect this tendency toward eliciting certain modes of quoting or describing of the social world from students. One sees it especially in the curious role orality played in the colonial classroom. Far from seeking to banish or suppress orality, beginning in the 1910s colonial educators began to make limited use of it in the classroom.²³ To this end, colonial classrooms became spaces for collecting certain kinds of African speech genres. Guides for folklore collection and amateur ethnography – produced by Levy-Bruhl at the Ecole Coloniale²⁴ – were circulated to instructors in colonial schools, who were encouraged to gather oral "data" from their students and their students' communities. These collection guides focused exclusively on what they called folklore, and not other speech genres associated with epic memory, specialized knowledge, or gender specific forms.²⁵ The guides explain

how to cultivate the “special attitude” required to collect oral texts. One “need not be a specialist,” they advise, “nor have read doctoral dissertations, nor even know indigenous languages.” Instead, a teacher had to learn to “strip himself of his personality to find the thoughts he does not have naturally. [...] It is enough to look around you, to look with method and without prejudice.” (Charton 1930)²⁶ The guides do not supply specific questions to ask and rather advise teachers on how to train themselves to ‘look and hear with method’ so that these folktales can become texts that are detachable from their original context. The guides are essentially directions for hearing and transcribing myth as myth, for training oneself to flatten the interlinked times and spaces that might adhere in a myth into a duality: a world of things in which one really lives and a religious or superstitious world in which one lives only in the imagination. Many teachers, European and African, responded to these calls for contributions and their findings were printed and circulated throughout the system. And indeed it seems highly likely that contributing to this scientific conversation was one key to professional advancement.²⁷

But the results of these surveys were not circulated merely for the edification of the community of teachers, but rather in order that they might be used in the classroom. In some years, students were coerced to participate as well. Responses to the exam question I mentioned earlier – tell us a folktale in simple language – were reprinted and circulated for teachers to make use of in their lessons. Thus, folktales “collected” in one area of French West Africa were used as material for *dictées* or memorization in a classroom somewhere else perhaps just a year later.²⁸ As Talal Asad has observed, it is not the personal authority of the ethnographer that matters so much as the social authority of ethnography as a form.²⁹ Following this insight, we could say that this feedback loop of collecting and reproducing oral texts did not establish the value of particular versions of folktales; rather, it worked to establish the authority of the form in which they were being written down, the authority of the methods of quoting and interpreting the voices of the social world.

Perhaps the most astonishing use of orality in the classroom was an exercise that some colonial teachers’ manuals suggested employing when their students’ expression was not lively enough in French. The activity in question involves bringing a griot (a traditional oral performer) into the classroom in order to recount a folktale for the students. The students were then to mimic the voice and gestures of the griot and work on writing a French version of the folktale. What the exercise serves to practice is crafting an image of the griot’s speech in French. In this exercise, the griot plays himself as a subject speaking for the past, whose discourse can be quoted. His speech is in the process of being reconfigured as the memory of something that is past, and the exercise works to practice the terms in which that memory can be spoken for. (Davesne and Gouin 1939, 4)³⁰

‘Revise His Memory...’

While this in-class exercise was intended for young children, students at the highest levels of the education system were undergoing even more complex translation exercises. The best example of these are the Cahiers Ponty, or Ponty notebooks. They are a collection of over 700 monographs produced by students in their final year of the Ecole Normale William Ponty from the 1930s on. To graduate from this elite institution, which

trained teachers for the entire federation and counted several future presidents and prime ministers among its alumni, students were required to produce an ethnography of their own community during their summer vacation. The *Ponty* notebooks are conserved at the IFAN research center in Dakar, and are a remarkable record of the ways of seeing and speaking that were cultivated in colonial schools.³¹

The original description of the notebook assignment is worth quoting in detail. The goal was to “oblige our students to use precise observation, and an exact description of the facts. [...] to instill in the spirit of our young instructor a serious discipline, to contain the verbal imagination, to avoid false literary descriptions, to turn the gaze of our future schoolmasters toward the rational knowledge of their original environment.” (Charton 1933)³² The Ponty student should “confront the ideas and opinions that he has encountered at school with those of his illiterate brothers who have remained in the village [...] and revise his memory with total sincerity.”³³ The basic assignment, then, was for the student to translate his own lived experience into the terms of an ethnographic monograph, to rewrite his own past and that of his community in a new perspective – to revise his memory, as the assignment put it. While the assignment explicitly discouraged the use of “false literary descriptions,” many of the notebooks themselves are structured on a deep level by the tropes of novelistic prose, particularly those of the *Bildungsroman* or novel of socialization. Thus what the assignment sought to avoid – false literary descriptions – turned out to be necessary to give a legible account of one’s socialization as a modern subject. So in order to become an accredited teacher from 1930s on in French West Africa, one had to write one of these notebooks – part ethnography, part *éducation sentimentale*.³⁴

The students who authored Ponty notebooks very often contrast French education with other forms of socialization, comparisons which are rarely favorable.³⁵ And in this sense the notebooks depart from the usual arc of a novel of socialization – instead of the narrative of one socialization, they depict two transformations.³⁶ The first is the student’s socialization in his community of origin, the form of which depends, obviously, on his background. The second is the story of the writing of the notebook itself; the student’s passage through French school which enables him to now perform the backward gaze the notebook required, this looking back on his origins from a ‘rational’ perspective. In a sense, then, part of the work of writing the notebook is to project backwards onto the student’s socialization the terms of legibility into which it was now being translated, and thus transforming what kind of an account can be given of it.

In this regard, it is especially informative to note how the Ponty students describe their own earlier experiences in Quran schools. For instance, in a notebook about his own experience at a *daara* [Quran school], Abdou Rahmane Diop wrote:

The marabout takes it upon himself to simply engrave in the memory of his students the maximum number of verses possible [...] such that the students often develop an extraordinary memory. But the other faculties of the spirit remain atrophied [...] *For the school of memory, we should substitute another that exercises the other functions of the spirit.* The monotony of the recitation by heart of verses that are not understood must make way for a [another] form of study that can captivate the students. *The concern for religious education should no longer guide instruction – instead, the principle should be that of a literary education [formation littéraire].* (A. R. Diop n.d., 34–5)

Diop's proposal to substitute French education – particularly literary education – for religious instruction was a frequent trope in educational discourse in the colonial period. What I want to argue here is that refiguring the *daara* as merely “the school of memory” where students learned only “the monotony of recitation by heart” was, in part, an effect of the practice of writing the notebook. For the *daara* to become the school of memory, it had to be produced as such.³⁷

Certainly, this process was never a stable or top-down imposition, nor was it necessarily synonymous with alienation. Tellingly, one finds in some notebooks the marginal notations of schoolmasters, who quarrel with their students' turns of phrase or comment on the value of particular sections.³⁸ These voices that intervene in the margins are an apt figure for the complexities of authorship in the textual regime of the colonial classroom, where students were required to give an account of their own socialization in a certain format that was then supposed to efface itself in order that the performance might appear authentic. Thus we need to exercise extreme caution in reading para-literary genres such as the Ponty notebooks, so as not to reify the “revisions of memory” that were the aim of the assignment.

To sum up the tendencies I have been tracing, then, literary study in colonial schools seems to have been a way in which certain styles of seeing and quoting the social world were cultivated, in order to make certain forms of authorship authoritative. As I have tried to suggest, what counted as reading and writing was from the very beginning a space of struggle, both within the institution and outside it, and different forces made use of these practices in different ways for various ends.³⁹ One effect of literary study seems to have been that it made available different kinds of discursive positions from which, to adapt Karin Barber, one could edit what came to be called tradition, in order to make new kinds of claims on collective memory. (Barber 2007, 158)

'The World Moves, The World Changes'

To explore how the tensions and contradictions of colonial literary study find echoes in francophone literature before independence, I want to turn to three novels, the Guinean Laye Camara's 1953 *L'Enfant noir* (originally translated as *The Dark Child*) the Senegalese Ousmane Sembène's 1956 *Le Docker noir* (translated as *The Black Docker*), and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's 1961 *L'Aventure ambiguë* (translated as *The Ambiguous Adventure*).⁴⁰ All three were written and published around or just after independence and were among the first francophone novels to attain a certain stature and wide circulation.

L'Enfant noir by Laye Camara (or Camara Laye as he is often called) is a coming of age novel told in the first person, which traces the growth of a young Malinke boy from his infancy to early adolescence. The novel was initially very successful, perhaps in part because of the way it depicted African cultures for a largely French public – the novel spends a lot of energy recalling with nostalgia what it calls mystic and ritual practices in great detail, and does not really advance any substantive criticism of colonialism. This did not go unremarked upon its initial publication – the Cameroonian novelist Mongo Beti once wryly observed that the narrator's oddly naive tone and fascination with totems seemed to have come straight out of a colonial textbook. Beti was perhaps more right than he knew.⁴¹ Recent scholarship has cast doubt on Camara's sole authorship of the novel, suggesting that the manuscript was partially ghost-written by several white Europeans, and that it was promoted by the French Overseas Ministry as an

example of the success of colonial education. Camara had arrived in France in 1947 on a scholarship to study to be a mechanic after having coming in first on the final examinations for professional aptitude given in his native Guinea. It was in Nanterre that he met the French woman who helped him compose his autobiographical novel, and the members of the colonial administration who helped him find a publisher. By now this controversy is well-known in the field.⁴² I want to put it aside for a moment, and explore how the novel might also be responding, on a formal level, to the disciplines of authorship I have been tracing.

In Camara's novel, the narrator often quarrels with himself, especially over the terms in which to understand the past, particularly how to make sense of ritual or magical events he experienced in childhood. Over the course of the novel, there is a gradual progression in the ways in which the narrator accounts for this past. Here, for example, he is recounting how he participated in a collective performance of song and dance when he was a child: "*Que regardaient à vrai dire ces yeux? Je ne sais pas. Les alentours? Peut-être! Peut-être ces yeux ne regardaient-ils rien; peut-être était-ce de ne rien regarder de visible, qui les rendait si lointains et comme absents.*" (Laye 2007, 62)⁴³ The foremost detail in his memory now is a strange, faraway look he remembers seeing in the eyes of the other performers; he begins to wonder, "What were those eyes looking at," hinting that his own eyes are no longer among this assembly. As the narrator continues to reflect on the past, he keeps asking whether he can believe what he has seen. These events, he writes, "*me paraissent incroyable! Ils sont incroyables [...] Pourtant il suffit de me rappeler ce que j'ai vu, ce que mes yeux ont vu. Puis-je récuser le témoignage de mes yeux?*" (*ibid.*, 73–74)⁴⁴ As he becomes more and more of an onlooker onto his own memory, the narrator's eyes become the eyes he was watching in the first quotation – a gaze he can look back on askance, but whose perspective he seems no longer to be able to inhabit. This gradual transformation also seems to inaugurate a new temporality, which comes into sharp relief in the following passage:

*Je ne veux rien dire de plus et je n'ai relaté que ce que mes yeux ont vu. Ces prodiges [...] j'y songe aujourd'hui comme aux événements fabuleux d'un lointain passé. Ce passé pourtant est tout proche: il date d'hier. Mais le monde bouge, le monde change, et le mien plus rapidement peut-être que tout autre, et si bien qu'il semble que nous cessons d'être ce que nous étions, qu'au vrai nous ne sommes plus ce que nous étions, et que déjà nous n'étions plus exactement nous-mêmes dans le moment où ces prodiges s'accomplissaient sous nos yeux. Oui, le monde bouge, le monde change... (*ibid.*, 80)*

This final sentence displays a dazzlingly dense superimposition of tenses. "We cease to be what we were" becomes "we are no longer what we were" and finally transforms into "we were *already no longer* exactly ourselves in the moments in which these miracles were occurring before our eyes." The novel seems to remain thereafter in this "already, no longer" moment. Through this reconfiguration, belief comes to be retrojected into the narrator's memory as the hermeneutic that his past demands. His relation to what he has seen and heard is reconfigured in terms of what he can believe, or perhaps what will be believable to the text's presumptively skeptical reader. This struggle to reconfigure the past, to see and hear in new ways is also associated with the world moving and the world changing, suggesting that perhaps it is a kind of world-making activity.

Many of the students who wrote Ponty notebooks exhibit similar struggles with their positions as onlookers onto their own pasts. For example, Cheikhou Tidiane Dieng,

who wrote a study on the myth of the ‘*génie des eaux*’ for his notebook, regrets that he believes in the existence of certain spirits despite himself:

C’est parce que nous sommes nés au milieu des parents superstitieux qui nous ont habitués à avoir peur des vents de sables [...] de bonne heure nos parents ont mis en nos têtes cette erreur: qu’il existe des esprits mal-faisants et jaloux. Et je vous dirai en toute sincérité que quoique n’en ayant jamais eu une prueve, j’y crois, malgré moi, et je ne me sens pas encore la force de lutter contre ces traditions injustifiées. (Dieng n.d., 47–8; my emphasis)

The resemblances to the ways in which Laye’s narrator struggles with himself are uncanny.⁴⁵ Like Camara’s novel, many Ponty notebooks often seem at risk of splitting into two narrative voices, one saying “this is what I saw” and the other interrupting, “but this is what that must have *really* meant.” What I want to suggest is that Camara’s novel may be the most widely circulated example of a genre that was actually heavily commissioned during colonial period, sometimes as a condition of professional advancement. But unlike the Ponty Notebooks, the marginal notations in *L’Enfant noir* have, so to speak, been erased, allowing the manuscript to be published and read as literature. And read rather widely, I might add, since it sold well over a one-hundred-thousand copies, and was translated into several languages very rapidly, allowing it to circulate as world literature as well. But what, exactly, was circulating?

The equivocation of Camara’s narrator could be taken as evidence of the involvement of multiple authors. While not discounting this, I want to make a somewhat different point. In order pass his exams with a first and to travel to France in the way that he did, Camara would have already been required on exams and compositions to prove he could inhabit a narrative mode similar to the one we encounter in the novel. While Camara never wrote a Ponty notebook, similar accounts of his past were likely required and elicited from him as conditions of mobility in the institutions through which he passed. So something rather complicated is going on in the reception of *L’Enfant noir* as world literature, since we are not only dealing with the circulation of a discreet literary work or an example of a genre, but also with the refraction of the disciplines of authorship and reading that were taught in colonial schools.

‘*This Slow Vertigo*’

Perhaps more than any other francophone novel of its era, Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure Ambiguë* (The Ambiguous Adventure) explores the French colonial school as an institution that makes and unmakes worlds. The novel follows the young scion of the Diallobé, Samba Diallo, from his beginnings as a student at the Quran school who shows extraordinary piety and devotion, through his time in the French colonial school and journey abroad to France, and, finally, to the tragedy that awaits him on his return.⁴⁶ As this sketch indicates, the competing socializations of the French colonial school and the Quran school are at the heart of the narrative. At a certain moment, Samba Diallo, is asked by a French friend: “Tell me how they conquered you, personally.” He replies:

Je ne sais pas trop. C’est peut-être avec leur alphabet. [...] Longtemps, je suis demuré sous la fascination de ces signes et de ces sons qui constituent la structure et la musique de leur langue. Lorsque j’ai appris à les agencer pour former des mots, à agencer les mots pour donner naissance à la parole, mon bonheur ne connut plus de limites. [...] J’avais interrompu mes études chez le

maître des Diallobé au moment précis où il allait m'initier enfin à la compréhension rationnelle de ce que, jusque-là, je n'avais fait que réciter, avec émerveillement il est vrai. Avec eux, voilà que, subitement, j'entrais plain-pied dans un univers où tout était, de prime abord, compréhension merveilleuse et communion totale [...] Mais ils s'interposèrent et entreprirent de me transformer à leur image. Progressivement, ils me firent émerger du cœur des choses et m'habituerent à prendre mes distances du monde. (C. H. Kane 2003, 172–173)⁴⁷

This passage does not seem to describe a difference between rival educational systems, or even languages. Rather, it appears to try to capture, in fiction, a certain dislocation – what Kane calls “living at a distance from the world” and perhaps what Gayatri Spivak once called “the battleground of epistemes.” One finds this sense of being “at a distance from the world” in many Senegalese texts of francophone expression from this early period.⁴⁸ This ‘distance’ evoked here, though, contrasts sharply with how the novel describes the recitation of the Quran that Diallo practices:

Cette parole n'était pas comme les autres. [...] La Parole de Dieu coulait, pure et limpide, de ses lèvres ardentes. Sa tête endolorie était bruisante. Il contenait en lui la totalité du monde, ce qu'il a de visible et ce qu'il a d'invisible, son passé et son avenir. Cette parole qu'il enfantait dans la douleur, elle était l'architecture du monde, elle était le monde même. (C. H. Kane 2003, 14–15)⁴⁹

Kane’s narrator describes the holy word here *as the world itself*. Perhaps, then, we can draw on the attempt of this novel to point to its own dislocation in order to think of colonial education (and literary study in particular) as a kind of world-making in its own right, one that aimed to transform the possibilities of speaking for and from other worlds.

Approaching literary study in this way might also cause us to broaden some of the very influential accounts of literature that have been foundational in literary criticism since poststructuralism. In *The Order of Things*, for example, Michel Foucault defines literature in the Modern period as being “that which compensates for (and not that which confirms) the signifying function of language.” Since the 19th century, Foucault writes, “literature began to bring language back to light once more in its own being: though not as it had still appeared at the end of the Renaissance. For now we no longer have that primary, that absolutely initial, word upon which the infinite movement of discourse was founded and by which it was limited.” (Foucault 1994, 44) In the analysis I have been tracing of colonial literary study as a world-making activity, however, the historical arc by which literature becomes a consolation for the disenchantment of language in modernity seems to be reversed. In its institutional uses in French West Africa, literature seems to have only belatedly had the compensatory role Foucault suggests for it. Instead, it was initially one way in which the retreat of language into mere signification was (and continues to be) enacted. To put that another way, it was in part through the disciplines of literary reading and authorship that the colonial classroom sought to sever word and world. In this perspective, Foucault’s insight does not appear incorrect; rather, it seems to not go far enough. Literary study appears to have been one method of cultivating what, following Webb Keane, we might call a new semiotic ideology – a set of understandings and practices surrounding the materiality of words, things and human agents. (Keane 2007, 16) Kane’s novel does indeed seem to be mourning the living word’s passage into mere signification; but – crucially – this mourning takes place in the very literary medium which, in part, seems to have contributed to language’s transformation into mere words. Perhaps more than any other novelist of his generation, then, Kane struggles to evoke the world-making effects of colonial education in the literary medium that it had, in part,

made available. At one point, Kane's novel refers to the epistemic transformations underway as a "slow vertigo." (C. H. Kane 2003, 47) This is as apt phrase as any for the double-bind of francophone African literature in this period.

Authorship on Trial

Ousmane Sembène's first novel, *Le Docker Noir*, echoes the legacy of colonial literary education very differently, by subverting its obsessions with authorship and memory. If the authorship controversy in *L'Enfant Noir* is behind the scenes, in Sembène's novel it takes center stage. The plot turns around a murder trial in which the victim is a famous novelist and the principle evidence is a stolen manuscript. A young Senegalese man, Diaw Falla, emigrates to France to work on the docks in Marseille and spends his nights writing a historical novel about the last slave ship to leave France. But when Diaw travels to Paris to share his manuscript with an established French author, she takes it and publishes it under her own name. When he confronts her, she ends up dead and he is arrested and then convicted for her murder. During his trial, Diaw's claim that he wrote the stolen novel figures prominently in his defense. But during the cross-examination, the Prosecutor asks him to prove it.

'Vous prétendiez,' dit le Président, 'être l'auteur du Négrier Sirius? Pouvez-vous me réciter un passage du livre? Vous avez le choix.' [...] 'Combien de jours vous a-t-il fallu pour l'apprendre?' interrogea le Président.

Falla [...] répondit avec mépris: 'Je ne l'ai pas appris en prison. Je vous dis que je l'ai écrit... écrit.' (Sembène 2002, 58–63)⁵⁰

The fact that Diaw can indeed recite his work is presented as proof that he has merely memorized someone else's words. As if the call back to the double-bind of colonial literary authorship risked going unnoticed, Sembène's novel includes a second recitation as well. After Diaw has been convicted and is languishing in prison, he writes a letter home in which he copies out a song he had learned as a child in a French colonial school, an ideological poem about the devotion of the *tirailleurs Sénégalais* – the West African infantrymen who fought for France – to their commanding officers.

Il me revient à l'esprit une récitation que j'ai apprise à l'école.

'Le dévouement des tirailleurs sénégalais

Pour leurs chefs, est digne d'admiration.

Ces braves gens se donnent tout entier

A celui qui les commande..."

J'abrège (faute de mémoire).

"... L'officier ne peut pas oublier le regard

Que jettent ces hommes une fois tombés

Pour ne plus se relever. C'est une vraie

Troupe... Française... que nous avons.

Il est impossible de l'employer autrement

Qu'au service de la Patrie.'

Voilà qui est clair comme enseignement! (ibid., 214)⁵¹

The tone here is an eerie replica of the kind of texts that were actually were taught, with its brave African soldiers dying joyfully for the fatherland. "How's that for a clear

education,” Diaw observes ruefully, suggesting that this was the true form of authorship that France had hoped for from him. The questions that emerge from the juxtaposition of these two recitations cut to the core francophone literary culture in this period: what counts as a performance of authorship? Who is authorized to speak from memory, and in what in what terms?

In a sign of things to come, Sembène dedicated this, his first novel, to his mother. “*Je dédie ce livre à ma mère, bien qu’elle ne sache pas lire... Penser qu’elle y promènera les doigts suffit à mon bonheur.*” (Sembène 2002, i)⁵² One can detect, in this dedication, a prefiguration of what has been one possible response to the legacy of literature’s implication in colonial education. In a sense, Sembène’s dedication raises the question of what would it mean address literature to a public that has been historically excluded from the category of literacy. What would it mean to write for a public that could not yet read what you wrote? These questions emerged with a vengeance in Senegal in the postcolonial period, as some Senegalese intellectuals, including Sembène, began to advocate for a modern literary and cultural movement in Wolof. In the next chapter, I will explore the friction between these intellectuals and the francophone cultural field, which began to be institutionalized as national culture beginning in the 1960s.

Architectures of the Literary

I want to conclude by returning very briefly to the Zola lesson I began with. The painterly scene of a vegetable market that found its way into the colonial classroom is a description of Les Halles, the famous covered market built in the mid-19th-century as part of the Hausmannization of Paris. In Zola’s novel, Les Halles are a major figure – the paragraph right before this passage evokes not only the vegetables but the great iron and glass structure itself, describing it as “a modern machine.”⁵³ But in the 1950 Zola lesson, the building that structures this cornucopia of form and color is practically nowhere to be found. So to teach this as a composition lesson, then, a very important frame that exists within the novel ends up being elided. Of course, it is not that a frame has disappeared completely; rather, the passage seems to have acquired a new one, namely the four-page guide for the teacher that accompanied its use in the colonial classroom.

This raises again the question I began with: why would colonial educators have been invested in eliciting texts that resembled *this* one, in particular? And what might this have to do with replacing the frame that existed in the original novel with a new, pedagogical apparatus? In attempting to answer this question, it is very tempting for me to turn to my own training in French literature. The first critical impulse would surely be to explain that *Le Ventre de Paris* exemplifies a tendency in Zola’s Naturalism toward narrative encyclopedia, and to explore what the significance is of transposing this stylistic preoccupation to a new historical moment. This would seem a promising connection to make, since one way of understanding the Naturalist project is as a mode of observation that aimed at a complete mapping and mastery of the city, in ways that are deeply resonant with the territorializing dimensions of knowledge gathering in the colonial imaginary. Prendergast, for example, suggests that in this particular passage from Zola “a narrator’s transcendent perspective has been smuggled into the character’s” such that we are presented with a virtual panorama of a “city evacuated of obstructive challenges to understanding, the city perceived from a position of mastery, confirming an identity at

once of the viewing subject and the subject viewed.” (Prendergast 1992, 70–71) One could certainly advance an interesting case for how and why it might have been desirable to transpose such a perspective to the colonies, and elicit colonial students to replicate it.⁵⁴

And yet, such an explanation risks effacing a productive tension that the recontextualization of this passage opens up within the practice of literary criticism itself. To put it simply, it is virtually certain that whoever adapted this passage for use in the colonial classroom did not actually excerpt it from Zola’s novel. It is much more likely that the passage had already acquired a certain independent life of its own and had been anthologized many years before in various school readers.⁵⁵ This hypothesis also helps us understand why the frame of Les Halles has gone missing. Zola’s narration describes the frame around this organic cornucopia as a “gigantic metal belly”; and indeed, one undercurrent of this very passage is a deep sense of narrative unease. In *Le Ventre*, Les Halles are a space where modern appetites are produced and satiated, and as such they possess a deeply ambiguous status in Zola’s moralizing universe. But in this passage’s classroom life, this original frame has come to be removed, probably because – as so often happens when literature is adapted for use in classrooms for children – anything resembling ideology had to be peeled away. So without wanting to dismiss offhand the productive insights that might emerge from a close reading or generic analysis of the passage, it seems to me that if we commit too prematurely to the methods toward which our training as literary critics predisposes us, then we risk, in this case, missing something crucial: namely, that the place of this passage, this novel and this author in literary history probably had very little to do with its use in the colonial classroom. Far more important would have been the institutional authority this passage had already acquired in previous school readers and through decades of use as a writing lesson. Of course, all the stylistic and generic insights we would be tempted to draw out of *The Belly of Paris* are part of why it originally came to be adapted for use in schools, and why it made its way into colonial classrooms. But the further institutional life that this passage has had is absolutely not reducible to our literary critical understandings of the original work. There is no better illustration of this than the superimposition of frames that I have been belaboring. The ‘original’ frame of this vision that would be of interest to us as literary critics (*Les Halles*) has been displaced by the pedagogical guide that serves to guide the institutional practice of literary study.

I wonder whether, as critics and teachers of literature, we might take some methodological lesson from the way this shard of a novel has been recontextualized and the work that this does. Might we not ask where the architecture of our own experience of a literary text comes from? By what histories – institutional and otherwise – is a text literary to us, and what kind of authority does this status confer? How might an understanding of how literary study was used by colonial institutions to cultivate particular ways of seeing and speaking about the world complicate our understandings of the globalization of literary culture as a being mainly a matter of the circulation of particular works or genres, the flow of literary capital, or even the dialogue of particular artistic movements? Could we not also work toward attending to the diffusion and transformations of certain practices and dispositions associated with literary reading and writing? To put the question one final way, if literary study seems to have been a world-

making activity in the colonial classroom, then what happens to our understanding of world literature?

Chapter Two

Your Papers, Please: Unauthorized Voices in the First Wolof Novel and Film

At a 1963 conference at the University of Dakar on the subject of “African Literature of French Expression,” the Senegalese writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène launched into a vehement critique of Negritude¹, the aesthetic movement and ideological project of the poet Léopold Senghor (who was then President of Senegal, and who had given the conference’s opening address). Sembène spoke at length, and quarreled especially with the academic papers that had been presented during the conference, many of which had tried to apply Negritude as a critical framework with which to study African literature. The panel of writers he was on – which included other well-known African authors such as Camara Laye, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and Tchicaya U Tam’ si – had been scheduled at the end of a long day of conference papers, and many of the writers present had had the dubious pleasure of listening to analyses of their work.² Sembène had heard himself described as a practitioner of Negritude, which he seemed to take particular umbrage with. “What is negritude?” Sembène wondered.

Speaking for myself, here in Senegal, the very center of negritude, I say frankly that I do not know. Why don’t I know? If we look at the social situation Senegal today [...] nothing seems to have been achieved at all. [...] There was a time when negritude meant something positive. It was our breastplate against a culture that wanted at all costs to dominate us. But that is past history. [...] I am against negritude because to me nowadays it no longer means that combination of revolutionary fervour that people like to pretend that it has. (Quoted in Moore et al. 1965, 56–57)

Once he had exhausted his critique of Negritude, Sembène focused his ire on Senegal’s entirely francophone educational system. “[U]ntil we have made African languages part of our educational system,” Sembène argued, “in the primary schools and elsewhere, our literature will still be subject to the control of other powers, or other people’s good intentions.” (*ibid.*, 57) After Sembène had finished speaking, the floor was opened to questions. Another Senegalese writer, the poet and storyteller Birago Diop spoke up:

Diop: I have no questions, but my native language is Wolof and I would like to ask M Sembène Ousmane to repeat the whole of his speech in Wolof. That is all. He talks about cultural imperialism. Very well, I would just like him to make the same speech, as eloquently, in Wolof. (*ibid.*, 58)

Sembène – a Wolof speaker as well – admitted that he could not repeat all of what he had said in Wolof, but insisted that he did not think “that means our language is poorer.” He pointed out that even in French one says “radio” and “nightclubs.” Seemingly unimpressed, Diop repeated his request that Sembène “make [his] speech over again in Wolof.” Sembène replied:

Sembène: I can assure you that, if I had taken the time, I could have written *Le Docker Noir* [his first novel, written in French] in Wolof. But then who would have read it? How many people know how to read the language? And if I had not taken the trouble at least to learn the grammar, even if only phonetically, I should not be in a position to write it; but then, who is going to read

me? And how many people, I speak only of Africans, is it going to affect? That is one of the contradictions of our life. (*ibid.*, 58)

At this point, another Senegalese writer, Abdou Anta Ka, intervened to protest the direction the conversation was going.

Ka: [...] I should not like this debate to take a political turn. It must be kept at a literary level and everyone must say exactly what he thinks. That is more important than anything. (Quoted in Moore et al. 1965, 59)

But what, Sembène inquired of Ka, was “pure literature”? What, indeed?

In this chapter, I study the emergence of modern Wolof literature and film in the 1960s and 70s as a response to Diop’s challenge: *but could you say it in Wolof?*³ Specifically, I study the ways in which the first film and the first novel produced in Wolof – Ousmane Sembène’s⁴ *Mandabi* and Cheikh Aliou Ndao’s⁵ *Buur Tilleen*, respectively – engaged with this problematic. To describe *Mandabi* and *Buur Tilleen* as artworks that are “in Wolof” is to make a complicated claim. Both the novel and the film exist in multiple versions and languages, because Sembène and Ndao were obliged to remake their works in French.

Sembène’s *Mandabi* (1968) was the first feature film shot in an African language. It was adapted from Sembène’s 1966 novella *Le Mandat* [The Money Order], which was written in French. As a condition of the funding he received to make *Mandabi*, Sembène had to simultaneously shoot a version of the film in French as well. Cheikh Aliou Ndao originally wrote the text of *Buur Tilleen* [King of Tilleen] in Wolof in 1967. He tried for 10 years to find a publisher for his novel before giving up. In the meantime, he rewrote the novel in French and an adaptation entitled *Buur Tilleen: Roi de la Medina* [Buur Tilleen: King of the Medina] was published by *Présence Africaine* in 1972. The Wolof “original” was finally published in the late 1990s – nearly 30 years after it was first written.

Describing these artworks as “first” is also a potentially problematic claim. There are and continue to be a wide variety of oral and written textual genres, scholarly traditions, and styles of performance in Wolof. Therefore in positioning *Mandabi* and *Buur Tilleen* as a kind of “beginning” for modern Wolof literature, I am not trying to offer the basis of a canon (what canon of Wolof literature could possibly begin in the 1960s, anyway, since that would exclude the oral and the Wolofal traditions?). Rather, it seems to me that the difficulty of “beginning” a modern Wolof aesthetic movement is posed in the works themselves, precisely in response to the challenge of how to “say it in Wolof.” Both Ndao and Sembène, I will argue, perceived the rigidly francophone postcolonial cultural field as being in a state of crisis and proposed instead a turn to Wolof – not as index of cultural nationalism, but as a way of contesting the limitations francophone artistic production placed on what kinds of publics could be addressed.

Immediately, however, both novelist and filmmaker were confronted with the difficulty of actually producing and distributing work in Wolof. For different reasons and in different ways, both *Mandabi* and *Buur Tilleen* had to be re-worked into French in order to initially reach a public. In this chapter, I read the traces of this movement between multiple versions and languages. I argue that in both the novel and the film this compulsory translation has been transformed from an imposition into an object of

poetics. My argument takes its cue from a certain genre of encounter that occurs in both *Mandabi* and *Buur Tilleen*. In this encounter, the protagonist is exposed as not having an identity card and must search for the proper papers in order to be authorized to circulate. I read these scenes as allegories of the situation of aesthetic discourse in Wolof, which at the time was subject to surveillance and authorization by the francophone cultural field which it sought to interrupt.

In order to gauge these works' perceived disruptive force, however, I first need to situate them in the broader field⁶ of cultural discourse in Senegal in the 1960s and 70s. I begin this chapter with an examination of two controversies surrounding public speech in "national languages," in order to draw out just how difficult it could be to "say it in Wolof" under President Senghor.⁷ The first is Sembène's intervention in the 1963 conference. The second controversy I have in mind is the 1977 censorship of Sembène's film *Ceddo*, which was also made in Wolof. *Ceddo* was banned by Senegalese government for its use of a double letter "d" in its title. The government had taken upon itself the right to decide how the national languages were to be transcribed, and double letters were not permitted. The term *ceddo* actually refers to a controversial period in pre-colonial Senegalese history. By insisting on his right to refer to this period in the way he chose, Sembène sought to lay claim to a right to re-open a discussion about collective memory.

But Could You Say It In Wolof?

What did it mean at a conference on francophone literature in Dakar in 1963 to ask, as Abdou Anta Ka did, that the debate be kept on a purely literary level? Clearly, Ka was not referring only to the content of Sembène's critique, which did indeed range toward topics that might be conventionally understood as "political." What Ka seems to have been also objecting to was the possibility that, by merely raising the difficulty of articulating an aesthetic, political critique in Wolof, Sembène was disturbing the 'literary' status of the conversation. To put that another way, we might say that to merely raise the issue of having such a conversation in Wolof – and not, I would add, to actually have it – constituted at that cultural moment a turn toward the political.

What made this point political was that it disturbed the naturalness of the fact that the conversation was occurring in French in the first place. Furthermore, it drew attention to the way in which access to discourse in French was (and still is) unequally distributed. Sembène's intervention is political not merely because it has drifted from the conversational (and conference) focus on 'aesthetics.' It is political because it points out that the ability of the speakers to focus on "aesthetics" depends in important (but difficult to acknowledge) ways on not noticing that this capacity to discuss literature indexes a shared history of colonial education that has not been broken with, and indeed risks being reproduced by the educational apparatus of the post-colonial state.

Sembène's initial polemic threatened to shift the interaction from a scholarly and artistic conversation about literature into a debate about the conditions that governed postcolonial life in Senegal, especially the Senghor government's passion for the French language and the importance of literary study as an alibi for it. This is why Birago Diop's challenge to Sembène – but can you say that, as *eloquently*, in Wolof? – is so powerful.

Without even saying it directly, Diop's reply points to a crisis which Sembène ruefully admits is "one of the contradictions of our life."

By challenging Sembène to repeat his critique of Negritude in Wolof, Diop was, on the one hand, pointing out the obvious – whether Sembène was right or not, his critique of the educational system as neocolonial was conditioned by a learned eloquence in French. But Diop's challenge to "say it in Wolof" also did some work on the terms in which Sembène could respond to him. We can see from the reply – "I do not think this means that our languages are poor" – that Sembène assumes that a certain framing of the question has already taken place and that he wants immediately to dispute it. We might paraphrase the frame Sembène seems to react to like this: "The difficulty of remaking the speech in Wolof indexes the lack of a certain capacity immanent in the language itself." This capacity is then imagined in terms of a rich/poor binary. Not only does Sembène have the sense that remaking his speech in Wolof would be difficult, but he also detects and resists a particular interpretation of that difficulty.

One source of this interpretation would actually have been quite obvious to many of the participants in the 1963 conference. Sembène was not only responding to Diop, his reply was also a kind of rebuttal to the opening address delivered at the conference by President Senghor himself the day before.⁸ In that address, Senghor had begun by defending the choice of African authors of his generation to write literature in French.

Senghor pointed out that he and other francophone writers had not, in fact, chosen French at all – rather it had been imposed on them. Then, however, he went further, going on to say that if they had been given the choice, they would have chosen to write in French anyway. Because French, he declared, was "the language of politeness and civility [*politesse et honnêteté*]"⁹ of "clarity and rigor." (Senghor 1964, 399) He did not pursue this particular argument in great depth in his speech, and instead directed his listeners to an article he had written the previous year in the journal *Esprit*.¹⁰ But further elaboration would have likely been unnecessary to anyone in the Senegalese (and, indeed, francophone) cultural field at the time. Senghor's defense of his government's choice of French was well known among intellectuals. It rested on an argument about the contrasting natures African languages and French. In *Esprit*, and in many other venues and articles in the first decade of his presidency, Senghor made the case for continuing education and instruction in French in the newly independent nation. The terms in which Sembène contrasted French and the "national" languages are worth exploring, in order to get a sense what Sembène was arguing against.

What emerges from Senghor's discourse on the question of the state's official language is a certain vocabulary for framing the debate about national and cultural language. In Senghor's speeches and essays in this period (which were collected in *Liberté I* soon after), languages are first of all imagined as bounded units, as organic entities about which it is possible to make propositional statements ("French has... National languages do not have..."). Secondly, languages are thought of as possessing certain qualities which make them well or ill suited to various tasks. Third, these qualities are aligned along a binary axis, with technical vocabulary on the one hand (transparency, rigor, analysis, logic) and aesthetic vocabulary one on the other (nuance, delicacy, sentiment, poetry).¹¹ While Senghor appears to line up French on both sides of this binary, he locates the national languages squarely on the poetic side of the equation.

French, in Senghor's formulations, is figured both as an aesthetic resource with poetic vitality and as a kind of technocratic national infrastructure.

The "qualities of order and clarity" of the French language, Senghor wrote in *Esprit*, had made of it "a universal language, the singular language of science and diplomacy" for "three centuries." (Senghor 1964, 359–363) It was a "language of rigor [...] analysis [and] synthesis" which possessed an arsenal of "word-tools," a "transparent vocabulary" as well as "a supple and precise syntax" which ordered the movements of thought "with a quasi-mathematical logic." And yet French was a poetic language, too, capable of "expressing the most noble sentiments and the most delicate and troubling ones." French poetry could "express the inexpressible with nuance and delicacy: suavely." (Senghor 1976, 7)

As for African languages, Senghor noted that "no languages are more appropriate to poetry, where the syntax of juxtaposition and the words loaded with images produce a poetic explosion, that sings the rhythmic melody of verse." (Senghor 1976, 8) He would argue that they were naturally "poetic languages." (Senghor 1964, 361) He suggested, though, that their aptitude for poetry was their weakness, in part due to their "juxtaposing" syntax; French, on the other hand, had a "subordinating" syntax which made it better suited to abstract thought and reason. (Senghor 1964, 360) He suggested that what was needed was to "provide our national languages with the means to be modern languages, capable of transporting science and technology." (Senghor 1976, 8)

In practice, Senghor's promises to "modernize" African languages often amounted to a way of stalling on the demands of his critics for educational reform.¹² Sembène's exasperated intervention at the conference on African literature of French expression clearly speaks to the growing sense among intellectuals that the government had no interest in breaking with the colonial language and was in fact prepared to use the prestige of French and African languages' supposed lack of anything except poetic capacity to forestall the emergence of competing aesthetic and political visions.

"Ceddo Cannot Be Written Otherwise"

Some 14 years after the conference in Dakar, Sembène himself would be caught up in the government's attempts to monopolize the right to "develop" the nation's linguistic infrastructure as it saw fit. In 1977, Sembène had completed his film *Ceddo*, a two-hour historical epic about indigenous resistance to religious conversion in a 17th- or 18th-century Senegambian kingdom. Distribution of the film was held up, however, when a governmental commission insisted that Sembène had to change the opening credits of his film so that the title card read "CEDO" and not "CEDDO." (See Figure 1)

Several years earlier, the government had published a law, authored by the President himself, that had made it illegal to publish anything in the national languages that did not conform to their official standards of transcription.¹³ The decree had stipulated that all Senegalese languages were to be transcribed without doubling any letters, which linguists call gemminates. Gemminates represent long consonant and long vowel phonemes (*dd* and *oo* for example), which an increasing number of linguists had agreed were needed in written Wolof so as to avoid confusion.



Figure 1: *The scene of the crime* (Sembène 1979)

The government thought otherwise. “At the moment when a literature and press written in our national languages are developing,” the decree read, “it is impossible for public power to tolerate the establishment of anarchy and confusion in this domain, which is what we are witnessing with the hatching and profusion of “savage” systems of transcription for the national languages which are marked by nothing so much as the improvisation and individualism of their authors.” (Quoted in Diagne 1978)¹⁴ The law, written by the President himself, required that every piece of writing in a national language that was intended for the public sphere be approved by a commission, which would, in theory, only be allowed to regulate the correctness of the writing, rather than the content. Being in violation of the law carried a 1-3 month minimum prison term and fines of anywhere from 20,000 to 1 million CFA.¹⁵

Sembène refused to change the title, and the film was forbidden to be shown in Senegal. In the months that followed, a war of words ensued in the opposition press sympathetic to Sembène and the government daily *Le Soleil*.¹⁶ Sembène fired the opening salvo: “Ceddo cannot be written otherwise,” he declared in an open letter to Senghor and the Senegalese people. “We know the cost, in Wolof and Pulaar in particular, of neglecting gemminates. We would end up in total incoherence. If the authorities want to prohibit writing in Wolof, they just should go ahead and do so.” (Sembène 1977)

Sembène’s letter generated a swift response the Minister of Education, Abd’el Kader Fall. Writing on the government’s behalf, he lambasted Sembène and his supporters in a full page editorial that was positively dripping in sarcasm and contempt. The article, entitled “A Chacun Son Métier” (“To Each his Profession”), scolded Sembène and his sympathizers for trying to turn what was a “scientific” debate into a “political” one. Fall emphasized the “rigorously scientific process” that the government had gone through to arrive at its decision regarding the use of gemminates. He pointed out that the President – himself an *agregé*¹⁷ in grammar – had said that one would have to wait for “six or seven doctoral theses on the question [of gemminates]” to be published before being “more or less” sure about the orthography. To make a good argument in this case, one had to try to convince “scientifically” and not “subjectively.” Otherwise, Senegal’s national languages could “never become effective instruments of our culture if

every citizen set themselves up as a linguist and a grammarian.” As Fall put it, “one can be a good writer without having been to university” but “no matter what the quality or level of one’s studies, one can never improvise oneself as a grammarian.”¹⁸ In this way, Fall positioned Senghor as schoolmaster to the entire nation. As for the linguists who had dared side with Sembène in the quarrel, “What are their university and scientific titles?” Fall thundered, “Where are their works? Where are their theses? What scientific study, or even article, proves that one must write *ceddo* and not *cedo*?” (A. K. Fall 1977)

Fall’s intervention did little to quell the uproar. A flurry of commentaries¹⁹ and polemics²⁰ followed. And yet none of the arguments were successful in reversing the government’s decision. Sembène steadfastly refused to change his title, and so *Ceddo* would remain unseen in Senegal until Senghor’s resignation some three years later. But the struggle to define what, precisely, was being censored and why continued to unfold. As late as 1979, Senghor himself wrote in to the French daily *Le Monde* to complain when an article described *Ceddo* as being “banned” in Senegal. Senghor pointed out that it was not banned outright but simply could not be shown in its current format because “M. Ousmane Sembène does not wish to obey Senegalese law.” (Senghor 1979)

The conventional scholarly and political wisdom on this controversy has been that the linguistic debate was merely a smokescreen. The *real* reason, many commentators have surmised, is that the film was deemed offensive to just about every religious sensibility in Senegal. This explanation seems reasonable enough given the plot of the film alone. In the film, the *ceddo* – a historical group of warriors in the pre-colonial Wolof kingdoms – revolt against their king when they feel he is allowing his kingdom to be overtaken by the new religions, Islam and Christianity. Their revolt is eventually crushed by a combination of a scheming imam, a priest and a slave trader. Outside of Senegal (which was the only place you could see the film for more than a decade) *Ceddo* seems to have been received as a glorification of what viewers presumed to be a true, historical example of African resistance against Islam.²¹

The trouble with seeing *Ceddo* as a film that seeks to portray history is that it seems to run against accepted versions of Senegalese history in quite dramatic ways. Both the written historical records and the oral traditions of the period it purports to depict suggest that conversion in Senegambia was a far more gradual process of negotiation and accommodation than the film suggests. Mamadou Diouf has suggested that this was a strategy on Sembène’s part to make a critique of the contemporary Senegalese entanglement of institutionalized religion and state power. “*Ceddo* purports to tell the stories of the wars between the aristocracies and the Muslim communities in the 17th and 18th centuries,” Diouf writes, “but it in fact relates to the involvement of religion, marabouts and bishops in the political conflicts of Senegal today.” (M. Diouf 1996, 244) In making a supposedly historical epic, then, Sembène found a way to speak obliquely about present political entanglements.²²

I want to argue that, in line with Diouf’s reading, the quarrel over the orthography of the word *Ceddo* both was and was not a pretense. On the one hand, the question of the title’s orthography was clearly the mere occasion that was found to make a potentially troublesome film – which the Senegalese government had, to its embarrassment, bankrolled – go away. But the dispute over who gets to decide how *ceddo* would be spelled is inseparable from the complicated history of the word *ceddo* itself.

Most contemporary Senegalese historians agree that the *ceddo* were originally a category of royal-slaves who served as warriors to the crown in the pre-colonial Wolof kingdoms. In the 18th century, the rulers of many of these kingdoms were themselves overthrown by their *ceddo*, who in turn established dynasties of their own.²³ During the 18th century, Senegambian society was ravaged by the instability these military regimes, which survived in part by capturing and selling slaves. In the 19th century, as resistance to these kingdoms centered around Muslim teachers and charismatic leaders, the term *ceddo* became an epithet to refer to all the non-Islamic Wolof aristocratic kingdoms, including the original ones the *ceddo* had overthrown. Through this trajectory, the word *ceddo* has come to mean “unbeliever,” “pagan” or “traditionalist” in Wolof (See Searing 2003, 206).²⁴

Given this etymology, it might seem at first surprising that *ceddo* would be something Sembène would choose to celebrate. But then, perhaps it was not this etymology that Sembène had in mind. Unsurprisingly, he was asked often what the term meant. His answers seem less like coherent definitions and more like attempts to get at something which risked being ineffable but whose stakes were, for Sembène, high indeed.

Sembène: Those who are called to this day the Ceddo are not an ethnic group. It's a Pulaar word that designates in one way or another those who resist slavery. That means those who “conserve the tradition.” The Ceddo are “the people of refusal.” One finds the spirit of the Ceddo just as much among Muslims as Catholics. (Quoted in Busch and Annas 2008, 113–114)

Sembène: Among the Wolof, Serer and Peul, being Ceddo means being jealous of one's absolute liberty. It is also being a warrior. Not a religion nor an ethnicity, it is a manner of being with rules [*être avec des règles*]. (my translation) (Quoted in Murphy 2000, 178)

In just these two examples, Sembène seems to have been trying to attach a new cluster of meanings to *ceddo*. To what end? I want to argue that, both in the film and in interviews, Sembène seems to attempt to assert *ceddo* as a different kind of positionality or ethic with which one could disturb an official account of collective memory. As Mamadou Diouf puts it, *Ceddo* “leaks noise into the midst of the totalitarianism of post-colonial historical interpretation. It reproves the ambitions of the state and the dominant groups in the writing of history.” (M. Diouf 1996, 245) Given this sketch of a contextualization, I hope it has become a bit clearer how the quarrel over how to spell “Ceddo” was about much more than an extra letter – and why Sembène preferred to let the film go unseen in Senegal rather than change his title. The censorship of the film and the ensuing quarrel over the spelling were part of a single struggle over who could claim the authority to define *ceddo* – Sembène or the state. The stakes of this were no more or less than who was authorized to speak for the past, what could be said, and what doing so might make possible in the present.

The Identity Card and the Scribe: Voicing in Mandabi

The question of what was to be done with the voice was central to the development of cinema in Francophone Africa. As Manthia Diawara has pointed out, the French colonial regime only became interested in regulating cinematic production and distribution in its African colonies after the advent sound technology. During the silent film era, the

colonial authorities had been relatively uninvolved in the development of film in West Africa. But in 1934, the government issued a decree that gave itself the right to examine both the scripts and the credentials of anyone wanting “to make cinematographic images or sound recordings” in the colonies. Applicants had to describe the legal regime they fell under (there were several in the colonies at the time), provide proof of their professional credentials, and include the script for the film. The law was rarely applied to French filmmakers but it was often used to restrict the activities of a burgeoning generation of African filmmakers.²⁵ In the early post-colonial period, the strategy and the infrastructure changed. In the interest of forming “binding economic, political, and cultural relations with its former colonies,” France partially financed the installation of “partial production units” in Francophone capitals. This meant films produced in the former colonies -- primarily newsreels and documentaries -- had to be sent for postproduction in Paris. (Diawara 1992, 21–35)

All of Sembène’s 1960s films – leading up to *Mandabi* – bear the traces of this post-production structure. Often, it was impossible – for financial, bureaucratic, or immigration reasons – to bring the actors who had performed in the films to the post-production studio to complete the sound editing for the film. Quite often, this meant that the roles were performed and voiced by different actors. Thus, speech in these early films has an extra-diagetic flavor to it. To put that another way, voices in Sembène’s early work are often estranged from the scenes and the bodies they accompany. Even if what is spoken matches the “sense” of what is being performed in the scene, accent, intonation and other qualities of voice index the uneven geographies of production through which these performances passed.

The most famous example of this is Sembène’s breakthrough film, *La Noire De...* (1966). In the film, the main character Diouana is played on-screen by the Senegalese actress Thérèse M’Bissine Diop but the voicing of the character in the soundtrack is done by the Haitian actress and singer Toto Bissainthe. Bissainthe voices the thoughts of Diouana in sonorous French, although the character is not supposed to be fluent in that language. Sembène was apparently unable to pay for Diop to travel to Paris to record her voiceover.²⁶ The principal reason for the production being so short on cash was that the script for *La Noire De...* had been rejected by the French Ministry of Cooperation, which was the principal way francophone African film was funded at this time.²⁷

In many ways, then, the situation of production of *Mandabi* (1967) must have seemed auspicious in comparison. Sembène had funding and distribution from the outset this time, and not from the Cooperation but from the French Centre National du Cinema. André Malraux, then French minister of culture, had given Sembène special permission to apply for CNC funding, which had previously been granted only to French nationals such as Godard and Truffaut. But with this new source of funding came, of course, new kinds of strings. The most irritating of these strings came in the form of the French producer Sembène was required to work with, Robert Nesle. The two immediately did not see eye-to-eye. Nesle wanted Sembène to film in color, which Sembène argued against because he thought it would give the film a “folkloric” quality. Sembène eventually conceded this point, but some of Nesle’s other suggestions were impossible to stomach. Specifically, Nesle saw the film as a more of a madcap comedy, and also wanted it to include more nudity – both changes he thought would make it more palatable to French audiences, which might not appreciate a rather slow-burning but devastating

satire of the stifling bureaucracy and rampant desperation of the early independence period. Sembène flatly and successfully refused these changes, though he had to go to court to do so.²⁸ The final condition of receiving the CNC funding was that Sembène make a French version of his film as well as a Wolof one. This meant, in practice, that Sembène had to shoot two versions of *Mandabi* at the same time, one in French and one in Wolof. I will explore the impact of this curious mode of production in depth momentarily, but I want to pause briefly to note the irony that *Mandabi*, of all Sembène's work, would be caught in so much red tape and bureaucratic wrangling over finances.

Mandabi was adapted from Sembène's novella *Le Mandat* (The Money Order), published in 1965 by Présence Africaine. (See Sembène 1966b) The story – which conserved the same basic structure in the transition from fiction to film – follows the futile efforts of Ibrahima Dieng, an unemployed patriarch in Dakar, to cash a money order sent by a nephew who is working in France. Dieng needs an identity card to cash the money order but he has only his voting card and a tax receipt. In order to get an identity card, he needs a copy of his birth certificate, which in turn he cannot get because he does not know and cannot prove the date he was born. The resulting plot follows Dieng, the hapless petitioner who cannot prove who he is, from *guichet* window to *guichet* window in a vain attempt to acquire the proper authorizing documents. Along the way he is fleeced by a variety of shady characters and, when word gets out about his newfound “wealth,” his friends and neighbors descend on him to ask for loans or extend him credit, until he is finally ensnared in a web of obligation that he cannot escape.



“You’ll need an identity card.”



“What month was he born in?”



“You need a birth certificate, three photos and an official stamp.”



“What do you need? An identity photo? Look this way.”

Figure 2: *Mandabi and the bureaucratic imaginary.* (Sembène 1970)

When one knows something about the arduous production history of *Mandabi*, the endless bureaucratic wrangling onscreen starts to seem like an allegory of Sembène's own struggles to get his films made. Indeed, figures who lack the proper authorization occur in other early Sembène films as well. Sembène's first film, *Borom Sarret* (1963), follows another hapless protagonist through the streets of Dakar. This time the hero is a horsecart driver for hire, who must traverse the city in search of fares. But it all goes wrong he takes a fare into a neighborhood of central Dakar where horsedrawn carts are not permitted. There, he is confronted by a policeman who confiscates his papers and his cart. (See Figure 3)



Figure 3: Policeman: “Do you have the authorization to be here?” (Sembène 1962)

In Sembène's films, then, the scenes of not having the right documents (and capital) to proceed or circulate refer obliquely these films' own situations of production. Whether or not Sembène “meant” these scenes to be taken as allegories is perhaps not the right question to be asking. It seems more productive to me to ask how the dynamics of the cultural field – the films' own situations of production and the terms in which they could circulate – might have left marks of their own that are still legible, under the right circumstances. In this perspective, we could then ask how and why these artworks highlight their own mediated quality and what kind of a strategy it was to do so.

Borom Sarret was produced with the support/surveillance of neocolonial French cultural institutions and features examples of the overdubbed, “disembodied” voicing I described earlier.²⁹ *Mandabi*, on the other hand, was shot twice – once in Wolof and once in French. Does this mean then that the “disembodied” voices of Sembène's early work are no longer to be found in *Mandabi*? The question is more difficult to answer than it appears, and to begin to unpack it we need to explore the truly extraordinary circumstances under which *Mandabi* came to be made.³⁰

Accounts vary on how Sembène shot two versions of the film at once. What is clear is that the cast was composed of mostly non-professionals, because Sembène felt that a professional actor “could not put himself into the skin of the unemployed.” The

rehearsal process was intensive and took two and a half months (compared to just five weeks of shooting. Paulin Vieyra, the director of production on the film, later recounted the complexities of this rehearsal process. Vieyra claims that the non-professional actors were hired in part based on their ability to read the script.

“To facilitate the passage from one language to another, Ousmane Sembène had written the screenplay for the film in literary French, and he had tried to make it so that the dialogue was a literal translation of the Wolof into French so that the actors, by learning the French text [...] could turn it back into Wolof without difficulty.” (Vieyra 1972, 96; my translation)

According to Vieyra, this led to a unique rehearsal process, in which Sembène had to discuss the script with his actors in order to settle on how to “adapt their gestures to the Wolof text translated into French.” The description Vieyra gives of this process is extraordinary and worth quoting at length.

In people’s everyday speech there is an interaction of language and gesture. Naturally, *certain expressions call for certain gestures* that are the same from one individual to the next. The differences in the amplitude of the gestures indicate differences in temperament. But in the film *Le Mandat*, because they began with dialogue written in terms of the action and in strict conformity with the sentiments evoked, *they had to abbreviate certain gestures in order to maintain the logic of the story that needed to be told*. It was not the case that these were artificial gestures recreated in light of a particular aesthetic, but rather what we call “functional gestures.” The author [Sembène] *reduced certain gestures here and there, and elsewhere eliminated them entirely*. [...] *Without taking anything away from the genius of the language, in this particular case, cinema disciplined it*. It is not the case in *Le Mandat*, as it has often been said, of *cinéma vérité* [...] Ousmane Sembène thought that it was necessary to keep the language in the dramatic context that he had established beforehand in order to avoid watching the film get away from him. Because *Wolof speech, liberated from any constraint, demands frills, coquetry and hyperbole that could have risked stretching the film or denaturing its spirit*. (Vieyra 1972, 97–98; my translation and emphasis)

Part of the rehearsal process, then, consisted in editing the gestural aspects of the Wolof speech styles that the cast brought with them. This was done in rehearsal by moving the ‘text’ of the film from Wolof into literal French and then back again.

What is worth highlighting here is that this iterative translation works to shear the text, as it were, of some of the pragmatic and gestural elements that had attached themselves to it. As Vieyra rightly points out, certain expressions call for certain gestures, and un-learning (or, as Vieyra puts it, disciplining) these aspects of everyday speech takes a lot of practice. What does seem clear, in Vieyra’s account, is that certain aspects of the text – what could be classified as its referential meaning – became the basis of the performance, and thus the final work. I am not sure I would go along with Vieyra in his characterization of Wolof speech as filled with “frills” and “coquetry,” but he does seem to be ventriloquizing a basic assumption about the process of translation Sembène had to settle on – for the rehearsal process to make sense one had to act as if, in practice, it was possible to separate content from what appeared to be ornament.

For Wolof speech to take place in the film, then, it had to be put in a relation with its French translation, against which it would have to be measured and, if necessary, in whose image it might have to be adjusted. In addition to the obvious power imbalance, a certain language ideology underlies this imposition.³¹ The implicit assumption of the imposition to make a French version was that nothing of substance, nothing that matters,

could possibly be lost in such a transfer. But, as we can see from Vieyra's account, the need to keep the two versions equivalent did have an effect: it re-oriented the criteria of the performances around "logic of the story" and "the sentiments evoked" such that "certain gestures were abbreviated." I want to point out that this seems to have been an underlying assumption not only in the production constraints Sembène was forced to accept in *Mandabi*, but also of the whole practice of overdubbing African voices in early francophone cinema. The fundamental presupposition at work in these transpositions was that nothing – or at least nothing that could count – would be lost in this process.

I want to be clear here that I am not making the familiar "something is lost in translation" argument. Instead, I am trying to turn that formulation around. My question is not "what was lost in translation?" but rather "how might the requirement to translate have framed in advance which aspects of the text would be translatable and which could be, in a sense, lost?" As I see it, these iterations of the text of *Mandabi/Le Mandat* might be more productively understood not as translations of a given, bounded work, but rather as a series of re-negotiations, within a set of constraints, of what in a given scene was going to be meaningful.

It is worth pointing out here that this dilemma and Sembène's strategic response to it – negotiating with the nonprofessional actors over how much aspects of everyday speech could be edited – was not limited to just the production of this particular film. Negotiating with his actors on the non-referential and gestural aspects of everyday speech was something Sembène made a focus of his rehearsal process throughout his career. In a late interview, he described how he tried to "reproduce the language of real life" without "destroy[ing] anything of the original atmosphere nor [...] their personality."

Take for example the question of greeting. *People will greet each other and go into some other matter, and in the middle of the other matter they would suddenly start greeting each other out of the blue. The cinema is rational, therefore, you have to suppress the repetition of greetings, but if you tell non-professional actors this, they can't grasp it. The roundabout way of thinking, the ins and outs of thought, it is very difficult to get people to change them. So when you are rehearsing the actors, you have to rehearse the language, gesture, and look, to make sure that there is no dead space.* (Quoted in Busch and Annas 2008, 129)

Greetings (*nuyu*) are a complex and fine-grained genre of speech in Wolof. As Judith Irvine demonstrates in a classic study, Wolof speakers use the set of questions and answers that form the greeting to negotiate their statuses with regard to each other. A particular positionality in the standard exchange (the question-asker) is associated with a lower-status position. For Irvine, a speaker who launches back into asking after the other person's well-being after the conversation has shifted (as Sembène describes his actors doing) is doing so to position him/herself as lower-status, possibly to curry favor, etc. (Irvine 1974)³² There is actually an example of precisely this kind of negotiation in *Mandabi*, when the neighborhood Imam stops by to try and borrow money from Dieng. This suggests that while the pragmatic dimensions of speech in Wolof may have been "disciplined" by cinema in *Mandabi*, they have not been entirely suppressed. In this case, Sembène's rehearsals with his actors seems to presuppose some metapragmatic awareness of both the *nuyu* and the conventions of modern film.³³

Sembène's account of his rehearsal process bears a resemblance to what Vieyra describes as occurring during the shooting *Mandabi*, which I take as indication that, far from being limited to the unusual circumstances of that film, this rehearsal practice

continued to some degree during Sembène's career as a director. How to accommodate in cinematic form the language of everyday life in all its roundaboutness? This question did not derive *only* from the neocolonial production structures Sembène had to engage with early on; this dilemma clearly stuck with Sembène, and he seems to have been acutely aware that his position as the director accorded to him a certain privileged authority to decide what was dead space and what was meaningful interaction.

Rather than attempt to dissimulate this ambiguous authority as a mediator between different speech registers, Sembène was fond of drawing attention to it. One of the recurring images in early Sembène films is of the director himself and it is instructive to note the role he plays in several of his first films:



Figure 4: Sembène as the *écrivain public* (scribe for hire) in *La Noire De...* (Sembène 1966a)



Figure 5: Sembène (right) playing the same role in *Mandabi*. (Sembène 1970)

The *écrivain public* is a scribe, a writer/reader for hire whose role it is to serve as a middleman of the written word for the community with limited access to it. In thematizing his own position as a director in this way, Sembène draws attention to his role as a mediator of what aspects of speech can pass over into cinema. Like the identity card checks that his films passed through (literally and figuratively), Sembène's positioning of himself as an *écrivain public* draws awareness to the mediation of the artwork through regimes enforced translation. In this way, Sembène suggests that what he is engaged in is not *auteur* cinema, but *écrivain public* cinema, which would make the artwork's mediation of different registers of speech into an object of poetics.

Of course, Sembène flatly denied that his cameos were intentional. "There are times," he said, "when actors who've promised to come – because often certain actors aren't paid, they just promise me they'll come – don't show up. [...] I have to be ready in case of an absence." He went so far as to say that the roles he plays in his films were "never planned [...] a priori." (Quoted in Busch and Annas 2008, 69–70) My sense is that these statements are not as problematic as they initially might appear. Sembène seems to have been quite aware of the mythology that was accumulating around him as the "father" of African cinema, and in interviews he was quite adept at stage-managing its presentation. At times, he would appear to play along with the interviewer's construction of his directorial persona. But, on a moment's notice, he would seem to turn the tables, deflate the myth of his authorship even as it was being built, contradict something he had said years earlier, and so on.

Thus I find it difficult to say that what matters about these cameo appearances is whether they are intentional or not. Besides, one way of understanding the effect this particular denial ("I never meant to play any of the roles I played in my films") is to see that it serves precisely to direct attention away from Sembène's agency as the *auteur*-director, and back onto the social web of personal and economic contingency in which his production was embedded. To put that another way, in denying that he meant to draw attention to his role of mediator in these early films, Sembène is actually *continuing the performance* by refusing to take authorship of the very gesture that could have been interpreted as the work of a self-conscious *auteur*, rather than an *écrivain public* at the mercy of contingency.

There is an indication in a later Sembène film, *Xala* (1975), that these self-reflexive gestures are not a matter of chance alone. In between the making of *Mandabi*, *Ceddo*, and *Xala*, Sembène collaborated on the editing and publication of a Wolof-language journal, *Kaddu* [speech, *parole*]. The journal lasted for several years before closing for financial reasons. In the film *Xala*, one of the characters actually walks around the streets of Dakar trying to sell copies of *Kaddu*. Thus, Sembène in a sense takes advantage of the medium of the cinema (which is already public speech) to do a *publicité* (advertisement) for the journal which was struggling to find a public. Given the difficulties the journal faced, it is hardly surprising that the *Kaddu* seller is arrested in the film for presumed vagrancy.



Figure 6: *The Kaddu seller (right) under arrest in Xala (Sembène 1975).*

With this gesture, Sembène actually draws together two threads that I have been following so far – the surveillance of attempts to make certain kinds of public utterances in Wolof, and the moments in which Sembène points to the way his artistic authority positions him as a mediator between different registers of speech. The journal *Kaddu* is depicted as unauthorized speech, or rather speech that is constantly at risk of being exposed as not belonging in certain public spaces. It cannot take its public or its circulation for granted.

To understand what kind of a positionality Sembène might have been trying to create for himself, we can contrast idea of the *écrivain public* with a certain conception of the public intellectual. There are many moments in his life when Sembène was called upon to speak in the genres of a public intellectual – at the conference in Dakar, for instance – but his strategy often seems to be to respond as an *écrivain public*. Namely, he agrees to perform the mediating function required of him, but he refuses total authorship and insists on the legibility of a certain double-voicing in what he has to say. This also means that in situations where he is called upon to be a public intellectual, he often tends to try and redirect the focus of the conversation to the context in which this demand is being made and the terms which it sets for him.

This helps explain why Sembène was such a notoriously difficult man to interview. To read Sembène's interviews is to read a set of conversations with someone who seems impatient with the genre of the interview itself. Occasionally, if an interviewer did not rub him the wrong way, Sembène would actually comment on (rather than perform) his discomfort with these genres of public speech.

Gadjigo: In 1975, at the University of Indiana at Bloomington, you gave a lecture entitled "Man Is Culture." During that whole week that I worked with you, you were always searching for, I would say, the "right word" to express what is, for you, African culture.

Sembène: *But I was speaking to whom?* In this area there are those who speak Mandingue, but there are also people who don't speak Mandingue but that also speak French. *It's by that exact word that I am going to be able to situate them and show them what's going on. Here, it's not about academic*

French, academic English . . . it's about language used in everyday life. It could be also that this worry about the exact word comes to me through literature; the worry of being heard well, understood properly. (Quoted in Busch and Annas 2008, 194; my emphasis)

What this exchange helps clarify is that it is not an issue, alone, of ‘linguistic’ politics, as if the only political choice would be what language you chose to speak, as an index of identity or cultural nationalism. What Sembène is suggesting, instead, is that certain registers of speaking depend on what can be presumed of their context. That is to say, the search for “the right word” is not about a struggle to say what you mean, alone, it is a struggle to be heard well, to situate your interlocutor. This aspect of speaking, rather than language ‘choice,’ is what Sembène seems to wrestle with throughout this early period. And the position he seems to reach is this: if the terms in which he speaks, artistically or as a lecturer or interviewee, are not entirely up to him, what he can do about it is draw attention to that mediation. This is the sense of the ‘écrivain public.’ To put that another way, if the terms of the encounter are already given in a way that it is unfortunate but at that moment uncontested, what Sembène can do is contextualize his reply in a way that makes explicit the givenness of the terms in which he makes it.

Discourse Arrested: Voicing in Buur Tilleen

In the domain of the printed word, the struggle to “say it in Wolof” in the early independence period followed a similar trajectory – writers often found they had to “say it in French” first, but for different reasons. Because the accumulation of capital necessary to make a film was (and still is) of a far greater order of magnitude than what is required to publish a novel, the means of production for francophone literature could be controlled by a much less state-centric array of institutions and forces. In particular, *Présence Africaine* – the legendary journal and publishing house founded by the Senegalese Alioune Diop in 1947 – lead the way in publishing works by francophone/wolofone intellectuals such as Cheikh Anta Diop and Cheikh Aliou Ndao. But although the channels of circulation were less encumbered by intransigent institutions for written texts than they were for films, the question of how a text written in an African language might find an audience seemed problematic enough as to constitute a barrier of its own. Sembène could make a film in Wolof which could then – government willing – be projected around the country. But how a writer such as Cheikh Aliou Ndao might find an audience for the manuscript of his first novel, written in Wolof, seemed far more complicated to publishers in this period.

Cheikh Aliou Ndao is best known as a playwright, especially for his 1967 play *L'Exil d'Alboury*. In Wolof, he has published works of poetry, two short story collections, and two novels. Ndao began writing poetry in Wolof while completing his secondary education in Swansea in the 1950s. Later, in Grenoble, he was part of the *Ijjib Volof* group which created the first standard syllabary for Wolof using the Latin script.³⁴ In a 2008 interview, Ndao told me that he had not been interested in linguistic research for its own sake, rather he saw it as a means to the end of writing creatively in Wolof. (Ndao 2008) According to Ndao, writing in Wolof and other national languages became a movement in this period because “we could not directly confront the Senghor regime.” (*ibid*)³⁵ Ndao – who was raised in a Mouride milieu – was well aware of the existence of

the Wolof alphabet and the venerable poetic and scholarly traditions that exist in it. He told me had opted for a system of Latin characters to “reach a larger public.” (*ibid.*) Upon his return to Senegal after completing his secondary education, Ndao began work on a novel in Wolof, *Buur Tilleen*, which he finished in 1967.

Unable to find a publisher, Ndao rewrote the novel as *Buur Tilleen: Roi de la Medina* and it was published by *Présence Africaine* in 1972. The Wolof version finally appeared some 30 years after it was initially written. *Buur Tilleen* was published in Wolof by the elite research center IFAN (Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noir) affiliated with CAD University in Dakar, under the direction of Aram Fal.³⁶ Although *Buur Tilleen* is probably the first prose novel to have been written in Wolof, by the time it was published other Wolof novels (such as Maam Yunus Dieng’s *Aawo bi*) had been written and published in the meantime.

When I asked Cheikh Aliou Ndao what it had been like to translate his own work from Wolof into French, he replied that the French versions of his novels were not translations at all, but rather adaptations. (Ndao, 2008) Indeed, the two versions of *Buur Tilleen* are just that different. To start with, the French version is considerably longer. Certain plotlines and characters have been developed further, and scenes that take place in certain social spaces (often francophone ones) that were marginal in the Wolof version are stretched over several chapters. I want to focus on a difference between the two versions that is not as obvious, but whose significance in the context of my analysis will, I think, become clear.

Buur Tilleen is, like *Mandabi*, the tragedy of a traditional patriarch out of step with the changing urban world around him. It is also set in the early independence period. The drama of the novel unfolds when Gorgui Mbodj is informed by his wife Maram that their daughter, Rakki, has become pregnant by Gorgui’s best friend’s son. Because Rakki is unmarried and because the father is of a lower caste, Gorgui banishes his daughter rather than suffer the shame of having her continue to live under his roof. Maram continues to visit and care for their daughter behind Gorgui’s back, but when Rakki goes into labor both parents are unable to get to the hospital before she and the baby die in childbirth. The novel appears to condemn Gorgui’s intransigence and stubborn pride, and has been read as a “crisis of traditional values” novel.

The aspect of Ndao’s adaption that I want to focus on is so seemingly minor that it is barely a ripple in the current of this plot. After Maram reveals their daughter’s pregnancy to Gorgui, he leaves the house in distress to be alone with his thoughts. In the pages that follow, the main character drifts through the streets of the city at night. The character’s physical wandering eventually spills over into the narration as well. The story leaves the present and delves into his past, where we learn of Gorgui’s childhood, education, past glories and eventually the downfall that brought him to his present, sorry state. As the narrator and character’s voices become conjoined, the narrative is able to leave the particular and reflect on a larger, collective past of which Gorgui’s story is merely the token. But this reverie stops abruptly when a policeman appears, demanding to see Gorgui’s papers.³⁷ In his haste, Gorgui has left the house without his identity card and so he is arrested and taken to the police station.³⁸ This scene serves a very minor function in the plot – it conveniently ends Gorgui’s foray into his past and brings the focus back to the present and its unfolding drama. But as minor as it seems, the policeman’s demand for identification actually has a rather striking effect on the

narration. In both the Wolof and French versions of the novel, the mode of narration before and after the demand for identification changes. In Wolof, *Buur Tilleen* is narrated mainly in indirect discourse. Here, for example, is the beginning of the novel:

Maram gën a teel a tëdd! Mu ngi walbatiku di walbatikuwaat. Mënul fexe ba nelaw. Te nag dafa mel ni guddi tey la fel yi ak màtt yi doon nég. Lee-léeg baraag bi jaayu, ngelaw li di ko yëngal, muy kox-koxi ni ku ànd ak jàngoroy sèqët. Ci biti, lépp a ngi ne tekk; kenn du dégg lu dul dàllu nit ñi mujje ci mbedd yi ñuy karaas-karaasi di ñibbi. Xelu Maram yépp a ngi ci Góorgi Mbóoj, jëkker ji. Ndaw saa ngi naan, man de, xawma fu sériñ bi war a ne ba waxtu wii. (Ndao 1993b, 7)

Maram is in bed very early! She tosses and turns. She cannot find a way to sleep. The fleas and bedbugs are so bad that night is like day. From time to time, the shack trembles as the wind shakes it, wheezing like someone with a cough. Outside, all is still; all one can hear are the sounds of people in the street shuffling their way home. Maram is thinking of Góorgi Mbóoj, her husband. Where could that man could be at this hour, she asks herself. (my translation)

The alignment of the narrator with the pathos of the scene at hand is typically modeled with such interjections as *Ndeysaan!* (Alas, poor man!/Le pauvre!).³⁹ For the most part, the voices of narrator and character are easily distinguished. In the passages before the identity check, however, the narration slides further into free indirect discourse, to the point where the difference between the narrating consciousness and the individual character's voice is no longer transparent.⁴⁰ This slide into the past occurs gradually, through framing clauses. Here, for instance, is how the reverie begins:

Góorgi génn kër gi, topp Tilleen, di dox, ndeysaan, te xamul fu mu fëm. Mu ñëw-a-ñëw ba Kër Alkaati yi taxaw, ba yàgg mu jàdd ci ndeyjooram, jublu sëg yi; bi mu ca yegsee romb leen. Li muy dox lépp xalaatul dara, saagawul, sikkul kenn; newul Maram nii mbaa Ràkki naa, xanaa di dem rekk te xamul lu tax. Yegsi na jawu Gëltappe jàddati, dem ba buntu kër sériñ Abdu mu taxaw. Góorgi daal dox naa dox ba ne jaas postu Tilleen te xamul na mu fa yegsee. Ndeysaan, mu sonn, faf toog ci eskale yi. *Fi Góorgi gi déju xelam yépp a ngi jublu démb, muy gis dundam, di gis ba muy gone ba léegi ak fi mu masa jaar yépp.* (Ndao 16; my emphasis)

Góorgi left the house, heading toward Tilleen, walking – poor man! – and not knowing where he was going. He kept walking all the way to the Cité Police, paused for a while, then turned to his right, heading toward the cemetery; when he reached it, he kept going. As he walked, he thought of nothing, did not blame or reproach anyone, not even Maram nor Rakki, just kept walking and not knowing why. He arrived at the bridge of Geule Tappé, turned again, went as far as the gate of Serigne Abdou and stopped. Góorgi indeed walked and walked till he suddenly found himself in front of the Tilleen post office and he had no idea how he had got there. Poor man, he was tired, and sat down, exhausted, on the steps. *As Góorgi sat there, his whole mind rushed back to the past, and he could see his life, from childhood to the present, and every single thing he had been through.* (my translation and emphasis)

Note the final sentence where the narration signals that it is about to switch into a more free indirect mode. Immediately after, the speaking voice will start to advance statements that are somewhere between the more distant narrator the reader has encountered before and Gorgui's own strong views.⁴¹ As the reverie continues to take hold, the frames drop further away and the narration no longer signals that it is speaking for Gorgui's lived experience. In the final passages before the policeman appears, for example, the reader encounters phrases in which it is difficult to say who or what is being voiced:

Ndekete goney tey, ñoom, seen yoon nekkatul ci loolu. Moo fu àddina jëm su fekke ne li fi maam ya ba woon lépp jox nañ ko gannaaw? Waay waay ku xam fu ñuy teere? (Ndao 1993b, 24)

Ah, but look at today's children, they will have none of this. Oh, but where is the world heading when everything that mattered for the elders, they toss all of it behind them. Oh god, who knows where we are heading? (my translation)

But then the cop appears and demands, “*Ey, sa waay, looy def fii ba waxtu wii?*” This translates as: “Hey buddy, what are you doing *here* at *this* hour?” The question interpellates the narrative into a more clearly delineated deictic frame in which the referents of *you*, *here* and *this* hour are more rigid and less open to the forms of errancy that occurred during the nighttime excursion. After the policeman appears, the voices of the narrator and the characters become more sharply distinguished. The narration still includes moments of free indirect discourse but these tend to be framed and limited glimpses of present, interior sentiments rather than long stretches of discourse that propose an image of the collective past.⁴²

Let me put the stakes of this shift as concisely as I can: the first example of novelistic free indirect discourse in Wolof is, literally, arrested. The Wolof narrative responds to the policeman's request for identification and permission to circulate by distinguishing between the unnamed, narrating voice and the individual, named characters. Their collusion seems possible no longer.

In the French adaptation, the overall effect of the intervention of the cop is preserved. The French version, *Roi de la medina*, is also written mainly in indirect discourse. For example, here is the beginning of the novel in French, from before the reverie:

Tôt couchée, Maram se tourne, se retourne, ne pouvant dormir. Les puces, les punaises, s'acharnent sur son échine, parcourent sa nuque, envahissent ses cheveux. Les insectes évitent ses tapes maladroitement, se moquent de son énervement, de son impuissance. La vieille baraque, faite de planches disjointes, bouge, grince, beugle, miaule, fouettée par le vent. De temps à autre, Maram l'entend gémir comme un homme rongé par les ans, un malade pris d'une violente quinte de toux. Du dehors ne parvient que l'écho des pas des derniers passants attardés, leurs voix de noctambules se perdant au loin. Maram pense à Gorgui Mbodj, son mari. Elle prépare son accueil, essaie toutes sortes de phrases, se surprend à murmurer des sentences, des proverbes, des mots à moitié articulés, comme pour conjurer la colère éventuelle de son époux. “Je me demande où est-ce qu'il se trouve.” (Ndao 1988, 9)

In bed early, Maram tosses, turns, unable to sleep. Fleas and bedbugs nibble on her back, roam over her neck, invading her hair. The bugs avoid her clumsy slaps at them, mocking her annoyance, her powerlessness. The old shack, made of loose boards, moves, squeaks, moans, mews, whipped by the wind. Sometimes, Maram hears it moan like an old man, or an invalid overcome with a violent coughing fit. Only the echoes of the final, late passersby reach her ears, their nocturnal voices losing themselves from afar. Maram thinks of Gorgui Mbodj, her husband. She prepares for his arrival, trying out all sorts of phrases, surprising herself mumbling sentences, proverbs and half-articulated words as if to conjure the eventual anger of her husband. “I wonder where he could be.” (my translation)

But in Gorgui's nighttime reverie, the narrative switches into a different mode which it allows it to speak for a certain collective past.⁴³ When the cop appears, the voices of narrator and character become more clearly distinguished and their ability to move freely in time and space splinters into a more static, third-person narration.⁴⁴ After the

intervention, the voices are free to remain private, interior voices of psychology, but nothing more.⁴⁵

However, there is a very important difference between the two versions of the novel, specifically in terms of how the character's nighttime excursion is handled. Note in the following passage, how the shift to voicing Gorgui's reminiscences is handled differently.

Gorgui longe les murs de la rue 6, s'arrête de temps à autre, puis reprend son errance. A la cité des policiers, il bifurque sur la droite en direction du cimetière musulman. Il ne maugrée pas; n'en veut à personne. Sur le pont de la Gueule Tapée, il hésite quelque peu, laisse le marché sur sa gauche, se trouve devant le Repos Mandel, lui tourne le dos, dirige ses pas vers la poste de la Medina. Parvenu au bâtiment, fatigué, il s'effondre sur la dernière marche. Gorgui Mbodj, la tête dans les mains, plonge dans les ténèbres de son village ancestral, en quête de forces nouvelles dans sa lutte contre un sort cruel.

"Je n'ai pas dévié de l'enseignement de mes pères; sur le chemin de l'honneur, je me suis conduit en homme bien né. Ma devise: ne pas déchoir aux yeux de mes pairs. Je m'en suis tenu à la vérité, refusant le rôle de brandon de discorde, la tête haute quoi qu'il advienne. Les voisins savent que j'ai respecté ma règle de vie. Par stricte obéissance à ma morale, je ne milite dans aucun clan politique. Las de ne pouvoir m'attirer dans leur sordides intrigues, les gens m'ont donné ce surnom 'Buur Tilleen' – 'Roi de la Medina.' (Ndao 1988, 24–25)

Gorgui follows the walls of rue 6, stopping from time to time, then begins his wandering again. At the Cité Police, he heads right toward the Muslim cemetery. He doesn't grumble, is not angry at anyone. On the bridge of Geule Tapée, he hesitates a bit, leaves the market to his left and finds himself in front of the Repos Mandel, turns back the other way, directs his steps toward the Medina post office. Reaching the building, exhausted, he collapses on the last step. Gorgui Mbodj, head in his hands, plunges into the darkness of his ancestral village in search of reinforcements in his fight against a cruel fate.

"I have not strayed from what my fathers taught me; on the path of honor, I conducted myself as a well-born man. My motto: never disgrace myself in front of my peers. I limited myself to the truth, refusing to be anyone's troublemaker, head held high no matter what happens. My neighbors know how I respected my principles. Through strict adherence to my moral code, I am not a part of any political clan. Tired of not being able to lure me into their sordid intrigues, people gave me the nickname 'Buur Tilleen' – 'King of Medina'" (my translation)

Note that in French, the text employs the first person singular within quotation marks to speak of the character's past, whereas in Wolof it uses free indirect discourse. Thus to introduce the reverie in Wolof the narrator signals the shift with framing clauses, but in French the narrator simply vanishes and the character speaks directly. But while the image of the character's voice that we get in the French version can say "I," it is a first person that exists only within quotation marks. In Figure 6, below, I have reproduced the same moment as it appears in the two texts. Note, in the side-by-side comparison, the way the quotation marks in the French version run down the sides of the page.

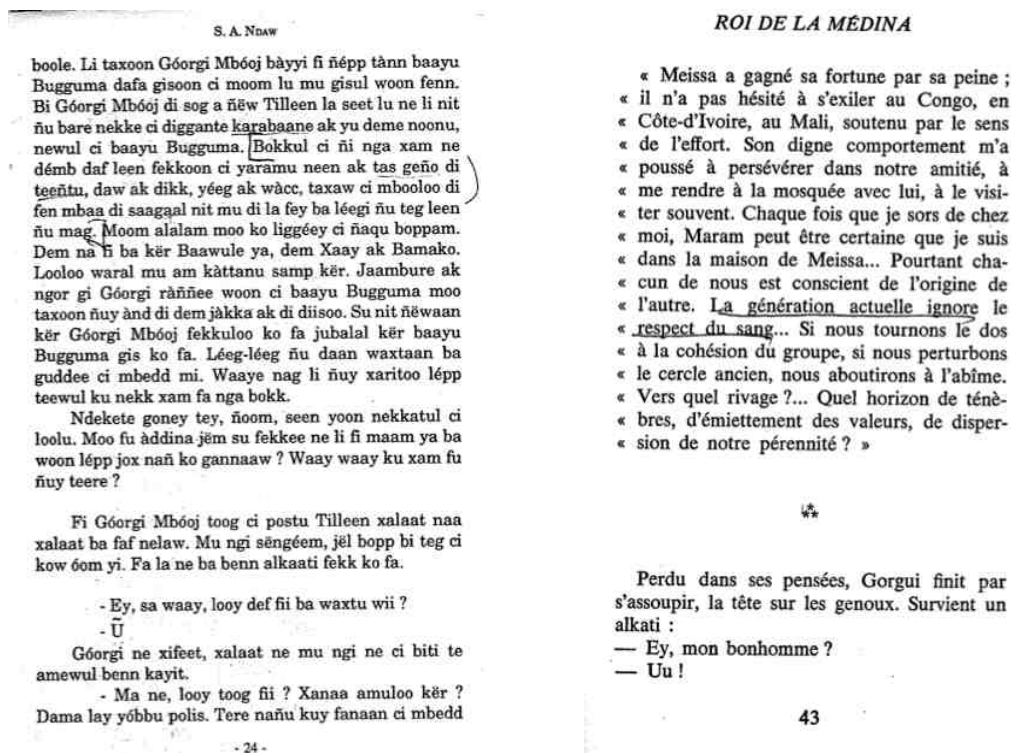


Figure 7: The scene in which the narration is arrested, as it appears in Wolof (left) and French (right).
Reproduced from Ndao 1993; Ndao 1988.

These quotation marks are a very French typographic tradition for reporting large stretches of discourse – clearly indicating *at every moment* that the voice that says “I” is a reported one. So when the Wolof free indirect monologue is transposed in this way, it indexes a certain distance in the alignment of the narrator with the subjectivity he is quoting. The possibility of voicing a certain relation to history and the capacity to circulate freely in time and space in French seem subject to their being made quotable, to their being, in several senses, *reported*.

The quotation marks also shift the frame in which memory is expressed from one that exists within discourse itself (“he remembered”) to the metadiscursive, typographic level. This has the effect of literally making more visible the frame in which memory is reported. The quotation marks, then, indicate that something is being passed along, across a certain boundary. They represent, in a way, a frontier across which the character’s subjectivity can cross only by being translated into a set of given terms. The way in which Ndao adapts the novel into French points, then, to a policing mechanism of a different order – namely, the impossibility of getting literary work in Wolof published in this period; and thus, the imposition of having to translate one’s work into French in order to have it circulate.

A Missing Transcript

I want to conclude very briefly by returning once more to the challenge posed to Sembène after his intervention in that 1963 conference. The Dakar conference on “African Writers of French Expression” took place just a year after the more famous 1962 conference in Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda, which was entitled, “A Conference of African Writers of English Expression.” The Makerere conference was a historic gathering of anglophone African writers, and one that led to the founding of both the journal *Transition* and Heinemann’s African Writers Series. But it is also well-known for its having been singled out by Ngũgĩ Wa’Thiongo, in *Decolonising the Mind*, as one of the moments that led to his own turn away from working in English and toward writing in Gĩkũyũ. Taking Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara as his principal foils, Ngugi pointed out that the theme of the conference “automatically excluded those who wrote in African languages.” (Ngũgĩ 1994, 22) The ensuing discussion over “the language of African literature” has become a canonical polemic (if one can speak of such a thing) in the field of postcolonial studies.

But unlike the nearly contemporaneous conference in Makerere, the Dakar conference has, to my knowledge, not been much discussed in the scholarship. Even more surprising, though, is the fact that Sembène’s intervention – which seems to anticipate Ngugi’s challenge – has generated no scholarly attention at all. The simple reason for this is that the transcript of the conversation between Sembène and the other writers simply does not appear in the official record of the conference, which was published by the Faculty of Letters of the University of Dakar. All that appears in this French record of the conversation is Senghor’s opening address, and the many conference papers that were given on Negritude and Francophone literature. While the conversation between writers is listed in the official program in that document, no transcription of it is included. (See Université de Dakar 1965) The only transcript I have been able to find of the debate actually exists in English, in a record of the conference which was published by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which partially funded the Dakar conference as well as another on African Literature in Freetown the same year. (Moore 1965)⁴⁶ For this reason, the 1963 challenge to Sembène to “say it in Wolof” has, as far as I can tell, gone completely unnoticed in scholarship on francophone literature and in postcolonial studies more generally.⁴⁷

I cannot say with certainty why the transcript of the writers’ panel does not appear in the official record of the conference in French. Clearly, a French transcript had to have been made in order for it to appear elsewhere in English translation. But it is not clear whether this transcript was intentionally suppressed, and, if it was, whether Sembène’s disruption of the francophone discussion of francophone literature had something to do with it. What is certain, however, is that this contestation of francophone literature in the very scene of its institutionalization has been largely effaced for scholars.

While I do not want to engage in imagining what alternative histories of postcolonial and francophone criticism might exist had this debate been part of the critical conversation, I do think that its absence points to the need for a reevaluation of the emergence of francophone Senegalese literature that would understand it as a contested category very early on. Particularly during the tenure of Senghor’s regime, the state and neocolonial “cooperation” institutions were very keen on promoting

francophone literature and film, and kept a watchful eye on the emergence of other articulations of the cultural field. In this chapter, I have argued that both Sembène and Ndao seem to begin from the ways in which this supervision or obstruction conditioned their own attempts to articulate a modern aesthetic movement in Wolof. For different reasons and in different ways, *Mandabi* and *Buur Tilleen* take the difficulty of producing and sharing a context with their imagined publics, and make this difficulty into an object of poetics. In this cultural moment, then, struggling to say it in Wolof often meant doing so within the contours of what was sayable in French.

Chapter Three

Adrift in Translation: Mariama Bâ, Maam Yunus Dieng and the Terms of Literary Legibility

In 1980, at the height of her literary acclaim,¹ the Senegalese novelist Mariama Bâ addressed the Frankfurt Book Fair on the political function of African literatures. She was there to accept the Noma Prize for Publishing in Africa, of which she was the inaugural recipient. Bâ proposed a portrait of the writer as a social critic:

“The [African] writer must echo the aspirations of all social classes, especially the most disadvantaged ones. He must denounce the ills and pains that afflict our society and hold back its full blossoming, he must strike out at the archaic practices, customs and mores that have nothing to do with our precious cultural heritage. This is his sacred mission, to be accomplished against all odds, with faith and tenacity.” (Bâ, 1980; reprinted in (Azodo 2003), 403, my translation)

And yet Bâ complicated this account by noting that an African writer working in a “borrowed language” would necessarily be at a linguistic distance from her audience:

[T]he language the writer uses is understood and spoken only by a tiny minority of the population. The writer thus runs the heavy risk of failing in his political mission, because his message has a limited reach and is heard outside the people whom he addresses.” (*ibid*, 407)

Bâ’s Frankfurt speech has since acquired a textual life of its own. It has persisted past the author’s untimely death in 1981 as a privileged touchstone for critical readings of her most famous novel, *Une si longue lettre* [So Long a Letter]. Curiously, though, only one aspect of this Frankfurt speech tends to be remembered: the suggestion that the writer’s job description includes “striking out at archaic practices.” In a telling example of this trend, a small excerpt of the speech was translated and included in a short, anonymous preface to the English edition of *So Long a Letter* in 1981:

“[Mariama Bâ] promoted the crucial role of the writer in a developing country. *She believed that the ‘sacred mission’ of the writer was to strike out ‘at the archaic practices, traditions and customs that are not a real part of our precious cultural heritage.’ So Long a Letter* succeeds admirably in its mission.” (Bâ 1989; my emphasis)

In the speech’s transformation into a frame story that explains the objective of the novel, Bâ’s concern with how she will be heard fades away. For an Anglophone audience, then, the mission of the novel has been clearly identified as striking out at archaic traditions, even before the reader reaches page one. Bâ does not, in her speech, elaborate on which traditions she has in mind. But many of her readers, perhaps prompted in part by this preface, have not been nearly so circumspect. *So Long a Letter* has often been read as a denunciation of the institution of polygamy. Indeed, it would be very difficult to disentangle the perception of *Letter* as a book “about” polygamy from the terms in which it became internationally acclaimed. The official commendation Bâ received when she won the Noma Award gives an indication of just how intertwined these were:

[Une si longue lettre] portrays the isolation of married women who reject polygamy in a society where it is taken for granted, and the plight of articulate women living in a social milieu dominated by attitudes and values that tend to deny women a proper social personality. (Zell, quoted in (Mortimer 2007))

The commendation represents a rather widespread of framing of the novel. In this chapter, I will explore the limitations of this account by rereading Bâ's *Letter* in relation to two very different reception histories.

I begin with the international critical reception, which has often positioned Bâ as the kind of writer she describes in the first half of her Frankfurt address – one who sharply criticizes outdated customs (polygamy, especially) for restricting the development of a recognizably modern, emancipated female subject. In a series of close readings, I show that while Ramatoulaye, Bâ's narrator, does often seem to strive toward this ideal, her relationship to it is left far more uneven and opaque than has often been concluded. Furthermore, I show that Ramatoulaye's deviations from this progressive trajectory have on occasion actually been "corrected" by critics, so that the main character more closely resembles what the novel appears to promise. Rather than judging these critical interventions as simple misreadings, I explore what they might be able to tell us about the terms in which postcolonial literatures become legible to a world literary public.

I contrast my study of the international critical reception with an examination of how *Letter* has been reworked and translated by a Wolof writer, Maam Yunus Dieng.² Dieng has written a novel in reply to Bâ entitled *Aawo bi* [The First Wife] and has also translated *Letter* into Wolof (as *Bataaxal bu gudde nii*). By approaching *So Long a Letter* through Dieng's responses to it, I argue that we can begin to read for another Mariama Bâ, one deeply preoccupied with the very anxieties of audience that were edited out of her Frankfurt address, as it appeared in the preface to the English edition.

This multivalent comparison also allows me to explore aspects of the novel that have not been previously attended to by critics. In particular, I consider how the critical preoccupation with denouncing polygamy as an ancient, oppressive institution has obscured the way in which *Letter* can be read as an intervention in the debates over proposed reforms to family law that were raging in Senegal in the 1970s and 80s. Rather than reducing Bâ's work to a simple statement for or against polygamy, as has so often been the case, I find in her work a critique of the terms of legibility that are made available by literary and legal forms. To sketch the contours and stakes of Bâ's feminism, I trace an agonized struggle in her work over what alternative forms of social value might still be possible. But rather than supplying an answer, I suggest that Bâ leaves this question open – as if this gesture had a value in and of itself.

Spectres of Tradition and Custom

The Noma Award's interpretation of *So Long a Letter* initially seems to have much to recommend it. The overall plot would seem to supply all the evidence necessary to support a claim that this is a book about how the development of Senegalese women's "proper social personality" is hindered by polygamy. Both the main characters – Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou – are shocked when their husbands secretly take second wives. Aissatou chooses to divorce her husband, while Ramatoulaye (the narrator)

remains married to hers, even though he subsequently abandons her and their children. The novel opens with Ramatoulaye's husband's death. She composes the 'novel' in seclusion while she mourns him, as one long, sprawling missive addressed to Aïssatou.

Besides the overall plot, a specific passage often seems to come up in readings of the novel that take it to be a book 'about' polygamy. In this passage, Ramatoulaye is reflecting back on the education she and her childhood friend Aïssatou received at a colonial all-girls school.

Nous sortir de l'enlisement des traditions, superstitions et moeurs; nous faire apprécier de multiples civilisations sans reniement de la nôtre; élever notre vision du monde, cultiver notre personnalité, renforcer nos qualités, mater nos défauts; faire fructifier en nous les valeurs de la morale universelle; voilà la tâche que s'était assignée l'admirable directrice.
(Une si longue lettre, 28; my emphasis)

To lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values in us: these were the aims of our admirable headmistress.
(*So Long a Letter*, trans. Modupé Bodé-Thomas, 16; my emphasis)

The school described here is most likely modeled on the *Ecole des jeunes filles de Rufisque*, a real, elite institution that drew students from all over French West Africa. Mariama Bâ was herself a product of this institution, and her biographer (and daughter) Mame Coumba Ndiaye has suggested that the heroic headmistress described here was based on Bâ's actual *directrice* at Rufisque.³ Elite colonial schools were less successful in producing assimilated subjects than in creating the conditions for intellectual resistance to colonialism; by gathering students from all across the empire they inadvertently created space for new forms of solidarity and identification among elites. Schools were also one of the apparatuses within colonialism that most explicitly articulated its humanitarian alibi – the ideology of the civilizing mission, that colonialism was saving subject peoples from untold centuries of barbarism. As I argue in Chapter One, colonial schools were also key sites in which new definitions of reading and authorship emerged – which is in part what this passage describes. The girls' studies are presented as a new kind of self-fashioning that can rescue women from the bog of tradition, superstition, and custom.

So Long a Letter is often framed as a denunciation of the ways political independence in Senegal did little to address gender-based inequality. This is clearly its aim on one level, but in responding to this dilemma some of Bâ's readers have been very quick to return to this passage on colonial education as proposing a sort of answer. Rebecca Wilcox, for example, writes approvingly of the "admirable feminist tendencies" of the education the two main characters receive, which prepares them to resist the "pressures of tradition." (Wilcox 2003) I am in agreement with Wilcox in certain respects. A certain feminism *does* seem to derive from Ramatoulaye's education. But I think the question could also be: what are the stakes of reading *So Long a Letter* only in terms of *this* particular feminism? Furthermore, what is authorized if we equate the goal of feminism only with producing stable subjects who can "resist" tradition? Are we not in some sense proposing to finish, in criticism, what colonial education set out to do? One critic whose reading of the novel demonstrates the stakes of this is Kathryn Fleming. Fleming writes nearly interchangeably of "the controlling forces of Islam," "the

powerful machinations of tradition,” “the insidious lure of polygamy,” “the looming specter of Islam,” and, finally, “the looming specter of polygamy.” With this collection of figures, Fleming perhaps personifies the triad of “tradition, superstition and custom.” (Fleming 2003, 207–212) But how do “tradition, superstition and custom” become “polygamy and Islam”? I ask this because polygamy is indeed something of a specter in *So Long a Letter*, but perhaps not in the way Fleming intends. Polygamy is a motivating engine of the plot, it touches every character’s life in the novel, and yet actual examples of polygamy are always staged just outside the narrative frame. As Obioma Nnaemaeka points out, “It is puzzling that a book [...] in which the word “la polygamie/polygamy” never appears and polygamy (the institution) never functions [...] has been debated and analyzed *ad nauseam* in literary criticism [...] as a book *about the institution of polygamy*.” Nnaemaeka suggests that one possible reason the book has been read in this way is, again, the English translation. Bâ’s English translator renders the phrase *le problème polygamique* as “the problem of polygamy.” As Nnaemaeka wryly observes, this is like translating *le problème politique* (the political problem) as “the problem of politics.” (Nnaemeka 1997, 163–7)⁴

Other readers of Mariama Bâ have gone beyond the “specter of polygamy” and taken the novel as an injunction to denounce what polygamy is understood to be like in Senegal. In an essay on *So Long a Letter*, Keith Walker grounds his analysis with a definition: “African Muslim polygamous societies are, by definition, relationships of permanent Koran-sanctioned social inequality in which the power of the husband reinforces the domination, subordination, and submission of women. This power is rationalized by the elders and their Koranic explications of what ‘ought, should, and better’ be and of what is ‘right, good, and bad.’” (Walker 1999, 136) This definition locates the origin of social inequality in a scene of “bad reading,” specifically the naive or cunning reliance on the sanction of a sacred text. Defined in this way, polygamy becomes something static and purely exterior to particular women and men who might practice it. But if this is what African Muslim polygamous societies are, by definition, like, should we not expect to find elders citing the Quran all over the place in *So Long a Letter*? In fact, nowhere in the novel is the Quran invoked to justify polygamy, nor even are any of the *hadith* which Bâ’s characters could very well have referred to. What is cited to explain polygamy? Fate, God’s will, filial duty, the materialism of the poor – but perhaps the most frequent explanation are secular accounts of human nature. Nevertheless, I believe that this definition demonstrates something fundamental about the reception of Mariama Bâ. It offers a version of polygamy in the novel *as it should have been*. In a sense, this account corrects the picture of polygamy by adding a supplemental definition in which a scene of overly literal reading comes to explain social inequality.⁵

Walker’s scene of “bad reading” seems eerily like the mirror image of another well-known passage in the novel. In this scene, Ramatoulaye lauds her friend Aissatou’s decision to leave her husband after he secretly takes a second wife. In response to his duplicity, Aissatou divorces her husband, continues her education, and eventually becomes a translator in New York. Famously, the novel ascends here into a hymn to books:

Tu t’assignas un but difficile; et plus que ma présence, mes encouragements, les livres te sauvèrent. Devenus ton refuge, ils te soutinrent. *Puissance des livres, invention merveilleuse de l’astucieuse intelligence humaine*. Signes divers, associés en sons; sons différents qui mollent le

mot. *Agencement de mots d'où jaillissent l'Idée, la Pensée, l'Histoire, la Science, la Vie. Instrument unique de relation et de culture, moyen inégalé de donner et de recevoir. Les livres soudent des générations au même labeur continu qui fait progresser. Ils te permirent de te hisser. Ce que la société te refusait, ils te l'accordèrent.*
(*Une si longue lettre*, 50-51; my emphasis)

You set yourself a difficult task; and more than just my presence and my encouragements, books saved you. Having become your refuge, they sustained you. *The power of books, this marvelous invention of astute human intelligence.* Various signs associated with sound: different sounds that form the word. *Juxtaposition of words from which springs the idea, Thought, History, Science, Life. Sole instrument of interrelationships and culture, unparalleled means of giving and receiving. Books knot generations together in the same continuing effort that leads to progress. They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted.*
(*So Long a Letter*, 32; trans. Modupé Bodé-Thomas, my emphasis)

This account of reading and sociality seems like the polar opposite of Walker's "African Muslim polygamous societies." In those, everyone is beholden to a holy text which reinforces the subordination of women. In this account of a society organized around a reading public, books join together generations in a "progressive labor." They are the "sole instrument" of culture and a force outside of society, with the power to give you what society refused you.

Some critics have focused on this passage as a sort of metafictional key to understanding the role of reading in the novel. In fact, I would argue that this passage is so often implicitly taken to be the novel's own articulation of its ideal reading public that other scenes that might demonstrate the limitations of this model are often considered only in relation to this one. This has been especially true of a certain key moment in the narrative, in which Ramatoulaye tries to decide whether she should leave her husband or not. After learning of her husband's betrayal, Ramatoulaye does not divorce him, and in fact she stays married to him though he abandons her and her children. She even mourns him for the appropriate amount of time after he dies of a sudden heart attack many years later. At the very moment when we as readers have been prepared to see Ramatoulaye assert her independence, she appears to do nothing of the kind. To say that this has frustrated many readers of *Mariama Bâ* would be an understatement. I would argue that this is no accident. This is a particularly opaque moment in a text in which the narrator's thoughts, feelings and opinions are usually center stage. While there is no consensus in the criticism over how to read this scene, two argumentative threads stand out. First, critics have debated whether this scene means that Ramatoulaye 'accepts polygamy' or not.⁶ Another persistent trend is critics' attempts to resolve this scene's troubling opacity by 'fleshing out' the psychology of Ramatoulaye. There is a great diversity in these latter attempts to make sense of this moment (although Islam and polygamy are frequently cited as reasons for Ramatoulaye's inaction).⁷ I will not focus on the psychological portraits critics have provided, but rather on why this moment in the text seems to provoke this genre of response. Perhaps it is because this moment is left open to interpretation that readers seem tempted to complete what Mariama Bâ left, as it were, unfinished. The move to offer a psychological biography of the narrator here serves to restore a clear sense of her individuality at the moment when it seems most in peril. It is as if, to adapt a comment Franco Moretti once made about the *Bildungsroman*, the criticism has only been able to understand Ramatoulaye's choice as a deviation from what she should have chosen, as a sign of incomplete self-liberation.

Another way of approaching this moment would be to suggest that it does not need to be explained away. Perhaps the dissonance is precisely the point. Indeed, at the very moment when Ramatoulaye is debating whether she should stay or go, she does so through the image of a book. “Leave!” she writes, “Draw a clean line through the past. Turn over a page on which not everything was bright, certainly, but at least all was clear.” (Bâ 2001, 61)⁸ At the moment when, in the eyes of many of her readers, Ramatoulaye should have acted as if her life were a novel, she does not do so. She tries but fails to conceive of her self as a text here – or to put it more accurately, *as that kind of a text*, the one where you can just turn the page.

Even more strikingly, Ramatoulaye continues in this same scene to try out other ways of seeing, besides the reading of books. Just after discarding the possibility of turning the page, Ramatoulaye recalls her mother’s warning: that the gap between her husband’s teeth was a sign of his sensuality, of his appetite for pleasure. Ramatoulaye had ignored this warning because it was superstitious. And yet in this moment, she cannot help but recall how right her mother was. Igolima Amachree points to this reaction as evidence that Ramatoulaye’s story is ultimately the tragedy of not being modern enough. Amachree bemoans the way Ramatoulaye “rejects the custom of polygyny and wants to be lifted out of it and yet she accepts the superstition of reading a person’s character by the shape of the teeth. [...] Thus we see her enmeshed in those same ‘traditions, superstitions and customs’ while thinking that she has been lifted from the ‘bog’ of them.” (Amachree, 81) Amachree seems to be correcting Ramatoulaye here for not resembling more closely the ideal subject that her education was supposed to produce. What might it tell us about the terms of world literature that it is at the moment when the image of selfhood as a book is found to be problematic, that a world literary public has often intervened to adjust the picture, to restore an emancipatory account of reading and subjectivity?

Amachree’s suggestion that the novel stages a conflict between modernity and tradition is also a common analytic frame, not just for *So Long a Letter* but for African literature more generally. Another critic, Irene Assiba D’Almeida, outlines this binary:

What Ramatoulaye really wants is to be a modern woman, conscious of her rights as an individual and determined to fight for these rights. However, being a modern woman is at once seductive and threatening. Seductive because it opens up to the possibility for freedom and change, threatening because potentially, it has the power to destabilize the ground on which she stands. And so, Ramatoulaye is always torn between modernity and tradition. (d’ Almeida 1986, 165)

An assumption that this reading seems to introduce is that tradition is something static and unchanging. D’Almeida describes it as the “ground” on which Ramatoulaye stands. I want to trouble this assumption, by pointing out that what could be named “tradition and custom” was actually in full contestation in the period in which Bâ wrote this novel. Furthermore, the pertinence of the category of “tradition” to debates about family form has a complicated legal history in Senegal, which is an important but ignored dimension of the novel’s context.

So Long a Letter stages a complex dialogue with the struggles over women’s civil rights in Senegal that took place in the 1970s-80s. Specifically, I want to argue that the novel is deeply intertextual with a set of legal reforms introduced in 1973, which are collectively called the Family Code. The Code marked a significant shift in the

Senegalese legal system – in certain regions prior to 1973, the domestic “domain” – which included legal issues related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance – was governed by religious or customary law. This was due to the fact that during the colonial era of French West Africa, there were essentially two legal systems – one for citizens (to whom French law applied) and another for subjects (who were in theory under religious or customary courts).⁹ Most pertinently for Bâ’s novel, it is important to note that what came to be enforced as “religious and customary law” was itself partially the product of an effort to standardize and make permanent a diverse set of practices. Before instituting the customary tribunals that would govern subjects, the colonial administration deployed anthropologists to study and formalize local customs, which were then given the force of law.¹⁰ “Tradition and custom,” then, did not refer to unchanging, indigenous practices, but rather to new, negotiated legal formations, to which individuals and institutions responded strategically. So the idea – very common in readings of Mariama Bâ – that there was ever a simple binary between modernity and tradition needs to be put in question, especially when it comes to questions of family law and family form. Far from being a “bog” in which women had been stuck since time immemorial, tradition and custom were hybrid socio-legal spaces in full transformation.¹¹

In the early 1960s, after Senegal’s independence, a committee was convened to resolve this complicated legal history by reforming and unifying family law. After over ten years of debate, the Code introduced a number of reforms, including making repudiation illegal, making signed consent mandatory, making dowries optional, and changing inheritance laws. Most relevantly for *So Long a Letter*, the Code made it mandatory that husbands declare their intent to be either polygamous or monogamous at the time of marriage – with polygamy being the default option. The Code generated significant debate about marriage in Senegal throughout the 1970s and ‘80s, the period during which Bâ’s novel was written and published.¹² The Code actually comes up in passing in the novel, but it is also present in another, more structural sense. The betrayals that the two main female characters suffer in the novel – in which their husbands take second wives without their knowledge – would have, in theory, been illegal under the Family Code. In this sense, there is a very close resemblance between the family dramas the novel stages and the family forms the law sought to regulate.

I want to propose that literature and the law continue to be intertwined in the reception of the novel as well. When the committee that produced the Family Code tried to reform polygamy, the solution they reached was to stipulate a choice for or against it. One objection to this solution has been that, in its effort to offer a choice in the matter of polygamy, the committee imagined both men and women as abstract subjects who could either say yes or no. But in practice such a choice might be more of a negotiation that would take place in a whole matrix of competing commitments, affiliations, dispositions, and constraints.¹³ Interestingly, though, this legal persona who could say a simple “yes” or “no” to polygamy is not what we find in Bâ’s narrator, Ramatoulaye. But it *is* what we find in the critical reception of Mariama Bâ, which has often read Ramatoulaye as she should have been, namely as someone who simply says no to polygamy. What can we make of this curious convergence? Of the way the terms of legal intelligibility seem to parallel those of literary legibility? Perhaps both world literature and modern, positive law cannot do without categories such as “tradition, religion and custom,” which serve as

screens onto which narratives of the development of secular, modern individuality are projected.

Criteria of Value

In one of Ramatoulaye's apostrophes, in which she seems to be addressing some indeterminate, larger audience, she asks, "When will educated society reach the point at which it determines itself not by virtue of sex, but rather criteria of value?"¹⁴ In response to this demand, her exasperated interlocutor blurts out the other question that hangs over the entire work: "Whom are you addressing, Ramatoulaye?"¹⁵ It is difficult to answer either one of these questions. Ramatoulaye's demand for a new form of social value encapsulates the mode of feminist contestation for which the novel is rightly famous. And yet it is not clear from the immediate context quite what she has in mind. An answer to the second query – whom are you addressing – also appears elusive, since the implied audience here and elsewhere is incredibly elastic. At times, Ramatoulaye seems to be writing to herself as much as to Aïssatou, while other times she seems to address a public that is much, much larger. In what follows, I explore the unresolvability of both value and address in the novel in order to trace what I take to be Mariama Bâ's distinctive mode of critique.¹⁶ This will propel me to revisit the terms of the novel's reception in order to ask why the critical trends that I have been following have been so dominant. Finally, I will explore how Bâ's critique is echoed by another Senegalese writer, Maam Yunus Dieng, who has taken up and transformed *Letter* in various ways.

One of the most persistent, and indeed anguished, questions in *Letter* is what *other* kinds of value might be possible. What could possibly be an adequate, alternative source of value with which to transform society, in the context of rapid urbanization, the extension of the market into countless new areas of social life, the persistence of caste privilege, patriarchy, and colonial structures of social inequality? The source of value Ramatoulaye seems to advocate for most often is an interior, individual space which houses faculties of sentiment, reason, and agency. What goes on in this space of interiority is usually presented as what others *should* value in a person, rather than caste, wealth, gender, and so on. Nowhere is this account of the individual's worth given more clearly than in the passage in which she chastises her brother-in-law for proposing that he take her as another wife after her husband's death:

You forget that I have a heart, reason, that I am not an object to be passed from one hand to another. You have no idea what marrying means for me: it is an act of faith and love, a total gift of your self to the being that you have chosen and who has chosen you. I insisted on the word chosen. (Bâ, 85; my translation)¹⁷

The dramatic progression of *Letter* is principally driven by the many ways in which Ramatoulaye's individuality is under constant threat from other criteria of value. These include the demands of an "antiquated, traditional morality"¹⁸ and the "imperious laws" associated with "desires, instincts and drives."¹⁹ Ramatoulaye herself seems on occasion to be subject to both of these in complicated ways. Indeed, some of the moments that are taken to define her progress toward becoming a free, independent individual seem curiously superimposed with these other forms of valuation.²⁰

There is, however, another form of value in the novel that is neither moral nor instinctual – namely, exchange value. Despite (or perhaps because of) how often Ramatoulaye asserts that the individual's interiority is what should count, she often worries that it is at risk of becoming something that is merely countable. At the funeral of her husband, as the gifts of condolence pour in, Ramatoulaye bemoans the fact that expressions of sympathy are now all made in bank notes: "Troubling exteriorization of invaluable interior sentiment, counted in francs." (Bâ 2001, 14)²¹ *Letter's* fundamental crisis turns around the ways in which Ramatoulaye's life might be measured – but also risks being mismeasured. The language of quantification suffuses the work's prose at the most intimate of moments. Ramatoulaye worries: "I *gave without counting*, gave more than I received [in her marriage]." She tells herself, "It's *the sum* of all the lost or seized seconds that make for successful or failed lives." Even her most reflective and outraged moments are often inflected with measurement: "I *measured* myself against the shadows" [...] "I *measured*, in front of stunned eyes, how thin was the liberty accorded to women."²²

How could one account for a life? The need to do so spurs Bâ's *Letter*, and yet the novel seems riven by the impossibility and the inevitability of re-counting in a given set of terms. While the individual's agency, reason and sentiment often seem to be what Ramatoulaye means by her new "criteria of value," the novel complicates this progressive teleology and ultimately leaves the question of value open. It is as if *Letter* cannot do without the individual's interiority (to ground its critique of actually-existing social values), but it also cannot make do with it either. The generative force of this paradox drives *Letter* to pose the possibility of a new form of value while refraining from identifying it with any pre-existing category. I want to suggest that we might find this gesture to be valuable in itself, as a mode of critique.

The demand for a new form of social value is intimately bound up with the elasticity of *Letter's* address. Indeed, in order for the novel to demand another valuation without determining it in advance, it must *necessarily* refuse to limit its address to any already-achieved form or genre. This is what accounts for the famous generic indeterminacy of the work: it resembles a letter, a diary, and a *Bildungsroman* without quite assimilating itself to any of these. I want to suggest that the formal instability of the novel's address is intimately linked to the problematic I began this chapter with, namely Bâ's anxiety of audience. Her worry in Frankfurt over how and where her work would be read could, of course, be understood to refer only to the material conditions in which her address was situated – the fact that she could not take for granted widespread French literacy in Senegal or a local economy that could sustain a book publishing market. But I want to suggest that Bâ's concern with address is at least as much about *how she can be heard*. The capacity to be heard depends on what modes of address one is authorized to make, whether one can make others listen if they would prefer not to, whom one can speak for, what can be spoken about – not to mention the stylistics, sensibilities and expectations of a given audience.²³ In *So Long a Letter*, the struggle to give shape to a new form of social value is fundamentally a struggle over how one might be heard – and in what terms.

No Given Address

Up until this point, I have considered one set of terms in which Mariama Bâ's work has been heard, namely in the international critical reception. I now want to explore what it is about the novel that seems to have given substance to this reception. In other words, I want to ask why Bâ's novel has often been read as the story of the emancipation of a modern female subjectivity over and against the forces of tradition and custom. I will also explore how this tension of address and audience that I have been drawing out reverberates in Maam Yunus Dieng's reworkings of Mariama Bâ.

Many readers of Bâ have noted the way that Ramatoulaye's work on her letter appears to be her way of recollecting herself, of recording what she has been through as a married Senegalese woman of a certain generation, and of steeling herself for what life will throw at her tomorrow. Indeed, it is almost a truism in the criticism that the central narrative conceit of the novel is that Ramatoulaye's letter-writing is also a mode of self-writing. I want to suggest that it is because Ramatoulaye appears to be shaping herself into a modern individual through a *practice of writing* that this form of work on the self has been so legible to and so celebrated by a world literary public.

The letter as a fictional genre seems to promise an account of an individual's interiority to a public that is acquainted with what are now conventions of novelistic prose. Both the diary and the letter – genres which *Letter* resembles without ever quite assimilating itself to – are genres which have a long history in French literature and in many other literary traditions besides. For the international literary public that embraced *Letter*, the convention of an author using them to construct a sense of a character's psychological interiority was well-established. Part of the reason for the success of *Letter* is, I want to argue, that the effect of incorporating these para-literary genres could be taken for granted by a wide sampling of the book's readers and that the self-making they appeared to promise aligned well with emancipatory models of politics central to the liberal imagination. It is for this reason that some readers of Bâ seem to have wanted to complete Ramatoulaye's transformation for her, or to scold her *as if she were a real individual* when she strays from the path that the generic markers appear to have laid out for her.

The dynamic between a fictional letter and the novel that incorporates it is what Bakhtin would describe as the relationship between a primary speech genre and a secondary one.²⁴ Thus Bakhtin will write of novels as having historically “absorbed and digested” various primary genres (letters, idiolects, etc). (Bakhtin 1986) Bâ's novel seems to me to be addressed to a public for whom the novel has already “digested” the genres of the letter and the diary. But in the reception of *Letter*, the interplay that Bakhtin identified – between a novel and the genres of speech it “voices” – is taking place on a spatiotemporal scale that one does not exactly find in Bakhtin. This raises the question of *where and how* a world literary public comes to take for granted the fictional effect a generic form of writing (the letter, the diary). How, for an international audience, does a novel that takes the form of a letter come to suggest the contours of a particular subjective formation for that novel's protagonist? Where do readerly expectations about what literary form makes legible come from, how are they disseminated, and what are the stakes in certain conventions tending to become hegemonic?

What seems to me to be at issue in the reception of *Letter* is a certain reflexive recognition occurring on the part of the international literary audience. That the narrator fashions herself through a practice of writing has tended to confirm an international readership's idealizations of what kind of sociality literature makes possible. To put that another way, *So Long a Letter* has often served as an occasion for the self-recognition of a world literary public.

To demonstrate the limits of this form of recognition, I want to look again at that famous passage in *Letter* on the power of books, which I argued earlier seems to have been influential in the novel's embrace by teachers of literature. But this time, I will complicate matters by examining how Maam Yunus Dieng (the Senegalese writer who has staged a long-running dialogue with Bâ's work) has translated this passage into Wolof (with her collaborator Arame Fal). Here, then, is the same passage – first in Mariama Bâ's original French and then in the Wolof translation, with English versions of both alongside:

*Puissance des livres, invention
merveilleuse de l'astucieuse intelligence
humaine. Signes divers, associés en sons;
sons différents qui mollent le mot.
Agencement de mots d'où jaillissent
l'Idée, la Pensée, l'Histoire, la Science,
la Vie. Instrument unique de relation et
de culture, moyen inégalé de donner et de
recevoir. Les livres soudent des
générations au même labeur continu qui
fait progresser.* (Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*,
50-51)

The power of books, this marvelous
invention of astute human intelligence.
Various signs associated with sound:
different sounds that form the word.
Juxtaposition of words from which
springs the idea, Thought, History,
Science, Life. Sole instrument of
interrelationships and culture,
unparalleled means of giving and
receiving. Books knot generations
together in the same continuing effort that
leads to progress. (trans. Modupé Bodé-
Thomas, *So Long a Letter*, 32)

*Dooley téere, doy na waar; kéemaan la ci
kéemaan yi xelum doom-aadama sàkk: ay
rèdd nga boole muy baat; nga booley
baat, xel nàcc, indi xalaat, nettali taarix,
génne xam-xam, wone àddina. Téere
mooy jumtukaay yu yéeme, ci jàllale
caada ak weccentey xalaat. Ñooy boole
ñu bakkul jamono, tēnk leen ci benn
gēstu, ba ñu génne ci lu jariñ mbindeef yi.*
(trans. Maam Yunus Dieng and Arame
Fal, *Bataaxal bu gudde nii*, 62)

The power of books is quite
extraordinary. They are a marvel amongst
all the mysteries of the spirit of the
children of Adam. Lines that you
combine until they are words. Combine
words and intelligence flows forth,
bringing thought, narrating history,
leaving knowledge in its wake, revealing
the world. Books are astonishing tools for
the transmission of culture and the mutual
exchange of ideas. Books bring together
those who are not of the same generation,
tying them into the same inquiry, whose
goal is that which is useful to all
creatures. (*Bataaxal*, my translation into
English)

As I mentioned earlier, some critics have noted that this is a metadiscursive moment, one in which the novel seems to refer to its own medium and context of circulation. This passage appears to be making a claim about how the book, in which it is embedded, exists for a wider public of readers. For some, this is indeed the novel's own account of what kind of sociality books make possible. Indeed, we might say that this scene seems to

invite a certain public of readers to recognize themselves – or, more accurately, their mode of reading – in the text.

Dieng and Fall’s translation remains close enough to the semantic meaning of the original to be considered accurate, and yet it registers a crucial difference. While they render the sense of the passage in Wolof, their translation also seems to attempt to recreate (rather than replicate) the way in which this passage presumes something about its field of circulation:

Bâ: *Instrument unique de relation et de culture, moyen inégalé de donner et de recevoir.*

[Books are] a unique instrument of relation and culture, an unequaled means of giving and receiving. (my translation)

Dieng: *Téere mooy jumtukaay yu yéeme, ci jállale caada ak weccentey xalaat.*

Books are astonishing tools for the transmission of culture and the mutual exchange of ideas. (my translation)

In Fall and Dieng’s translation, books are still an “astonishing” (*yéeme*) technology, but their unique and privileged power seems to have been diminished. In the original, books appeared to be the glue of social relation in an idealized public sphere. But Dieng and Fall are transposing the passage into a literary context which is, at present, somewhat inhospitable to such an idealization. What has to be translated in this passage is not only the semantic content, then, but a whole set of assumptions about how this text and indeed books in general exist for a public. Dieng and Fall’s translation introduces what the original passage seems not include – a sense that this projected reading public is, indeed, a projection.²⁵

Something about the passage seems to have “drifted” in translation.²⁶ Fall and Dieng have translated a moment in which the novel is itself imagining what it means to address a public – and this is precisely something that it is *not* the same in Wolof and French. What the drift in their translation records, then, is the difference between what a literary address can take for granted in the two languages. The subtle differences suggest that a reading public is not a function of books or even of readers, but rather of being presumable and reflexive – of being able to presume both that readers exist and that they will identify themselves as the addresses of your utterance.²⁷ What Dieng and Fall’s version allows for is an awareness of the fact that, without this reflexivity, books are a mere technology. This is significant, because the notion that books are a just-add-water public sphere is, I think, part of the appeal of this particular novel to teachers of literature.

But perhaps here my comparison risks flattening out the complexities of the original passage. While one could indeed read this praise of books as a moment in which the novel sketches its own field of circulation, we ought to recall that Ramatoulaye’s actual letter is not included in the public sphere described here. The letter (or series of letters) that form the novel are not self-described as literature, nor are they even sent within the novel itself. Instead, Ramatoulaye concludes *Letter* with a promise to hand-deliver the manuscript to Aïssatou the next day. While Ramatoulaye’s paean to books clearly celebrates the transformative social power of a reading public, we ought to recall that within its own narrative frame this is a text that does not circulate. Bâ’s letter presents itself as something intended for but *not yet* presented to a public. With this paradox in mind, the drift that Dieng and Fall’s translation registers appears not to be an

introduction on their part at all, but rather an echo of a mode of address that already saturates the original work. By reading Bâ's novel back through its Wolof translation, then, we can begin to see the internal complexity of *Letter*'s address. The novel seems to oscillate between an idealization of a reading public, on the one hand, and a deep concern that the terms in which one might address such a public *and be heard* are all already pre-determined. Faced with this crisis, *Letter* addresses itself to a public that is not yet a given.

Imagined Assemblies

I now want to explore how Maam Yunus Dieng has taken up this mode of address in her novel *Aawo bi* [The First Wife]. Dieng first published *Aawo bi* in 1992, but she wrote the manuscript many years earlier – not long after *So Long a Letter* appeared.²⁸ I want to suggest that *Aawo bi* is just as much a 'translation' of Mariama Bâ's *Letter* as is *Bataaxal*.

The link between *Letter* and its Wolof translation is obvious, but the case for reading Dieng's novel as a response to Bâ requires a short explanation. On the face of it, the plot of *Aawo bi* seems suggestive of a connection. The novel follows the story of Ndeela Diop in her marriage and charts her survival of her in-law's awful treatment of her. She perseveres through their abuse and is relieved when her husband takes a second wife – with whom she forges a lifelong friendship. In the face of all the scorn and abuse her in-laws heap upon her, she refuses to be driven away and indeed defies her tormenters by enacting the conduct of a virtuous wife in the face of their harassment. The strength of her character is eventually publicly celebrated and she is rewarded with a plane ticket to Mecca. Ndeela's story is told by Penda Gewel (a female griot, a *griotte*)²⁹ to another listening woman, Fama, whose hair she is braiding. The novel by and large conserves this conversational frame.³⁰

Aawo bi was written not long after *Letter* was published, and it would seem to be rather obvious to read Dieng as the defender of tradition/custom as opposed to Ba, the critic of it. In many ways *Aawo bi* could seem like a rural, pro-polygamy response to Ba's urban, anti-polygamy novel. However, just as it is inadequate to read Bâ only as a critic of polygamy, I argue that a for/against framing of *Aawo bi* would lead to a very superficial account of Dieng's engagement with Bâ. Both the novels are indeed intertwined with polemics about family form and feminism that took place in the 1970s-80s in Senegal (and continue to this day). But Dieng, like Bâ, is not reducible to a statement for or against the institution; rather, both are concerned with the terms in which it is possible to give an account of oneself and be heard.

There is a far more subtle way in which Dieng's *Aawo bi* is a response to *So Long a Letter*. In *Aawo bi*, Dieng has taken up the central conceit of *So Long a Letter* – that the novel's central narrative device is also a form self-making. But rather than letter-writing, Dieng works with another "textual" practice.³¹ In *Aawo bi*, Ndeela's self is 'written' through her being spoken about by someone else. The virtuous conduct of the main character is inscribed in praise by the *gewel*-narrator, who verbally composes for the woman whose hair she is braiding. Just as in *Letter*, one woman's story is passed along to another; but in *Aawo bi*, letter-writing has been replaced with the voice of the *gewel*. As a narrator, Penda adopts a conversational form for the narrative. As she says to

Fama, her interlocutor, “*Déglul rekk ma wax la.*” (M. Y. Dieng 1992, 6) (Just listen, I’ll tell you.) And yet, while the novel is structured like a conversation Penda is having with the reader/listener whose hair she is braiding. In typical *gewel* fashion, Penda makes a strong claim to her authority as a narrator, “*Man maa teewee cocc ba coset, dara umpu ma ci; déglul tey ma wax la fi Ndeela jaar ba agsi fii.*” (M. Y. Dieng 1992, 5) (I was there from beginning to end, nothing in this escaped me; listen, today I’ll tell you what Ndeela went through to get here.) And yet, the narrative stretches the bounds of this frame to report conversations and scenes at which the *gewel* was clearly not present. Thus *Aawo bi* resembles a conversation between two women without quite limiting itself to this genre, much as *Letter* presents itself as a letter exchanged between two women, while still taking license to bend toward literary fiction at many moments. But unlike Ramatoulaye in *Letter*, the narrator in *Aawo bi* does seem not have access to any of the characters’ thoughts. Instead, the narrative focuses instead on their deeds.

In Dieng’s reply-novel, then, the self-writing at the heart of the narrative is imagined as the protagonist’s enactment of a certain ideal of virtuous conduct, which then makes her self quotable. In *Aawo bi*, Ndeela ‘authors’ her public persona (since she is a *géer*, or non-casted person, she is a subject to whom public praise can accrue) by enacting ideals of feminine virtue. She ‘writes’ the story of her self in a way that is legible and circulable for others – but someone else (the *gewel*) must do the ‘writing.’ This is done, I want to argue, toward the end of realizing a very different ideal of subjectivity. Part of what Dieng’s novel explores is what a literary public might look and act like if it were composed of another configuration of the self besides that of a private, silent reader and a distant author. *Aawo bi* picks up on the linkage between a certain textual practice and a certain formation of the self that was at the heart of *Letter*. But it offers a very different formation of the self, where it is conduct, character, and virtue that the individual seeks to enact through certain practices.

If the focus of Bâ’s novel is Ramatoulaye’s interior space of sentiment, reason and agency, in Dieng it is her heroine’s *jikko* (character/nature/*comportement*) that takes center stage. Celebrating the main character’s *jikko* is central to *Aawo Bi*, but the valances of this particular term of Wolof ethical vocabulary are difficult to render into English. Jean-Leopold Diouf’s standard Wolof dictionary translates *jikko* as a person’s “character” or “nature.” (J. L. Diouf 2003, 170) Detailing and recognizing the exemplary qualities of Ndeela’s *jikko* is in some sense the aim of Penda and Fama’s conversation -- “*Wallaay jikkoo jeet wurus la*” (M. Y. Dieng 1992, 6) (By god! Her *jikko* is also gold.) And indeed, the voice of the *gewel* is particularly well suited to be this task, as one function of the *gewel*’s speech is to publicly enact the virtue of noble subjects and bloodlines, much as one primary function of a letter is to communicate the intimate thoughts and feelings of an individual subject. But in translating *jikko* as “character” or “nature,” as Diouf’s dictionary suggests, we perhaps risk proposing a deceptive equivalence between subjective formations. If *Aawo bi* is about affirming Ndeela’s *jikko* (character, nature, spirit), the begged question seems to be: what sort of actions can be recognizable as indices of one’s true nature? How do particular actions or practices come to be indicative of a virtuous or pious subjectivity? The answer would seem to be that celebrating Ndeela’s *jikko* depends on the expectations of subjectivity and ethical behavior that suffuse the social world in which she is embedded. To put that another way, how her ‘true nature’ becomes socially legible depends in important ways on social criteria that

are neither wholly interior nor exterior to her self. In *Aawo bi*, Ndeela's *jikko* becomes a text, by virtue of its capacity to become object-like, to become quotable. To do this it must bear some resemblance to established expectations of feminine virtue and conduct.³² It is this tension – between her pursuit of virtue and the socially determined categories in which that pursuit is enacted – that I want to argue generates some of the friction that animates *Aawo bi*. And just as individual interiority in Bâ's *Letter* turns out not to be the intrinsic truth of subjectivity but rather a certain capacity that must be cultivated, so too are the virtues of Ndeela's nature presented as not natural in and of themselves but rather as achievements in process which might in turn inspire others to the cultivation of virtue.³³

Dieng's novel, then, sketches a very different formation of the self, but one that is also enacted through a certain textual practice. Instead of private reading and correspondence, we have public praise and public reputation. But just as Bâ's letter does not arrive in the course of the narrative, so *Aawo bi* never actually breaks into public praise of the *gewel*. Rather, Penda's narration is presented as private conversation between the two women. Both novels, then, absorb genres (letter writing, the *gewel*'s public praise) of self-writing, and yet neither work fully commits to how these genres typically exist for an audience. Much as Bâ wrote an epistolary novel in which letters are not actually exchanged, *Aawo bi* is narrated in the *gewel*'s speech without it ever becoming public praise before an assembled audience.

In the absorption of these genres into novelistic form, a drift of a different order is introduced – between the formations of subjectivity these genres of self-making appear to promise and the novelistic use to which they are put. To put that in radically simpler language, Bâ's *Letter* appears to consolidate an individual self, while the *gewel*'s praise in Dieng's *Aawo bi* appears to bring into legibility the heroine's virtuous nature. And yet both novels withhold the closure promised by their own central narrative devices. How might we begin to think this curious structural parallelism? I want to argue that Dieng's novel is, in its own way, also a translation of *Letter*. What Dieng appears to me to have translated is Mariama Bâ's mode of address.

The paradox of address Dieng faced, as one of the earliest Wolof novelists, was rather different from Mariama Bâ's fears that her work would be, as she put it in Frankfurt, "heard outside the people whom [she] adresse[d]." Since Dieng could not take for granted widespread literacy in Wolof in the recently standardized orthography, she was concerned from the very beginning with being heard at all. She acknowledges as much in the preface to *Aawo bi*, where she addresses the paradox of writing a novel for a public which cannot yet read it. Dieng begins this preface by hailing her reader as a friend and praising her courage for taking up the novel. Dieng assures her reader that the task will be difficult at first, but that "there is nothing in this book that you don't already know."³⁴

Kon, xarit, nanu jëli démb boolek tey, yaatal sunu xam-xam, jottali ko sunuy moroom, nu waaajal ëllëg. [...] boo jängee sama Aawo bi ba noppi, daldi may fey, te bu ko waaaj. Bindal te bul tiit, bul taxaw; noonu la ñepp tàmbaalee. [...] Aywa, jëlal sa xalima nu bind. (M. Y. Dieng 1992, 3–4)

So, friend, let us go and get the past and *join it* with the present, broaden our knowledge, convey it to our peers, and prepare for tomorrow. [...] when you have read my *Aawo bi* through to the end, now you can repay me, without hesitation. Write without fear, without stopping. This is how everyone begins. Come, take up your pen and let us write. (my emphasis and translation)

Dieng's preface imagines a public for whom the reading of literature would present some difficulties. But she positions her novel as a gift presented to the reader, a gift which puts the reader in the author's debt. But the repayment Dieng calls for in return is quite extraordinary – she calls on the reader to become a writer in turn. The action of the reading public she envisions is that of joining the past and the future together. And the verb she chooses for the modality of this action of bringing together is quite interesting -- *boole*, which means 'to assemble.' The noun *Mboolo mi*, an assembly of people – for the performance of a *gewel*, for example – is derived from *boole*. The questions Dieng seems to explore in her preface are these: Is the unfamiliarity of her audience with novelistic form to be understood as a crisis, or as an opportunity to reinvent and transform what a literary public can be? Might other configurations of literary form and address turn the reader into a writer? Could other modalities of action besides that of the silent, private reader become the characteristics of a reading public? And lastly, if literature can bring the past and the future into an assembly, how might the writer address this audience of the past and the future, of the living and the dead?

For both Bâ and Dieng, then, books are indeed an “astonishing technology” that permits one to *assemble* a public. And yet each writer's work remains necessarily askance from any idealization of such an assembly. Each novel raises the possibility of closure with an intended public – of being heard – even as it suspends it in the realm of potentiality. The as-yet undelivered letter is the figure of this potentiality of address for Mariama Bâ. For Maam Yunus Dieng, it is the author's gift of writing, which the reader is invited to return. In different circumstances, then, and in different ways, both Mariama Bâ and Maam Yunus Dieng address themselves to publics the shape of which is not given yet.

Coda

The 'Work' of Wolof Literature in the Age of Structural Adjustment

In this dissertation, I have studied how Senegalese writers and filmmakers have engaged with the history of the category of the literary, especially with the ways in which francophone literary study came into being as one component of a program for reforming and modernizing textual cultures. I have also explored how artists working at the interstices of Wolof and French have engaged with this history by seeking to reopen the question of what authorizes proper reading and authorship. Thanks in part to their interventions, reading and writing practices have become perennial aesthetic and institutional problem spaces in the Senegalese cultural field. The friction around proper reading and authorship has often taken the shape of struggles over the contours and constitution of a future reading public. This is as true of the efforts of colonial educators to manage proper reading as it is of the creative work writers and filmmakers working in Wolof. For what else were the Cahiers Ponty, or Senghor's war on "savage" systems of transcription," or even David Boilat's refashioning of a multiplicity of textual cultures, if not attempts to instantiate practices of reading and writing that would in turn make it possible to anticipate (and, indeed, produce) a certain future public. I have also shown that one consistent aesthetic strategy of Senegalese writers and filmmakers has been to begin from this crisis of audience, to highlight the ways in which their public is still yet to come. In readings of Ousmane Sembène, Mariama Bâ, Cheikh Aliou Ndao and Maam Yunus Dieng, I have shown how Senegalese texts appear to transform the crisis of their own public's potentiality into an object of poetics.

In this Coda, I undertake a preliminary exploration of the afterlife of these dynamics in contemporary Wolof-language fiction. Specifically, I focus on two recent novels – Cheikh Aliou Ndao's *Mbaam aakimoo* (*Mbaam dictateur*) and Boubacar Boris Diop's *Doomi Golo* (*Les Petits de la guenon*) – which seem to me to signal an important aesthetic shift. Through readings of these two works, I explore how Wolof literature has been transformed in the more than three decades since Senghor resigned the Presidency and his successor Abdou Diouf took office amidst great social and economic turmoil.

This Coda is guided by a series of questions: What becomes of the oppositional stance of Wolof language literatures during the ebb of state-centered cultural nationalism? What do Senegalese linguistic politics look like when it becomes increasingly difficult to address their claims to the state? What is the function of Wolof literature at a time when the Senegalese public sphere is itself already rapidly Wolofizing 'from below' and yet the independence-era dream of a mass, literate public in African languages still seems frustratingly out of reach? And finally, what is the 'work' of Wolof literature in the age structural adjustment – an era when the very meaning of 'work' is being transformed by rampant unemployment, strange new sources of wealth, nontransparent flows of capital and debt, the unavailability credit, devaluations of the CFA, and so on? I will not pretend that I can supply definitive answers to any of these questions here, but through them I will attempt to explore how *Doomi golo* and *Mbaam aakimoo* refract the increasing precariousness of life and labor in neoliberal Senegal.

Both Diop and Ndao have had long careers writing in French, but while Ndao has been writing and publishing plays, novels, poetry and short stories in Wolof for decades,

Diop's turn to Wolof has been more recent. In 2003, Diop published *Doomi Golo*, his first novel in Wolof, which he later translated and published in French as *Les petits de la guenon*. In 2000, Ndao had published *Mbaam Dictateur*, the French translation of his Wolof novel *Mbaam Aakimoo*, which has since appeared in Wolof in two installments. *Doomi Golo* and *Mbaam Aakimoo* arguably represent a major shift in the Wolof novel – toward poetics that are recognizably in dialogue with most of the major currents of the 20th century novel, from modernism to the New Novel to magical realism. On the level of scale alone these works represent a significant break with earlier Wolof fiction. *Mbaam* and *Golo* are both large tomes that attempt to incorporate and coordinate textual universes that are far more complex than what one finds in earlier Wolof prose works.

The plot of Ndao's *Mbaam* is quite simple: in order to rid themselves of a ruthless dictator named Wor, the people of an unnamed African nation turn to an occult practitioner who transforms the dictator into a mute donkey. The novel charts Wor's journey through these two states – dictator and donkey – and the many characters and communities he encounters. *Doomi Golo* is much harder to summarize but it, too, uses a seemingly simple plot as an occasion to weave together a multiplicity of stories. *Golo* is presented as a series of notebooks recounting the life and history of the Senegalese town of Niarela. The notebooks are written by a very old man named Nguirane Faye who is preparing them for his grandson Badou, who has immigrated and who Nguirane hopes one day will return. But this frame is quickly stretched as the novel strains to incorporate many different stories, including some that appear to be alternative histories, fabrications and even nightmares.

I want to trace two related threads in these works. First, I consider how Diop and Ndao take up the long-running concern in modern Wolof literature with the limits of literary address – in other words, Wolof writers' awareness that they are writing for a future public. I explore how Diop and Ndao have re-imagined the significance of this feature of Wolof literary address for the Senegalese cultural field, post structural adjustment. These texts are reacting to two related trends: first, since structural adjustment the Senegalese state has withdrawn considerably from the projects for cultural hegemony it pursued under Senghor, so that Wolof writers are no longer confronted by the same statist, interventionist francophone cultural agenda which Sembène faced in the 1970s. Secondly, since the 1980s the Senegalese public sphere has been increasingly Wolofized 'from below,' but the rise of Wolof as *the* primary vernacular of public speech has not brought to an end the structural linguistic inequalities against which Wolof writers positioned their work against in the 1960s and 70s. Indeed, with the gradual (but nonlinear) retreat of the state from projects of mass education and the ceding of the terrain of literacy to NGO and civil society, the dream of a mass, literate public in Wolof seems as distant as ever and the public of Wolof writers such as Ndao and Diop remains, in some respects, frustratingly potential, albeit for different reasons.

In this context, however, Wolof fiction's speculative, even tenuous, ability to presume a literary public actually seems to have made it into fertile aesthetic terrain for the figuration of the period's promises and paradoxes. To put that another way, the 'work' of Wolof literature has become – as work in Senegal has more generally – fractured in terms of its connection to temporality and place. And it has been this very fracturing of 'work' that has led Diop and Ndao toward new aesthetic directions in their

own writing. Quite simply, in *Mbaam Aakimoo* and *Doomi Golo* one encounters formal and stylistic innovations not seen before in Wolof prose fiction. What I want to suggest is that such developments seem intended to reckon with the transformations of time and place in the symbolic economies in which the ‘work’ of Wolof literature is itself embedded.

These transformations of ‘work’ lead me to the second line of thought developed in this Coda. In these two texts, the Wolof novel becomes a space for reflecting on the transformations of work itself – *liggéey* in Wolof. *Liggéey* carries many meanings (as of course “to work” does in any language). *Liggéey* can mean labor in the conventional sense, but it also refers to witchcraft (*liggéey*) as well as practices of spiritual devotion (*liggéey* as submission to one’s spiritual teacher, or *seriñ*) and gendered, domestic work in ideologies of maternal labor (*liggéeyu ndey*) – to name just a few. The many senses of *liggéey* in Wolof predate the structural adjustment era, but with the breakdown of the meaning of ‘work’ in its narrow sense a multiplicity of intersecting and translocal economies of value have arisen. Recently, the Wolof novel has tended to become a space in which it is possible to represent, trace and attend to these superimposed forms of *liggéey*. In particular, *Mbaam* and *Golo* seem to begin from the uncanny remainder generated by moments in which the various modalities of ‘*liggéey*’ are transacted with each other. These texts strain to imagine not being “at home” with the increasing equivalence, abstraction and de-localization of all these many forms of work – perhaps especially the novel’s own translation of a multiplicity of speech genres into literary capital. But before I can convey the stakes of these texts’ defamiliarization of their own novelistic labors, however, I will need to sketch some of the ways in which the meaning of ‘work’ has itself come to be transformed in the Senegalese popular imaginary in the last 30 years.

Hope and Hopelessness: Labor in Neoliberal Senegal

Clothed in a white shroud – a garment usually reserved for a corpse – a human form emerges from the sea. (Figure 1) As this figure rises from the waves, a hip-hop beat begins – just a mournful, minor key piano hook stretched over a two-step break. On top of this simple production, we overhear a conversation between two young men, one of whom is planning to take a pirogue to Europe, a very risky ocean voyage, in order to find work. The young man says he is off to “*Barça walla barsax*” – “Barcelona or hell.” This is how the Senegalese rapper Neew Bi begins the music video for “Galgui” (The Boat), his 2008 song about clandestine immigration. Neew bi’s name means “the corpse” in Wolof and in the video and in live shows, he performs in this white shroud to indicate that he is the living dead: a ghost of those who have drowned at sea, risen from the depths to warn, mourn and chastise the living. (See Figure 1)



Figure 1: Neew Bi, “Galgui” (L. Ndiaye 2008)

In the past several decades especially, the youth population in Senegal has increased dramatically and so too has youth unemployment.¹ For years now, some young people have taken to small crafts to sail to Europe to find work (or at least the promise of it). Those who succeed are often able to find only precarious work – the most visible example of which is that of the *modou modou*, the mobile merchant selling small commodities on the street, perennially exposed to arrest and deportation – as well as the very real threat of racist violence. (Kington 2011) Filling the “structural demand for cheap migrant labor in informal sectors” in the economies of the North (de Haas 2008, 1) means a precarious existence for many migrants, who can be detained at any number of ‘transit camps’ before being deported. (Genova and Peutz 2010) The journey by sea is also notoriously dangerous, and many young Africans have died along the way after their boats capsized. (Shenker 2012) Neew bi’s “Galgui” invokes all these dangers, but reserves special venom for the Senegalese state, whom he portrays as attempting to enforce border controls and ‘catch’ migrants in the act, instead of addressing the economic conditions that might have caused young people to expose themselves to such dangerous journeys.

“Galgui” is a somber track, “more of an incantation” than a song. (A. Ndiaye 2011) Neew bi uses the song’s spare production as a backdrop for his delivery. In the chorus, the rapper places special emphasis on the verb *dem* (*to go, to leave*). In the first two bars of the chorus, Neew bi drops it on break’s off-beat, but on the last bar he simply intones *dem* five times, letting it resonate like a fading pulse. In the video, directed by Lai Ndiaye, Neew bi punctuates his rap with a rowing motion, a repeated gesture of moving an invisible oar. The video superimposes various images of Neew bi performing this gesture on top of others of him pointing out to sea, and of *gal gi* (the boat) haunting and transparent. (See Figure 2)

What might this accumulation of ghostly apparitions have to do with the *speculative* nature of clandestine immigration – with the ways in which it is a search for a future employment that drives young people to expose themselves to such journeys and

working conditions? To put this another way, what might Neew bi's ghostly self-presentation as the living-dead have to tell us about the precarity of labor in neoliberal Senegal, and the increasing sense that work is something that is only available elsewhere?



Figure 2: Specters upon specters. (L. Ndiaye 2008)

In a 2002 essay, Jean and John Comaroff analyze the figures of the zombie and the immigrant in the contemporary South African popular imaginary. These twinned figures, they argue, “have their source in social and material transformations sparked by the rapid rise of neoliberal capitalism on a global scale.” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002, 797) The transformations of neoliberal capitalism, according to Comaroff and Comaroff, “fracture the meaning of work and its received relation to place.” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002, 795) In the Senegalese context, this manifests itself in the way in which ‘work’ for many young people always seems to be elsewhere, which spurs the perilous journeys Neew bi warns about. Under neoliberal conditions, Comaroff and Comaroff argue, the figures of the living-dead and the immigrant have become privileged topoi for figuring the enchantments and “experiential contradictions” of neoliberal capitalism. Namely, its potent mix of “hope and hopelessness [...] the fact that it appears to offer up vast almost instantaneous riches to those who can control its technologies, and, simultaneously, to threaten the very livelihood of those who do not.” (Comaroff and

Comaroff 2002, 782)² Although “Galgui” emerges out of a different history of social transformations (neoliberal and otherwise) than the South African context Comaroff and Comaroff analyze, Neew bi’s performance as the living dead resonates strongly with their analysis.

Senegal was the first African country to receive a “structural adjustment” loan in 1979, an important milestone in the global neoliberal turn. In the 1980s, it received some 15 different stabilization and adjustment loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, some of which were later cancelled due to ‘noncompliance.’ Yet during this period of ‘restructuring’, Senegal saw its international debt rise from 49% to 63% of GDP. In the 1990s, Senegal received further adjustment loans to various sectors (in 1994, 1995, and 1997), suffered the devaluation of the CFA³ in 1994, and privatized 55 of 188 parastatal industries. (Walle 2001, 1–3) The process of neoliberal economic restructuring began in Senegal during the administration of the Parti Socialiste – under Abdou Diouf, Senghor’s handpicked successor – and continued after the “liberal” Abdoulaye Wade defeated Diouf in 2000. The period since 1980 has seen a gradual withdrawal of the state from many sectors – a transformation which was compounded by a severe drought across the Sahel in the 1980s. (Mbodj 1992, 114) The “structural adjustment” reforms imposed on Senegal and other African nations

were supposed to achieve “stabilization” and economic growth through the devaluation of currencies, the deregulation of markets (including agricultural markets), the reduction of state bureaucracies, and the privatization of state and parastatal industries. In keeping with the economic philosophy of “neoliberalism,” it was preached that removing state “distortions” of markets would create the conditions for economic growth, while rapid privatization would yield a flood of new private capital investment. The effects of these measures on economic growth, and the extent to which they were or were not actually implemented in particular countries, remain hotly debated. But this much is clear: The idea that deregulation and privatization would prove a panacea for African economic stagnation was a dangerous and destructive illusion. Instead of economic recovery, the structural-adjustment era has seen the lowest rates of economic growth ever recorded in Africa (actually negative, in many cases) along with increasing inequality and marginalization. (Ferguson 2006, 11)

Neoliberal restructuring has, furthermore, dramatically transformed the role of the state in many African nations. As van de Walle puts it, the ‘reform’ process has

motivated a progressive withdrawal of governments from key developmental functions they had espoused in an earlier era. All over Africa, the withdrawal from social services is patent, particularly, outside the capital. In the poorest countries of the region, donors and NGOs have increasingly replaced governments, which now provide a minor proportion of these services. Even in the richest countries, the state’s ability and willingness to service rural constituencies has atrophied. Paradoxically, many of the states in the region are both more centralized and bigger, and yet they appear to do less development work than they did before adjustment. (Walle 2001, 12)

This ebbing of the state (especially in rural areas) certainly characterizes the Senegalese case during the height of the economic and social crisis in the 1980s and 90s. As Mamadou Diouf suggests, two expressions capture the “political repertoire” of this period: “the disengagement of the state” and “Minimal State, more efficient State” (*Moins d’Etat, Mieux d’Etat*). (M. Diouf 1997, 310) Such was the disengagement of the

state at the height of structural adjustment that the Senegalese linguist and intellectual Pathé Diagne could write, in 1984,

Senegal, in the 1980s, looks like a country just coming out of war. Its economy and society are in crisis. Its uprooted populations barely survive in the cities and villages. They are condemned to powerlessness in the face of an environment that has become hostile. Postcolonial Senegal is an enormous and artificial superstructure centered on Dakar... The Senegalese state, concentrated in Dakar, and manipulated by a vast technocracy, avoids... bankruptcy ... thanks to foreign assistance that undermines its independence. (Quoted in Fatton 1987, 80)

But the neoliberal turn was also quite messy and nonlinear. Diouf, for example, argues that the rise of technocracy as a political rationality “opposed to the nationalist politicians of the independence period” predates the 1980s and the “adoption of the idioms of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.” Diouf instead traces a larger shift in governance’s legitimating discourses, toward “privileged expertise to the detriment of mass movements and popular mobilization.” (M. Diouf 1997, 310)

Since the 1990s, President Wade also occasionally swam against the current of privatization, but this often took the form of autocratic power-grabs, especially re-nationalizing certain sectors as it suited him politically. (Fredericks 2011) So one could say that one of the features of Senegalese experience of neoliberalism has been the ways in which it has existed alongside other modes of governance, in particular (and under Wade especially) a personalization of the state, the persistence and even deepening of patron-client structures, etc. As David Harvey once put it, “dictatorship and neo-liberalism [are] in no way incompatible with each other” (Harvey 2005, 34) – a fact that was manifestly demonstrated in the gerontocratic Wade era.⁴

Perhaps the most iconic (and even beloved) cultural figure from Senegal’s era of structural adjustment might be “Goor,” the hero of cartoonist TT Fons’ long-running comic *Goorgoorlu*. Created in 1987 “right in the middle of structural adjustment,” Fons’ long-running comic depicted the humorous travails of a hapless, unemployed Senegalese everyman named Goor [which simply means ‘man’] and his wife Diek, who struggle to secure “la dépense quotidienne” (their daily ‘bread’). The Wolof verb *goorgoorlu* which Fons made his title can mean “to get by,” “to make an effort,” “to make progress” or even “to do one’s best.” A common French translation is *se débrouiller*. In Fons’ *Goorgoorlu*, the practice of getting by is transformed into a way of life, *le débrouillardisme*.⁵ The comic struck a nerve and became immensely popular, especially in its incarnation as a TV show that ran for many years on RTS1, Senegal’s main government channel. Fons’ strips extracted much bitterly funny comedy from the ways in which the practice (and indeed art) of *goorgoorlu* was becoming a defining strategy of existence in urban Senegal. In the very first strip, “Liberalism” from February 1987 (Figure 3), Fons makes explicit the link between his character’s *goorgoorlu* existence and the neoliberal ‘adjustments’ to the economy.



Figure 3. Goor discovers what it is that free markets free him to be.⁶ (Fons 1991b)

Hoping to take advantage of the many promises of economic reform – lower tariffs, a revised tax code, less regulation – the unemployed Goor rushes off to buy what he needs to be a *modou modou*, a mobile merchant walking the streets selling small, everyday items to passersby. But when he arrives at the “market,” Goor finds that it is already overflowing with countless others who have been reduced to having the exact same idea. “I was here before you and liberalism!” one cries out. “Factory for sale. Two million first price!” hollers another. The primal scene of the ‘freed’ neoliberal market, then, turns out to be a fight between *modou modou* over space on the sidewalk to sell their small commodities. In Fons’ comics, there is rarely a sense that daily existence is secured through anything resembling salaried work, but rather by virtue of *goorgoorlu*, that is, through any number of schemes, efforts, and hustles. As Comaroff and Comaroff put it, “The workplace and honest labor, especially work-and-place securely rooted in local community, are no longer prime sites for the creation of value.” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002, 781) In the Senegalese context, *goorgoorlu* has increasingly replaced *liggéey* in this respect in the popular imaginary.

Cadillac, Renault, Toyota: The Changing Shape of a Future Literary Public

In a recent speech on African language literatures, the Senegalese novelist Boubacar Boris Diop addressed the supposed lack of a public for Wolof literature. “L’histoire de toutes les littératures humaines montre que ce sont toujours les textes qui précèdent le public – parfois avec plusieurs siècles d’avance – et non l’inverse.” (Boubacar Boris Diop n.d., 8) That Wolof literature is written for a public that is yet to come would seem to be one of its particular qualities – even a peculiarity. But in the speech Diop turns this

‘crisis’ around and insists that *all texts* are for a future public – implying that perhaps even texts that are written for a seemingly very present and determinate public are exposed to the contingency of their own futurity. Diop characterizes his own writing in Wolof as necessarily beginning from an awareness of the work’s speculative quality. The Wolof writer’s work is speculative because he begins with some acknowledgment of the difficulty he will have in presuming that he will be read by the very public that must be addressed. What I want to suggest is that this speculative quality of the Wolof novel – its address to a public that is yet to come – has made it particularly well-suited aesthetic terrain in which to figure the precariousness of life and labor in neoliberal Senegal.

On the one hand, one might have expected this period to be received as something of a relief by Wolof writers. For since the 1980s, the Senegalese state has retreated from the cultural agenda of patronage and institutional support (and, I would add, surveillance) that it pursued under Senghor and against which many of the independence-generation of Wolof intellectuals reacted. But, as it turns out, this has not necessarily been a victory for the intellectuals who advocated national-language literatures. Not only has the state retreated from pursuing an activist cultural agenda, it is also now less willing and able than ever before to engage in the institutional transformations that advocates of Wolof-language literature saw as necessary to intellectual decolonization – including the promotion of mass literacy, changes to the educational system, and so on.

But the state’s relinquishing of its hegemonic aspirations in the cultural field is not the only important shift in the last 30 years. During this same period, there has been an increasing ‘Wolofisation’ of the public sphere. In part through the rise of new media technologies (from private radio stations and television networks to the web and text-messaging), Wolof today is a far more dominant language in public discourse than it ever was under Senghor. And yet this transformation been largely taking place ‘from below,’ without a high level of active participation by the state. (Smith 2010) Thus while there has been an explosion in spoken and written public discourse in Wolof, this has not coincided with a rise in formal, institutional literacy in Wolof, as the comments section of any Seneweb.com article can attest. For this reason – as well as the economic difficulties of book publishing in West Africa (Cf Fal 2007) – the public for Wolof literature remains, stubbornly, potential.

In an acknowledgment of the persistence of this paradox, Cheikh Aliou Ndao concludes his 2002 essay *Taaral ak ladab ci lammiñu Wolof* [Aesthetics and Literature of the Wolof Language] with a discussion of the challenges and opportunities that face the promotion of writing, reading and publishing in African languages. Ndao calls on his readers to consider what might be achieved if the project of formalizing writing in Wolof took off. The metaphor he chooses, however, points to how the ‘work’ of Wolof literature is transformed in the neoliberal world order:

The Americans, the French and the Japanese are all at the same level of knowledge, yet not one of them turns their back on their mother tongue. One goes through English to make a Ford or Cadillac. Another goes through French to make a Renault, and the Japanese go through their language to put out a Toyota. (Ndao 2002, 47–48; my translation)⁷

Ndao invokes these car brands as examples of what can be achieved when the language of “a nation” is harnessed as a technology. The point here is rather clear: Ndao asks his Wolof readers, ‘what might we be able to accomplish if we did not switch languages

halfway through our children's education?' As he puts it, the Americans, Japanese and French do not abandon "the languages that nursed them" (*bàyyiwoo làmmiñ wi nga nàm*) This is really a small, rather tongue-in-cheek aside in a much larger treatise, but I will belabor it anyway.⁸ Because beneath the playfulness of the car manufacturing metaphor, this comment also raises some very difficult questions for Wolof literature, for francophone literature, for World literature. What might it mean that, in the early 21st century, Ndao's metaphor of choice here for championing African language literatures is that of manufacturing automobiles? One conclusion it suggests is rather stark: literature (and even literacy) is not outside of the globalized market. Ndao's choice of these particular brands is not without a certain irony. Ford, Toyota and Cadillac (GM) are all multinational companies and even Renault was privatized in 1996. They are certainly no longer the work of any individual 'nation.' So Ndao's comparison of the work of building a national-language literature to automobile manufacturing also implicitly suggests that *literature* is itself a complex commodity like any other in the neoliberal world order. Literature is now produced elsewhere for consumption in Senegal, and what is produced in 'raw form' domestically often has to be 'finished' and published elsewhere, for other markets – the situation of what Pascale Casanova would call the "literarily deprived territories." (Casanova 2007, 116)

Ndao's metaphor, then, points to a tension in Wolof literature that has existed since at least the early 1980s. To put it simply, it has become increasingly difficult to create "national culture and nationalist discourses of legitimation under conditions of neoliberalism." (Ferguson 2006, 20) Like other forms of work, the 'work' of literature has become ever more transnational which makes it increasingly difficult to see its 'work' as being addressed to the nation. This has also made the dream of a mass public for African language literatures ever more remote. In a sense, what Ndao's talk of Cadillacs and Toyotas ironically suggests is that it has become every bit as difficult to envision a thriving, mass public for African language-literature in Senegal as it is to imagine a domestically-built and nationalized Senegalese auto industry. With the fracturing of the meaning of work and its connection to the local, such projects threaten to recede past the horizon of what is presently imaginable. So what, then, is the 'work' of Wolof literature in this neoliberal age, when its position is as tenuous and speculative as ever?

The Uncanny 'Work' of the Modern Wolof Novel

In Cheikh Aliou Ndao's *Mbaam Aakimoo*, a young man named Malaw slowly gathers money to leave the unnamed country by mugging strangers in the night. "*Maalaw niruwul ku dégg li baay biy wax. Moo lu mu tudde liggéey?*" [Malaw was not one of those who listens to his father. What did he even mean by working?] (Ndao 2007, 19) Refusing to be a *modou modou*, Malaw chooses to be a thief, waiting only for the moment when he has amassed enough money to leave the country – "*su amoon xaalis génn réew mi.*" (Ndao 2007, 19) Both *Doomi Golo* and *Mbaam Aakimoo* take up Malaw's question – what does it mean 'to work' now? – and strive to trace some of the many connections and transactions between different modalities of *liggéey*.⁹ Amidst all the senses of *liggéey*, both novels are especially concerned with occult 'work' – in Wolof, a marabout is said to

perform ‘work’ on someone when he acts mystically upon them, for either good or evil ends. As their titles indicate, these novels are also both very much concerned with curses that have the potential to transform humans into animals,¹⁰ empower animals act like humans, and inflict upon subjects a variety of creaturely or abject conditions¹¹ that are neither human nor animal, nor entirely living or dead. But for the Wolof novel in the age of structural adjustment, this occult *liggéey* is not primarily about magical powers or curses. Rather, it gives the fiction writer an idiom with which to figure the transformations in the conditions governing existence in contemporary Senegal.

Alongside these novels’ fascination with occult ‘work,’ both texts are heavily invested in exploring fiction’s own ‘work’ on discourse – in asking what is the novelist’s license for putting into relation various forms of writing and genres of speech. Both *Mbaam Aakimoo* and *Doomi Golo* display a far greater structural complexity than earlier Wolof novels, as well as a tendency toward formal experimentation. Both works seem to push into overdrive the novel’s formal capacity to constellate multiple primary speech genres. Different voices and registers break in to these works and assert themselves, sometimes even compromising the structure of the novel as a whole. In both *Mbaam* and *Golo*, the plotment of the novel eventually gives way under this strain. In *Golo*, the elderly narrator eventually perishes and is replaced by a madman character who may or may not actually exist. In *Mbaam*, the novel swerves as it encounters various other voices and genres of speech, dropping the story it was telling to pick up the thread later.¹²

In Ndao’s *Mbaam Aakimoo*, this assemblage of voices nonetheless centers around two poles: the absolutist voice of the dictator whose word is law¹³ and the absolutely voiceless donkey whose life is reduced to being merely a source of labor. In putting in play the dictator and the donkey, *Mbaam* figures the transformation of the monovocal into the voiceless. As the dictator, Wor aspires to hear only hear his own voice or echoes echoes of it.¹⁴ As the donkey, however, he has no voice and can only listen.

Of course, the novel cannot help but reflect this tension back onto its own narration. There seems to be a terrible anxiety in Ndao’s novel that the work of the novelistic narrator is ultimately on a par with that of the dictator; that both are, in some sense, struggling for absolute mastery and monovocality within a certain domain populated by many other competing voices. For this reason, I think, we start to hear the voice of Wor the dictator actually begin to interrupt the narrator’s account, commenting on a particular scene, quarreling with his own portrayal. The dictator’s struggle to monopolize all discourse within a certain domain becomes a fictive double of Ndao’s narrator, and even at times a rival one.¹⁵

And yet the novelistic narrator finds itself doubled again in Wor in his incarnation as a donkey. For as the accumulation of a multiplicity of different forms of speech suggests, this novel is also a space where various bits of discourse accumulate, even taking it over in a way the novelist is powerless to control. So in this sense the novelist is like the mute donkey as well – he has a privileged position from which to overhear all the goings on. The donkey in the family concession functions as the Wolof equivalent of the fly on the wall: a being that no one notices and before whom one can say anything. In this way, both the donkey and the dictator double the ‘work’ of the fictional, novelistic speaker: one appears to be totally in command of this fictional universe, while the other is merely an eavesdropper whose work is ultimately not his own.

In *Doomi Golo*, Diop employs a similarly marginalized figure – the old man in the village whom no one notices anymore – as a novelistic speaker who allows for a vast collection of stories and genres of speech pile up.¹⁶ Like most of Diop’s francophone novels, it is highly structurally complex, and features multiple narrators and stories within stories. But even more striking are the variety of different genres of speech and writing that encrust themselves into the novel like barnacles. The novel is shot through with legends, *wolofal* poetry, *bàkk*, refrains from songs by Etoile de Dakar. Like Ndao, Diop seems to envision the ‘work’ of the Wolof novel as being one of assemblage, of bringing together all these different voices into a new space, which may make possible new kinds of relationality between them. And as it does in *Mbaam*, in Diop’s novel the structure of the work eventually cannot serve as scaffolding any longer, and it becomes dissolved under the weight of constellating so many other forms of discourse. In *Doomi Golo*, the novel is an aesthetic space where other voices, other worlds, other temporalities are pounding at the door, demanding to be let in. In both Diop’s *Doomi Golo* and Ndao’s *Mbaam Aakimoo*, the work of the novel seems to involve serving as an environment in which these other voices may “have the last word.”¹⁷

The ‘work’ of Wolof literature in these two novels, then, seems to consist in bringing into relation a multiplicity of different voices while insisting that the capacity of novelistic form to do this must remain, as it were, uncanny. Both *Golo* and *Mbaam* employ the novel’s constellational properties – the ways in which the form allows for a representation of the transactions between all the different actually existing modalities of *liggéey* (from the occult to the gendered to the spiritual) – but both works also stage curious rearguard actions against their totalizing ambitions. As a novel, *Doomi Golo* seems to want to swallow, report and fictionalize several centuries of the Senegalese cultural formation – from the historico-mythic past that interweaves stories of Talaatay Nder, Kocc Barma and the Ceddo, to a present in which professional footballers and *làmbkat* dominate the imaginary – and yet the novel also insists that it is a set of handwritten notebooks that are written for Badou, the immigrant grandson, who will return to claim them in the future. The text points to its own futurity by refusing to reveal to the novelistic reader one last notebook – the “Book of Secrets” – which it claims will only be revealed to Badou when he returns from abroad. *Mbaam Aakimoo*, for its part, seems incessantly to warn that in the novelist’s mastery of craft lies concealed both the absolutist designs of the dictator and the mute, eavesdropping donkey. In a sense, the question these two Wolof novels now seems to ask is – is it possible to write a novel which can both make use of the marvelous constellational properties of that form, but which also refuses to be at home with the uniquely modern equivalence that seems to be presumed of all the forms of work and speech that the novel contains? In other words, can one still write a novel that would not be at home with being a novel?

The tensions underlying this gesture in *Doomi Golo* and *Mbaam Aakimoo* are, of course, not new. They stretch back to the crises of audience and address that I have been tracing throughout this dissertation. For instance, one finds similar thematizations of the limits of fiction’s own narrative work in Maam Yunus Dieng’s *Aawo bi* and Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*, in the way those texts figure their own narrative medium (as the *gewel* and letter, respectively). One also encounters prefigurations of Diop and Ndao’s concern and care for a future public in many of the texts I have discussed – from Sembène’s dedication of *Le Docker noir* to his own illiterate mother, to the drift that

registers in Dieng's translations of *Letter*, to the limitations that are placed on the Wolof narrator's discursive errancy in the French version of *Buur Tilleen*. So while there is a relative continuity between *Mbaam Aakimoo*, *Doomi Golo* and the other Senegalese texts that I have been discussing, I have sought in this Coda to draw out an important shift in Wolof fiction that I argue is beginning to manifest itself in these recent novels. I believe this turn has to be understood as pointing to important transformations of the social world (Senegalese *and* global). What has changed is the situation in which the longstanding paradoxes of audience and address that I have been studying are embedded. With the retreat of the state, the departure of young people to look for work abroad, the Wolofization of the public sphere 'from below,' and the erosion of *liggéey* in its narrow sense – this very 'work' of writing for a public that is yet to come has been transformed as well.

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Notes

Introduction

¹ The Geographical Society was founded in 1821 in part to compete with the “African Association” in London, which sent Mungo Park to West Africa. In the early 19th century, the Society counted among its members and affiliates many boldface names of intellectual life: from Alexander Von Humboldt to François-René de Chateaubriand. The only comprehensive history of the institution is Fierro 1983.

² “Marabouts” is a polyvalent term in Senegal that can refer to an Islamic teacher, Sufi religious leader or occult practitioner. It is not totally clear which use Boilat has in mind, but the documents the men provided suggests that they are Islamic teachers, literate in Arabic.

³ The legend under the portrait of the first marabout reads as follows: “*Marabou du Fouta Toro. De race peul. Diadhiaca né à Baol. Deux petit grisgris au col.*” The second man is more clearly identified, and seems to have had a more sustained relationship with Boilat. He is described as “*Amadi Golojo. Marabout toutcoulor né à Boulibani [...] neveu du Roi de Bandou Almami Sahada.*” This could perhaps refer to Saada-Ahmadi Aissata, who ruled from 1839-1851. See Ka 2009, 336.

⁴ Many African speech communities that have been in historical contact with Islam have at one time or another modified the Arabic script to write their own languages. The use of Arabic to write African languages is called ‘ajami’ scripts in general; Wolofal is the ajami script for Wolof. Wolofal simply means ‘to make Wolof.’ For most of the 20th century, Wolofal and other ajami scripts have been largely ignored in the scholarship, a trend which is now being reversed. Another complementary current in the scholarship has been a renewed focus on the longstanding communities in Senegambia for whom Arabic literacy was the norm. For various interventions in both these regards see Camara and Mitsch 1997; Ngom 2010; Pasch 2008; Kratli and Lydon 2010; Djenidi 1979; Mamadou Diouf and Leichtman 2009.

⁵ The petition is most likely a Wolofal version of the one Robinson describes as being circulated in 1843 by members of the St Louisian community who wished to establish a Muslim tribunal. (Robinson 2000, 81) My thanks to Fallou Ngom for this suggestion. For a discussion of the importance of Muslim tribunals in the ‘civility’ of the *originaires* in St Louis, see M. Diouf 1998.

⁶ Interestingly, the notebook itself appears to have been first used by Golojo, who is presumably the creator of the final manuscript. Composed in Arabic, this text begins at the back of the book (for Boilat and his readers). Since Golojo was called back to Fouta, he seems to have left the book unfinished. So his designs for unfinished geometric figures for the manuscript are still visible on the pages in pencil. And indeed, Boilat appears to have pasted his collection of texts over the earlier manuscript in places. One *gris gris*, for instance, is superimposed over Golojo’s sketch, creating an striking palimpsest of textualities.

⁷ For further discussions of *gris gris*, *téere* and other practices of protection and divination, see Sow 2009; Roberts et al. 2003.

⁸ Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that my decision not to reproduce the *gris gris* visually here should not be taken as a foreclosure of the possibilities of discussing Boilat’s gesture. Indeed, I think it is vital to note here, even in passing, Elizabeth Povinelli’s commentary on Michael Taussig’s decision to include an empty square instead of a drawing of an Aboriginal frog totem in his essay, “Maleficium: State Fetishism.” Povinelli writes that “as an ethics of respect” this gesture not to reproduce what would be considered sacrilegious is “unassailable.” But Povinelli points out that this exploration of an “anthropological ethics” could go further, in order “to understand who and what are being protected, saved, and recuperated from the breach and shadow of the settler archive and colonial history.” Povinelli further cautions against “the substitution of a practice of textual deletion, ellipsis, and paraphrase for a fuller social theory of the politics and ethics of alterity and similarity.” (Povinelli 2002, 71–3) While not pretending that my own work here can claim to take up this weighty challenge, I want to signal the importance for this introduction of Povinelli’s thinking on the “radical interpretation” that occurs in moments of incommensurability and “radical linguistic (and social) alterity.” (Povinelli 2001)

⁹ Boilat actually sent a total of three notebooks. The first two are composed of documents meant to detail the dialect of Arabic employed by Trarza in northern Senegal and Mauritania. While these manuscripts seem to have been appreciated by the Society as well, the last notebook (under discussion here) seems to have caused the most excitement.

¹⁰ As in many French colonies prior to the 20th century, there were a variety of racial categorizations and privileges at work in St Louis at the time of Boilat's stay there. *Signares* were an important and relatively economically powerful class of *métis* women in St Louis and Gorée.

¹¹ The letter further states that the documents will be:

soigneusement examinés par les savants qui s'occupent de ces sortes d'idiomes... Les notions que vous voulez bien nous transmettre ont encore plus de prix.... Il nous importe de connaître les affinités qu'ont entre eux les peuples de ces vastes contrées, les nuances qui les distinguent, ou les différences plus ou moins tranchées qui les caractérisent. Chaque nouveau document répand un plus grand jour sur ces affiliations et sur cette diversité d'origine, et de semblables recherches tendent à faciliter nos rapports avec les différentes branches des nations qui avoisinent nos établissements. (Quoted in Boilat 2000, 252–3)

¹² The notebook, whose full title is *Notes du Fouta Toro: Lettres, moeurs, superstitions, chansons du Fouta. Quelques fables de la Gambie chanter [sic] par les Oulofs*, is conserved at the Richelieu location of the Bibliothèque Nationale. I look forward to the further insights of other scholars into this material, since my own account of them is necessarily preparatory and partial. Part of the reason they appear to have disappeared from view has to do with the consolidation of the Society's collections. In 1942, these were absorbed into the collections of the BN. But since the Society's collections are administered by the Department of Maps, they are housed at the Richelieu location, which means they do not show up in indexes of the BN's larger collection at Mitterrand. Though microfilms of the documents exist, you essentially have to know where they are and what they are in order to find them. My own path to finding them is in part contingent on the increasing digitization of the BN's collections, which has the potential to undo some of the confusing separation and consolidation of collections that occurred in the 20th century. After encountering a description of the collection in Boilat's *Esquisses*, I was able to cross-reference the receipt of the collection in digital editions of *Bulletin* of the Society, and then track down the proper reference number in a 1970s catalogue of the Society's holdings. Without the digitization of records, it would likely have taken me months just to establish that the notebook still, in fact, existed in Paris.

¹³ Another likely reason for the collections not being further studied is that scholars with the expertise to read them simply did not exist at the Society in the 1840s.

¹⁴ I am working with Silverstein and Urban's notion of entextualization here, as the "process of rendering a given instance of discourse as text, detachable from its local context." (Urban 1996, 21)

¹⁵ I am, of course, not suggesting that Boilat's enframing of these documents is a definitive transformation of them as objects. What the collection does is propose a new articulation of the nature of the distance between text and reader (which in the cases of some of these artifacts involves them being presented as 'texts' in ways they had not been before).

¹⁶ The frontispiece declares its objects of study to be: *Physionomie du pays – Peuplades – Commerce – Religions – Passé et Avenir – Récit et légendes*. The work is divided into different sections on each area of Senegambia, with corresponding subsections on customs, appearance, etc of the people who inhabit them.

¹⁷ Incidentally, Boilat's *Grammar* won the prize over a dictionary of Serer written by then-governor of Senegal Louis Faidherbe.

¹⁸ While Boilat's ties to the St Louis community and fluency in Wolof made him uniquely qualified to direct the educational system, his efforts to expand it to include a *collège* were met with great resistance by the Frères Pluormel, the Catholic sect who had administered education in the colonies for many decades. The promising African students that were selected for Boilat's *collège* were the same children who would have become the *moniteurs* in the Pluormel system (essentially, the teaching assistants of the Brothers). The opposition of Pluormel to anything but rudimentary education in St Louis led to a power struggle that Boilat eventually lost. His biographers believe that the charges of embezzlement and philandering against Boilat and the other African priests were trumped up, but in 1852 he left St Louis and returned to France, where lived the rest of his life as parish priest in Nantouillet (Seine et Marne), and where he wrote his *Esquisses* and *Grammaire* in a sort of exile. Though the *collège* eventually closed, Boilat's influence would continue to be felt and discussed in the 20th century.

¹⁹ *Premier véritable écrivain du Sénégal par ses Esquisses sénégalaises, premier linguiste, premier historien, premier missiologue et aussi premier artiste africain moderne comme en témoignent les illustrations de son voyage à Joal, il est aussi un précurseur de la première forme de recherche en sciences humaine d'Afrique noire.* (Bouquillon and Cornevin 1981) The frontispiece of their biography also adds

some more ‘firsts’: “*Précurseur sénégalais de la pédagogie, de l’ethnographie, de la linguistique, de l’histoire, de l’art, de la missiologie et des lettres en Afrique.*”

²⁰ While Boilat likely never directly consulted the particular works I am be discussing, he would certainly have had the possibility to read works like them, and they do give an idea of the Society’s practices of knowledge gathering.

²¹ Irvine also points out that many of the early grammars of African languages were written by missionaries who would have been using the same printer for bibles and tracts in many different languages. These early orthographies tend to simplify wherever possible, eliminating diacritics, and so on. As Irvine puts it, “The more missions that could share a press and use the same fonts, the better – or at least the more economical.” This trend shaped how Wolof would be written as well, in some very lasting ways. Boilat’s Grammar, for instance, does not use gemminates (double letters) in his transcriptions of Wolof. Nearly 120 years later, his work was used as precedent and ammunition in the Senegalese government’s censorship of Sembène’s film *Ceddo* for the crime of using two “d”s in its title. (See Chapter 2)

²² Although they were quite happy to portray African speech communities as being “without writing,” many missionaries were aware of the existence of Ajami scripts that had been used for many centuries to transcribe African languages. As his collection indicates, Boilat certainly was. The absence of Ajami from these discussions has less to do with its prevalence than with the audience of missionary and early-colonial tracts. As Irvine puts it, “while the religious works were supposedly destined for an African audience, the more immediate audience was the rank-and-file missionary who was not particularly well-educated and not necessarily linguistically talented.” (Irvine 2001)

²³ One encounters this trope in missionary tracts as well. For example, the 1860 *Catéchisme en Français et en Volof*, a missionary tract for use in Dakar, seems to imagine itself as being intended for a people without writing. And yet one of the verbs it takes as an example to demonstration how verbs are conjugated in Wolof is *bind*. (“Ku la binda?” [Ku la bind?] – Who created you?) In the context of a theological discussion, *bind* means “to create” but it is also commonly used to mean “to write.” This seeming paradox – printing an orthography for a people without writing while using the verb “to write” as a linguistic example – is not, I think, a mere accident. If anything, it recalls Jacques Derrida’s critique of a certain scene in Levi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques*. In the moment in question, Levi-Strauss has been marveling at the fact that the Nambikwara use a word that means “drawing lines” for the act of writing. “It is quite evident,” Derrida wryly observes, “that a literal translation of the words that mean “to write” in the languages of people with writing would also reduce that word to a rather poor gestural signification. [...] As if ‘to write’ in its metaphoric kernel, meant something else. Is not ethnocentrism always betrayed by the haste with which it is satisfied by certain translations or certain domestic equivalents?” (Derrida 1998, 123)

²⁴ Even this position, however, was a departure, since many earlier generations had maintained that African languages were not worth studying at all since they were “wild and without grammar” and thus liable to change and render past data useless. But the authors of early missionary and colonial grammars and collections of folktales argued that African languages’ “wildness” was precisely what made them worth studying. They imagined themselves as botanists studying wild species (a trope which Boilat employs in his grammar). Thus Boilat’s work was part of a much larger reconfiguration in the production of knowledge about African lifeworlds, one that involved a focus on identifying forms (proverbs, folktales) that could be extracted from discourse and practice as ‘texts’ that would serve as specimens for further study by qualified specialists. (Irvine 2001)

It should be noted that all of Boilat’s work does position itself against a certain strain of French racist discourse, which tended to deny the humanity of Africans. Like the other early authors of linguistic work on Wolof (Dard, Roger), Boilat used grammatical study to argue that Africans were just as human as Europeans. In this line of scholarship, the ‘discovery’ of grammar in African languages tends to be staged as a sort of surprise for the reader, with the rhetorical effect of inviting the reader to share this surprise and thereby the recognition Africans are just as human as anyone else. Roger’s account of ‘discovering’ grammar in Wolof, which Boilat quotes, is a prime example. Roger writes, “What a surprise to find so much order, so much method even, though there had been no regulator than nature! So, under the influence of the same organization, all men, without imitating each other, without knowing each other, form their languages after the same principles, just as in every country swallows mechanically construct their nests in the same manner.” (Quoted in Boilat 1858)

²⁵ For example, most pragmatic, indexical features of speech.

²⁶ Similarly, a section of the same guide on gathering folklore advised the traveler that “the most minor historical memories conserved in the legends of savage peoples” were “too often mixed with fables” and only the observer who knew how “to doubt, to examine and, above all, penetrate the character...” could separate historical memory from legend. (Delagrave 1875)

²⁷ Once again, Boilat appears to have had the help of at least one named native informant in assembling these. The songs are described as having been sent to Boilat by “M. Picard Bourneuf Charles, prince du Walo” who will be publishing them later. No further publication seems to have occurred and I have so far been unable to find out much more about Picard. In *Esquisses*, he is described as being the nephew of Ndate-Yàlla, the queen of Walo who made Boilat wait for so long for an audience with her.

²⁸ These portraits, realized with a precise eye for color and composition, have since acquired a life of their own, and one can find them reproduced as the covers of various historical treatises on Senegal, and even occasionally as postcards for sale in Dakar.

²⁹ And indeed this portrait comes with its own secondary gloss, in the form of a legend Boilat appended to it, explaining to the viewer what she was seeing.

³⁰ My reading of this frame in which fetishism can be made manifest is informed by the work of Pietz 1985 and Keane 2007. Keane’s definition of fetishism is particularly resonant with Boilat. He writes “the idea of fetishism concerns the sorting out of potential agents and modes of action in the world [...] an imputation directed at others who have purportedly confounded the proper boundaries between agentive subjects and mere objects. The accusation sorts the universe into things (bodies, rocks) that are material and subject to natural law, and other things (souls, thoughts) that are immaterial and subject to other forces—human agency or divine intervention.” (Keane 2007, 77)

³¹ In the secular colonial school system of the 20th century the aim of French proficiency was the production of a semi-literate corps of workers to serve in the colonial bureaucracy and be reliable intermediaries with the native population. Although the aim of the educational system was very different in this context, one sees a similar anxiety about students “learning only words.”

³² For Boilat, this crisis was especially grave when it involved young women. For Boilat, a young woman who understands French properly can be expected to conduct herself with ‘propriety,’ to understand the “duties of a Christian.” (Boilat 2000)

³² As he put it, “It is through a lack of understanding of French that many young people have gone astray.” (Boilat 2000, 14)

³³ He also warns his audience against speaking to their domestic servants in Wolof. There is a larger discussion to be had about the ways in which Boilat’s linguistic portrait of St Louis is overlaid on class lines. In his address, the figure of the maid seems to be imagined as a vector of vice *and* speech in African languages.

³⁴ *Mariages à la mode du pays* were a category of relationship and legal status in St Louis and Gorée, usually between European men and African women, often *signares*. They often involved cohabitation and produced children, who were sometimes recognized by their fathers. They were also often terminated upon the father’s departure.

³⁵ The figure of the mother is surrounded by a complicated silence in the imaginary of Boilat’s *oeuvre*. According to the *état civil* examined by his biographers, Boilat’s birth mother was Marie Monté, a “freeborn *mulâtresse*” residing in St Louis; next to nothing known about his French father, who may have been a sailor. Although Boilat clearly drew on his connections to the St Louisian community to assemble the material he needed to write his two books, he does not discuss the extent of his own kinship relations. In what is perhaps a significant gesture despite itself, however, the very first portrait Boilat presents in the illustrations that accompany *Esquisses* is of a nameless *signare*.

³⁶ Boilat’s speech was for the population who already frequented French schools. But he was quick to note that the rest of the population would have need of evangelism in indigenous languages. In this respect, he mentions the work of his compatriot, the Abbé Fridoil. Boilat reports that Fridoil was able to draw many new parishioners to his church by adapting the catholic dogma to the tunes of pre-existing Wolof *woy*. Boilat reports with satisfaction that he has heard “in Kayor and Baol, Muslim and idolatrous women and young girls singing with pleasure the catholic dogma.” (Boilat 2000) And yet surely this “success” points also to the very problem that caused Boilat so much consternation with the children who do go to school. They may well be singing Catholic songs in Wolof, but how is a priest to know that they understand what they are singing?

³⁷ One can see this in the colonial schoolteacher's uses of orality in the classroom which I detail in Chapter One, but also in my study of the independence-era Senghor government's attempt to regulate what it called the "savage systems of transcription" in Chapter Two.

Chapter One

¹ See Hemmings 1953, 81, quoted in Prendergast 1992, 68.

² *Education Africaine* was the post-World War II continuation of the *Bulletin de l'Enseignement de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (hereafter: *BEAOF*), a major venue for institutional and pedagogical discourse within the colonial school system.

³ See "Exploitation d'un text..." in *Education Africaine*, 1950. And here is the passage in English translation by Brian Nelson:

From his perch upon a bench, Claude admired the day dawning over the vegetables. The waves of greenery assumed delicate, shadowy hues – pale violet, milky pink, and greenish yellow. [...] bunches of spinach, sorrel, and artichokes, sounded every note in the scale of greens. At the intersection of the Rue des Halles [...] there were enormous white ones, as hard as cannon balls, curly ones with big leaves that made them look like bronze bowls, and red ones which the dawn seemed to transform into magnificent flowers with the hue of wine-dregs, splashed with crimson and dark purple [...] Here and there gleamed the varnished golden-brown of a basket of onions, the blood-red of a heap of tomatoes, the soft yellow of a display of cucumbers, and the deep mauve of aubergines; while large black radishes, laid down in funeral carpets, formed dark patches in the brilliance of the early morning. (É. Zola 2008, 25–26)

⁴ See 'Examens' in *BEAOF*, Avril–Juin 1931, p. 69.

"The solemn opening of the colonial exhibition took place first for the head of state [...] and then the next day for crowds of anonymous visitors. If one is to believe the curiosity and interest generated around world for this grand event, [...] then the success of the endeavor must be judged to have been very great indeed. No expenses have been spared to bring to Vincennes the greatest possible number of people who might profit from this amazing object lesson that has been unfurled before the eyes of the Universe by almost the entire Universe. France can find in this success an affirmation of the value of its methods of colonization [...] Moreover, the inhabitants of its colonies will learn to know, admire and love the nation that protects, enriches and educates them. Thus the year 1931 will be a glorious one for France." (my translation)

⁵ My research into French colonial literary education in West Africa draws on the important work already done on education in a variety of colonial contexts. See Viswanathan 1989; Allan 2008; Desai 2001.

⁶ This research was conducted in the following archives and libraries: Archives Nationales (AN), Dakar; L'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), Dakar; Bibliothèque de l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), Dakar; Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (CAOM), Aix-en-Provence; Bibliothèque Nationale (BN), Paris.

⁷ I am referring to Senghor and Sadju 1970.

⁸ "Knowing something does not mean knowing it by heart; that simply means putting it in the larder of our memory. That which we rightly know can be deployed without looking back at the model, without turning our eyes back toward the book." (Montaigne 1993, 171)

⁹ The *Ecole des otages et et fils de chefs* was created in the mid-19th-century by the colonial governor Faidherbe to provide free instruction in French language and culture for the sons of prominent Senegambian families. As the name indicates, the students were also being held as hostages to ensure their kin's cooperation with St Louis. The school was closed in 1872 but later reopened by Faidherbe as the *Ecole des fils de chefs et d'interprètes*. It eventually became the Ecole William Ponty, which is discussed elsewhere in this chapter. (Lehmil 2007, 163–164)

¹⁰ For a discussion of the context of the *dictées* written by the hostages, see Bouche 1975, 333.

¹¹ For an overview of the Colonial School system in its first decade, see Conklin 1997, 77–81.

¹² A concurrent project of the colonial state was the push to regulate the Quran schools which had existed in Senegambia for many centuries. The AOF instituted literacy tests for Quran school teachers, and tried to enforce the teaching of French as part of the daily program. The culmination of these efforts was the creation of a state-run "Medersa" in St Louis, which was modeled on early experiments in Algeria. The

Medersa foregrounded the study of Arabic as a living language (as opposed to a divine one), and had the goal of gradually minimizing religious study in favor of the study of literature. As Mamadou Ndiaye has argued, though the Medersa in St Louis eventually closed, it had by that time produced a new generation of Islamic educators who went on to found a new kind of Quran school across Senegal. (M. Ndiaye 1985) Again, memory was a crucial trope in calls to regulate Quran schools. In this case, the goal was the suppression of the practice of teaching students to memorize the entire Quran. For centuries in West Africa, memorizing the Quran was the initial discipline to which Quran students submitted. Often, only those who had committed the Quran to memory could then proceed to study the Islamic sciences, including Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*) as well as grammar, rhetoric, history, literature and so on. In Wolof, the student who has committed the Quran to memory would be called the *kaang*. As Ware and Launay have argued, this distinction was highly regarded, but not as a feat of memorization (as colonial educators saw it), but rather as an ethical discipline of coming to embody the divine word. (Launay and Ware 2009) In any case, the practice of memorizing the Quran was not all that was taught in these *daaras*, though it was certainly what French colonial education defined itself against. As Ndiaye, Kâ and others have shown, centers of religious learning such as Pir and Cokki – deeply enmeshed in the Trans-Saharan book trade – had for centuries been radial hubs in regional networks of Islamic learning and science. (Ka 1982; M. Ndiaye 1985) Thus the heavy focus of colonial pedagogy discourse on the practice of memorization alone needs to be understood as part of an attempt to define the Quran school only in terms of this devotional practice, thereby effacing the important social and scholarly functions of these very venerable educational institutions.

¹³ Ajami literacy had a complex and antagonistic relationship to the elaboration of colonial modes of authorship and reading, partly for the obvious reason that it was important for the self-understanding of the colonial classroom that it alone be the unique site from which ‘literacy’ was disseminated. Nonetheless, the fact that a sizeable number of Africans could read and write in Ajami scripts was noticed over and over again in French colonial pedagogical discourse, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. For instance, in his survey of the Medersa of St Louis, when Delafosse writes the term *seriñ* (marabout) in Arabic, he uses a modified *jiim* character for the *ñ* phoneme. This is a Wolofal convention, since the Arabic alphabet has no *ñ* phoneme. Thus Delafosse clearly had to have had some knowledge of the conventions of Ajami scripts, a familiarity he betrays unintentionally. What is curious, however, is even when colonial authors noted that Africans read and wrote in Ajami scripts, this observation often did not serve to unsettle their portrayals of Africans as being “without writing.” Ajami literacy was therefore, in the imaginary of colonial pedagogy, often a less-than-literacy. In some ways, the legacy of this is still seen in the not uncommon equation made in literacy campaigns between “literacy” and French literacy. For a fuller discussion of Ajami, see Ngom 2004; Cisse 2006; O. Kane 2003.

¹⁴ For a discussion of *association* as policy and practice see Wilder 2005, 52–54.

¹⁵ For an overview of the important differences between the three types of primary schools (urban, rural and village) in the initial 1903 incarnation of the AOF school system, see Conklin 1997, 79–81.

¹⁶ See Conklin’s discussion of the Colonial Administration’s emphasis on ensuring that only “practical training” was taking place at all levels of instruction – even the postprimary ones – with the aim of producing a body of (semi-)literate workers. “The school system and curriculum conceived in 1903 reflected the Government General’s overall philosophy of how best to move African society along the path to civilization. The accent upon reading and writing at the regional school level was designed to guarantee the federation the literate auxiliary personnel that it needed to embark on a program of mutual beneficial *mise en valeur*. Instruction of the mass of Africans was to contribute to the same end by teaching them basic skills that would help raise their productivity.” (Conklin 1997, 81)

¹⁷ Note that the passage on the colonial exhibition quoted earlier actually describes the exhibition itself as an object lesson, which was a fairly common way of referring to it in the promotional literature. This *mise en abyme* of the object lesson in the colonial imaginary seems to have been picked up on by at least one Senegalese novelist. In *Mirages de Paris* by Ousmane Socé Diop, the protagonist travels to France where he ends up playing himself in one of the human zoos that were a feature of the exhibition. In this sense, he comes to embody the object of the object lesson.

¹⁸ Here is the full passage:

Comment l’auteur s’y est-il pris pour faire naître cette impression? Voilà ce qu’il faut s’ingénier à faire trouver, voilà ce qu’il y a de plus important et de plus profitable dans la lecture expliquée. [...] Comment tel auteur s’est-il, aussi parfaitement, imposé à ma “conviction”? Si nous

négligeons cette étude de la technique de l'écrivain, nous manquons le but principale de notre enseignement. Que dirons-nous d'un professeur de peinture qui enseignerait minutieusement la composition des couleurs utilisées par un artiste et qui se tairait sur les caractéristiques de son art? Evitons d'agir comme ce professeur.

¹⁹ Here is the full passage:

Pour éviter le verbalisme et les défauts d'esprit qu'il entraîne, nous n'enseignerons que le français usuel, la langue de tous les jours, ou, du moins, nous ne passerons à des exercices plus délicats que le jour ou nos élèves auront l'esprit parfaitement mure et manieront sans hésitation la syntaxe et le vocabulaire courants. Nous élimerons avec soin de nos leçons les termes abstraits, les mots figurés; il faudra qu'à travers nos leçons de langage où de rédaction on aperçoive immédiatement la réalité. En même temps, et sans attendre d'être parvenus à des exercices difficiles, nous entreprendrons une lutte constante et méthodique contre les défauts courants de l'esprit de nos élèves. Nous relèverons au passage les moindres traces d'emphase, d'exagération, d'imprécision, de prétention, de psittacisme. Nous exigerons qu'ils sachent toujours exactement ce qu'ils disent et que l'expression ne dépasse pas leur pensée.

²⁰ Here is full passage:

[I]l existe une langue courante, différente de la langue littéraire, et c'est la première qu'il faut enseigner à nos enfants, puisque nous n'avons pas l'ambition de les transformer tous en écrivains [...] Au lieu de l'être pensant, il n'y a plus qu'une machine scolarisée. Nos élèves deviennent incapables d'initiative, parce que nous prenons l'habitude de vouloir pour eux. Ce sont des récepteurs inertes, et de mauvais récepteurs. Ils suivront plus tard aveuglement tous les mots d'ordre qu'on leur donnera. Ils sont mures pour subir les contraintes de tous les ordres de l'existence. Que nous sommes loin de notre idéal d'éducation démocratique. Il faut réagir contre cette tendance, écouter la voix qui parle en chacun de vos élèves, les faire s'exprimer le plus librement possible. [...] Certes, il y a le problème de la discipline, et il n'est pas question, sous prétexte de spontanéité, de laisser nos élèves faire ce qu'ils veulent: il faut un pouvoir qui légifère, qui punisse même quand c'est nécessaire. Mais il faut essayer de respecter la personnalité de chacun. C'est difficile, mais combien plus intéressant que notre enseignement dogmatique! L'introduction de l'étude du milieu local vous y aidera en partie: c'est déjà un grand pas en avant que d'intéresser l'élève à tout ce qui l'entoure, et cette étude peut susciter ou ranimer les enthousiasmes.

²¹ This was the required composition topic for students seeking the Diplôme supérieur d'études primaires in 1913: "Dites quels moyens vous employez ou vous vous proposez d'employer pour faire connaître et aimer la France aux enfants des écoles de village." (Anon. 1913)

²² "Decrivez l'habitation de vos parents. Quels sentiments vous inspire-t-elle?" (Anon. 1921); "Le dimanche au village. Ce qu'on y fait, ce qu'on y voit, ce qu'on y entend" (Bamako, 1924) and "Vous avez appris des fables. Dites celle que vous préférez et racontez-là en phrases simples" (Dakar, 1925). The latter two are from a collection of colonial exam topics included in *BEAOF*, 1925. This issue also reprints many of the passages used for writing lessons.

²³ This development could also be understood as the system's gradual realization that the colonial classroom was powerless to simply efface orality and had instead better try to incorporate and "modernize" it.

²⁴ For a helpful discussion of the Ecole Coloniale, see Wilder 2003. For an overview of the institution itself, see Cohen 1971.

²⁵ The extent of what was *not* collected in the colonial classroom is far too broad to elaborate, but just in passing one could mention that genres with specific contexts of performance were highly unlikely to be collected as tokens of the "African mentality" in the way that folktales were. While epics were collected by school teachers (among others) in the colonial period, they do not seem to have been used in the classroom with anywhere near the frequency of other, simpler forms.

²⁶ Here is the way the *BEAOF* frames the activity:

Pourquoi ne pas contribuer aussi à l'accroissement de nos connaissances sur la géographie, l'ethnographie, l'histoire naturelle, le Folk-Lore du pays? Voilà un violon d'Ingres qui en vaut bien un autre. Mais, direz-vous, il faut pour cela être spécialiste, avoir lu de doctes ouvrages, introuvables ici, connaître des langues indigènes ou les vocabulaires secrets des savants docteurs.

Que non pas, à condition de rester modestes. Il suffit, selon ses goûts, de regarder autour de soi, d'observer avec méthode et sans parti pris, de ne pas se perdre dans le vague des hypothèses et des théories générales, d'apporter son humble pierre au commun édifice. Nous serons ici à votre disposition pour vous donner les renseignements utiles, nous publierons vos essais. Pour commencer, pour fournir un cadre aux observations, voici un premier questionnaire sur le Folk-Lore. Il nous a été communiqué par le directeur de l'Institut d'Ethnologie M Levy-Bruhl dont les savants travaux sont connus du monde entier. Il a été établi par M. Mauss. Le folk-lore est d'accès relativement facile aux broussards et à nos instituteurs indigènes. Il y faut de la curiosité, le souci du réel, et par dessus tout, l'inflexible volonté de bannir l'imagination.

And here is the citation from the guide itself, which seems to have been written by Marcel Mauss:

Il faut dépouiller sa personnalité pour retrouver des pensées qu'on n'a pas naturellement. Les phénomènes sociaux sont difficiles à noter. La plupart de ces faits sont inconscients. (my emphases)

²⁷ Georges Hardy describes the consequences for teachers who were not up to date on the BEAOF: “*en 1917, on trouvait encore des instituteurs qui ignoraient l'existence [du BEAOF] et enseignaient à leur fantaisie; en bonne justice, il eût fallu les rétrograder. Que dirait-on d'un employé de chemin de fer qui ne tiendrait pas compte d'une modification de l'horaire des trains.*” (Hardy 1918, 24) Naturally, we should be wary of taking Hardy at his word and avoid assuming that the Bulletin was read assiduously by every teacher in the system. Nevertheless, his warning does indicate the importance given to awareness of and participation in the knowledge-generating activities of the Bulletin within the institution. The comparison of the journal to a train schedule which all operators had to follow is indicative of its centrality to the self-imagined of the colonial school system as a modernising institution.

²⁸ In 1913, fables were collected on the exam for the Certificat d'aptitude à l'Enseignement in response to this composition question: “*Rapportez un conte ou une légende de votre pays dont les personnages soient des animaux.*” (Anon. 1913) Later that year, the fables were edited into a collection by Monod and Kanté and published in BEAOF with an introduction by Hardy. Hardy acknowledges that the collection had its origin in the exams and explained the strategy of using folklore:

pour faire l'éducation d'un peuple il faut le bien comprendre, et les éducateurs surtout ne doivent rien négliger pour pénétrer le peuple qu'ils ont à instruire. [...] Il est un champ très vaste qui s'ouvre à la curiosité et à l'observation de l'éducateur, c'est l'étude des traditions populaires, des usages, des fables, des légendes, des proverbes qui reflètent la mentalité de la race noire. Le Folklore Indigène est en effet très riche, et ceux qui considèrent toujours les Noirs comme des demi sauvages ne se doutent pas que ce peuple possède, faute d'écriture, une littérature orale très vaste.

[...] La fable, racontée en français, constitue un excellent exercice de langage. Traduite par écrit, elle devient un devoir de rédaction des mieux choisis. Ecrite par le maître, en un style simple et correct, elle constitue, quand elle n'est pas trop longue, un exercice de récitation des plus profitables. (Hardy, Monod, and Kanté 1913; my emphasis)

Hardy concludes by calling calls for native teachers to collect more fables “*directement de la bouche même des anciens, des griots, etc.*”

²⁹ (Anon. 1913)

³⁰ Here is a description of the activity:

Pour lutter contre la manie scolaire – si fréquent – de la lecture et de la récitation monotones il est un procédé qui nous a donné des résultats remarquables et que nous croyons devoir signaler à titre documentaire. Nous faisons venir en classe un conteur indigène, un ‘griot,’ qui, dans le dialecte local, racontait aux enfants, avec sa mimique habituelle – si merveilleusement expressive – une fable du pays aussi vivante que possible. Les élèves redisaient la même fable avec les mêmes gestes, les mêmes intonations; puis il la lisait ou la récitait dans sa traduction française. Ils introduisaient alors aisément dans cette lecture ou cette récitation [...] le ‘sens du théâtre’ qui leur sont naturel.

³¹ While the Cahiers Ponty are housed at IFAN, access to them has historically been closely guarded. I am grateful to the Director of IFAN, M. Papa Ndiaye, for permission to work in this archive. When I conducted this research in 2010, the Cahiers were in the process of being reclassified, so the references below may no longer match.

³² Here is the full description:

l'élève devrait faire appel avant tout à son expérience personnelle et non à des travaux extérieurs [...] obliger nos élèves à l'observation précise, à la description exacte de faits connus, familiers. Bon moyen d'imposer à l'esprit de notre jeune instituteur une discipline sérieuse, de contenir l'imagination verbale, d'éviter les fausses descriptions littéraires. [...] tourner les regards de nos futurs maîtres vers la connaissance rationnelle de leur milieu originel. C'est bien là en effet une condition de l'efficacité de notre action éducatrice. Dans ce retour sympathique aux faits de la vie indigène, nos instituteurs trouveront avec le respect des traditions vivantes, le sentiment des transformations nécessaires. (my emphasis)

³³ Source listed as "Rapports jusqu'en 1948" in Archives Nationales. Quoted in (Afanou and Togbé Pierre 1967, III).

³⁴ For example, Baba Ndiaye's Cahier begins by describing his departure from home for the Quran school, a scene which is evoked in highly sentimental prose that would, in theory, be disallowed by the assignment as too literary, but which seems to have been, in practice, very common in these memoir/ethnographies:

Petit garçon de huit ans, je quitte ma famille, maman qui fond en larmes, pour l'école coranique. [...] Mon cœur ulcéré, comblé de chagrin et j'éclate en sanglots. Plus de père! Plus de mère! Je suis perdu! Je suis captif! Une indifférence inhumaine répond à mes lamentations. (B. Ndiaye n.d., 34–5)

³⁵ For example, Babakar Sedikh Diouf, writing of his own socialization as a child, faults it for not promoting the "flowering of the child's personality."

Cependant [cette éducation] n'a ni un programme défini, ni un emploi de temps, ni même une théorie pédagogique pour les éducateurs. Son éducation n'est ni complète ni méthodique. Tantôt autoritaire et tantôt attrayante, cette éducation ne donne au "comment?" et aux "pourquoi?" des enfants qu'une explication fort pauvre qui s'appuie d'ailleurs le plus souvent sur la superstition et la mysticisme [...] Donc éducation autoritaire et dogmatique, signe d'une méconnaissance de l'enfance, ne favorisant point l'épanouissement d'une personnalité naissante et se confondant dans sa majeure partie à un dressage, à un montage de mécanismes. (B. S. Diouf n.d., 11)

This particular turn of phrase that describes French education as promoting the child's "personality" occurs in several other Cahiers. For instance, when Cheikhou Tidiane calls for an expansion of French education:

pour libérer une jeunesse opprimée, l'éclairer, défendre sa personnalité et lui donner une idée nette de ses devoirs d'homme vivant dans le monde moderne. (C. T. Dieng n.d., 25–6)

³⁶ In Human Rights Inc, Joseph Slaughter provides a helpful summary of the genre: "we could provisionally gloss [the Bildungsroman] as the didactic story of an individual who is socialized in the process of learning for oneself what everyone else (including the reader) presumably already knows." (Slaughter 2007, 3)

³⁷ Here, for example, is how Baba Ndiaye contrasts the Quran school with the French school:

A l'école coranique, la mémoire compte plus que l'intelligence. Il ne s'agit point en effet de comprendre les textes, mais de les savoir sur le bout des doigts au point de les avoir constamment présent dans la mémoire: c'est l'enseignement dogmatique. (B. Ndiaye n.d., 46)

Mamadou Dia describes the Quran school in similar terms.

Cet enseignement analytique routinier et autoritaire s'adresse presque uniquement à la mémoire auditive, moins à l'intelligence. L'élève récite ainsi sans comprendre. [...] Cette méthode a un gros inconvénient car elle porte l'enfant même arrivé à l'école primaire à ne faire appel qu'à sa mémoire. (Dia 1946, 7)

(Incidentally, I am not certain whether this the same Mamadou Dia who later became Senegal's first Prime Minister, who did indeed attend Ponty; further research is required.)

In Amadou Sylla's notebook, the negative effects of the Quran school are even more stark:

L'enfant à l'école coranique [...] finit certes par avoir implanté en lui un très profond sentiment religieux. Mais le sentiment fait de lui un fanatique aveugle et le prédispose à la réaction et à la guerre sainte. [...] Enfin la formation morale ainsi conçue [...] constitue un très sérieux obstacle à la fréquentation de l'école française partant à celle de l'évolution des masses de la contrée. Enfin l'individu qui a subi un pareil dressage manque d'indépendance parce que dépourvu d'esprit critique. Il demeure toute sa vie esclave des croyances et des préjugés. (Sylla 1946, 18, 25)

³⁸ For instance, in Mody Diagne's Cahier, next to a discussion of marabouts an annoyed *maître* has scribbled: "*mal expliquée*." (M. Diagne 1940, 3)

³⁹ Heeding Priya Joshi's critique of Gauri Viswanathan's work on literary study in British India, I want to note that the colonial classroom was not the single origin from which new modes of reading and writing emanated. (Joshi 2002, 5–9) Rather, an emerging field of printed, popular texts written by and for Africans was influential in diffusing and transforming the new practices of reading and authorship. One illustrative example is the monthly periodical *Bingo*, which was edited by the Senegalese novelist and politician Ousmane Socé Diop. Unlike the more (politically or aesthetically) radical francophone periodicals written by colonized intellectuals such as *La Race nègre* and *L'Étudiant noir*, *Bingo* addressed a more popular audience – both in West Africa and among African students in Europe. *Bingo* made use of many of the genres of writing common to colonial classrooms and pedagogical journals – pseudo-monographs on particular "ethnic" groups, transcribed and translated folktales, etc. – since these were in large measure the colonially-authorized modes of authorship for Africans in French in this period. But we can also see *Bingo*'s re-circulation and serialization of folktales as an exploration of what such genres might make possible in a different context.

Because *Bingo* was actively trying to reach a broad and diasporic francophone African public, its editors tried to position the magazine as being for a mass readership that was not necessarily literate. One of its most popular features was a gallery of reader-submitted photo portraits – since portrait photographers either itinerant or studio-based were working across AOF in this period. (Bajorek 2010) The feature was called "Nos Lecteurs" (Our Readers). Many "readers" of *Bingo* who may not have been "literate" in the narrow sense submitted their photos in order to see images of themselves alongside photos of other Africans, which were presented in a collage format in each issue. This feature seems to have been incredibly popular (the editorial board was inundated with images sent in from all over the federation) but also controversial, with many letters to the editor objecting to the way the feature was turning *Bingo* into "a magazine for illiterates." In colonial regimes of perception, photography was likely understood as a "realist" mode of representing the world, and *Bingo*'s heavy use of it seems to have allowed it to pass colonial censors. But *Bingo*'s editors and readers also seem to have found in photography a richly unstable mode of representation whose representational volatility could be a source of new modes of identification and address.

⁴⁰ As I mentioned earlier, many of the first generations of francophone African authors worked as teachers in the system and many more passed through its classrooms. I want to be clear that I am not therefore suggesting that this determined their works any teleological way, but I do want to see if reading early francophone literature in dialogue with this history might allow us to follow threads that might not be attended to otherwise.

⁴¹ Beti writes, "*univers idyllique, optimisme de grands enfants, fêtes stupidement interminables, initiations de Carnaval, circoncisions, excisions, superstitions [...] Laye aborde bien les thèmes qui auraient dû donner de la valeur à son récit, mais pour les considérer dans une optique empruntée à je ne sais quels Contes de la brousse et de la forêt ou quel Mamadou et Bineta devenus grands.*" (Beti 2007, 28)

⁴² See King 2003.

⁴³ "What were those eyes really looking at? I don't know. The surroundings? Perhaps! Perhaps those eyes were not looking at anything; perhaps it was not looking anything visible that made them so faraway and almost absent." (my translation)

⁴⁴ "They seem unbelievable to me! They are unbelievable! [...] But it is enough to remind myself of what I saw, what my eyes saw. Can I doubt the testimony of my own eyes?" (My translation)

⁴⁵ Despite his ambivalence here, elsewhere in the notebook Dieng is more emphatic in his call for modernization:

Quant de parler de progrès, essayons de nous affranchir de cet esclavage auquel nous condamnons certaines traditions. C'est sans doute un travail long et pénible, qui passe inaperçu dans les grands problèmes qui nous occupent, mais qu'il faut réaliser si nous voulons qu'il fleurisse sur cette terre d'Afrique une humanité meilleure. (C. T. Dieng n.d., 47–8)

⁴⁶ Novels that center around protagonists who reflect colonial (mis-)education back onto their communities of origin are common in independence-era francophone fiction. See, for example, *Mission Terminée* by Mongo Beti, *Une vie de Boy* by Ferdinand Oyono, and *La Rue case nègres* by Joseph Zobel.

⁴⁷ Here is the English translation, by Katherine Woods:

I don't know any too well. Perhaps it was with their alphabet. [...] I remained for a long time under the spell of those signs and those sounds which constitute the structure and the music of their language. When I learned to fit them together to form words, [...] my happiness knew no further limit. [...] I had interrupted my studies [at the Quran school] at the very moment when [my teacher] was about to initiate me at last into the rational understanding of what was up to then I had done no more than recite – with wonder, to be sure. With these new skills I was suddenly entering, all on one floor, a universe which was, at the very first, one of marvellous comprehension and total communion. [...] But they – they interrupted us, and undertook to transform me in their image. Progressively, they brought me [away] from the heart of things, and accustomed me to live at a distance from the world. (C. H. Kane 1972, 159–160)

⁴⁸ The alienation that Kane's main character experiences is, of course, not necessarily representative of the vastly varied lived experiences of those who attended both Quran and French schools. For a thoughtful history of the *longue durée* of Quran schools in Senegambia (including the way they are depicted in *L'Aventure Ambiguë* and the *Cahiers Ponty*) see Ware 2004.

⁴⁹ “This word was not like other words. [...] The Word of God flowed pure and limpid from his fervent lips. There was a murmur in his aching head. He contained within himself the totality of the world, the visible and the invisible, its past and its future. This word which he was bringing forth in pain was the architecture of the world – it was the world itself.” (C. H. Kane 1972, 4)

⁵⁰ Here is the exchange in English:

“You claim, said the President, to be the author of *The Slave Ship Sirius*? Could you then recite for me a passage from the book? Your choice.’ [...] ‘How many days did it take you to learn it?’ asked the President. Falla [...] replied with contempt, ‘I did not learn it in prison. I tell you that I wrote it... I wrote it.’” (my translation)

⁵¹ Here is the song in English:

“I seem to recall a recitation that I learned at school.
 ‘The dedication of the Senegalese *tirailleurs*
 To their leaders is worthy of admiration.
 These good people give themselves entirely
 To he who commands them...”
 I abbreviate (can't remember)
 “... The officer cannot forget the look
 These men gave as they fell
 Never to rise again. It is a true
 French... brigade.... that we have.
 One could not use it otherwise
 Than in service to the Fatherland.’
 Now how's that for a clear education!” (my translation)

⁵² “I dedicate this book to my mother, though she does not know how to read. Knowing she can run her fingers over the pages is enough to comfort me.” (my translation)

⁵³ Here is the full passage:

Et Florent regardait les grandes Halles sortir de l'ombre, sortir du rêve, où il les avait vues, allongées à l'infini leurs palais à jour. Elles se solidifiaient, d'un gris verdâtre, plus géantes encore, avec leur mâture prodigieuse, supportant les nappes sans fin de leurs toits. Elles entassaient leurs masses géométriques; et, quand toutes les clartés intérieures furent éteintes, qu'elles baignèrent dans le jour levant, carrées, uniformes, elles apparurent comme une machine moderne, hors de toute mesure, quelque machine à vapeur, quelque chaudière destinée à la digestion d'un peuple, gigantesque ventre de métal, boulonné, rivé, fait de bois, de verre et de fonte, d'une élégance et d'une puissance de moteur mécanique, fonctionnant là, avec la chaleur du chauffage, l'étourdissement, le branle furieux des roues. (E. Zola 1960, 627)

And here is the translation:

Florent watched Les Halles emerge slowly from the shadows, from the dreamland in which he had seen them, stretching out like an endless series of open palaces. Greenish-gray in colour, they looked more solid now, and even more gigantic, with their amazing mast-like columns supporting the great expanse of roofs. They rose up in geometrically shaped masses; and when all the inner

lights had been extinguished and the square, uniform buildings were bathed in the light of dawn, they seemed like some vast modern machine, a steam engine or a cauldron supplying the digestive needs of a whole people, a huge metal bellow, bolted and riveted, constructed of wood, glass, and iron, with the elegance and power of a machine working away with fiery furnaces and wildly turning wheels. (É. Zola 2008, 24–25)

⁵⁴ Furthermore, Zola's experimental novel was roughly contemporaneous with the rise of the *leçon de choses* in the Republican classroom, and one could obviously say more about the interplay between the classroom and the naturalist novel as experimental spaces in which one was supposed to simply introduce a new element and then intuit its function and the operation of the system in which it was embedded.

⁵⁵ This scenario seems especially likely because the passage used in the lesson has been subjected to many small edits that differentiate it from the text in the original novel. The edits, overall, seem designed to make the passage less of an excerpt of a larger work and more of a stand-alone example of virtuous prose. For example, the second sentence, "Il força son compagnon à admirer le jour se levant sur les légumes," vanishes in the classroom version of the text. In the original novel, it serves to remind the reader that the panorama is, in fact, being seen by two spectators – Claude, the painter; and Florent, the fugitive and hapless socialist who is, at the very moment he observes all this food, doubled over with hunger.

Chapter Two

¹ Negritude was a literary and intellectual movement begun in Paris the 1920s and 30s by a group of black students from the francophone colonies – Léopold Senghor from Senegal, Aimé Césaire from Martinique, and Leon Damas from Guiana. The group's synthesis of modernist and surrealist poetics with a staunch anti-colonial stance was enormously influential in later francophone literature. The poetry of Senghor and Césaire, in particular, circulated widely in the African diaspora and Left avant-garde circles in the mid-twentieth century, and is a common point of reference in the intellectual climate surrounding the struggles for African decolonization. Both Césaire and Senghor eventually entered politics. Senghor was a deputy representing Senegal in the French National Assembly prior to independence. After independence, he became Senegal's first president – a post he held from 1960 to 1980.

The Negritude movement was retrospectively baptized in 1948 by Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to a foundational anthology of francophone poetry edited by Senghor. Quite a bit of critical ink has been spilled trying to analyze the ideology of the movement. Much of the early debate centered around trying to decide whether the movement had made essentialist, racializing claims about the unity of black lived experience, and if so whether and how that mattered. Many studies also focused on the differences between Césaire's and Senghor's formulations of Negritude. For a helpful overview of the controversies surrounding Negritude, see Irele 1986. I am not going to rehearse any of the classic arguments about Negritude here, for the simple reason that most of them study Negritude mainly as a theoretical or aesthetic construct. For the writers and filmmakers studied in this chapter, Negritude was not a theoretical object but the *de facto* cultural policy of the Senegalese state during Senghor's presidency. My concern is with how Negritude operated in practice as a hegemonic discourse in the Senegalese cultural field that often controlled access to funding and training, as well as publication and performance. For more on Negritude as cultural policy, see Harney 2004.

² The poet U Tam'si said it made him feel like "[the critics] were the doctors and [he was] the patient."

³ I am focusing on Sembène and Diop's 1963 exchange because it seems to condense one central problematic that faced Wolof-language writers and filmmakers in the 1950s-70s: namely, how to answer Diop's challenge to "say it in Wolof." I want to be clear, though, that I am not positioning this interaction as the moment of origin for modern Wolof literatures. Vocal advocacy for Wolof-language literature began to take shape almost a decade earlier, with the publication of *Nations nègres et culture* by the Senegalese intellectual (and, later, politician) Cheikh Anta Diop. The broad aim of *Nations* was to demolish the cultural and racial supremacist foundations of European imperialism. The work is now often remembered for its argument that the Wolof language and ethnicity (and, indeed, Africans as a whole) are descended from ancient Egypt. The racial underpinnings of Diop's argument have since met with skepticism, but his cultural, literary, and linguistic interventions made him an intellectual touchstone in Senegal and for Wolof writers in particular. This is due in part to the way that Diop sought to demonstrate in *Nations* the possibility and, indeed, inevitability of a "complete modern literature" in Wolof. Nestled in the middle of the tome is a

section on “Developing National Languages.” “African languages,” Diop writes, “are far from being afflicted with a ‘natural poverty,’ and all that remains is to apply ourselves in an effort comparable with that which was applied to Western languages, so that [African languages] are at the level of the exigencies of modern life.” Such ‘development,’ he contends, is “inseparable from translations from foreign works of all kinds [...] and it is inseparable as well from the creation of a modern African literature which will necessarily be educative, militant and essentially destined for the masses.” He proceeds to illustrate this proposition with a series of translations from French into Wolof, followed by a Wolof poem. The texts he translates are a French version of Einstein’s theory of relativity, an excerpt from Corneille’s *Horace*, and the text of *La Marseillaise*. Through these translations, Diop seeks to demonstrate that Wolof can represent some very visible emblems of Western science and French national pride simply by transforming its existing vocabulary to match the “exigencies of modern life.” (C. A. Diop 2000, 405–450) While I do not have the space to adequately discuss and unpack Diop’s pioneering work in *Nations*, it is fair to say that it is considered to be a pivotal moment by the subsequent tradition of modern Wolof writers. For a discussion of Diop and Senghor as two poles of the independence-era Senegalese cultural field, see B. B. Diop 2006, 89–134. For an insightful reading of Diop’s thought and its complicated reception in Senegalese intellectual life, see Diouf and Mbodj 1987.

⁴ Ousmane Sembène was born in 1923 in Ziguinchor, in the south of Senegal. He was expelled early from school and worked several manual labor jobs before being drafted to fight for France in World War II. He was largely self-educated. He emigrated to Marseille in the late 1940s to look for employment; there he worked as a dockworker and was active in the CGT. Throughout the 50s Sembène wrote a series of iconic realist novels, beginning with *Le Docker Noir* (1956) and including *O Pays, mon beau peuple* (1957) and *Les bouts de bois de dieu* (1960). He also composed shorter works of fiction such *Le Mandat* and *Vehi-Ciosane* (1965). In the early ‘60s, dissatisfied at the limited ability of literature to address a broader African public, Sembène decided to start making films. Rather than go through French system of becoming an accredited director, he applied for and received a grant to study filmmaking at the Gorki studios in Moscow. He began with a series of shorts made in French -- *Borom Sarret* (1963), *Niaye* (1964) and *La Noire De...* (1966). By the late 60s, he was making films mainly in African languages, beginning with *Mandabi* (1967), and including *Emitai* (1971), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977), and *Guelwaar* (1992). His last film was 2004’s *Moolaadé*. Sembène died in 2007. Gadjigo 2010 is a very helpful biography.

⁵ Born in 1933 in Bignona, Cheikh Aliou Ndao is a prolific writer best known for the 1967 play *L’Exil d’Albourny*, which was performed in Senegal, France, and Belgium and collected the top prize at the first Panafrican arts festival in Algiers in 1968. Ndao began writing poetry in Wolof while completing his secondary education in Grenoble in the 1950s. Upon his return to Senegal, Ndao began work on a novel in Wolof, *Buur Tilleen*, which he finished in 1967. Unable to find a publisher, he rewrote the novel as *Buur Tilleen: Roi de la Medina* and it was published by *Présence Africaine* in 1972. The Wolof version finally appeared some 30 years later. Since *Buur Tilleen*, Ndao has written many plays and novels – including another one in Wolof entitled *Mbaam Akimoo*, which again appeared first in French as *Mbaam Dictateur*. For a helpful overview of Ndao’s career see Gierczynski-Bocande 2005.

⁶ I am using “field” in Bourdieu’s sense here.

⁷ Wolof and six other languages were declared “national languages” immediately following independence. This was to afford them some official recognition, but also to distinguish them from the “official language,” which remained French.

⁸ Senghor’s speech, entitled “La littérature africaine d’expression française,” was published in the official transcript of the conference. (Université de Dakar 1965) It was also included in the first volume of his collected writings, *Liberté I*. (Senghor 1964, 398–402)

⁹ *Politesse* and *honnêteté* refer to the French tradition of courtly behavior and sociability which in English is often translated as civility. The citation itself – unattributed in Senghor’s speech – is from Jean Guéhenno, a French writer of the early middle of the 20th century whose work does not seem to be as widely read anymore. Senghor was apparently quite fond of this particular phrase, and he was apt to trot it out nearly every time he was called upon to justify his (or his government’s) francophilia. It is interesting to note that Senghor’s citational style – his habit of quoting authors in passing, whether attributed by name or not – seems to contradict his own hyperbolic claims of the clarity, order, transparency, and universality of French as a language. Rather, what seems to be partly at issue in Senghor’s partiality for French is his fondness for a certain *style of writing*, one in which the author constantly re-situates his discourse in a web

of quotations that indexes a certain presumed educational and class background. The clarity of this style, then, depends in some measure on an audience that is familiar with the field of texts Senghor is citing. We might be tempted to say that for all Senghor's appeals to embodied experience as the basis of his aesthetics, what his rhetoric performs for the uninitiated is not clarity, but rather distinction.

¹⁰ The article in question is "Le Français, langue de culture." (Senghor 1964, 358–363)

¹¹ Senghor's schematism of African and European languages also clearly takes place in a highly gendered imaginary that would benefit from further analysis.

¹² As he never tired of reminding his critics, Senghor had suggested teaching in African languages all the way back in 1937. But making the prediction that Senegal would one day teach in African languages did not have the same effect in 1963 or 1977 as it had in 1937. It does not seem to have been the case that Senghor was ever publicly against teaching in African languages, but one may still observe that for the duration of his presidency (1960–1980) this goal was not systematically pursued. The state did not attempt to introduce instruction in national languages until 1978, but then only in primary education and the project was not sustained. (See Prinz 1996; A. Fal 2007)

¹³ This was not the first time these languages had been transcribed, though it was the first time they were codified by a modern state.

¹⁴ The full title of the Decree is "Loi N° 77-55 du 10 Avril 1977 Relative à l'application de la réglementation en matière de transcription des langues." Here is the relevant passage in the original French: "A l'heure où une littérature et une presse écrite en langue nationale prennent leur essor dans notre pays pour la première fois d'une manière significative, il est impossible pour les pouvoirs publics de tolérer que s'instaurent dans ce domaine si sensible de la langue, l'anarchie et la confusion et que l'on assiste à l'éclosion et à la profusion de systèmes "sauvages" de transcription des langues nationales ne relevant que de l'individualisme de leurs auteurs et de l'improvisation."

¹⁵ By the time of the *Ceddo* controversy, the authorities had already used the law to force the Left publications *Siggi* and *And Soppi* (which were routinely critical of the government) to change their names (to *Taxaw* and *Andë Soppi*, respectively) or face steep fines.

¹⁶ See Gassama 1977 for the initial coverage of the censorship.

¹⁷ A post-baccalaureate degree required in France to teach in certain levels of the public education system.

¹⁸ This dig about education levels is clearly intended for Sembène, who left school very young after, apocryphally or not, an altercation with his colonial schoolmaster. He was largely self-educated.

¹⁹ Many of these were included in a special section of *Andë Soppi* in May 1978, entitled "Débat sur les langues." Other interventions appeared in *Taxaw*. The linguist and translator Pathé Diagne, in a lengthy piece entitled "Defense and illustration of the Senegalese Languages" opined that, "Senegalese citizens, with diplomas or not, are free to reflect reason and react on what is proposed or imposed on them." (P. Diagne 1978) Aram Fal, the linguist who was to eventually codify what has become the standard transcription of Wolof in Latin characters (with gemminates, of course), argued that the government was taking its cue on Wolof orthography from several dictionaries written during the colonial period. As she pointed out, it was not until the Prague School in the 1920s and 30s that phonology developed as a sub-discipline of linguistics, resulting in generations of linguists trained to both hear and record as significant the difference between "d" and "dd." (Fal 1978) The most wry commentary of all, though, was Ibrahima Gaye's "Un contre-décret du peuple" (A counter decree of the people) in which the author writes a letter of complaint to Senghor in French, but applies the decree to the written French, which results in a royal linguistic mess. (Gaye 1978)

²⁰ One of the most fascinating critiques of the government's position was advanced Diagne, who took Senghor to task for his appropriation of Wolof ethical terminology in his political speeches – a phenomenon which was part of a larger effort by Senghorian state to reconfigure the Wolof *géer* code of conduct as a basis for national identity. (Mills 2012) Diagne points out that *teraanga*, *kersa*, *sutura* and so on are not self-evident moral virtues that possess *only* a dictionary meaning; rather, they are "principles of conduct" that mean and are actualized in social practice. "Let [Minister Fal] be the judge of whether he conforms to the tradition he evokes," Diagne writes. This critique is particularly fascinating in the context of the *Ceddo* debate, since in large measure what is at issue is precisely how words like "Ceddo" are defined and how such re-definition can alter the shape of who can speak for the past – and especially *whose* past. (P. Diagne 1978)

²¹ Gilles Deleuze seems to me to come close to this assumption in his reading of *Ceddo* in *Cinema 2*. (Deleuze 2005, 244)

²² Sembène himself seems to commend Diouf's interpretation. When pressed to say when his film was set – even in which century – Sembène refused to give a clear answer. He would only say “These events occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and are still occurring” and that “it could take place in any part of Africa, at any time.” (Quoted in Busch and Annas 2008) The authorities seemed to hear him quite well in this respect, for the only other condition they imposed on the film being shown was that he agree to distribute flyers before each screening informing viewers of the “historicity” of the film.

²³ See Barry 1998; Searing 2003; Mamadou Diouf 1990.

²⁴ Jean-Leopold Diouf's standard Wolof dictionary defines *ceddo* simply as “animist” while Sana Camara's lexicon defines it as “pagan.” As Sembène pointed out, the term *ceddo* originally came from Pulaar (another language spoken in Senegal), which indexes the channels through which Islam was diffused in Senegambia.

²⁵ Paulin Vieyra, the first African graduate of the cinematic institute and the eventual cinematographer for *Mandabi*, was denied permission to film in Africa, and ended up making a film about Africans in Paris instead, *L'Afrique sur scene* (1955). The decree was also invoked to ban the screening of films that were deemed too anti-colonial. The collaboration between Chris Marker, Alain Resnais and the publishing house Présence Africaine – *Les statues meurent aussi* (1955) – was banned under the Laval decree, and it remained unseen in France for 10 years. As Resnais described it later “[the authorities] were fine with the meaning of the film, but (and this is where it becomes interesting), *such things could be said in a review or a newspaper, but one didn't have the right to say them in the cinema, even if they were true.*” (Quoted in Lequeret 2003; my translation and emphasis)

²⁶ See “Un entretien avec T. M'Bissine Diop” in the DVD extras on the Médiathèque des Trois Mondes edition of *La Noire de...* (Sembène 1966a)

²⁷ Even though the Cooperation had nixed the initial script, it would eventually agree to distribute the finished film, though not without some further meddling. Sembène initially shot *La Noire de...* as a feature film, and included some scenes in colored filters, which were intended to convey the Diouana's emotional state as her employers brought her to France.

I started to make [*La Noire de...*] without the authorization of the National Center of the French Cinema. However, as it was a co-production between Domirev (Dakar) and Les Actualités Françaises, it needed one. Due to a vicious circle *I could not obtain authorization because I did not have the professional card since to obtain one it is necessary to have already made a film* or to have been assistant (which I did not want to be). *Finally we realized that by presenting La Noire de . . . as a short film (less than one hour) it would be easier to regularize the situation with the CNC.* In the beginning, i.e. in the time of the scenario, the film was meant to be about one hour and a half. *So I cut all the color scenes.* (Quoted in Busch and Annas 2008; my emphasis)

²⁸ See Diawara 1992, 32; and Diallo 1973, 48–49. So negative was Sembène's experience producing a Wolof-language movie under the watchful eye of his French producer that he vowed never again to accept funding from France. This put him in the position of seeking funding from the Senegalese state; as we saw in the case of *Ceddo*, the state would find its own ways to intervene.

²⁹ Sembène himself provided the voice-over for *Borom Sarret*.

³⁰ The French-language version of *Mandabi* is now so difficult, if not impossible, to locate, that I am not aware of any scholarly articles that discuss it. One of the likely reasons for this is that Sembène or the distributor shelved or destroyed it. There are, however, a few accounts of what it was like to watch the French version. Apparently, the effect of the actors' performances, some of whom apparently were not comfortable speaking in French, was altogether uncanny. The French version, then, appears to have been a continuation of the style of voicing that prevailed in Sembène's earlier films. The speech of the African actors had to be transposed into French, but instead of this occurring in a post-production studio in Paris, the actors had to, as it were, over-dub themselves. What we are left with now is the Wolof version, which exists as “the” film. It is a brilliant and yet partial record of what was by all accounts a complicated way to make a film.

³¹ Irvine defines language ideology as “a cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.” Quoted in Keane 2007, 16.

³² It is important to note that *nyyu* also involve much more than the manipulation of status. They also may serve to index kinship relations, express friendship, and convey the joy of meeting someone again. Increasingly, a lengthy greeting might also index a shared rural background, as the practice is less common in cities.

³³ Pragmatics studies how meaning emerges from a given utterance's context of use, especially the ways in which that relevant context is itself subject to renegotiation. Pragmatic meaning is typically distinguished from semantic or referential meaning. Metapragmatic awareness refers to speakers' awareness of the pragmatic dimensions of their communication. On metapragmatics and metapragmatic awareness, see Silverstein and Urban 1996; Silverstein 1993; Silverstein 2001. For a general discussion of the metapragmatics of Wolof speech styles, see Irvine 1975.

³⁴ *Ijjib Wolof* is a Wolof syllabary (*syllabaire*) published by the Association des Etudiants Sénégalais en France in Grenoble in 1959. It is usually identified as the first systematic attempt to produce a standardized orthography for the Wolof language using the Latin script. According to Cheikh Aliou Ndao, the group was formed by Senegalese students enthusiastic about what Cheikh Anta Diop had demonstrated could be done with African languages in *Nations nègres et culture*. (Ndao 2008)

³⁵ Ndao's intellectual engagement with Senghor was not, however, simply antagonistic. For instance, in an article written for *Ethiopiennes* in 1993, Ndao acknowledges Senghor's centrality for intellectuals of his generation:

Le poète de Joal a joué un grand rôle dans la prise de conscience des gens de ma génération. L'on ne pouvait être indifférent. Il fallait épouser les idées politiques de Senghor ou les combattre. Soutenir ses vues philosophiques ou les réfuter. Se déclarer farouche partisan de la Négritude ou s'affirmer comme son adversaire. Paradoxalement cela a produit quelque chose de positif chez chacun de nous. Senghor ayant abordé tous les thèmes, on ne peut combattre ses idées sans faire comme lui ou tout au moins le tenter. (Ndao 1993a)

³⁶ It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Aram Fal to the community of writers working in Wolof. A linguist by training, Fal produced what would become the official script for Wolof. She also co-authored one of the first widely available dictionaries. When she was at IFAN, she edited and published the earliest works of Wolof prose -- Yunus Dieng's *Aawo bi* and several works by Cheikh Aliou Ndao. She has continued to be a tireless activist for the cause of literacy in national languages, which she has continued with her current NGO OSAD, which has published a whole new generation of authors working in Wolof as well as mature works by Ndao. Aram is also the sister of Aminata Sow Fall, a well-known Senegalese novelist in her own right. Though Aram Fall has always remained on the editorial and linguistic side of activism for writing in national languages, she has recently collaborated with Yunus Dieng in translating Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* into Wolof (see Chapter 3).

³⁷ In both versions the policeman is called an *alkati*, a Wolof term for a cop that derives from the Arabic *al Qadi*.

³⁸ After he has been gone for hours Maram goes to the police in distress to report him missing, only to find him already in jail. Gorgui's humiliation is deepened when the policeman proposes that he can be released if he can get someone well-respected in the neighborhood to come down and vouch for his identity. The only person Gorgui knows who can vouch for him is, naturally, his best friend -- and given recent events he can hardly stomach asking him. They pay a fine instead and he is released.

³⁹ *Waaye céy léegi! Soo toppandooqul say moroom ñu teg la nitu àll, naan danga dellu gannaaw. Ndeysaan!* (Ndao 1993b, 9) (Ah, but these days! If you do not mimick your peers then you are called a peasant, and they say you are backward. Alas!)

⁴⁰ This mode of narration is used for Maram's reminiscences as well, in the very early sections of the novel, with similar framing clauses: "*démb ak tey day jaxasoo ci xelam, léttante ni fàlley*" (Ndao 1993b, 9). I am focusing principally on Gorgui's reverie here since it is the space of free indirect discourse in which the cop directly intervenes. After the policeman arrests Gorgui, the narrator's voice is distinguished more easily from both of these characters.

⁴¹ For instance: *Xam ne moom, li ko baayam daan digal masu cee jóg, mooy doon gor di sàmm ngor, ngir kenn du la yab. Di bañ fen, di moytu rambaaj mbaa di dugg lu sa yoon newul.*

He admittedly never departed from what his father used to advise him, that is to be a noble man, such that no one could show him disrespect. He avoided lying, avoided scoundrels, and never stuck his nose into what was not his business.

⁴² For example, in the following passage, the narration relates what Gorgui is thinking, but it does so through a discursive frame, marking its difference from the sentiments it reports.

Ndaw si it, yàgg na ak jëkker ji yàggaay goo xam ne bu waxul it mu xam li muy xalaat. Moo tax mu ngi ne cell li ñuy dox lépp jëm Tilleen. Góorgee gën a tey ne li mu nar a def, xolam àndu ci, dina ko metti. Xéy na Maram dina ko ci mere ay at mbaa mu waccee ko kër gi dellu Ndar. Moom ci boppam du ñakk bés mu réccu. (Ndao 1993b, 26)

[The woman has been with her husband for such a long time that even when he doesn't speak, she knows what he was thinking. So she remained completely silent as they walked all the back to Tilleen. Gorgui was about to talk about that which he was about to do, his mind dwelled on it; it would be painful. Perhaps Maram would be angry about it for years or perhaps she would leave their home altogether and return to Ndar. Even he, himself, might regret it one day. (my translation)]

⁴³ Here is the passage directly before the policeman's demand for identification. Like the Wolof, it is difficult to cleanly distribute these sentiments to either the character or the narrative speaker:

La génération actuelle ignore le respect du sang... Si nous tournons le dos à la cohésion du groupe, si nous perturbons le cercle ancien, nous aboutirons à l'abîme. Vers quel rivage? ... Quel horizon de ténèbres, d'émiettement des valeurs, de dispersion de notre pérennité? (Ndao 1988, 43)

[The current generation ignores the respect of blood... If we turn our back on the cohesion of the group, if we disrupt the ancient circle, we will find ourselves hurtling into the abyss. Toward what distant shore?... What horizon of darkness, disintegration of values, scattering of our future? (my translation)]

As this excerpt indicates, however, what is overheard in the reverie is in large measure a ventriloquization of Gorgui's older, deeply patriarchal *géer* point of view, which mourns the ways in which he and his value system will perish in the new generation – a symbolic death that is literalized when Raki dies in childbirth. This exposition of Gorgui's point of view, of his attachment to his honor, is setting the stage for the tragedy that ensues when he casts his daughter out of the home. *Buur Tilleen* – like *Mandabi*, interestingly – seems torn between ridiculing its patriarch and mourning the obsolescence of what he represents. On the one hand, the novel articulates a searing critique of the patriarch's attachment to 'traditional values' at all costs. Gorgui is a risible figure in many ways, clinging to his *géer* virtues while he lives in a shack, trudging around Medina on a ragged horse like some debased caricature of bygone Wolof nobility. Indeed, *Buur Tilleen* might simply be a comic novel, if not for the tragedy that lurks at the end. On the other hand, though, the text often seems to be genuinely invested in trying to evince sympathy for Gorgui. So while the novel does seem to strive to depict the futility of attempting to square contemporary urban lived experience with strict adherence to honor and other noble Wolof values, the text also seems to suggest that, antiquated or not, collective memory often speaks in precisely this language of noble virtue – *ngor, kersa, sutura*. Thus the narrator's merging with Gorgui's voice is a deeply ambiguous gesture, which makes its transformation all the more suggestive.

⁴⁴ For example:

Bougouma et Raki mesurent leur isolement. Sans soutien. Sans avis. Seuls. Ils ne prennent plus part aux bruits de la grande ville, aux distractions. Leur horizon est obstrué, l'infortune les emprisonne comme dans un filet; ils butent contre l'incompréhension, la méchanceté. (Ndao 1988, 76)

[Bougouma and Raki measure their isolation. Without support. Without advice. Alone. They no longer take part in the distractions and commotion of the big city. Their horizon is obstructed and misfortune snares them in a net; they encounter only incomprehension, malice. (my translation)]

⁴⁵ In an interesting exception to this, a blurring of speakers occurs at the end of the French novel, however, something that does not occur in the Wolof version. The switch responds to the tragedy of Raki's death in childbirth. The Wolof version simply ends with Bougouma turning his back on Gorgui, implicitly blaming him. But the French version switches back into this mode to share in Maram's sorrow.

Certaines dames du quartier ne seront là que par pure curiosité, pour dire plus tard: "Nous n'avions prévu. Il ne faut pas renverser les tabous, c'est la vengeance des Ancêtres." Cela n'a aucune importance pour Maram. Elle ne pleurera pas devant les visiteurs. C'est quand elle mesurera l'irréversible, le vide, qu'elle se livrera à son chagrin. Quel est donc notre sort, nous,

filis, d'Adama Ndiaye? Ne serions-nous que des petits cailloux ballotés dans un tamis par des mains malhabiles? Des grains de sable un jour de tourmente? (Ndao 1988, 109–110)

[Some ladies of the neighborhood will be there for the sake of curiosity, to be able to say later “We told you so. One should not break the taboos, this is the vengeance of the ancestors.” That has no importance for Maram. She will not cry in front of the visitors. It is only when she measures the irremediable, the void, that she will abandon herself to her sorrow. What then is our fate, we sons of Adama Ndiaye? Are we only mere pebbles tossed in a sieve by clumsy hands? Grains of sand on a stormy day? (my translation)]

⁴⁶ A version of this English transcript, which was sourced from Moore et al. 1965, also appears in Killam 1973.

⁴⁷ This is obviously the simple explanation. There is a larger question, of course, about the way in which francophone literatures figure in postcolonial theory.

Chapter Three

¹ Originally published in French in 1980, *Letter* was greeted with immediate and international success. It is no exaggeration to say that it has become one of the most widely read works of African fiction, and it is certainly the best-known text of any kind from Senegal. *Letter* has been particularly embraced in the United States, where it very quickly became a staple of many a French department's curriculum and is often taught in courses on world literature as well.

² French has been the “official” language of Senegal since independence, but Wolof and 18 other languages are classified as “national” languages. Of these, Wolof is by far the most widely spoken, by as many as 80% of the Senegalese people in some estimates. (Sall 2009) Today, ‘Wolof’ refers both to a language and an ethnic identity, though both of these uses have a complicated history. (See Irvine 2008) Today, many Senegalese who speak Wolof as a first language would not necessarily identify themselves as ethnically Wolof. And since the modern urban centers of St Louis and Dakar were established in Wolof-speaking regions, Wolof has become a vernacular language of urban space, trade, popular culture, and politics. My description of Dieng here as a “Wolof” writer, then, is primarily intended as a linguistic label.

³ See Ndiaye 2007; Barthélémy 1997.

⁴ Nnaemeka's further point is worth highlighting: “Even on the two occasions that Ramatoulaye makes references to the institution, *la polygamie* is not used; she chooses instead to speak about the modalities of its operation.” (Nnaemeka 1997, 167)

⁵ I want to emphasize that my engagement here is not so much with individual critics, but with what I see as dominant trends in the critical reception. Thus while I do engage with particular critics' readings of the novel, my intention is not to personalize my argument or enter into a polemic with any single interpretation of the novel. Indeed, all the critics' readings I mention here have had an important influence on my own work. My concern, then, is that certain tendencies in the criticism in general have tended to reproduce a vision of the novel that makes it difficult to read differently.

⁶ Coulis, for example, argues that Ramatoulaye “is willing to accept the polygyny of Islam, despite her own personal revolt against the system.” (Coulis 2003) Wilcox, on the other hand, writes that “Ramatoulaye never really accepts polygyny for herself or anyone else.” (Wilcox 2003)(Wilcox 2003)

⁷ Fleming, for instance, suggests that this decision is taken in accordance with “traditional Islamic precepts.” (Fleming 2003, 215) Ajayi-Soyinka suggests that the reason for this decision “could be [Ramatoulaye's] respect for cultural and religious tradition, her devotion to her husband, or her sense of obligation to her twelve children and her school that paralyzes her—but it is hard to imagine that her subjection to polygyny is not a factor in her paralysis.” (Ajayi-Soyinka 2003, 197) Azodo asserts that “[Ramatoulaye] tends to believe that prolonged suffering, not a firm solution, would bring her plenitude of life and insurance against further disappointment and death.” (Azodo)

⁸ “*Partir! Tirer un trait net sur le passé. Tourner une page ou tout n'était pas luisant sans doute, mais net.*”

⁹ The complexities of the French colonial legal system are discussed in M. Diouf 1998. The more general postcolonial legacy of such multi-category legal regimes in African is explored in Mamdani 1996.

¹⁰ For the role of imperial anthropology in shaping ‘customary’ law, see Robinson 1992.

¹¹ For more on colonial legal structures and family form in West Africa, see Wilder 2003; Wooten 1993; and Snyder 1981.

¹² For more on these controversies, see Loimeier 1996.

¹³ Fatou Sow has made this point, in slightly different terms. (F. Sow 1996)

¹⁴ *Quand la société éduquée arrivera-t-elle à se déterminer non en fonction du sexe, mais des critères de valeur.*

¹⁵ *À qui t'adresses tu, Ramatoulaye?*

¹⁶ My use of the term “critique” here is informed by Judith Butler’s reading of Foucault’s “What is Critique?” Butler describes critique as “a practice in which we pose the question of the limits of our most sure ways of knowing” and “that perspective on established and ordering ways of knowing which is not immediately assimilated into that ordering function.” (Butler 2001, 5)

¹⁷ *“Tu oublies que j’ai un coeur, une raison, que je ne suis pas un objet que l’on se passe de main en main. Tu ignores ce que se marier signifie pour moi: c’est un acte de foi et d’amour, un don total de soi à l’être que l’on a choisi et qui vous a choisi (J’insistais sur le mot choisi).”*

¹⁸ This is personified by the villainous Aunt Nabou who is “pétrée de la morale ancienne, brûlée intérieurement par les féroces lois antiques.” (Bâ 2001, 48)

¹⁹ Exemplifying this is Aïssatou’s husband Mawdo, who blames his taking a second wife on “la force des instincts enfouis dans l’homme, instincts qui le dominant, quelle que soit son intelligence.” (Bâ 2001, 52)

²⁰ For instance, in a well-known scene, Ramatoulaye declines Daouda Dieng’s offer of marriage in writing. While this letter has often been read as an index of the agency of a modern individual, it has rarely been noted that Ramatoulaye has the letter hand-delivered by a *gewel* (a griot, in Wolof; *gewel* are caste group). (A. B. Diop 1981) This reinforces Ramatoulaye’s status as a *geer* (non-caste person, noble), because, traditionally, a *gewel* would mediate between a *geer* subject and public space, often speaking for her/him or serving as a messenger. This gesture seems surprising, considering how critical of the caste system the narrator is at other times, especially when it is invoked to delegitimize her best friend’s marriage. My point is not to suggest that she is a hypocrite, but rather to point out that this famous letter of refusal is overlaid with a patron-client relationship based on caste status.

²¹ *“Troublante extériorisation du sentiment intérieur inévaluable, évalué en francs.”*

²² *J’ai donné sans compter, donné plus que je n’ai reçu...[C]’est la somme de toutes les secondes perdues ou cueillies qui fait les vies râtées ou réussies... Je me mesurais aux ombres... Je mesurais, aux regards étonnés, la minceur de la liberté accordée à la femme”*

²³ Talal Asad makes a related point about the limits of free speech as a liberal virtue: “The enjoyment of free speech presupposes not merely the physical ability to speak but *to be heard*, a condition without which speaking to some effect is not possible. If one’s speech has no effect whatever it can hardly be said to be in the public sphere, no matter how loudly one shouts.” (Asad 2003)

²⁴ The difference between primary and secondary speech genres is not a functional difference in Bakhtin’s work. Rather, secondary speech genres are “complex” only insofar as they are necessarily composed of various primary ones. (Bakhtin 1986)

²⁵ Christopher Miller’s description of Bâ’s relationship to her audience as “projective” seems to me to capture this aspect of her poetics quite well. (Miller 1993, 291)

²⁶ How might we think this drift? The effect brings to mind Benjamin’s famous claim that in a translation content adheres only loosely to language, like the “ample folds of a royal robe.” What makes us experience language and meaning as tightly bound up together in the original – like “a fruit and its skin,” in Benjamin’s image – is, I think, precisely what is non-linguistic about how we “mean” anything at all. (Benjamin 1968) Our capacity to be meaningful is conditioned by what we can presume about the terms in which our utterance might become intelligible to another. It seems to me that it is this dimension of language – what we presume we can presume upon – that becomes ill-fitting (or, perhaps, more capacious) in translation.

²⁷ My use of “public” here takes its cue from Michael Warner’s essay, “Publics and Counterpublics.” (Warner 2002, 65–124)

²⁸ (M. Y. Dieng 2010) *Aawo Bi* appeared right at the beginning of the first wave of publishing Wolof prose manuscripts in the 1990s, which was initiated by Aram Fal when she was affiliated with the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire. *Aawo bi* appears to have been both the first novel published in Wolof and the first Wolof novel written by a woman.

²⁹ *Gewel* is the Wolof name for the endogamous social group of performers and musicians who are traditionally the custodians of what is today defined as oral tradition. A *gewel* might also be called *griot*, a term of French origin. Griot is used to describe the traditional oral performers who are found across a range of Sahelian societies.

³⁰ For example, “*man dey xaar naa la ba tàyyi, xàddi woon naa sax; ragal naa ni sunu létt yii du yegg tey; foo jogéeti bay jooy?*” (M. Y. Dieng 1992, 5) (I’m exhausted waiting for you, I had actually given up; I was afraid our hairbraiding session would not happen today; but where are you coming from like this, in tears?) As Guedj Fall points out, the conversation that forms the narrative is doubled by the hairbraiding. (G. Fall 2006) At the end of the text, Fama makes the analogy explicit: “*Man bu saa létt yi baaxut tey it, neex na ndax waxtaan wi.*” (M. Y. Dieng 1992, 7) (For me, even if my braids are terrible today, it was all worth it because of this conversation.)

³¹ I am using text in a broad, Bakhtinian sense here to include oral “texts” as well. This use of “text” is also informed by Karin Barber’s recent work, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics*.

³² I want to be clear that I am not necessarily arguing that the ethical and aesthetic ideals that Ndeela pursues are more socially or politically desirable. Indeed, my own initial reactions to *Aawo bi* ranged from frustration to disgust with what I perceived as the main character’s stoicism. I found the character’s attempts to enact feminine virtue in the face of adversity maddeningly anti-feminist. Only gradually was I able to see it as more than a deviation from my normative expectations of agency. It was also through my conversations with Dieng and a growing sense of her work as being in dialogue with Bâ that I was able to reread and study the text with the understanding that my own preconceptions might be made relative and partial.

³³ For instance: “*ku roy ci Ndeela doo juum. Ab aawo noonu lay mel.*” (M. Y. Dieng 1992, 70) (Who ever models herself on Ndeela would not do so in error. A first wife should be like her.)

³⁴ “*dara nekku ci loo xamul woon*”

Coda

¹ In 2010, 44% of the Senegalese population was estimated to be under 15 years old. (World Bank 2010)

² Although Comaroff and Comaroff are concerned with actual zombies, I take the more general terrain of the living-dead to be what is at issue in their argument. Neew bi’s performance as the revenant of the drowned immigrant in “Galgui” lies on a larger continuum of states being that are suspended precariously life and death, and subject to the control of unknown or unseen forces. Djibril Diop Mambéty’s 1992 film *Hyènes* (Hyenas) vividly exemplifies the proliferation, after structural adjustment, of figures suspended between life and death. In the film, a town ravaged by debt – we see the furniture in the mayor’s office being repossessed – receives a promise of deliverance with the return of a prodigal daughter, Linguère Ramatou, a woman said to be “richer than the World Bank.” Ramatou is willing to be her hometown’s benefactor, but only on the condition that the townspeople kill Dramane Dramé, the film’s ostensible protagonist. Dramane and Ramatou had been lovers back when the two of them were young, but when she became pregnant he left her for another woman. Ramatou then went abroad to work as a prostitute and became incredibly wealthy through means that the film leaves opaque, and has now come home to exact her vengeance on Dramane. With this bounty proffered, Dramane’s community begins speculating on his death. His neighbors and friends start showing up with new products they have obtained on credit, in the expectation of the financial windfall they will reap after his death. As several characters put it in the film, “*mbuurum bukki jot na*” – the reign of the hyenas has come. This macabre frenzy of consumption culminates in a carnival, complete with fireworks over the Sahelian sky. In the midst of all the fervent speculation over his imminent demise, Dramane himself becomes something of a specter – a man who is no longer completely alive, since his death has become everyone’s investment. In the final scene, a crowd of townspeople surround Dramane and slowly close in to consume, leaving behind only a pile of clothes. *Hyenas* dramatizes a persistent terror that runs through many figurations of neoliberal rationality – what Comaroff and Comaroff describe as the “suspicion that it is only by magical means, by consuming others, that people may enrich themselves in these perplexing times.” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002, 792)

³ The common currency used by the Communauté Financière d’Afrique, which includes a dozen West and Central African economies.

⁴ During the writing of the dissertation, Senegal was in the midst of a presidential election that saw the eventual defeat of Abdoulaye Wade at the ballot box. Wade's decision to run for a third term, and his use of a hand-picked constitutional court to approve the dubious legality of it, unified the opposition, sparked the M23 movement and led to weeks of sustained protests. But despite dire predictions of Senegal's imminent slide into chaos, the second round of the presidential elections were peaceful and delivered Wade a crushing defeat at the hands of his former prime minister, Macky Sall. The new president takes office amidst great hopefulness, but of course the character of his governance remains to be seen.

⁵ Here is how the first *Goorgoorlu* collection accounted for its origins:

Crée en 1987, en plein plan d'ajustement structurel, conséquence d'un marasme économique insistant et cause de licenciements et autres pertes de situation, Goorgoorlou a tout tenté quand il a perdu son emploi, avant de se résoudre à débrouillardise quotidienne, aléatoire comme on s'en est rendu compte mais excitant et formateur du caractère. Du point de vue du caractère, Goor, de semaine en semaine, a évolué depuis quatre ans qu'il vit, avec cependant une constante: sa fixation sur... la dépense quotidienne. (Fons 1991a, 11)

⁶ Here is a translation of the comic:

Panel 1: *Goorgoorlu! Goorgoorlu* they tell you all day long – but how? My God, one must have means even to *goorgoorlu*

Panel 2: At a time when salaried workers lose their jobs and people with master's degrees are unemployed, I can't see how I will be able to *goorgoorlu*. What can I do? Commerce, maybe...

Panel 3: Commerce? ... Yes, why not the market is free. Customs tariffs are reduced. The tax code is revised. All is not lost. I will be rich.

Panel 4: Thieum! Long live liberalism! Quick, let's go purchase a *bitikou mbag* [mobile shop]!

Panel 5: Quickly before it's too...

Panel 6: ... late. [Off-panel voices:] "I was here before you and liberalism!" "Move along, there's no more free space!" "Ow!" "Factory for sale! First price 2 million!"

⁷ "Amerikeñ beek Frànse bi ak Sàppone bi ñoo yem xam-xam bu ñu jàng, waaye ku ci nekk bàyyiwoo làmmiñ wi nga nàmp. Kii ci àngle la jaar ba defar Ford mbaa Cadillac. Kee jaar ci frànse ba defar Renault, Sàppone bi yit jaar ciw làmmiñam ba gènné Toyota."

⁸ I want to note in passing that Ndao's *Taaral* is a book-length analysis of the history and practice of Wolof poetics, from *woy* and Wolofal to the written work of writers of his generation and beyond. I don't want to give the impression I am in any way trying to paraphrase or give a snapshot of his larger argument or project with this quotation. Nevertheless, I do think this comment, as marginal as it is, does reveal something about the situation in which the larger project finds itself.

⁹ For instance, a section of *Mbaam Aakimoo* focuses in large measure on a single *daara*, or Koran school, where Wor-the-donkey lives at a certain point. This section functions almost as a political economy of the *daara*, examining all the forms of labor that occur there and the transactions between various kinds of capital (monetary, spiritual, etc).

¹⁰ In Ndao, the first mention of this modality of 'work' of this occurs when a vulture falls dead at the feet of Wor, the dictator, right in the middle of a public celebration. This is a bad omen if there ever was one, but perhaps – Wor worries – it is more than a bad omen. Perhaps it is a curse. As it turns out, the dead vulture is merely a dead vulture, but its appearance presages the real occult *liggéey* around the corner – the medium's transformation of the dictator into a donkey by means of witchcraft. The people of this unnamed nation resort to this occult 'work' to counteract the way in the dictatorship attempts to monopolize all labor: This is the sense in which Ndao uses *aakimoo* (*aakimu*, to hoard something only for oneself) to mean "dictator." In the novel, the only way of countering the dictator's total appropriation and alienation of all labor is through another modality of 'work,' the occult *liggéey* which can transform him into an animal.

¹¹ *Doomi Golo* also features a scene of occult *liggéey*. But in this case the subject of the curse seeks out the 'work' herself. Late in the novel, the intrigue that has been brewing between the villainous Yacine Ndiaye and her co-wife Bigge Samb comes to a head. Bigge Samb steals Yacine's French passport and then convinces her to go see a marabout who, Bigge says, can restore Yacine's passport so she can regain her lost and now unprovable citizenship. In a lengthy scene, the marabout transforms Yacine into a white European with a passport to match. But what appears at first to be an occult transformation can also read as a figuration of a process of "naturalization" – that is, of Yacine's becoming (or, in her case, re-becoming) a French citizen. Besides embodying Yacine in a new way, the visit to the marabout results in a new *passport*

(to replace the one her rival had stolen). Thus the substitution of selves here is not only an occult transaction, but change in legal status. As “occult” as the scene appears, then, the magical transformation at work is not an example of an age-old practice of witchcraft; it is rather a figuration of the fundamentally enchanted nature of the state-security apparatus that regulates the mobility of bodies in the neoliberal world order. The regime of passports, visas, and checkpoints is depicted here as a spectral, disembodied modality of power that can remake bodies and act on life itself. All the “magical” elements of Yacine’s visit to the marabout – collecting strange objects and large sums of money, repeating one’s name, signing one’s name, receiving a new image – all of these practices double the bureaucratic impositions involved in obtaining a visa. Instead of the leather-bound *téere*, this *liggéey* produces a passport, another booklike object that seems endowed with an agency all its own to protect the one who carries it. *Doomi Golo* depicts the ‘work’ of immigration and naturalization as fundamentally occult and super-natural, as *liggéey*. (See Diop 2003, 316–18; Diop 2009, 316–18)

¹² For example, in the section of the novel on the *daara*, the narrative often slides into a cataloguing of the very forms of speech one finds in the *daara*, suggesting that they, too, are part of its political economy. After reproducing the song that the *taalibe* use to stop a scorpion from stinging them, the narrator muses, “*Faut-il croire? [...] la formule est efficace.*” (Ndao 1997, 127) This suggests that the concern with reproducing and commenting on so many other speech genres *within* the novel is not about their collection but about documenting what it is that they *do*. It is not important whether one *believes* that the song protects from scorpions – it is about effect, not belief. This section of the novel is an exploration of the novel as a form of speech in which one can display and attend to other forms of speech – what various genres of speech *do*, what speech and song can be exchanged for, who can utter and hear certain forms of speech.

¹³ “*il s’est même trouvé a la tête d’un pays où sa volonté se confond avec la loi*” (152)

¹⁴ As the French version has it, it “*Quelqu’un aurait-il oublié que la seule voix qui reste dans le pays est celle de Wor?*” (Ndao 1997, 178)

¹⁵ The narrator in the French adaptation, *Mbaam Dictateur*, makes this tension explicit. he describes the story he is telling as “a fabric of inventions,” from which “one must be ready for anything” and “there is no limit.”

Seule la fiction permet d’accepter ce que la logique rejette. L’esprit ne recoit que ce qui est prouvé, évident, certain, palpable. L’on se soumet a la fiction a cause de ce qu’elle vise des le depart. Aussi en l’ecoutant ne separe-t-on rien. L’animal, le végétal, l’homme se mêlent, parlent, marchent, pensent, font preuve des même capacités. Pas une seule différence entre eux. (Ndao 1997, 266)

But this narrative power to not distinguish between subjects and objects, this capacity to make everything “intermingle, speak, walk and think together” is also an aspect of Wor the dictator:

Le pays a l’aspect d’un jouet entre les mains du dictateur. Tout lui appartient. Il jouit. Il domine les ressortissants, les richesses, la végétation, le reste, comme il l’entend. Personne ne dit mot. C’est une infirmité chez lui. Aucune différence entre les pierres, les animaux, et les fils d’Adam. (Ndao 1997, 173)

Much as the country is a “plaything” in the hands of the dictator, the novelistic world risks being a space in which the narrator dominates everything with the power to command “rocks, animals, and the children of Adam.” (Ndao 1997, 261)

¹⁶ “*Un homme quasi centenaire, ça compte à peine plus qu’un nouveau-né dans son berceau. Ça me permet d’observer sans être vu et de laisser traîner mes oreilles partout. Et je te livre tout.*” (Boubacar Boris Diop 2009, 18) This image of the narrator as “letting his ears drag all over” is an apt one for the especially permeable narrative voice in these two works.

¹⁷ At the very beginning of the novel, when the original narrator is still alive, the French text acknowledges this inevitability:

Il y a eu certes un petit problème, bien difficile à résoudre pour un vieil écrivain débutant comme moi. N’étant pas un de ces poètes fameux dont notre peuple est si fier, qu’ils se nomment Serigne Moussa Kâ, Mabo Guissé ou Cheik Aliou Ndao, je me suis senti désemparé quand, au fil des semaines, d’autres événements ont en quelque sorte exigé d’être racontés, eux aussi. Je pourrais dire, pour utiliser un langage imagé, qu’ils frappaient à la porte comme des sourds et essayaient de sauter par-dessus les bords de mes Carnets pour y resquiller une place et que ça faisait tout de

même un drôle de vacarme. De guerre lasse et sans doute encore une fois par inexpérience, je les ai laissés avoir le dernier mot. (Boubacar Boris Diop 2009, 18)

The Wolof text strikes a similar note on the fictive narrator's amateur status, but emphasizes as well that this novel is addressed to a future reader, with whom the text cannot presume closure at the present moment.

Man bokkuma ci bindkat yi ñuy soow. Doore ca Musaa Ka ba agsi ci Séex Aliyu Ndaw, jaar ci ñoomin Sëriñ Mbay Jaxate ak Maabo Gise, ñu ma gën a aay fuuf ñoo saxal seeni kàddu yu rafet ci biir xolu askan wi, jëmbët leen ci xeli doomi Aadama yi. Man nag, damay jéem rekk. [...] Su dul woon Juróom-ñaari Téere yii may langèek yow, àddina sàppi kon na ma bu yàgg. Dina la xamal tey lu tax ma fonke nii bind ak xalaat. Li ma lay waxsi, guléet bésu tey mu génne sama gémmiñ gii, jaar ci sama xalima, jaaxaan ci téere bi nga yor, di la xaar fii ci Ñarelaa... (Boubacar Boris Diop 2003, 18)

[I am not among the great writers. From Moussa Ka and Cheikh Aliou Ndao to Sëriñ Mbaye Diaxaté and Mabo Guissé, people far more talented than I am have sprouted their beautiful words in the very heart of the nation, and implanted them in the minds of the children of Adam. As for me, I'm just making a go of it. [...] If it were not for these seven notebooks that I am gathering for you, the world would have disgusted me a long time ago. Today I want to tell you why I care this much about writing and thinking. That which I am about to say to you now leaves my lips today for the first time ever, passing through my pen, and lying itself down in this book which you are holding, awaiting you here in Ñarelaa.]