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Sara Kathryn Wierwille April 9th, 2025

French: An African Language

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Abstract

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This work studies the changes of the French language on the African continent in a time of post-colonialization with a particular focus on the language dynamics in Senegal, a West African country that was the former seat of the Afrique Occidentale Française. Without colonial constraints, the language has evolved in relation to other African languages. During the colonial period, a French monolingual society was artificially imposed on Senegal, but today, multilingualism is resurging, seen in the rise of vernaculars like Urban Wolof, which blends French and Wolof vocabulary, phrases, and grammar. This study examines the relationship between Wolof, the lingua franca of Senegal, and the French language. It first explores literature, showing how French is Africanized to reflect African cultural realities. It then focuses on Urban Wolof, a mix of French and Wolof, in cities like Dakar, and explores how Hip Hop uses language to challenge political power. Finally, the study investigates how film highlights the socio-political dynamics between language and power, with Africanized French resisting France's historical linguistic control and ultimately becoming an African language. With the majority of French speakers now in Africa, studying French language use on the African continent is important to understand the future of the language as it is changed by those who speak it the most.

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French: An African Language

Introduction

The prevalence of the French language on the world stage, beyond France that is, has been marked with a colonial history. The “mission civilisatrice” doctrine of French colonial rule included a racist idea that Africans needed to be saved and “civilized” (Mansour 1987). A large portion of this project, included proper French education where colonial students were instructed how to read, write, and speak in the “correct” French of France. African languages were outlawed in schools and students were punished if they spoke anything but French during classes. The French language was a tool for the colonial rule to establish control. As Judith Irvine puts it, “Language does not just label the world; it is not simply a tool of reference, separated from the social forms and cultural concepts of which one speaks. It is also dynamically engaged in constituting them and enacting them.” (Irvine 2012, 49). The French language in Africa was a primary tool of colonialization. Today, French continues its hold on Africa, with 21 African countries which keep French as an official language.

In the postcolonial period, the modern usage of the French language is changing while its colonial legacy is still felt. African French-speakers are no longer forced to accommodate the colonizer by speaking their language in school and public places. This has led to fierce debates over the place of European colonial languages such as French and English in both literary and political contexts. In the literary sphere, many African writers continue to use European languages to comply with publishers that are often funded by Europe. Since the time of independence, writers have disagreed about the continued use of European languages in African literature. Authors such as Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have decried the use of European

languages for communicating African thought. He believes that if the audience for his writing is African, he must communicate in an African language which prompted him to switch to write in Gikuyu (Botwe-Asamoah 2001). Others such as Léopold Sedar Senghor, the first president of Senegal and a celebrated poet, lauded the use of the French language. His presidency maintained the use of French in the government and the press. Additionally, Senghor was a supporter of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) which promotes the French language use in Africa and connects French-speaking countries back to France (Pronczuk 2024).

Recently however, there has been pushback against the organization as African countries prioritize their own native languages and criticize what they see as linguistic neocolonial influence by France. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger all recently announced a withdrawal from the OIF after they removed the French language of its official status in an effort to distance themselves from France (Mossard 2025). In Senegal, a country that is often considered a bastion of the French language in West Africa, the recently elected President Bassirou Diomaye Faye in 2024 has criticized French education, advocating for only native Senegalese languages such as Peul, Seereer, and Wolof to be used in primary education, while waiting until secondary school to introduce French education (Cham 2024). The actions of the youngest elected leader in Africa contrast those of the older Senegalese political elite that have maintained the prestige of the French language in high circles (Pronczuk 2024). This is evidenced by President Faye's insistence to deliver all speeches in both French and Wolof carving out a greater space for African languages and their legitimacy on the world stage.

Despite language laws that have de-prioritized the use of French, the language does remain spoken in much of West and Central Africa. Yet it is transforming into a language that reflects African identities outside of a colonial purview. Sixty percent of the world's French

speaking population lives in Africa. This figure is estimated to be 85% by 2050. This is the inverse of the 1960s when 90% of French speakers resided in European or Western countries (Peltier 2023). There is no doubt that they do not and will not continue to speak the same language as the one spoken in Europe today. The center of the Francophone world is no longer France. It is Africa. This also means that the future of the language resides in Africa. In a post-colonial world, how does colonial language continue to live in an independent Africa? How does a language change when the majority of those who speak it come from a different culture and how can we expect the French language to evolve in the future?

The French language is evolving free from the control of France and its regulating institutions like the Académie Française. Many French speakers in Africa find it uncool to speak the proper metropolitan French of France (Peltier 2023). And so, the French language is evolving to suit the needs of those who speak it. This includes mixing African languages and French to create new means of communication that fit within African culture and life more comfortably. A young rapper from Côte d'Ivoire named Jean Patrick Niambé told the New York Times, "We create words from our own realities, and then they spread" (Peltier 2023). This has resulted in French patois like Nouchi in Côte d'Ivoire or Urban Wolof in Senegal (O'Mahony 2019). This means that the world is not only witnessing but also validating the evolution of the French language as it is being shaped by the planet's youngest populations, those who live in countries like Senegal where the median age is 14 today. In other words, French as a language is becoming indigenized to Africa. It is becoming an African language.

In this paper, I will be analyzing the changes that are ongoing in the French language and how it is being Africanized. There are at least 3,000 languages spoken on the African continent which means there is immense diversity in the possibility for change and interaction between

French and African languages. For the purpose of this paper, I will be looking at how the French language is evolving in Senegal, a West-African country that was once the center of the Afrique-Occidental Française, the French colonies in Africa. Senegal has had a long history with France starting as early as the 17th century (McLaughlin 2008b). The most widely spoken language in Senegal is Wolof, a member of the Atlantic branch of Niger-Congo phylum. Though French is the official language of Senegal, Wolof is the de facto language. In this paper, I seek to analyze how French and Wolof interact to create an Africanized French. I understand that as a young, white woman from the United States my work must elevate the work of Senegalese authors and researchers who are embodying this change in language. My work is heavily influenced by the time I spent in Dakar, Senegal where I learned Wolof, and experienced language use firsthand. My hope is that this work can open new conversations about the French language in relation to its history as a colonial language and its future in Africa.

Language of course does not only consist of words on a page but encompasses every form of communication. I will be sectioning my work into three genres of media. The first chapter will focus on literature in which I will decode Wolof expressions and linguistic structures and oral patterns as they appear in the transformed French text. I will analyze how African concepts of orality have Africanized francophone literature in *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* by Birago Diop by capturing the orality of Wolof in written French. The second chapter of my thesis will be devoted to languages practices of multilingual speakers of French in Senegal today. I will look at spoken language and urban vernacular, in particular Urban Wolof, which has been popularized by hip hop artists and rappers. I will demonstrate how the Senegalese media sensation of the last decade *Journal rappé,* has fundamentally changed how the Senegalese people interact with news and the francophone African diaspora. Finally, I will look at how

Wolof and French are spoken together in films. The first film to be analyzed is Ousmane Sembène's *Mandabi* (1968) which depicts life in Senegal close after Senegalese independence in 1960. The second film to be analyzed is Mati Diop's *Atlantique* (2019), demonstrating contemporary language use. The two films show how French language use has changed over time as well as the social status of French in Senegalese society.

Languages are not autonomous systems that operate separately from culture and politics. Language is a form of social interaction and an expression of the very structure of society. For a long time, the French language was used by colonial rule to restrict African culture and thought. It is important to see this as a shift away from an artificial enforcement of a monolingual French society under colonialism to a multilingual society where French and African languages can be used in tandem. A multilingual approach additionally recognizes the spaces that many different African languages hold in society as well as where the French language rests in relation to them. This stands in contrast to the universality of French in France which suppresses the use of other languages and even recently passed a law requiring foreigners who wish to hold a *carte de résident* to have a level of B1 French or higher, proven with an exam (Bain 2025). In Africa now, French is used to speak to the realities of African cultures. In making French African, African French speakers are rupturing the systems of control that first brought the French language to Africa. Though this may seem surprising to those with an image of the French language tied to France, the French language is actually declining in use outside of Africa which means African speakers of the language are continuing its global use therefore placing the future of the language firmly in their hands.

Chapter 1

Woven Language in Senegalese Literature

Though perhaps the most obvious use of language is through day to day spoken interactions, language choice plays a significant role in literature. Literature can shape the national identity of a country for global readers. Literary creation results in cultural production. Literature can communicate to others a description of the writer represents, how they act and feel. For many African authors, there is a cultural negotiation that is present in many of their texts (Xavier 2016, 95). To get published or to expand readership with a global reach, authors often have to flatter French cultural sensibilities to sell their work in the West (Xavier 2016). This could be done through works that contemplate African writer's place in the French literary canon as in Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's *Les plus secrète mémoire des hommes* or more simply by writing texts in French. Senegalese authors have struggled to decide in which language they should write and thus which language they should use to present themselves to a global audience. To write in Wolof has the tremendous benefits of writing in one's native tongue as well as refuting the colonial language, but to write in French gives Senegalese authors greater recognition on the world stage, not to mention greater access to publishers.

The question first gained wide-spread attention at the Conference of African Writers of English Expression at the Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda, 1962. It is the same conference Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o cites as a moment that led him to stop writing in English and transition to his native Gikuyu. In his book *Decolonizing the Mind*, he writes that the theme of the conference "automatically excluded those who wrote in African languages" (Ngũgĩ 1986, 22). He explains that every language has a dual makeup. It is both a mode of communication and a bearer of culture (Ngũgĩ 1986, 13). Scholar Kwame Botwe-Asamoah

further argues, “It also represents the collective memory bank of a people’s historical experiences and is a product of human beings communicating with one another” (2001, 748). The decision to write in Wolof or French is, of course, not unilateral but it does come with implications. In the eyes of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, writing in French, or any European language entails a betrayal of history and a loss of culture. On the other hand, writing in French gives African authors a wider reach with their work. This ongoing discussion is what Tobias Warner calls The Language Question. “But could you say it in Wolof? And what audience would you reach if you did? . . . Should one write in a former colonial language or in a vernacular?” (Warner 2019, 2).

In this chapter, I will discuss the Language Question. Instead of an either-or situation, which puts Wolof and French in opposition with one another, I will argue how French can be a crossover mechanism for the Wolof language in analyzing *Les Contes D’Amadou Koumba* by Senegalese poet, writer, and storyteller Birago Diop. In his contes, Diop uses the French language as a medium to express fundamentally Wolof ideals and even the Wolof language itself. Diop understands the intimate ties between language and culture and uses the French language to express Wolof culture. In doing so, the French language is made African. Writing in French is less of a way to flatter a potential Western readership and becomes more of a way to take control of the language to benefit an African readership.

The Language Question has been a salient and political topic long before Senegal gained its independence in 1960. In 1963, the Dakar Conference on African Literature of French Expression, the first of its kind in French but which largely followed in the footprints of its more famous anglophone counterpart in Kampala mentioned previously, became a focal point for this debate. Senegal’s first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor was a poet whose philosophy of

African art, called Négritude, shaped his political agenda. He was educated in France and was a strong advocate for the French language. In 1983, he became the first Black member elected to the Academie Française. Along with many other members of his government, he led the discussion surrounding the future of Senegalese literature. His party, the Socialist Party of Senegal, ruled the government for forty years from its independence in 1960 to 2000. Senghor encouraged the use of French language in literature. “Nous, politiques noirs, nous, écrivains noirs, nous nous sentons, pour le moins, aussi libres à l'intérieur du français que dans nos langues maternelles. Plus libres, en vérité, puisque la liberté se mesure à la puissance de l’outil: à la force de création.” (Senghor 1962)[1]. However, in protest of Senghor and his government’s prioritization of the French language, Ousmane Sembène, a prolific Senegalese novelist and filmmaker, gave a public critique of Senghor. “Why is literature written in a former colonial language being institutionalized in a nation that was supposed to be undergoing decolonization?” (Warner 2019, 1). In his speech he warned, “Until we have made African languages part of our educational system in the primary schools and elsewhere our literature will still be subject to the control of other powers, or other people’s good intentions.” (Quoted in Warner 2012, 36)[2]. Birago Diop replied with a challenge for Sembène, “I would like to ask M. Sembène Ousmane to repeat the whole of his speech in Wolof. That is all. Because he talks about cultural imperialism. Let him make the same speech, as eloquently, in Wolof” (Quoted in Warner 2012, 36). To this, Sembène replied that he could not. He asserted that he could have written his novel, *Le Docker Noir*, in Wolof. He says “But then, who is going to read me? And how many people, I speak only

[1] English translation: “We, Black politicians, we, Black writers, feel at least as free in French as in our mother tongues. Freer, in truth, since freedom is measured by the power of the tool: the force of creation” (my translation).

[2] For more information about the detrimental effects of the enforcement of French language learning over that of African languages in early education and literacy, see Moustapha Fall’s *The Impact of Mother Tongue Illiteracy on Second Language Acquisition: The Case of French and Wolof in Senegal* (2020).

of Africans, is it going to affect? That is one of the contradictions of our life" (As Quoted in Warner 2012, 37). Diop's challenge of "But could you say it in Wolof?" raises nuance to the dichotomy of wanting to write for Africans in an African language, but then also worrying whether an audience for the work could be found.

In his own work, Diop has fused seemingly opposing elements. In retelling traditional West African folktales, he translates and transposes his work in two dimensions. He translates his work both from Wolof into French as well as from oral literature into written literature. The work of Diop to translate the oral tales in a written form attests to the "dynamisme des cultures africaines et leur capacité d'adaptation" (Azarian 2006, 57)[3]. His work is careful to preserve the orality in his texts and just as he preserves orality in the written word, he too preserves Wolof in his use of French. These tales were created to be transmitted through society orally, therefore Diop must preserve orality to conserve the authenticity of each tale. This is accomplished through the style and structure of the text. Wolof is itself an oral language and therefore to preserve oration in his text, Diop structures his writing to emulate that of spoken Wolof. In doing so he melds together French and Wolof language creating an Africanized French.

Diop reveals the motivation for his collection of stories with an introductory narrative. He begins as many childhood stories have begun for centuries, with a parent, in this case Diop's grandmother, inquiring in Wolof whether their child (Diop) is asleep. "Baké, tu dors?" "Oui, grand-mère!" Diop replies[4]. Of course, his reply signals the opposite of sleep and Diop continues the introduction by recalling the routine of his grandmother to lull him to sleep with traditional West African tales of a cunning hare or vengeful fairies. These are the tales which taught him how to grow up within his community. When he left his home in Senegal for studies in France, it

[3] English translation: "the dynamisms of African cultures and their capacity of adaptation" (my translation).
[4] English translation: "Baké, are you sleeping?" "Yes, Grandma!" (my translation).

is these same tales that comforted him when he missed the warm sun. “Plus tard, sous d’autres cieux, quand le temps était sombre et le soleil malade, j’ai fermé souvent les yeux. . . j’ai écouté ma mère et surtout grand-mère qui disait encore les déboires de Bouki-l’Hyène” (Diop 1961, 1)[5]. Upon returning to Senegal, Diop had the fortune of meeting again his family griot, Amadou Koumba. As a griot, Amadou Koumba was a professional storyteller who maintained the tradition of oral history by leading the storytelling in Diop’s village. The griot holds a high place in Wolof society. He is responsible for the transmission of knowledge and culture (Irvine 2012, 52). Diop tells how Koumba taught him the “sagesse des ancêtres.” (Diop 1961, 11)[6]. He attests to the power of these stories that nursed him in his childhood by describing the reach of their audiences and the universality of an audience’s laughter or exclamation of fear. “La frayeur et la gaieté qui palpitant aux mêmes heures dans tous les villages africains qu’enveloppe la vaste nuit” (Diop 1961, 11)[7]. Diop seeks to replicate these momentous stories in written form, and specifically, in French. Though his written form will lack the voice as well as the particular communal ambiance of orality, which Diop himself regrets to be true, these stories retain their communal voice as Diop centers his narrative in the voice of Amadou Koumba. It is important for Diop to write through the words of Koumba, as well as his grandmother, as it anchors his work in the ancient tradition of storytelling. Diop does not take ownership of the tales for himself, to do that would result in a significant loss of orality. A hallmark of these tales’ orality is their passage between storytellers across time. Like the griots, Diop’s task is to transmit the stories to a reader. Diop centers his work in the collective as opposed to the individual. To the

[5] “Later, under other skies, when the time was somber and the sun was sick, I frequently closed my eyes. . . I listened to my mother, and especially my grandmother who recounted again the woes of Bouki-the hyena” (my translation).

[6] “The wisdom of the ancestors” (my translation).

[7] “The fear and the glee that pulsated at the same time all the African villiages enveloped in the vast night” (my translation).

West, African proverbs and folktales are author-less which makes them both childlike and essentializable which allowed them to be used to make sweeping racist claims about African cultures (Warner 2012, 6). Diop refutes the idea that African folklore is author-less. He lays out a clear line spanning three degrees of authorship. Additionally, Diop refutes the fetishization of African folktales by writing his collection in French. "Griots are stewards of linguistic expertise" (Irvine 2012, 60). As a griot, Diop shapes language patterns in his text. His work predates Senegalese independence and represents an early insistence on the inclusion of African literature in the French literary canon.

His grandmother and Koumba are the frame Diop will use to weave upon to retell these stories and it is a weaving motif that emerges throughout each story. "Dans la trame solide de ses contes et de ses sentences, me servant de ses lices sans bavures, j'ai voulu, tisserand malhabile, avec une navette hésitante, confectionner quelques bandes pour coudre un pagne sur lequel grand-mère, si elle revenait, aurait retrouvé le coton qu'elle fila la première ; et où Amadou Koumba reconnaîtra, beaucoup moins vifs sans doute, les coloris des belles étoffes qu'il tissa pour moi naguère" (Diop 1961, 12)[8]. Diop weaves oration and written word and more importantly for this paper, French and Wolof. The weaving he speaks of in this introduction is purposeful, each step is taken with great care to maintain the integrity of both languages and the various speaker-narrators through whom tradition is ultimately pieced together like threads in a woven cloth. Diop demonstrates with his collection of stories how the amalgamation of French and Wolof is not a random mash of languages, but a deliberate pattern of threads combined to create a new tapestry, a tapestry that holds within it the past while looking to the future. In this

[8] "In the solid frame of his tales and sentences, using his unswerving leaps, I wanted, clumsy weaver that I am, with a hesitant shuttle, to make some strips to sew a loincloth on which grandmother, if she returned, would have found the cotton that she first spun; and where Amadou Koumba will recognize, much less vivid no doubt, the colors of the beautiful fabrics he weaved for me once" (my translation).

chapter, I will analyze two of the nineteen tales that make up Diop's collection of contes. The first conte, "Maman Caïman" is a retelling of Amadou Koumba's traditional tales, but the last *conte* "Sarzan," which finishes the collection, is the only story written by Diop himself.

Layered Narration in "Maman Caïman"

"Maman Caïman" is the tale of mother crocodile, Diassigue, and her children the *petits caimans*. In this story, varying levels of narration mirror the complexity in the woven languages. The structure of the text, the multiplicity of narration, act as a metaphor for the communal voice as well as the multiple languages of the voices. The narrators change constantly throughout the brief tale demonstrating to the reader that knowledge is built by many voices woven together. The multiplicity in the narration creates a story with a communal voice which is key to the sense of orality that Diop aims to preserve. This communal voice, as opposed to an individual voice, overlaps and even contradicts itself at times which encourages the blend of language. The levels of narration begin to overlap from the start of the story. It begins with an extravagant declaration that "Les plus bêtes les plus bêtes des bêtes qui volent, marchent et nagent, vivent sous la terre, dans l'eau et dans l'air, ce sont assurément les caïmans qui rampent sur terre et marchent au fond d'eau" (Diop 1961, 47)[9]. This phrase, which is a spoken statement by Golo the monkey, is structured in a manner that emulates spoken language as opposed to literary language. The French language, especially in writing has proper grammatical rules that are less stringent in spoken language. Looking at this phrase in French, one can see the repetition of the superlative

[9] Wolof translation: "Rabi all yi gena ñaak xel (ñaakaxel) ci rab yii naaw, dox ak féey ci biir suuf si lañuy dund, ci ndox ak ci jawwu ji, ñoom ñooy kaiman yii raam ci suuf si ak dox ci biir ndox" (my translation).

English translation: "The most beastly the most stupid of beasts that fly, walk, and swim, live under the ground, in the water and in the air are certainly the crocodiles that crawl on the earth and walk at the bottom of the water" (my translation).

in the beginning of the sentence is uncharacteristic of standard French grammar. Diop replicates spoken language, and specifically spoken language in Wolof, since Wolof is an oral language, to enhance the orality of his text. In doing so, he plays with the languages to highlight a structure that is characteristic of Wolof. In the French, the word repeated over and over again in this phrase for emphasis is "bête." In French, the word "bête" can refer to an animal generally, or more specifically a beast. The word also has a connotation of stupidity in informal language. When spoken in Wolof, the word is not repeated each time. The phrase translated into Wolof is as follows, "Rabi all yi gena ñaak xel (ñaakaxel) ci rab yii naaw, dox ak féey ci biir suuf si lañuy dund, ci ndox ak ci jawwu ji, ñoom ñooy kaiman yii raam ci suuf si ak dox ci biir ndox." To refer to an animal in Wolof is "rab" but to reference stupidity is "ñaakaxel" in Wolof. However, in Wolof, "rab" holds another meaning referring to someone who has been possessed spiritually. In repeating the word three times, Diop can accentuate each of these three definitions. "Rab" is a word that also resembles the word "raaba" which means to weave. In this phrase, the crocodile is considered the most beastly of animals for its ability to move between different modes of mobility. A crocodile can access both the land and the water making it more versatile. It can weave between landscapes. After this exaggerated exclamation, the reader's attention is quickly pulled in a new direction and their curiosity mounts when Amadou Koumba declares "Cette opinion n'est pas mienne, elle appartient à Golo le singe" (Diop 1961, 47)[10]. This rapid change in narration is a mark of the dynamism of the oral narration and shows also the importance of different points of view in the story. The opinion of Golo is moderated when the reader learns that he is "le plus mal embouché de tous les êtres" (Diop 1961, 47)[11] according to Koumba as he

[10] "This opinion is not my own, it belongs to Golo the monkey" (my translation).

[11] "The worst blabbermouth of all beings" (my translation).

continues narrating the story. Golo is a character who lives in the present. He always speaks before thinking. Naturally then, he would be in conflict with Diassigue, the mother crocodile, who has the best memory in the world and thus remembers everything. Diassigue does not only remember her own memories, but all the memories transferred to her through her maternal lineage. She, with the collective wisdom of her ancestors, together recount the history of West Africa. “Maman Caïman rassemblait donc ses enfants et leur disait ce qu’elle avait vu, ce que sa mère avait vu, et lui avait raconté et ce que la mère de sa mère avait raconté à sa mère” (Diop 1961, 46)[12]. However, her children, the little crocodiles, do not want to listen to these stories. “Les enfants de Diassigue commençait donc, eux aussi, à croire que Golo disait la vérité. Ils trouvaient que leur mère radotait parfois un peu trop peut-être” (Diop 1961, 49)[13]. In this phrase as well, one can see that Diop is playing with French grammatical structures. The sentence ends with “peut-être” which is uncommon in standard French grammar. In a sentence, the word usually is written directly after the verb. However, when the phrase is spoken in Wolof, the term for maybe, “amaana” comes at the end of the sentence. In Wolof the phrase ending in “maybe” reads more naturally. “Xale yu Diassigue tambali, ñoom tamit, di gem ni seen yaay dafa doon gaawa wax tuuti amaana.” Diop structures this sentence according to Wolof grammar which serves two purposes. First, he is able to preserve the orality of spoken Wolof which would be the original language for telling these stories. Second, he also is able to create a sense of unease that

[12] “So, Mother Crocodile gathered her children together and told them what she had seen, what her mother had seen, and had told her and what the mother of her mother had told her mother” (my translation).

[13] Wolof translation: “Xale yu Diassigue tambali, ñoom tamit, di gem ni seen yaay dafa doon gaawa wax tuuti amaana” (my translation).

English translation: “The children of Diassigue also began to believe that Golo was telling the truth. They felt that their mother sometimes talked a little too much maybe” (my translation).

is important for the plot of the story. The "peut-être" at the end of the phrase creates a kind of imbalance in the French adding emphasis to the word and leaving the phrase with a feeling of inadequacy which translates to unease. The source of this unease is unearthed when war arrives near the crocodiles' homes.

Diassigue notices something is awry when she sees groups of ravens flying over the river cawing a warning. "Un soleil tout nu – un soleil tout rouge/ Un soleil tout nu et tout rouge/ Verse des flots de sang rouge/ Sur le fleuve tout rouge" (Diop 1961, 53)[14]. Wolof structures are again apparent in the crow's song. The crows warn of the nearby war between the Ouoloffs and the Oualo in describing the spilled blood dying the river red. The third verse begins not with a subject, but with a verb which is not characteristic of spoken or written French, but permissible and often used in French poetic form. In Wolof however, it is common for the verb to precede the subject in the spoken language, the verb might in fact commonly start a sentence. One can almost hear the Wolof in the song. Mother Crocodile knows to be careful because she has learned the ways of war from her ancestor's stories. "L'herbe sèche peut enflammer l'herbe verte" (Diop 1961, 53)[15]. Here, she speaks to her children through a proverb, a common practice in which elders share wisdom with their children. Again, Diop maintains orality in preserving spoken Wolof practices. Like the proverbs, the histories Diassigue told her children were not just entertainment for the bored young crocodiles, but also a method of teaching them lessons that could keep them safe in the future. When Mother Crocodile tells her children they must flee, the

[14] Wolof translation: "Jant bu amul dara - jant bu xonq/ Jant bu amul dara ak jant bu xonq/ Sotti deret bu xonq/ Dex gu mboa gi" (my translation).

English translation: "An all naked sun – an all red sun/ a sun all naked and all red/ pours streams of red blood/ on the river all red" (my translation).

[15] Wolof translation: "Ñax mu wow mi mën na lakk ñax mu wert bi" (my translation).

English translation: "Dry grass can enflame green grass" (my translation).

young crocodiles refuse to follow, and they pay the ultimate price for their rejection of their mother and their rejection of oral tradition.

In this story, Diop uses the multiplicity of narration creates a sense of orality in the text as a fundamental aspect of oral tradition is the transmission of stories between different speaker-narrators. Africanist scholar Viviane Azarian describes this saying "Diop insiste ainsi sur l'importance du souvenir, de la mémoire et s'inscrit dans une chaîne de transmission, dont il se présente comme simple relais accordant le mérite de la narration à d'autres narrateurs" (Azarian 2006, 60)[16]. The writing is attached to oral tradition by the change in the writing style. Diop writes the story with an evolving narration which engages the reader with the text. Moreover, the multiplicity of the narration attaches itself to traditional oration in a symbolic way through the plot of the tale. Oral tradition and the collective depend on one on the other. Oral tradition requires a community so that collective knowledge can be transmitted between communities. Similarly, the collective demands an oral tradition so that knowledge can be shared for the protection of the community. Diop additionally remains faithful to Wolof oral tradition by asserting the totemic nature of animal symbolism in his stories by not assigning the animal characters individual names and individual identities. To give these animals a name would be to force them to become more Western, forced to live within the conventions of mankind. In referencing the traditional animals that make up Wolof folktales, Diop does contextualize the Wolof word for each animal with the French word. Golo-le-singe, Bouki-l'hyène, Leuk-le-Lièvre, and Sègue-la-Panthère are all examples of this doubling. The animal is first said in Wolof and then in French. Translated into English, "Golo-le-singe" would be "monkey the monkey." Diop's doubling suggests two important things about language use. First, there is something

[16] "Diop thus insists on the importance of remembrance and of memory and it being a part of a chain of transmission, which he presents as a simple relay giving the credit of narration to other narrators" (my translation).

untranslatable particularly in the Wolof names of the animals which are a fundamental part of Wolof folklore. Second, French can be used to contextualize Wolof concepts to share them with a wider audience. Here, the change in language goes in two directions. The doubling attests to the multilingualism of the text.

Additionally, Diop demonstrates the dangers of singular opinion on collective knowledge. At the very beginning of the tale, the reader is made wary of singular opinions once Amadou Koumba contextualizes the opinion of Golo. Individual opinions should be distrusted, while collective opinions combine many points of view and are adapted to serve the community best. A mark of oral literature is that it does not tell the reader a lesson, instead it shows the lesson through examples. In this tale, the reader even experiences the process of learning the lesson themselves. At the beginning of the story, they are told that the caimans are the "les plus bêtes les plus bêtes des bêtes" and as soon as they have accepted that singular opinion to be true, Amadou Koumba explains why they should not believe the first statement is correct. This experience that Koumba and Diop create alike keeps the reader engaged in the story and more ready to accept the moral at the end of the story. The engagement of the reader/ audience is a crucial part of oral literature because the audience is an equal partner in the artistic creation of the story (Julien 1979, 190). It is equally sensitive to the immediate reactions of the audience each time the story is told. Like any good storyteller, Diop guides his reader/ audience through the story keeping them engaged through the changing narrative voices. Orality demands the presence of a collective body so that it can be shared making it by definition, held by the collective in a way that writing can never be. The folie of individualism is shown when the young crocodiles are killed because they do not heed the warnings of their mother and through her, the warnings of their ancestors. Their downfall is due to their "unwillingness to participate

in a communal act of language" (Julien 1979, 103). Diassigue hopes to guide her children through the flux of information that was formed for her by language and stories. The young crocodiles ignore past knowledge and the attempts of protection by the community and the result is fatal. This tale shows how oral tradition plays a vital social function in West African culture. It is a useful tool for protecting the community against danger (Kamara 2016, 77). African history and knowledge are not made by a singular voice but by the passage of collective knowledge through oral tradition. This results in a collective knowledge that is richer and more nuanced and that can also better protect all members of the community. Diassigue understands this and her desire to participate in oration indicates that she respects the value of language (Julien 1979, 194). It also indicates the important role language plays protecting the survival of the community.

"Maman Caïman" is an example of how Diop captures traditional oral Wolof folktales in spoken French. The tales that he recounts in French are beloved by those who heard them in their childhood. These are tales that every school child learned from their own grandmothers, family griots, or community at large. Diop's tales have even been reenacted as plays by school children online, such as in the video by the children at Le Group Privé Cheikh Abdoul Ahad Mbacké (GPCAAM), a private school in Touba, Senegal. The video records a class that reenacts contes in Birago Diop's second collection of tales, *Les Nouveaux Contes d'Amadou Koumba.* These videos certify that Diop achieved his goal of preserving these tales in education. In these reenactments, the children use a mixture of French and Wolof. The griot tells the overarching storyline in a voice over in French, while the dialogue between characters is spoken in Wolof. What is particularly interesting in this video, is that French and Wolof are placed side by side in their respective roles for the story. It is made clear how the rhythm of the sounds in Wolof and

the short length of the words, relative to that of French, cannot be translated into a written French text. The reenactment creates an interesting circle of mediums. The story, which is originally an oral story in Wolof is written in French and then made oral again in the video and with the added orality, there is Wolof speech. There is something to be gained from the French text, or else the school children would have skipped the added interlocutor of the French text, but it is also important to note that when the story is spoken out loud again, Wolof speech returns. This supports the earlier argument of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who insists that to write authentically about African culture, one must use an African language. Diop is careful to capture a sense of orality, which necessarily evokes Wolof speech, to maintain cultural authenticity in his written French, though there are undoubtedly aspects that are lost in translation. He lets the traditional tales speak for themselves and does not try to control them under his authorship. In "Sarzan" he continues to contemplate the place of language in a post-colonial setting as well as the future of Africa at large. Unlike the other tales in the collection which are adapted from traditional folklore, this is in a story of his own design.

The Palimpsest of Language in "Sarzan"

In "Sarzan" Diop acknowledges the political turmoil of a newly independent Senegal and addresses the future of language as well as society in post-colonialism. He speaks to how Senegalese society changes in the face of colonialism and more importantly, how it stays very much the same. Diop ventures farther away from the frame set by Amadou Koumba in this last tale, to tell not a story of the past, but one of the present. This is the last tale in his collection, and it is the only one solely written by Diop. While the previous tales told stories of the past to inform the collective for the future, this story deals directly with how to tackle the enduring

consequences of colonialism. Though the story is the conclusion to the collection, it is also an introduction to African folktales in a contemporary setting.

In “Sarzan,” Diop’s narrative control is complete. In the previous stories of his collection, Diop’s main role was that of a transcriber and a translator as well as an editor who curated the stories and guided them into a new form. He did not speak to his reader directly but instead; his words were refracted through the griots who shared the stories with him in his childhood. This layered transmission of tales is key to maintaining the sense of orality that Diop aims to preserve in his text. With “Sarzan,” Diop takes full control of the narrative in speaking directly to the reader. He does not need to condition his work through that of other authors, but instead he can create a tale that comes directly from his imagination and personal life experiences (Kamara 2016, 79). He is additionally able to insert himself as the narrative voice and shape the lesson, or argument of the story around his own particular views. Furthermore, the narrator in this story resembles Diop himself. He does not just recount the plot to the reader but tells the story in a first-person point of view and engages in the action of the story. Like Diop, the narrator too is a traveling veterinarian which emphasizes Diop’s presence in the story. Though he loses the external validation given to him in using the name of a well-known griot, and to be sure this does result in a loss of orality in the text, Diop gains the agency to create a text that is particular to his own argument. In taking full control, Diop can even comment upon his previous work. This does not mean, however, that “Sarzan” sticks out against the rest of the collection. It, like many of the other tales, follows the lives of a community, in this case the village of Dougouba, and teaches the reader a lesson through the experiences of the community. Additionally, as argued by Mohammed Kamara, “Sarzan” is similar to the other tales in terms of its representations of African traditions and worldviews and according to Jacques Bourgeacq, it is the blend of

tradition in a contemporary world that makes the tale so poignant. In this tale, Diop acclaims the steadfastness of Senegalese society and the strength of the ancestors despite external threats.

The story begins with a long description of the village of Dougouba where this story takes place. Contrary to oral literature that emanates the spoken language of griots, this detailed description is characteristic of written literature and would be tedious to speak aloud for an audience.

> "Les ruines s'amoncelaient indistinctes des termitières, et seule une coquille d'œuf d'autruche, fêlée et jaunie aux intempéries, indiquait encore, à la pointe d'un haut piquet, l'emplacement du mirab de la mosquée qu'avaient bâtie les guerriers d'El Hadj Omar. Le conquérant toucouleur avait fait couper les tresses et raser les têtes des pères de ceux qui sont maintenant les plus vieux du village. Il avait fait trancher le cou de ceux qui ne s'étaient pas soumis à la loi coranique. Les vieux du village ont à nouveau leurs cheveux tressés. Le bois sacré que les talibés fanatiques avaient brûlé, depuis longtemps, a repoussé et abrite encore les objets du culte, les canaris blanchis à la bouillie de mil ou brunis du sang caillé des poulets et des chiens sacrifiés" (Diop 1961, 167)[17].

This description of Dougouba's history serves an important purpose as it provides context for the reader of the Dougoubani's continued resistance and introduces the reader to the theme of persistence. Diop begins Dougouba's history well before European arrival in Africa and refutes the colonial argument driven by France that Africa was a "tabula rasa" and had no history or culture (Kamara 2016, 81). Discussions of colonialism that are centered around European

[17] "The ruins of the termite mounds piled up indistinctly, and only a shell of an ostrich's egg, cracked and yellowed in the weather, still indicated at the tip of a high stake the location of the mirab of the mosque that the warriors of El Hadj Omar had built. The conqueror had cut the braids and shaved the heads of the fathers of those who are now the oldest in the village. He had the necks of those who did not obey the Qur'anic law cut off. The village elders have their hair braided again. The sacred wood that the fanatical students of the Qur'an had burned a long time ago, has grown back and still houses the objects of worship, the canaries blanched with millet mash or browned with the curd blood of chickens and dogs sacrificed" (my translation).

colonialism always put Africa in the context of the West. Diop rejects this by documenting a more complete history of African civilization and decentering France in Senegal's history.

The first image invoked by Diop is that of a failed conquest. The crumbling tower of Omar's Mosque, the braids of hair that have regrown, and the sacred woods that stand tall again all show a society that has moved through and continued past threats to their stability and way of life. All that was lost has been reclaimed. Even though people in the village will move away to urbanized centers, they are all grounded in the teachings of the ancestors. "Tous savaient que la racine de leur vie était toujours à Dougouba qui avait effacé toutes traces des hordes de l'lslam et repris les enseignements des ancêtres" (Diop 1961, 167)[18]. The stability of Dougouba is set deliberately by Diop to contrast the presence of Sergent Thiémokho Keita.

Keita is a tirailleur, a Senegalese solider who fought for the French colonial army, one of hundreds of thousands of African soldiers who fought France's wars in Lebanon, Sudan, and Marrocco. His character is immediately held in contrast from the rest of the village when Keita dismisses the connection to his village and is reluctant to return when his service in the army has concluded. He is explicitly told by his commanding officer that he is separate from and even above the rest of his community. "Toi qui as beaucoup voyagé et beaucoup vu, tu apprendras un peu aux autres comment vivent les blancs. Tu les "civiliseras" un peu" (Diop 1961, 168)[19]. It is a long-held tactic of colonialism to divide the native population by extending certain favorability to a select few. Though Keita has been taken away from his home to fight the colonizer's war, he views himself as above his community because of his relative prestige in the eyes of France. The

[18] "Everyone knew that the root of their life was still in Dougouba which had erased all traces of the hordes of Islam and taken up the teachings of the ancestors" (my translation).
[19] "You who have travelled a lot and seen a lot, you will teach the others a little how the white people live. You will "civilize" them a little" (my translation).

French colonial education system is an example of this. When colonial schools transitioned from missionary schools into a secular French education, they were mostly for the sons and relatives of the chief. The goal of that system was to create an African bourgeoise that could be assimilated into French society and would work on behalf of the colonizer as an intermediary that would replace European personnel (Kamara 2005, 106). Kétia is acting as an intermediary of sorts between his village and his French commanding officer.

The narrator and Keita travel back to Dougouba by car but since there is no road directly to the village, they must walk the last part of the journey. Keita is affronted by this fact and tells the narrator, "Quand tu reviendras ici, tu arriveras jusqu'à Dougouba en auto, car, dès demain, je vais faire travailler à la route" (Diop 1961, 169)[20]. The arrogance of Keita's statement rests in his unilateral decision making. He will not act with and in the community, but separately and alone. Keita does not allow for any consideration of what is collectively the best for his village, he has decided unilaterally that what is right is to resemble a colonial definition of civilization. Keita's focus upon his return is not the people of his community but a desire to stronghold his village into a future that resembles the order of his military service. Despite this, he is embraced enthusiastically by his village. His father, the village chief, embraces his son and holds Keita in high importance in the community. Diop alludes to the fortitude of the Malian empire in naming his protagonist Keita, as the name recalls the leaders of the empire suggesting Keita is descended from an ancient line of African leaders (Pouille 2021, 26). This further accentuates Keita's fallout from his community. His disdain for his culture and the power of the ancestors becomes more blatant and even violent. He calls his community's traditional practices "des manières de

[20] "When you come back here, you will arrive to Dougouba by car, because, starting tomorrow, I will work on the road" (my translation).

sauvages" (Diop 1961, 171)[21]. He burns the sacred woods. "Il avait coupé et brûlé des branches du Dassiri, l'arbre sacré, protecteur du village et des cultures, au pied duquel on avait sacrifié des chiens" (Diop 1961, 177)[22]. Keita denounces the ancestors telling his father, "Qu'on laisse tranquilles les morts, avait-il dit, ils ne peuvent plus rien pour les vivants" (Diop 1961, 176)[23]. An artificial separation is enforced by Keita between the Dougoubani and the ancestors with whom their lives are grounded. And as they did in the time of the Qur'anic invasion, the ancestors reclaim Keita for themselves:

> "Ce fut aux abords du crépuscule que le sergent Thiémokho Kéita eut sa tête changée. . . soudain, il sentit comme une piqûre à son épaule gauche; il se retourna. Quand il regarda à nouveau ses auditeurs, ses yeux n'étaient plus les mêmes. Une bave mousseuse et blanche naissait aux coins de ses lèvres. Il parla, et ce n'étaient plus les mêmes paroles qui sortaient de sa bouche. Les souffles avaient pris son esprit et ils criaient maintenant leur crainte: Nuit noire ! Nuit noire!" (Diop 1961, 179)[24].

Keita's unilateral attempts to divide the community are futile against the ancient power of the ancestors. In the end, Keita becomes a babbling madman who is delegated to a low social status among the children and dogs. It is easy to see Keita's transformation as punishment for his defiance. However, the ancestors do more than punish him, they possess him, reclaiming him for

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[21] "The ways of savages" (my translation).

[22] "He had cut and burned branches of the Dassiri, the sacred tree, protector of the village and crops, at the foot of which dogs were sacrificed" (my translation).

[23] "Let the dead be left alone, he had said, they can do nothing for the living" (my translation).

[24] "It was near dusk that Sergeant Thiemokho Keita had his head changed. . . Suddenly he felt a sting on his left shoulder; he turned around. When he looked again at his listeners, his eyes were no longer the same. A white, frothy drool sprouted from the corners of his lips. He spoke, and it was not the same words that came out of his mouth. The breaths had taken his spirit, and now they shouted their fear: Dark night! Dark night!" (my translation).

themselves. His words are not his own and his identity is taken by the ancestors. He is forced to speak their words which come out as long verses with warnings not to disregard the dead. "Écoute dans le vent/ Le buisson en sanglot: / C'est le souffle des ancêtres/ Le souffle des ancêtres morts/ Qui ne sont pas partis/ Qui ne sont pas sous terre/ Qui ne sont pas morts" (Diop 1961, 174)[25]. They use Kétia as an intermediary of sorts as well to speak directly to the other villagers. "Il [Kétia] redit chaque jour le pacte/ Le grand pacte qui lie/ Qui lie à la loi notre sort ;/ Aux actes de souffles plus forts/ Le sort de nos morts qui ne sont pas morts/ Le lourd pacte qui nous lie à la vie" (Diop 1961, 175)[26]. The words of the ancestors declare explicitly that it is breath, or language, that connects them to life. Kétia tried to sever that bond by refusing to honor the ancestors and now he must repeat their words every day.

Kétia's transformation causes him to lose his name and his identity. "Personne n'osait plus l'appeler de son nom, car les génies et les ancêtres en avaient fait un autre homme. Thiémokho Kéita était parti pour ceux du village, il ne restait plus que Sarzan. Sarzan-le-Fou." (Diop 1961, 181)[27]. Keita's name is taken from him and replaced with Sarzan, a French word reclaimed by a Wolof alphabet and pronunciation. Sarzan is a wolofized version of the French word "sergent." Spoken in Wolof, the "g" sound of "sergent" is turned to a "z" sound as there is no "g" sound in the Wolof alphabet. Keita loses the power of his aristocratic name and is given a name that alludes to his betrayal. Sarzan the character, as well as Sarzan the word, is a symbol for the envelopment of foreign objects by core African beliefs such as the ancestors. Just as the

[25] "Listening in the wind/ The weeping bush:/ It's the breath of the ancestors/ The breath of the dead ancestors/ Who did not leave/ Who did not go underground/ Who did not die" (my translation).

[26] "He [Kétia] repeats every day the pact/ The great pact that binds/ That binds to the law our fate;/ To acts of stronger blows/ The fate of our dead who are not dead/ The heavy pact that binds us to life" (my translation).

[27] "No one dared to call him by his name, because the spirits and the ancestors had made another man. Thiemokho Keita had left for the villagers, only Sarzan remained. Sarzan-the-mad" (my translation).

remnants of the Qur'anic invasions were reabsorbed into the community, so is Sarzan. Many have left Dougouba for urban areas but, unlike Sarzan, they know the root of their lives remains there. Sarzan, who forgot or even purposefully ignored this, was given a strict reminder. Diop illustrates an African community that does not begin or end with colonialism. In fact, colonial attempts are not at the center of the community whatsoever. It is the ancestors, and the communal values that uphold the community throughout time. While Diop refutes colonial attempts to "civilize" Africans and strip them of their beliefs and values, he shows how the community absorbs these changes over time and reclaims them as their own creating a palimpsest. We can see this palimpsest in language specifically as Senegalese society reclaim the French language for themselves and continue.

Diop's tales showcase a Senegalese literature where languages intertwine, and French is ultimately Africanized to speak the realities of a different culture. His work to preserve the orality in his texts means that he must additionally preserve spoken Wolof. As he weaves together the traditional tales, he weaves together languages. He shows in his work how the French language can act as a medium for Wolof, crossing over Wolof values, ideas, and structures. Diop's focus on orality is precise, showing extreme intent to create a text that has been purposefully woven. "La parole s'impose délibérément en tant que thème: sa présence est parfois si concrète qu'on croirait assister aux aventures de la parole conscient d'elle-même" (Bourgeacq 1979, 220)[28]. Bourgeacq remarks on the concreteness of the sense of orality, calling the speech alive. What he may not realize perhaps is that the consciousness of the speech arises from the interaction of the French and Wolof communicating with each other throughout the

[28] "The word is deliberately imposed as a theme: its presence is sometimes so concrete that one would think to witness the adventures of the self-aware word" (my translation).

text. Diop shows a desire to cross barriers with his work. He blends the oral with the written, the fantastic with reality. In a preface to Diop's second collection of tales *Les Nouveaux Contes d'Amadou Koumba,* Senghor wrote "Il n'y a, en Afrique Noire, ni douaniers ni poteaux indicateurs aux frontières. Du mythe au proverbe, en passant par la légende, le conte, la fable, il n'y a pas de frontière. . . Tout vit, tout possède une âme : l'astre, l'animal, la plante, le caillou. C'est l'animisme négro-africain" (Diop 1967, 9)[29]. Diop's work does not heed the boarders of language but weaves them together and in doing so reclaims the French language as African. Literature, however, is not the only is not the only place where French and Wolof are intertwined. The speech patterns of French and Wolof speakers have changed as a result of the mixture between French and Wolof. Younger generation of Senegalese people living in urban areas have begun speaking a new vernacular, Urban Wolof, which has new implications for the Senegalese people's relationship with the French language.

[29] "There is no, in Black Africa, neither customs officers nor indicator posts at the borders. From myth to proverb, from legend to tale to fable, there are no boundaries. . . Everything lives, everything has a soul: the star, the animal, the plant, the rock. This is black-African animism" (my translation).

Chapter 2

Urban Wolof as Africanized French: The Case of *Journal Rappé*

As opposed to the more static written language of literature, spoken language is more dynamic and evolves quickly. This is due to the fact that spoken language is created spontaneously on the part of the speaker. Compared to writing, which is more fixed, one has less time to plan a message when speaking which leads to increased exploration of different phrases and meaning (Markoska 2019). Additionally, while literature requires higher barriers to entry, mainly formal education, spoken language requires none. Thus, in analyzing the spoken language patterns in Senegal, one can discover how people use language in a more practical manner. In Senegal, there are over 30 languages that are spoken regularly (Cissé 2005). This results in an intricate multilingual speech community, which according to Fallou Ngom, is defined as "a group of people who do not necessarily share the same language, but rather a set of norms and rules for the use of language" (Ngom 1999, 134). Each language in the speech community plays a given role in its respective geographical location as well as its social setting (Mclaughlin 2008b). These languages include French, Wolof, Pulaar, Seereer, Joola, Arabic dialects, and even Portuguese-based creoles. For example, Pulaar is spoken mostly in the northern parts of the country around the city of Saint Louis while the Portuguese-based creoles are spoken in the southern part of the country which is called Casamance (McLaughlin 2008b).

In this chapter, I will analyze the role of French in the spoken language practices of the Senegalese people. First, I will discuss the socio-linguistic landscape in Senegal and will introduce how a new dialect of Wolof influenced by French, called Urban Wolof, has been used as a linguistic tool to create an urban identity. This urban identity has emerged alongside the

making of a Senegalese and particularly a Dakarois style of art and music such as hip hop. Language, and a mastery over language has been central to unification of urban identity and hip-hop identity alike. Next, I will introduce *Journal Télévisé Rappé* (*JTR*), or as it is more commonly known, *Journal Rappé*, as an example of how the command of language is used to educate and entertain. *Journal Rappé* is an online news broadcast created by two hip hop artists, Xuman and Keyti, who rap the news in French and Urban Wolof. Their work helps to educate Senegalese viewers on current events as well as to promote civil engagement in Senegal. They use their strong command of language to take back control of their political climate. The French language has always been a tool for elites to maintain control over business, education, politics, and the press (Niang 2022) but on Jo*urnal Rappé* they employ French in a way that is most accessible to the general public. This results in changes to the language that Africanizes French.

The Sociolinguistic Landscape of Senegal

Officially, Senegal is a francophone country. That is to say that the only official language inscribed into its constitution is French. It is also a member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, an international organization of French speaking countries that promotes the use of the French language (Fall 2020). This is all a testament to the remaining relevance of the French language in Senegal post-independence. However, there are six other languages that hold the status of national language: Wolof, Pulaar, Seereer, Joola, Soninke, and Mandinka. (Ngom 1999). Of all the languages spoken, Wolof is the most widely used and is considered the country's lingua franca. Wolof has become Senegal's lingua franca due to the fact that the ethnic group which speaks Wolof, the Wolof people, were historically merchants who oversaw trade throughout the country with other ethnic groups in the region as well as European traders. Wolof

became the language of commerce (Fall 2020). After Senegal gained independence in 1960, Wolof speakers grew significantly, and estimates say that 90% of the population speaks Wolof as either a first or second language throughout the entire country and 96% of the population of Senegal's capital, Dakar, speak Wolof (Cissé 2005).

Language is tied closely to ethnicity in Senegal. The Seereer people speak Seereer. The Haalpulaar speak Pulaar (Ngom 2000). This means that language is an important marker of social class as well as identity (McLaughlin 2001). While Wolof has emerged as the lingua franca, there are those belonging to other ethnic groups that resent the "wolofization" of language in Senegal. (McLaughlin 2008a). For example, the Haalpulaar which is the second largest ethnic group in Senegal, view a shift to Wolof as an erosion of their own identity. (McLaughlin 2008a). Many are concerned that increased use of Wolof will lead to a language shift away from the Pulaar language and erase their culture. A linguistic study on language shift in Senegal by Fiona McLaughlin, (2008a) found that while the French language did not pose a serious threat to the use of native African languages in Senegal, Wolof did provide a potential threat to the use of the other national languages there. This is particularly true in a time when rural populations are moving to urban centers to find better working conditions.

The Emergence of Urban Wolof

In urban areas such as Dakar, Thiès, and Saint Louis (which was the former capital of Afrique-Occidentale Française when Senegal was under French rule) proficiency in Wolof is associated with the ability to adjust and actively take part in urban society. For example, many of the individuals that move to the city for work and work as taxi drivers. Since Dakar is the largest city in Senegal, it is a cosmopolitan place and there are many foreigners who need to use a taxi to

move around the city. These international riders will speak French, and the taxi drivers will need to know how to incorporate some French words into their speech to communicate effectively. In these urban areas, it is specifically a new urban vernacular variety of Wolof called Urban Wolof, or sometimes called Dakar Wolof, that denotes an "urbanized" social status. Urban Wolof is characterized by and distinguished from rural dialects of Wolof by its large-scale lexical borrowing from French (Mclaughlin 2001). This change in Wolof is a result of over 350 years of contact with the French language as a result of colonialization which lasted from when the French founded the city of Saint Louis in 1659 to when Senegal gained its independence in 1960. Ngom argues, "In Urban Wolof, Wolof and French operate together naturally and most often subconsciously on the part of the speaker" (Ngom 2000, 138). Speakers of Urban Wolof modify the sound of the French words they use to adhere to the Wolof phonological repertoire. The "wolofization" of French words includes substituting sounds that do not exist in Wolof phonology for the closest equivalent and breaking up consonant clusters to meet Wolof phonotactic constraints (Ngom 2000). Examples of this include the change of the French word "voiture," meaning "car", to "watir" or the change from "fièvre," meaning "fever", to "febar." (Ngom 2000). In Wolof, there are fewer nasal sounds, so [v] is denasalized into [w] or [b]. (Ngom 2000). Additionally, clusters of consonants will be broken by repeating vowels as in "torop" which comes from the French word "trop" meaning too much or "kontor" stemming from the French word "contre" meaning against (Ngom 2000).

One can think of the relationship between French and Wolof as a spectrum with Metropolitan French on one side and Pure Wolof on the other. In between the two languages there exists many varied mixtures of the two languages including Senegalese French, (which is also known as non-standard French) and Urban Wolof. It is important to note that along the

spectrum between the two languages there exists many variations in speech. Each speaker is going to speak their version of a mixture between French and Wolof slightly differently based on their education, their background and in what environment they are speaking. “There are no absolute parameters on what is French and what is Wolof, and boundaries between them are fluid” (McLaughlin 2001). This has led to difficulties in categorizing the mixing of the languages and classifying it into linguistic terms such as “code-switching,” “pidgin” or “creole.” Linguists have had differing and often contradicting opinions[30]. When thinking in terms of why the languages are mixed, it is noticeable that French and Wolof are mixed not so that two groups of people who do not speak the same language can communicate (as in the case of creoles and pidgins) but so that bilinguals can communicate together more precisely (McLaughlin 2017).

The following are examples for two types of language mixing: Senegalese French and Urban Wolof. Senegalese French largely follows French syntax and grammatical structures but is conditioned by the phonotactic constraints of Wolof (Ngom 1999). It also uses very few if any Wolof words in its speech. The following example is taken from the data in Ngom’s 1999 study where he had a Wolof speaker who attended French primary school write a letter in French. The first line is the “correct” Metropolitan French while the second is in the subject’s Senegalese French.

> “Cher frère aîné, j’ai préparé les bagages moi-même. . . . ”
>
> “Sér garand férér, sé préparé lé bagaas awek matét” (Ngom 1999, 136).

As in Urban Wolof, the constant clusters are broken up by repeating vowels and sounds are denasalized such as [v] which is replaced with [w] in “awek.” A particularly interesting aspect of this example is the use of “matét” to replace the French “moi-même” which means myself.

[30] For differing accounts of how to classify the mixture of Wolof and French into linguistic terms see Legendre & Schindler 2010, McLaughlin 2001, and Swigart 1992.

“matét” stems from the French “ma tête” which means “my head.” It is a common practice for multiple French morphemes to be combined into one word by Senegalese speakers (Ngom 1999). Additionally, in Wolof, the way to designate oneself is by saying “sama bopp” which means “my head.” Therefore, “matét” is a Frenchified version of the Wolof concept of “myself.” (Ngom 1999). If this was spoken in Urban Wolof, the speaker would be more likely to say “sama bopp” instead of using the French word. Senegalese French is spoken by those with a higher level of French education as it uses a French grammatical structure that is learned only in French schools. French is not normally spoken outside of a professional sphere and is a marker of formal education. Senegalese French is spoken less commonly than Urban Wolof because access to formal French education is not universal in Senegal with only 41% of the population receiving French education (Fall 2020).

Urban Wolof goes farther than Senegalese French in manipulating and mixing the two languages and would be positioned more closely to the Wolof side of this spectrum of language. As well as phonetic changes, there exists lexical hybridation which is when Wolof and French morphemes are fused to create hybrid words. An example of this is “dibiterie” which is an Urban Wolof word for a restaurant that sells meat. The word combines a Wolof word for meat with the French suffix “-erie.” This suffix is used in other French words such as “essenserie” which means “gas station”. Dibiterie is neither a French nor a Wolof word and shows the increased hybridity of Urban Wolof (Ngom 1999). McLaughlin (2001) calls this code-mixing, when a single word contains morphemes from two different grammatical structures. The following examples of a French stem word combined with a Wolof suffix come from her study in 2001. It should be noted that the French stem words have undergone a phonetic change to resemble Wolof phonetics.

"Seer-***ul***!"

It's not expensive!

"Arieer-***al***!"

Reverse!

In the first example, the third person singular negative suffix "-ul" is added to "seer" which originates from the French word "chèr." In the second example, the Wolof suffix "-al" which denotes the imperative tense, is added to "Arieer" which originates from the French word "Arrière" meaning behind. It is only when the two morphemes are added together that the meaning of the phrase becomes reverse. In the grammatical structure of Wolof, the verb itself stays in the infinitive form and is conjugated by suffixes such as "-al" which denotes the imperative, and pronouns like "-ul" which denotes the negative tense. McLaughlin argues "Such words can be intended or understood as either French or Wolof. In such cases, the two distinct grammatical systems are not even juxtaposed, but rather simultaneous" (McLaughlin 2001, 163). Additionally, French syntax is often manipulated to conform to Wolof syntax. In French, concepts are often not described in one precise word but in a phrase (Dione 1980). For example, Wolof verbs such as "yenu" meaning "to carry on your head" or "gaddu" meaning "to carry on your shoulders" hold precise direct image meanings. To say the same in French would resemble English which requires a phrase such as "porter sur la tête" or "porter sur les épaules." To resemble Wolof syntax, lexicalization in Urban Wolof results in French phrases that are squished together to make one word (Ngom 2000, 168). Examples of this include "alaterete" meaning "à la retraite" in Fench or "dentite" which is a Wolofized version of the French "carte d'identité."

Urban Wolof is not only spoken by French-Wolof bilinguals. The changes between the two languages are fluid and unmarked (Swigart 1992) which means it is possible for individuals

who cannot speak French to understand and use French words in their speech that have been wolofized to become a part of Urban Wolof (McLaughlin 2008a). For example, speakers of Urban Wolof who do not have a formal French education find it difficult to identify French lexical borrowings. In a study by McLaughlin (2001), an Urban Wolof speaking participant did not know the phrase "Ampagaay" came from the French "en pagaille" (McLaughlin 2001, 163). This suggests that Urban Wolof is not only a product of alternative use of two languages for bilinguals between two codes, but it is instead a third, separate code (Swigart 1992). This third, separate code distinguishes itself from French and Wolof just as a new urban identity in Senegal distinguishes itself from other ethnic groups.

Urban Wolof stands in contrast to Kajoor Wolof also known as pure Wolof ('Kajoor' being the word for 'pure' in Wolof) which is spoken in rural areas of the country. It is also referred to as "Wolof piir" with "piir" being a woloficized version of the French word "pur." Kajoor Wolof is highly regarded in the rural areas of Senegal or in the traditionalist city of Touba and marks the speaker as one who is a resister of the growing influence of the West[31]. However, in the urban areas, if one were to speak Kajoor Wolof they would be regarded as overly provincial and perhaps even unable to participate fully in urban society. Therefore, speaking Urban Wolof has become a necessity for those living in cities to prove to others that one can fit into urban life. French continues to hold a place of prestige as the language of the government, and business representing a particular ability to communicate beyond national borders. In incorporating French words into Wolof, making Urban Wolof, speakers show they are accepting of the cosmopolitan nature associated with French. Urban Wolof has emerged as urban areas have grown, and as new urban identities are forming in Senegal (McLaughlin 2001).

[31] See Mansour 1987, Ngom 2000, and McLaughlin 2001 for more detail on the city of Touba's resistance against Western influences.

As a result of extensive interviews with individuals living in Dakar, McLaughlin found that people in Dakar were identifying less with their ethnicity and more with the city they inhabited. One respondant went so far as to say "Quand je suis chez moi je suis Haalpulaar, quand je suis à Dakar je suis Wolof" (158). Another respondant joked, "That's the new ethnicity in Senegal now, to be from Dakar" (McLaughlin 2001, 170). Language helps shape identity especially in a society like in Senegal where ethnicity and language are so closely intertwined. The specific slang of Urban Wolof can be somewhat cryptic, and this creates an "in" group in Senegal that outsiders, like the French, cannot access, which helps to form a new identity (Drame 2019). The use of the French language is therefore separated from a French identity and becomes a part of a specifically Senegalese identity. Speaking Urban Wolof becomes a way for individuals to identify with fellow city-dwellers, and fellow Senegalese. Urban Wolof is a marker of social status and relays to the listener that they are city-dwelling, with some education but not an elite (Ngom 2000). The new urban identity in Senegal is finding a way to reconcile the continued use of the French language while also grounding its use in the African lexical structures of Wolof. There are benefits of French language use which keep Senegal connected to other countries in the ever-increasing age of globalization, but also keep Senegal connected to the diaspora and the greater West African region. In Africanizing the French language into Urban Wolof, the people of Senegal can retain the French language while breaking with the French identity that demands assimilation of Western ideals. In the process of Africanizing the language, a distinctly urban and young identity has emerged in Senegal that uses mastery of language to speak to power and there is no better example of this than in the hip-hop movement in Senegal.

Senegalese Hip Hop as a Catalyst for Change in the Y'en a Marre Movement

Started in the 1980s, Hip Hop arrived in Senegal through the urban middle class as they were exposed to hip hop in the United States and in France from travel for school, work, or pleasure (Ndiaye 2021). In France, rap and Hip Hop were introduced by Black and Arab immigrants who raised criticism through their music about how French identity promotes an invisibility of difference for those with different ethnic backgrounds (Nyawalo 2014, 141). French society demands that minority populations conform and assimilate to French identity which means upholding an inherently European status quo. This was the same mindset of the French colonial movement which promoted assimilation of the colonies to become "French" (Mansour 1987). There is a disconnect between the French identity expected for immigrants and minorities to uphold and the cultural differences do in fact exist and certainly contribute to French society (Nyawalo 2014, 140). Hip Hop gives these artists a platform to resist the forced invisibility of minority groups in France and make their voice heard with a public platform. Their speech is their power which is made exacting through their eloquence. As in France, Hip Hop and rap are used as a medium for disrupting the sociopolitical status quo (Ndiaye 2021, 38). The mixture of French and Wolof words in the music distinguishes Senegalese Hip Hop from the Hip Hop in France (Yervasi 2018). This demonstrates that the mixture of the two languages, and the Africanization of French is a marker of Senegalese identity. Like Hip Hop in the United States, Senegalese Hip Hop initially valued flashy displays of wealth but after criticism from their audiences, they quickly turned their attention to promoting civic awareness against political elites as a way of staying relevant in the eyes of the people (Drame 2019). Therefore, Hip Hop artists act as both messengers of political thought and entertainers.

Hip Hop has become an important tool for asserting one's agency in a system where one does not feel control. This is particularly for younger generations, who use Hip Hop to assert

themselves as people who belong to something greater than themselves and as people who cannot be ignored by politicians or elites. Community engagement and solidarity are fueled by youth development centers such as G Hip Hop which was founded by a well-known Senegalese artist of the first generation of Hip-Hop musicians, named Paco Pat Ghetto. (Zea 2023). As in France, Hip Hop becomes a medium for those disillusioned with their political system to make their speech powerful by forming a collective civic voice. In his documentary on the history of Senegalese Hip Hop, *100% Galsen*, musician and activist Keyti explains "C'est à la fois une sorte de rage, rage d'expression ce qui fait sa portée c'est que cette rage d'expression passe par le filtre de la maîtresse du langage" (Sene 2012)[32]. In taking control of language through music Hip Hop artists are using their voice to advocate for their community and get what is beneficial to them from their political system.

Hip Hop artists have used their platform to raise civic awareness and unify the population through social movements. An example of this is the *Y'en a marre* movement, a movement that centered art and language to push for political change. "Y'en a marre" is a French term meaning "fed up" or "we've had enough." It began in 2011 in response to what the movement leaders believed was wasteful spending by then President Abdoulaye Wade and frequent electrical blackouts. (Ndiaye 2021). The *Y'en a marre* movement was lead in no small part by Hip Hop artists. While they are motivated to critique the politics of the moment, these artists do not adhere to particular Senegalese political parties (Ndiaye 2021). For example, Hip Hop artists advocated for the election of Abdoulaye Wade and his *Soppi* Movement (Soppi means change in Wolof) in the 1990s but when Wade did win the presidency in 2000, he was not exempt from criticism

[32] My transcription.
"It's at the same time a kind of rage, a rage of expression that is carried, a rage of expression that passes through the filter of the mastery of language" (my translation).

from these same artists (Yervasi 2018). In fact, the *Y'en a marre* movement was created in response to government spending habits by the new president that the community deemed wasteful. The *Y'en a marre* movement was similar to the other political movements in West Africa of its time like the *Balai Citoyen* Movement in Burkina Faso (Yervasi 2018). These movements focused on supporting the autonomy of the people by encouraging them to engage in politics through voting, protests, and even by engaging in the news or current events. They would post music videos on the internet that provided political messaging to their viewers and encourage community mobilization efforts to get people to vote (Smith 2019). While the *Balai Citoyen* movement in Burkina Faso disseminated its messaging in French, the *Y'en a marre* movement used Urban Wolof as the language for engaging the people (Yervasi 2018). This alone shows just how prevalent Urban Wolof is in Senegalese society, as well as a shift from widespread use of metropolitan French to an Africanized form of French represented in Urban Wolof.

The choice of language is important for engaging people's interest in social movements because language choice affects the reception of the information (Smith 2019). The choice on the part of the movement's leaders to use Urban Wolof shows that this form of an Africanized French is what is most widely comprehensible and comfortable for their audience. This is particularly true in the digital age which has led to a democratization of access to media. The media and press in Senegal were run by the government through the Conseil National de Régulation de l'Audiovisuel (CNRA) up until the 1990s when the advent of independent radio stations gave listeners more options for content (Ndiaye 2021, 53). There are two main implications for the dissemination of music and political thought when there is governmental control over the media. First, this meant that news and television were shared only in

Metropolitan French which meant individuals without French education or language skills could not consume the media (Smith 2019, 202). Second, government censorship hindered artist's abilities to call for social and political change (Niang 2022, 205). The internet has drastically changed how people get their news in Senegal. In Senegal, over half the population has internet access putting the country slightly above the world average for access to the internet (Smith 2019). This has opened new opportunities for citizen-journalists to emerge on digital platforms. Perhaps the most well-known of these citizen-journalists in Senegal are Keyti and Xuman of *Journal Rappé*.

The multilingual approach of Journal Rappé

Journal Rappé, was started in 2013 by Chiekh "Keyti" Sene and Makhtar "Xuman" Fall. Well-known solo artists in their own right, they decided to join together to create a news show that was accessible to the greater public in Senegal. They rap the news once a week on Fridays on both YouTube and the Senegalese Television station 2STV and use both French and Wolof to communicate their work (Hackel 2013). They have over 25 million views on YouTube and 258,000 subscribers which demonstrates their success in and outside Senegal. Their work revolutionized the dissemination of news in Senegal because they published their show on YouTube, and because they used Hip Hop, humor, and rap to make the news entertaining. It was Xuman who originally came up with the idea. He was frustrated at the high production costs that forced him to wait until he had enough songs for an album to release his politically relevant music (Niang 2022, 209). He wanted to find a way to release individual songs more quickly to keep up with the fast pace of current events. This, coupled with a desire to continue political engagement after the election of Macky Sall, which led to a decline in momentum for the *Y'en a*

marre movement, led Xuman to the idea of *Journal Rappé* (Warner, 2021). Xuman explained his motivation to start *Journal Rappé* in an interview with Maya Angela Smith in 2015: "Everyone can be a journalist or a reporter because of smart phones. We said we're going to do something. We're going to rap the news and give our own point of view on what's going on around us… Instead of waiting for the revolution, we are going to be the revolution" (As quoted in Smith 2019, 203). With the advent of social media, they entered into the realm of citizen-journalism taking back control over the dissemination of news, language, and politics. At first, the show started only on YouTube because they could not find a news station to support their work. However, after their show blew up on social media, they made a deal with 2STV station (Niang 2022). While most people in Senegal speak multiple languages nearly all print media and television news are in French, with some private radio shows in Wolof (Smith 2019). However, *Journal Rappé* is a multilingual show that raps the news in both French and Wolof.

Xuman and Keyti share the airtime of the show equally. Xuman starts the show by rapping in French and Keyti ends the show rapping in Wolof. Their episodes last around seven minutes and cover three or four of the most important stories from the past week (Hackel 2013). Their goal is to create news that engages young people (Gueye 2013). Therefore, they keep their show short and use humor and rap to explain difficult topics. As their artistry grew within the greater Hip Hop movement in Senegal, they understand the importance of keeping a well-informed public to maintain political accountability. In an interview with National Public Radio (NPR), Xuman stated "Ignorance is your enemy. Wisdom is a weapon" (Cornish 2015). Xuman and Keyti's work informs the public while holding politicians accountable and democratizes access to the news all while entertaining and engaging their viewers. Their philosophy could be boiled down into one word Xuman and Keyti themselves coined to describe their work, called

"edutainment," which is an example of their common use of wordplay (Smith 2019). They provide clear and credible information while also being fun and entertaining and humorous. Their ability to weave together humor, music, and news is part of why they are so engaging particularly with younger people. In addition to telling the news, they also use their platform to educate viewers about ongoing social movements such as *Y'en a marre*. In one episode they told viewers how to get involved with the "Dox ak sa Gox" (Walk with your community) initiative which promotes the monitoring of elected government officials (Smith 2019). Their work not only informs people but also encourages them to use their own voices to engage in politics to protect democracy.

Another reason they are so engaging is their multilingual structure. Their unique structure of news in both French and Wolof honors Senegal's heterolinguistic landscape. Since language is tied to social class, it also means that they can reach a wider audience. Viewers with no French education can follow the Wolof section and international viewers can follow the French. For the most part, the French and Wolof sections are identical but sometimes they divulge based on the audience. For example, in episode one of season three, Xuman and Keyti fashion their speech differently depending on the language spoken. When Xuman discusses dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea by undocumented immigrants hoping to make a better life in Europe, he speaks directly to European leaders saying that Europe cannot just be an onlooker and that the problem will drown everyone. When Keyti discusses the same news story in Wolof, he chooses to speak to Senegalese and African leaders who he feels hold responsibility for making the conditions at home bad enough that people are compelled to make the dangerous choice to leave for Europe. The multilingual structure of the show allows Xuman and Keyti to access aspects of communication that could not be reached in only one of the languages. For example, to use curse

words in Wolof would be considered incredibly disrespectful as it is the language of traditional values. To curse in French, however, is more socially acceptable as expletives in casual French speech is more common, especially in France. French words are used to convey concepts that are more crude or even racy. In episode 17 of season one, Xuman and Keyti both use the French word “fornication” in their respective segments to discuss a nocturnal underground party scene that developed during Ramadan. In Wolof, these concepts would not be discussed publicly on the news, but French allows them to speak about it.

Keyti, who does the Wolof portion of the show has spoken in multiple interviews about the importance of language in *Journal Rappé*. “Our relationship with language is really - it's funny. French is the official language. Language is something really important for a community because it defines you. We've forgotten our language, or they [the French] made us forget about our language, so we got to restore that pride of using your own language and being proud of using your own language. So that's the job we are also doing with this *Journal Rappe*. We shouldn't let our languages die” (Cornish 2015). The elevation of Wolof is an important aspect of the show as it encourages the use of Wolof to speak about topics like politics which are usually spoken of in French. Additionally, he has discussed how the creativity required in Hip Hop was a way of reclaiming his culture. “My first linguistic revolution was with rappers. The only thing that I’m really, really, really proud of, is people asking me how come you are able to say these things in Wolof? You know, it takes creativity. It takes research. You just have to go back, ask people. How can I translate this idea? . . . It is important” (Quoted in Smith 2019, 207). The show takes care to honor the differences between the two languages in both sound and rhythm. Every show has music in the background that keeps the pace of the rap which Xuman and Keyti recite. In her study of *Journal Rappé*’s production process, Jessica Hackel explains how the

show's music producer, Abdul Mbackey, better known as "No Face Undacova," is sensitive to the differences in sound between the two languages. He works to reflect these differences in the beats he produces for the show. During the French segments the beats are faster reflecting the flowy syllables of the French language. This changes in the Wolof segments as the beats drop in tone and pacing to reflect the deeper sound of Keyti's speech.

Though the languages are kept separate on the show, there is an inevitable mixing of language present. Keyti has said in interviews he tries to use Urban Wolof slang to engage younger audiences for example leading to a sprinkling of French phrases in the Wolof section such as ending a sentence with "quoi" or adding in an adverb like "vraiment" (Smith 2019, 207). When languages do mix, it is often with the goal of achieving the most effective communication. Numbers are often spoken in French, mostly due to the fact that French numbers can be quickly added in a fast-paced rap compared to Wolof numbers. Much of the humor in the show comes from wordplay or witty remarks as evidenced by their fondness of portmanteaus such as "edutainment" and "journartiste." Keyti and Xuman use language to make shocking satirical statements at the end of their stories which they call "punch lines" (Hackel 2013, 17). In episode 20 of season one, Keyti combines French and Wolof to make a political critique of the new prime minister at the time Aminata Toureé, though she is better known in Senegal as Mimi. He starts the segment praising her tenacity as a woman in politics but ends the segment with a shocking punch line. "Mais nak...sa guerfaz yi rek nga war sanzer passeukeu diplomatiquement quand même tu nous mets en danzer" (Hackel 2013)[33]. In this line, Keyti critiques Tournée's preference to wear western style wigs instead of her natural hair. He also chooses to make the critique in French which additionally mocks her association with the West.

[33] English translation: "but you're jeopardizing our diplomacy with your weaves," translation by Keyti.

The multilingual aspect of their show is also part of why it has been so accessible and successful internationally with the Senegalese/ French speaking African diaspora. The use of French allows for lateral connections throughout the diaspora. *Journal Rappé* is well known abroad and has been covered in many large publications like The New York Times, NPR, and Al Jazeera. The New York Times even called *Journal Rappé* a new form of the popular American news satire program "The Daily Show" (Lau 2013). *Journal Rappé*'s messaging faces inward to engage the Senegalese population but also outward to connect the diaspora and to combat prejudiced conceptions about Africa (Niang 2022). In an interview with Anna Gueye, Xuman said his goal was to give "notre version de l'actualité différente de celle imposée par certains medias" (2013). They want to combat the idea that "Africa is misery" through international edutainment (Niang 2022). With their French broadcast, they also can connect with the diaspora. They encourage an international viewership and the maintenance of a transnational digital agora by inviting international artists to perform (Hackel 2013). For example, when President Obama visited Senegal during his presidency, Xuman and Keyti invited several guest artists to share their views on the visit on episode nine of season one. In their plans to develop and expand *Journal Rappé* they are working to set up international *Journal Rappés* in other countries such as Mauritania (Haessner 2018). They are also collaborating with Google to expand their production and viewership (Hackel 2013).

Spoken language in Senegal is changing to suit the needs of the people who speak it. The various mixtures of French and Wolof demonstrate how the boundaries of language can be fluid in a multilingual society. The popularity of Urban Wolof has risen as more of the population in Senegal urbanizes. This dialect of Wolof which incorporates many lexical borrowings from French, has become popular among young people and Hip Hop artists in particular. After many

years of limited control over their own languages due to the French colonial regime, Hip Hop artists have led social movements that revalorize the use of African languages like Wolof and encourage the population to make their voice powerful through language by engaging in civil discourse. *Journal Rappé* is an example of how Hip Hop culture in Senegal has embraced multilingualism. The young people who watch Xuman and Keyti see them as role models when it comes to how they speak language. Therefore, Xuman and Keyti are shaping political and linguistic discourse by creating a space of alternate media expression. This digital space is open to anyone with internet access which results in a democratization of news access. It also means that language is deterritorialized. For centuries the French language has had an intimate relationship with its place of origin, France, and all that France represents for Africans, mainly the legacy of colonial rule. This work is disassociating the French language with French identity and associating it with a new urban identity that is markedly African. This reclamation of the language to communicate African ideals and identity makes the French language African. Multilingual communication is showcased in Senegalese cinema as well where language becomes a tool to highlight the socio-political status of a film's characters. This additionally exposes the relationship between language and systems of power.

Chapter 3

Revealing the Power Dynamics of Language in Senegalese Film

Film has been and continues to be an important medium in Senegal, since before independence in 1960. Its special ability to merge sound with images is key especially in a region with a long history of oral narratives. Unlike literature, anyone can watch a film, and it can be a tool to create new narratives and form opinions which is why African filmmakers like Ousmane Sembène made the transition from writing novels to directing films. "Ça m'a amené au cinéma pour mieux poursuivre ma quête de militantisme. . . pour raconter l'histoire avec la tradition de l'oralité le cinéma devient pour nous un outil important. Il est de tous les arts l'expression les plus faciles et les plus agréables pour un grand public" (Gadjigo 2015). These narratives and opinions are often central to the creation of national identities. During the colonial period, film was used to restrict decolonial thought while advancing colonial values. In 1934, the Laval Decree was instituted which legalized censorship of cinema and gave the French state sole control over production and distribution of all films. Named after a colonial minister Pierre Laval, it was the first instance of legalized intervention into African cinema on behalf of the French state and also the first acknowledgement that cinema had the power to awake anti-colonial thought. The films at the time were focused on labeling Africa as "other" through anthropological films that exoticized African culture like the films of Jean Rouche *Au pays des mages noirs* (1947) or *Initiation à la danse des possédés* (1949) for example. After independence, film was used in an opposite manner to construct a distinctly Senegalese identity that could be distinguished from France. By analyzing language in Senegalese films one can learn much about the socio-political status of language and its relationship to power.

Films were an important tool for the French to create a reductive narrative of Africa during colonialization while at the same time disseminating narratives that uplifted French culture and values. The earliest films in Senegal were brought by Christian missionaries in the earliest 20th century (Kayir 2022). These films, all of which were in French, used language to restrict African thought. Senegalese filmmaker and philosopher, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra who worked on films with Ousmane Sembène, argued that colonial films in French alienated individuals from African structures of thought which cannot be properly captured in the French language. "Je ne dis pas que le cinéma seul réalise cette monstruosité de faire de nous des étrangers dans notre propre pays, mais admirablement manié par l'Occident, il participe, pour une bonne part, à notre abâtardissement, à l'aliénation de notre pensée et de nos consciences" (Vieyra 1969). Films thus upheld a colonial view. They were African stories told by Europeans such as *Paysans noirs* (1948) directed by Georges Régnier and based off of the 1931 novel of the same name by the colonial administrator Robert Delavignette. There did exist however, anti-colonial films by European filmmakers as well such as *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953) by Chris Marker and Alain Renais though it was banned in France for more than a decade. After Senegalese independence, African filmmakers revolutionized the medium to tell African stories made for and by Africans to depict honest portrayals of African life.

Film in Senegal has been political from the beginning. After independence, it became a mechanism for disseminating decolonial thought, an inversion of its role throughout the colonial period. Films were, and continue to be, a method for Africans to retake control of their own image and decolonize the mind of their people. In the early days of independence, these films were a hybrid between documentary and fiction, telling real stories that unraveled the myths of hegemonic imperial rule (Genova 2013). Language helps to structure thought. When African

languages began to be included in African cinema, it radically changed film's ability to relate to larger audiences without French education. The language also helped to enter anti-colonial systems of thought that are inaccessible in French. Language choice is particularly political and can be used by directors to accentuate the French language's relationship to colonial systems. In looking at when and where the French language is placed in African cinema, we can see its place in Senegalese society and how it is changing over time.

In this chapter, I will analyze two Senegalese films that showcase the socio-political status of language in Senegalese society. The first film, *Mandabi* (1968) by Ousmane Sembène illustrates the language dynamics in Senegal just after independence in 1960. It is the first film made in Wolof and depicts a strong relationship between language and class. The second film, *Atlantique* (2019) by Mati Diop depicts present-day socioeconomic and political struggles as well as a contemporary look at language use in Senegal. Both of these films lay bare the systems of power underneath language policies in Senegal through their depictions of power systems. In comparing and contrasting the two films, we can see how the dynamics of language have changed over time and how they have stayed very much the same as well.

Post-independence language use in Mandabi directed by Ousmane Sembène

Ousmane Sembène is widely regarded as the father of African cinema due to his pioneering film style that represented African life on its own terms, radically breaking with the previous colonial depictions of the continent by European filmmakers (Bakari 2008). His works, which focus on the socio-political landscape of his native country Senegal, have garnered international acclaim across Africa and Europe and the Americas. At first, Sembène was a well-known author of Senegalese literature. His novels include *La Docker Noir* (1956), *Les Bouts de*

Bois de Dieu (1960), and, *Guelwaar* (1996). However, as discussed in the first chapter, literature was not largely available to the general public because printed media was in French. This, along with low levels of literacy, prevented Sembène from reaching larger audiences. In an interview with Teshome Gabriel, he explained, "The problem when I was writing books was that I was only known by the elite minority. When I talked with the masses, some had heard of me or they had seen my picture in the newspaper, but other than that, that is all they knew of me. And so, the problem for me was to get involved in an art like cinema, which has a larger audience" (Gabriel 1982, 112).

His goal was both to portray the common man and to speak to the common man in his work. For that reason, he believed that film was a better medium for speaking to the people of Senegal because anyone, no matter their formal education, can watch a film. For Sembène, the move was just as political as it was artistic, as films have a better opportunity than books to create new consciousness among the masses (Mortimer 1972). Sembène understood the systems of power that uphold the prestige that surrounds the French language even to this day. To be a novelist meant that Sembène would have to abide by publishers' preference for French (Warner 2012). Film allowed Sembène to explore multilingual stories and depict Senegalese culture in a more honest way that could not have been done solely in French. This is evident in his work, which asserts the value of telling African stories in African languages. His own change from novelist to filmmaker showcases "the relevance of film as a vehicle for education and liberation in contemporary Africa" (Mortimer 1972, 26). It is also a testament to his profound commitment to socially relevant art. He was committed to portraying candid depictions of African life which was revolutionary in a time of recent Senegalese independence and after years of French colonial

control over cinema (Kayir 2022). One part of the authenticity of Sembène's films is his mixture of language which opens new avenues of African thought.

Sembène's film *Mandabi* (1968), which is also his first film in an African language, Wolof, demonstrates the power dynamics behind language in post-independence Senegal. The film follows the story of an everyday traditional Senegalese patriarch Ibrahima Dieng, an unemployed man who lives in a poor quartier of Dakar with his two wives and many children. One day, he is sent a mandabi (money order) for 25,000 CFA from his nephew Abdou, an immigrant in Paris who sweeps the streets of Paris in order to save enough money to afford his return to Senegal and start a family. Abdou asks his uncle to safeguard 20,000 for his return to Senegal, give 3,000 to his mother and tells Ibrahima to keep 2,000 as a gift. The film follows Dieng as he tries to navigate the labyrinthine and at times even absurdist bureaucratic system to obtain an official identification card so he can then cash the money order. When his neighbors learn about his newfound wealth, they swarm around him trying to solicit loans or convince him to buy things from them which only exasperates the situation. The money order that was supposed to bring the poor man and his family some relief instead launches them into crushing debt and in the end, the mandabi is stolen by a sweet-talking relative named Mbaye, leaving Ibrahima worse off than before. Throughout the film, Sembène critiques the neocolonial systems that still govern post-independence Senegal and uses the French language in the film as a representation of neocolonialism. The film can also be seen as an allegory for the globalized finance system that promises aid to Africa but leaves insurmountable debt in its place.

Though the film is well-known as the first film in Wolof, there are scenes in French. Each instance of spoken French is purposeful, however, and separated from Wolof speech to provide commentary on how social status and wealth relate to language. French is the official language

of Senegal, and is therefore the language of bureaucracy, business, and the bourgeoise. The French-speaking characters in the film drink and eat imported coffee and croissants, work for the government or the bank, and use French to belittle or even trick individuals who do not speak French like Ibrahima Dieng. When Ibrahima travels to the post office to cash the money order, the official behind the desk asks for a carte d'identité. He requires that Ibrahima prove his identity with a foreign and colonial control of identification. Though the interaction takes place in Wolof, French words are also inserted into the conversation which include the three objects Ibrahima must acquire to prove that he is in fact himself. Only then can he cash the money order. These words include "carte d'identité," "photo," and "timbre fiscal." Ibrahima tries to prove his identity using a tax receipt which he calls "impôt," inserting another French word into the conversation, but the impersonal and imperious bureaucratic system demands that its citizens adhere to specific categorizations creating a barrier between the individual and the system. The word "impôt" is actually one of the first French words inserted into the film. When the postman comes to deliver the money order in the first scene, Ibrahima's wives Méty and Aram become worried exclaiming that they have paid their "impôt" inserting the French word into their Wolof speech. When Méty says aloud the word "impôt," she drags out the sound of the vowel slightly which changes the rhythm of her speech slightly and puts emphasis on the foreign quality of the word. These words are used when interacting with characters outside of the family's neighborhood where one's face and word are no longer sufficient to prove one's identity. The French words obstruct Ibrahima's access to himself, and his identity and they are the only way to obtain a proof of citizenship in the post colony. Ibrahima leaves the post office to travel to the Commissariat de police to obtain his identity card which depicts the police a neocolonial guardian of people's access to themselves. In other ways, French becomes a manner of creating

new networks of relationality in the French post colony among those who are less closely related. For example, the police officer Ibrahima visits calls him “Papa” as a sign of respecting his elder. Mbaye, who we never learn for certain if he is a relative by blood or by acquaintance, calls Ibrahima “tonton” and Méty “tata.” These are French words, but they are co-opted to create familial bonds where there are none.

The film highlights the duality of language by focusing on the tension between French and Wolof. The two languages are situated as opposites and are shown to represent different cultures, social statuses, and even different world views (Linscott 2014). Clothing is an emblem of this opposition in the film. Ibrahima, a traditional Wolof man wears an impressive boubou when he goes around town with a Kofi hat to denote his piety as a practicing Muslim. His dress is characteristically traditional compared to the French-speaking bureaucrats who all wear western style dress. The boubou is a symbol of his pride as a respectable member of Senegalese society. When Ibrahima first visits the post office to cash the money order, he hires a scribe to read the letter his nephew Abdou sent him along with the money. Ibrahima promises to pay him once the money order is cashed, but upon learning he cannot cash it, he leaves and the scribe (who is played by Ousmane Sembène himself) lashes out, grabbing at Ibrahima’s large boubou. Ibrahima becomes outraged at this usurpation of his private space and what he perceives as a sullying of his status as a respectable man. Sembène uses French and Wolof as monikers for opposing visions for a contemporary Africa (Linscott 2014). French is emblematic of the new African elite which emerged post-independence. It represents the euro-modernization of Senegal in a rapidly globalizing world. It shows also that though independence from French rule was won in 1968, French institutions such as the banks, bureaucratic systems, and even money orders still rule Senegalese society. This capitalistic system prioritizes individual consumption. There is an

exception for French words appropriated by Wolof speakers to express their bonds of relationality that don't exist in Western society such as calling an elder "uncle" as a sign of respect. Wolof is the language of tradition and represents a time before colonialism where a "culture of dependency" keeps the community secure (Lincoln 2010). Also called "African solidarity" by Samuel Zadi, the term describes the communal mode of living that favors the well-being of the community over the individual.

The film showcases how French capitalistic institutions disrupt and destroy traditional Wolof solidarity and circles of exchange. For example, many of the issues Ibrahima faces in trying to cash the money order revolve around his illiteracy and inability to speak French. He is ill-suited for the structures of a Euro-influenced commerce. On the other hand, his wives, and even he, have no trouble getting rice, fish, clothing on the promise of future payment. The quest he must undergo to locate an identification card shows how he must justify his existence in a Western-style system. This system is contrasted against his local neighborhood, separate from his community, and divorced from oral professions of personhood where one person can vouch for the honesty and integrity of another. In the bureaucratic system, a person's word is not sufficient, in fact it is dismissed and worse, it is annulled. This stands in contrast to his traditional neighborhood where his presence among others is justification enough for a place in society. Once he leaves his neighborhood for the city, Ibrahima becomes anonymous and easily ignored by the bureaucratic system showing a contrast between the local and the global (Niang 1995), the suburban neighborhood which still functions like an African village and the city-center that functions like the French metropolis. At the same time, Islamic convention creates unreasonable pressures on Ibrahima coercing him to promise loans of money he cannot give and does not even have. When the Imam asks him for a 3,000 CFA loan, he does not deny it for fear of being seen

as individualistic, even though only 2,000 of the 25,000 money order is for him. Likewise, he cannot refuse money to a lying beggar woman for fear of spiritual condemnation.

Solidarity is also misused to protect individual capital in the film. When Mbarka, the shopkeeper learns of Ibrahima's money order, he tries to sell him more food saying, "You are not a customer in my shop; you are a brother. Stop being so suspicious"[34] Mbarka uses the French "client" for customer but the Wolof "sama rak" for "my brother" showing a contrast between the relationships that can be expressed in French as opposed to Wolof. Mercantile relationships of commerce are expressed in French while relationships of familiarity are expressed in Wolof. Samuel Zadi argues that Mbarka tries to obscure the capitalistic relationship he and Ibrahima actually have by creating a false sense of traditional brotherhood that might cause Ibrahima to trust him (Zadi 2018). However, when a little boy enters the shop after Ibrahima, he calls the boy "sama doom" (my child), another form of relating to who he is speaking with using Wolof. So it may be that Mbarka uses the different languages because each language is tied to a different network. Wolof is to communicate a network of sharing and exchange, while French is for a financial network. This can be seen in the scene with Abdou, Ibrahima's nephew in France, when he says that he came to France to learn a "métier" and earn "xaalis" (money). The first word in French relates to a financial system of learning a trade to work, while the second word in Wolof relates to a concept that is shared and exchanged.

Ibrahima and his family survive off of the credit that Mbarka gives them for food, but he is not always so lenient. When Ibrahima becomes desperate to pay Abdou's mother her promised 3,000 CFA, Mbarka is not sympathetic when he learns that Ibrahima cannot pay his debts and exploits the vulnerable situation to take jewelry that belonged to Aram, Ibrahima's second wife.

[34] Translated transcriptions of the movie are taken from the official subtitles for the film.

Ibrahima must use the jewelry as a mortgage for the money he owes to Mbarka and has to pawn jewelry worth 15,000 CFA for a 2,000 CFA loan, not even enough to pay his sister her share of the money order. This exchange is different from the system of credit Ibrahima has used throughout the film. Credit is what has fed him and his family for years, but now he must pay with objects he actually has like the jewelry. The film shows that traditional solidarity cannot function properly under a capitalistic system and the discrepancies between the languages of French and Wolof point to this just as they create a type of fluency across cultural economies.

Though French and Wolof are opposed in the film as metaphors for the world views the languages represent, the film does not advocate for neither an acceptance of globalized capitalism nor a return to traditional society. In fact, the film critiques both and instead advocates for something else, a third way forward that respects tradition while adjusting to the fact of a globalized world, in linguistic terms this means the addition of French loanwords that describe the entities of globalism such as “cheque,” “timbre fiscal,” “mairie,” “commissariat de police,” and “carte d’identité.” The addition of these French words shows that these new concepts cannot be ignored and are a part of modern society. However, they are not integrated fully into Wolof, they remain French. There is a refusal to integrate these terms into Wolof because they simply don’t exist in Wolof and are not allowed entrance into the language. In keeping them separate, Sembène is showcasing that they are foreign, critiquing the economics of exploitation. French is the language that Mbaye uses to trick Ibrahima. The audience knows that he plans to make Ibrahima sell his house and knows Ibrahima should not trust him with the money order, but because he tells his plan in French, Ibrahima and his family are unaware of the scheme. This appropriation of French is demonstrated by “Mandabi,” the title of the film and the driving force behind all of Ibrahima’s ails, which is itself a French-Wolof hybrid word. It combines the French

word “Mandat” with the Wolof definitive article “bi” into one word. French and Wolof thus combined signal the overtness of globalism upon the traditional Wolof world. At the same time, French and Wolof are not spoken for equal amounts of time. “Mandabi” is an example of a French word brought into a Wolof grammatical system. The overall structure remains Wolof.

This Africanization of French and French intrusion into African life is also apparent in the larger production dynamics of the film. Due to funding constraints, Sembène had to work with a French producer to create *Mandabi.* This did put considerable strain on Sembène’s creative control. Though he has been critiqued in the eyes of other filmmakers for acquiring European funding, Sembène has stated, “Je suis prêt à coucher avec le diable pour réaliser mes films.” (Mortimer 1972, 67). One could see the “mandabi” itself as a kind of “sleeping with the devil.” It is a certain acceptance of French bureaucracy to access money that is coming to Senegal and to the hands of Senegalese people. The mandabi does not originate in Senegal, it is a French bureaucratic concept that allows Abdou to send money back to his country. Without the mechanism, he would not be able to send the money home which at the same time helps his family and continues to incentivize him to stay in France. A condition of Sembène’s funding for the film was a cut of the film entirely in French which would be created alongside the original in Wolof (Warner 2012). Therefore, the script was caught in a series of re-negotiations between French and Wolof during the shooting. Sembène, as the director, was in charge of mediating different types of speech to create an effect that upheld his argument. Certainly, Isseu Niang’s spontaneously composed title song ‘Mandabi’ remained untranslatable into French and the French version of the film never gained any currency.

Globalization, like the money order itself, may not be a modernity that Africa can escape but that does not mean either that it is a zero-sum game requiring a loss of tradition. Similarly for

French, which while undeniable for world trade need not replace nor take over Wolof and other African languages. If anything, *Mandabi* is proof that Senegal with a contained Africanized, Wolofized use of French continues to use French in ways that are beneficial but never overstep into traditional Wolof spaces. Sembène is arguing for Africans to form solidarity, but to do so in a way that does not try to return to the past and ignore modernity. In 2003 Sembène said, "We must revise, question, and rethink, absolutely, all laws that have been devised elsewhere before our [African] independence. I am a part of the world like anybody. I am not the periphery of it" (Sembène 2003, 8). He envisions a world where Africa can participate equally in global society and that had to occur with an Africa facing cinematic tradition that refused the heliocentrism of French-language cinema. Throughout the colonial period, African languages and Africa as a whole was pushed to the periphery of thought. A Wolof script in which French words are interlopers returns Africa to the center.

The film's final scene is a fierce critique of a capitalist, Islamic, patriarchal Africa modeled on coloniality. After Ibrahima is robbed of his mandabi, he issues a passionate monologue about how he must also become "a jëkk jëkk"[35] Sembène is critiquing capitalism, Islam, and the patriarchy as all colonial forces. He showcases the dog eat dog mentality of coloniality and individualistic notions of survival. The repetition of words in his monologue highlights the high levels of emotion at the climax of the story. Wolof is an oral language of repeated words, and he says "dëgg" which means "to understand" many times showing just how certain he appears in his revelation that he too must become a wolf to survive. In response to his outcry, the postman, the same man who delivered the troublesome mandabi, tells Ibrahima,

[35] A wolf among wolves (translation is taken from the official English subtitles

"ñanu ko soppi." Ibrahima responds, "Kan?" "Yow, sa doom, sa jabar, man,"[36] the postman assures. It is in the reminder of who "we" is, that Ibrahima remembers he is not alone after struggling to work with an alienating bureaucracy that disregarded his place in society and is instead a member of a community even if he doesn't know them as he knows his neighbors. Earlier in the film, he saw only those in his neighborhood as part of his community, but now the postman who is seen as a person outside of the neighborhood, reminds Ibrahima that he is a part of a larger community as well. This is an unexpected phrase from the postman who works as a messenger to deliver written words in French from the former colonial power as in the mandabi, or from the neocolonial bureaucracy, such as tax forms. A visit from the postman is not seen as good news to Méty and Aram when he first comes to their house with the mandabi. Sembène's choice to have him as the voice of change in the film is therefore interesting. Perhaps it is a reminder that everyone, no matter their position in the system, can be an instrument of change.

The ending of *Mandabi* is ambiguous. When asked by Sada Niang about the meaning of linguistic diversity in the film Sembène answered, "As far as I am concerned, I no longer support notions of purity. Purity has become a thing of the past. We have to open up to the diaspora for their and our own sake. I constantly question myself. I am neither looking for a school nor for a solution but asking questions and making others think" (Niang 1995, 176). The purity that Sembène speaks of is related to language because of the colonial education that enforced a "pure" French education. In a time of post-colonialism, this purity is a thing of the past. Africanized French embraces the impurity, the blending of different languages to reflect the linguistic diversity that exists on the continent. Purity is what has kept the French language disconnected as a colonial language that is used to divide society based on those who can abuse

[36] "As for the country, we will change it." "Who?" "You, your children, your wives, me." (translation from the official English subtitles)

it for their own gain, like Mbaye. It is in the appropriation of French to fit African thoughts that the transformation of French into an African language occurs. This transformation is still ongoing in present day Senegalese society, As Christopher Linscott remarks "If Mandabi is a film "of its time" it nonetheless prefigures the present" (Linscott 2014, 231). Many years later, and significantly closer to the present, the film *Atlantique* shows how the dynamics of language have changed over time to reflect a contemporary landscape, but also how, in many ways, they have stayed the same.

A contemporary look at language use in Mati Diop's Atlantique

Atlantique (2019)[37] is Franco-Senegalese director Mati Diop's first feature length film, a contemporary depiction of love and migration in Senegal. The story follows Ada, a young Senegalese woman who is promised in marriage to the rich Omar. However, she is in love with Souleiman, a poor construction worker whose boss, Mr. Ndiaye has refused to pay Souleiman and his fellow workers for three months. Exasperated and disillusioned with the lack of opportunities in his home country, he looks to Europe for the promise of a better future. One night, without saying goodbye, he and his friends decide to leave for Europe and make the dangerous crossing in a pirogue, a small fishing boat, to Spain. They do not survive the journey. When the women left behind begin to act strangely, with fevers and gaps in their memory, fires begin to disrupt Ada's wedding and the house of Souleiman's boss. The *rabb* (spirits) of the men who died in the Atlantic have returned to possess their loved ones and demand their pay from their deceitful boss. It is a genre-mixture of a film, being at once a love story, a social drama, a mystery, a docufiction, and a ghost film.

[37] The English title of the film is *Atlantics*, but for the purpose of this paper I will be using the French title, *Atlantique.*

This structure, while perhaps confusing to critics, reflects the hybridity of modern Senegalese society which as discussed in the second chapter, has embraced a mixture of French, Senegalese, Islamic and even American cultural aspects. Diop, a person of mixed-race herself, has commented on the hybridity of her style. In an interview with *Interview Magazine,* she remarked "At the time of my film *Atlantics*, I felt that French people and the French press got very overwhelmed with my profile. Like, "Okay, she's French, but she shoots in Senegal, in Wolof. Her films are not fiction or documentary, they're hybrid. She's an actress too, but she's making films." They got overwhelmed super quickly with people like me just because I'm too hybrid. You can't put me in any box." (Harris 2024). Diop is the daughter of Wasis Diop, a Senegalese musician and Christine Brossard, a French photographer. Her uncle is Djibril Diop Mambéty, is the celebrated Senegalese filmmaker of films such as *ToukiBouki* (1973). His work was known for its flamboyantly experimental style and its ability to expose the realities of neocolonialism and globalized capitalism. Diop's style similarly confronts neocolonial issues with a culturally pluralistic approach.

The film *Atlantique* (2019) is based off of her previous short film *Atlantiques* (2009), a documentary that follows the real-life account of Serigne Seck, a young man who died trying to make the dangerous crossing between Senegal and Spain. *Atlantique* is the fictional reenactment of that story. The film's realistic depiction of Senegalese life gives insight into everyday language use in Senegal. It is also an example of language used for political effect. Diop's film is made to critique the systems of power that surround language and by analyzing language use in this film, one can see how French and Wolof are tied to neocolonial hierarchies.

This film mostly uses Wolof as opposed to French. In comparison to *Mandabi,* where French and Wolof were used separately by characters of different classes, in *Atlantique,* French

is absorbed into the Wolof spoken by the characters. However, like *Mandabi*, characters representing the bourgeoisie do incorporate more French into their speech, such as Mr. Ndiaye and the police officers investigating the fires. For example, when the young detective, Issa, imprisons Ada in an attempt to make her talk to him about the fire and Souleiman, Omar, who is now Ada's husband comes to get her and the Commissaire tells Issa to let her go saying "Jëkaram moom la jëlsi. Laisse-la tout suite."[38] The conversation between the Commissaire and Issa switches consistently between Wolof and French. Each time the Commissaire speaks in French, the pitch of his voice is higher, and stays lower when speaking Wolof which helps the viewer distinguish between the two languages. Additionally, the rhythm of his speech changes when he speaks French. When he tells Issa to "laisse-la toute suite" his voice slows, enunciating every syllable forcefully and even moving his hand up and down in time with his words for added emphasis. The only scene fully in French is on the part of the doctor who performs a virginity test on Ada after her parents-in-law demand it, learning of her affair with Souleiman. It is not a conversation, just a series of demands as he positions her for the test. In the film, it is as though the French language is an intruder on the purity of Wolof, much like the doctor intruding on Ada's personal space and dignity. The scene connects and critiques both the French language and the Senegalese patriarchy, showing them to be colonial controls of power.

One of Diop's goals of this film was to portray an authentic depiction of contemporary Senegalese life as it is disrupted by a ghost generation, the generation that has been lost to sea. All of the actors in the film are real individuals that Diop met on the street which results in genuine acting performances (Serge 2023). Additionally, many of the actors do not speak French with a high level of proficiency, which Diop remarked in a press interview at Cannes, saying that

[38] Her husband is here. Let her go now. (Translation from the official English subtitles)

it caused some issues during filming because she herself does not have a high level of proficiency in Wolof (Serge 2023). Therefore, the film is an example of how French words and phrases are incorporated into Wolof on the part of those who do not have a high level of proficiency in French. In *Mandabi,* the characters are separated by language relative to their profession and social standing. The characters that speak French speak French and those that speak Wolof speak Wolof with occasional French loan words but in *Atlantique,* French and Wolof are mixed together in sentences spoken by individuals that do not speak French at all such as Ada's friend Dior. When the women are upset upon learning that the boys have left for Spain she says, "Mu xam ak mu bañko xam. Ils ont déjà partis. Diap ci nga dal."[39] In speaking the French, the rhythm of Dior's words slows as she tries to calm her anxious friend similar to the pattern of the Commissaire's speech. The inserted French feels out of place against her quickly spoken Wolof. It is an interjection that adds emphasis to the urgency of what she is trying to say.

The merging of binaries is a central theme in the film which contemplates the liminal space between life and death, the present and the past, Africa, and Europe, the real and the fantastic, French and Wolof. This liminality is demonstrated through the leitmotif of the sun setting over the Atlantic Ocean. These shots are dispersed throughout the film marking the transition to when the women become possessed by the *rabb* of the departed men who haunt the night. The *rabb* are spirits of the dead who inhabit the living. In the case of *Atlantique,* they are *faru rabb* or lover spirits who come back specifically to haunt their loved ones (Galt 2022). The ocean and the sky are mixed by the light of the sun which shows the harsh boundaries between the past and the present and the real and the fantastical are not so stark (Struve 2024). Even the heavens and the mass graves in the water are not disconnected realms. The focus on the liminal

[39] "It's too late. They have already left. Please calm down" (Translation from the official English subtitles).

shows her commitment to migration as a global issue and deconstructs the arbitrary borders of the West through *faru rabb*. Migrants themselves are liminal, suspended in a space beyond borders and even treated as expendable bodies by immigration laws (Forfert 2025).

The film exposes the root causes for clandestine migration critiquing neocolonial globalized commerce that exploits the global south which in turn incentivizes immigration to Europe to strengthen their economy by working lower paying jobs (Kayir 2022). The boys who leave for Spain have not been paid in three months by Mr. Ndiaye and the police do not wish to interfere with the Commissaire telling Issa in French, “Monsieur Ndiaye a beaucoup fait pour nous.” This narrative of colonial gratitude is critiqued as the use of the French here again stands out in the Wolof film as an unwelcome imposition. Diop’s use of the supernatural permits a conflation of the past and the present. The ghosts in the film not only haunt the women they left behind, and their cheating boss, but also the stories of empire that deny their past wrongdoings. Yasmina Price argues, “the spectral lyricism of Diop’s cinema is a haunting mechanism that reveals the extent to which the catastrophes of colonialism have never stopped happening” (Price 2023, 56). One could even argue that the continued use of French, a colonial language, is another catastrophe of colonialism that never stopped happening. Diop discussed her inspiration for including a fantastical dimension to her social commentary saying, “When I was in Dakar in 2009, the way the boys were telling me about the crossing felt very strange to me, because I was talking to boys who were here in front of me, in flesh and bones, but who were so possessed by the idea of elsewhere that they were no longer here anymore. And it's also about a youth who disappeared in the ocean, which can be felt like a ghost generation — you know, a whole group of young people who disappeared in the ocean. And I personally — I was troubled; I was a bit haunted by that. And that's why for me, it was always going to be a ghost film” (Qureshi 2019).

The fatal attraction to the ocean is felt throughout the film. Even when Souleiman is with Ada, she complains "Yaa ngi xool geej gi rek. Xooloo ma sax."[40] Serigne Seck, the young man at the center of Diop's documentary short *Atlantiques* once said to Diop "Quand on decide de partir, c'est qu'on est déjà mort" (Serge 2019)[41]. Therefore, there is a clear spiritual dimension to a depiction of migration that is truly African which is needed to comment on the underlying system of power. However, in the short, his longing to leave is expressed only in Wolof not as death but as an aspiration. There is sturdiness in his conviction showing that before he has left, he has already gone. Though the choice to leave is provoked by an inability to find financial stability, there exists a faith, a determination that continues him to look for elsewhere. At the time of the film, Serigne had already made the crossing once but was deported back to Senegal. Throughout the film he speaks of his conviction to make the perilous crossing again. He does not see failure as having returned to Senegal, but as a failure of resolve to try again (Xavier 2022). Nothing, even the pleadings of his friends will prevent him from trying again. This is not to say, he expects to become rich in a Western paradise, but that his hopelessness is so acute that he can see no future where he is, leading to a determination to break down the boarders enacted by Western liberal democracies that deny him a future. In French, this idea can only be expressed as "mort", which means the Wolof creates an opening where the French does not. Senegalese writer Abasse Ndione uses "mbëkë mi," a Wolof term that encapsulates the comprehensive hopeless that sparks the conviction to risk everything by crossing the ocean in his novel, *Mbëkë mi. À l'assaut des vagues de l'Atlantique* which also tells the story of Senegalese migration to Spain.

The spiritual dimension of the film is at the core of Diop's argument against the neocolonial systems that exploit the global south and in turn encourages the deathly migration to

[40] You're just watching the ocean. You're not even looking at me. (translation from the official English subtitles)
[41] "When one decides to depart it is because they are already dead" (my translation).

Europe. It is worth mentioning that elements that to a Western audience may seem fantastical, actually have epistemic grounding in West African and Islamic cultures where djinn and the faru rabb are not considered unrealistic (Price 2023). Diop herself has said that in African cinema "fantasy is part of reality" (Struve 2024, 198). The inclusion of the fantastic is at once a refusal of a colonial notion of reality (which ignores the presence of spirits) and a demand to bring humanity to those whose are lost in the ocean. Her work deconstructs classical colonial dichotomies focusing not on the real world but on the realness of the world (Struve 2024). The real horror of the film is not the supernatural, but the harsh realities of life. It also works to show the violence of neocolonial systems without reverting to depicting violence against Black bodies. There are no scenes of the crossing, though there is a scene where the spirit of one man in the body of Thérèse, one of the possessed women, tells Ada in Wolof at the beach bar where she was supposed to meet Souleiman before he left, "Li ma yaakaaroon ap tund la ndakete maru geej la. Bu rëy."[42] That all these scenes should occur in Wolof is no coincidence either, for the language has the ability to communicate a spiritual dimension the French language cannot. Thérèse's milky eyes, the main sign of the possession, stare straight into the camera as she speaks, in a direct contradiction to the colonial gaze that loomed over cinema about Africa.

In many ways, Sembène was a pioneer of African cinema. His films examined changing cultural values and defined new meanings for contemporary Africa. The intermingling of language in Sembene's films denaturalized the monolingual concept of language which was radical in a time just after independence (Yervasi 2018). At the same time, Sembène's social realist work rested largely within the confines of Western cinematic structures as a result of his deals with "le diable." His films are for the most part palatable to the West with their easily

[42] What I'd thought was a mountain was a wave. Immense. (Translation from the official English subtitles)

categorized genres and linear storylines. However, Sembène's theory of a hybrid future in *Mandabi* is consistent with present Senegalese society, both culturally and linguistically. This is showcased in Diop's *Atlantique* which contemplates the liminality of migration and makes plain in image and sound how past injustices are the root of present systems of inequality. Diop's film bends Western conventions of reality by introducing a fantastical dimension to her critique of a real-world issue. In doing so, she creates a global story, not a story based on Western structures but one that acknowledges cultural norms and thought that are not recognizable to Western audiences and more importantly cannot be expressed in Western languages like French. That these stories must be told entirely in Wolof, relegating French to short phrases and loan words demonstrate that there are areas of thought that cannot be expressed in French. In the film, the French language is used sparingly, placed in moments that influence its coloniality. Only the police officers and doctor ever speak full sentences in French and the topics spoken in French always deal with either economic terms such as counting money or expressing some kind of superiority like the doctor asserting authority during the virginity test or the Commissaire reprimanding young Issa for daring to question the legality of Mr. Ndiaye's business practices. French language is quarantined in these particular moments as though to deemphasize its real-life power and exacerbate its coloniality. This further suggests that there are limits to the mixing of the two languages. As in the case of *Mandabi,* bureaucratic terms such as "impôt," "million francs," and "carte d'identité" are kept in the French language marking them as foreign and colonial. They are not allowed entrance to the Wolof language because they are not Wolof concepts. Similarly, the *faru rabb* do not speak in French because only in Wolof can they authentically express the fantastical dimension of reality that does not exist in French and Western thought.

Conclusion

Outside of colonial monitors, the French language has and continues to evolve into a language that suits the needs of the populations it serves, and that is by a majority, Africans. The purity of the French language was enforced through violence in colonial education that imbued a certain perception and usage of the French language that tied it to exploitation. However, in a time of post-colonialism, the barriers between French and other African languages have softened, and French can be used according to the speaker's wills as opposed to a colonial decree.

In literature, French is used as a crossover medium to share African ideas with a greater audience by encapsulating traditional oral Wolof histories in a written French. Birago Diop's *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* (1961), Africanize the French language by instilling fundamentally African structures into the text such as orality and collective knowledge. The weaving of language creates a richer text, one that even appears to be self-aware due to the intra-communication of French and Wolof. This weaving is showcased through multiplicity of narration that engages the reader as though the text is recounting a story orally. Additionally, grammatical structures that honor Wolof speech emanate the orality that Diop seeks to preserve in his text. The work shows how French can be used to cross the borders of political territories such as France and Senegal, reality and the spiritual world as evidenced in Sarzan, and the structures of written and oral language.

In spoken language, Wolof and French interact to create a speech that is more exacting which serves those who speak it rather than an external enforcement of language. As the two languages interact there is even a creation of new meanings, one that is neither French nor Wolof. The fluid hybridity in this mixture, as evidenced in Urban Wolof, widens the accessibility of French to those without a formal French education. In *Journal Rappé,* French and Wolof exist

together reflecting the reality of a multilingual Senegalese society. Again, French is deterritorialized from France. French Hip Hop music becomes distinctly Senegalese when it is used to rally the Senegalese people to protest for their political rights. Senegal is linguistically highly diverse with around 25 languages consistently spoken within its borders. Language in Senegal is tied closely with ethnicity and thus culture. While linguistic studies have shown that French does not pose a substantial risk to the continued use of African languages in Senegal, a study by Fiona McLaughlin (2008b) showed that the rise of Wolof as a lingua franca does pose a risk to the continued use of other African languages spoken such as Seereer and Pulaar. The dominance of Wolof risks to artificially impose monolingual communication on a firmly multilingual society, something that the French failed to do under colonialism. Further research on how French interacts with other Senegalese languages is important so that the consideration of languages and cultures within Senegal is not reduced to Wolof only.

In film, the relationship of language to socio-political structures becomes clear as the characters mix, and keep separate, French and Wolof to emphasize its relationship to systems of power. French is tied to neocolonial globalized finance as its use in both *Atlantique* and *Mandabi* are restricted to loanwords and phrases that accentuate the language's coloniality. Additionally, Wolof is tied to systems of thought such as the fantastic that cannot be adequately accentuated in French. This shows there are limits to the mixture of French and Wolof. Film is a medium that offers insight to the orality of languages, which is particularly important for Wolof, as it is an oral language. The films show how the rhythms of speech change when a speaker switches between French and Wolof, something that cannot be captured in text. Additionally, *Mandabi* and *Atlantique* show how French words and phrases are incorporated into Wolof speech by individuals that are not proficient in French.

There do exist still tensions between French and African languages like Wolof. In literature, there continues to be a real debate over how publishers should use language in written text. There is an argument to whether the ubiquitous use of the French language for written texts upholds colonial influence over African literature and discourages literature in African languages. At the same time, French is a tool to foster connections with the diaspora. There are thousands of African languages which are spoken in relatively localized regions of Africa. As demonstrated through *Journal Rappé*, and *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba,* French communication allows for a wider reach. Birago Diop's work is well-known across Africa, in part due to his use of French. Similarly, Xuman and Keyti's *Journal Rappé* has a following across West Africa and the diaspora thanks to the segment in French. They are even able to connect with the diaspora through international segments to connect Senegal to the diaspora by keeping their viewers up to date with current events all around the world.

This study has shown that the changes which the French language is undergoing is an important topic of conversation and warrants further study. This paper shows one example of French changing in one specific region of Africa in relation to a single African language, but changes in the French language are happening across the continent. French is changing in numerous and even contradictory ways depending on its geographical and societal location. Further studies in other African countries would be compelling so as to create a comparison among different African cultures. There are now multiple variations of the French language across the African continent that speak for themselves, outside of European influence. Nouchi, a French patois from Côte d'Ivoire for example, is an amalgamation of Abidjan and French that is distinct from Senegalese Urban Wolof.

The decentralization of the French language is not something that has ended in modern times but continues to be a current phenomenon. The questions raised in this paper can even apply to other colonial languages such as English and Portuguese. The issue of mixing languages and changing forms of communication is an ongoing issue on the continent that people grapple with every day. My time in Senegal was marked by a constant negotiation between French and Wolof speech. Members of my host family would teach me key Wolof phrases so that I could follow their conversations which were constantly switching between French and Wolof. In my host family's home, my host mother would often French-ify her Wolof when she spoke with me, or with my host sister who lived in France. Outside the home, I strived to Wolofize my French so as not to appear too much like a tourist. These negotiations, signified by the bilingual billboards around the busy streets of Dakar, are marked by their relation to class, gender, religion, and situation. Language, particularly a former colonial language such as French, is closely tied to the power structures which are created and imposed by the people who speak the language. The process of Africanizing French represents a change in the power dynamics the language has historically represented. It also shows how a language that in Western thought is tied so closely to one country and one culture, France, can be morphed to serve the goals of an entirely different Wolof culture. That is not to say that French can ever replace Wolof, or even completely communicate fundamentally Wolof thought, but that Africanized French aims to communicate African thought outside of colonial controls. It is true, that as African countries look to cut themselves off from the influence of France, French use is declining. It is also true that the French language will never the primary language of an African country, as most African French speakers use it as a second or third language, but it has its place in society. Its main advantage is as a crossover language, a mechanism for communicating to the outside world. As French use

declines across the rest of the world, the future of the French language rests in Africa. The language that will continue on will not be the centralized, territorialized language of France, but a language marked by the multiplicity found in adaptation with its interaction with African languages.

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