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Stagecraft: Pedagogy, Culture and Performance in Senegalese Theater

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in French and Francophone Studies

by

Brian Dennis Quinn

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Dominic R. Thomas, Chair

This dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach to ask why in Senegal, home of president-poet Léopold Sédar Senghor and host to two World Black Arts Festivals, theater appears so drastically reduced from the heights of what critics consider the "Golden Age" of Culture of the 1960s and 70s. In fact, theatrical production within this country has become something of a blind spot in the fields of Literary and Performance Studies, since textual analyses and performance fieldwork both prove essential to understanding how theatrical practice is conceived, produced and transmitted within this West African country and former colony. From a contemporary perspective, written texts for stage production, especially published ones, are scant and rarely come to performance, a fact that has called many to declare the apparent death of theatrical practices in Senegal. However, research on the ground reveals that the very term theater takes on a rather different meaning within this country, generally

encompassing a more popular, community-based approach and often displaying an unreserved and conscious embrace of non-textual, collective and at times seemingly plagiaristic approaches to drama.

Here we will explore archival material and oral histories, using performance fieldwork and textual analysis to discover how artists and performers have come to craft the Senegalese stage - official and otherwise - as it exists today. This will include a discussion of the influence of pedagogical discourses and disputing models of Culture in Senegalese theater, as well as how these are circumvented through performance. This work focuses on pivotal places and events in the crafting of the Senegalese stage, with chapters on pedagogical reform and performance at the Ecole William Ponty; Léopold Sédar Senghor and André Malraux's complementary views and uses of Culture and the staging of these through the theater of the 1966 Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres in Dakar, as read against the 1969 Festival Panafricain d'Alger; as well as contemporary efforts to craft a subversive and activist form of theater operating along global and transnational networks.

The dissertation of Brian Dennis Quinn is approved.

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Introduction

Setting the Stage: Emerging Performance Spaces in the Postcolony

The field of Francophone African drama, despite its central place in histories of the French colonial empire, the later African Independences, and the postcolonial period up to the present day, has not received the same degree of critical attention as Francophone African literature or poetry. The published works of this theater have been the focus of a number of landmark studies, and scholarship on contemporary African playwrights producing in French has rightly emphasized the transnational aspect of their works. This study aims to contribute to existing scholarly work by integrating a contextual, as well as textual, approach. Through the use of archival material, interviews, textual analysis, site visits and performance fieldwork, here we will explore the emergence, reception, appropriation and transmission of a European-inspired theatrical space and practice in the West African country of Senegal. This practice has relied on the crafting, from the colonial period to the present, of a new stage that took influence from previous traditional practices of rites and ritual, but also served as host to a continual exchange of political discourse and dialogue with and among Senegalese communities. Long a port of arrival for European missionaries, merchants and travelers, Senegal is an apt illustration of the long-term intertwining of cultural forms and practices between West Africa and Europe. In the case of theatrical performance, we will find that the stage upon which such intertwining takes place is never neutral, but rather comes lined and lacquered with a series of protean rules, assumptions and expectations. These ingrained and foundational ideologies at the root of major theatrical initiatives and places of creation have, over time, come to craft the contours of the Senegalese stage and to define the stakes of performance thereupon.

This study will constitute an attempt to approach such theatrical practices on their own ground and according to their own terms. It will seek neither to tease out the characteristics of a pre-colonial, authentic tradition, seen as dissociable from European influence, nor to indicate prescriptions as to how the Senegalese theatrical world might move toward a form of written stage production more in line with European and Western sensibilities. The central interest here will rather be to discern how theatrical performance upon the colonial and postcolonial stage has interacted with and responded to reigning ideologies of the day, as theatrical innovators compose, frame, and conceive of Western stage practices, making them their own in the process.

To enter into the study of Francophone African drama is to contend first with an array of complexities and latent aporias regarding the history and status of theater, ritual and performance on the African continent. Perhaps the first of these potential critical pitfalls emerges in scholarly discussions on the relationship and putative similarities between theater and ritual. Once taken as the exclusive purview of anthropological study, practices of ritual had long been ignored in conversations on African performance. Despite the exhibition of skill and regular instances of production before an audience, such performance forms as *kotéba*, a commonly cited practice in studies of performance in modern-day Mali, whereby conflicts among the community are aired and eventually resolved (Diawara 18; Schipper 53), were at best viewed as pre or proto-theatrical in nature. It was in the interest of granting full recognition to such performance forms that Senegalese scholar Bakary Traoré would write *Le théâtre négro-africain et ses fonctions sociales*. As Michel Foucault and, in the context of scholarship on Africa, Valentin Mudimbe, have shown, the field of knowledge through which various discourses about an object form can leave a lasting imprint on later understandings of that object (Foucault, *Archaeology* 23, Mudimbe x). Traoré, in his response to European understandings of theatrical performance,

which in effect limited critical appreciation to what the West had already known through its own history, merges both a literary and anthropological approach, thereby making African performance forms, ritualistic or not, impossible to ignore. "Car le théâtre africain, comme tous les arts," he would state, "répond à des besoins fondamentaux" (9).

This functionalist approach, seeing performance in all contexts as primarily responding to a set of social necessities, avails Traoré of the field of European anthropological literature on the function of ritual. Traoré borrows from this literature, particularly the work of French ethnographers Maurice Delafosse and Henri Labouret, to establish the legitimacy of African performance forms as reflections of social life and factors of cohesion within the community. In so doing, he employs the ethnographic discourse of those who once administered the French West African colonies to argue, from a functionalist vantage point, for the full recognition of pre-colonial forms of ceremony as theater in its own right, and by virtue of their communal impact: "C'est un théâtre qui se veut réel et au service d'une cause... C'est une transposition à la scène des caractères observés minutieusement dans la vie courante et rendus avec beaucoup de vérité" (19).

In his critical writing, Traoré embraced the interplay and interchangeability at times of theater and ritual fully, insisting these were symbiotic aspects of a selfsame practice of fostering a sense of social cohesion. However, other scholarship focusing on the distinctive characteristics of the two has tended to describe areas of divergence, even if they cannot be fully extricated from one another or seen as discrete entities. The specificity of theater as opposed to ritual, tradition or folklore is the central preoccupation of Alain Ricard in his *L'Invention du Théâtre*, where he argues that "L'expression théâtrale... n'est pas de l'ordre du donné anthropologique, en Afrique ou ailleurs: elle est le produit d'une élaboration poétique" (24). For Ricard, theater's

distinctiveness lies in the importance of what he calls a poetic stage practice, secured through a clear establishment of the social roles of directors, writers and actors. Although, Ricard argues, ritual can have a strong impact on contemporary examples of stage performances, these are better described as uses of ritual upon the poetic stage as a means of re-calibrating theatrical practices. These contributions resonate poetically, but may also serve to align theatrical performance with nationalist initiatives and interests. Illustrations of Ricard's argument regarding political translations of ritual into theater are numerous in the African context, and we may cite, for example, the role of *kotéba* in the forging of a national performance heritage in the nation of Mali, especially in the founding and development of the Kotéba National du Mali (Sissoko 49). Such nationalist re-appropriations of traditional performance practices are not unidirectional in nature, but have also been used to drive and justify many Western theatrical movements and innovations. Examples of this range from Antonin Artaud's use of Balinese theater as the foundation for his new philosophy of performance, to the espousal of the notion of *théâtre total* in the 1950s by events such as Paris's international *Théâtre des Nations*, which took as its ideal the "total" theatrical work staged folklore was thought to represent.

Ricard's insistence on the distinct nature of ritual and theater is, in large part, intended as a critical response to the scholarship and stagings of American theater director Richard Schechner. In the 1960s, Schechner had founded with The Performance Group a ritually based form of theater deeply inspired by the writings of Artaud. Schechner's performances, the most iconic of which was a collective, interactive piece called *Dionysus in '69*, sought to reinstate a functional element whereby theater would serve as a tool for individual and social transformation. Schechner saw the relationship of theater and ritual as operating along a continuum. On one end was what he called the transformative effect of ritual, through which the

audience and performers (or initiates in the case of ritual) are actually transformed, moving from one level of social status to another, meaning that participants were substantively changed by the experience. On the other end was the transportative effect, typified by Western theater, and described by Schechner as constituting the passive process of witnessing the narrative and rhetorical movements of a performance on stage, only to be returned, by the end, to precisely the same point status-wise as upon arrival, and so one is not changed in any real way by the performance.

This understanding of theater's positioning with regard to ritual, like that of Traoré, passes through anthropological theories to propose new understandings of theatrical performance in a contemporary context. Schechner's theories were in large part developed out of a long collaboration with anthropologist Victor Turner, an experience that would lead Schechner to initiate an anthropological approach to theater and critical scholarship that marked the beginning of the academic discipline of Performance Studies in the United States. Turner, for his part, was highly critical of what he called the "mechanistic presuppositions" of the functionalist approach to ritual and its inattention to processes of "meaning-making." He proposed what he called the "social drama" as the basic narrative unit of ritual ("Social" 144). Analyzing the possible functions of such social dramas performed through ritual, Turner focused on the importance of an ultimate redress of the group, accompanied either by reintegration or recognition of a schism. He argued that this presence of social drama in ritual has served as "the experiential mix from which the many genres of cultural performance, beginning with redressive ritual and juridical procedures and eventually including oral and literary narrative, have been generated" ("Social" 158).

In his work as a scholar and theater director, Schechner has adapted Turner's insights, particularly the notion of liminality, which for Turner describes the in-between state of the initiate as he or she assumes the role of the ritualistic neophyte (Turner, *Forest* 93-111). Schechner finds similarities between the neophyte in Turner's case and the performer who, in the Western tradition, dons the identity and traits of another, and so becomes not quite himself, but also "not-not" himself ("Performers" 88). Schechner's contribution here is innovative in part due to his use of ritual to understand theatrical performance, and not the reverse. He furthermore endeavors to close the divide that had excluded theater from what he perceived as the profound transformative quality of ritual.

This experimental usage of the mechanisms of ritual in theatrical performance would also be taken up years later by Cameroonian playwright Werewere Liking, whose play *La Puissance d'Um* brings together theatrical writing and ritual and mythology of her native Bassa traditions. In this work, the writer stages the ritual vetting that traditionally follows the death of a member of the community. As death is perceived in Bassa culture as an unnatural occurrence, the ceremony consists of locating the guilty element of the collective and symbolically purging it. Like Schechner, Liking aims to create a performance experience that leads audience members through a ritualized form of transformation and eventually, she hopes, to a higher state of consciousness. Marie-José Hourantier has called Liking "le seul dramaturge africain qui adapta les mécanismes rituels traditionnels au théâtre" (16). This is true in as much as Liking, in her writing, has not sought to depict representations of ritual at the merely poetic level discussed by Ricard, but rather to create for audience members and attendees an experience close to that of a ritualistic transformation. In an attempt to create a potential third way for African performance forms, Liking has collaborated with French scholar Hourantier in the development of what they

call "une esthétique du théâtre-rituel." Their experimental work is based out of the group's performance center in the Ivory Coast, where scholars and creators alike engage in a hybrid approach to ritual and performance: "Abordés comme une initiation et une thérapie, ces rituels mêlent intimement des rites semblables... [ces pièces rituelles] évoquent toutes une maladie, une dégradation, une quête avant d'atteindre la réalisation" (Hourantier 22).

The trouble with textual approaches to Francophone African drama

Critical approaches to the specifically textual practices associated with Francophone African drama have long called attention to this theater, but have done so in the goal of providing broad overviews of the key figures and the plays produced (Blair). Among the central questions raised by this theater is that of the choice of language in performance. A focus on theatrical performances in European languages will tend to elide literary and theatrical efforts in native African languages. Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o has long evoked this point and, in *Decolonising the Mind*, expands on how the imposition of British theatrical models has stifled local performance forms and their relationship to African languages (37-41). Literary scholarship on Francophone African drama furthermore tends to conclude with expert prescriptions as to what might be missing for such theater to be considered fully "developed" as according to Western standards. Many such scholarly works have been produced with a sincere respect for their object of study, but frequently struggled to disabuse themselves of certain paternalistic perceptions ingrained in institutional approaches to questions of literary and artistic production in Africa.

Such was the case, for example, in Robert Cornevin's 1970 book *Le Théâtre en Afrique Noire et à Madagascar*, foundational in that it represents the first serious and detailed study of what the author calls "la richesse d'un théâtre africain francophone riche de plusieurs dizaines de pièces, dont les thèmes sont tirés d'un immense patrimoine de traditions orales conservées dans leur vitalité jusqu'à l'époque contemporaine..." (8). Cornevin shared with former colonial schoolmasters a marked enthusiasm for the "théâtre néo-africain" as a hybrid form of African and European performance. However, donning the cap of the African historian, he deeply regretted what he called "l'ignorance des Africains vis-à-vis de leur patrimoine artistique" (7) and wished for this theater to concentrate more on tapping the wealth of its own, African historical material. In the same vein, Corvevin discourages African creators from venturing onto the terrain of the adaptation of Western classics of drama, suggesting that he had yet to see a successful example of such an attempt by an African troupe, especially with regard to productions of Shakespeare: "Que les hommes de théâtre... cherchent dans l'incomparable fonds historique de l'Afrique noire les sujets, les personnages, plutôt que de se lancer en de hasardeux syncrétismes scéniques afro-anglo-saxon..." (295).

In Jacques Scherer's *Le théâtre en Afrique noire francophone*, another example of European scholarly work on Francophone African drama, the author appears just as ambivalent as Cornevin with regard to theatrical adaptation, which, he remarks, one finds so frequently in Paris that it has called him to call into question the very infallibility of strict French classicism. This restrained outlook on the value of stage adaptation and mise-en-scène leads Scherer to attempt to situate African stage performance along an historical continuum modeled after textbook academic understandings of the evolution of Western dramaturgy. In so doing he states that African theater is, at times "antérieur à l'Antigone de Sophocle, par sa difficulté à déclarer

injuste," and at others "postérieur à celui de Dumas fils, par son intérêt passionné pour les idées et pour leur application réelle dans la société" (9). Indeed, from the outset, Scherer adopts an evolutionary stance with regard to his object of study, understanding it as a form of expression in its as-of-yet embryonic form: "En Afrique, il n'y a pas, ou pas encore, de tradition théâtrale, et l'on ne peut se plaindre de cette liberté" (9). In fact, Scherer's book is a kind of *rapport de mission*, following years of travel to several African countries in a project of cultural intervention funded by the French Ministère de la Coopération. It is, no doubt, the lingering role of such formerly colonial institutions and interests that paves the way for an understanding of Francophone African drama as in need of expert intervention in order to progress from a pre-colonial form of ritual to an idealized practice of purely poetic representation, inspired by African history and custom in its content but, in its form, resembling in every way a Western vision of what theater is and how it must operate. The Cameroonian director Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh would review Scherer's work by stating: "Such is the continuing paternalism and Eurocentricity that push Scherer to theorize about the possibilities of the emergence of such a tradition, beginning with the work of [Director of the colonial Ecole William Ponty] Charles Béart," a theatrical historiography that Eyoh calls "a marvelous celebration of French paternalism" (140-1).

It is in this context of a lingering sense of French paternalism and what Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh identifies as a kind of academic assimilationism, that John Conteh-Morgan nuances perceptions within the field with his *Theatre and Drama in Francophone Africa*. One important starting point to this study is a reminder that while African uses of aspects of ritual in theatrical performance may run counter to classical views of stage representation, they are in fact closely in line with the theatrical avant-garde of twentieth century Europe (15-16). In *Le Théâtre et son*

double, Antonin Artaud famously declared, after all, contemporary European theater lifeless and decadent (63). For Artaud, as perhaps for Liking in *La Puissance d'Um*, "le théâtre est fait pour vider des abcès" (45). Artaud further admonishes what he sees as a European lack of vision in theatrical practices, asking: "Comment se fait-il que le théâtre occidental ne voie pas le théâtre sous un autre aspect que celui du théâtre dialogué" (55). Derrida, in *L'Ecriture et la Différence*, takes up Artaud's argument and its call against habitual imitative approaches to Western theatrical representation in favor of a theater proceeding through what he calls "la parole d'avant les mots" (352). "L'art théâtral doit être le lieu primordial et privilégié de cette destruction de l'imitation: plus qu'un autre il a été marqué par ce travail de représentation totale dans lequel l'affirmation de la vie se laisse déboubler et creuser par la négation" (344). The relation of these writings to the field of Francophone African drama, as Conteh-Morgan points out, is that they point toward the need for a more complex understanding of just what *theater* is, and call into question any critical approaches standing upon the presumption that African theater is gradually evolving its way toward a more developed, Westernized manner of theatrical representation. The West's most celebrated theorists of the form, especially Artaud, have written foundational texts pointing out to what extent these practices are rooted in the history and ontology of the place in which they emerge. With this in mind, attempts to place African theater along a spectrum ranging from a supposedly pre-theatrical form of ritual to a proper practice of theatrical performance appear profoundly misguided. What is needed instead is an exploration of Francophone African drama as it has emerged, examined through the terms and contexts in which it has imagined itself. This is not to deny the clear importance of European theatrical drama in the history and contemporary iterations of the Senegalese stage, but rather to

"provincialize Europe," as Dipesh Chakrabarty would say, in order to cease to take it as the universal center in matters of theatrical representation (poetic, ritualistic, or otherwise).

Conteh-Morgan's work goes a long way in accomplishing this, both through his critical discussion and through his selection of an introductory anthology representing some of the key texts and writers from the field of African theater in French. In an attempt to reflect the scope of this theatrical production, the selection includes such foundational playwrights as Aimé Césaire, Tchicaya U'Tamsi and Cheikh Aliou Ndao, among others, within a critical discussion of the works' reception and major influences. As an anthology, the work indeed speaks to Brent Hayes Edwards's assessment of the anthological literary form as a means of "marking time," and has helped to establish this dramaturgy within a field of academic study (Edwards 44). However, Conteh-Morgan also points to one of the major shortfalls of his approach, concluding his book by asserting the need to provide "a fuller picture of theatrical activity in Francophone Africa," that is, as opposed to work by Francophone playwrights produced in Europe or the United States (221).

The transnational element of these theatrical works, and especially the fact that many central theatrical figures hailing from Francophone African now produce work mainly in Europe or America, is a central observation of Conteh-Morgan's later work with Dominic Thomas, *New Francophone African and Caribbean Theatres*. Here, the authors call attention to what they see as a new generation of playwrights, who feel no strong connection with the independence, nationalist or pan-African struggles of earlier generations, and have produced a transgressive theater, disengaged with notions of defending any purported African authenticity (xvii). Sylvie Chalaye also notes this phenomenon in her work on contemporary Francophone African playwrights in vogue in France since around the 1990s, a group that includes writers such as

Kossi Efoui, Caya Makhélé and Koffi Kwahulé. Chalaye considers these writers from a postcolonial and also a postnationalist perspective: "Ce sont des écritures du marcottage et de l'hybridisation, des écritures qui assument leur nature profondément monstrueuse et font de cette génération d'écrivains, une 'génération d'aliens,' une génération qui provoque ce 'syndrome Frankenstein' dont parle Koffi Kwahulé, dès lors que le monstre brise l'enclos et s'élance au-devant du monde" (14). This notion, coined by Kwahulé, of a Frankenstein generation is all the more apt in that it indicates and displays the hybrid aspect of a movement of theatrical practice rooted in a Western theatrical tradition that seemingly will always see it as other, belonging to an African folklore and heritage from which many contemporary African playwrights feel quite estranged. Chalaye's description of what she calls "des ecritures de transhumance, des écritures migrantes," serves to highlight what might be seen as the placelessness of such works, whose authors are "contraints au marronage," associated geographically with the African continent, but professionally far more active in the Hexagon or elsewhere in Europe.

While recent scholarship has led to important work on such transnational playwrights, there has been a slow abandonment of the study of Francophone African theater from the actual territories in which it has emerged. If the literary *marronage* described by Chalaye and writers such as Efoui is the contemporary result of a Francophone theatrical practice established by colonial instructors during the interwar period, something must have come of the actual sites and institutions that oversaw the emergence and development of this new performance space. If we limit our appreciation of African playwrights' work to textual analysis and performances in Western institutions, we gain the ability to engage with the highly transnational exchanges now at work in these theatrical productions. However, we also lose, with the same focus, a sense of context, and must abandon lines of questioning related to the reception, maintenance and

transmission of theatrical performance within these African countries. One of the limits of this study is that, by focusing on a smaller geographic area (the theatrical production of Senegal and the Senegalese), we reduce the number of stage texts available for close analysis and anthology. However, such a choice also affords a diachronic perspective of the African stage, from the point of emergence of what Ricard called its poetic function in the colonial schools of the early twentieth century, to more contemporary engagements with transnational understandings of theater within today's "postdramatic" moment (Lehmann).

This study constitutes a focus on the Francophone African stage as both the bearer of the political and social discourse of its evolution, as well as the producer of such discourse, a form of knowledge-producing power. The *stagecraft* of the title aims to describe the false neutrality of what Peter Brook has called the "empty space," an aesthetic concept for his purposes, but one which, on a political and social level, proves impossible to achieve. As we will see, claims to novelty and innovation in theatrical production are frequently accompanied by the suggestion of a liberated space, whose universality renders it neutral and safe. This universalist rhetoric often resides within the redefinition of an abstract but dutifully brandished concept, such as cultural heritage, or the African soul, whether depicted by colonists or by Africans themselves. In fact, as performers of the European colonial schools would learn, any stage comes with own series of rules and expectations whereby the performance's purpose is conveyed. Theatrical impositions of a form, or innovations to that form, must come with an alternately crafted, sign-bearing stage, the container of the performative "mechanisms" to which Hourantier refers in her analysis of ritual and theater. Here we will look at the major episodes of such theatrical stagecraft in the country of Senegal, an astonishing producer of artistic creation and a nation that has served as a

symbolic example both of long interaction with European culture and of the successful production and exportation of artistic works to a global audience.

The collective crafting of culture in Senegal

In spite of its relatively small size and population (now approx. 14 million), the former colony and now country of Senegal has long counted itself among the leading producers of African artists and intellectuals. Its coastal geography made it one of the first landing ports for Europe's entryway into Africa, thus leading to a long history of collaboration and exchange. Much of this exchange centered around the slave trade and European exploitation of the region, but there was also the early emergence of a *métisse* population, a culture of mixed cosmopolitanism, with a de facto aristocracy of families and trading cliques gaining an increasing influence, most notably on the island of Gorée and in the city of Saint Louis, which long served as the capital of French West Africa. The mixed marriages of European merchants and Senegalese *signares*, the term used for Senegalese wives of foreign colonizers, was a central organizing institution of such cosmopolitanism. One of the original literary and intellectual figures of Senegal, the Abbot David Boilat, was the child of one such union. His *Esquisses Sénégalaises*, published in 1853, represents an early literary gesture providing sketches and descriptions of the many character types, ethnicities and social roles then to be found within the author's home region. The example of Boilat and his work demonstrates how, from its beginnings, Senegalese literary production in French was most hybrid in nature. Concerned with the distinctiveness of his home language and customs, Boilat was also a linguist and wrote the first complete grammar manual of his native language of Wolof, entitled *Grammaire de la*

langue woloffe. He was, however, also French-educated, and, in his writings, proved to be a staunch defender of the use of the French language within Senegalese society. In *Esquisses* Boilat calls himself "un enfant du Sénégal," indicating that he is also fluent in both Wolof and Serrer. However, he moved to France quite early in his adult life and would spend the vast majority of his years serving the church within the Hexagon.

In his love for and profound interest in his home region and language, as well as in his deep engagement with the language and *civilisation* of France, Boilat is indicative of questions to be taken up again by later Senegalese writers and literary movements. We find similar themes, for example, arising in the work of early twentieth-century Senegalese writer Bakary Diallo, whose *Force-Bonté* relates the tale of a young *tirailleur*, or enlisted African soldier in the French army, who serves in World War I. Throughout Diallo's novel, his protagonist displays a sincere enthusiasm for the colonial project, though is aware of the acts of violence it can often inflict. He nonetheless strives to learn the French language and attain the status of an educated African and writer, an objective that is ostensibly achieved through the process of writing his book. In considering Diallo's espousal of assimilation into French civilization, critics have often struggled to reconcile Diallo's literary gesture of taking to the page to give voice to his own thoughts with the fact that he largely galvanizes the French authorities and the promises of a civilizing mission. For David Murphy, the novel "can be read as a declaration of a distinctive Franco-Senegalese consciousness, displaying the rise of a simple Fulani shepherd to the status of 'French' author" (54). This appreciation of the work establishes it as a primer for a common theme in later Senegalese creation, that of a struggle to find a sense of autonomy and freedom within the complexities of a multivalent regional, and later national, identity.

An additional shared aspect in Senegalese literature and artistic production is a prevailing sense of political and social activism. Far from engaging in art for art's sake, writers, artists and filmmakers have long endeavored to produce work not only, or hardly, as a means of self-expression, but rather as a tool for denouncing acts of social injustice and proposing alternative social models. One of the continent's most renowned talents in this respect was the Senegalese Ousmane Sembène, who used his work to flatly denounce practices of colonial violence and oppression. The scope of Sembène's literary work ranged from the migrant experience in France (*Le Docker noir*) to attempts to enact anti-colonial reform at home, whether agrarian (*O Pays, mon beau peuple!*), labor-based (*Les bouts de bois de Dieu*), or aimed at corrupt and centralized postcolonial practices of government (*Xala*). Sembène furthermore bridges the divide between literary production and performance. Unsatisfied with the impact his written work had on a Senegalese population with low rates of literacy, Sembène switched media and sought training as a filmmaker at the relatively late age of thirty-nine. He would study in Moscow and eventually became one of Africa's most celebrated screenwriters and directors.

The contemporary legacy of Sembène, today widely regarded as among Africa's most important and impactful activist writers, reflects the place of culture with Senegalese society, where creation has long been connected with the notion of conveying a social or political message. This activist element of the role of culture would prove all the more important following independence from the French in 1960, and with the rise of an approach to artistic creation that often found itself either more directly nationalist, or, at the least, obliged to respond to a rising system of cultural administration within the newly independent country. Sembène often found himself in the latter camp, and engaged in several public disputes in the post-Independence years with the Senegalese government, and most notably with its first president,

Léopold Sédar Senghor, today's founding father of the Senegalese nation and, in many respects, also the foundational figure of contemporary definitions of *culture* within the collective national imaginary.

These collective notions of the place and history of post-Independence national culture often follow a common narrative, as Hélène Neveu-Kringelbach has found in her work on oral narratives in the dance community (*Dance Circles*). This same narrative also runs through historical understandings of culture in the fields of theater and the visual arts. Although it is certainly a broad-stroke depiction of over fifty years of cultural policy, it nonetheless operates as a collective understanding of the vast changes and transformations to have taken place within the lifetimes of some of the key figures of the contemporary creative scene. The narrative begins with the period immediately following independence, generally remembered as a Golden Age, when the first Senegalese president, French-educated writer and intellectual Léopold Sédar Senghor, engaged the nation in large-scale cultural initiatives, making investment in culture one of the primary concerns of the new Senegalese administration. Part of the logic behind this push for culture at home and abroad was economic in scope, in that Senghor aimed to export works of art and performances worldwide in the form of exhibits and tours. It was hoped that this would not only constitute a revenue-generator, but would also establish Senegal's place as a leader in cultural production, a reputation that, it was thought, would make of Dakar a global tourist destination, or the Paris of West Africa. In his political message, Senghor allied his cultural initiatives with national hopes for prosperity, promoting an ideal of "enracinement et ouverture," that is, a profound sense of rooting in local African customs and practices along with a fervor to share and export those customs, mixing them with others. This, along with the oft-quoted phrase attributed to Senghor, stating that "la culture est au début et à la fin de tout développement,"

broadly characterizes the widely professed belief among the technocrats of the poet-president's day that policies of cultural interest went hand-in-hand with those of economic concern (M'bengue 13).

Senghor's vision to transform Dakar into a haven for foreign visitors never quite materialized, nor did many of his grandiose urban plans intended to attract a larger share of the tourist market. Chief among these, for example, was a cultural promenade that would have begun at the national theater and continued along the coastal Corniche, leading the *promeneur* from theater to museum, to outdoor art markets. However, he did succeed in implementing and mobilizing a number of national cultural institutions that exist to this day. For the occasion of the Festival Mondial des arts nègres in 1966, a groundbreaking cultural event in its time, Senghor would construct the Théâtre National Daniel Sorano. The project was funded in large part by the French government, whose Ministère de la Coopération kept the Hexagon involved in a wide range of cultural initiatives well past the independence of its former colonies (see chapter 3). The structure would house three separate troupes, the Ballet National, the Troupe Lyrique, and the Troupe Théâtrale, which would enjoy a considerable level of exposure in its first years, including two highly publicized tours performing adaptations of *Le Malade Imaginaire* and *Macbeth*, as well as original works by Senegalese writers Cheikh Aliou Ndao and Boris Birago Diop at France's national Théâtre de l'Odéon, in Paris. Senghor's strategy, a sort of cultural offensive, was a success for a time, managing to associate, in the minds of a culturally savvy global audience, favorable sentiments toward the now liberated African continent and the stagings of African tradition offered by Senegalese national troupes. Senegalese cultural institutions would, in turn, become affiliated with a broader, global Black Arts movement, inspired by Senghor's unprecedented festival and evidenced by later solicitations for residencies

and partnerships with the Sorano structure on behalf of such giants of African American performance as Alvin Ailey and Katherine Dunham.

As the collective narrative goes, this Golden Age would come to an end, however, with the dawn of the period of structural adjustment. This is when the World Bank and IMF would impose large state loans with the explicit condition of deep cuts to the national budget, bringing dire consequences to state-funded cultural institutions and leaving the State unable to take sole initiative in a large number of services, once public, but now forcibly privatized (Cruise O'Brien et.al. 65-72). Today, members of the Sorano troupes who were present at the time of structural adjustment largely attribute the institution's sudden fall from grace, fairly or not, to the presidency of Abdou Diouf, which began in 1981 after Senghor voluntarily stepped down. At this point, national funds were and would remain greatly reduced, a reality that forced artists to attempt to create institutional homes in the private sector. Thus began a rush to the private troupes, the first of which, Les Tréteaux Sénégalais, had formed in 1969. This group was made up of graduates of the National Conservatory who were the first departing class unable to simply join the Sorano troupe upon graduation, since the troupe had by that time already filled its roster. Rather than abandon their prospects of an artistic career, these graduates founded their own troupe, which would soon count among its numbers the choreographer and director Mamadou Diop, among other central figures of the contemporary theatrical landscape. The Tréteaux survived largely thanks to a subsidy implemented by Senghor and renewed by Diouf after a strategically astute decision on the troupe's part to found their repertoire on a stage adaptation of the first president's epic poem *Shaka*. The success of the Tréteaux was followed by that of a second private company, also formed by graduates of the National Conservatory and calling themselves Le Nouveau Toucan, after French director Jean-Marie Serreau's famous company La

Compagnie du Toucan. Despite a short-lived success, this troupe had a notable collaboration with playwright Cheikh Aliou Ndao, known for his commitment to promoting stage works in the national language of Wolof (Ndao "Théâtre privé"). Neveu-Kringelbach calls this new, post-Senghorian group of performers "the State's orphans," a generation that remembers fondly the days of bountiful governmental support for the arts, but was forced to survive on its own as a result of the State's sudden and drastic budget cuts. These orphans would found mechanisms of artistic creation within the private sector that would serve in part as a model to those that came afterward and faced an increasingly liberalized field of funding schemes.

Today's Senegalese artists and performers represent a third generation, those of "les Soloistes," (Neveu-Kringelbach, "Choreographic" 47) who have never learned to expect significant help from the State to fund their productions. In the dance world, this vast liberalization of the arts has led to a tendency to create productions with a small cast that can be easily exported and sent on tour, especially through the network of French cultural centers. Dancers have also sought to capitalize on the interest of European tourists in taking individual or group lessons in "traditional" Senegalese dance, and especially *sabar* (Bizas). In the visual arts, grassroots attempts to spread artistic practices can be found in movements such as Set-Setal, of the late 1980s through the 1990s. This movement, whose name means to be and make clean, included the painting of public murals and departed largely from conventional forms of institutional patronage (Harney 218). It also proposed a renewed and revitalized visual iconography of local and national history, depicting key galvanizing figures, proposing "une nouvelle mémoire historique, désireuse de rompre avec celle qui a accompagné l'ascension de la génération nationaliste " (Diouf, "Fresques" 41).

In the theater world the widespread liberation of the cultural field has led to a harsh reduction of the national troupe's activities and has generally left performers with three possible pathways artistically. A relatively small number has successfully managed to market their creations to the French cultural centers, necessarily paring down their casts so as to produce offerings that will lend themselves to tours and allow a larger payout for each performer. Recourse to this option necessitates a crucial and strategic choice, however, in that these centers tend to incentivize creators to play to a French theatrical aesthetic that can often be of less interest to Senegalese audiences. To create a performance for the market of French cultural centers, then, is often to forego the possibility of touring the same show to the larger Senegalese audience base, which tends to prefer larger casts, less focus on dialogue and a freer, less reserved approach to combining dramaturgy, music, dance and folklore. Therefore, although the potential financial incentive of booking with the French cultural centers is considerable, it is necessarily a small market and those catering to it risk investing time in a creation they are unable to sell elsewhere.

The second option, and an appealing one to many aspiring Senegalese actors, is found in the comedic sketches and popular dramas diffused on television or online. The pioneers in this field were the members of a troupe called Daraay Kocc, whose reputation now rests upon a large number of popular series and films made for television, including a dramatized version of Mariama Bâ's novel *Une si longue lettre*. Today these televised productions, also called *théâtre* by performers and spectators, produce many of the country's national celebrities, with genres ranging from slapstick comedy to short-form family drama. The means of distribution of these works also ranges from prime-time television spots, to a viewership exclusively on the web, to an informal market of strategically distributed DVDs sold by friends and vendors. Seasoned

actors and directors of the generation of the "State's orphans" often express deep ambivalence toward this kind of work. They applaud the initiative necessary to mount such a project from start to finish, but lament the mass appeal of what they see as a mere desire for celebrity on the part of individuals with little or no formal training in the dramatic arts. In this respect, the televised sketches produced today represent for cultural figures the antithesis of a Senghorean approach to culture in its shunning of conservatory training in favor of learning, on the spot, how to play to the camera and charm a television audience.

The third and most widespread option for performers comes in what is broadly termed popular theater. The presence and importance of popular theater has been studied in a variety of African contexts (Barber; Kerr). In Senegal, as elsewhere, the term is not rigid in nature, but stands as more of a functional, floating signifier for performances focused on instilling a sense of unity and cohesion among the community (Desai). Such performances can, in certain instances, gain a considerable amount of visibility, however, as is the case with the tournament and championship performances of the annual youth club events, a national competition discussed in greater detail in chapter 5. On the professional level, many troupes have also managed to garner some success in what they call a *théâtre de sensibilisation*, that is, performances that are commissioned, by NGOs for the most part, to be performed in local languages, and touching upon the structure's theme of choice. There is considerable overlap in the practitioners of this and televised theater. Indeed, troupes are often chosen by NGOs for the popular recognition afforded by the actors' appearance in televised productions. However, the content of these performances are heavily marked by initiatives common to foreign intervention initiatives, and have the effect of restricting troupes to topics such as immigration, hygiene, disease prevention, family planning and so on. This and the continued importance of the French cultural centers

indicate the extent to which foreign interests and aesthetics continue to dictate what is produced on the market of theatrical creations throughout Senegal.

Noticeably absent from any of these three options is a creative process focusing on the authoring of a published stage text by the pen of a single writer, such as the plays anthologized in the work of Conteh-Morgan and Thomas. In the contemporary performance landscape of Senegal, the written text has generally fallen into the background as troupes engage in collectively created works, often recycling themes or maintaining an improvisational flexibility in their work meant to allow them to respond to the widest possible range of commissions. Senegal has a small number of what we might call canonical stage works, some published and reprised in the national theaters (for example *L'Os de Mor Lam*, by Birago Diop or *Le Choix de Madior*, by Ibrahima Sall), some passed on informally and recreated in adapted form, with no single, authoritative text (*Bigolo*, for example, a work that originated in the William Ponty School and was then reprised perhaps most famously in the 1950s by Keïta Fodéba's Ballets Africains).

The diminished role of the written stage play in this context has led to a significant blind spot in scholarly work on contemporary Francophone African theater, especially in its relation to performance. Senegalese theater and its history up to contemporary moment are underserved by the anthologizing work of literary scholars. In fact, this history comes across more clearly in the interplay of multiple texts, reprisals and adaptations with the acts and sites of performance that have inscribed them within the collective national imaginary. This history by no means exists in isolation, but is always in dialogue with the movements and approaches of a global theatrical history, as this study will show. However, it is, in large part, this national narrative of theatrical

performance and its development in Senegal that motivates the many popular theater performers and aspiring television actors and directors found throughout the country today to take the stage.

The Dialogical Process of Stagecraft

This stage and its history illustrate the function of performance spaces as what Anne Ubersfeld called "le lieu du discours," itself a producer of meaning, the space that serves not only to host "la parole théâtrale," but also to represent it "dans sa conformité à une réalité psychique autonome" (10). For Ubersfeld, the discursive influence of a work is not to be sought in the text or signs placed upon a stage, but rather in how such signs have come to be displayed as representative of a certain reality: "tout discours d'un personnage avant même de dire son éconcé, a pour message de nous apprendre dans quelles conditions il est parlé" (11). To compare this approach to that of literary analysis, Ubersfeld, a founding figure of the field of theater semiotics, in effect suggests we take the stage *as* page. Even when blank, it is discourse-laden and, as such, proves part of what Derrida called a larger *archi-écriture* that resists binary oppositions between the meaning-making process of text and those of performance. This observation of performance space as a conduit to social discourse is helpful in its extending to the stage the kind of rhetorical force that allows performances to mark the collective imaginary and create new meaning within it.

Part in parcel of the stage's framing work, and a central aspect of this study, is the event that serves to host the performance, while, moreover, helping to shape the discursive impact of a theatrical production, its later reception within a broader theatrical heritage, and its implications to existing or desired social models. In our *reading* of theater, to use a theme employed by

Ubersfeld, we will consider the event as paratext. In the context of Francophone literature and its production, Richard Watts has pointed out that "... each edition of a work and, by extension, each paratext addresses a culturally specific moment and a culturally specific readership, thereby projecting a singular version of the text through the lens of the chronotype... of its publication" (14). This diachronic study will take a similar interest in the framing - the performative paratext - around stagings of particular works as elements of performance that marked the reception of a work, but also made an imprint on the rules and expectations seen as latent in the performance space itself. They responded to and recrafted what it meant to perform a play in the Senegalese context as well as what a play was expected to do. At stake will also be the role of events in facilitating the stage's rhetorical interaction with its audience, a factor which has been key particularly in analyses of the pan-African cultural festivals and their impact on and framing of newly postcolonial societies (Apter). Such events, festivals and expositions, can leave a lasting mark on forms of creation and reception (Le Prun), and leave creators, in theater or productions of so-called traditional folklore, with frameworks within which they may innovate through embodied behaviors, performance or textual practices (Askew, Cole, Strother).

An additional analytical tool useful to a study of the stage as a space of discourse is the dialogical effect operating within that space, a notion that Ubersfeld borrows from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. In his writing on the novelistic form, Bakhtin proposed a departure from linguistically oriented scholarship of his day by arguing that the special quality of the novel lay not in its content, but rather the interplay between the content and form, the whole operating within an overarching social context: "Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon" (259). What Bakhtin describes as dialogism in the novel is the ability of the novelistic voice to represent the multi-vocality of

discourse, incorporating the infinite voices to be heard within the social reality in which the utterance came about. This approach takes into account the imprint of a social sphere on literary creation: “The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogical threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness...” (276). The totality of social signifiers and their multitude of possible interpretations is what Bakhtin calls the social heteroglossia. He argues that the novel's most distinctive and fruitful characteristic as a literary form is its ability to interact with such heteroglossia through a multiplicity of discourses. This further implies that any exploration of novelistic discourses will require an appreciation of the social heteroglossia that has left its mark on any given literary utterance, and not simply a formalist linguistic analysis. For, as Bakhtin argues: “To study the world as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined” (292).

Ubersfeld, in her usage of dialogism as a critical approach to theater and performance, in fact departs from Bakhtin's own critical framework, since the Russian critic argued that the dialogical effect could not take place in drama, as there is no narrative voice framing the spoken word of the characters on stage. Bakhtin would claim that in theater: "There is no all-encompassing language, dialogically oriented to separate languages, there is no second all-encompassing extra-plot (not dramatic) dialogue” (Baktin 266). While this can in fact be said of theater if it is approached from a purely textual perspective, Ubersfeld questions Bakhtin's exclusion of the form from his theories by introducing the interplay of text and performance. In *Lire le théâtre*, she explores the two extremes of what she calls the text-performance binary, the first being the classical approach, which focuses on the text alone, the second, typified by the

writing of Antonin Artaud, shuns the text in favor of the live experience of performance. In fact, Ubersfeld argues, there is a semiotic relationship of the two that reflects the very multiplicity of voices Bakhtin establishes as inherent to the novel. If theater lacks the rhetorical stage or backdrop of the narrative voice, the actual, physical stage of the theater, understood as a semiotic foundation, steps in to encompass the very social heteroglossia to which Bakhtin refers.

This adaptation of Bakhtin's term proves useful particularly in the study of context-specific theatrical practices, as it has in previous scholarly work on African and postcolonial literatures (Miller 26, 219). However, performative analysis also benefits from an embodied approach that does not limit an understanding of knowledge and heritage transmission to the rhetoric and trope. Embodiment in performance is a vital part of understanding the interplay between a stage presentation and the social sphere it addresses. We therefore must not only ask what was being presented on stage, but also whose bodies were being presented, to whom, where and how? In this regard, textual and historical analysis are insufficient, however rather useful is the concept of the scenario, developed by Diana Taylor and described as "a paradigmatic setup that relies on supposedly live participants, structured around a schematic plot, with an intended (though adaptable) end" (13). In the context of Senegalese theater, scenarios of encounter, resistance and reasoned compromise repeatedly returned as performative gestures laden with meaning and designed to compel new terms and negotiations in the rules of exchange within Franco-African society.

This study will explore the beginnings of a performance space that first arose under the supervision of French colonial pedagogy in Africa. The social and theoretical context of this period is replete with the multi-vocal discourses discussed by Bakhtin that produce and transmit performed scenarios as these change and adapt, but, as Taylor states, do not go away (Taylor 33).

These have a profound impact on the plays produced by the young African students, who also deliver a response to such discourse, generating a discursive impact and response that cannot be found within the plays' texts alone. The texts must instead be seen as created in dialogue with colonial theories of education at the time, to which the students were not likely to have had direct exposure, but which entered their embodied experience through the "copies of lost copies" that scenarios represent (Taylor 55). Such socially situated forms of discourse through performance had a deep impact at the early moments of theatrical creation in Senegal, but also continue to influence the ways in which contemporary performance spaces are perceived and crafted. As the early performers of this dialogical theater sought out rhetorical and performative space on the stage of the William Ponty School to respond with indirect defiance to the demands of colonial pedagogical theory (chapter 1), so now must contemporary performers of the Senegalese stage contend with the functions of a performance space left behind by an elite class of intellectuals from a nationalistically minded generation of pan-Africanists (chapters 2 and 5).

Here we will explore the impact of such discourses on what has come to emerge as the contemporary Senegalese theatrical stage space, addressing the interplay of such discourses on major sites and events of this theatrical history with the work of the performers themselves, who have attempted to stage a multi-vocality of discourses upon a stage that has emerged through colonial intervention. The gesture toward multi-vocality can constitute an appeal for greater political autonomy and influence, as was the case in the Ponty students' questioning of colonial attempts to form a labor-oriented, agriculturally trained class of indigenous elites. It can also constitute a gesture for greater centralized control placed in the hands of the State, as was the case, for example, in the pan-African cultural festivals of 1966 in Dakar and 1969 in Algiers.

Stage dialogism, we will find, does not constitute shorthand for political liberation, but can also be employed in a manner which instantiates claims to increasingly centralized political power.

The first two chapters of this study will focus on the impact of pedagogical discourses on theatrical performance, beginning with the site often referred to as the birthplace of African drama, L'Ecole William Ponty. Indeed, as Traoré would argue, this was, more accurately, the birthplace of African theatrical practice in French, and one that served as a point of dialogue between young African students and colonial pedagogical theory. Pedagogy, an approach among others through which the French sought to achieve a targeted administration of the African population, became the foundational form of discourse for a new practice of African performance. Composed and rehearsed independently, outside the surveillance of French instructors, the first French plays of the colonial schools were all the more useful in that they could be framed as representative of an emerging, hybrid African soul, deeply indigenous in the attachment to local traditions, yet also French in its faculties of reason, critical distinction and analysis. In reality, though free to stage what they wanted, the demands and expectations of the colonial institution were always present. Moreover, the stage on which the Ponty students would perform arrived rife with the demands of an audience intent on seeing in performers evidence of a response to pedagogical initiatives, or of what was to come in the emerging elite of a future Franco-African society.

Chapter 1 will explore some of the pedagogical theories and practices that preceded the productions at the William Ponty School, arguing that these had a great impact on how the students saw their role within the school as well as within colonial society. We will also examine a split between the goals of a Ponty education as it was designed and the students' perception of their own education. Although the curriculum was, by the time of the theatrical

productions, designed to promote a colonial approach of *association*, arriving students displayed a lasting attachment to the notion of *assimilation* and the universal republican rights these promised to afford in their later lives and careers. We will see how the tension between these two notions in colonial pedagogy manifested themselves in the students' own experience of the curriculum by looking at an unpublished novella produced by one of the School's most promising students from this interwar period. Chapter 2 will continue the discussion of theatrical production at the Ponty School, this time focusing on a key administrative stake of pedagogical practice at the time: the location and usages of the campus site. We will see how the Ponty campus, today a politically charged site of memory, has served as the commemorative stage of collective imaginings of a prosperous future. These imaginings have always involved a process of temporal interweaving, whereby the past is summoned to incite actors of the present to share in their efforts toward a collective hopeful vision for the future.

In the following two chapters our focus will turn to the impact of notions of culture as a universal concept in the theatrical stagings of the period immediately following Independence, described as one of marked nationalism in the arts in Senegal and elsewhere on the continent. We will find that notions of culture as a subject for nationalist policy was an important emerging concept during the period leading up to independence, and opposing visions of culture as a nationalist practice yielded celebrations of African independence that in fact prove dissonant in a number of ways, illustrating the multi-vocal forms of discourse within calls for greater or more successful African liberation.

Chapter 3 examines key movements in global efforts to redefine the notions of culture and civilization. We will look at the implications of a shift in the French approach and understanding of culture, as illustrated by the new Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, founded by

André Malraux, a shift that, within the theatrical world, had been instantiated through the visibility of the Théâtre des Nations festival, which brought together troupes from around the world to represent their respective nations and perform culture. These factors will be considered in dialogue with the theater produced at the spreading French *centres culturels* of French West Africa. These would host performances discussing the emerging concept of a universal culture thought to house a multitude of civilizations. This pluralizing of *civilization* represented an important shift in understandings of these two terms and functioned, for French administrators, as a framework from which to continue to exert influence under the banner of culture and *coopération* at a time when means of overt political intervention were diminishing.

Continuing with questions of notions of culture and their representation on the theatrical stage, chapter 4 will engage in a reading of the events of the two first pan-African cultural festivals of the 1960s, the Festival Mondial des arts nègres of Dakar in 1966, and the Premier Festival panafricain d'Alger of 1969. Read against each other, these two global events describe the contours of slightly though tellingly different approaches to culture as a notion within the broader pan-African struggle for liberation. A reading of two of the featured theatrical works of these two events, both of which, *Les derniers jours de Lat Dior*, by Amadou Cissé Dia, and *L'Exil d'Albouri*, by Cheikh Aliou Ndao, were written by Senegalese playwrights, will explore how these differences were made manifest on stage. However, the details of these artistic debates also came across in many important ways through the framing of the events and the discourses surrounding them. While the Dakar event presented festival attendees with the instantiation of a largely completed independence struggle, which, now at the phase of national unity, could achieve such unity through the concepts and terms laid out by president Léopold Senghor's tenets of Negritude, in Algiers the mood turned to a markedly anti-Negritude message,

and one that insisted on the on-going independence struggles, especially with the yet-to-be-liberated colonies controlled by the Portuguese dictatorship. Indeed, these framings of the two festivals underlie the theatrical texts as well, determining to a large extent the way in which these works would be received, understood, and situated within a Senegalese theatrical canon.

The fifth and final chapter is the result of multiple trips made to Dakar and uses interviews and performance fieldwork to provide a snapshot and analysis of the contemporary Senegalese stage through the eyes and practice of one of its most prominent activist troupes, the company Kàddu Yaraax. This chapter will offer a discussion of some of the latent effects of the pedagogical and cultural discourse that has run through the emergence and development of theatrical work in Senegal. It will also chart out some of the performative strategies whereby companies like Kaddu Yaraax have come to incorporate, innovate upon and transmit a national theatrical heritage. A discussion of the diminished condition of state-funded culture in contemporary Senegal along with current re-appropriations of the forms of what is called traditional or popular performance, precedes a brief performance case study of one of the interactive forum shows for which Kàddu Yaraax has garnered an international reputation. Such performances at times deliver on their promises of a democratic theatrical experience with a liberating populist function, but can also serve to reinforce, inadvertently or not, local power structures already in place, a fact that has made popular and forum theater forms in African contexts the subject of some criticism. However, here it will be argued that at the heart of such works is a desire to respond to, shape and transmit the theatrical heritage that has been handed down to the contemporary stage and its performers. In this regard, these performers share with their William Ponty School predecessors the impulse to use the stage as a means of calling into question matters of form and ideology inherent to the contours of the theatrical stage itself.

Chapter 1: Language, Distinction, and Lessons of Things:

Pedagogy at the William Ponty School

Collective memories and remembrances of the Ecole William Ponty of French West Africa operate along a complex, interweaving fabric of temporalities. Among its different legacies in the national Senegalese imaginary and in critical discussions, the institution is frequently remembered as the birthplace, or cradle, of Francophone African drama, as reflected by Senegalese stage director Maurice Sonar Senghor, who asserts: "C'est bien de cette tradition qu'est né le théâtre contemporain africain" (18). The William Ponty School is where Africans were first encouraged to write and perform French-language stage productions based on their own history and culture. Students were incited to employ the conventions of Western dramaturgy, inspired by coursework on French classical authors, such as Corneille and Racine. The exercise yielded plays whose impact went far beyond the limits of the School itself, leading to theatrical soirées in Dakar, even a tour in France as part of the 1937 *Exposition Universelle des arts et techniques* in Paris, a showcase of French technological prowess and global influence where the Ponty students would serve as an illustration of what was considered the new, emerging Franco-African mind. To this day in Senegal, the Ponty institution is evoked with a touch of nostalgia. Theater artists and prominent figures recall the School as harking back to an originary moment in Senegalese performance, when theatrical practice was coupled with high levels of erudition and literacy.

It is important to note that Ponty does not, in fact, mark the beginning of theater in French West Africa. It is rather the first episode in the crafting of a new space for theatrical performance in French, a space that would serve as a site of exposure for young students who wished to validate Africans' role in their own history. Previous scholarly work on the theater

performed at Ponty has focused on the important role of this performance and validation of African historical narratives, alongside what might be seen as a certain failure on the part of the students to adapt a more critical view vis-à-vis their colonial pedagogues (Warner). Indeed, this new performance space also served to hide a number of political and economic stakes at play within shifting colonial policies. As such, the Ponty performances would fit within a broader context of colonial pedagogical initiatives whereby the French would endeavor to transmit a sense of native traditionalism to their indigenous populations (Kelly). Such traditionalist initiatives were employed not only in French schools, but also, for example, in the English Achimota School of what was then the Gold Coast (Coe). Peggy Sabatier situates the role of such performative activities within one of the major pedagogical objectives of the Ponty School, which was to placate and control a rising Franco-African elite, making them fluent in the language and ideals of the colonizer, but also enrooted in local, African traditions (1978; 1980).

The pedagogical project at Ponty during this interwar period fit within a larger movement of colonial humanism, the mechanisms of which led to a number of systematic contradictions in the handling of colonial societies. For Gary Wilder, these contradictions and paradoxes are indicative of the unwinding of a French imperial nation-state in crisis: "A new colonial rationality placed subject peoples in a politically effective double-bind that racialized them as minor members of the French nation. But it was also self-undermining and created possibilities for critical political intervention" (5). In the Ponty context, the desired result of the institution's pedagogical initiatives was to stave off what was called *déracinement*, or uprooting, among a new Westernized elite, which "was seen as a problem first among the French colonialists and later among some educated and self-aware Africans as well" (Sabatier, "African" 9). Later uses by the students of this elite status in association with their former school highlights that, although

the Ponty performances most certainly served colonial interests, especially in their symbolic depictions of the victory of French technology and reason over so-called indigenous superstition, the theatrical productions in fact served a double purpose, reinforcing colonial power structures, while also providing students with the opportunity to take possession of colonial discourses of knowledge regarding their own history and customs (Jukpor).

Responding to the focus on Ponty as the so-called birthplace of Francophone African performance, Bakary Traoré points out the significant historical elision implicit in such a legacy. He reminds us, for example, that performance forms existed well before the French conquest and served important social and religious functions in rituals that the colonizers had simply failed to recognize as theatrical in nature. Alioune Oumy Diop echoes this point when, in discussing contemporary theater issues in Senegal, he describes pre-colonial theatrical forms as a resource underexploited by today's theater artists. These important corrections to critical appreciations of African theater speak to similar discussions regarding the notion of a supposed birth of African literature. Just as Amadou Hampâté Bâ worked to achieve recognition for forms of orality and oral performance in literacy and memory transmission (Bâ 166), Traoré and Diop grant recognition to pre-colonial forms of African theater as a central element of its later development and innovation. With such correctives in mind, we must therefore qualify that the Ponty School marks an important first in that the institution facilitated the first crafting of a performance space conceived specifically as one of interaction between African culture and the West. What remained to be seen was the extent to which this new performance space would also be a dialogical one, or the measure to which it may operate as by a "dialogized process, to shape its own stylistic profile and tone" (Bakhtin 277).

By the time the young Ponty students first took the stage in 1933, and well before their productions became a wider cultural phenomenon, the markers by which the works were to be interpreted had been set by previous decades of colonial conquest and pedagogy. In this interwar period, French instructors at the Ponty School and across French West Africa struggled to adapt their pedagogical approach to an administrative imperative to produce culturally rooted, practically minded educated Africans. The disavowed foil to this approach was an assimilative one that sought to produce Black Frenchman, a process otherwise more in keeping with the purported universalist tenets of the *mission civilisatrice*. The very notion of a civilizing mission was a mutable one, as Alice Conklin points out, and would undergo a number of shifts and renegotiations (4). With the rise of a coterie of politically active, French-educated West Africans that included Senegalese Assemblyman Blaise Diagne, the assimilation process was seen as yielding a number of unintended consequences. Diagne was a resident of Saint Louis, one of Senegal's *quatre communes*. These four territories benefitted from a special status, conferring to its native inhabitants the full voting privileges of French citizens and thus the right to send a representative to the National Assembly. Diagne, the first Black African to win this election, stood as an indicator of a growing political activism among a French educated African elite. This phenomenon was seen as a potential threat to French objectives, which, after considerable human and economic investment in the colonies, were now aimed at fostering an active agriculture-based economy and thus required, first and foremost, a malleable laboring class from the local populations. In response to such pressures, and through widely distributed trade journals and circulars, the administrative authorities ensured that colonial pedagogues were cognizant of their role in dealing with these economic demands. This made for policy

imperatives that indelibly shaped the life of colonial schools, and eventually played a prominent role in the crafting of the Ponty stage and its theatrical works.

Yet the goals of colonial pedagogy, in the case of the Ponty School and elsewhere, proved elusive and difficult to achieve. The thwarting of an emerging class of politically privileged and intellectually elite could not, it turned out, be left to a simple matter of pedagogical reform. We are reminded by postcolonial scholars, most notably Homi Bhabha, that rhetorical images of "the people" are not formed through imposition from above, but through a process of continual, repetitive interplay between narrators and those who are narrated (*Location* 199-244). Likewise, colonial initiatives that sought to enroot Africans into a subjugated role were met with re-appropriations and re-workings of such imagined colonialist prototypes. Even those who most enthusiastically espoused their own narration by colonial discourse were limited to constitute what Bhabha has described as a pseudo-mimicry, one that is "almost the same, but not quite" (*Location* 122). There remained between the colonizer and the colonized a rhetorical space, employed by the former to distance the latter from full recognition as an equal, or as one who could wield equal political power. This same rhetorical space also left room, however, in the colonized individual's mimicry of the colonizer, for alterations in subsequent performances of cultural identity. This agonistic interplay has often been described by scholars as one of pedagogy and performance (Chakrabarty, "Museums" 6; Kohli 319). In the case of the crafting of the Ponty stage, this process of pedagogy and performance is also present in a very literal sense.

In this chapter, we will engage in a discussion of a new performance space, the Ponty stage, by first addressing the discursive "displacements and entanglements" which preceded it (Mbembe 15). Here the postcolonial notions of pedagogy and performance will encompass a

literal sense (educational reform and stage productions) that is meant not to confound the broader theoretical meaning but to enforce, symbolize and intensify it. This section of the chapter's argument will frame the next chapter's discussion of commemorative stakes of performance and ruination at the Ponty site of the colonial period and today. Here we begin by addressing the conditions of emergence of a series of theatrical productions whose impact and legacy proved not only far-reaching, but also largely self-contradictory. The seeds of this contradiction were sown from the beginnings of a School whose history and purpose tethered the institution to initiatives of conquest. And yet through its development and special status, the School would contribute to producing a character prototype, that of the elite *évolué*, whose status and ambitions were seen as running counter to the administration's interests. This chapter discusses the pedagogical imperatives and performative responses around such paradoxes by exploring the history of the Ponty School itself, and by engaging with a narrative testimonial left behind by one of the School's most illustrious former students.

L'Ecole William Ponty: school of conquest

The forms of pedagogical discourse brought to bear on students of the William Ponty School reflect discussions of conquest, be it military or cultural, through the imposition and diffusion of foreign schooling, a theme that is particularly salient in this case, given the primarily military origins of the Ponty institution. The Ponty School would soon establish itself as a central institution within what Jean-Hervé Jézéquel has called "l'émergence d'un univers des possibles dans les relations entre sociétés africaines et École coloniale" ("Histoire" Para. 4). This new element presented families with a choice, the ramifications of which were not yet clear: to

put their children through a traditional, or Islamic education, or to send them to the newly arrived colonial school. The implications of this decision resonate with depictions of such a dilemma in important works of Francophone literature, particularly Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure Ambiguë*, where the imported forms of colonial education are described as a means to learn "l'art de vaincre sans avoir raison" (47). In the case of Kane's novel, the protagonist would successfully pursue his French studies with the blessing and encouragement of his family and village. However, the exchange is continually framed within the "ambiguous adventure" of divesting from a familiar social structure in favor of one whose consequences and potential rewards are far from certain. Those sending their children to the colonial school had to contend with the possible waning of tradition in favor of what is seen as brute technology, an exchange that always returns Kane's characters to the question: "Ce qu'ils apprendront, vaut-il ce qu'ils oublieront" (44)?

The Ponty School's beginnings took place in such ambiguous conditions, its status as a pedagogical institution intermingled with its function as a supplement to military conquest. Its first inception was called L'Ecole des Otages, founded in 1855 in Saint Louis, then capital of French West Africa. At the time, economic crisis in Europe compelled colonial powers to seek more aggressively to capitalize on their territories. Already well established along the coastal *comptoirs* of the region, the French began to set their sights on the expanses inland, where their influence had yet to take hold fully and where Muslim theocracies were being mounted and propagated, in large part in resistance to an expanding European presence (Diouf, *Histoire* 157-60). The French met force with force, as their army generals, the most notable and influential of whom was the mythic Louis Faidherbe, engaged in a form of conquest that involved not only military operations, but also a network of treaties to establish strategic partnerships with smaller

communities not yet aligned with the Muslim kingdoms of the region. Colonial powers were eventually able to overcome the area without engaging in the kind of direct military assault employed in the invasion of Algeria. This approach to conquest downplayed the role of military operations in the French infiltration of West Africa and made processes of cultural conquest all the more crucial. Indeed, it was such an indirect approach of collaboration with local populations that would allow later French authorities to maintain the belief that that the conquest of West Africa was one of exceptional tact and civilizing prowess, as twentieth-century administrator Robert Delavignette would assert, by writing of "Notre conquête, infiniment plus sage," as an initiative that "procédait en grande partie de l'exploration, préfigurait une politique indigène à laquelle les Noirs ont pu adhérer" (*Chefs* 101).

In this softer, cultural strategy to cull favor and then impose domination, French education held a central place from the start. In 1855, General Faidherbe founded the Ecole des Otages to house the sons of conquered chiefs. The actual status of residents of this school remains ambiguous to this day. As the institution's name indicates, the students were, by title and purpose, hostages, often serving as bargaining chips for French forces (Hazemann 139). For their part, African leaders would send their "sons" to the school as assurance of their good faith in territorial treaties established with the French. Cooperation with colonial authorities, what Achille Mbembe would call "conviviality," would also ensure local leaders a measure of power and influence in their own communities as they partnered with the French and sought a place for themselves within the new frameworks of power then taking shape as a result of the encroaching European presence (104).

The status and circumstances of each *ôtage* at the school varied, and there are no existing written records of terms of exchanges. However, correspondence between French and African

forces indicate that it was common practice for Faidherbe to insist that at the time of capitulation a chief or community surrender one of its “sons” to the school as a sign of loyalty. A further strategic factor of this practice was that it allowed French forces to decide those on whom they would impart the French language. Once educated at the Ecole des Otages, which had no set curriculum or degree, but where terms depended on the wide range of political and familial factors involved for each resident, these "sons of chiefs" would assume the leadership roles ascribed to them by local tradition while also serving as intermediaries to the French, familiar with colonial interests and able to communicate in the colonizer's tongue. Language and pedagogy thus became key tools of conquest for the French as they locally sought political and military allies. Meanwhile, as former residents of the school at Saint Louis became further implicated in negotiations of political and economic influence, their recourse to French began to turn the language into a tool of power and prestige, establishing French as a symbol of heightened political influence. The French colonial school was not the only path to such prestige, however, and many families, for pragmatic and economic reasons, would decide instead to send their children to the Islamic schools, or to immediately involve them in trade (Jézéquel "Histoire," par. 3). The rise of the French colonial school and the increased competition it gave to other pedagogical options would there represent an important new factor in the emerging colonial society of the day and have an impact on the early history of the William Ponty School.

Military conquest of rural areas in the region was, for the most part, complete by 1903, with the Ecole des Otages having complemented the military *pénétration* carried out by French generals Faidherbe and Archinard, with the exception of a period of closure between 1871 and 1892, when the school was closed due to budgetary and administrative shortfalls. With the reduced need for military operations, the Saint Louis school would have to adjust its purpose and

procedures to shifting hegemonic practices in the colony. The school remained in operation but was renamed the Ecole Normale de L'Afrique Occidentale Française. Its new status was meant to elevate the structure to the level of a French *école normale*, which served to establish the nation's intellectual and administrative elite in the Hexagon. The AOF's own *école normale* was similarly designed to confer a measure of prestige to its students, training them to become the new generation of indigenous teachers and interpreters. While no longer coming under the school's keep by military means, students, especially those later sent out as teachers in the region's *école rurales* - an initiative to propagate French culture into the remote areas of the colonies -, were nonetheless perceived as foot soldiers in the next phase of colonial conquest in rural areas. Less concerned with the content of the school's pedagogical program, the educators at Saint Louis were charged with producing young men able to promote, by example, the perceived benefits of French values and reason, characterized not surprisingly by an amenability toward compromise and collaboration with French authorities.

Students at the Ecole in Saint Louis were envisioned as carrying forth their Western education into the remote hinterland and affecting, through an imagined process of cultural and intellectual diffusion, a gradual but steady infiltration of European values. It was a model of pedagogical indoctrination confident in French educators' ability to eradicate rival modes of understanding and operating, especially those of Muslim belief, within an emerging Franco-African society (Brévié). Colonial discourses of pedagogy also came cloaked in philanthropic language expressing a purported desire on behalf of the French to work toward the best interests of an indigenous population in need of technological and intellectual advancement. The school's director at the time describes the pedagogical task of newly graduated indigenous instructors thusly: "Appelé à vivre au milieu de populations très arriérées, l'instituteur aura le devoir de se

mêler à elles pour faire pénétrer des idées et des habitudes nouvelles, susceptibles d'améliorer la sitation matérielle, d'accroître le bien-être et d'élever le niveau moral des habitants" (qtd. in Ly 3: 103).

Colonial administrators clearly stated their intention to use education as an additional means of conquest to carry on beyond the armed campaigns in the region. Indeed, according to colonial strategy, the act of generating subjects sympathetic to the French colonial project was tantamount in importance and scope to that of a military operation. Even beyond the actual conquests, colonial education remained seeped in the rhetoric of infiltration and a softer form of cultural dominance. At the time of the school's transition to the status of *école normale,* Camille Guy, governor of Senegal, declared, speaking specifically of the role of the colonial teacher in West Africa: "Une civilisation qui entend s'imposer par la force ne conquiert pas un pays; elle peut avoir l'illusion de la conquête, elle n'en a pas la la réalité. C'est par la douceur, la persuasion, la démonstration du fait constaté ou du résultat obtenu que se gagnent ces victoires pacifiques" (qtd. in Ly 100). At the Saint Louis school, the strategy for achieving what Camille Guy called "peaceful victories" began with a 3-year curriculum that allowed students to specialize to become either teachers or translators. With the vast expanse of its West African territory now under French control, for colonial powers the act of conquest now fell within the purview of its educational institutions. These would continue the work carried out in the earlier years of military conquest, now engaging in what *Directeur de l'enseignement* Georges Hardy would call "une conquête morale," one which effectively replaced the gun and treaty the school manual and status-granting diploma.

In 1907, for practical concerns, the school was soon moved closer to the colony's new capital, Dakar, on the island of Gorée, just four kilometers off shore from the capital's main port.

Gorée was one of the Hexagon's earliest holdings and played a central role in early stages of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. At the start of the twentieth century it, along with Saint Louis, Rufisque and Dakar, had the privileged administrative status of a *commune*. Its male indigenous population were therefore citizens of the Third Republic and benefitted from voting rights, also sending representatives to the French Assembly. This special status, along with centuries of trade and European presence, gave rise to a cosmopolitan *métisse* culture through which Gorée natives often sought to distinguish themselves from their countrymen from rural Senegal who still held the status of subject. It was during its time on Gorée island, and in large part due to the cosmopolitan culture associated with this commune that the School would begin to foster its reputation as a *pépinière*, as it has often been called, or nursery, for an emerging generation of African elites ("Ecole William Ponty"). Two years into its tenure on the famed island, the colonial school would be given the name by which it is known today: L'Ecole William Ponty, a name which commemorated the former Governor General Ponty of French West Africa, who had served from 1908-1914. But the Ponty School was soon directly connected with the spirit of its site within the local and regional imaginary, also becoming known, unofficially, as the Ecole de Gorée.

The actual administering of the School on this small island presented considerable challenges, not the least of which were the repeated occurrences of student truancy. At the time, young pontins (the name given to Ponty students) were all too aware that in the nearby city of Dakar numerous employment prospects awaited whereby literate, enterprising young men could obtain lucrative positions as customs officers (Ly 1: 300). Frequent fugues to the capital contributed to an actual shortage of indigenous teachers in Senegal, a situation soon resolved by the economic crisis of the 1920s, which effectively wiped out employment opportunities for

young African job seekers without specialized degrees. The crisis, along with concerted efforts on the part of the Inspector General to increase enrollment regionally, led to a larger student body. With the rising student population came the challenge of a rapidly deteriorating facility so dilapidated that authorities were again forced to consider relocating, this time to a site that allowed for more space, and distanced students comfortably enough (for instructors, that is) from the excitement of Dakar without incurring prohibitive shipping costs. Plans were drawn to move the School to an abandoned French military camp in Sébikotane, some thirty kilometers from the capital. The transfer would not take place until 1938, precipitated by the accidental death of a student due to a collapsing staircase.

The new bucolic setting of the Ponty School was also favored in response to what was then considered the primary challenge in colonial education, which was that of indigenous elitism. Colonial administrators and educators at the time noted that the numerous reforms and relocations of the Ponty School had generated the unintended consequence of fostering a strong sense of cultural distinction among students as they negotiated their way through an emerging colonial habitus (Bourdieu). Colonials argued that once the young pontins reached a certain level of instruction they were immediately loath to take on any work other than administrative or teaching posts (Biais). The French perception of this phenomenon, whether founded or not, brought to light an important contradiction between employed approaches to indigenous education and actual French objectives. Although notions of local elitism had in fact been in large part produced by colonial authorities to promote the privileged status of the institution and to encourage enrollment, the desired end result of the Ponty School did not differ greatly from that of its initial inception at the Ecole des Otages. French pedagogical discourse sought, above all, to foster the emergence of an educated, politically docile group of intermediaries favorable to

colonial authority and to the notion of a productive and fruitful Franco-African society administered by the French.

The rising visibility of elitism among this group of French-educated Africans contravened these objectives in two crucial ways. First, it was seen as creating a counter-productive cultural distance between African teachers and the remote communities they were meant to serve. It was noted that indoctrination in French culture and republican ideas might lead to a disavowal of local customs and beliefs, rendering tenuous interactions between young instructors and the communities they served. These concerns were fed by a marked disenchantment students often felt upon arriving in the rural communities of their new post (Jézéquel "Enseignants," 519). Secondly, with the growing political influence of French-educated Africans, or such *évolués* as Blaise Diagne, colonial authority became increasingly concerned with the potential perils of producing an entire class of politically conscious West Africans eager to claim their place within the tenets of a putatively universalist republican society (Manning 78-9).

Responses in colonial pedagogical discourse to these perceived contradictions between the purpose and approach of indigenous education had already emerged years prior to the Ponty School's move away from the Gorée site. In 1917, Georges Hardy, a graduate of Paris' own Ecole Normale Supérieure at rue d'Ulm, was appointed French West Africa's Directeur de l'enseignement, at the age of 26. He notably published a widely distributed work entitled *Une Conquête Morale: l'enseignement en A.O.F.* In this manifesto for a new approach in colonial pedagogy, the *normalien* elaborates on how educators might bestow on African students the so-called gift of the French language without leading them into what was seen as the economic dead-end of *diagnisme*. This term emerged to suggest not just the political activity of French

West Africans, but also their staunch faith and personal investment in French culture's assimilative potential. The *évolués* were increasingly referred to as the *déracinés*, the uprooted. In his introduction to Hardy's book, François Clozel, Governor general of French West Africa at the time, gives expression to the colonial distaste of such *déracinés*, explaining that:

> En distribuant notre enseignement aux primitifs, nous sommes trop souvent à développer chez eux un verbalisme pompeux et ridicule, à meubler leur mémoire de formules qu'ils emploient sans les entendre comme les conjurations d'un fétichisme nouveau; à en faire trop souvent, en somme, des niais vaniteux, incapable et mécontents. (iii-iv)

Colonial authority thus began to see its own pedagogical discourse as producing formidable problems for the administration of the colony, even causing considerable rifts among administrators themselves with regard to the purpose of the Ponty School (Segalla, "Micropolitics"). In a 1936 speech later published in *Education Africaine* and given at the Ponty School while it was still located on Gorée island, colonial administrator M. Michel reflects how the actual space of the school site had become deeply problematic for colonial officials, symbolizing for students the promise of cultural elitism through French education. In a paternalistic appeal for students to follow the example of the "races prévoyantes," Michel asks his young interlocutors to lend him, in effect, their unpretentious, African ears:

> Pour enlever tout ce qu'il peut y avoir de prétentieux dans ce vocable, banissons tout de suite l'appellation de conférence... Admettons dès le seuil qu'un administrateur de colonies vous parle en administrateur de brousse que le hasard des affectations place aujourd'hui à Dakar... Mes amis, nous allons tout simplement, tout bonnement tenir un palabre. Avec un peu d'imagination nous nous considérons comme bien loin de Gorée. (6)

Michel illustrates here a move in colonial pedagogy to figuratively associate the space of a specialized school like William Ponty with the customs of a rural environment. The new Ponty site of Sébikotane was envisioned as the eventual vehicle of such a desired atmosphere of palaver, chosen not only for its practical advantages, but also to dislodge from the Ponty image

its accumulated signs of elitism and prestige. For starters, the facilities available at the former military barracks provided ample space for agricultural and artisanal workshops, meant to bring students in closer contact with what was depicted as a native African culture associated with labor and craftsmanship. It was thought that the isolated nature of the Sébikotane site, unlike that of Gorée, would keep students' attention away from the attractions of the colonial capital of Dakar. Above all, the students were not to perceive their arrival at Ponty as a move toward a life of urban cosmopolitanism, as they might have believed while housed on the Gorée island commune. Rather, they were to experience their arrival at Ponty as a step toward the simpler life of a teacher, or *administrateur de brousse*, the image Michel evokes with good reason as part of the new pedagogical model of the colony's desired end result in African education. Sébikotane, which was removed from the coast and topologically similar to a remote landscape of inland West Africa, could be difficultly mistaken as a gateway to Dakar or to an urban, cosmopolitan social status. This new space rather represented a symbolic journey, imagined and produced entirely by colonial pedagogical discourse, deeper into the customs and traditions of local African culture and not further away from them.

These shifts in approach, language and imagery regarding colonial education indicate the mutability of pedagogical discourse, which, much like notions of the *mission civilisatrice* itself, remained flexible in response to shifting priorities of the French West African colonies. Yet, although discourses shifted, the desired end result of colonial administrators proved relatively stable throughout time. From the strategic, militaristically oriented Ecole des Otages, to the *évolué*-producing *école normale*, up to the Sébikotane site's attempt to attract students to a rural African setting, the purpose of education at the most selective of French West African pedagogical institutions remained linked to a need for subservient intermediaries between the

African population and colonial authorities. In effect, the pedagogical discourse produced by colonial writings and educational reform served to shadow or highlight to varying degrees what essentially remained at the core a form of political domination over the African population. The history of the Ponty School evinces such subjugation. What remains to be established, then, is how the pontins themselves reacted to the pressures of such discourse. Indeed their gestures of re-appropriation of colonial prototypes for their own use were central in establishing the lasting reputation of a school which, despite its inextricable ties to colonial subjugation, is nonetheless commemorated to this day in Senegal as one of great prestige, as an institution that in fact launched the first generation of anti-colonial African leaders.

The narrating Pontin: the cahier *of Assane Seck*

Samba Gadjigo, in his study of literary echoes and depictions of the colonial school in the Francophone African novel, points out the inevitable pitfalls of analyzing colonial discourse and policy exclusively though writing produced by members of the administrative apparatus. This approach, he points out, will only serve to highlight the interests that policy was meant to serve, and not how it was experienced by the actual subjects of the time. "L'enseigment," in this case, "ne sera alors vu que pour ce qu'il était supposé être et non ce qu'il était. Ainsi on en saisira par exemple l'organisation et la structure, mais jamais comment il affectait l'élève indigène dans dans son être, sa manière d'être, sa vision de lui-même et des autres" (11). It is in the interest of addressing the lived experience, or one example thereof, of students living under these

educational policies that we turn to the case of Assane Seck.[1] Today, Assane Seck is known in Senegal for having played many roles in his country's history as an independent nation. His reputation is that of Senegal's longest serving minister (from 1966-1985), Professor of Geography at L'Université Cheikh Anta Diop, and *homme de culture* who served as Minister of Culture in his first ministerial post in 1966, having been named to that post immediately following the Festival Mondial des arts nègres of April of the same year. In the collective national memory, one of the well known biographical points of Seck's background as a leading figure in the Senegalese political and intellectual landscape is that he was once a student at the selective William Ponty School (Sonar Senghor 16). He arrived at the School in 1938, the year the institution first opened the doors of its Sébikotane site. Seck, who is originally from the Fogny region in Casamance, still recalls his eagerness as a young man to immerse himself in the stimulating environment of the Ponty campus and to take his place among the emerging class of French West African "elites" (Seck). Having also studied at the renowned Ecole Primaire Blanchot in Saint Louis, Seck had set his sights on the prospects available to ambitious, studious young men within the colonial school system. He was not long to distinguish himself among his Ponty classmates and went on to complete his 3-year curriculum *majeur*, first in his class, a title that came with a pecuniary award.

Throughout his life, Seck had warm memories of his time at the Ponty School and, in interviews, recalled having developed a close relationship with the School's director, Charles Béart. He also stood out as a leading figure in the school's artistic life, having played the title role in one of the Ponty School's most fondly remembered theatrical productions, *Bigolo*, a collectively authored play about a dissident military leader from Seck's home region of

[1] I had the privilege of speaking with Professor Seck over the summer of 2012, before he passed away on November 27 of the same year. I remain grateful to the former Minister for his generosity in sharing his time as well as his personal papers from his years as a Ponty student.

Casamance. The experience would be generative not only for Seck's own notoriety domestically and abroad - the play would be reprised in Dakar as well as years later in Paris with the Fédération d'étudiants africains noirs en France (FEANF) - but also that of the Ponty School, which used its theatrical productions to promote its role within French West African society. To this day, Seck is remembered nationally as one of the *grands pontins* whose impact on Senegal of the twentieth century is said to be in part attributable to the superior quality of the Ponty curriculum. In this sense, Seck's example is highly reflective of the pedagogical contradiction perceived by colonial educators at the time of his education. As we shall see in the discussion of his novella, although subject to the demands of an anti-*évolué* academic program, Seck still sought to appropriate and recast colonialist stereotypes of the enrooted African, performing this colonially promoted prototype while hinting at its potential use in the formation of a new class of West African leaders.

By its title alone Seck's student novella, "Malick, ou le noir évolué," resonates with what has been called the first Francophone African work of literature to take the topic of the colonial school as its central theme. *Les trois volontés de Malic*, by Amadou Mapaté Diagne, was published in 1920 as a commission from publisher Larousse and intended for use as a pedagogical text in colonial schools. The book is "a paen to the benefits of colonialism," and its laudatory tone towards colonial authorities, along with its critically problematic conditions of publication as a commissioned work, necessarily call into question Diagne's degree of agency in the work, if not his authorship (Watts 27-8). Seck's novella, a graded assignment intended as the capstone project of his studies at Ponty, raises similar questions. However, the lack of a broader readership, as well as the political crisis of colonial administration typical of this interwar period, as Wilder suggests (the novella was written around 1941, Seck's final year at the School),

combine to afford Seck a slight narrative margin from which to adopt a subtly critical view of the prevailing colonial contradictions and paradoxes of the day.

Malick was submitted as the young pontin's *cahier* assignment of his third and final year. The *Cahiers*, or notebooks, constitute, along with the theatrical productions, one of the signature assignments of the Ponty curriculum. The two exercises were implemented in the same year, 1933, at a moment when instructors had begun expressing interest in the work of contemporary French ethnographers, most notably that of Maurice Delafosse and Henri Labouret. These prominent writers marked the beginning of a turn in ethnographic approaches by defending what they considered to be the inherent value of African culture, which for them indeed constituted a form of *civilisation*, but one that French colonial authorities widely ignored or grossly misunderstood. However, as Patrick Manning states, "while defenders of African culture, [they] were not critics of colonialism. On the contrary, they were colonial officials, they believed in the justice of colonial rule, and in the superiority of Europe... For the African future... they saw no alternative but in submission to the tutelage of Europe" (91). For these thinkers, the key to a more efficient and harmonious Franco-African future lay first in a deeper understanding of, and respect for, African customs and beliefs (Amselle 32-34; Edwards 73-77). Secondly, they argued, colonial administration should integrate elements of African cultures that were particularly well adapted to the African's surroundings. These included religious beliefs as well as agricultural practices, local artisanship and performed folklore. It was argued that successful integration of African customs to French colonial society might lead to the foundation of a functioning Franco-African society in which the natives nonetheless remained "authentically" African.

The approach of this new generation of ethnographers resonated deeply with French

teachers in West Africa who, in their trade journal *L'Education Africaine*, wrote reviews and summaries of ethnographic studies, highlighting aspects they saw as potentially useful to colonial teachers, such as popular folktales and fables that could be integrated to the curriculum. It was thus inspired by ethnology's approach to knowledge through observation and description that Ponty instructors implemented the *cahiers* exercise, whereby students would spend the summer before their final year at the Ponty school conducting ethnographic fieldwork in their home community. The pontins could work on the topic of their choice, but these generally reflected ethnographic trends in approaches to Africa, with a strong focus on farming practices, mythology, religious beliefs, marriage customs and culinary techniques. Students would then spend a part of the school year writing a notebook-length report of their findings, including detailed descriptions, drawings and commentary on the origins and usefulness of a given practice.

In a context where pedagogical discourse demanded that instructors work somehow to enroot their students in their own culture - notwithstanding the irony of their mission to serve as facilitators of an "authentic" African identity - the cahier proved a particularly useful tool for the Ponty pedagogues. Required to act as independent observers and collectors of knowledge about their own indigenous cultures, the student was thus encouraged to recognize the value of such customs, while also producing his analysis through an ethnographic form of discourse that allowed little rhetorical space for conjecture, creativity or contestation. The experience, as several pontins would later note, was a dry and tedious one, and of all the work imposed on the young Ponty students, this seems to have been the one they most resented (Sabatier, "African"). As the capstone project of their long academic background, the *cahiers* did little to excite the literary imagination of these students of Western culture and, perhaps more significantly, locked

them within a strictly descriptive and analytical form of language. If French West African society was the result of an interplay between the narrator and the narrated, the pontins were here forced to employ the scientific discourse of the colonizer on themselves. They were, in effect, forced to serve as the producers of discourses around their own cultural difference and instantiate the very local "uniqueness" that, for the French, necessitated their exclusion from the universalist tenets of the *mission civilisatrice*.

The impact of pedagogical and ethnographic discourse on the Cahiers William Ponty highlights the significance of Seck's own modest literary project when, for his assignment, in lieu of submitting an ethnographic work, he produced a fictional narrative, but one which he assured would be equally reflective of local realities as what he called the dry and descriptive "anciens modèles" of the *cahiers*. What results in Seck's assignment, entitled, "Malick, le Noir évolué," is a claim to access to what Bakhtin discussed as the dialogical quality of the novelistic voice, a gesture we might imagine originated in Seck's familiarity with French literature through his Ponty coursework. In his work of fiction Seck is able to depict and deploy as signs of meaning the lived experiences of a rising and ambitious indigenous student navigating among the many colonially inspired prototypes for the "educated African." Additionally, Seck is able to turn language on itself to attempt to address the symbolic power that language wields within colonial society. Indeed, through Seck's novella we find the testimony of a young student remarkably aware of the very contradictions of colonial education that administrators were attempting to rectify. Thus the status of this document, which was never published, may not be said to be one of great impact on French West African society due to its limited readership. However, it does serve as a significant historical echo of the otherwise lacking African voice in response to colonial musings and imaginings of the enrooted French-educated African. As we will see, the

writing of this young and studious pontin is far from constituting a dissident screed against colonial society. The literary gesture here is forcibly more complex and nuanced, and speaks to how colonial power could be met with ambivalent espousal, more dissonant than dissident in its echoing of colonial discourse.

If, as Richard Watts states, "each paratext addresses a culturally specific moment and a culturally specific readership, thereby projecting a singular version of the text through the lens of the chronotope (Mikhail Bakhtin's term for the merging of the notions of time and place...) of its publication," Seck provides one such lens in the brief introduction to his novella (14). This introductory text, "Aux lecteurs," seeks to first justify to Seck's reader the author's choice of genre.[2] The use of an apostrophe ("To the readers") addressed to a plural readership that he would clearly not have in the single instructor meant to grade his assignment nonetheless begins the text by announcing its appeal to a literary, and not ethnographic, realm of discourse. Seck anticipates the reaction of his reader(s) to the object before them: "Un roman d'un élève de l'école William Ponty! Quelle préttention!" But the young author bids the reader's patience, recalling the precise goal of the *devoirs de vacances* according to what he calls "l'ancien modèle." Seck places the rote definition of the exercise in the mouth of his reader, putting the following in quotation marks as an imagined pedagogical response: "C'est un devoir qui consiste, étant donné un sujet, à rassembler tous les renseignements qui s'y rapportent et à les classer." But Seck points out what he sees as a crucial blind spot of this assignment: "Vous ne me parlerez point d'élégance dans le style, ni d'enchaînement entre les divers renseignements. En quelque sorte, c'est une plate citation de faits vécus." The young pontin's work is in fact an interrogation of the "platitude" of the school's approach to language, which does not allow for questions of

[2] All quotes are taken from the original document, which Seck kindly made available for consultation following an interview.

style or of the artfulness of writing, but only concerns itself with the use of language as a tool for the clear and concise communication of facts.

Seck reassures his reader, nonetheless, that his novelistic tale will be solidly based in the realities of both *Blancs* and *Noirs* in the colony. The proof of this will be, he says, that each *Blanc* "qui a fait quelques années de colonies" and each *Noir*, if an *évolué*, will see himself in the characters depicted therein. In addressing his imagined readers who are "frères de race," Seck promises to reveal truths with which the *évolué* will be closely familiar but loathe to recognize. He, like the historian Brunschwig years later, would endeavor to describe the *lettrés*, or: "Les premiers à souhaiter l'accéleration à l'Occident," as Brunschwig described them, also adding that, "Ils ont volontairement aidé les Blancs, d'autant plus qu'ils croyaient, eux, au mythe de l'assimilation et qu'ils ne doutaient pas, eux, de l'efficacité du 'système colonial' français" (211). For Brunschwig, the term "système colonial" must be placed in quotes as he hardly believes that such a thing existed. Seck's novella, however, indicates the degree to which the diagnist *lettrés* that Brunschwig describes could be aware of the tenuousness of their own position, so deeply invested in a purported "système colonial" susceptible to collapse under its own weight, and thus far from capable of integrating its French-educated Africans to metropole society.

Seck's appeal to the novelistic voice reflects the questions of a broader literary concern, that of the value of literature as a testimony to history. Seck espouses a realist approach, making it clear to his reader that he above all wishes to capture the experience and realities of those living in the colonies. However, he also appeals to a greater sense of flourish, style and elegance in the uses of language, elements he felt were missing from the limitations of the *cahiers* assignment. Curricular programs from the Ponty School indicate that nineteenth-century realist literature made up an important part of students' coursework, a fact perhaps related to the

importance of such literature in the Hexagon's school for future colonial administrators (Rauch 47). The presence of realist literature in the curriculum surely reflected a vision whereby literature was intended to depict the moral struggle spurred on by man's encounter with the realities of nature and social life. Seck, on the other hand, if inspired by such literature, would most likely have seen himself more in line with Flaubert than Balzac, as he himself seems to indicate in the first inter-textual reference of the novella, where he states that, if the *évolué* reader is honest with himself, he will inevitably conclude upon reading Seck's work that, "Malick, c'est moi," a reference to the famous phrase "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" reportedly said but never written by Gustave Flaubert in reference to his famous novel.

The tale making up Seck's assignment constitutes a brief bildungsroman relating the educational experiences of a young boy from Casamance. Through the course of his studies at the Koranic school, Malick persistently shuns "la daba," the West African hoe and here a metonym for hard labor in the field. Malick's instructor, not knowing what to do about the recalcitrant child, chastises him for what he sees as excessive idleness and fragility. When the teacher asks the young Malick what he plans to do in life, without hesitation the young Malick replies, "Je veux être comme un Toubab" ("toubab" designates a white European). Exasperated by the boy's insistence on attending French school, and still reeling from the memory of the boy's brother who by the end of his studies finished idle, refusing to labor in the field, the instructor and boy's family eventually accept. The story proceeds to recount Malick's ascendancy up the hierarchy of colonial schools, first at the local *école française,* and then gaining admittance to the regional school in Ziguinchor, a city with enough European residents and influence for the excited young boy to conclude "Ici c'est la vie! Je ne suis plus un sauvage, je suis citadin."

Throughout the course of his tale, Seck employs direct address to his reader to evoke the

central role of language in his vision of ascending the educational latter to become a *toubab* in his own right. Already his status at the regional school of Ziguinchor seems to accord him satisfaction as to having cut himself off from his origins "dans la brousse." The narrator appeals to the reader, describing Malick's new, pressed white kaftan and flashy shoes to ask, "Qui pourra jamais dire qu'il vient de la brousse? Personne." To the delight of Malick and to the satisfaction of his notion of having arrived in "la vie citadine," he is invited, with his classmates, to a soirée organized by the local enterprise Société kilomètre 6. The young students see the event as their chance to shine in the worldly company of colonial society. Arriving, they find that they impress the crowd with their pressed European clothes and elegant manners. The evening moves on to a series of speeches. The first is given by the president, who "débite en Oulof un long discours de remerciement... Deux autres membres discourent après, l'un en 'français tirailleur,' l'autre en Diola." The use of "débiter" as the verb to describe the act of speaking Wolof indicates the basic level of the French bureaucrat in a language already seen as inelegant and course. The "français tirailleur" refers to the broken French commonly used by the African *tirailleurs*, or sharpshooters, having fought in the first World War, and Joola, a main language of Ziguinchor, which has a large Joola population, indicates that the speaker was, to his detriment, not adequately skilled in the colonial language to address such an audience. In Seck's tale, the stage is set perfectly for the young men to dazzle their audience with their command of formal French. "Tremblent-ils d'avance à l'idée qu'ils vont bientôt parler devant cet auditoire?", the narrator asks. "Certes non! Ils sont trop sûrs de leur supériorité sur ces gens..." Malick indeed shines in his speech, and the audience is delighted with his spattering of adjectives and his "brûlants remerciements."

There is a touch of humorous irony in Seck's treatment of his character's rise to

distinction as he depicts a child possessed by his desire to shine within the colonial habitus. Signs of such distinction include dress codes, as we find in Malick's pride in his pressed, white kaftan. The main carrier of signs of indigenous distinction, however, is language. Here Seck gives the reader a glimpse at the colonial idea of the natives' "verbalisme pompeux" denounced by François Clozel in his preface to Hardy's treatise on colonial education. An ambitious young student eager not only to learn but also to outshine his African peers, Malick already embodies the pedagogical "problem" long described by colonial administrators. He conceives of his own ascent up the educational ladder as operating an ontological transition away from his idea of "African-ness," while pedagogues would wish him to identify more closely with what they depict and seek to instantiate through pedagogical discourse as the native student's true roots. Malick's key tool in ascending above his rural community is the French language, which he sees not as a vehicle of description and logic, but rather as a means of distinction above the "sauvages" among whom he was born and raised. For Malick, the French language is far more than a matter of linking signifier and signified. It is at the core of his identity, as one who aspires to be just like a "toubab."

Words and things

Here Seck highlights an issue with which colonial authorities had been grappling as early as the arrival of Georges Hardy as Directeur de l'enseignement in 1916. After all, language, once used by authorities as a status-granting tool through which to produce indigenous intermediaries, could also be deployed against the French. In order to maintain their dominance educators soon attempted to couple language pedagogy with a consideration of the social ends to which the

newly acquired language would be used. Attempts to disarm language as a tool of distinction were led by a focus on language primarily as a tool of labor, a simple process of joining signifier and signified (Segalla, *Moroccan*, 67). This notion was conceptually intended to oppose what was seen as the African's mystical relationship with language, which, the pedagogues claimed, invested words with inherent mystical power rather than seeing them as mere instruments of communication. Hardy attributed this and Clozel's observation of a "verbalisme pompeux" to a failing sense of logic, a response which reflected the very kind of paradox that Bhabha describes as characteristic of, even inherent to, colonial discourse. In attempts to contravene the risk to hegemony posed by one such as Blaise Diagne - the political symbol of the republican *mission civilisatrice*'s logical extension - authorities were able to contend that this so-called indigenous "verbalism" in fact sprouted from a pre-logical mentality native to the undeveloped African mind. Henri Brunschwig points out that in fact "Le caractère fondamental de ces acculturés," such as the fervently pro-French student of Seck's tale:

> ...n'est cependant pas qu'ils savaient lire et qu'ils parlaient français. C'est qu'ils avaient délibérément fait un choix. Ils souhaitaient accélérer l'évolution qui leur semblait pousser l'Afrique vers une civilisation occidentale dont les techniques étaient supérieures à celles de leurs traditions et dont l'esprit, chrétien, musulman ou humaniste, leur semblait conciliable avec leurs façons de penser. (92)

Thus Malick's attachment to the French language goes beyond what instructors would have seen as a mystical relationship to words, reflecting instead the zeal with which the protagonist has made his choice, that of becoming a full-fledged toubab.

The notion of a pre-logical indigenous intelligence also reflected the pedagogues' affinities to anthropological models of the time, among which descriptions of pre-logical "mentalities" were not wanting. The work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl has a particularly strong impact on colonial educators. The first 1937 edition of *L'Education Africaine* included quotes taken

from *Morceaux choisi de Lévy Bruhl*, especially explaining what the ethnographer described as the "pre-logical" mind. Cast against the French model of a progress-oriented *civilisation*, this image of the African mentality (also a fabrication of Western discourse) helped educators to depict the indigenous mind as unfamiliar with, even averse to, processes of logical thinking that made such progress possible. Hardy's writings would help form the spearhead of the Hexagon's revised, simplified goals in pedagogy with these observations in mind, summarized as follows by the Director General: "Nous voulons former des hommes pour qui le monde extérieur existe et qui passeront, modestes, vaillants, en faisant le bien" (173).

Hardy's first official attempt to propagate Western logic among the indigenous of French West Africa took shape in a geography manual published in the first year of his tenure for use in the curriculum throughout the AOF (Hardy, *Géographie*). Here, he gives a geographical depiction of each colony, broken down into 3 sections: "Le Pays," in which he describes the geographic layout of the land, "Les Habitants," which focuses on ethnic makeup and the general character of local peoples, and finally "Le développement économique," the *raison d'être* of colonial collaboration, which spells out what is produced in the region, and how the colony might continue to produce it and better. The tone of the manual is mostly descriptive, leading Hardy to switch hats from that of the geographer, to the ethnographer, to the economist. The seemingly neutral and simple, descriptive tone of the manual, as well as its structure, lay out for the student a seemingly evident causal relationship whereby the resource-rich land awaits the action of its capable, though not always willing, inhabitants to lead the land to its promised, though eternally deferred economic development. It offers a simplified social equation for the indigenous. Successful administration of the colonies was, according to Hardy's model, no longer a matter of cultural adjustment, but one of compiling a plain-faced assessment of

objective facts presented as self-evident. "Il est aisé de voir, par l'étude qui précède que l'Afrique occidentale française est un pays naturellement riche," Hardy states in the conclusion to his manual. "Mais, tout riche qu'il soit, ce beau pays ne réalisera toutes ses aptitudes que le jour où ses habitants se seront mis résolument au travail" (78).

For Hardy, all that was required for such a spirit of work to take hold over the African character was a direct encounter with the fruits of his labor, and a clearer understanding of the goals of his colonizers. "A cet enfant insouciant nous avons le devoir de révéler ce que son pays peut devenir… Dans son imagination toute primitive, un déplacement de forces, si l'on peut dire, se sera opéré," an imagination that must be guided by contact with the reality of his condition and surroundings. "Et cela justifie amplement l'enseignement de la géographie dans nos écoles françaises, cela doit aussi dominer et vivifier cet enseignement" (78). Whereas an education in ideas and principles risked leading students down the slippery slope of *diagnisme*, with its growing demands for African citizens and subjects, a direct relation with the objective realities of the colonies, a comprehensive evaluation of the actual things in the African's reach, would, it was thought, oblige the young student to understand the inescapable reality of his situation, which colonial observations always depicted as one of inferiority.

Hardy would push this point further in his 1917 book *Une Conquête Morale: l'enseignement en A.O.F.*, wherein he would call for an "enseignement adapté." The first assertion, implied by the title, was that the educator's work constituted no less than a continuation of the important military conquests carried out in the preceding century and facilitated in large part by the apparent willingness of Africans to collaborate with the French. Now dominant in the region from a military standpoint, in order to achieve what one French writer would call the essential *mise en valeur* of the colonies (Sarraut), the French needed an

indigenous population that was more than simply obedient, which Hardy pointed out was the lowest of virtues. "Aussi, voulons-nous posséder jusqu'au coeur de nos sujets et supprimer entre eux et nous tout malentendu" (*Conquête* 3). Hardy would also focus on the purely practical place of language in indigenous education, although he himself ironically employs language every bit as lofty and laden with metaphor as that of republican values. Thus the 'light' of French civilization would operate indirectly on the African mind as it took direct contact, for the first time, with the things of the objective world. Hardy's writing reflects such an image in his recourse to Europe's most famous allegory: "… pour le moment, restons dans la caverne dont parle si joliment Platon, et regardons le soleil trop brillant dans le miroir des marigots africains" (*Conquête* 172).

In his new linguistic directive, the Directeur de l'enseignement would notably take recourse in the tenets of a pedagogical exercise that had been put to extensive use in the context of the Third Republic's education reforms. *La leçon de choses* was inspired by the Anglophone world's "object lessons" and sought to instill in students a sense of objective analysis through precise and accurate description. According to the *leçon de choses*, students were to learn through direct contact with things drawn from everyday life. The object was used in class to discuss its name, characteristics and utility in context. The colonial curriculum dictated that students work with objects from eight categories through the course of the year: the school, the body, food, housing, clothing, the family, the village, and travel (Béart, Joly). The exercise not only aimed to enhance students' power of description, but was also seen as working to pass on an approach to language that would leave an indelible effect on students' minds, turning each student, to use Hardy's words, into men for whom the outer world exists. What was once seen as the assimilative influence of the French language now instead merely introduced Africans to a

relationship with logic leading to an appreciation of the semiotic interplay between signifier and signified, a relationship which, it was believed, would translate into a greater appreciation for productive work, be it clerical or manual.

In light of the pedagogical pressure taking hold throughout this period, Seck's semi-autobiographical depiction of a young Ponty student speaks to what Bhabha has called "borderline engagements of cultural difference," often both "consensual and conflictual" (2). In his literary gesture he indeed protests to the imposition of the "dry description" of anthropological discourse in the *cahiers* assignment, calling for a greater appreciation of elegance and style in the students' writing. He appears to appeal to a form of writing to which pedagogues had slowly been restricting access since the consequences of a class of republican *évolués* became apparent. In this sense Seck's assignment is a conflictual one. It also remains consensual, however, in that he proceeds to serve colonial discourse its own object. His morality piece quickly sets itself up as the tragedy of a young upstart inebriated with the effects of his own "verbalisme pompeux" in French as well as the sense of distinction such verbalism affords. Less of a call to dissidence - a rare event in the Ponty context - Seck's writing in part highlights the role the colonized can play as active though ambiguous producers of social meaning and discourse in colonial society.

Malick's demise: narrative and the plight of the évolué

At the center of Malick's inner conflict is not only his use of the French language as a tool of distinction but also his understanding of French as forming an essential part of his personal identity in a Franco-African society. Thus, when he is at home during his summer

vacation, he is greatly offended when, while resting on the edge of the forest, a Frenchman emerges, having lost his way while out hunting, and automatically accosts him in *français tirailleur*: "Enfant, toi y a pas moyen connaît chemin village?" This greeting calls into question the core of Malick's very image of himself. It suggests to the young boy "qu'il ne diffère pas beaucoup des autres, puisque l'étranger n'a pas vu du premier coup qu'il est civilisé et qu'il sait parler correctement le français." Seck in fact uses such episodes in his story to underline what he sees as Malick's primary predicament within colonial society. In wanting nothing other than to become "comme un Toubab," Malick is aspiring to a recognition of equality that he will never achieve. Seck uses irony in his narrative voice to highlight the futility of Malick's quest. When the young student returns home during the summer and repudiates his family for reflecting the type of "sauvage" he has worked so hard to avoid becoming, the narrator intercedes: "Bravo! Malick, tu veux être comme les Blancs? Va étudier!... Va être en contact direct avec eux... Va te civiliser un peu plus... Et tu pourras alors exiger qu'ils te traitent en... en égal bien sûr!"

Seck is critical of Malick's condescending attitude toward his own background and upbringing, and skeptical as to the possibility of such an individual truly becoming "comme un toubab." As his protagonist continues along his path toward *civilisation*, indeed an assimilative view of the purpose and usefulness of French pedagogy and language, Seck will underline the pangs and obstacles to which such a character is likely to be exposed. Malick studies his way up the educational ranks and is eventually one of the few representatives of his region to be sent to the William Ponty School, which Seck places on the then already mythical Gorée island location. Malick's yearning to become "un Blanc" leads him to fall in love with a young *signare*, or mixed race girl. She is from Saint Louis and - a source of great pride for the young man - has a Senegalese mother and a French father. The relationship with this young girl, along with his

arrival on Gorée island represent, for Malick, his successful exit from African society and into the civilized world of the French. Seck has created precisely the *diagnist* character to which the French administration was opposing itself at the time, even connecting Malick's love interest to Diagne's own native city of Saint Louis. The ostensible signs of Malick's cultural success are highlighted when, during a meeting at home, the protagonist's mother asks, "est-ce que tu peux causer avec les Blancs?" "Oui," Malick gloats, "je comprends leur langue autant qu'eux... J'ai une femme presque blanche."

The author, however, portrays Malick's path as one of inevitable perdition, as we find in the character's sudden contact with "reality," in a section Seck entitles "Du rêve à la réalité." The most significant event of Malick's rapid unwinding as a character comes when he must confront the French father of the girl with whom he has fallen in love. Malick had found a propitious moment to flee from Gorée island to run off and meet with his *signare,* Marie-Louise, in her native Saint Louis. Upon arriving, however, he discovers that the white father, having discovered their relationship, has sent the girl away to finish her studies in France. Revolted by Malick's insistence that he has the right to love anyone he wishes, the father retorts: "Vous les Nègres vous vous donnez trop de culot. Dès que vous connaissez par coeur le produit de a + b par a - b, vous vous croyez des phénix et dès lors vous n'avez d'autres égaux que les Blancs." Malick is thrown into an emotional tailspin by the loss of his love and the father's expression of racist views seemingly in direct contradiction with the republican tenets he had been taught to admire. "Or, le Nègre est-il un homme?", he asks to himself. "Qui ose me dire oui, lorsque les Blancs qui dirigent le monde par leur civilisation le considèrent comme un être intermédiaire entre le singe et l'homme?" Reflecting on the motto of the Republic after his harsh brush with what he now considers the colonial reality, Malick exclaims "Fraternité!... Vain mot qui ne cesse

de sortir des bouches pour se confondre dans le néant." The character has become lost in his quest to become "comme un Toubab," as he drowns philosophically, socially and emotionally in the contradictions of a colonial society that has taught him to reach toward the light of a so-called universal civilization, while ceaselessly reminding him, as does his own uncle, that for the French he will always remain "noir comme du charbon." Seck describes his state of mind at the end of this episode: "Malick est malade."

In fact, Seck portrays his character as coming full circle to the eventual result of his wish to shed himself from his own culture, an internally catastrophic clash between Malick's own idea of his place in society and the actual "realité" of the colony. The message resonates deeply with pedagogical efforts at the time to bring educated Africans in touch with the political and economic "realities" of a colonial society, which sought to encourage the prototype of the educated *enraciné* as opposed to the elitist *évolué*. Following Malick's moment of personal crisis, the next chapter brings us ahead three years, the duration of the Ponty curriculum. The protagonist has completed his studies at the *école normale*, and is depicted with a thoroughly transformed demeanor. He has been appointed as a teacher at the rural school of Sédhiou, wears the traditional boubou instead of Western clothes and has accepted to marry a woman of his family's choosing. As the narrator explains, "D'ailleurs il a complètement changé. Il n'est plus le Malick de la plage, des casinos et des bals. Il n'aime plus ces distractions européennes qui lui plaisaient autrefois." Culturally and intellectually, he has become the Ponty School's idea of an educated *enraciné.* He attends meetings organized by the association of Ponty graduates, but not often and does not stay long, suggesting, as the authorities would have it, that his attendance at this School does not, for him, form the core of his identity. It does not make of him a culturally aloof "elite." At the meeting he repeats to one of his peers the advice offered to him by his

uncle, to realize that "quoique tu fasses, tu resteras noir comme du charbon." How does he respond to those of his age group who insist that Africans be treated as equal to the French in colonial society? He reflects the analytical emphasis of his Ponty education and the supposedly logical and pragmatic perspective it sought to instill, by simply replying: "Il y a certaines choses que vous refusez d'analyser." *La leçon de choses* appears to have taken its effect on the Malick character. Seck's narrative does not share how this transformation has taken place, but he does suggest that it has yielded a calmer, sager educated young man, suitably prepared mentally and intellectually to fill the role laid out for him by simple "reality."

Seck's depiction of so-called reality serves to run roughshod over Malick's dreams to become "comme un toubab." However, though he offers critical illustrations of French and African characters meant to represent colonial society, the reader cannot clearly determine the author's own position regarding the French pedagogical initiatives to which Seck is himself subject. Malick's retort to his colleagues, "Il y a certaines choses que vous refusez d'analyser," is the clearest statement of the character's viewpoint after his transformation, yet proves enigmatic. It could indeed evince an espousal of French pedagogical discourse. However, the character's disenchantment with a Western-inspired model of African elitism does not preclude a desire to circumvent such models above and against French colonial authority. Seck portrays his protagonist as laughable for his ardent desire to assimilate. However, the novella offers no other sympathetic character or prototype of one who has managed to live between French and African culture. Moreover, the intellectual path that led Malick to his transformation to what appears to be an *enraciné* is kept in silence as the author says nothing about his time at the Ponty School, only that, by appearances, colonial pedagogy has accomplished its goal by drawing this educated African closer to his own culture and away from any notion of a culturally elite status that might

bring him closer to the comfort and luxury afforded to French residents of the colony.

Seck's novella serves as an illustration of the paradoxes inherent in this particular moment, or chronotype, to use Bakhtin's term, of the colonial society of French West Africa. He appears to challenge colonial authority with direct interrogations of the inconsistencies of colonial administration and pedagogy, using his work to shine light on the failed promises of French republicanism. However, the eventual transformation of his character appears to instantiate the elitism, or dead-end diagnisme administrators and instructors had determined were a prime danger to economic advancement. Like Seck himself, Malick turns out to be a model subject of pedagogical discourse. Yet in his symbolic revolt against the "flat descriptions" of the *cahiers*, then the cornerstone of a Ponty education, Seck also points the way toward an analysis of what Homi Bhabha has discussed as the ambiguous nature of the colonized stereotype. Just as in contemporary memories of the Ponty School, wherein the pontin can be depicted as either a colonized elite or a dissident pan-African intellectual, in Seck's assignment, pedagogy and performance interweave, defining the complex nature of colonial subjectivity.

Malick's silence regarding his own transformation does not equate with the author's own silence, who employs the same narrative voice from the beginning to the end, a literary gesture that appeals to the very stylistic flourish that educators were then seeking to prevent in the pontins' understanding of and approach to language. While Malick obtusely walks away from his colleagues, Seck himself embarks on the work of employing narrative expression to take active part in the formation of Franco-African subjectivities. Within the demands of pedagogical discourse, he has found a shallow narrative margin in which to position himself, begging the indulgence of a no-doubt already sympathetic instructor (Seck earned a grade of 18 out of 20 for the assignment, with no marginalia other than a few corrections of grammar or style). However,

Seck's efforts also reflect the obstacles of such an approach in the *cahier* form. This was the students' final assignment and was nonetheless evaluated according to questions of representation and so offered very limited rhetorical space for deeper dialogical expression and engagement. The opportunity for such engagement would come with the emergence of the Ponty performance space, which carried with it pedagogically burdened notions of an enrooted tradition, but also revealed the dialogical and commemorative potential of the stage. Such dialogical uses of the Ponty campus, a space which had quickly become a signifier in its own right within the French colonial heteroglossia, opened up new opportunities for students in search of a less restrictive model for their place in the emerging Franco-African society. As we will see in the next chapter, these commemorative opportunities were seized upon on stage, in depictions of the continent's former "great men," as well as in the political realm, where the Ponty campus is to this day perceived as a testament to the imprint of such great men of Africa from the pre-colonial period to the present.

Chapter 2: Staging Futures:

Commemoration and *Les arts du temps* at the William Ponty School

The former campus of the colonial Ecole William Ponty, today in ruins, reflects the institution's longstanding history as a commemorative site of a certain idea of pan-African elitism. This site of memory, or *lieu de mémoire*, to use Pierre Nora's term, has also long functioned as a symbolic placeholder for hopes of a prosperous Senegalese and African future. Perhaps the clearest illustration of the Ponty School's early role as a colonial site of memory can be found in the original theatrical works performed to commemorate, along with local customs, what students saw as examples of "great men" in indigenous African history. Today, the Ponty site stands largely abandoned, the School itself having been transferred after Independence to the city of Thiès, some thirty kilometers inland from the former Sebikotane campus, where it was integrated to the national system and eventually lost its special elite status. However, among the ruins of the former campus a small village has sprouted called Sebiponty, a contraction with the name of the neighboring town of Sebikotane. The community of Sebiponty has long identified itself with the memory of the Ponty School and, for lack of historical attention to the legacy of the School, residents there now work to maintain the site's status as a pan-African *lieu de mémoire*.

In describing the nature of the memory processes at work in such sites, Nora states: "La mémoire est la vie, toujours portée par des groupes vivants et à ce titre, elle est en évolution permanente, ouverte à la dialectique du souvenir et de l'amnésie, inconsciente de ses déformations successives, vulnérable à toutes les utilisations et manipulation, susceptible de longues latences et de soudaines revitalisations" (19). Today's Sebiponty community constitutes a microcosm of such a living society, and periodically revives commemorations of the Ponty site

to craft the memory of an institution having served as an intellectual and artistic cradle for Africa's modern generation of "great men." Locally, these commemorations serve immediate political interests, in that they appeal for a more important role for the curative community and village within current, ongoing urban expansion projects in the immediate area. However, while the commemorative charge of the Ponty School often constitutes an asset to the small Sebiponty village, the School's history can also prove problematic to their purposes, often becoming entangled in contemporary political struggles or even competing for commemorative attention with broader, national initiatives.

Commemorative processes at the Ponty campus operate according to an active and mutable dynamic, with sights set not only on the value of remembering the past, but also, and perhaps more significantly, on renewed models of how to propel the community and region toward a viable and modern future. Multiple initiatives have left physical traces on the site, yielding an interweaving network of material forms of remembrance lying dormant within the village of commemorative ruins, but always ready for re-use in future imaginings of economic and social stimulus. In the context of sites of postcolonial memory and commemoration, where strong "expectations of modernity" have often yielded lackluster-to-dire results, ever-arriving models of the future can appear as arrested in time (Ferguson, *Expectations*). The contemporary Ponty site at Sebiponty is an illustration of such "arrested futures" and the hold these can have over national narratives and community formations among those left to build lives among the material remainders of aborted commemorative imaginings of imminent prosperity (Rao).

Discourse on these abandoned commemorative futures, by communities, politicians, or academics, tends to evince a sense of nostalgia, often described as common to the postcolonial condition, a longing for what might have been (Lachenal and Mbodj-Pouye). This nostalgic

effect, especially as it pertains to ruined sites, can evoke what has been called a *ruinenlust*, described by Huyssen as a function of Western visions of modernity, or a longful looking back at the structures and aesthetics modernity has left in its wake (16-21). In the context of the postcolonies, such nostalgia for ruins takes on a different twist, suggesting a regretful remembrance of modernity, appearing as found and then lost in a historical progression from colonialism to the trials and misfortunes of postcoloniality. The Western gaze is often captivated by nostalgic castings of such ruins and thus shades over local, mutable re-uses of sites and material for new, redefined purposes. Suggesting a more dynamic focus on what she calls imperial formations, Ann Stoler has attempted to resist the "historical blunting" and flattened temporalities that often result from an over-determined attention on material decay in postcolonial ruins (193). In this more dynamic approach, she argues that to "think with ruins of empire is to emphasize less the artifacts of empire as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime than to attend to their reappropriations and strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present (196)." This outlook on ruined sites, which resists the nostalgic reflex triggered by the aesthetic effect of ruins, questions the claims postcolonial scholarship often makes regarding the so-called colonial impact on the postcolonial world. Such binaries tend to ignore imbricated temporalities and remembrances between *colonial* and *post*. In the case of the Ponty campus, the site has in fact always been a place of recuperated ruins, since even at the School's arrival it had already served as a military camp and by then stood as abandoned and neglected barracks. Thus, the commemorative aspect of the site is neither colonial nor postcolonial in nature and to speak of heritage at all with reference to the School neglects the ever-mutable aspect of its function as *lieu de mémoire*.

In this chapter, our attention will turn to acts of performance at the site of the William Ponty campus, with a focus on its role in the kind of political "reappropriations and strategic and active positioning," addressed by Stoler. This commemorative component has made of Sebiponty a site of charged political remembrance and a key *lieu de mémoire*. The *arts du temps* of the chapter's title refers simultaneously to an artistic categorization used by colonial officials at the time of the Ponty plays to describe the arts of theater, dance and music, as well as the interplay of temporalities found in commemorative acts at the site. It is this same interplay, and specifically the evocation of the past to give form to new visions of an imagined and often utopic future, that served to inscribe the Ponty campus as a referential site of memory in the history of Francophone African theater. By looking at commemorative practices during the colonial and contemporary periods, we find similarities that highlight a certain duality of discourse at the base of these commemorations of African pasts. This duality is characterized by occasional historical recastings and revisions for the sake of aligning the past with designated future objectives. It is also rife with apparent contradictions as to how the site is to be framed and remembered. In the colonial period, French administrators sought to frame the event of the Ponty performances as evidence of an entirely new Franco-African mind. Ponty students themselves viewed as new neither their educational backgrounds nor their "minds," but rather the commemorative uses of their theatrical works and the implications these had on Africans' potential as contributors and leaders in the emerging Franco-African society. These colonial and African framings of the same event were indeed working at cross purposes, yet managed to co-exist within the performance, even proving productive to the Ponty plays' success and enduring legacy.

In the contemporary context, the Ponty site has been used to instantiate the Senegalese nation's role as a leader in Francophone and African erudition and promise for the future.

Meanwhile, grassroots curators and residents of the contemporary Ponty campus loudly protest the material ruination of the site and appeal to government officials to renovate its infrastructure as a national site of cultural heritage. These contesting voices reflect what James Ferguson has called a duality of the local and global in postcolonial modernity projects (*Global*). Taken together as evidence of the consistent commemorative role this site has played, these two periods can reflect the often dual nature of commemorative discourse as well as the role that performance can play in making of dissonant voices a legacy, however ahistorical, of shared vision for the future.

The Future in ruins: crafting memory at the former William Ponty campus[3]

In 2006, construction came to a halt on one of several *grands projets* launched by the Senegalese president at the time, Abdoulaye Wade. Among the environing brush of the small town of Sébikotane stood the structural beginnings of what former President Wade had envisioned as the most elite and pan-African of the continent's universities. L'Université du Futur Africain represented a higher education initiative with ambitions every bit as lofty as its name. Conceived to serve as a fully autonomous campus on the outskirts of the Dakar region, the University of the African Future (UAF) was to have its own water supply, electrical grid, vast fields for hands-on coursework in agricultural engineering and a functional farming distribution chain to provide food and to generate revenue for the institution. The University's building plans reveal an ambitious project of somewhat utopian undertones. Digitally produced images of the site design show a ground plan reminiscent of Le Corbusier's utopian proposals for the city of

[3] Research on this section was carried out in collaboration with anthropologist Ferdinand De Jong of University of East Anglia, and is based on a series of interviews and visits to the former campus site between June 2012 and October 2014.

Paris. The project's Senegalese architect, and President Wade's architect of choice, Pierre Atépa Goudiaby, cites Le Corbusier as a major source of inspiration, or "mon idôle," in an interview posted on his personal website (Atépa; De Jong and Foucher). This aesthetic influence is perhaps most striking, as seen in the project's brochure, in the two long rows of Y-shaped buildings that follow the library in a straight line, one row serving as a dormitory block, the other designed to host a series of large, interactive classrooms ("Université"). Visitors of the UAF were to enter the site through the towering main administrative building, which was embedded with a large, arched promontory. Upon entering the campus, the visitor would stand directly in front of the main library, built in the striking form of an inverted pyramid, standing narrow at the base and reaching outward toward the top, a symbol of the student's broadening knowledge-base, and also a reference to the pyramidal form inscribed into pan-African iconography by Senegalese Egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop (*Nations*).

The UAF's preliminary curricular outline reflected the intently future-oriented scope of the project, seeking to equip students with what were seen as the practical skills needed to meet the technological and economic demands of the twenty-first century. The UAF also intended to enroot its students in their African history and heritage, through coursework at a department for Advanced African Studies and a House of History to be dedicated to African contributions to world history. The project's brochure and promotional DVD, both of which circulated among policy leaders and donors while the institution was in its developmental and construction phase, declare that the University would offer a degree equal to those of the world's most prestigious institutions of higher learning, citing the examples of Harvard and MIT. According to the project's designers, such a notion of instant, radical equality would be made possible primarily through the use of digital and satellite technology. For example, the library was to be entirely

virtual, not containing a single book and yet offering access to the world's knowledge via access to global digital libraries. Two-way live-streaming technology would allow students to sit in on classes, as they took place, at the best universities throughout the world. In a sense the idea was to eradicate geographic disparities, along with what Homi Bhabha has called the postcolonial "temporal lagging" (364), seeming to always keep development and prosperity beyond the reach of countries of the so-called "Global South." UAF students would be able to interact directly with their professors and distant classmates. Locally, the group's work was to be monitored by an on-site specialist, whose role would seemingly be akin to that of a teaching assistant, a rather subordinate role that explains the local academic community's resistance vis-à-vis the project. Although short on solutions to the long list of logistical challenges its program would present, not the least of which being a potential overreach in curricular scope, the University of the African Future nonetheless provided an ambitious and innovative concept in its radical approach to resolving Senegal's current educational woes.

Figure 1: Entrance to the University of the African Future. Photo by author.

Figure 2: The University's virtual library. Photo by author.

The administrative building, the inverted-pyramid library and two of the several Y-shaped buildings of the plan were the only structures Wade was ever able to build. Though it was a central piece of the president's panoply of ambitious building projects, realization of the UAF ran against insurmountable funding obstacles mid-construction when chief donor Taiwan removed support in reaction to Wade's move toward closer relations with China. With a major donor abruptly withdrawn, Wade was gradually forced to abandon his hopes for the site. For some time afterward, government officials of the Wade administration continued to give tours of the unfinished campus to visiting dignitaries as proof of the progress of Wade's government and no doubt in a final attempt to attract new partners to save the project. But the UAF was doomed by its donor troubles before it could even reckon with inevitable subsequent design challenges such as how to supply water to such a remote location with no available plumbing infrastructure. For the project planners, such concerns appear to have been secondary to the visual impact of the outer structures of the buildings, which today stand as a ruined reminder of the outsized ambitions of one of contemporary Senegal's most controversial "great men."

By the time the Senegalese elected Wade out of office, the electorate having thwarted his attempt to violate his own constitutional amendment by seeking a third presidential term, hopes for saving the University had deflated completely. In the current political climate and discourse, the UAF remains a distant memory. President Macky Sall has made frequent mention of imminent plans to open a new university at Sébikotane, although it is not clear whether the new administration plans to use the skeletal infrastructure already in place or to erect its new university at a different location. In any case, the sign indicating the UAF's presence still stands, rusted and weatherworn, aside the roadway passing through Sébikotane from Dakar to Thiès. Its buildings, though unused and abandoned, are watched over by a team of three guardians who

take turns standing watch around the clock. Today, the abandoned site stands ominously in the brush a short drive off the highway heading north from Dakar. It is a modern-day ruins, suspended in time, as though waiting patiently to be razed or revived at the whim of the next large-scale political initiative. The architectural centerpiece of the campus, its library, is clearly visible from the delapidated amphitheater of the neighboring ruins of the William Ponty School. The two buildings face each other at a distance in the brush, products of very different times, but similar processes of ruination.

Figure 3: The abandoned amphitheater of the former Ponty School. Photo by author.

Figure 4: Panel indicating the roadway to the Université du Futur Africain construction site. Photo by author.

The commemorative key to the story of the University of the African Future, and especially its choice of site, just a short walk away from the former William Ponty School, lies in the educational background of Abdoulaye Wade who, in his youth, was once a student and resident at the famed Sébikotane school. Wade would pursue his studies at Ponty during a time of large-scale reform in colonial education under the new, Fourth Republic. Students at this time were encouraged to engage in a broad curriculum that included the study of literature and

mathematics, but also woodwork, farming and musical education. Like the UAF decades later, Ponty's Sébikotane location was conceived as an autonomous campus providing students with the practical skills they would need to advance African society to prosperity and social harmony within its future Franco-African configuration. These practical tools were likewise paired with a focus on transmitting a sense of African heritage, this time mitigated through the pedagogical tools of French authorities. Much as the UAF was to be built at a comfortable distance from the urban bustle of Dakar - a fact that allowed Wade to keep the public relatively under-informed of the progress of the UAF construction site - the Ponty School was transferred away from the Dakar region to Sébikotane in search of a more pastoral and controlled environment for educators and students. Wade, in designing his new University and choosing its location was thus replicating in multiple ways the educational environment and pedagogical approaches he himself had known as a young student.

Such similarities in the conceptual framework of both the Ponty School and the UAF no doubt reflect, to some extent, the practical advantages of the site, which include adequate space and proximity to a major road. However, one also finds within the logistics and rhetoric of the UAF project a multivalent commemorative process seeking to make of one monument yet another. Indeed, for Wade and others, the location of the UAF would ignite a multi-directional process of memory involving a contemporary political agenda and commemorative stakes of and in the past. And the establishment of this university "for the future" would have as its stepping stool a past far from neutral. On one level the campus served to highlight the elite status of Abdoulaye Wade's own education and to associate the leader with a School that is now, in a somewhat ahistorical fashion, remembered as a training ground for the first generation of anti-colonial African political leaders. Wade, a longtime political opponent through the years of both

Léopold Sédar Senghor's and Abdou Diouf's governments, stood to benefit from actively commemorating and thus instantiating his own place among the list of "first" great political leaders of the region. His political foe Senghor, having pursued his studies in France, was ostensibly absent from this list. Secondly, the UAF sought to borrow from the prestige of the Ponty name a sense of symbolic political and intellectual credibility. In a 2013 interview, Mohamed Camara, who served as Director of the UAF project in the years leading up to its abandonment, explains Wade's choice of site thusly: "The idea is that Sebikotane has a location called Sebi-Ponty, known for its spirit of excellence. It is the sparkle of excellence that the President wanted to capture, a kernel that the President wanted to regrow in the University of the Future" (Camara). Weaved into the rhetoric of Wade's commemoration was a belief in a spirit of place that would serve to connect the actors of the University of the Future with their symbolic forefathers, the Ponty students, who once also arrived to Sébikotane from throughout the region to represent the best and brightest of their respective homelands.

As Julius Hell and Andreas Schönle note in their introduction to *Ruins of Modernity*, ruins can serve as a site of rupture and/or as a site of continuation. Wade's vision suggests a notion of continuation of, and not rupture from, the colonial past. One can relate such uses of the William Ponty School to recent scholarship noting the problematic issues evoked, and especially the boundaries blurred, by postcolonial evocations and commemorations of the colonial past. In the Senegalese context, focusing on the palimpsestic nature of such remembrances of the past, anthropologist Ferdinand De Jong has discussed the interweaving temporalities of past and present at work in the relocation, in 2004, of the famous "Demba and Dupont" statue in Dakar, commemorating Senegalese and West African participation in the First World War alongside the French ("Recycling"). Such examples often lead to more probing questions than discrete

conclusions, as Robert Aldrich demonstrates in his consideration of memorials of the Belgian presence in Congo via monuments such as the statue of King Léopold in Brazzaville. "What," he asks, "is the boundary between commemoration and celebration? How can local pride (or outrage) be reconciled (or should it be?) with divergent historical interpretations and political goals" (Par. 34)? In his own response to such issues, De Jong relates re-uses of Western colonialism through monuments and commemoration to Bhabha's notion of "objets trouvés," that is, that the remaining pieces of Western civilization in the postcolonial world are treated as found objects, taken sometimes out of context for political and social purposes of the present and turned into "recyclia" ("Recycling" 197). In this vein, he also points out how commemorations of Lat Dior were used to celebrate the participation of the Senegalese in World War Two, an entirely different context and temporality but one that nonetheless amply fit the bill ("Recycling" 202). Drawing again from Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire,* which, according to Nora, "ne vivent que de leur aptitude à la métamorphose, dans l'incessant rebondissement de leurs significations et le buissonnement imprévisible de leurs ramifications" (35), De Jong addresses memorial acts in the postcolony as a possible means of reconfiguring the weight and meaning of colonial cultural heritage.

The colonial history of the Ponty School, which, its contemporary reputation notwithstanding, was not an institution of political empowerment, but rather a colonial vehicle for producing indigenous intermediaries, indeed calls for such instances of commemoration and reconfiguration. These acts are ambiguous and require of such sites of memory the symbolic and interpretative flexibility (one might say a-historicity) to permit remembrances that diverge from historical record in the strictest sense, or what Nora describes as the distinction between history

and memory. This flexibility thus allows such commemorative projects to bend the meaning behind the monument or place toward contemporary political purposes of the present.

Commemoration and performance at the William Ponty School

The example of the University for the African Future is reflective of postcolonial modes of processing, and recalibrating to contemporary uses, what might be called a heritage of colonial institutions and histories. Local and national approaches to such heritage operate along multiple temporalities, looking forward (toward the future) and backward (at the past), reflecting the Janus-faced notion of postcolonial nation formation once described by Homi Bhabha ("Narrating" 3). However, they do not correspond well with clear and rigid divisions between so-called colonial and postcolonial periods, thus the advantage of favoring Nora's term of site of memory, or *lieu de mémoire*, in addressing the Ponty site, in that it takes into account the temporal deconstruction of historically rigid notions of past events and their implications for community formation. In processes of memory, the past and future inform each other mutually. Herein lay the utility of what colonial educator and the original facilitator of the Ponty productions, Charles Béart, called *les arts du temps*, that is, the performative arts of music, dance and theater, in the context of the theatrical plays at this colonial school. To break down what was then a fifty-year past of colonial conquest and persuasion, the School employed these arts specifically for their temporal elasticity, a mirror of the commemorative productions themselves, which were intended to stage the deeds of former African leaders while attempting to point the way toward possible functional understandings of what the future, Franco-African colonial society would and should hold.

By the time the Ponty School arrived at the abandoned military barracks near Sébikotane in 1938, the school's original theatrical performances had already become a cultural institution for the colony. Beginning in 1933, while the School was still located on its Gorée Island campus, these productions were originally conceived by instructor Charles Béart, who would later become the School's director, as an opportunity to instill a sense of camaraderie and friendly competition among students, while also fostering an artistic component within the culture and curriculum of the School. It was not by chance that this theatrical event had a decidedly Africanizing tone, encouraging students to stage elements of their home culture, history and folklore, in a blend between notions of so-called traditional African custom and French literary culture. They were in fact invested with the double goal of transmitting the French language to students, while symbolically enrooting them in what was seen as their native African traditions, as per the associative colonial theory of the day addressed in the previous chapter. The productions would turn out to be very popular among the local community on Gorée Island. They were quickly seen as a reference in discussions of successful Franco-African cooperation within a shifting colonial society. In fact, the considerable impact of these plays suggest a colonial context and audience eager to engage in spectator-driven narratives about the significance of French presence in West Africa, while reading cues as to how such a presence might function socially and economically.

Almost immediately after its inception, word of the Ponty theatrical experiment spread throughout the higher levels of the colonial administration and intellectual and artistic circles. The plays were soon known for being carefully rehearsed and scripted throughout the course of the academic year. Relatively short and presented as part of a *soirée théâtrale*, productions incorporated a combination of each of the *arts du temps,* with scripted scenes, music and dance.

Soon, the Ponty school also began using its performances to welcome esteemed guests, a practice especially frequent at the Sébikotane site, where the large amphitheater proved an apt space for formal reception ceremonies combined with a performance meant to present visiting politicians and public figures with a sampling of the latest developments in French colonial pedagogy. These visits also resulted in written accounts by French writers of the life and impact of the Ponty School on the region (Duhamel; Gillois). Interest in the event among colonial authorities and foreign residents in Dakar grew sufficiently to enable an annual performance in the form of an evening gala at the capital's opulent Chambre de Commerce, where the evening's program was preceded by words of welcome to the audience and encouragement to students by officials as high up as French West Africa's Governor General.

The Ponty theatrical productions were hailed at the time for their representational value, but in fact played a highly commemorative role. The performance events reflected the School's organizational modus operandi in that presentations were broken down into groups by colony. Just as students were housed in separate dormitories, divided by colony, the performances were written, rehearsed and performed separately by la troupe du Dahomey, du Sénégal, de Guinée, etc. The audiences were also, in a sense, representative of a certain cross-section of colonial society and administration, with a mix of local residents, street merchants, students, instructors, colonial officials and even Ponty graduates who no longer participated but returned to their former school's campus to attend the event. Regarding the shows themselves, spectators would note the fidelity with which students endeavored to stage various aspects of important local rituals and marriages. However, what stood out most for spectators, and what, as we shall see in the next chapter, had the greatest impact on later theatrical works, were the stories of former African monarchs' encounter with encroaching French military generals, performed with the

backdrop of folklore, dance and music. The performed tales of such monarchs as Samory and Béhanzin excited the imagination of students and spectators and were the first instances of collective Franco-African commemoration of the French conquest.

These commemorative acts were to become the object of intense collective interpretation for colonial discourse from the colonies to the métropole. At stake were the implications of such hybrid Franco-African works to the administering of the colonies. From the French perspective, the performances were uncomfortably close in time to the acts of resistance and submission the students were commemorating. While acknowledging the significance of such historical episodes, it became important for the French to instantiate the interpretation of a group of individuals, elite and educated intermediaries, representing the emergence of a new kind of African mind. From a commemorative standpoint, this notion allowed for a tabula rasa with regard to students' possible connections to elements of their past deemed unsavory or counter-productive, while also precluding potential attempts to commemorate according to heroic modes the dissident African leaders conquered or placated through the French conquest.

Colonial reactions to the shows were generally marked by enthusiasm and praise. Commenting on the first performance held at the Chambre de Commerce, in Dakar, one journalist marveled at “la vérité saisissante de cette reconstitution... Les acteurs jouent avec un naturel tout à fait remarquable,” and further remarks that their performance evinces nothing "d’une création artificielle d’un rôle,” rather, he states, the African students appeared to reenact for their audience an authentic scene of indigenous life and history ("Dakar"). The day's performance consisted of two separate parts, one a staging of classical European works, the other inspired by the students' original writing based on indigenous culture. The first, it seems, was marked by a dry "côté scolaire," while the second, which included "chants et choeurs locaux et

deux pièces indigènes" was seen by this journalist as "le symbole d'une évolution longuement poursuive," nothing less than "le signe d'un nouvel esprit africain." Also admiring, if somewhat less enthusiastic, was the response in a 1937 edition of *Afrique Française* published by the highly influential colonial administrator and author Robert Delavignette, then director of the Ecole National de la France d'Outre-mer, who would see in the Ponty plays no less than the beginnings of an emerging African literary movement. "Nous ne crions pas au chef d'oeuvre," he would state, "...mais s'il naît un jour un dramaturge africain, il procédera de ce théâtre d'instituteurs," a rather prescient statement in response to what Delavignette would call "un témoignage irrécusable d'heureuse colonialisation" (471).

Part of the Ponty plays' appeal to French audience members was the use, as Béart would concur in a later article, of themes from the French classical works of theater by Corneille, Molière and Racine, with which the students had become familiar through their coursework on French literature (Béart, "A.O.F." 134). More than one observer noted that a number of the plays, especially those that staged African royal courts, had a distinctly cornellian quality to them, addressing central themes such as that of temptation, loyalty or political adversity. Reflecting on the role of French literature in this creative melding with African mythical traditions, Béart would state: "Elle (la littérature française) a fourni un levain et quelques fois des moules. J'ai toujours craint un Rodrigue-Soundiata ou une Bineta-Andromaque; cela ne s'est jamais produit" ("Origines" 156). Aside from the historical, epically themed plays for which the Ponty theater would later become renowned, some works presented would stage simpler scenes from everyday life, such as a trip in a train, or short scenes from school life. Already in the early years of its inception, each colony began to develop a dramaturgical style on which it forged a reputation. Thus, with the passing performances, audiences would come to expect, for example,

scenes from religious life from the Dahomean troupe, or satire and comedy from the Guinean troupe. Spectators could therefore attend performances expecting a type of initiation into an aspect of indigenous culture, as the students were implicitly expected to share, as they did in their ethnographic *cahiers* exercise, an element of the religious or customary life of their local culture. Béart would reflect this notion in his later writings when he said, "la pièce est vraiment 'le chef-d'oeuvre' de la colonie qui l'a composée, qui s'efforce d'en faire 'un document,' et y introduit les plus beaux chants de son terroir, les plus belles légendes" ("A.O.F." 134).

It was due to such questions of representation - in the French sense of "performance," but also in the sense of representing one's home culture or colony - that these plays would prove so remarkably useful to a colonial discourse occupied by the questions of *assimilation* and *association* addressed in the previous chapter. At a time when colonial theory had spent many decades in search of the correct approach to bring about an enterprising and independent generation of "enrooted" intellectuals, familiar with the language and logic of the Hexagon but impervious to the distractions of universalist ideology and cosmopolitan culture, the plays provided authorities with a fitting opportunity to declare the success of their preceding associative efforts. Surely, it was thought, these students would not fall into the trap of *diagnist* political activism driven by a devote faith in republican values. The students' recourse to African customs and traditions to stage their own stories stood as proof, to colonial eyes, that the notion of assimilation had become entirely *dépassé*, for it seemed the pontins were using their plays to fully assume their African heritage and thus implicitly renounce their claims to universalist French *civilisation*. These pontins represented, it was hoped, the emergence of the enrooted elite the colony had been hoping to produce. The discovery did not come without an aura of excitement and fascination from colonial audiences, whose writing and reception of these works

were framed in language of novelty and the utterly new. This, it was hoped, was the sign of what the previously quoted journalist called "un nouvel esprit africain," the one that the French had been waiting for to help them guide the colony to financial viability and profit.

Even fierce critics of colonial society joined voices in declaring that these productions of *théâtre indigène* represented the emergence of an art and intellect that was totally new; not the traditional African ontology with which the French had become familiar, but also not proof of an assimilating process whereby the Africans might be seen as becoming French, or even like the French. One of the earlier French observers of this *théâtre indigène* was Denise Moran, an author and vocal critic of French colonial administration. In her 1934 book *Tchad,* relating the author's observations in the region of Chad in the 1920s, Moran firmly denounces the notion of a civilizing process taking place at the behest of France in the Hexagon's African colonies, claiming instead that French administrators in the Afrique Equatorial Française and elsewhere were, in short, avarice-driven brutes whose treatment of the natives brought shame upon French culture. In reaction to the Ponty plays, Moran is similarly critical of the colonial pedagogues at the heart of what she saw as an ostentatious show of colonial authority, saying, ″Ce goût des noirs pour le théâtre, les educateurs essaient depuis longtemps de l'utiliser." In the context of the Ponty plays she responds by ironically stating that "les novateurs s'enhardissent," but, although distancing herself from the colonial narrative surrounding the event, Moran nonetheless finds value in the students writing and performances ("Théâtre" 574). She is especially impressed by the students' ability to write in an elevated register of French and expresses enthusiasm for the implications of such a skill. "Ecrire en français n'est pas, pour eux, comme pour les demi-civilisés de la génération précédente, accumuler des mots redondants en phrases dépourvues de sens. Ils savent choisir l'expression juste, construire logiquement, simplement" ("Théâtre" 574).

The choice of adjectives, noting that the students have learned to express themselves logically and simply, resonates with educational reforms encouraging students to adopt a calm, rational objectivity in their approach to language. Thus, although critical of French attempts to frame these works within a pedagogical context, Moran's commentary seems eventually to corroborate the conclusion of her peers. "Ce sont vraiment des esprits nouveaux," she writes at the end of her article on the Ponty plays, concurring with other French audience members that the principle novelty of these productions lay not in the works themselves, but in the supposedly radical newness of the minds creating them ("Théâtre" 575).

The colonial apparatus was quick to appreciate the potential utility of such an event not only within the colony, but also in the *métropole* itself. The students of the William Ponty troupe found themselves invited to participate in the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques. The invitation was in fact the result of a request by the Governor general of the AOF himself, who envisioned the performance in the context of a greater effort to display what were seen as the benefits of French colonialism to the Hexagon. It did not take long for the Ministry of Colonies to concur with the Governor General's point of view and approve the trip. That year a group of 40 students would board the SS Mendosa in a voyage that included a performance at the Exposition's Île des Cygnes on the river Seine, another at the opulent Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris, with an additional concert given at the Congrès International de l'Enseignement and a visit of the Ecole Coloniale guided by Robert Delavignette, the school's director at the time. The production at the exposition provoked lively reactions from critics and the press, which generally praised the students' performances, some considering the implication that such theater had on the productions being put on in Paris at the time. Stage director Charles Antonetti would later note that they appeared to have integrated their performances and roles

through their bodies, and not through their heads, as he often found to be the case with European troupes (qtd. in Béart, "Origines" 155). Artistically, the Ponty school and its *théâtre indigène* made a lasting impression on the Hexagon, where frequent theatergoers had become more accustomed to representations of Africans in plays authored by French playwrights and often performed by Europeans in blackface, representations which were of course inspired by colonial fantasy rather than fact (Chalaye, *Noir* 256). The impact of these plays laid the terrain for pontins able subsequently to pursue studies in Paris and recuperate the label of *théâtre indigène* to their own advantage in productions staged and promoted by African student associations. In the context of the Exposition, these original Ponty plays, entirely directed by the AOF's finest students, seemed to fit neither with the objectifying framework of the exposition, nor with the orientalising plays about Africa that had been delighting French audiences in large venues such as the Théâtre du Chatelet. The result was an awed reaction in the French press and openly inquisitive observers wondering at the emergence of this new type of African performer and writer. Speaking at the pontins' performance at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Robert Delavignette would praise the students' work, declaring: "ce théatre cesse d'être un divertissement local et prend place dans le théâtre universel" ("Théâtre" 471). In his opening statements to the Parisian performance, Governor General Henri Labouret would similarly declare: "Il ne s'agit pas d'exotisme pour vous; ni d'initialisation européenne pour eux. Dans une synthèse de danses et de chants, de musique et de littérature, un art dramatique s'éveille qui procède de leur pays et du nôtre, de notre langue et de la leur" (qtd. in Delavignette, "Théâtre" 471).

From the perspective of the colony, however, it was of utmost importance that the event not run counter to contemporaneous political concerns, that is, to a long-standing pedagogical

effort to ground students in local, African traditions. For example, a primary worry of the higher-ups of the Ministry of the Colonies was how the young Africans would react to their first encounter with the "griseries" of Parisian society. It was specified that the students were not to interpret their appearance at the exposition as fulfilling the role of performers, but rather were to understand the tour as an opportunity to represent the fruits of colonial education, a mission the Minister described as being purely "à caractère éducatif." The Ponty plays were not, the minister insisted, "théâtre" in the proper sense of the word. If the colony wished to go to such length and expense to facilitate such a trip, it was solely to demonstrate to the Hexagon "l'existence d'une civilisation indigène qu'on peut faire monter jusqu'à nous" (Charton). Colonial officials' insistence that these students not consider themselves proper artists as a result of their Parisian tour reveals the central political stake of the Ponty plays. Faced with somewhat sympathetic representations of conquered African chiefs, it was essential for colonial officials to seize the commemorative framing of the event, that is, to decide which kind of Franco-African future these commemorative pasts were pointing toward.

The future of choice in the context of these plays was the same as the one set out by pedagogical initiatives, which is why, for Ponty director Béart, the school productions were, above all, "une excellente leçon de français," as well as an ontological experiment: "c'est une des rares occasions où la pensée française a pu se mêler intimement à la pensée indigène." Commenting on the students' reaction to the experience, Béart adds "Ils ont été très heureux de faire applaudir des choses qui leur sont chères, et sans doute leur seront-elles plus chères parce que nous les avons applaudies" (Béart, "Culture" 12). The pedagogical value of the productions was also confirmed by the renowned pedagogue Robert Delavignette himself, who explains that, following such an experience, the pontins will be better prepared to serve the colonies as teachers

and administrators. He cites Denise Moran, who declared, "Quand ils retourneront au village pour soigner, pour enseigner, ils ne seront pas des étrangers incapables de comprendre et de se faire comprendre…. Ainsi naîtra une Afrique moderne qui loin d'avoir perdu de son génie propre le verra refleurir." Because, as Delavignette states, this is not theater merely for theater's sake: "Il est enraciné en pleine terre et il leur inculquera sans cesse le sens d'une Afrique qui évolue, mais qui demeure essentiellement agricole" ("Théâtre" 471). If reckoning with French West Africa's past involves a commitment toward a certain vision for the future, colonial authorities would ensure that this future was in line with associative pedagogical objectives. Indeed, they would seek to damper the commemorative impact of the event with the help of the language of colonial pedagogy.

Ponty theater and ′les arts du temps′

An important part of the colonial framing of this theatrical event was the 1937 publication of a special edition of *Education Africaine, bulletin de l'enseignement en Afrique Occidentale Française*, a journal founded by Georges Hardy in the early days of his tenure as Directeur de l'enseignement. The edition was entitled "Théâtre Indigène et la Culture Franco-Africaine," and included a selection of the Ponty plays performed as part of the School's *soirées théâtrales.* This edition was prefaced by the Ponty theater's most visible facilitator, Charles Béart, then School Director. Béart placed the significance of these theatrical productions within the context of a long-running and continually evolving collaboration between Africans and the French. What audiences were observing, he argued, was the emergence of a long-repressed *âme noire*, a soul that is best transmitted through the all-encompassing form of theater, the closest

relative to the storytelling rituals and dance long observed by European anthropologists as sitting at the core of native artistic expression in the region and here he cites most notably Henri Labouret (*Les Manding et leur langue*) and Maurice Delafosse (*Les nègres*) (Béart, "Culture" 4). Then, Béart explains, came the missionaries, the Christian educators who set out to convert the indigenous population and eventually made them ashamed of their own cultural roots and heritage. The repressive process was further reinforced by the symbols and authority of the once praised *mission civilisatrice*, and although in its attempt to undo such misguided approaches colonial education had aptly focused on developing *les arts de l'espace*, such as sculpture and woodwork, Béart argues that it had unfortunately neglected *les arts du temps*, such as dance and theater, arts which, as anthropology informed him, required a cultural initiation for the audience member to evaluate or even understand ("Culture" 3-4).

In his dissertating on African art, Béart appears aware of the commemorative possibilities and potential impact of these *arts du temps*. The particularity, to his mind, of these performative arts lay in the need for cultural initiation, in other words, a full understanding of cultural meanings in order to interpret accurately what it meant for a performer to dance a certain movement or engage in a given ritual. Yet, Béart's concern also extended to the pontins' historical plays, whose interpretation was not solely a matter of cultural initiation, but also subject to the processes of commemoration. No specific knowledge of African culture was needed, for example, to follow the story of the encounter of Samory and Capitaine Péroz, just perhaps an appreciation for what this depiction of the past implies for the future of Franco-African culture. What was necessary, in fact, was less of an African cultural initiation than an awareness of the contemporaneous political and social concerns that set the stage for these particular productions. It was thus through the staging of such histories that the Ponty students

would, in fact, commemorate their past in hopes of instantiating a certain vision of their future within colonial society, a vision connected to their desire to play a more authoritative role.

The history plays of the Ponty School stage a common scenario: that of the encounter. Through their scripted performances of former African kings and warriors, generally depicted as senseless barbarians in French historical accounts and assigned very little importance in the colonial curriculum, the Ponty students wished to enact a possibility of dialogical encounter between the French generals and their African counterparts. The history of the gradual French conquest of the region being replete with grey areas, with shifting loyalties and opportunistic treaties quickly signed and broken for strategic reasons, it is of course difficult for the students to commemorate their African predecessors as epic heroes the likes of General Louis Faidhberbe, whose mythical image in the colonial literature crowded out other contenders to the founding father role of Franco-African society (Demaison; Hardy, "Afrique"). However, they did clearly take issue with certain matters of historical record and the way former leaders of the continent had come to be mistreated by the conqueror's historical account. More important, the pontins wished to alter the commonly accepted notion at the time that African leaders such as Samory, Béhanzin and Lat Dior were war-hungry chiefs whose word could not be trusted. The narratives of these works are animated by interwar concerns about to what extent African intermediaries, such as the elite trained at Ponty, could be employed to help the colony toward a greater *mise en valeur* of its investment.

These themes come across in an example of one of the first of what were later known as the Ponty *épiques historiques*, this one entitled *L'Entrevue de Samory et du Capitaine Péroz - 1887* and published in the 1937 special edition of *L'Education Africaine.* Here, the students from Guinea imagine a decisive encounter between a conquering French general and one of the

region's most intractable resistors to European encroachment. The Guineans, in the staging of their locally born hero, do not utter a dissident cry against the conquering French, but rather perform a relatively submissive Samory Turé, forced to concede to the threat of French military might. This play would certainly not constitute the kind of revolutionary gesture taken up in later incarnations of the historical epic form. However, there are nuances in Samory's acts of submission that suggest that the authors were not merely concerned with showing deference to the strength and will of their past and current colonial masters. In their way, the pontins depict Samory as conceding to Péroz in the name of his own self-interest, thus behaving logically and with the understanding that he and his people will have something to gain from collaboration with the French. What is remarkable, therefore, about the depiction of this character is not the political repercussions of his decision, but rather the performance, in front of colonial educators, of an African chief in full command of the powers of reason. This depiction attempted to fly in the face of colonial theory at the time, which represented the pre-colonial African "mentality" as also pre-logical and averse to reason.

The play begins with Samory's son, Karamoko, who delivers a speech having returned from France, where the colonizers had arranged for him to attend military parades and battle simulations. The young prince urges his father and the court to accept that they are no match for French military might and therefore must agree to sign a peace treaty with Péroz, who is fast on his way to Bissandougou. "J'ai vu leurs soldats, j'ai assisté à leurs simulacres de combat: en vérité, rien n'égale leur force," Karamoko declares to the ire of his father (42). But following the loud protest of his *sofas*, or foot soldiers, Samory concedes that defeat may well be inevitable should he decide to take arms against the French this time. The king is aware that his army would follow him to their death, "...mais malgré votre courage indomptable, malgré votre

impétuosité au combat, je crains pour vous et je crois que je ferai bien de conclure la paix avec ces infidèles" (42). Here is a way for the almamy, or king, to face defeat without compromising the reputation of his warriors, as well as a depiction of a leader fully capable of assessing a given situation, recognizing facts, and acting according to his own interest. Whether or not Samory's defeat was in fact inevitable historically is secondary to the pontins' portrayal of an African leader acting in accordance with logic, rather than out of a pure lust for combat. In this play, Samory is able to use his reason to recognize an opportunity to benefit politically from a treaty with Péroz. Speaking of the potentiality of coming to such an agreement, Samory states, "Cela nous permettra d'agrandir tranquillement nos états d'un autre côté" (43).

In light of educational theory in the colonies at the time, which argued that practices of reason were foreign to the pre-colonial mind, the staging of one such pre-colonial mind laying out a rational assessment of his options politically and militarily was more than simple deference to colonial authority. In fact, the students were pointing out in this play that African ontologies were not in need of French intellectual influence in order to appreciate the principles of rational decision-making. Furthermore, in this play, whose title points to the centrality of the encounter, we find that Samory's final decision leading to a concession to French forces had largely taken place before the *entrevue* in question, thus diminishing Péroz's importance in the culminating moment of the plot. At the end of this first scene, Samory repeats aloud his conclusion on the action to be taken, stating that although his warriors are ready to fight "... cette fois, je préfère la paix, car maintenant, je répugne à verser le sang des Blancs. Nous profiterons de cette paix avec eux pour aller guerroyer chez nos ennemis du Ouassolou" (43).

The first scene ends with a *danse bouffonne*, interrupted by the arrival of Péroz's interpreter, who announces the Captain to the court. The ensuing dialogue between the two

leaders constitutes the majority of the second and final scene. Péroz begins by warning Samory of the solemnity of his next decision: "L'heure est grave. De toi dépend la paix et la guerre." He then accuses Samory of failing to respect his earlier agreements with French forces. "Tu as pillé Bidiga, tu as fait des captifs à Niagossola, tu dévastes les régions que tu avais promis de respecter, tu maltraites les populations que tu avais juré de laisser vivre en paix" (44). This sets the tone for the beginning of the dialogue, where Péroz seeks to get the best of Samory by agitating him through insults in front of his court and warriors, even evoking the sensitive question of his legitimacy as ruler and his questionable royal lineage. Samory at first responds to Péroz's provocations, calling him "homme à la langue fourchue," but upon a further dressing down from Péroz shows himself capable of introspection and self criticism, stating "J'avoue m'être laissé emporté par une colère indigne de moi" (45).

With the stakes of the encounter established, and the conditions of a dialogue set mostly by Samory's ability to respond calmly to Péroz's provocation, a negotiation can take place that reflects the historical importance of this exchange, but above all would, for the audience of the time, resound clearly as an echo of contemporary concerns of governance in the colonies. Appealing to Samory to accept peace with the French (which the leader has in fact already decided to do), Péroz states that it is his last chance to enter in good relations with the Colonel Faidherbe by allowing the French access to the Niger River so that they may provide supplies to the famished region of Bouré. "De plus," Péroz adds, "tu t'associeras à notre oeuvre et tu aideras à rendre la prospérité à cette région désolée en laissant ouvert à nos commerçants l'accès de Kankan et du Ouassoulou" (45). The *oeuvre* here is the civilizing mission, and what is at stake is a partnership that will allow the French to spread their civilization throughout the region. The young pontins staging this play are indeed quite aware of the commercial interests at stake in

such a process. Just as colonial authorities had at this point emphasized the importance of a greater *mise en valeur* of their colonial endeavors, the pontins recognize that their relations with the French must involve a greater facilitation of commercial activity. However, the quid pro quo for such an agreement, as they saw it, was greater authority within the new local political configurations. Péroz thus makes an offer to Samory: "La France veut bien reconnaître ton autorité sur les Etats sofas que tu as su grouper, mais elle veut que les peuples puissent jouir dans la paix des fruits de leur travaux" (45). Samory accepts Péroz's terms: "Chef, tu as raison. Je signerai ton traité d'amitié car tu es fort et bon" (46). The play then ends with the almamy calling his court to celebrate the newly forged friendship with a dance.

While making no clearly dissident political statement in its text, this play is exemplary of the Ponty performances in that it describes the contours of still unsettled hegemonic and political issues not explicitly stated in the students' coursework. The reconciliation resulting from the dialogical encounter, based on reason, between Samory and Péroz reflects the kind of partnership that French colonials were hoping to establish with the pontins. In their performances, as in their comportment, the students show that they are willing to enter into such an agreement, but look to establish here their right to tell their own stories and history, and seek to argue, through their performances, that behaviors of logic and reason are not inherently foreign to the African mind as French historical and anthropological narratives would have it. Lastly, the plays point out that the proposed Franco-African partnership with the young students toward a greater capitalization of the colony must involve more serious roles of authority for the African elite.

For the pontins, the stage thus becomes a tool for interacting with the social heteroglossia of the French colony of the interwar period, enabling students to use staged portrayals of the past not only as historical commemorations, but also as embodied models for a path forward in the

emerging Franco-African socio-political context. Unlike colonial readings of these events, which saw the Ponty performances as evidence of a rupture with colonial pasts, or the beginnings of a new, African ontology and mind, the students themselves used their commemorative pieces as evidence of historical continuation. Much like the African kings and courts as they are depicted in these plays, Ponty students wished to enter into a relationship of more direct collaboration with colonial society, and one that saw them as worthy legatees of French civilization. Moreover, they were, like Samory in this play, able to find their own interest in Franco-African relations and willing to concede passage to the French in exchange for greater recognized authority within their own territory. This view of the colonial exchange was indeed absent from French writings on associative approaches to be taken in West Africa, which systematically employed ethnographic writings and notions of African tradition to highlight what the French considered, for self-serving purposes, irreconcilable divergences, or indeed shortcomings, in the "mentalities" of their African subjects. Thus the colonial framings of such stagings of Africans exhibiting the capacity of reason and introspection were necessarily marked by the need to see such a concept as inherently new, a rupture with pre-colonial African ontology. The pontins themselves were using the stage to make use of a commemorative heritage, claiming their achieved status of reasoned, intellectual elitism for their pre-colonial ancestors, and employing this example as an argument for an increased role for themselves in the colonial society then taking shape. Although these cries for closer colonial collaboration were later disowned by the same generation at the time of Independence, they nonetheless represented a form of resistance against colonial tendencies to impose, between French reason and the African mind, a perceived ontological distance thought to justify French political domination in the region.

Continuation and rupture in the commemorative process

Notions of continuation and rupture are inherent to commemorative acts such as the Ponty plays, where an ideological or historical connection to the past serves as a helpful symbol in attempts to create new momentum toward an established vision for the future. It is to such purposes that Abdoulaye Wade, some eighty years after the Ponty plays' debut, has endeavored to remember publicly and to commemorate his time at the *école normale* in Sébikotane. Indeed, he frequently employed the popularly maintained trope of its former role as a nursery for a new West African elite, and his place within that elite. In a 2012 interview, Wade emphasized the institution's role as "l'école de formation française du niveau le plus élevé." He also emphasized the selective nature of the School, explaining that the students at Sebikotane were indeed the best from around the region, recruited to serve as an emerging elite in French West Africa. Wade confirms that performance was a crucial element of the School's overall culture and that its institutional trademark was the pertinence and visibility of the original productions performed by its students. He fondly recalls his own participation in students' stagings of African resistance heroes and, during the 2012 interview, appeared to go into a trance as he hummed the chorus's song from one of the School's most impactful plays, called *Bigolo*, in which the title character was played by Assane Seck of the previous chapter. Much like Seck, whose time in Paris was marked by his role with the Féderation d'étudiants noirs de France, (FEANF) for which he would help to re-stage many of the performances that established his reputation at Ponty, Wade would use his experience in African cultural production to improve his own status and visibility in France. As a young student, Wade managed to use his cultural cachet from the Ponty School to

establish a role for himself as a cultural figure in the Hexagon, where he was instrumental in establishing the first African students' association in Besançon. He would later become president of the FEANF's chapter in Grenoble, where he would also organize an African arts festival, for which he penned a play in what he called the "Ponty style," that is, dedicated to commemorating the feats of another of Africa's "great men" or heroes.

The commemorative processes at Wade's University for the African Future project had a seismic impact on local memorial dynamics within the Sebiponty village itself, where one finds a small community of residents engaged in their own forms of remembrance. They do so with a collective sense of connectivity to their village and to the renowned institution it once hosted. A small number of residents have living memories of the colonial campus while it was still in operation and some worked for the Ponty School as monitors or staff. Upon the institution's final transfer to Thiès, many took up residency within the abandoned buildings, in effect becoming full-time curators of the former Ponty site. They have also played an active role in transmitting the memory of the Ponty School to later generations and many of their children, who attended the primary school housed in the old campus, now join their elders in working to establish and maintain the neglected campus's place within a collective national consciousness. These later generations came of age immersed in a sense of the School's history and importance, but also share in the notion of nostalgic loss as the School's infrastructure, and especially its iconic amphitheater, has fallen further into disrepair.

The ruination of the former Ponty site, combined with a shared sense of despair over contemporary Senegalese society, have cast a nostalgic pall on a period when, it is imagined, the campus must have been bustling and dynamic, destined to play an active role in leading the region toward economic viability. A discussion with one of the Ponty School's former

employees, now in his eighties and living with his family in a former Ponty building standing at the foot of the colonial amphitheater, demonstrated how such forms of nostalgia are transmitted from one generation to the next. "Ici, c'était le paradis sur terre." said the man who remembers the school as a place of harmony and order (Diallo). If the errors and evils of colonialism are recognized and denounced among the community, an exception is granted for those who worked at this particular site and are remembered as benevolent and kind. "Les Français étaient bons," says the former employee's daughter, who recalls a childhood spent on the campus playing with the children of former French director Charles Béart. The utopic remembrances of the former school are echoed by a former laundry worker at Ponty, who today lives in a small hut around the old campus. "Quand il y avait l'école, il y avait de l'ordre et du travail. Maintenant c'est le désordre" (Adama Mbengue). The testimonies of current residents of the Sebiponty site are indeed warm with regards to the former French colonial instructors, but not in as much less pan-African in nature. In fact, what is recalled by the community is the work of a benevolent pedagogical institution *as well as* the emergence of a political and intellectual elite groomed to lead the region into independence. "Ici c'était l'Afrique en miniature," said the former Ponty employee, in a commemorative vision that recuperates the institution's history in favor of a pan-African reading of its past, however ahistorical such a reading may be.

Such curative efforts of the Sebiponty community have come up against the effects of time as well as a lack of institutional will to preserve the School's memory. Among Sebiponty residents and former Ponty students it is often said that Senghor purposely neglected the institution's legacy as it did not serve his own political interests. Whether or not this is true, it sets up a useful commemorative trope of struggle against institutional opposition, one that is further nourished when, during the presidency of Abdou Diouf, much of the former Ponty

campus was parceled off to host state corrective institutions (a prison and a rehabilitation program for juvenile delinquents). But community narratives of institutional neglect regarding the Ponty campus are perhaps evoked most powerfully among village residents by the decrepit state of the campus's iconic colonial amphitheater, which once hosted meetings and assemblies held in honor of the old Ponty School's esteemed guests. Today the large structure has no institutional proprietor and has been left in a state of ruin. Its walls have since fissured and its roof collapsed, leaving mangled iron beams which descend into the now open-air performance hall.

In a symbolic process to reverse or valorize the ruination process, the amphitheater has come to represent the lost glory of a site that served as the launching pad for what is remembered as West Africa's first generation of intellectual and political elites. In commemoration of the site's past, local youth and performance groups at Sebiponty regularly put on productions of *théâtre folklorique*, modeled after the theatrical performances of the old Ponty School. Teachers from the local primary school have taken it upon themselves to manage visits by impromptu tourists who arrive from around the world for diverse reasons in search of what remains of the renowned *école normale*. On one visit to the site, the children of the village began excitedly explaining the site in Wolof based on the few phrases and facts they had heard from community elders. On another taxi ride to the Ponty campus, the young driver explained that all of the great African leaders came to the Ponty School to study: Wade, Senghor, *even* Gaddafi. His notion of the school's role reflects the often ahistorical, commemorative view often adopted in remembrances of the institution.

In effect, these communities are using the legacy of the Ponty School in attempts to secure a place for the Sebiponty village within the network of decentralizing urban projects

currently promising to transform the entire urban area of the capital. Sebiponty promises to be an important benefactor of Senegal's Acte 3 de la décentralisation, which has committed the government to resolving the problem of urban clutter in the overpopulated Dakar peninsula. A recently completed toll road that passes in close proximity to the Ponty site has shortened the trip to the capital from a traffic-plagued 1-3 hours to a mere thirty minutes on Senegal's new and modern highway, built by French road company Eiffage. The area also awaits the opening of the new international airport of Dakar, currently in construction, but which has been promised for early 2016. The new urban highway system places Sebiponty - whose iconic amphitheater can now be seen from the new highway - directly on a newly drawn cartography of metropolitan Dakar. The nearby city of Diamniadio is to serve as a major traffic and attraction hub within this new cartography and is slated to host a new series of luxury hotels and accommodations for passers-by who, coming from the airport, might be inclined to visit the area, its upcoming high-end villas, or perhaps will have business in the newly constructed Centre International de Conférence, an impressive convention center built in collaboration with the Turkish government.

The staggering amount of planning around a village whose ruins - the commemorative "sparkle" at the center of this activity - appear to have lain in neglect for many decades, has ignited a mixture of excitement about the future as well as despair over authorities' failure to preserve the heritage site itself. On one end, what is seen as the imminent development boom that surely awaits the Sebiponty area has set off massive real-estate speculation with the rapid rising of the new "expectations of modernity" that come with this new commemorative use of the ruin. The Sebiponty village is surrounded by vacant expanses of land that, though barren, have for the most part been purchased in a rush to capitalize on what is expected to be a rapid boom in real estate prices. The empty parcels of land represent financial options for the future, as owners

hold on to their assets until it proves the right time to build or sell. Clearly, there is growing excitement regarding what the future will hold, based on hopes for an ever-arriving modernity and wave of development, as well as anticipation of all that these commemorative ruins have the potential to represent for the nation.

On the other hand, Sebiponty residents note that key pieces of infrastructure, and especially the amphitheater, are in danger of collapsing. Looking upon the current sight of two ruined institutions intended to lead the country into a pan-African sense of solidarity and prosperity, these locals see evidence of a selfsame process of ruination. This was perhaps best evidenced by the sentiments of a former foreman on the UAF construction site. A lifelong resident of the Sebiponty village, he had invested all of his personal dreams and aspirations, for himself and his children, in the successful completion of Wade's University project. Now, ten years after the halt of construction at the site, he sees in the decaying site of the UAF campus physical proof of the same disappointment and negligence residents see evidence in the ruined William Ponty campus: "... si tu vas à Ponty, tu as envie de pleurer. Parce que tous les présidents africains sont passés ici. Et on n'a rien fait. Le thème de ma discussion, je pense que c'est axé sur ça. Ce que l'université souffre là, l'école William Ponty a souffert, et continue de souffrir.". In his testimony, the foreman reflects the elasticity of temporal experience in sites of memory such as Sebiponty, where meaning is invested not only in the material structures put in place and the initiatives these represent, but also the renderings and recasting of interweaving temporalities that shape people's understanding of the contemporary memorial experience.

Here we have approached the Ponty performances through an exploration of the commemorative history and uses of the Sebiponty site itself, a *lieu de mémoire* that has frequently served as a place of performed negotiations with standing power as well as a symbolic

placeholder for new visions of an emerging pan-African future. The Ponty plays represent an important first commemorative use of the site, where a promising group of students sought to reinvest a problematic colonial history with signs of political and economic continuation in their collaboration with French forces, a gesture that in fact ran counter to colonial discourse of the time. Uses of commemorative continuation are later found in Abdoulaye Wade's conceptual framework for the Université du Futur Africain as well as in more recent urban projects now seeking to renew the Sébikotane region as a beacon of Senegalese modernity within both a pan-African and global context. The Ponty plays would serve as a key originary moment in the Francophone African theatrical practices, most notably introducing the genre that would later be known as the *épique historique*. Such plays sought to reassess the role and actions of Africa's "great men" at the moment of their encounter with colonial forces. However they are also inscribed within a longstanding and continuing process of commemoration and ruination that has contributed to the material and symbolic traces of this site of memory, making it a regional laboratory for narratives of continuation and/or rupture between pre-colonial and colonial, or colonial and postcolonial histories.

As we shall see in the following two chapters, which address culture and performance at the two "first" pan-African festivals of the 1960s, works like *L'Entrevue de Samory et du Capitaine Péroz* had a strong impact on later Senegalese theatrical heritage and continue to resonate with Senegalese audiences today. Pedagogy, as discussed in these first two chapters, and specifically colonial attempts to utilize the Ponty stage to compel a certain vision for the near political future and its emerging heteroglossia, became deeply imbricated in national performance practices. The next major organizing principle, still at work in contemporary Senegalese performance, is that of culture as an expression of the universal, but also as a binding

agent for the community and nation, a concept that would come to the fore in the institutions dedicated to practices of culture, and the festivals designed to place culture on display.

Chapter 3: The Crafting of Culture:

from Civilizing Mission to *Rayonnement culturel*

The 1966 Festival Mondial des arts nègres, also known as FESMAN, constitutes a key moment in the history of theatrical representation in Senegal. Organized at the behest of poet-president Léopold Sédar Senghor, the festival was intended to present the artistic and intellectual vivacity of a newly independent Africa to festival attendees and to the world. This, Senghor would emphasize, was at long last an opportunity to witness Africa, which, as he argued, "se relève, lentement, de ses ruines" in a "témoignage de foi en l'Homme," presenting itself of its own volition and without the intervention of Western specialists or intermediaries ("Message" 11-12). The event was additionally intended to serve as an illustration of the tenets of Negritude as laid out by Senghor, arguing through exhibits, conferences and performances that the "ensemble des valeurs de la civilisation noire" could indeed be discerned and defined through the work of the festival's performers, artists and intellectuals (*Ce que je crois* 136).

As an event, FESMAN also articulates the consequences of a new vision of culture as a nationalist vehicle initiated and maintained by a class of elites. Enlisting the participation of friend, fellow statesman and "man of culture," French Minister of Cultural Affairs André Malraux, Senghor was participating in an ideological shift that had long been taking place in large part through revised justifications of colonial presence in West Africa. This shift moved from the disavowed notion of a civilizing mission to the seemingly innocuous ideal of a French *rayonnement culturel*, a term that expresses the idea of a spread, or dissemination of French cultural influence, but also implies a heliotropic relation between the Hexagon and the regions to which its universal culture would radiate. In the latter phases of French attempts to maintain influence in the colonies, the colonial administration's objective was less to effect change in

colonized populations (either through assimilation or association) than to affect a sentiment of shared identity through the myth of a universal and universalizing culture as human heritage. This myth would grant a privileged status to the colonizer as the purveyor of that culture. The idea of a *rayonnement culturel* came to prominence in West Africa at a time when the Hexagon began losing its hegemony in the colonies. It provided a method and ideological framework through which the French could hope to retain a diplomatic and economic presence.

The participation at the 1966 Festival in Dakar of André Malraux as head of a newly created Ministry of Cultural Affairs - a governmental body that was the first of its kind and was charged to enact a cultural *rayonnement* domestically - served an important function in the local Senegalese context as well. First, it would serve Senghor's vision of casting culture as closely linked with state activity. Senghor is frequently quoted as stating that "la culture est au début et à la fin de tout dévelopment" (M'Bengue 13). This compelling approach in a newly independent country now, above all, eager in its endeavor to "catch up" economically with the West, set the stage for the Senegalese president's later move to place his own figure and office at the center of a global *rayonnement* of Senegalese culture, intended to portray Senegal as a leading producer of culture for West Africa and the world. For example, In M'Bengue's *La politique culturelle au Sénégal*, the author draws a distinction, intended to differentiate the Senegalese nation from its peers, between newly postcolonial nations that sought development through purely economic means (a thinly veiled allusion to Houphouët-Boigny's Côte d'Ivoire) and Senegal, which also integrated the cultural into its development plans. Secondly, the model for cultural institutions that arose during the final decade of French colonial presence, namely that of the *centre culturel*, would leave a lasting impression on later Senegalese notions of culture as a means of promoting civic responsibility and social harmony. These institutional attempts to promote and maintain a

sense of shared, Senegalese identity reflect earlier colonial initiatives using culture to describe the contours of a putative French West African identity.

This is the first of a two-chapter study of the display of culture as found at the pan-African festival events of the 1960s. Here, we will frame the next chapter's study of the theatrical works presented at FESMAN and Panaf' by first addressing the emergence of a specific concept of culture. The chapter will posit, that during the time of decolonization up to the early years of independence, Senghor and Malraux generated and promoted sister models of a universalizing culture seen as reflecting the distinctive nature of a given people or nation as part of a broader, universal human heritage that the state was entrusted to protect and disseminate. These notions of culture as inherently reflective of its nation of origin elide, especially in the case of Senghor and Malraux, the role national cultural institutions play in crafting understandings of culture and the nation. Hidden even deeper within the rhetoric of the two statesmen were the ways in which the notion of a *rayonnement culturel* may serve as a tool of political influence, specifically, in the case of France and West Africa, as a revised version of the colonial *mission civilisatrice*.

Culture in the time of Decolonization

When FESMAN's guest of honor, French Minister of Cultural Affairs André Malraux, stepped to the podium at the event's academic conference, entitled "Fonction et signification de l'Art nègre dans la vie du peuple et pour le peuple," he began his speech by addressing the significance of the festival itself, declaring, "Nous voici dans l'histoire" ("Discours"). He then shifted focus to the role of his fellow statesman, Léopold Senghor, "Pour la première fois un chef

d'état prend entre ses mains périssables le destin spirituel d'un continent." Malraux's speech proceeds to inscribe the historic nature of the event within a geopolitical landscape that saw the United States and Russia as two rising oppositional models in matters political, social and artistic. Neither hostile nor allied to either superpower, the Minister sought a third way, of which the Hexagon would stand out as the global leader, what he envisioned as, and called elsewhere in his writing, the "Third Continent" (Mossuz-Lavau). For Malraux, notable member countries of this third group would include India, Japan, Iran, as well as the now independent former colonies, especially those once belonging to France. What united these countries, Malraux believed, was a commitment to the spread of a universal human heritage in the form of culture, broadly defined as the ensemble of a nation's artistic production of all kinds. Unlike the American cultural model, he stated, which was designed for capitalist pursuits, or the Soviet model intent on liberating the proletariat, Malraux's Third Continent took for its ideal the promotion of culture not only as an asset to the nation, but also as a vital contribution to a greater dialogue about what it meant to be human.

Malraux would further argue that the historic nature of the FESMAN event lay in Africa's official, staged entry into the realm of culture, that is, out of the realm of the sacred and into that of aesthetics. Addressing contemporary relationships to African masks, he relates these to the portal engravings of Chartres cathedral. Once sacred objects invested with religious meaning, for Malraux both examples had lost their spiritual essence and become signs, signifiers within a universal human heritage or dialogue. This is what Malraux calls culture, or "cette force mystérieuse de choses beaucoup plus anciennes et beaucoup plus profondes que nous et qui sont notre plus haut secours dans le monde moderne, contre la puissance des usines de rêve. C'est pour cela que chaque pays d'Afrique a besoin de son propre patrimoine, du patrimoine de

l'Afrique et de créer son propre patrimoine mondial" ("Discours"). The First World Festival of Black Arts was historic for Malraux precisely because it was, as many saw it, the first of Africa's attempts to create and define its own heritage, situating itself within a broader vision of global human heritage and securing a place, for the French Minister, within the Third Continent.

However, amidst the universalizing rhetoric of Malraux's speech lay an additional, much more particular layer of historical processes at work. For Malraux, history at the time entailed presiding over the multiple independence celebrations of France's newly independent former colonies, for example those of Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo and Gabon in August of 1960. These were accompanied by declarations of a common cause and identity among the new French-speaking free nations of the world. One of the primary binding agents of this identity was L'Action Culturelle, an endeavor that deployed French artists and creators to the Hexagon's former colonies to spread the benefits of French culture to regions of the world where artistic practices and traditions were seen as still in development. Through contact with populations in Senegal and elsewhere in the postcolonial world, foot soldiers of L'Action Culturelle would spread what were seen as the universal benefits of culture. For France, these efforts served to help the metropole maintain its privileged relationship with the former France d'outre-mer. The initiative's ideological proximity with the tenets of the civilizing mission, which once claimed to deliver the manna of civilization to what were seen as the underdeveloped areas of the globe, highlight culture's new role, in this period, as a justification for continued French presence and influence.

Recent scholarship has focused attention on the overlooked role of Malraux's actions in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs within a broader French agenda in the immediately postcolonial period. This agenda included the frequently underhand dealings of a cohort of French

technocrats intent on ensuring continued economic control of an African continent rich in natural resources. The most infamous incarnation of these efforts, Jacques Foccart, known colloquially as *Monsieur l'Afrique*, helped bring about what Xavier Vershave has termed La Françafrique, in which repeated clandestine French economic intervention on the continent, with the approval of the highest levels of government, wrought havoc in the former colonies by introducing levels of corruption in African governing bodies that ensured French business would continue to benefit from privileged access to the resources of former French colonies.

In her essay on Malraux's role in this history of neocolonial power in Africa, Catherine Coquio argues that the French Minister of Culture served an important function in France's continued dominance in Africa, playing the role of the soft power in tandem with Foccart's deliberate interventionist schemes. For Coquio: "La parole 'lyrique' de Malraux parachevait 'en beauté' l'opération qui consistait à accepter la fin d'un empire pour assurer son relais par un autre système de domination, efficace à proportion qu'il saurait se cacher derrière une série d'accords d''assistance' et de 'coopération,' engageant la France à soutenir ses 'amis' africains, et inversement" (175). The two power brokers of such an exchange, Foccart and Malraux, represented two extremes of a selfsame political process: enforcing alliances with the former African territories, either through direct economic means in the case of Foccart, or, in that of Malraux, by promoting a model of *rayonnement culturel*, as Coquio writes, "par une France appelée à jouer son rôle emancipateur et 'fraternel' au sein d'une 'civilisation universelle' dont elle aurait la clé" (178).

In a discussion of the effect of cultural intervention in Africa on later theatrical production in France, Jean-Philippe Dedieu also highlights the Hexagon's commitment to employ culture as a means of maintaining political influence on the post-independence continent.

Sending young Frenchmen with mixed levels of training and experience to transmit the classics of French drama to the masses, the Ministère de la Coopération, formed in 1959 by General De Gaulle, sought to foster popular sympathy to the French language and to the Hexagon's notion of a universal culture. The stage was a key element of such efforts in the colonies. This is particularly observable, for example, in the global efforts of a traveling French troupe called Le Théâtre de l'Union. Led by two classically trained actors from La Comédie Française, this troupe received a commission from the Ministry to tour to the French-speaking colonies of the globe, performing pieces from the classic French repertoire. Their appearances also came with short theater workshops, allowing members of the "French Union" to try their hand at theatrical performance in the Western tradition. The troupe was at the vanguard of a growing demand, for cultural interventions in the colonies, as a diplomatic and cultural response to the threat of decolonization. In his writing on L'Action Culturelle, Dedieu points out the enduring tropes of the language of conquest, dating from the years of Faidherbe's encroachments on the region and resonating still in the promotion of theatrical tours, often described in such militaristic terms as a *tournée mitrailleuse*, or *tournée de pénétration* (9).

Malraux's message to the audience at FESMAN ("Nous voici dans l'histoire") fits within the trajectory of this history, examined by Coquio and Dedieu, of an attempt to define French culture, and indeed cultural practice, as a form of universal human heritage, as a unifying principle traversing nascent political borders. In the Senegalese context, the emergence of French cultural centers coincides with a disavowal of the notion of a French civilizing mission (discussed in chapter 1), and with a growing momentum in favor of political independence for the colonies. With France's slipping grip over West African territories and lagging approval of colonial efforts at home, French authorities were in need of a new iteration of the civilizing

mission, one that would serve to appease an increasingly restive African elite, while closing local gaps among generations as well as among urban and rural populations.

The colonial administration's attempt at meeting this new need for indirect influence came from High Commissioner Bernard Cornut-Gentille in the form of the *centres culturels*, which were first inaugurated in 1946 in French Equatorial Africa and in 1953 in French West Africa. The initiative spread quickly, and by 1957, French West Africa counted 107 centers bringing culture to the masses of the region's urban and rural areas. The cultural centers also provided a useful response to the question of the African cultural elite, providing them with an opportunity to assume leadership positions in colonial society. Meanwhile, authorities used the elite's cultural initiation and literacy to bridge a divide with the rural populations, which were further removed from previous pedagogical interventions by the French. Although not the source of Africans' first contact with the French, the centers were the first vehicle of a popular initiation to the French notion of cultural activities as a community-forming agent. Membership was not mandatory, and therefore reflects, as Nicholas Bancel writes, a social will to develop new forms of interaction within colonial French West African society (109-134). The centers placed an important emphasis on the practice of team sports, with a coordinated effort to transmit the rules and techniques of major European sports. Each center was equipped with a library containing a collection generous in its depiction of French colonial efforts. Press publications were also available, but only those that glorified metropolitan life, such as *Paris Match*, but made no mention of French political debates of the day, in attempts no doubt to stave off discussion of the growing unrest in Algeria. The medium of cinema played a central role in the life of the cultural centers, and at least 7 cinema-vans would tour from center to center, projecting films that romanticized French presence abroad or portrayed affable colonial figures

such as Father Charles de Foucauld. As the vehicles of a new sense of community under the umbrella of cultural activities facilitated by the French, the centers served as an institution of mutual recognition for the African elites, while familiarizing the indigenous population with metropolitan customs and practices.

The print culture relating the activities of this "imagined community," was an internal publication called *Traits d'Union*. This revue consisted mostly of contributions from African correspondents and was circulated widely among the centers, giving an idea of the cultural life and activities of each structure. Issues included regular reports of various cultural gatherings and sporting events, and were supplemented by color photos and the occasional diagram to help instruct center leaders in matters such as the set-up of a Western proscenium stage. As Bancel states in his writing on the centers, "le journal des centres culturels, *Traits d'Union*, rédigé par des responsables associatifs participant aux centres culturels, s'impose comme un médium privilégié de la diffusion des schémas socioculturels métropolitains" (122). However, the journal would also seek to redefine the social space of French West Africa in a context when overt political intervention risked triggering an insurgency on the part of the local elite. The goal of the *centres* and of *Traits d'Union* was to redraw the map of French West Africa, with boundaries that would be seen as every bit as cultural as they were political, making the case for an unmistakably *French* West African identity.

The drive to symbolize the presence of an emerging, culturally francophone identity within the West African colonies reveals itself quite clearly in a cover to *Traits d'Union* proposed by one Alioune Badara Fall and sent to the magazine's Editor-in-Chief, Lompolo Kone (Fall). Kone, a former student of the William Ponty School, and member of the rising West African elite to whom the written *organe* of the cultural centers would be entrusted, would go on

to become foreign minister of his native Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and one of the leading intellectuals and writers of the post-independence period. The proposed cover to *Traits d'Union* by a fellow African enthusiast of French culture and its institutions would depict a stylized, anthropomorphic map of the French West African region transformed into the caricature of a stereotypically Africanized face. The northern region of the continent, the then politically troubled Maghreb, would serve as a patch of hair to the figure of this mythical African proponent of French culture and beneficiary of its *rayonnement*. The face is tellingly looking outward to the rest of the world, suggesting an Africa eager to participate in global relations. The artist makes use of the distinctive geographical contours of the Gambia River and the Cap-Vert peninsula to form the individual's mouth and nose, but the eyes are perhaps its most striking feature. They embody the calm and poised look of a confident yet somehow docile, outward-looking individual. At the center of the image is the French *tricolore*, symbol of the cultural heritage and supposedly universal values the centers were designed to transmit. Behind the flag is a visualized depiction of the emissions of a radio antenna, a means of communication and cultural dissemination then becoming increasingly popular in the region. The antenna is placed near the depicted figure's ear.

Figure 5: Model cover for *Traits d'Union.*

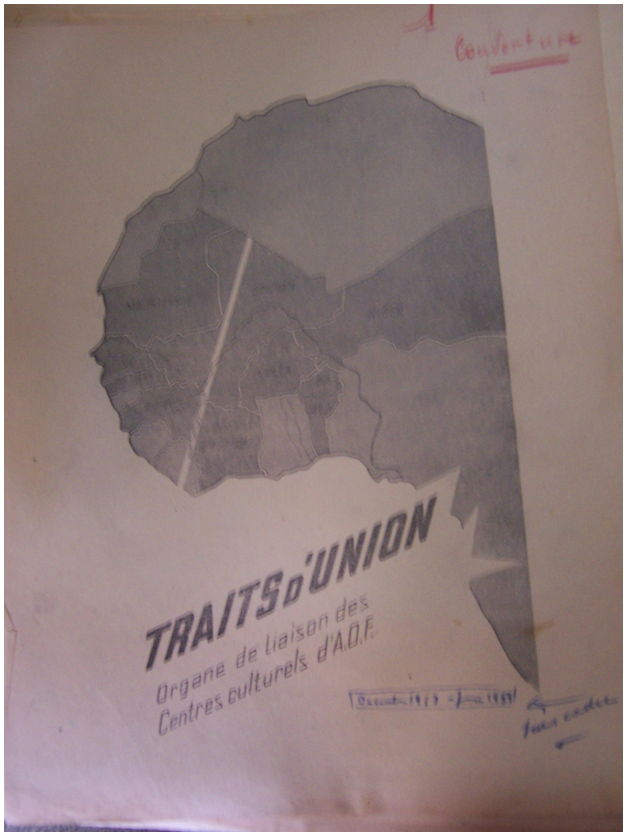

Figure 6: Cover chosen by editorial committee

In the end, Fall's design was turned down in favor of the more somber image pictured above, at right. His image is telling, however, in part because it is reminiscent of an earlier cover of *Paris Match*, once famously analyzed by Roland Barthes in his book of essays, *Mythologies*. Barthes writes about the semiotic work that goes into a depiction of a young Senegalese *tirailleur*, whose figure fills the magazine cover and who is standing in a devote salute, presumably to the French flag. "Cela, c'est le *sens* de l'image," Barthes states, expounding that the image is intended to suggest, without question, "que la France est un grand Empire, que tous ses fils, sans discussion de couleur, servent fidèlement sous son drapeu, et qu'il n'est de meilleure réponse aux détracteurs d'un colonialisme prétendu, que le zèle de ce noir à servir ses prétendus oppresseurs" (189). In his proposed cover of *Traits d'Union*, Fall highlights the complex nature of the West African elite's situation. They are able and eager to employ the signs of emphatic

adhesion to the colonial project, but not quite able to take their place as full citizens and beneficiaries of this same project. What Fall's depiction elides, furthermore, is the work of policy and pedagogy that would be required to grant an appearance of unity and widespread adhesion among a region of staggering diversity and growing regional and generational division.

Framing the pictorial and textual content of the revue were the prefatory editorials of the cultural centers' founder, Bernard Cornut-Gentille. The texts serve as a telling point from which to read the challenges and concerns that were involved in fostering this new sense of cultural French West African unity. In the first editions of the new revue, Cornut-Gentille is enthusiastic about its circulation and potential impact on the cultural life of the region. "Le dernier numéro de 'Traits d'Unions' a groupé des collaborateurs de valeur et l'accueil qu'il a rencontré nous a amenés à tripler le tirage prévu" ("Témoin" 3). Such auspicious beginnings were largely attributed to the work of a rising and promising African elite, which Cornut-Gentille was sure to mention in his recounting of the centers' success. "De tous les Territoires, une Elite enthousiaste et avide de se perfectionner réclame maintenant leur extension et demande mon appui dans ce but" ("Témoin" 3). The goal of the centers and of the *Traits d'Union* publication was explicitly stated as forming a "new" Africa, animated by a profound "friendship" traversing the typical geographic and political borders, justified and continually renewed through a shared cultural interest and identity: "Qu'il (le journal) soit donc par-dessus les étendues africaines, par-dessus les barrières administratives et les hiérarchies nécessaires, le témoin solide de notre amitié, de notre volonté de 'faire' une Afrique nouvelle" ("Témoin" 3). The main defining feature of culture as promoted by the French cultural centers was that it was to serve as a space of dialogue, a sphere for exchange regulating a new and increasingly problematic social space for the colonial administration.

Beyond the lofty rhetoric of the centers' objectives in impacting the region, the editorials of *Traits d'Union* also served as a space for establishing the limits within which the centers were expected to operate. Unsurprisingly, the administration was clear and firm in its directives, stating that the cultural centers were not to become political rallying points, nor meeting places for independently organized clubs. The centers were organized structures in their own right and would brook no parallel administrative bodies assembling within their facilities. Such a concern stemmed from difficulties encountered in the activities of the previous *maisons de jeunesse*, whose group assemblies often gave way to outright political activity, and sometimes resistance. However, and perhaps more subtly, Cornut-Gentille would also keep close watch over the rhetoric and forms of exchange prevailing among centers through the *Traits d'Union* revue. As such, the High Commissioner would warn against any form of "flatterie administrative," or "tout compliment à l'égard de vos chefs et de mes collaborateurs" ("Alerte" 3). In their written contributions, authors tended to pay homage to their colonial facilitators, a gesture which appeared to clash with the objectives of the cultural review in that it brought political hierarchies and forms of dominance to the fore. Appealing to the readership of *Traits d'Union*, Cornut-Gentille insisted that they see the publication as "le messager fidèle de vos préoccupations intellectuelles, de vos aspirations humaines, de vos craintes," and that the revue must therefore, "refléter votre vie la plus intime et la plus profonde" ("Alerte" 3). By insisting upon the strictest sense of egalitarianism in the activities of the center as well as in the way in which members interacted via *Traits d'Union*, Cornut-Gentille effectively sought to suppress potential awareness of the center's unequivocal interdiction of even vaguely political activity or discussion.

An additional and more direct challenge faced by the centers was the habitual behaviors of the assembled groups with regard to one another. These institutions were above all intended

to bring together in unity a range of social categories that had increasingly drifted apart, to some extent because of the previous decades of colonial intervention. However, while attempting to appease the educated cultural elite of the region, who at this point had nurtured certain expectations with regard to their social status in colonial society, the administration had by this time abandoned any hope of integrating the white colonial population to the work of creating a coherent social fabric (Bancel 115). Cornut-Gentille's own exasperation with this particular population can be read in the lines of one of his editorials when he states: "Vous, mes collaborateurs métropolitains, cessez totalement au Centre Culturel d'être le chef qui condescend à s'entretenir avec ses subordonnés." Habitual behaviors constituted an obstacle for the administration, and not only those of the colonial population, but also, apparently, those of the culturally active indigenous members of the centers. This would incite Cornut-Gentille to add, in the same editorial: "Vous, Amis Africains, cessez de croire que tout ce qui est fait en votre faveur n'a pour but que de vous 'enfermer.'" A later remark in this article suggests a level of dissonance with earlier pedagogical initiatives, which sought to instill in the elite a taste for the most practical concerns of colonial life (see chapter 1): "Et surtout, ne sollicitez pas non plus des concours limités à des tâches d'organisation pratique, à des 'services' matériels modestes" ("Foyer" 3). Practicality of this kind clearly did not fall in line with the objectives of the cultural centers, which sought to instill a sense of unity along much more abstract and tellingly less material parameters. In its endeavor to both "distraire l'élite" and "éduquer les masses," the centers sought primarily to serve as what *Traits d'Union* Editor-in-Chief would call an "équipement social," or, more solemnly, "un sanctuaire de la culture" (Kone 3).

Staging Culture - La Coupe Théâtrale

The theatrical activities of the *centres culturels* were not only the most followed, but also the most fruitful events with regard to the colonial administration's objectives. The plays created and performed at the centers represented a useful continuation of illustrations of a putative new African mind - language carried over from the earlier years of the Ponty plays - emerging through the efforts of French colonial society. However, the productions of this period also had a strong impact on Senegalese theatrical heritage. This phase, known in historical chronologies of Senegalese theater as "la période des centres culturels" would reinforce certain theatrical practices introduced at the time of the Ponty School and instate new innovations that exist to this day (Mbaye). Yet, as Alioune Mbaye states in a rare moment of critical attention to this period, there is almost no scholarship discussing the impact of the plays of the *centres culturels* on later Senegalese theatrical production. Mbaye attributes this to the close association of these performances in national memory with the earlier theatrical works of the Ponty students at Sébikotane. The *centres culturels* indeed display similarities to the pedagogical framing of the Ponty performances outlined in chapter 1. However, to overlook their modifications to the genre is to ignore the impact these performances would have on later processes of community formation through theater in Senegal.

In an announcement made through *Traits d'Union*, Bernard Cornut-Gentille informed the network of *centres culturels* that, following a period of consultation with a number of the active members of the cultural institutions of French West Africa, he had decided to inaugurate a region-wide *concours* ("Organisation" 3). This contest would unite the centers by implementing a tournament-style competition of original theatrical work. Cornut-Gentille set the terms of the contest, stating that entries were not to exceed 90 minutes in length and could include a

maximum of twenty-five cast members. Each piece was to be an original work designed to represent a troupe's home cultural center. The centers were to hold a competition to select their troupe, and would then compete with neighboring centers. Each territory was to hold its final at its *chef lieu* or hub. Cornut-Gentille set out the cartography of the quarter finals, which were to be disputed by neighboring colonies, so that Dahomey would compete against Niger, Upper Volta against Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire against Guinea and Senegal against Mauritania, with the final held at the *Théâtre du Palais* in the French West African capital of Dakar. Cornut-Gentille also laid out the specifics of who would serve on the deciding juries, specifying that jury members would include the local French *fonctionnaire*, one member of the academic association IFAN (l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire), and a representative of Youth and Sports Services. The language of the plays would be French, so that performances would be intelligible to members of all centers, with the natural exception, Cornut-Gentille would add, of songs, dances or folkloric aspects that troupes would want to incorporate and which could be performed in local indigenous languages.

The linguistic aspect of the plays would prove central to the centers' goals. In its attempts to instantiate a broader French West African identity, the Coupe Théâtrale would make it a requirement that each center represent itself, on stage, through the language of the European colonizer. As these centers were mostly frequently led by a French-educated elite, this would also prove to be an efficient means of putting on display the elegance of these Africans' French while also providing a pedagogical experience for the audience. Spectators were not only integrating a text in the foreign language, but also participating in the establishment of an African elite distinguished through its successful command of the French language as well as through regular participation in the cultural life of the colonies. In opposition to the function of

the French language as a vehicle of clear intelligibility and communication among the many different centers, were the stagings of rituals and traditional performances. By adding that these were to be performed in local African languages, the French were indicating a respect for African society and customs, while also representing a stark contrast, on stage, between the unity and apparent universality of the French language and the staggering multiplicity of African languages within the region, the former employed as a means of communication and exchange, the latter as a performance of local particularity.

Yet, the plays of the cultural centers reveal a literate elite eager to engage with the emerging role of culture within colonial African society, but also to innovate on the theatrical forms introduced in their earlier Ponty years. Many of the leaders of the French cultural centers of this period were in fact themselves former students of the Ponty School, as was the Editor-in-Chief of *Traits d'Union*, Lompolo Kone, who was also a successful playwright in the Coupe Théâtrale. In the Ponty plays, for instance, students were made to stage the colonial encounter between African tradition and French modernity as one of inevitable submission to the supposedly superior reason of French civilization. Indeed, this was often described by French administrators as one of the laudable qualities of the West African population, that is, that their conquest did not require extensive military conflict as did the conquests of North Africa, and that they could be brought to reason and eventually see how the colonial pursuits were, it was said, directly in their best interests (Delavignette 101). However, in the later plays of the cultural centers, students were able to posit a co-existence of two civilizations, both equally valid, and neither requiring a subjugation of the other. Thus, while these new creations - no longed called indigenous theater, but now African theater - employed tropes and forms similar to their Ponty predecessors, which included the use of folklore and staging of African customs, the centers'

productions created a platform to stage narratives more in keeping with the desired colonial model of co-existence at a time when growing political sentiment toward self-rule was threatening to expulse the French altogether.

One clear illustration of this shift in thinking about the co-existence of civilizations is the play *Sarzan*. As a winner of the Coupe Théâtrale, this text was published in that year's edition of *Traits d'Union*. The play was adapted from a tale by Senegalese writer Birago Diop and told the story of a Senegalese sergeant who, after fifteen years of service in Europe, returns to his native home with the goal of "civilizing" his people. The production was written and directed by Lamine Diakhaté - a later representative of Senegal at the Festival Mondial des arts nègres in Dakar -, who, in a prologue to the published version writes: "Ce n'est pas une pièce de théâtre que vous allez voir, mais un drame engendré par le contact de deux civilisations" (48). The plural of civilization is drawn out as a contrast to the protagonist's universalist notion of civilization in the singular, an idea also outdated at this point in the colonial context. Diakhate's play is intended to highlight the aspects of such "civilizations" that one cannot escape, insisting that one cannot pull away from one's origins. In a statement reminiscent of Malraux's previously cited definition of culture, Diakhaté states: "Un homme veut lutter contre les forces obscures qui régissent la vie de toute une société. Des forces obscures qui ont déjà régi la vie de ses ancêtres: des forces obscures qui ont régi sa propre existence" (48). Between these "forces obscures" and the "force mystérieuse de choses beaucoup plus anciennes et plus profondes que nous" described by Malraux, there is a common cause: to depict the distinctiveness of a society as inhabitable within a multiplicity, as contributing to one, larger "Universal" human dialogue, what Malraux would call culture in the global, universalizing sense.

When the protagonist of Diakhaté's story, Thiémoko Keita, leaves Europe to return to his native region of Dougouba, it is at the behest of his *commandant*, who, dissuading Keita from studying to become an interpreter or *garde-cercle*, insists that his talents would be most needed at home, saying: "Tu apprendras un peu aux autres comment vivent les Blancs. Tu les civiliseras" (49). Keita's father, we soon discover, was a close collaborator of the famous French general Archinard of the colonial conquest, a fact which, for his superiors, augurs a successful introduction of Western know-how in Ketia's rural region through the person of this now world-wise African *civilisé*. Keita takes on his mission wholeheartedly, determined, as he says, to "civiliser les gens de Dougouba" (50). He is a personified model of the most naive understanding of the civilizing mission, a mission which, as we recall from the undoing of Seck's character Malick discussed in chapter 1, is doomed to fail.

Keita's arrival in his native region is marked by the surprise of finding things not quite as he had remembered them. Referring to the native residents of the region, he declares with some shock that, "Il y a des choses ridicules auxquelles ils tiennent et qui n'existent pas en France." In his journey back to the customs of his homeland, Keita is accompanied by the Inspecteur-Vétérinaire, a Senegalese character who represents a mixture of long years of study and a direct contact and familiarity with the local population. The sage of the relationship, the Inspecteur-Vétérinaire explains to Keita, "Oui, Keita. C'est la différence entre les civilisations." To this Keita replies, "Mais, Docteur, ici les gens ne sont pas civilisés" (50)! Keita's interlocutor then takes the time to expand on what was then the contemporary understanding of the term civilization in this context of a waning colonial influence. "Refléchis un peu, Keita, la civilisation ce n'est pas le beau costume européen que nous portons toi et moi. Ce n'est pas non plus cette langue française que nous parlons." These eagerly desired signs of civilization of an

earlier colonial period - that of Assane Seck's protagonist Malick - are now seen as devoid of meaning when taken out of context. Here, there is no longer one single model of civilization, taken for universal, but a multitude of civilizations existing within a larger human society. The Inspecteur-General states this himself in his tutorial to Keita: "On a seulement oublié de dire qu'il n'y a pas une civilisation, mais qu'il y a des civilisations dont chacune met l'accent sur un aspect de la condition humaine" (51).

The apparently less restrictive view of civilization in French West Africa was not without significant political implications, however. Broader notions of a universal civilization at these cultural centers removed the focus from outward symbols of political and societal domination (i.e. - the Western clothing and even language were no longer part of a *sine qua non* of civilized society) in order to instantiate as a *fait accompli* an amorphous sense of shared, political identity with the French. These were civilizations, in short, which shared in their contributions to a universal human heritage or culture. The Inspecteur-Vétérinaire reflects the amorphous quality of the new notion of civilization, when he explains to Keita, "Une civilisation? Mais c'est un ensemble très complexe d'oeuvres, d'institutions, d'habitudes, de traditions, de formules, de méthodes, de reflèxes individuels et collectifs, d'aspiration et de moyens. Si tu veux, c'est un cadre, un climat, une ambiance, un réseau serré qui touche tous ceux qui y vivent, qui s'insinuent en eux: eux-mêmes l'enrichissent, la transforme" (51). The character's focus on artworks and institutions, the first in his list of elements involved in the constitution of a civilization, would speak to the role of the *centres culturels* as institutions designed to promote works of art and validate them as performed examples of the fruit of civilization. Such a notion's political usefulness for the colonizers comes to light however when the Inspecteur-Général relates this understanding of civilization to colonial West Africa, stating:

> Actuellement nous avons besoin d'être épaulés par la communauté. Cette même communauté nous a accueillis dès notre naissance: elle nous soutient, nous éprouvons le besoin d'échanger avec elle, et cela pendant toute notre existence. Est-ce que nous pouvons nous priver de ce passé et de ce capital d'oeuvres, d'institutions, d'habitudes, de langage, de méthodes que nous avons trouvés ici? (52)

Keita replies to this rhetorical question with a resounding, "Ah! non." The question is in fact not only intended for the protagonist, but also and above all for the audience of the *centres culturels*. Now nearing a crossroads in the development, or undoing, of French colonial society, France, through the framework of a more inclusive model of civilization - what in the time of Malraux's Ministry would simply be called culture - was employing the new West African elite to make its case for a need for continued and mutually beneficial relationship between the Hexagon and its colonies.

This was a final attempt on the part of colonial administration to salvage a sense of common mission and identity, this time staging French West African traditional customs as able to co-exist, indeed as having much in common, with Western civilization. Thus, the rituals of Keita's region are compared with the mystic practices of the West. Sacrificial rites are placed in dialogue with the votive of saints in a Catholic church, and the terror villagers display at the oncoming Kankurang - a mystic figure who arrives to initiate the rite of passage of boys to be circumcised - is compared with the noise and celebration around the annual Carnival of Venice. In an editorial text for *Traits d'Union*, Assane Seck, by now a leading figure in so-called African theater, singles out *Sarzan* as one of the more promising examples of the Franco-African works emerging from the Coupe Théâtrale. Seck notes that, throughout the action of the play, neither French nor African civilization is ridiculed or criticized by the author. "En somme, tout le drame réside dans l'opposition de deux civilisations, toutes deux valables, peut-être au même degré" (Seck, "Soirée" 46). In his study of the plays of the cultural centers, Alioune Mbaye would also

indicate *Sarzan* as a noteworthy example, and one that stood out for its departure from the *folklorisme facile* to which many of these productions were prone.

The signs of belonging to either civilization are indeed represented as equal, with African society on equal footing with that of France. However, the stage on which local folklore and customs would be performed cannot in itself be neutral and in this case was decidedly French. The staging, for example, of the Kankurang, in its representation of the taboo figure, actually divests it of its symbolic power (De Jong, "Masquerading"). The role of the Kankurang is to terrify children who are about to be initiated in the circumcision rite and thus his effectiveness in striking fear in the heart of his audience depends on a level of secrecy. In the actual Kankurang ceremony, the person fulfilling this role is free to move about and around the young neophytes, thus escaping their scrutinizing glance. By representing the figure on the proscenium stage, under the lights of the cultural center and to have it incarnated by an actor who removes his costume and is credited with playing the part, undermines the element of secrecy essential to the rite. Such intricacies of representations highlight the fact that the stage in this French colonial context could not be neutral, and certainly not in its representation of traditional African society.

One of the compelling expectations of the performances at the cultural centers was that they take as a source of inspiration local indigenous folklore. This often took the form of musical performance, stagings of rites of passage, or dance interludes. Thus, in their form as well as in their institutional origin in colonial policy, the performances had much in common with those staged decades earlier at the height of the William Ponty School. In an article published in *Traits d'Union* about their success in the Coupe Théâtrale competition with the play *Téli Soma Oulé*, the head of the theatrical troupe, a schoolteacher named Henry Vidal, discusses the choice of performing this particular play: "Deux solutions s'offrent à nous. Soit mettre en

scène des acteurs genre européen, se débattant contre la tradition et la coutume et interprétant une pièce de style moderne, soit rester dans la tradition purement africaine et présenter une adaptation historique et folklorique" (65). The troupe would opt for a Ponty-style historical performance and was rewarded for their choice, going on to compete in the federal competition. The troupe's director relates the play's success to the facility with which they were able to integrate folkloric dance and song by adapting this particular legend. From here, an informal canon of works begins to form, as troupes start using the *Traits d'Union* publication of competition winners in their own choice of plays to produce. Indeed, a number of these plays are even reprised by other troupes, based on their past success.

An additional modification on the form of earlier Ponty performances of folklore and historical drama was the competitive aspect of the productions. Aside from an important monetary award, cultural centers competed for the prestige, both locally and federally, that came with taking home the coveted *coupe*. In the interest of fairness, jury members from neutral areas were sent to the *chef-lieu* in order to preside over territorial finals. The final at the capital's Théâtre du Palais was presided over by the theater's director, Maurice Sonar Senghor (nephew of Léopold Sédar Senghor). Jury members would evaluate performances based on a point system, with grids providing categories such as "pittoresque," "élocution," or "discipline sur scène" ("Finale"). This grid system would mark the beginning of a new means of evaluating theatrical performance, and would have a lasting effect in later models of Senegalese performance and the use of theater to foster community formation and group identity.

La Coupe Théâtrale and its promotion through the French cultural centers and the circulation of *Traits d'Union* constitute the West African beginnings of the very notion of culture on which André Malraux would rely one decade later at the FESMAN event. This definition of

culture as both reflective of the particularities of a given nation or people, but also part of a broader, universal repository of human heritage, is in fact a rhetorical French construct in the West African context and one with subtly political objectives. This new understanding of an inclusionary culture as opposed to the exclusionary model of *civlisation* would allow the French to continue to make the case - now increasingly tenuous - for belief in a possible common identity among West Africans and the French. Now focused on expressing the distinctive aspects of a given people or nation, this new model of culture took community formation as its main objective. Culture, in this new sense, was taken as a given at the FESMAN event, but in fact had been the recent result of continual colonial interaction, and would have equally impactful echoes in both the colonies and the metropole.

Rayonnement de l'état culturel

The French experience of establishing cultural centers in the colonies would prove a formative one in the later development of culture and cultural policy in the Hexagon itself. In 1959, André Malraux found himself at the head of the newly created French Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The Ministry was the first of its kind in Europe, a governmental institution whose goal was to democratize culture, disseminating works and fostering cultural activities among the provinces of France, which, at the time, were considered far removed from the cultural offerings of large cities. Malraux described his new institution's task by stating: ""Il faut que nous puissions rassembler le plus grand nombre d'oeuvres pour le plus grand nombre d'hommes. Telle est la tâche que nous essayons d'assumer de nos mains périssables" (qtd. in Girard, Gentil 292). Comparing his ministerial actions to those of Jules Ferry, the nineteenth-century Minister of

Education who famously universalized the French school system, Malraux cast himself as a Ferry of the Fifth Republic, stating that his Ministry would "... faire pour la culture ce que la IIIème République a fait pour l'enseignement: chaque enfant de France a droit aux tableaux, au théâtre, au cinéma, comme à l'alphabet" ("Présentation").

But the objectives of Malraux's Ministry remained, as of yet, ill defined, and the minister would encounter difficulties in recruiting administrative talent to his service. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs at first offered little prestige among other potential administrative positions and it was not yet clear to which career paths involvement in this service would later lead. The timing of the Ministry's opening coincided perfectly, however, with the return home of a group of former colonial administrators in search of new employment in the postcolonial era. Malraux was quick to recruit these returning administrators, for the most part young, unmarried men with what was described as an independent, entrepreneurial spirit, all characteristics which served them well in implementing France's *rayonnement culturel* in "la brousse" of Africa, and which, Malraux thought, would also prove to be assets in their attempts to enact a similar *rayonnement* in the provinces of France. The new Ministry of Cultural Affairs, now charged with redefining and spreading France's new universalist ideal of culture and cultural policy quickly became what one collaborator, Jacques Renard, called: "... le rebut des AFOM, les administrateurs de la France d'outre-mer, mis au chômage technique par la décolonisation" (qtd. in Rauch 65).

One such former administrator was Emile Biasini, whose eleven years in Africa were spent between Chad and Dahomey, where he was charged with implementing and overseeing the activities of his territory's *centres culturels*. The experience left a profound mark on Biasini's view of the definition and utility of culture and *rayonnement culturel* in this late colonial period. To him, at least, the political objectives of his role in the African colonies were clear. He would

describe the goals of L'Action culturelle of the time as demanding the following: "Il faut d'abord que ces pays qui subissent une attraction instinctive de la France et respectent profondément la culture française trouvent, dans une présentation permanenete de notre pays, les éléments capables de nourrir cette admiration et de colorer une image conforme à leur idéal, dépassant même leur attente" (qtd. in Rauch 57). Trained in the Hexagon's Ecole Nationale de la France d'outre-mer - also the training ground of a number of administrators who would go on to work for Malraux in the new Ministry of Cultural Affairs - Biasini was well aware of the realities of the colonial situation in Africa, and that France's hold over its continental territories would soon be swept up by the tide of political calls for self-rule. This placed his work with the *centres culturels* in a delicate balance, the first factor of which was the French language. Biasini reflects thusly on the linguistic imperative of the time: "Il faut en premier lieu dépolitiser tout ce qui est français. Ensuite, enlever à toute action d'imprégnation culturelle un caractère de prosélytisme quelconque" (qtd. in Rauch 57). The key factor that would allow the colonial authorities of L'Action Culturelle, to dissimulate the forms of "proselytism" to which Biasini refers was the cloak of universalism, with the following apparent goal: "enseigner ce que la pensée française peut avoir de plus universel, de plus libéral et de plus humain. L'évolution politique est faite d'éléments tactiques correspondant à des époques ou des situations définies. La culture doit, sur un plan beaucoup plus large, surmonter tous les avatars pour faire des disciples de la France" (qtd. in Rauch 57).

After twelve years spent in the endeavor of creating such "disciples of France," Biasini returned home following the decolonization of the continent. Newly in search of work, he, like many of his fellow returned administrators, quickly found himself under the employ of Malraux's Ministry. After describing his work in Africa with the *centres culturels*, he claims to have been

given the following directive from the minister himself: "Ce que vous avez fait en Afrique, vous allez me le faire en France" (Biasini 14). Biasini would direct the spearhead initiative of Malraux's institution: the *maisons de la culture*. The purpose of these *maisons* was to create a national unity, in the newly formed Fifth Republic, around the notion of a universal and unifying culture similar to the one instantiated in Africa through the *centres culturels*. Malraux would illustrate the importance of this initiative, part of what the Ministry called its Fourth Plan, in front of the National Assembly in 1959, declaring:

> Si noble ou si usé que soit le mot démocratie il n'y a qu'une culture démocratique qui compte et cela veut dire quelque chose de très simple. Cela veut dire qu'il faut que, par ces maisons de la culture qui, dans chaque département français, diffuseront ce que nous essayons de faire à Paris, n'importe quel enfant de seize ans, si pauvre soit-il, puisse avoir un véritable contact avec son patrimoine national et avec la gloire de l'esprit de l'humanité. ("Présentation" 1959)

The Fourth Plan shared with its African *centres culturel* predecessors the goal of reflecting, and indeed reinforcing, the place of the particular and the universal in culture as promoted by ministerial institutions. Cultural activities at both types of centers endeavored to display what was distinctive about the local or national cultural heritage, which thereby proved its place within a larger human heritage of what was called universal culture. This was the beginning of the *tout culturel*, or what critic Marc Fumaroli called "l'état culturel" in a 1991 essay of the same name, roundly criticizing this new ubiquity of a vaguely defined culture in everyday life and in the public sphere. According to Fumaroli, "On n'insistera jamais assez sur l'erreur commise en 1959 dans le nouveau découpage des compétences qu'entraîna l'invention d'un ministère taillé sur mesure pour Malraux" (84). Biasini's retrospective outlook on the phenomenon is decidedly more optimistic: “La culture a maintenant triomphé. Toute vie, aujourd’hui, est culture. C’est un incontestable progrès, et le mot a fait fortune” (Biasini 49).

The rise and eventual success of this word, "culture," in French society of the Fifth Republic, emerged as the fruit of work in the French colonies, as well as in France. The preponderant role of colonial administrators in the creation of the French Cultural Ministry of Affairs, the subject of a study published by the Ministry's historical committee in 1998, indicates the imprint that the colonial administration, and the intricacies of managing a tenuous sense of francophone identity in the late colonial period, had on the French imagining of Malraux's universal culture. Biasini, then considered the right-hand man the Minister of Cultural Affairs at the time of the Ministry's creation, has commented extensively on the link between what was expected of him while serving Malraux's Fourth Plan and the means by which he would implement and maintain the French cultural centers of Chad and Dahomey. He confesses to having used the same "méthodes de brousse" he acquired in Africa while implementing a plan which, he says, "... ressemblait fort, dans sa conduite, à ce que j'avais fait en Afrique" (Biasini 16). He would bring to France, as Malraux instructed, what he had helped to begin in Africa, where hundreds of cultural centers, led by a rising African elite, worked toward the definitions and stagings of a new approach to performing tradition and the relationship between French and African society.

Crafting culture for an independent Senegal

The language of culture that had developed in West Africa through the *centres culturels*, and in France through the Ministry of Culture's *maisons de la culture*, would also prove key to the framing of the 1966 FESMAN event. Senghor's commentary on the significance of the festival employs similar rhetoric of an inherent soul or ontology, purportedly reflected through

the creative works of the newly independent nation. He had also developed this notion during his early years as a student in Paris, where he, with Aimé Césaire and Léon Gontran Damas, formed the literary movement of Negritude, the tenets of which included the defense and illustration of the distinctive, though often unacknowledged, contribution of Africa and its diaspora to human civilization. In his statement for this First World Festival of Black Arts, Senghor would frame the event as the dawn of a new future for what he called the Black soul and its new, self-determined role in the world, describing it by saying, "Transcendant les contradictions apparentes, le noeud de vipères des complexes hérités de la colonisation, senti par les entrailles et pensé par le cerveau de la Négritude, parmi les peurs primaires et les bombes savantes du monde actuel, il monte comme une affirmation sans morgue de la réalité ontologique africaine ("Message" 12).

FESMAN provided a public occasion for Senghor to re-ally his philosophy of culture with that of the French and its new Ministry of Cultural Affairs. In putting culture on display, the festival would, like the cultural centers of French West Africa, frame culture as a forum for dialogue. The event, Senghor argued, would constitute an originary encounter of civilizations whereby the artworks would reveal their deeper meaning, free for the first time of any intermediary such as the Western colonizer or specialist. In his prefatory remarks to the festival's program, Senghor framed the event by saying:

> Ce Festival n'est pas un vain étalage d'antiquaire. Il est une démonstration articulée de notre pensée la plus authentique, de notre culture la plus profonde... Participant, depuis toujours, mais toujours à distance et à personnes interposées, à l'édification de la Civilisation de l'Universel, l'Afrique, unie, réunie, offre à l'attente du monde, aux lieu et place d'une gigantesque panoplie, le sense de ses créations artistiques. ("Message" 12)

In later writing on what he called the "Fonction et signification" of FESMAN, Senghor would further expound on the festival's greater purpose, which, for him, was created "pour nouer les

dialogues d'où naissent les civilisations, en tout cas la *Culture*" (*Liberté* 58). The use of "Culture" as a proper noun reflects a universalism that had arisen through earlier debates surrounding the *mission civilisatrice* and its later successor, an inclusive understanding of multiple civilizations within a universal human heritage. The terms and notions of that debate, which had yielded "Culture" in the sense that Senghor implies here, were now being re-appropriated and staged for the purposes of the FESMAN event.

Malraux's presence at the festival set the stage of FESMAN as a triumphant moment for the notion of culture as a universal and unifying concept, a construct that would serve distinctly political purposes for both Malraux and Senghor. The Senegalese poet-president would make use of his profile to promote the country's role as a global leader in cultural production. Senghor would adapt earlier notions of national particularisms vis-à-vis a universal culture into his often cited dictum of "enracinement et ouverture," two notions chosen to represent what he described as the nation's devotion to its traditions and its willingness to participate in a worldwide cultural dialogue. Senghor would do much to nationalize the cultural production of his country, funding global tours for the national Théâtre Daniel Sorano, which had a theatrical troupe and national ballet performing in the style of traditional Senegalese dance. However, while performance of tradition seemed to play a central role in Senghor's vision of culture, the languages of that tradition did not. The government's immense sums accorded to the national cultural budget through what was called (in another element reminiscent of Malraux's Ministry) the Third Plan did little to reserve a place for African languages. This lack of attention to languages other than French had an especially strong impact on education, as primary schools of independent Senegal would teach almost exclusively in French, and still do (Castaldi 197-204). The nationalist initiatives of Senghor's Ministry of Culture would thus accord a privileged status to French as the

language of culture, in this way continuing the linguistic work begun by the French initiatives of L'Action Culturelle. Senghor's cultural policies also granted easier access to culture and its institutions to those with a greater command of the French language, thereby maintaining the close relationship between cultural production and a francophone elite.

From a contemporary perspective, the institutions resulting from Senghor's national policies have suffered from a diminished impact among the populations they were intended to serve. Today, the Théâtre National Daniel Sorano struggles to attract audiences, and must sometimes let entire seasons pass without generating a single theatrical production. The current state of this institution is due in part to the effect of the period of structural adjustment on national culture. When the World Bank and International Monetary Fund imposed liberalizing economic measures on Senegal, they also forced the national government to abandon much of its state funding for the arts. However, at least part of the cause of the national theater's contemporary woes lies in Senghor's early decisions in cultural policy. The elitism today associated with national theatrical productions in Senegal is also a result of linguistic challenges. Despite some attempts to produce, with mixed results, a few productions in Wolof, the company has largely opted to maintain, in its repertoire, the privileged place of the French language. This linguistic distance from a population that today sees itself as increasingly removed from the idea of a global *francophonie*, combined with the location of the Daniel Sorano Theater, in the expensive neighborhood of *Plateau*, an area difficult to access other than by car or taxi, has gradually rendered the institution irrelevant to a large part of today's Senegalese population.

Yet, while nationalist inceptions of Senegalese culture have been on the wane since independence, and this in spite of the efforts and rhetoric of two international Black World Arts Festivals (1966, 2010), vestiges of culture as defined and produced by L'Action Culturelle have

remained surprisingly relevant in certain aspects of regional and community theatrical production. Spaces of local cultural production and activity continue to play an important regulatory role among population groups seen as potentially troublesome. While in the days of French West Africa, the perceived, potentially restive group from the colonial administration's perspective was the rising African elite, the new focus of culture in contemporary Senegal is the country's youth population. Beginning in the 1970s, the Senegalese national government began to focus on gaining administrative control over informally organized football tournaments taking place around the urban area of Dakar. These efforts led to the creation of the Organisation nationale de coordination des activitiés de vacances, an institution that would soon channel youth activities into yearly events called the Nawetaan initiative. The word *nawetaan* ("summer" in Wolof) refers to the annual school vacations during which groups of young men and women are organized into sports competitions, educational outings and cultural events. The goal of the initiative is to promote among the nation's youth a sense of civic consciousness and moral fortitude, qualities that Senegalese political discourse of the 1970s and 80s often described as lacking in the country's youth population (Baller 380).

Figure 7: From a youth Nawetaan performance in the Yoff neighborhood.
The jury is seated to the left of the frame. Photo by author.

One key element of these contemporary culturally initiatives, which are organized locally by organizations called Associations Sportives et Culturelles (ASC), is the yearly theatrical competition. Like the other Nawetaan activities, these performances are seen as instilling among young Senegalese a sense of civic responsibility, which they put on display for what can often be a large crowd of youths and community members (Sow). Although they have a local impact, the events and *associations* are organized within a coordinated national network, with an ASC representing each neighborhood or town. Each year, a theme is announced nationally ("*la citoyenneté,*" for example, in 2014). The ASCs must then compose an original work based on that theme, and represent their own town or neighborhood in the initial rounds of the Nawetaan competition. As winners are decided, the competition continues and advances to the regional

level. Successful troupes will continue performing until they reach the national finals, which are organized in a different city each year.

In their form, the Nawetaan performances are something of a descendant of the former French cultural center iterations. They have adapted the jury evaluation system once used by administrators of the colonial institution. This time local leaders and cultural figures stand in as jury members and judge performances based on a list of set criteria. Like the *centre culturel* predecessors, these performances are judged by the "discipline" that performers show while on stage. They are also evaluated based on what jury members perceive as the overall authenticity of folkloric representations as well as the seamlessness with which creators have integrated the various required elements of the show into a cohesive narrative. Nawetaan performances are expected to reflect an element of local identity and custom while including in their overall composition at least one element of theater, poetry, folklore and dance. The performances tend to focus on folklore, as well as performed tributes to key figures in Senegalese history, a quality that aligns them with a longer tradition of Senegalese staging and representation that goes back to the William Ponty School and includes colonial depictions of social harmony and stability in a diverse and changing region.

The Nawetaan events depart from this history however in their use of Wolof, the language employed in all aspects of the performance, except, quite tellingly, the poetry section. To judge by the role of French in these performances, it appears to have comfortably maintained its status as the primary language of literary production in Senegal. Meanwhile, Wolof has taken the place of French in these shows as the language of mutual intelligibility. Indeed, it is the most widespread of what today are called the *langues nationales* of Senegal. The prominence of Wolof in these performances makes them immeasurably more impactful, at least from a local

perspective, and better attended, than the state-driven forms of theatrical culture, offered at the Théâtre National Daniel Sorano. Wolof has thus served, in a way that French never could, as a vehicle toward a greater democratization of culture throughout the nation, a phenomenon that has not emerged without considerable pushback from non-native Wolof-speaking communities who have often decried what they see as the gradual "Wolofization" of Senegalese society (O'Brien, "Shadow Politics").

Here, we have addressed the major historical forces and negotiations informing the ideological framing of the Senghor's pan-African cultural festival in 1966. The festival participated in a gradual redefining of the term culture, as well as an invigorated push, on the part of the state, toward more active involvement in culture and its local and national impact. Such a view of culture and of its function has been predicated on notions of the universalism of culture as a part of broader human heritage. However, we find that this particular view of universalism in West Africa is, in fact, the outcome of a history of colonial involvement in culture as a form of pedagogy and persuasion. Definitions of culture as more inclusive, or reflecting the possibility of the co-existence of several "civilizations," as the French would argue, served a markedly political purpose at the time it arose, as would later iterations adopted both in Fifth-Republic France and independent Senegal.

In the next chapter, we will turn our focus to how these debates surrounding the role of culture were staged and addressed within the theatrical program of FESMAN '66 and Panaf' '69. Even in the postcolonial context, the theatrical heritage of the Ponty School and the role of an African elite continue to emerge and trouble stage depictions of a now liberated African continent. Attracting equally adamant proponents and detractors, the FESMAN performers would find themselves at the heart of a debate whose stakes were no smaller than the place of art

and the writer in the administering of the many newly independent African states. These debates would center around opposing models of elitism and populism in cultural creation, a dichotomy brought to clear relief in the framing and stagings of both "first" pan-African World Black Arts Festivals, that of Dakar in 1966, along with its self-described opposite, that of Algiers in 1969.

Chapter 4: Defining Culture in the Political Sphere:

Theater at FESMAN '66 and Panaf' '69

In the late 1960s, the African continent would host within a period of three years two major international events aimed at presenting opposing views of the role of culture in the continent's decolonization process. For the first of these, Dakar's *Premier Festival Mondial des arts nègres* (FESMAN), in 1966, decolonization would be portrayed as marked by a cultural evolution within the continent and as well as by an overall harmony in diplomatic relations with the former colonizer. For the latter event, the *Premier Festival culturel panafricain* of Algiers in 1969 (or Panaf'), decolonization was seen as the promised result of a long-lasting and ongoing struggle against Western imperialist powers. True independence was yet to come for Panf', but seen as the future desired outcome of a direct confrontation with the colonizer on all fronts political, social and cultural. By title and purpose, both festivals would seek to instantiate a legitimate claim as the "first" global staging of an authentically African creative spirit in its primary, unmediated state. They would also constitute key political statements for two different visions for the newly independent continent's future.

The impact and stakes of FESMAN and Panaf', as dual and dueling visions of the role of culture in igniting and maintaining African independence, call for a look at the function of festivals, in content and form, as makers of new "worlds of meaning" in the postcolonial context (Mbembe 103). The festivals would hail the onset of a later phenomenon of festivalization in African arts, a development that lent to such events an increasingly determinate role in deciding which artists would receive funding and be deemed representative of their respective nations or cultures. They also highlight the role of staged historical narrative as a metacode, "a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be

transmitted" (White 5), in proposing, indeed compelling, new collective imaginings of the future. The festivals of Dakar and Algiers therefore prove to be deeply charged with political and social resonance as, led by leaders of different political movements, they sought to foster belief in and adherence to specific ways of perceiving the role of culture and the elite in a new political reality for the continent.

In scope and appearance, the form of the festival in these two examples is indeed consistent to what Baktin would describe as carnavalesque. However, unlike Bakhtin's notion of carnival, whereby the event enacts a temporary inversion of power relations, these festivals served to depict and enforce new power relations, thereby endeavoring to render them permanent. This marks the beginning in Postcolonial Africa of what Achille Mbembe has called the use of the grotesque and spectacular not merely as the purview of subversive, "non-official" forms, but also as "intrinsic to all systems of domination and to the means by which those systems are confirmed or deconstructed" (102). And although the festivals temporarily suspend real time to propose a new temporality and space, they do not quite constitute the "time out of time" suggested by Alessandro Falassi. Rather, these particular events seep their respective enactments of culture as deeply as possible into political space and time, in effect taking temporality and politics as the very matter by which to foster the new "worlds of meaning" crafted into their very framework.

In each of these festivals, space and temporality operated according to the demands and stakes of the event. In the case of FESMAN, representations of historical time were bent to the purpose of tying the cultural past and future of newly independent African countries to the tenets of Senghor's Negritude ideology. This vision of culture portrayed the young nations as deeply reliant on the leadership and vision of an educated, elite class of governing technocrats. The

Dakar festival thus focused less on the need for a radical rupture with the colonial past than on fostering a sentiment of national and pan-African solidarity behind the continent's newly minted governing class, the individuals now expected to lead their nations through a cultural and economic development of sorts that they hoped would resemble Western notions of modernity.

It was in part in reaction to the supposedly elitist and "bookish" atmosphere of FESMAN that the Algiers festival would be mounted three years later (Sellin 202). The location of the event, in a country that, unlike Senegal, had obtained its independence through a protracted violent conflict with the former colonial power, reflected its revolutionary agenda. If FESMAN would adopt Senghor's Negritude and its position of pacification and engagement with the former colonizers as the new African ideal, Panaf' took a very different approach, more akin to that of its *grand prix* laureate, the nation of Guinea, whose leader, Sékou Touré had famously exhorted his compatriots to respond to Charles De Gaulle's appeal to adhere to a new French Constitution under the aegis of a *Communauté Française* with a defiant *no*. The cultural outlook of countries like Guinea, which, due to economic sanctions imposed by the French remained in the throes of its decolonizing struggles, favored a collective approach to performance and the arts. This was in opposition to Senghor's appreciation of artistic creation, which privileged the status of the creator as a representative of an inherent "réalité ontologique africaine" (Senghor "Message," 12). More important, the Panaf' approach to culture was tied to the unshaking commitment, expressed by the event and its organizers, to a fervently dissident response to all forms of European dominance, past and present. What was at stake for both events in this implicit contest to facilitate what could be called the "first" pan-African festival was the right to claim the universalizing function of culture in the Malrucian sense so as to be able to moor to it their own political cause.

This chapter explores the role of festival in carving out new political and societal visions within the sphere of culture. We will address the specific cases of Senghor's festival in Dakar in 1966 and the later 1969 inception in Algiers to draw out modes by which content and form combine to compel society toward a specific political vision of the "imagined community" of the nation (Anderson). The stakes at hand for both festivals are particularly close to the surface on the performance stage, and, as was the case in the earlier example of the William Ponty School, the so-called *arts du temps* would prove critical to these new framings of an emergent African society.

Theater's didactic potential would provide both festivals with a practical way to represent to audiences preferred ways of situating history's relevance as an indicator of new potentialities for the continent's future post-independence. These functions of festival come to the fore in each event's choice of stage works. Here, we will examine as representative of their respective events' political message, *La Tragédie du Lat Dior*, by Amadou Cissé Dia, which was performed at FESMAN, and *L'Exil d'Albouri*, by Cheikh Aliou Ndao, performed at Panaf'. In highlighting the means by which these festivals instantiate a certain form of group identity as inevitable and always already present within the continent's history and contemporary political struggles, this chapter's purpose is not to criticize the political visions in dispute immediately following decolonization, but rather to dissect the means by which institutions such as festivals seek to hide the narrative and framing work invested in promoting certain, ideologically charged visions of nationhood while eliding others.

Festivals of Nations

Just as notions of culture employed at the 1966 FESMAN event did not first appear in Dakar, but emerged from an historical context of transnational exchange and negotiations of interests throughout the colonial period (see chapter 3), the festival form as employed at FESMAN and Panaf' had roots in an important, earlier iteration. The Paris-based event called the Theater of Nations has been largely forgotten in scholarship on twentieth-century performance. Nonetheless, it had a considerable impact on theatrical approaches and production on a global scale during its years of existence and beyond (Aslan, Peslin). The festival created a performative form through which to give voice to an expanding group of national cultures then claiming their legitimacy on the cultural stage amidst calls for decolonization and self-rule for the colonized territories of Africa, Asia and elsewhere. The event, founded in 1954 with the support of cultural impresario Claude Planson, took place annually at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt of central Paris (Planson). Starting out as the Festival international d'art dramatique de la ville de Paris, it was renamed the Théâtre des Nations in 1957 and took on the ambitious objective of transforming Paris into an international crossroads of theatrical performance (Peslin 19).

The Theater of Nations set an important precedent in its simultaneous display of stage production and national heritage. At the festival, one could discover, side-by-side, productions from Europe's premier avant-garde directors as well as renditions of traditional ceremonies or customs from regions that were seen as otherwise neglected by contemporaneous understandings of the theater. These included a wide, diverse range of performances with works by the Royal Shakespeare Company along with presentations of folklore by troupes from India, Israel and Iran. Odette Aslan, in her her 2009 study of the event, which she calls "le plus complexe et le plus singulier de tous les festivals institués en France au cours du XXe siècle," summarizes the

place of the nation within the festival as a performance-sign in its own right, leading to a form of global tourism that provided spectators with a panoply of nationalist performance forms from throughout the globe: "Plutôt que des spectacles ou des troupes, [le festival] conviait des pays, au point de s'enorgueillir du nombre de drapeaux progressivement plantés sur sa mappe-monde (7)."

The presentation, through performed culture, of such a world map would constitute one of the Parisian event's key attractions. It was also among the first global institutions to endeavor a presentation, on the same stage, of works of drama from European creators (some of whom, such as Peter Brook, or Julian Beck of The Living Theater, would go on to establish long and illustrious careers as the leading stage artists and directors of their generation) alongside performance forms typically conceived of as pre-, or para-theatrical, and habitually associated with the realm of tradition or ritual. Through its programming and public debates, the Theater of Nations would attempt to demonstrate the universality of theater, by positing that such so-called traditional performances belonged on equal footing with the leading dramatists and directors of Europe and America. As Odette Aslan states, "Le Théâtre des Nations donna à voir d'autres cultures mais invita le public à regarder, à écouter autrement qu'avec une curiosité pour 'l'exotisme' les balancements répétitifs d'une tribue africaine ou les sonorités perçantes de musiques orientales (8)."

In its attempts to shift from a euro-centric view of theatrical representation to what its organizers - and particularly Claude Planson - saw as a universalist approach, this festival would speak to a number of topics that had been long discussed in the context of African theatre as produced in the French colonies. One such topic was the potential usefulness, for the festival and for African performers and scholars, of an anthropologically inspired, functionalist understanding of the role of theater in society. In 1960, the festival made a special feature of its

first African participants, with the invitation of troupes from Mali and the Ivory Coast. The program included an academic debate with the participation of such central figures as Senegalese writers Bakary Traoré, Alioune Diop (of *Présence Africaine*) and Maurice Sonar Senghor (Director of the *Théâtre National Daniel Sorano* in Dakar). The discussion also included Claude Planson of the festival's organizing committee, and Charles Béart, the former director of the William Ponty School, who by then had established a reputation for himself as a leading figure in the promotion and development of *théâtre noir* in Francophone Africa, by virtue of his role in facilitating the early performances at the William Ponty School and before that at the *Ecole de Bingerville* in the Ivory Coast. Béart's remarks at the debate reflect early colonial concerns for African authenticity on stage: "Le colonisateur n'a ni 'importé' ni 'introduit' le théâtre en Afrique. La colonisation n'a fait que précipiter une évolution. En la déviant et en la faussant par l'imposition de ses critères occidentaux qui lui retirèrent spontanéité et liberté, donc authenticité. Et le théâtre africain s'est construit sur les fondations de ces formes importées du théâtre" (qtd. in Peslin 178).

On the other hand, Traoré's understanding of the origins and authenticity of *théâtre noir* was more fluid. His remarks reflect the functionalist perspective that would inform his writing on African theater while also enforcing the connections he continually made between an aesthetic and anthropological outlook on staged performance:

> On peut dire que le théâtre africain remonte aussi loin que les civilisations africaines. Dans la mesure où le théâtre est un fait social, mieux, une représentation sociale, il est exclusivement lié à la vie de tous les jours et devient une manifestation quotidienne. De ce fait, il traduit les émotions, les espoirs, les joies, les peines de l'homme. C'est ce qu'on pourrait dire pour caractériser d'une manière générale le théâtre négro-africain. (qtd. in Peslin 179)

This notion of theater as *fait social* was central to the festival's programming and philosophy. Theater was not to be seen as an exclusively Western phenomenon, nor were the contributions of

invited African performers to be conceived as folklore. When Maurice Sonar Senghor suggested in the course of the debate that workshops be created to help young African authors create in accordance with their own folkloric customs, founder Planson reacted immediately to the mere mention of the term folklore. As Aslan explains, at the time of the event, "[Planson] ne veut pas qu'on parle de folklore ni qu'on occidentalise les pratiques africaines. Pour lui, les récits des Griots, c'est du théâtre, les chants et les danses aussi" (126).

With respect to the later pan-African theater festivals, the Theater of Nations would, in all, prove constitutive as a precedent in that it provided a stage that served to place African traditions and performance forms at an equal level with European stage works. In this, it made use of the universalizing rhetoric of culture then already on the rise with the ongoing work of André Malraux and his Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Malraux and De Gaulle were themselves enlisted in the festival's logistics, personally welcoming the African heads of state the year the event highlighted contributions from African nations. The festival would also couple theatrical performance with that of a staged performance of the nation, making staged depictions of tradition and narrative representative of the nations from which they hailed. Lastly, the Theater of Nations would employ festival as a means of redefining history and indicating a way forward into both a cultural and political future. This temporal work of festivals is well highlighted by one of Claude Planson's contribution to the discussion on *théâtre noir*:

> Voici que les conditions changent. Des peuples entiers découvrent leur indépendance. En même temps, ils éprouvent le besoin de se voir au passé, de se connaître une tradition; et c'est aussi pour mieux se protéger un avenir. La présence, cette année, de troupes noires du Mali et de la Côte d'Ivoire au Théâtre des Nations, témoignera qu'il est d'autres accès à la dignité humaine que ceux que l'occident a mis des siècles à établir. (qtd. in Peslin 177)

Central to the Theater of Nations was its determinate staging of an historical past, serving as a vehicle for troupes and nations to "se voir au passé," as Planson said, in order to forge all the better a shared, desired future. The fact that this new staging of national custom took place alongside the

most prominent figures of what would become the new theatrical avant-garde of the West indicates an additional festive crossroads in the emergence of contemporary stage sensibilities in Africa and Europe.

Framing the festival event

Written accounts from both FESMAN and Panaf' attest to the oppositional nature of these two events, especially of the Algiers festival with regard to its Senegalese predecessor. One observer would characterize Dakar as promoting a "bookish" atmosphere, with a focus on an elitist approach to culture (Sellin 202). This aspect of the event was fostered not only through the central role of the festival's academic conference, but also through the close affiliation between cultural production and heads of state, most notably with the visible role played by host president Léopold Senghor and guest of honor André Malraux, whose mere presence and participation did not portend a radical break with past colonial structures. For festival attendees, the success and message of the event was tied to the tenets of Negritude itself, and so criticizing the festival was seen as criticizing Senghor's very philosophy (Cassirer 182). In interviews and commentaries many of the Anglophone African authors known to be highly critical of Senghor's vision were reserved in their participation and criticism. In the conference discussion on African theater, Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright who famously undercut Senghor's view of Black African creation by stating "a tiger does not claim his tigritude," (Soyinka *Burden,* 141) contented himself among arguments of the role and function of Black African theater in the pre-colonial past and postcolonial present, to give a summary assessment of Nigerian theatrical production, which he saw as thriving, following the end of British rule (Soyinka *Théâtre moderne*). FESMAN was intended to mark the ascension of Negritude as the leading ideological frame through which to imagine the future of an independent African continent, yet throughout the event, as one foreign observer notes, "a nagging question remained in the minds of many participants

on the validity of Negritude" (Cassirer 182). Such doubts led in part to what the later Algiers festival would declare as the death of Negritude, that is the staged demonstration of its irrelevance and impotence as an ideological model (Ischinger 23). Indeed, invited participants from the nation of Guinea, who were seen as exemplary in as much as they took home the festival's overall *grand prix* in the arts, took the event as an opportunity to depict Negrtitude as an ailing movement and a deeply colonizing factor in African understandings of the role of culture. Panaf' would enlist a younger generation of francophone writers and thinkers, such as Marcien Towa and Stanislas Adotevi, to its anti-Senghorean cause (Lindfors 5).

To further inscribe anti-Negritude rhetoric to the framing of the Panaf' event, Ahmed Sékou Touré, president of Guinea, would mark the importance of the festival with a special dedicated volume of his monthly political pamphlet, *Révolution Démocratique Africaine*. The volume was entitled "Premier Festival Culturel Panafricain d'Alger," and took on a number of themes addressed elsewhere in Touré's writings and poetry, which Dominic Thomas describes as "easily reducible to their political message and often represent[ing] mere adaptations of his political rhetoric" (33). Touré begins this pamphlet with a statement on the significance of choosing Algiers as the site of a true, first festival of pan-African culture: "Alger, qui symbolisait, à un degré avancé, la volonté et l'action assimilatrices de l'impérialisme à l'égard des peuples colonisés, eut alors, malgré le fardeau de la domination politique et économique, de l'oppression culturelle et mentale, l'audace de relever le défi" (7). This framing of the location of the festival then serves as a foil to Touré's main target of criticism, aside from colonialism, which was an elitist approach to African culture: "Si la culture est toujours de source et de portée sociales, elle est, parfois, dans certains régimes monopolisée par une minorité sociale qui s'en sert pour mystifier, dominer et exploiter la majorité du Peuple. C'est le cas de la culture d'élite qui s'oppose à la culture de masse, au savoir et au pouvoir du Peuple exercés démocratiquement dans les régimes progressistes" (11). Touré takes clear aim here at the impact of Senghor's Negritude on understandings of culture in the African context: "Il n'y a ni culture noire, ni

culture blanche, ni culture jaune... La négritude est donc un concept faux, une arme irrationnelle favorisant l'irrationnel qui fonde la discrimination raciale, arbitrairement exercée sur les Peuples d'Afrique, d'Asie et sur les hommes de couleur en Amérique et en Europe" (12). The Guinean leader draws his own difference with Senghor's model of cultural production by insisting that it must operate within and through the revolutionary struggles of those still in search of their liberation. He closes his message with a poem, in which he appeals to "le littéraire, l'architecte, l'historien,/ Le musicien ou l'artiste..." to become, "Une incarnation authentique, mieux un 'contenant'/ De ce qui le contient et qui seul peut le valoriser/ Dans l'Espace et le Temps: La Société et l'Histoire" (22). Touré's critique of Négritude and attribution of the title of "first" pan-African festival to Algiers, represents not only an indictment of Senghor but also of the Dakar festival with which he was so closely associated.

Among the clearest narrative framings of these two festivals were the documentary films that each produced. *The First World Festival of Negro Arts*, a short documentary on the FESMAN event by American filmmaker William Greaves in many ways reflects the narrative and performance strategies used by the festival to convey its particular message and tone. The black-and-white film maintains a steady, controlled pace, using footage from the FESMAN event. The images are narrated by a smooth and calm voice, which reads a text by American poet Langston Hughes. Hughes was present at the Dakar event and at an early part of the film we see him standing at one of the capital's beaches, contemplating the Atlantic. "What is my name," the voice inquires repeatedly, placing that singular voice in the perspective of a new, emerging subject, that of independent Africa, as it discovers and reveals itself for the first time through the Dakar festival. Hughes's text here reflects a recurring theme in FESMAN, that of Africa as a subjective and largely introspective voice, slowly awaking, but also looking to others to help it to define its own subjectivity. Engelbert Mveng expresses a similar idea in his contribution to the festival's conference:

> Voilà pourquoi [l'Afrique] s'est adressée à vous, spécialistes du monde entier pour vous écouter parler d'elle. Depuis longtemps, depuis des siècles, vous la regardez, vous tournez autour d'elle, vous la pesez à la balance de vos méthodes scientifiques, vous l'analysez en laboratoire et entre vous, vous communiquez en un langage secret, avec des éphithètes savantes, qui bourdonnent à ses oreilles. L'Afrique se doute qu'on parle d'elle mais elle a peine à saisir ne fût-ce que son propre nom, à travers la forêt épaisse des vocables étrangers.
>
> Aujourd'hui, elle se tourne vers vous; elle vous demande: 'Que dites-vous de moi?' Elle vous demande: 'Montrez-moi mon propre visage découpé en clichés, en croquis, en tableaux. Que je me découvre dans le miroir de vos yeux, car comment pourrais-je parler de ma beauté sans m'être jamais regardée à distance? (qtd. in Silva 117)

The process of self-discovery depicted in this film also takes place through the individuals - the artists, writers, and performers - that made up the festival's program. The film channels the new African subjectivity, now speaking through Hughes's voiceover, through the names of the continent's new nations, responding to the repeated question of "What is my name," with the response "My name is Benin, Ethiopia, Monomotapa. My name is Africa." Greaves's documentary places strong emphasis on the contribution and presence of a select group of individuals. The American filmmaker features, through much of the film, his own compatriots, with multiple shots of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Marpessa Dawn. The film implies, as we see each of these high-profile guests perusing through the exhibit of Léopold Senghor's Musée Dynamique, that the creation of this emerging African subjectivity was to take place through the participation and spectatorship of the individuals driving its culture.

A further point of correspondence between the festival and Greaves's film is the visual and narrative representation of disparate nations largely by their heads of state, not by their respective troupes, and even less so by the masses gathered at the festival. The men leading the nations of the event are depicted in the film as benevolent unifiers of a grateful people. They do not speak, but are praised by the narrative voice, which is symbolically portrayed as that of the African continent. One focal moment of the film is the mise-en-scène of the arrival of King Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, at which point surrounding attendees look eagerly up to the sky as the man who many saw as a living god touches down in his state aircraft. Similar honors are attributed to the festival's figurehead,

Léopold Senghor, when, during footage of an outdoor performance the camera zooms in on his presiding figure as Hughes's narrative voice states: "Let the poet, who also bears my name, Léopold Senghor, president of Senegal, let him and his countrymen provide a place at this festival for all who seek to know me." Still from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, the voice declares, while the viewer sees groups of elated masses running through the streets, "Let joy fill the streets. Gather round. Gather round. Let young and old join in. A festival is born." As we may surmise from this film, this particular festival is born and proffered to the masses. It is not born *of* the masses, an idea that will be expressed in later framings of the Panaf' event.

This is not to say that the masses are not present in this film. They indeed are, but appear to exist for the pleasure and approval of a presiding cultural elite. Greaves, at one point of the film, includes footage of ensemble performances by invited national troupes. In a continuous montage, he shows, one-by-one, short clips from their productions as performed on the stage of the Daniel Sorano Theater, built by Senghor specifically to host this event. There is no sound and so we do not hear the stage performances as the images pass from one to the next. Rather, the visual progression is accompanied by the resonant echo of a continuous applause, whose sound places it in the halls of a proscenium theater, like that of Sorano. Greaves does not depict the performance ambiance of a FESMAN open to the broader public. Instead, this representation of FESMAN reveals an event catered in its format and content to the well-heeled spectators able to obtain or afford a ticket in the president's new Western-style, national theater.

The diegetic progression of the film, as well as the structure of its narrative, reflect the very aspects of the FESMAN event that later critics would find so objectionable, particularly with regard to the masses and mass culture. And the poetic narrative voice adds to this favored elitism, depicting the voice of the African continent through the subjectivity of an individual poet, relegating the broader population to a secondary role. The film, just like the festival (as many would say), indeed glorifies the place of African art in the world, but in its narrative it also reinforces, indeed deepens, a

divide within the African population between the elite and the masses. The narrative framing of the festival may indeed be presented as innovative in its establishment of a new relationship to borrowed, previously established Western forms - ethnographic discourse being one of them - but is not, to the eyes of critics, conducive to the kind of revolutionary cry seen as sorely needed in African culture and performance.

By its location and programming, Panaf would distinguish itself from its Negritude inspired predecessor, introducing a vision of pan-Africanism that tellingly included the cultures of North Africa and the Maghreb. For Senghor, such regions were reflective of what he called "l'arabité," a culturally and ontologically distinct form of production that was therefore seen as separate from the tenets of Negritude *sensu stricto* (Senghor *Foundations*, 83). Panaf, on the other hand, organized the core of the event around the political urgency of the anti-colonialist struggle. The festival served to remind attendees that this struggle was not over, but continued to rage on violently in the Portuguese territories, where Angolans, Mozambicans and Cape Verdeans were engaged in a bloody war for independence. Featured throughout the Panaf' event were the contributions of the nation of Guinea, the one African nation to decline Charles De Gaulle's invitation by a 1958 referendum to remain under French control with a number of concessions toward local self-rule. In terms of cultural policy, Guinea's president, Sékou Touré had implemented measures that, to some extent, resembled those of Senghor, including the founding of a national ballet. Unlike Senghor, however, Touré choose consciously to grant theatrical works - seen as a Western form imported through the complicity of an African elite - a secondary role to the form of dance. He would have assistance in doing so from Senegalese choreographer Fodéba Keïta, a former student of William Ponty who would create the *Ballets Africains* and tour the world with his traditionally inspired dance works (Cohen). Dance, especially in collective forms and creations, was the preferred form of Touré at the festival. He saw it as corresponding more neatly with the Guinean efforts to protect and maintain

what could be called authentically African, that which, unlike staged dramaturgy, was present and thriving not because of colonial presence, but in spite of it.

American filmmaker William Klein's documentary film on Panaf', called *Le Festival Panafricain d'Alger*, adopts several strategies to reflect the distinctly revolutionary tone of the event in question. This documentary does not employ voiceover to narrate the event, but rather a frenetic montage whose narrative through line is not the event itself, but the anti-colonial themes animating it. The film opens with a Namibian freedom song, which, although not directly tied to the festival, sets the tone of the documentary. Rather than focusing on key musicians and writers seen as presiding over the festival, Klein's camera gives us street scenes of riotous mobs of people in celebration as they surround parading dancers. There is a section of the film dedicated to *fantasia*, or cavalcade, displaying armed Maghrebi horsemen as they charge through a desert scene in a striking display of valor and skill. In Klein's film, the festival participants speak, and especially those with a revolutionary message. He includes long interviews with Cap Verdean resistance leader Amilcar Cabral, who at this time, as head of his Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAICG), was engaged in a violent struggle with Portuguese authorities. Cabral briefly describes the history of his resistance group and explains that they face a European power whose arms are provided to them by NATO. Outrage over such neo-colonial practices is highlighted throughout Klein's film through intermittent archival images of colonial repression and violence, accompanied by framing key terms and quotations, such as "L'Afrique n'existe pas," from the continent's last remaining colonial dictator, António de Oliveira Salazar. We also find flash images of words and phrases, such as "L'Apartheid," "L'Assimilation," and provocations such as "La culture européenne substituée aux incultures africaines," interspersed with images of colonial symbols and figureheads of the already emergent Françafrique, representing France's continued efforts to maintain political and economic dominance over its former colonies. Images of Jacques Foccart, as the embodiment of this neo-colonialism, feature prominently in the film. Another French bureaucrat featured

prominently in Klein's montage is André Malraux. In a speech given by Stanislas Adotevi on the failings and inadequacies of Negritude, Klein accompanies the Beninese philosopher's denunciation of Senghor's approach to African culture as aiming to "faire oublier le présent" with the image of the poet-president hand-in-hand with the French Minister of Cultural Affairs. The alliance formed symbolically between the two *hommes de culture* in the framework of FESMAN is openly denounced in the form of Panaf', as Klein reflects in his rendering of the event.

Indeed, the negation of Senghor's vision of culture was one of the main underlying objectives of Panaf', as is clear from the enthusiastic reception of Stanislas Adotevi's speech at the event's conference. Adotevi, one of the most vocal critics of Senghorean thought, would later write the most impactful screed against Negritude, *Négritude et négrologues*. "La négritude a échoué," Adotevi declares to a packed audience in Klein's film, "parce qu'en reniant ses origines pour nous livrer pieds et poings liés aux ethnologues et anthropographes elle est devenue hostile au développement culturel de l'Afrique." To judge by Klein's documentary, Adotevi's statement was met with thunderous applause by a room of delegates from the many attending countries. "L'approche éternitaire du nègre négritique," he continues, "n'est pas une démarche métaphysique, mais une démarche politique. La négritude actuelle fixe et coagule à des fins inavouables les théories les plus usées sur les traditions africaines dont elle prétend être le reflet littéraire." Klein includes a large section of Adotevi's speech in his documentary, where the philosopher also criticizes Negritude's "quête forcée des traditions," its tendency to lead toward an inevitable "banale recherche d'exotiscisme," and its link to a vain literary branch, in a neo-colonial context wherein cultural production must take place in lockstep and tandem with the ongoing revolutionary struggle.

In Klein's film, the festival takes shape not as culture for culture's sake, but rather as an incitement to engage in direct action against neo-colonial practices. Beyond simply provoking the audience to react to an ever present colonial past, the film allies itself to the festival's cause by tying African culture to the vision of an urgent pan-African cultural and political revolution, as expressed

in the film's final statement, in bold red characters, that "La culture africaine sera révolutionnaire ou ne sera pas africaine." This was the meaning and function of culture at Panaf', tied to its relationship with the revolutionary movements of the continent. To achieve the most complete vision possible of such revolutionary culture, it was essential that Panaf' depict itself as the "first" true expression of Panafrican creativity, and thus take aim at the universalizing model of Senghor and Malraux.

Lat Dior, the unifier, on the FESMAN stage

In the theater presented at FESMAN and Panaf, the ideological debates surrounding the events and their implications on culture as a concept came to life on stage. Theater arrived at the festivals with a long cultural history that each event was left to parse through. One of the stakes of this heritage lay in determining for each festival's own purpose to what extent the stage arts, as taught at institutions like the William Ponty School, came with an inherent colonial imprint. FESMAN participants largely attempted to avoid such labels by associating its stage works with a pre-colonial theatrical practice that fulfilled a social function above all, and had done so long before the arrival of imported European forms. This was the argument of the foremost Senegalese theater scholar, Bakary Traoré, who would argue that, "Si nous essayons d'appréhender le théâtre non dans sa définition mais dans ses résultats, nous dirons que le théâtre est l'expression de l'homme, de sa sensibilité, de ses expériences. Il est en tous temps et en tous lieux, le reflet de la psychologie et des conduites des hommes" (525). This universalist view of the role of theater, focused on the result rather than the provenance of forms, permitted Traoré to adopt at FESMAN and throughout his career a functionalist approach inspired by earlier anthropological work on ritual. Traoré tended to cite the works of Griaule and Mauss, who in their study of African customs, sought to reveal the underlying function of the practices and

rituals they observed (526-7). Traoré's, definition of theater is constructed to accommodate a broad view of the place of the stage in everyday life, and it is in such terms that he describes the function of African theater: "De ces symboles populaires, il (l'homme) a fait un ensemble rayonnant d'humanité, le théâtre. Dès lors le théâtre négro-africain cherche à traduire 'la totalité des manifestations humaines de la vie" (533). Theater in the African context represented for Traoré a form of progression from one instance of theatrical activity, what he called "théâtre de transformation," and saw as "germes de théâtre," to a second example that he called "du véritable théâtre, dont les fonctions sont parfois encore réligieuses, mais tendent à prendre une autre finalité, la solidarité ou le maintien des traditions" (533).

The purpose of theater for Traoré was primarily social in that it served to demonstrate and maintain norms and a social order. This would make of theater a very useful tool for the task that lay ahead of the technocrats of the independent African nations, men who saw their mission as leading the continent to prosperity while maintaining a manageable social order. In this spirit, both FESMAN and Panaf' would employ stagings of historical time as performed instantiations of their visions of the future. If either festival could enlist to its cause collective memories of one of the continent's legendary heroes, it would constitute a considerable victory in its move toward either a Negritude-inspired message of pacification with the former colony and unity among African nations in the case of FESMAN, or, in the case of Panaf', a vision of broader pan-African unity in the continued armed struggle against not only colonialism, but also neocolonialist practices seen as thwarting African cultural development.

The Senegalese contribution to FESMAN's theatrical program, *Les derniers jours de Lat Dior*, a tragedy and historical play by Amadou Cissé Dia, reflects in its content and performance the political stakes of the wider cultural event. Dia's own background speaks to the role of the

elite in producing the new cultural landscape of an independent Senegalese nation. A former student of the renowned William Ponty School, his educational pedigree placed him among a new class of writers and politicians. Men such as Dia and Assane Seck participated as elite *hommes de culture* in the cultural production of the country as well as in the stewardship of the state and its cultural policy. Like Senghor, Dia, would go on to a lifelong career in government. Also like his poet-president, Dia would portray revolutionaries rather than behave as one, and even his staging of a legendary dissident at FESMAN tends to focus on the role leaders play in fostering unity rather than in breaking with the status quo. In the FESMAN production, it was Lat Dior the unifier, more than the dissident, that audiences would gather to see, a message that resonated clearly in a context wherein leaders found themselves expected to maintain order in the context of drastic social and political changes.

The performance of *Lat Dior* reflects the influences of form that Dia had inherited from a transnational theatrical heritage. The play's staging differed from that of the festival's other performances in that it was not presented in the proscenium of the National Theater, but in the large Stade des Amitiés. The outdoor performance included musical interludes with dancing, and characters galloping across the large, open stage on horseback. Intended as a foundational epic of the Senegalese nation, the play, in its combination of music, dance and drama, was indeed what had come to be known as *théâtre total*, an approach that, in the Senegalese context, had been long associated with the theatrical productions of Dia's old Ponty School and the later French *centres culturels*. This tendency toward a *théâtre total* in this work also reveals an affinity between the festival production of 1966 and the by then renowned stagings of the Theater of Nations festival in Paris (Aslan 8, Peslin 181). Correspondence between Dia and French stage director Raymond Hermantier in fact reveals that Dia had intended, with the

encouragement of Léopold Senghor, to submit his play for consideration for the Theater of Nations program following the performance at FESMAN (Pasquini, annex).

Dia's play also makes use of an historical narrative well known to Senegalese audiences, contributing to its transmission with the first stage production to tell the tale of a legendary national hero. The text would in fact be the first of several Senegalese stage narratives of the resistance struggle of Lat Dior, or Lat Joor Ngoone Latiir Joop, who is remembered in Senegal as a great resistor of colonial rule, as well as the unifier of the two major kingdoms in power in the region, Cayor and Baol at the moment of French military engagement (Bâ, M'Bengue). Lat Dior's eventual rule over both kingdoms led him to become the Damel-Teigne, a contraction of two terms for monarch, and this role secured his place in contemporary Senegalese memory as one of the founding fathers of the nation (Diouf 157-9). But he is far from the only such foundational figure of the Senegalese nation, and it is the task of Dia's play to place Lat Dior's resistance narrative within a nationalist constellation of fellow founding fathers in such a way as to instantiate the notion of an inevitable Senegalese nationalist movement forged in the frictional and at times antagonistic contact between these major figures. To achieve this, Dia employs performance as a pedagogical tool - much as had been done in his student days at William Ponty - to allow FESMAN spectators to invest belief in the historical presentation of an always already present sentiment of Negritude identity taking shape around the new political borders of the independent continent.

Dia thus depicts Lat Dior's interactions among and relationship with those who would later become, like the Damel-Teigne, the foundational historical figures of a nascent Senegalese nationalism. The first of these is the General Louis Faidherbe, whose role is that of a representative of colonial expansion in the region, but whose contributions are nonetheless

commemorated as central and generative of a contemporary national identity. In contemporary commemorative practices, depictions and performances of the French general have long played a central role in popular representations of the nation's history (De Jong, "Shining"). In the context of Dia's play, the author reckons with this heritage by portraying the relationship between the general and Lat Dior as one of mutual respect, though deeply antagonistic. Indeed, historically, the "peaceful victories" to which later colonial officials would refer were also gained through Lat Dior's own political maneuvers (Delavignette 101). Although ultimately defeated, he was a keen strategist, using his alliances with the French to obtain victories over local foes, and breaking these same alliances once he saw that they no longer served his interests. This approach made it exceedingly difficult for the French to secure the region for the free flow of goods and trade, an endeavor described as originating from a desire to "civilize" the region.

On stage, Dia seeks to reconcile the role of Lat Dior and Faidherbe in the constitution of what would later become the Senegalese nation. In so doing, it would be necessary to validate Faidherbe's contributions to such a heritage while recognizing the ambiguity of his status as a military force for the European colonizer. Dia's depiction of the historical work that goes into the forging of the Senegalese nation highlights this ambiguity while, for viewers and readers of his play, articulating the contradictory forces and ideas at work in the creation of a later Senegalese identity. His staged encounter endeavors to do this by first reversing the patriarchal relation that once characterized portrayals of the colonial encounter at the Ponty school, where staged historical interactions between leaders such as Béhanzin and Capitaine Péroz were marked by an intellectual and moral imbalance favoring the French. Dia makes an important modification to what had become a common theme in African history plays - that of the

encounter between French and African military leaders - by recasting it as one of mutual respect, full of potential for productive collaboration.

Faidherbe is first presented in conference with his Lieutenant, to whom he describes the fruits and future objectives of his labor in the region: "Le Djoloff enfin pacifié! Le Sine et le Saloum en paix! Le Walo également pacifié!... Partout règne un calme relatif, mais suffisant pour nous permettre de mener à bien notre dessein, notre grand dessein de créer une Sénégambie hautement développée" (26). The general's vision for the future of this region is given in terms that would ring true for the contemporary audience of the FESMAN event, many of whom were charged to enact such *développement* in their own respective countries. "Elle (la région) bénéficierait d'écoles laïques, d'un Service de santé efficace, d'une agriculture et d'un élevage prospères! Elle bénéficierait surtout d'un chemin de fer qui serait l'artère nourricière de ce pays" (26)! Faidherbe's attempt to establish a railway from Dakar to Thiès is to this day among the most present historical episodes and conflicts in popular remembrances of the history of Senegal. The confrontation between French forces and Lat Dior is taught to Senegalese schoolchildren nationally and commemorated with a popular song of what Lat Dior is said to have responded to Faidherbe, "Malaw," Lat Dior's horse, "n'a pas vu les rails," in resistance to the general's plans for the region. By evoking the incident, Dia is foregrounding the conflict between these two historical figures, but not before staging a Faidherbe whose intentions, though colonial in nature, were designed for the benefit of the region and its inhabitants.

But Dia's depiction of Faidbherbe has the primary purpose of establishing Lat Dior as a deciding factor in the political and economic climate of the region in his day. After enumerating his many plans for the Senegambia, Faidherbe gives in to a respectful exasperation over the hold Lat Dior continues to have over the success or failure of his project. "Et tout cela, encore une

fois, tout cela risque d'être anéanti par un seul homme: Lat Dior" (26)! The general then goes into an explanation of the ways in which the Damel-Teigne has proved a decisive and untamable figure throughout French military operations, forcing the general to conquer regions pre-emptively lest they decide to become allies of Lat Dior, at which point they would become an uncontrollable force. The general states that, although he had been able to establish a peace agreement with the resistance leader, "Lat Dior est toujours présent, partout présent, utilisant nos propres méthodes de guérilla... Il suffit qu'il apparaisse pour que les tiédos, comme l'herbe sèche, s'embrasent; il suffit qu'il leur parle pour qu'ils reprennent le combat" (26-7).

Yet despite the frustration that his military counterpart clearly causes him, Faidherbe has an unshakeable respect and admiration for Lat Dior's valor and skill, stating "Et le paradoxe, Lieutenant, le paradoxe, c'est que je ne pourrai jamais haïr cet homme! Je l'estimerai toujours" (27)! Furthermore, he will not allow others to speak of him in disparaging or racist terms. The lieutenant serves as the provoking force in this regard, in one of several moments of the play written to taunt the nationalist sentiments of those in the FESMAN audience. For the lieutenant, Lat Dior "est une sorte de paladin donquichottesque... qui aurait la ridicule ambition de 'défendre son sol,' le 'patrimoine de ses ancêtres,' comme si un nègre barbare pouvait nourrir pareils sentiments" (27)! The general reprimands his inferior: "Je ne puis admettre que tu insultes ces hommes! Je les respecte et les estime comme je respecte et estime tout adversaire valeureux, quelle que soit sa race" (27)! The scene serves to dissociate Faidherbe symbolically from the racist discourses - those of the civilizing mission, be it through "assimilation" or "association" - that were in fact behind justifications and understandings of the colonial conquest.

Dia's gesture in this is not designed merely to exonerate an historical figure from colonial atrocities, although that is in fact one result of his depiction, and one that gives a concise

illustration of what led to later critiques of the plays presented at FESMAN. His main focus is rather to reconcile the less palatable aspects of the period of colonial conquest, such as military subjugation and racist justifications for conquest, with the actual place of Faidherbe in national memory. For the FESMAN audience in 1966, he seeks to stage a version of history that might prove workable for the purposes of nationalist sentiment in a postcolonial era, not denouncing wholesale European influence and impact, but suggesting a shared belief in that impact taking hold in a context of mutual benefit and respect. As such, we can surmise without doubt that this is less of an historical account than a work of collective memory in the making, a reflection of the shades of ambiguity that arise in uses of history as a justification and driver of nationalist sentiment.

In Dia's play Faidherbe is himself ambivalent about his own role in conquering and administrating the region (with important ahistorical slippage, in his monologues, between the conquered region and the nation that would have emerged by the time of Dia's writing). "Après mon oeuvre de pacification, d'unification de tous ces royaumes, aujourd'hui épars et ennemis, quel Sénégal en sortira-t-il" (30)? Dia's Faidherbe then pushes his ambiguous position as a servant of the French empire to its limit by wondering aloud: "En édifiant la Sénégambie, n'est-ce pas pour Lat Dior, c'est-à-dire pour l'idée qu'il incarne, n'ést-ce pas pour réaliser cette idée que je travaille" (30)?

Faidherbe's vision of the nation appears to Dia's audience as deeply flawed and incomplete, and the general himself does not see clearly the end goal of his own work. This, like the racist rants of the Lieutenant, serves as a provocation to the FESMAN audience, and constitutes the writer's attempt to incite his spectators to take on, in a present-day context, the rhetorical problem that is posed on stage. The nationalist tone of this dramaturgical task rings

clearest in a provocation uttered by the character of an African interpreter and collaborator with the French who is depicted as having turned his back on his people. He aligns himself with the colonial project, but does so out of a self-interested cynicism and without Faidherbe's sense of a larger purpose. He commiserates with the general over Lat Dior's intransigence, stating "je te confirme que Lat Dior se prend pour un grand patriote, un nationaliste... Comme si la 'Nation Sénégalaise' pouvait jamais exister" (32)! This is the first use of the term nation in the play, and it serves as a taunt to present-day independent Africa, and especially Senegal, to view the ambiguity of its own history, including the role played by an oppressive colonial regime, not as an incitement for greater conflict, but as the fires in which a nascent self-determined nationalism had been forged.

If Dia was to integrate to his play the figures of Senegal's major foundational heroes, he could not, in a country of which an overwhelming majority of the population is Muslim, omit a staging of Lat Dior's encounter with Sufi saint Cheikh Amadou Bamba, founder of the Murid order. In a period of brief retreat from military activities, the military leader indeed spent time in the Murid holy city of Touba, where he received instruction from Amadou Bamba and eventually converted to Muridism himself. In the published version of Dia's play, Bamba's part of the dialogue with Lat Dior is printed in italics and consists solely of verses of the Koran. This serves to convey the otherworldly quality the saint was meant to transmit on stage, and is also an astute means of including sacred text within an otherwise secular stage work.

At a strategic crossroads in his response to French forces, and in a personal crisis of faith, Lat Dior expresses to the saint of Touba a sense of battle fatigue along with doubts regarding the purpose of his resistance, declaring, "... le guerrier en moi est mort. Mon voeu, Bamba, est de faire avec toi la conquête des âmes pour la gloire de l'Islam... et de Dieu" (41). While Faidherbe

finds himself frustrated from reaching the end of his quest due to his own inability, as he says, to bring Lat Dior to a clear understanding of his intentions, Lat Dior decides to commit himself to bringing the Toubabs, the white Europeans, to reason: "Nous mettrons le Toubab à la raison! Nous le vaincrons, et nous l'obligerons à quitter notre pays" (40). In a telling reversal of the model of the Ponty encounter, wherein it fell upon the French to transmit reason to a supposedly backwards indigenous population, Dia attributes the actions of the persisting French invaders to a failure to see the unreason behind their pursuit. Bamba's message to Lat Dior is ultimately one of perseverance in the face of adversity, born out of a sense of belonging to a grander, sacred purpose. In a further projection of nationalist concerns from the historical episodes on stage to the world of the audience, Lat Dior responds to Bamba's encouragement, asking: "Sera-t-il donc donné à d'autres générations - à mon fils, à nos petits-fils - de comprendre ton grand message... et de l'exécuter? Toi et moi, sommes-nous donc venus trop tôt? Oh! Dis-moi, Bamba" (46)?

Dia's constellation of founding fathers of the Senegalese nation would not be complete if it did not include the one presiding over the audience at FESMAN. As the event was intended to secure Negritude's place within this new moment of independence in and through culture on the continent, Dia could not leave out the role of the country's living foundational figure. Fittingly he situates the presentation of Negritude thought within the context of a musical performance. When the Almamy, or king, of the neighboring Tukulor kingdom sends a messenger to propose an alliance against the French, he sends with them a chorus of slaves, who seize the occasion to perform a song among Lat Dior's court and attendant soldiers. The song has an enchanting effect, as Dia writes in his stage directions that the soldiers are taken over by the sound, and noisily express their admiration. Recognizing the Almamy's ruse, Lat Dior puts a stop to the music and dancing: "Suffit à présent!... Ainsi, Amadou Cheikhou avait l'ambition d'avilir nos

âmes, d'amollir nos coeurs et nos bras, pour mieux nous vaincre" (20-1)! He discards the Tukulor soldiers and calls out to his own griot: "Sakhévar, invite tous les griots du Cayor et du Baol, et faites-nous entendre la voix immortelle de nos tam-tams" (21)! Sakhévar takes center stage as he leads the assembly and audience at the event through a didactic rendering of the individual elements of a traditional musical ensemble of Cayor and Baol, described not just as music for its own sake, but rather as a source of strength and courage. The *Déguedaw*, he says, is the voice of independence, the *Mbalakh* a source of courage. The progression continues, with each instrument adding its sound in a general crescendo until the griot exclaims: "Venez défendre la Terre sacrée du Cayor! Venez pour vaincre... ou pour mourir" (23)! Then, in a statement to the king: "Damel-Teigne Lat Dior, quand toutes ces voix ensemble se font entendre... quand toutes à la fois rythment nos joies, nos colères, notre Négritude, alors Damel-Teigne Lat Dior, rien, rien ne saurait résister aux Peuples du Cayor et du Baol" (23).

The uttering of Negritude, a term and concept created by Aimé Cesaire in the 1930s, by one of Lat Dior's griots is of course not an historical claim on the part of Dia, but rather a projection into the past of stakes contemporaneous to post-independence Senegal. It served to frame depictions of historic Senegal as having always manifested the cultural and national distinctiveness that Senghor would address throughout his life. It is furthermore significant in this scene that the concept of Negritude is evoked in a cultural context. The singing and dancing of the visiting Tukulor slaves are not innocuous, but rather come with the power to dilute the resolve of Lat Dior's soldiers, who, subsequent to this encounter, are in need of an immediate return to their own, "native" music in order to replenish their strength. In the world of Dia's play, culture is therefore a high-stakes affair and proves, moreover, the business of chiefs and, by extension, of heads of state such as those in the audience at FESMAN.

Dia's restaging of Lat Dior's role in Senegalese history and collective memory evinces the stakes at hand in the context of the FESMAN event, where a group of elite African writers and bureaucrats endeavored to take the reigns of a country driven by increasing nationalist sentiment. Furthermore, the performance of the feats of Lat Dior at this festival, in the large, outdoor form in which it was presented played to the didactic potentialities of theatrical performance. The production sought to inscribe the figure of Lat Dior in the collective understanding of the history of a now independent nation. On the pan-African scale, the play didactically encouraged spectators to invest belief and importance in the notion of unity behind their respective countries' foundational figures. In the case of Senegal, this firmament of historical legends included the event's host, Léopold Senghor, whose actions to foster a sense of national and pan-African unity would be called to question by many from within and without Senegalese borders.

Staging resistance at Panaf' '69

In his documentary on the Panaf' festival in Algiers, William Klein reveals the extent to which theater served as an artistic grounds for defining the cultural models FESMAN and Panaf were intended to craft. One observer of both festivals describes the use of the stage as the clearest indicator of Senegal's distinctive approach to culture, one that associated the staging of works with literary practices linked to the presence of an author, as opposed to the more collective, ensemble perspective associated with the Guinean delegation (Lindfors). This close association of the Senegalese delegation with a certain, purportedly elitist practice of theater comes through in Klein's film, in which the section dedicated to theater begins with a discussion, by the Senegalese troupe, of the kind of traditional taxonomy of performance favored by cultural

centers, and Senegalese scholars of performance like Bakary Traoré. "Ici, très peu de pays ont respecté les principes du théâtre traditionnel africain," states one member of the Senegalese delegation. Indeed, by the time of the Panaf' festival, this country had become the African figurehead in the promotion of a theatrical practice inspired by what were deemed authentically African traditional approaches to performance. One Anglophone example of such an approach would be Nigeria's performance of an adaptation of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, a play apparently in line with the Senegalese troupe's expectations in that it was based on notions of traditional theater.

However, if Senegal continued to serve as an exemplar of stage performance at the Panaf' festival, eventually winning the event's first prize in drama, details of the piece honored highlight some key ways in which Panaf' differed from its FESMAN predecessor. *L'Exil d'Albouri*, by Senegalese playwright Cheikh Aliou Ndao, staged the story of another of Senegal's historic leaders to have resisted colonial expansion: the Almamy, or king, Albury Penda Djeme Njaay. A key figure in the history of the Djolof Kingdom, whose territory ran further north, beyond the upper borders of the Senegalese nation, Albouri fought French colonial forces until his death in what is today Niger (Diouf, *Histoire* 159-60). In his depiction of this resistance hero, Ndao chooses to stage one of the key decisions of the king's long military career. Upon learning of the arrival of a French battalion that he could not hope to overcome due to its superiority in numbers and arms, Albouri, against the wishes of his own army, family and supporters, elects to retreat into exile in the northern city of Segu. He thus breaks with traditional expectations to stand his ground to his death, but does so in anticipation of a greater conflict to come. Justifying the implication of his actions, Albouri declares to his entourage: "Ma vue ne s'arrête pas à notre petit royaume; elle embrasse tout le futur" (34).

Just as with Dia's use of historical time in *Lat Dior* to appeal to a contemporary present, Ndao depicts a protagonist hero whose vision holds implications for those united around the stage of the Panaf' event. Within the diegesis of the play, Albouri displays a vision extending beyond immediate survival. He refuses both compromise and annihilation, choosing instead to safeguard and defend his culture against all forms of European subjugation. Albouri's vision spans multiple temporalities. From the historic past he feels the weight of a long-dating tradition that he chooses to defy. In his decision to lead his people to exile, a fate seen by his soldiers and even family as worse than death, he is not only envisioning what will be best for the future of his kingdom, but also that of the entire continent. Albouri presages into the world of the audience at Panaf', expressing through his actions on stage a belief, at the potential expense of his own legacy, in the possibility of a broader movement of pan-African unity and resistance. Whereas Lat Dior described his path and purpose through consultation with his fellow founding members of the Senegalese nation, a more cautious approach that involves surrender to national institutions such as the Murid order of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, Albouri in this play reflects the trajectory of a longer pan-African struggle through a drastic break with tradition. Instead of negotiating with colonial forces or standing his ground to the death as custom would have it, the king discerns a third, unchartered way, that of a dissident non-participation with that which is expected of him.

These different depictions of the role of Albouri and Lat Dior are not reflections of historical fact, but rather the workings of two playwrights who put their dramaturgies to use for two different visions of the future of the continent as it moves forward into independence and self-rule. In his prologue to the published version of *L'Exil d'Albouri*, Ndao openly declares the liberties he has taken with history for his own purposes. "Une pièce historique n'est pas une

thèse d'histoire. Mon but est d'aider à la création de mythes qui galvanisent le peuple et portent en avant (17)." This approach is consistent with what was seen at Panaf' as the inevitably political element of theater, or the refusal to engage in art for arts sake. This commitment to crafting culture at Panaf' as part in parcel with a pan-African revolutionary movement rings clear in the first lines of the festival's booklet: "La culture a pour point de départ le peuple en tant que créateur de lui-même et transformateur de son milieu. La culture dans son sens le plus large et le plus total permet aux hommes d'ordonner leur vie" (Mokhtari 5).

Reading the play against stage works more directly linked to Negritude ideology, *Albouri* stands out in its aim against the elite classes of post-independence Africa. This is highlighted in a scene in which the nobles of the Djolof kingdom, in the hopes of protecting the privileged status they enjoy in the society about to be left behind, attempt to convince Albouri's brother, the Prince Laobé Penda, to betray the king and facilitate a compromise with the French forces. The Prince resists, insisting that such an act would forever dishonor his name and that of the kingdom. However, the nobles manage to eventually convince him through diplomatic reason, insisting that the prince's duty is not to the king but rather to the good of the Djolof kingdom, which he must swear to protect. These motivations are in fact a thin veneer covering a deep sense of self-interest on the part of the nobles, whose designs are reflected in the line: "Je suis trop habitué à mes privilèges pour ne pas voir qu'Albouri exige notre ruine. Vais-je risquer mes domaines, mes greniers pleins, mes vallées qui retentissent du beuglement de mes troupeaux, pour voler au secours d'un marabout" (57)?

When the conspirators are surprised by a member of the slave class and an ardent protector of the king, they have him killed. The same noble declares, "Il avait un peu trop oublié sa place dans notre société" (62). The function of this sub-story in Ndao's play serves to

highlight the regressive role of those committed to maintaining positions of privilege held over from traditional social models. This is where Ndao adds an element of social revolution in his play, seeking to expose the effect of a more conservative, anti-socialist resistance to the kind of radical change seen as necessary to enact meaningful social change of the kind sought out through Panaf's close alliance with the armed independence struggles of the soon-to-be former Portuguese colonies. By portraying how compromising elements internal to African societies can also have a profoundly colonizing effect, Ndao was also taking an implicit aim at the very elite so central to the content, form and ceremony around the FESMAN '66 event.

In his assessment of Ndao's play, John Conteh-Morgan considers *Albouri* as one of the more successful African history plays in that it shows "a refreshing concern with plot structure, a desire to craft an absorbing story that is often absent in French African history plays" (155). However, Conteh-Morgan argues that the play is not without its dramatic shortcomings, such as the sudden and unexplained change of heart of Albouri's wife toward the end of the play. Originally defying her role as the king's unwavering servant, stating "Je suis femme avant d'être reine" (40), she eventually cedes, declaring to the court, "J'ai perdu mon arrogance pour faciliter la tâche à Albouri" (86). Conteh-Morgan argues that this sudden transformation appears unjustified in the course of the narrative and indicates that Ndao remains, in the end, a traditionalist, whose play does not goes so far as to subvert family structures.

While this reading is accurate with regard to the loyalty that Albouri demands of his entourage, there is an additional revolutionary message to the play that would correspond well to that of Panaf' in Algiers. As a representative of a collective dissident movement, the festival would favor the idea of unshakeable solidarity within the revolutionary pan-African cause. One of the more salient scenes of Ndao's play expresses this with chilling clarity. As Albouri and his

kingdom are preparing to leave for exile, his attendant halts the action abruptly by throwing on stage a man who has been tied up, explaining: "Cet homme a trahi. Il était en train de dissuader les gens de te suivre." "Qu'il meure," Albouri replies. "Qu'il ne soit pas fusillé mais égorgé; que son sang abreuve la terre... Que ses entrailles servent de festin aux hyènes maraudeuses" (80). There are similar invectives uttered toward the man before he is rushed offstage to be executed and the action of the play continues. Such a swift and harsh response to allegations of subversion, on the one hand, can be read in relation to other works that sought to stage ritualistic and governing practices most likely to shock Western sensibilities. This would be the case, for example, in Wole Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman*, which depicts British intervention to thwart a ritualistic suicide. On the other hand, there is also a revolutionary aspect to Ndao's narrative. The execution of the traitor serves no concrete purpose in the play's story. However, it does set the mood of a drastic social change that requires complete adherence from the collective. Ndao, a vocal detractor of Senghor and his linguistic politics, who would later commit his writing to the production of Wolof-language literature, presents a level of commitment to anti-colonial revolution that stands in stark contrast with the reasoned, indeed Cartesian, approach of writers such as Dia, inspired by Negritude.

There is, in Ndao's approach, a telling ambiguity toward the role of violence in resistance to colonial encroachment. In his retreat to Segu, the king is, in effect, avoiding a violent conflict. However, the playwright would not wish to depict his hero as hesitant to enact violence for the good of his cause, and the brutal execution of a potential traitor serves as an opportunity for Ndao to posit that revolution and resistance cannot take place without acts of violence, sometimes severe, wrought upon the West, or even members of one's own tribe if necessary. The revolution, Ndao seems to argue, will not transpire through reasoned discourse with the

oppressor. Or, as Fanon, a central posthumous figure of Panaf', would say: "Challenging the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints. It is not a discourse of the universal, but the impassioned claim by the colonized that their world is fundamentally different" (6). Fanon indeed stands as the ideological model for colonial resistance at Panaf', in the same country for whose independence he himself had taken arms. If the portrayal of Lat Dior at FESMAN served as a galvanizing symbol of unity within the new African element, the model of Fanon suggested the possibility of such unification facilitated, when required, by acts of violence: "Claiming responsibility for the violence also allows those members of the group who have strayed or have been outlawed to come back, to retake their place and be reintegrated. Violence can be understood as the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself through violence" (44). With his depiction of a summary execution of "un homme qui a trahi," Ndao places his work within one of the central themes in the framing and content of the Panaf' event, speaking with some authorial ambiguity - the playwright's own position with regard to this violence is not quite clear - to the struggle that Klein addresses in his interviews with the leaders of the anticolonial armed conflict, as well as the tactics espoused, to exceedingly tragic and brutal ends in Guinea, by the government of Sékou Touré, whose own national revolution would lead to internal executions of those seen as betraying or putting in danger the anticolonial, socialist cause.

FESMAN and Panaf' served to ignite a debate on the role of culture in the political sphere among African nations just entering a new period of independence. While both models agreed that cultural production should serve a burgeoning African independence and self-reliance, there had been no consensus as to whether the new independent nationalism should be allied to a gesture of unity toward the West, or forged in the fires of a continued revolutionary struggle

against persistent neo-colonial processes. The contours of this debate came across in the memory work enacted by two of the events' featured stage plays by Senegalese authors. The example of FESMAN and Panaf' illustrate the role of festival in producing and maintaining a new relationship to culture in the postcolonial era. However, these questions were far from settled by the two major festivals of the 1960s, as festivals would continue to function as opportunities for state institutions to support or negate given models for the role of culture in its depictions of the people, and their place within a global political and artistic context (Apter).

In the Senegalese context, the debate set in motion by FESMAN and Panaf' would resonate long after the actual events, with the former launching a commitment to an approach to culture driven by state-funded, centralized institutions, while the latter helped launch an enduring movement in favor of what came to be known as the popular arts. One finds to this day in Senegal the nuances and differences of these two approaches in the contemporary theatrical landscape, a question we will address in the next chapter with a discussion of the place of what is called *théâtre populaire* as a foil to a certain, *pôle officiel* in cultural production.

Chap 5: What of the "popular" in contemporary Senegalese theater?

As the practice of theatrical stagings in Senegal developed, from its emergence at the time of the William Ponty School to its use in the French *centres culturels*, up through the revised model of the Ponty play presented at FESMAN and Panaf', stage performance had nearly always been associated with the activities and concerns of an elite. The parameters of national theatrical performance, nearly all of which was in French, did much to ensure that stage productions would depend on a limited number of individuals comfortable enough in the colonizer's language to compose a play. This limiting of theatrical production to a small elite was further enforced by the cultural policies of Léopold Senghor subsequent to Senegalese Independence (Castaldi 197). The first president was intent on using the productions of the national theater to promote a francophone identity domestically, while facilitating success and potential tour dates abroad by offering performances in a European language. In the contemporary context, however, a very different theatrical landscape has emerged, as the institutions that once promoted the practice of a Francophone, proscenium-oriented theater struggle to gather the resources necessary for a full production, or even to attract an audience for the productions they are able to mount. And so it is amidst an environment of institutional inactivity at the level of the national theaters and the Ministry of Culture that one finds countless youth and community organizations defending the values of what they call *théâtre populaire*.

Senegalese popular theater is often criticized or dismissed as amateurish due in part to its characteristic exclusion of literary writing practices. Shows of this kind are rarely written down, let alone published, and there is no direct authorial relationship between an individual and the final content of what is presented before an audience. An additional critique of popular theater throughout Africa has highlighted the fine line it treads between serving anti-authoritarian

populist objectives and installing another mechanism of top-down moralizing characteristic of state-centered discourse (Kidd and Byram 91). Indeed, the popular works in Senegal, as elsewhere, often veer toward the authoritarian end of this line, also finding it difficult to refuse the not-so-disinterested aide proffered by political leaders and foreign NGOs. Yet forms of popular theater continue to thrive throughout the country, especially if one compares them to the small creative output of institutions such as the country's two large national theaters. As such, they demand inclusion in any discussion of performance heritage in the Senegalese context, indeed as its primary source of transmission today.

A number of scholars have addressed the difficulty of ascertaining claims to *popular* in the African arts, many concluding that the term has become a floating signifier or functional discourse (Desai 65). Karin Barber insists nonetheless on the need to study these popular forms, if nothing else, due to "their sheer undeniable presence as social facts. They loudly proclaim their own importance in the lives of a large number of African people" (1). Barber goes on to note the "apparently infinite elasticity" of the popular arts, a label that she calls "a fugitive category, seemingly ubiquitous and yet always fading as one tries to grasp it" (2). Taking a relational approach, Tony Bennett has argued that such art forms are better understood not as a fixed category, but as abstract in nature and shifting in their definition. (Bennett, Mercer and Woollacott 8). Gaurav Desai adopts a similar approach in his study of popular theater in Botswana, arguing that popular theater cannot be conceived of as a monolithic form, but is "best thought of as a normative discursive practice that engages in dialogues with other theatrical practices of society" (68). Forms of popular theater indeed take on such an elastic quality in the case of Senegal, responding in multiple ways, as Desai states, to multiple modes of social

discourse, including remnants of convention and form that remain with the popular arts as elements of an historically constructed national theater heritage.

In this chapter our focus turns to the specific case of Senegal's primary forum theater company, Kaddu Yaraax, often described as a leader in the realm of "popular" theater, despite the troupe members' own ambivalence toward that term. Observations here are based on interviews carried out over the course of several field trips taken within a two-year period, including a brief case study of one of the company's performances to draw some conclusions on the place of such performance practices within a broader history of theater in Senegal. This chapter argues that such so-called popular companies should not be assessed solely by how they may or may not advance literary practices in theater, or through a discussion of how effectively they execute attempts to form an anti-authoritarian theater for the oppressed. It is essential to also consider troupes' modes of innovation and transmission within the context of a local theatrical heritage with long-reaching historical factors. Popular performances demand to be interpreted on their own terms, which, as Barber states, means "engaging with them in a specific and detailed attempt to 'read' them according to their own conventions" (34).

This argument is intended to address simultaneously calls for a more text-based approach to popular theater, as well as past writing on the practice of theater for development in Africa (Fall; Kidd and Kumar; Kidd and Byram; Kerr). The latter have often focused on the faulty Freirian pretentions of popular theater forms, referring to the Brazilian theorist of pedagogy whose signature work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, has inspired entire movements of popular forms of "theater of the oppressed" seeking to invert power structures through performance. However, aside from trying to remain faithful to the theories behind their work (those of Freire and Augusto Boal being chief among these), the members of Kaddu Yaraax are also attempting

to wrest the transmission of Senegalese theatrical heritage from the control of the very top-heavy, state-centered institutions that are the contemporary by-products of a theater nourished primarily through initiatives of pedagogy and cultural nationalism.

Theater within and without the "Pôle officiel"

The popular theater movement in Senegal began to gain official recognition as a channel for the ongoing debates that animated the events of FESMAN and Panaf' in the 1960s. With the close of these two referential festivals, creators within Senegal sought to open a pathway for cultural practices that did not correspond so neatly with Senghor's state-driven approach to culture. It was in such a spirit that, in 1969 and 1970, La Fédération du Théâtre Populaire called for a conference to be held to determine the stakes and goals of *théâtre populaire* in the Senegalese context. From these meetings came a new manifesto of sorts, called "Les Options Fondamentales du Théâtre Populaire," a document that sought not only to denounce what was seen as a certain intellectual approach to theater already beginning to lose its audience, but also to establish a number of best practice guidelines to help the milieu define the role of *théâtre populaire* within the theatrical landscape ("Options"). These guidelines included staging performances in the round as opposed to what was seen as the imported proscenium form, and performing in African languages so as to have a lasting impact on groups not as comfortable in French as previous generations had been.

In a 1973 document published by UNESCO on cultural policy in Senegal, the author makes mention of the Fédération's conference on popular theater, suggesting that these popular forms "s'inspire de démarches préthéâtrales," employing a combination of dance, music and

traditional folklore, but no authored text (M'Bengue 42). The division between a literary form of official theater and a popular, "pre-theatrical" approach to performance is also reinforced institutionally, with the national theaters of Senegal being administered by the Ministry of Culture, while events such as popular theater performances and associations are managed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Popular theater was, even at the time, relegated to a secondary role in favor of the definition of culture then being dispersed and supported by Senghor.

And yet, despite the auspicious beginnings of an eager patron president, if seen solely from the vantage point of the country's state-funded theatrical institutions, contemporary Senegalese theater would appear to be at a rather disquieting standstill. For years, Léopold Sédar Senghor's Théâtre Daniel Sorano - inaugurated in 1965 as the paragon of a nationalist cultural production driven by Negritude ideology - has struggled to attract audiences. The drama department of the Ecole Nationale des Arts, which once supplied Sorano with its performers, has yet to recover from an enrollment crisis and hopes to receive in good time enough applications from candidates to justify funding an incoming class, as confirmed by the department's Director (Diop). And as the paint still dries on the *Grand Théâtre National*, one of the truly grandiose *grands projets* pushed forward by former president Abdoulaye Wade, the structure has yet to demonstrate how it will live up to its promise of enhancing Senegal's prominence on the global theatrical stage, as elucidated by its first theatrical director (Mbengue). Perhaps the most commonly cited stormy petrel for the official pole of theater is the lack of up-and-coming, or even aspiring new playwrights hoping to carry on the stage tradition of literary pioneers such as Cheikh Aliou Ndao, Marouba Fall or Boubacar Boris Diop.

While productions at the Théâtre Daniel Sorano are performed to near empty houses, events produced by youth groups of urban areas such as Pikine are often full beyond capacity

and feature performers widely recognized from their work in television or with popular theater festivals. In seeking to explain the ubiquitous phenomenon of popular theater in contemporary Senegalese life, Director of Culture for the City of Dakar, Oumar Ndao, assesses the situation by pointing out: "On a le plus grand nombre de comédiens au mètre carré dans le monde entier. Tout le monde est comédien. Tout le monde est passé par les ASC (Associations Sportives et Culturelles) ou les a vues de près ou de loin." Indeed, casual observations evince a Senegalese preference for forms of theater outside of the official, nationalist pole of cultural production. "Et pourtant," Ndao continues, "on n'a pas de bon théâtre" (Ndao). With the lack of training and resources for drama in Senegal, especially on the local level, popular performances can indeed often appear thrown together, or amateurish, as Ndao suggests, a point which may in part explain the lack of critical interest in these works. Yet, questions of quality notwithstanding, the social implications of this theater come to the fore when considered as a foil to more formalized works of state-driven theater. Given the lack of audiences and scarcity of resources at official state institutions of culture, popular theater groups have today taken on the role of transmitting what they see as an important national theatrical heritage.

This transmission does not take place without new interpretations and performative innovations regarding what such a heritage must represent and defend. A brief look at the Kaddu Yaraax company's artistic background, as well as the creative choices made throughout its development, will serve to highlight the historical and artistic stakes involved in this troupe's work, as well as how their performances fit within the broader dynamic of a Senegalese theatrical heritage as performed and produced by so-called popular theater companies.

Folklore, transmission and theatrical heritage

Like countless other Senegalese youths, the founding members of Kaddu Yaraax had their first encounter with theater while representing their neighborhood of Tableau Ferraille in the local Nawetaan theater competitions (described in chapter 3). The group of friends would quickly learn to adeptly innovate with the *théâtre total* form favored and promoted by the Associations Sportives et Culturelles. This form imposed a mix of music, folklore, theater and poetry, in a work whose central purpose is described by Nawetaan organizers and supporters as conveying a message, often in the form of a civics lesson, to local audiences and thereby fostering social cohesion and civic awareness (Sow). The purpose of the performance was anchored in the social, and favored an informal, festive ambiance. However, for the company's director Mouhamadou Diol, the events held greater artistic potential. "Pour nous ce n'était pas qu'un jeu," he states, insisting that from the beginning the group saw its activities as part of a larger artistic vocation. "On lisait des pièces, et on voulait vraiment s'informer sur le théâtre" (Diol).

The group developed its technique, its members familiarizing themselves over the course of several years with the modes of African folklore, dance and music taught and disseminated through the Nawetaan initiative. As a performer and artist, Diol does not denounce the role of folklore in African creation. He describes such practices as "ce que l'on a naturellement. Je veux dire, en tant qu'Africains, on sait danser et faire de la musique." This position in relation to folklore has meant that Kaddu Yaraax's theater has not sought to problematize notions of an essentialist African "soul" transmitted through performance, even as the troupe has drawn inspiration from non-African theatrical theories and practices. Diol does not disavow this folkloric aspect of what he considers the national Senegalese character. However, he does

problematize its current place in theatrical productions. "C'est ce que nous sommes," he continues, "mais je ne pense pas que cela seul constitue un art" (Diol). For Diol, in fact, the first critical response to the theatrical heritage of his country consisted not of criticizing the folkloric content of Nawetaan performances, but rather in denouncing the form imposed by these competitions of *théâtre total*. The competitive nature of these events appeared to preclude any artistic innovation and performances were assessed according to their ability to meet pre-established criteria of form.

Diol's greatest objection to these events was that they reinforced colonial historical constructs, acting according to ethnographic notions of authenticity and portraying the African performer as static, in a sense, frozen in time. This objection resonates clearly with the colonial origins of competitions such as those of the Nawetaan events, and their lineage through former *centres culturels* of French West Africa. Given their lasting impression on events such as the contemporary Nawetaan competitions, the *centres culturels* represent an important historical phase in the fabrication of today's idea of *théâtre total* in Senegal. The criteria employed to evaluate troupes' performances at the AOF-wide competition had a sufficiently enduring effect on notions of theater in Senegal to have carried over to evaluative criteria used to judge a Nawetaan performance today. Indeed, by denouncing this criteria-driven approach to folklore in performance, Kaddu Yaraax's artistic director was consciously walking away from the disavowed imprint of these competitions on much of what is today called *théâtre populaire*.

Diol is therefore elucidating one of Kaddu Yaraax's most important initial artistic insights as a company when he explains the troupe's early desire to break away from the Nawetaan vision of theater. As the Kaddu Yaraax members were able to sense at their creative beginnings, and as Diol now explains, "en fait 'théâtre total' signifie 'théâtre colonisé'" This comparison is not only

a comment on *théâtre total*'s roots in the colonial cultural policy of the AOF, but also refers to Diol's objections to this theater's insistence on moralizing to its audience, a prime feature of a theatrical approach whose main goal was once to occupy and neutralize a growing class of *évolués* through Francophone colonial culture. Indeed, once they had become multiple Nawetaan awardees, the troupe soon found itself confronted consistently with a formidable artistic dilemma. "Avec les concours on pouvait être créatifs, mais avec des contraintes," explains Diol. "Et le cadre était toujours assez politique. Les troupes devaient utiliser leurs spectacles pour transmettre un message, et dire 'quand il y a la grève il ne faut pas aller démolir les camions,' et ainsi de suite." It is at this point that Diol and his companions decided to break away from the stylized mores of their Nawetaan co-competitors and began seeking out a more politically incisive means of presenting their work. "On s'est rendu compte qu'on pouvait améliorer nos spectacles en omettant les conseils" (Diol). It is a decision which marked a turning point for the company while also presenting a formidable challenge: how to present a theatrical message to an audience without engaging, however so subtly, in what one might call "moralizing"?

In 1998, the group, having become independent of its ASC and taking on its current name of Kaddu Yaraax, meaning word, or voice, of Yaraax, created a new performance piece called "Yakaar" (or Hope). In this original creation, the group did away with the mixed, "Africanized" performance modes it had adapted at its beginnings and developed the following message, summarized by Diol as, "Si on veut développer quelque chose, il faut commencer par se développer soi-même" (Diol). The main objective of the work was to reveal the ideological faults and practical shortcomings of seeing the country's problems as always coming from abroad, usually from the West. At this point, the company's primary mission was to produce a

theater that would encourage positive change in everyday behavior as a means for developing solutions to larger societal issues. The troupe also decided to remove as much as possible the moralizing component from their work, although it quickly became apparent that a moralizing message was still present implicitly in their performances. In their search to make good on a promise to commit to a form of theater that was not only dialogical but multi-logical, the members of Kaddu Yaraax would make their next important artistic discovery with their first encounter with the form of forum theater.

The forum-géew

In 2002, Kaddu Yaraax discovered forum theater at a training workshop offered by the Institut Français in Dakar and run by Burkinabe performing artist Prosper Kampaoré, founder of the Atelier Théâtre Burkinabe. Forum theater is a performance method originally developed in the 1960s by Brazilian artist and political dissident Augusto Boal as part of his larger vision of a "Theater of the Oppressed." Since its development, this technique for using theater as a tool for political activism and social dialogue has gained popularity around the globe, and today a broad network of performers and activists works to promote forum theater as a means of empowerment for oppressed populations. In his book entitled *Theater of the Oppressed*, Boal elaborates on the structure and phases of forum theater, which, in the vein of Bertolt Brecht's "V-effekt," seeks to countervail Aristotelian processes of dramatic catharsis (Brecht 91-9). Taking Brecht's position of anti-empathetic distance one step further, Boal advocates a theater in which spectators, or as he calls them, spect-actors, are incited to act immediately on stage to embody the type of social or behavioral changes necessary to address a given problem. To begin, actors present a short

scenario in which a person or group is the victim of a form of oppression. Once the actors have performed their scene, a "joker" intervenes to solicit reactions from the audience. When the spectators have affirmed that what has taken place on stage could be improved upon toward a more equitable end, the troupe encourages them to take on the status of "spect-actor," stepping on stage themselves to replace one of the actors and modify the scene's outcome. Additional spect-actors are then asked to join in, and an open-form creative dialogue ensues wherein the stage becomes the facilitator of collaborative problem solving and discussion.

From the moment of this initial contact with forum theater, Kaddu Yaraax decided to dedicate their work exclusively to the form. In fact, what they call the suppleness of the forum theater form appealed first to the troupe's desire to use their work to engage with local audiences and address difficulties confronted on a daily basis to further their movement toward a more politically engaged theater. An additional benefit of this shift to forum theater was the adaptation of an architecture of performance that moved away from the folkloric or moralizing theater performed at the group's ASC and toward a form that bore important similarities with the *géew*, a performative structure with which Senegalese audiences would be quite familiar. For Diol, the reference point for the use of the géew in performance is a study by Alioune Oumy Diop, called *Le théâtre traditionnel au Sénégal*. Diol cites this work as one of the earliest influences in his search for a means of creating theater in an African mode that does not fall into the trap of facile reenactments of African folklore or mythology. Diop's study provided the opportunity for an artistic melding of theatrical approaches, now central to Kaddu Yaraax's work, which draws from pertinent outside theoretical writings and frameworks, while tapping into the collective Senegalese imaginary for ways of setting the theatrical stage. In effect, it is the

architecture of such so-called traditional performance forms that has proven useful to the company more than the folkloric content often associated with them.

In his book, scholar and stage director Diop offers a strong practical undergirding for directors who, like Diol, find the common folkloric approach rife with colonial undertones. Diop argues that: "le contenu du théâtre ne doit pas être du folklore dansé et chanté, bon pour la commercialisation. Il doit constituer un instrument de transformation de la société par son action directe sur cette société" (21). The idea of the social function of theater has been central to discussions of Senegalese theater, beginning with the seminal work of Bakary Traoré, *Le Théâtre Négro-Africain et ses fonctions sociales*. Much like Kaddu Yaraax's president and members, Diop is highly critical of staging folklore for folklore's sake, however, like Diol, he by no means dismisses all use of traditionalist or folkloric sources in contemporary Senegalese theater. To the contrary, Diop argues that Senegalese performers have a fruitful though underused *architecture* of traditional performance at their disposal in Senegalese performative practices that remains underrepresented in official theater to this day. He further argues that, while the exteriors of folkloric theater, checkered with the pitfalls of exoticism, are overused, elements of form from pre-colonial theater remain underused by performers despite their potential for reviving a potent and dynamic theatrical scene in Senegal.

For Diop, the most important of these forms of theatrical architecture is the *géew*, the name for the circle formed in villages to make room for a traditional theatrical or ritual performance, where one went to see and be seen, a connection he makes with the role of the *theatron* in Ancient Greece (26). This particular performance layout has much in common with the West's theater-in-the-round, but also includes a communitarian aspect, since the *géew* is place-specific and ideally conceived for and by the community in which it is formed. In fact, far

from constituting a mere practical detail of the performance, the *géew* posits an entire theatrical architecture that one does not find, for example, in the stone constructions of Senegal's two opulent national theaters.

While discussions of what is often seen as the current dearth of theatrical production in Senegal often envision any potential renewal of such theater as necessarily including a return to textual practices (Fall) - a notion which, in effect, opposes the "literary" theater of official national culture and the "merely popular" theater found in community centers - altogether different possibilities emerge when the focus shifts to these questions of "architectures" of performance. Diop, for example, insists that in order for Senegalese theater to thrive, it must do away with the physical and ontological separation imposed by Western drama between audience and performer. Oumar Ndao shares in this sentiment when he relates theater's current state to its architecture in both the literal and figurative sense. "Aujourd'hui on s'est mis dans des constructions avec des coins, des angles droits, on s'est séparés les uns des autres. On a quitté le cercle." Ndao thus joins Diop in suggesting that the national theaters do more to achieve a suppleness of form as they work to attract audiences. Unfortunately, the task is made difficult by the Western conventions of the proscenium adopted by both national theaters, where, as Ndao explains, "tout le monde, individuellement, consomme son produit. Mais chez nous c'est une consommation collective" (Ndao).

While state-funded theatrical organizations continue to struggle to marry Western theatrical conventions with more locally inspired performance forms, independent companies have had greater success employing the principles of the performance circle, or *géew*, within the communities where they perform. The case of Kaddu Yaraax adds an additional layer in the performance hybrid by combining the notion of the *géew* with the advantages of the

contemporary activist form of forum theater. For Diol, forum theater provides an opportunity to divest popular performances of their often moralizing tone, to perform in accordance with the *géew*, and thereby promote and transmit a form of Senegalese heritage that can be innovated upon and seeks to address important social issues. The choice of the form was therefore paramount in the company's development. However, as we shall see in the description of one of its events, attempts at realizing each of these visions would prove fraught with their own challenges.

The forum at work: a case study of a Kaddu Yaraax performance

On June 4, 2013, the Kaddu Yaraax company was called upon to create a forum piece on the difficulties experienced and posed by Dakar's large number of *marchands ambulants*, the blanket term used in this case for vendors on foot as well as those who set up temporary stalls. For several weeks the city had been grappling with security and safety issues related to the presence of these vendors in its streets and public squares. In the midst of this citywide debate, the municipality of the commune of Sicap-Liberté had just rendered an executive decision to remove the vendors who for decades could be found working each day on the public square of the Marché Ndiago in the neighborhood of Liberté 2. The expulsion was rendered down without local consultation and was certain to have a devastating effect on these vendors and their ability to support themselves. However, municipal authorities cited issues of safety and sanitation as deciding factors, a justification which seemed to satisfy many within the local community despite the lack of input from the vendors themselves. It was in the face of this one-way authoritarian decision-making and heightened tension within the community that the neighboring

cultural center, Keur Thiossane, decided to sponsor a forum theater presentation and debate bringing together vendors, city officials and local residents.

The performance took place on the same public square where the vendors would typically be found at their tables, selling their wares. At the time of the performance, the site had already been cleared out by the town hall. When Kaddu Yaraax arrived, its members hung the company banner alongside the façade of a house on the square, demarcating the performance space, which created a circular area quickly surrounded by spectators. Groups of children were seated on large mats on the ground. Chairs were set out for older members of the community. The expelled vendors were present, but remained off to the side, sitting along a building on an adjacent side of the square. The performance began with a warm-up, led by the show's designated "joker," who first engaged the children in a few dancing games and exercises. He then used the microphone placed in the middle of the circle to announce to the neighborhood that a performance and discussion were about to take place on the matter of the street vendors who had just been expelled from the very square where the audience was seated. The announcement attracted more people and by the time the performance began the size of the crowd had doubled within the space of approximately 10 minutes, with some straddlers standing in the street and watching from afar.

The troupe began with its usual opener, a short sequence in which the performers are divided into 2 groups, one yelling "Waaw, waaw," (Yes, yes!) the other responding "Déedéet" (No!) while pulling at a pantomimed rope in an imaginary game of tug-of-war. The joker stopped the group and asked them if there was any way they might turn the yes into a no or the no into a yes. Both groups refused, pulling at their end of the imaginary rope until the joker stepped in the middle and snapped it, sending both groups flying. The sight gag earned a hearty

laugh from the children in the audience. The joker then announced the troupe as the company Kaddu Yaraax. They performed a succinct explanation of what forum theater is, telling the audience that the show that was about to take place included three stages. First, the troupe would perform a scene while the audience watched. Then, the audience would be asked to give their opinion on the behavior of each character in the scene, with an open vote to decide which characters displayed good behavior (these were allowed to rest in the shade), which displayed bad behavior (these were made to wait out in the sun) and which had behavior that was somewhere in the middle (these were left in between the shady and sunny spots in the performance space). In the last stage, the audience would be invited to replace the actors on stage to improve whatever behavior they perceived as lacking. The joker then asked the audience members to commit to their active participation, sending the actors to have certain spectators sign a pantomimed pact of participation.

The performance then began, with two actresses portraying female produce vendors tending their respective tables while in the middle of a heated discussion. One was reprimanding the other, clearly her senior, for never properly cleaning up after herself at the end of the day and never sweeping up or collecting her garbage. The elder vendor replied by stating that she often had less energy than her younger colleague who should, above all, be showing respect to those who had played an instrumental role in establishing the vendor community on that particular square. As the discussion continued, an older gentleman in traditional dress entered and scolded the women for always leaving the square such a mess. He stated that years ago people in the neighborhood used to be able to convene on the square, but now the site is too dirty for one to stop and pray. He then stormed off, having said his piece. The next character was one of the public servants known locally as "les duty." These are ambulant tax collectors in charge of

collecting a daily fee from each of the vendors for the right to set up shop in a public space. After a brief interaction with the audience, the collector approached the two vendors, expecting payment, otherwise, he said, he would give the women a ticket. The vendors, however, were unable to pay the tax, since they had just arrived on the square. They pleaded with the collector to return later in the day when they would have sold something and would thus be able to pay. They also protested fervently at the amount of the tax, which they said represented too substantial a portion of their pay and has not resulted in any of the services the tax revenue is partially intended to fund, such as water sources, local security guards and public cleaning services. Unwilling to wait until later in the day, the collector handed down a fine and stormed off.

A by-stander, having witnessed the previous scene, then approached the vendors acknowledging the difficulty of their situation, but saying that she could not feel sorry for them. As a resident of the neighborhood she lamented the fact that the square had become so dirty that her children could no longer play there. She also explained that one of her children had recently hurt himself on a throwaway utensil left behind by one of the vendors and had to go to the hospital for treatment. Visibly upset by this, the vendors apologized, explaining that they were unaware of the incident. However, after effusive apologies, they also insisted that the residents should be supporting the vendors who, for decades, have provided a useful service to local families, often delivering goods directly to their clients' homes. Since residents have come to expect the convenience of such a service, they should also be willing to accept the vendors' presence on the square. At this point, a municipal employee abruptly burst on stage, reprimanding the two women for continuing to sell on the square when they had yet to respond to three consecutive summons to appear at the town hall. After an additional kerfuffle, he

proceeded to expel the women as they pleaded with him to leave them be since they needed to sell in order to provide for their families.

At the end of this short scene, the audience applauded and the joker once again took the stage. He asked for reactions to the behavior of each character, challenging some to explain why they thought certain characters should be left in the shade or the sun. The children initially insisted that the vendors should be placed in the sun, since they had not obtained the necessary authorization and were a nuisance to the neighborhood. However, after some interjections from the elder members of the community as well as from the vendors themselves, seated far off to the side but within earshot, it was generally agreed upon that they might instead find a way to coordinate with the vendors. This shift in the tone of the discussion took place with little direct intervention on the part of the joker. In fact, the forum had openly aired a latent indifference to the vendors' predicament that had facilitated the group's expulsion but, once stated in the open, was fervently opposed by many of the elder audience members. In the end, there was no obvious consensus and so the vendors were left in the middle, between the sun and the shade.

Once verdicts were rendered on each character's behavior, it was time for the audience to interact in a reprisal of sections of the scene. This began with children stepping up to replace the tax collector. Between the ages of 12 and 16, the young spect-actors began by chastising the vendors for not studying hard in school or acquiring some kind of trade so that they would not find themselves in such a predicament. Objections soon arose from the other community figures, and the children decided to step down when asked by the joker how this remark might offer any kind of solution to the problem. When the joker again asked the audience how the vendors might have changed their behavior, one of the actual vendors, visibly the doyenne, stepped forward and delivered an adamant and emotional objection to being thrown out of a neighborhood where she

had been working for over fifty years. Clearly shaken up by the experience of her expulsion from the square, she returned the microphone after a heartfelt testimonial and left both the circle and the performance. At this point a teenager stepped forward to suggest that the vendors take the time to clean up after they have finished their work, since cleanliness was one of the major complaints of local residents as well as the commune's main pretext for throwing them out. The vendors then insisted that they have always cleaned up their areas before leaving the square, but that there are others who consistently neglect to do so, thus giving the whole group a bad image and reputation. At this point the joker asked if some kind of organizational scheme could not be created in order to ensure that each vendor left the public square as clean as it was when he or she arrived that day. This idea was met with general approval from vendors and the audience. After some further discussion on the details of such an idea, the show came to a close on the conclusion that a solution was possible, but that it would take further work and dialogue on the part of the community. The groups present agreed to continue to seek out an agreement in this manner and Kaddu Yaraax offered to return to facilitate a follow-up performance and forum.

Kaddu Yaraax's performances nearly always end with a sense of open-endedness whereby no definitive resolution is achieved. This lack of resolution is, in fact, built into the framework of forum theater, as Boal argues that the audience's energy to react politically must not be drained vicariously through the arc of the story on stage (Boal "Forum," 274). Instead, the conflict at hand must remain unresolved on stage, as it is in life. Forum performers do not attempt to provide audiences with answers to their problems, but rather aspire to serve as a catalyst for the kind of social dialogue that might lead to a workable solution. In this case, the forum process effectively uncovered at least one important point that had not been addressed in the one-way political discourse leading up to the expulsion, which was that the community could

try to implement an organizational scheme to ensure that each vendor clean up his or her section. Aside from this point, written into the play were a number of other latent issues, which could have been taken up by the discussion but were left aside. For example, in the exchange between the vendors and the tax collector, audience members could have asked why the tax could not instead be collected later in the day, after the vendors have sold something and are in a better position to pay. Furthermore, spect-actors might have wondered where this tax revenue winds up if, as the vendors contend, it does not go into the improvement of conditions in public spaces like the Marché Ndiago. These potential points of dialogue were worked into the show following an initial research phase, during which the company integrated to the performance feedback from vendors, residents and local authorities. However, unlike the moralizing theater from which the troupe is continually distancing itself, these performances resist forcing issues that are not willingly adopted by the public and so constitute a more dialogical exchange between actors and audience.

For all of their merits as social theater, these forum works are not without shortcomings, as Diol willingly admits himself. Although this particular performance takes place among the local community, it has been commissioned and funded by Keur Thiossane, an internationally supported cultural organization, thus introducing a problematic patron-client relationship between Keur Thiossane and Kaddu Yaraax, who naturally wish to satisfy their patron in the hopes of receiving future commissions. Furthermore, within the audience, Diol admits that the troupe is not always successful in countering the overbearing effect of certain authority figures in a given community, who may be present at a show and can tend to monopolize a discussion, even bring it to a halt. This indeed nearly happened at the Keur Thiossane event, when it seemed that one of the actual tax collectors might intervene forcefully and take over the discussion.

Finally, the performances end with the hope that there will be a follow-up, which, by the company's admission, does not always happen for lack of time or funding.

Even with these criticisms in mind, it remains that Kaddu Yaraax has managed to have a visible and lasting impact on the theatrical landscape of the country. On one hand we may consider some of the real political resistance that the company has encountered in recent years in response to its work. The troupe became deeply engaged politically in opposition to the actions and abuses of former president Abdoulaye Wade, most notably in its 2011 performance "C'est simple comme Mbane" (It's as easy as Mbane), which toured around the country denouncing Wade's anti-democratic decision to install a *délégation spéciale* in the locality of Mbane in order to offset the political weight of a region where his party had just lost representatives in local elections. The troupe satirized the president's party, the Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS), as the "Parti Djaay Suuf" ("Parti des Vendeurs de Terre", or Party of Land Sellers), in response to Wade's covert sale of public land throughout the country, especially in the Dakar region. The troupe members also nearly found themselves in prison due to a heavy-handed reaction by authorities to a performance in Casamance of their creation "Monsieur Casamance," on the separatist movement in that region.

However, beyond its frequent run-ins with political power, the troupe has also played a decisive role in transmitting a certain form of Senegalese theatrical heritage among other independent troupes around the country, one that responds innovatively to Senegal's theatrical past as well as to the pressing political issues of the moment. Indeed, there are distinctive echoes of Kaddu Yaraax's most salient themes and images that resound throughout the landscape of local, activist theater in Senegal. Troupes frequently make direct reference to Kaddu Yaraax's work in performance creations. Thus, Kaddu Yaraax's creation entitled "La Baie de Hann n'est

pas une poubelle" (The Bay of Hann is not a garbage can) soon inspired another creation called "Kaolack n'est pas une poubelle," performed in the city of Kaolack. Kaddu Yaraax also toured a show addressing the thousands of Senegalese attempting to emigrate to Europe clandestinely by pirogue, a phenomenon that had a particularly devastating effect on Yaraax, which is a coastal village. The company's performance was entitled "Partir, ne pas partir" and inspired a number of variations on the theme, with spin-offs that often even took the same title as the original production and always included a number of direct acknowledgements of the work of Kaddu Yaraax and of the impact they have had on Senegalese performance. In fact, within the same neighborhood of Yaraax, such a show was performed in the community's small circular performance area, or *géew*, by a young company named Kaddu Askan Bi (Voice of the people), a clear reference to the presence and success of the group's elder and respected colleagues.

In the absence of an effective official pole in Senegalese theater, companies such as Kaddu Yaraax have carried on the torch when it comes to transmitting national theatrical heritage to the next generation of performers. The sheer frequency and long-standing presence of what are often called popular theater shows stand as evidence that an effective transmission is, indeed, taking place, though more so through small, independent companies than through the large state-funded edifices like the national theaters or the Ecole Nationale des Arts. While these forms of popular theater are often dismissed as non-literate, amateurish and ephemeral, in fact, many of these companies, like Kaddu Yaraax, are mounting a conscious defense of their own philosophical, historical and political positions through the way in which they endeavor to set the stage. Although they remove the role of the playwright and greatly reduce the place of written culture in their work, the decisions of these popular theater troupes respond directly to a longer

theatrical history in Senegal, where, while the official pole of theatrical creation has ostensibly withered, the non-official continues to expand.

Conclusion

This work has sought to highlight the processes of producing, or crafting, the stage that accompany the emergence of any performance form or tradition. Such stagecraft includes the impregnation of the space with the political and social discourses of the day (or chronotope, to adopt Bakhtin's term). This process etches the contours of a stage space always-already fraught with collective expectations of what a performance is supposed to do, who or what it represents, and to what purpose. In the case of francophone theatrical performance in Senegal and its beginnings on the Ponty stage, we have seen how modalities of stagecraft in the interwar period, intent on manifesting the pedagogically imagined prototype of the enrooted *évolué*, and availing itself of discourses of ethnologically inspired colonial humanism, were brought to bear on the theatrical exercises of this iconic French colonial school. The dialogical interplay that this space hosted proved in itself polysemous, generating widely different meaning, for example, in the context of colonial French West Africa than it would in that of the Hexagon for the 1937 Exposition Internationale des arts et techniques, or in later productions by the pontin-led Fédération d'étudiants d'Afrique noire en France (FEANF). Representation (in the Ponty stage's endeavor to show authentic renderings of local custom) and universalism (in the School's contention that a display of supposedly universal French logic would win Africans over to the colonial cause) were ingrained in the space of theatrical performance and later employed for the purpose of a state-driven cultural model at the FESMAN event of 1966.

Such stakes of representation and universalism are still very much a part of contemporary theatrical creation, found, for example, in the Nawetaan competitions' focus on folkloric authenticity. Universalist discourses continue to resound, meanwhile, in institutional efforts to employ theatrical works to carry the message of NGOs and non-profit organizations, usually to

such development-oriented causes as proper hygiene in schools and family planning for rural communities. The limits and exigencies of this stage do more than influence the performances hosted; they are in fact foundational in the production's very existence. While performers are by no means shackled by the discourses that have crafted the stage, they are nonetheless obligated to respond to them, either in an embrace of their implications, as was the case on the stage of FESMAN '66, or in a response to and interrogation of presuppositions of what performance is, an endeavor taken on by contemporary troupes such as Kaddu Yaraax.

In an attempt to foster what they call the "relations Sud-Sud" that might allow them to circumvent some of the political obstacles and limits to performing in the public space of the Dakar region, the troupe members of Kaddu Yaraax have, for ten years, organized and hosted an international forum theater festival. Eventually weary of seeing their funding requests to larger governmental structures met with square refusal, the Kaddu Yaraax troupe decided to make use of the transnational cachet of the forum theater form, using connections in Brazil as well as with other West African countries to host its first international forum theater festival in 2004. As a grassroots foil to the kind of pan-African cultural festivals of the early independence years, this event seeks to produce theatrical activities for local populations in a way that avoids reliance on habitual institutional partners, such as the Ministry of Culture, or, on a local level, the Associations Sportives et Culturelles, hosts of the Nawetaan competitions. The festival has received the promotional and logistical support of the Centro de Teatro do Oprimido in Rio de Janeiro, which included them in their online listing of global forum theater troupes. The theater company, over the course of the past ten years, has managed to invite visiting forum theater troupes from the surrounding countries of Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Burkina Faso and Mozambique, as well as European companies from France and Spain. The

festival has established Kaddu Yaraax's place as one of the country's most active working theater troupes, as a host of a regular yearly and international event. The lack of funding from the Ministry of Culture, once seen as a blow to the company's efforts, is now seen as a blessing. According to company Director, Mouhamadou Diol, the non-involvement of the Ministry has allowed the group to focus on producing the event as they wish, with minimal concern for habitual power structures when it comes to cultural administration.

One crucial aspect of such structures is language. In inviting troupes and performers to their festival, the Kaddu Yaraax members do not seek to instantiate the notion of a unified francophone identity among French-speaking African creators. This lack of interest in promoting francophone culture as an operable concept constitutes a departure from structural uses of *Francophonie* in culture. In November of 2014, Dakar hosted the fifteenth international Sommet de la Francophonie. The event included activities programmed throughout Dakar, with two main activity hubs located in Sébikotane, in the newly constructed Centre International de Conférences, built within view of the mythical William Ponty campus, and Dakar's Grand Théâtre National, built by former President Abdoulaye Wade and inaugurated toward the very end of what would be his final term. A program of events was organized in the Grand Théâtre, with a final, capstone performance, on the last evening of the Summit, of an original play written by playwright Massey Niang and directed by Mamadou Diop. The as-of-yet unpublished work, called *La légende du fusil*, depicts the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, highlighting the role and place of the nearby island of Gorée within that history. The production featured some of Senegal's best-known stage actors, with Lamine Guèye of the Sorano troupe in the lead role of the traditional African monarch. Dramaturgically, the performance included a number of familiar tropes of the form of the *épique historique*, addressing matters of historical record, and

performing a commemorative act of the impact of the region's leaders on a broader global history, while also including portrayals of kingly courts and traditional folklore. In its use of dramaturgical and performative approaches so closely linked to Senegal's national theatrical heritage, the play spoke difficulty to arguments of a broader, putative transnational "francophone" identity. Though well received, the production took place in front of a packed house composed of mostly Senegalese spectators.

Such events highlight the difficulty, impossibility even, of establishing a universally intelligible stage idiom, even among participating artists and members seeking to instantiate the legitimacy of a shared community of nations "ayant le français en partage," as stipulated by the website of the Organisation Internationale de Francophonie, organizer of the Summit. The centrality of a particular Senegalese heritage as represented by the performance space at the Ponty stage, the FESMAN event and the Grand Théâtre National at the Summit occasion, calls into question the usefulness and feasibility of presenting, within a cultural event, the characteristics and concerns of a supposedly united francophone community. Such questions appear to hold little weight, for example, in the most impactful theatrical performances in the Senegalese context, such as the televised performances now widely distributed through DVD vendors and Senegalese websites. It is a question that recalls not only the political debates around the notions of authenticity and European influence in African culture, but also the philosophical stakes brought out by Antonin Artaud in his writings against what he called the theater of representation, that is, beyond and before the discourses of power that precede and shape a stage performance. Artaud was indicating the possibility of a form of theater that preceded what Derrida later recognized as the repetition, or, for our purposes, the stagecraft that goes into solidifying the stakes and customs of a performance heritage. This reading of Artaud

in connection with Francophone African drama precludes an interpretation of the Senegalese stage as a liberating space that might somehow supercede Western discourses. In fact, African dramaturgy is every bit as tethered to a theater of representation and the political problems existing therein. However, our reading here also serves to grant this theater its rightful place as a form of response, with its own insights and aporias, as part of a global theoretical discussion among performers, directors, writers and spectators, who ask: what is theater and what, exactly, does it do?

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